



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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# Towards durable solutions: Sustainable reintegration of the forcibly displaced

Rebuilding agricultural livelihoods and rural communities





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# Overview



## 89.3 million people

worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2022a)<sup>1</sup>. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 up to May 2022, 7.1 million Ukrainians have been displaced internally (IOM, 2022) and 6.8 million refugee movements out of Ukraine were recorded (UNHCR, 2022b)



## 5.7 million

displaced people, including

429 300 refugees, were able to return to their areas or country of origin in 2021 (UNHCR, 2022a)



## 42 000 people

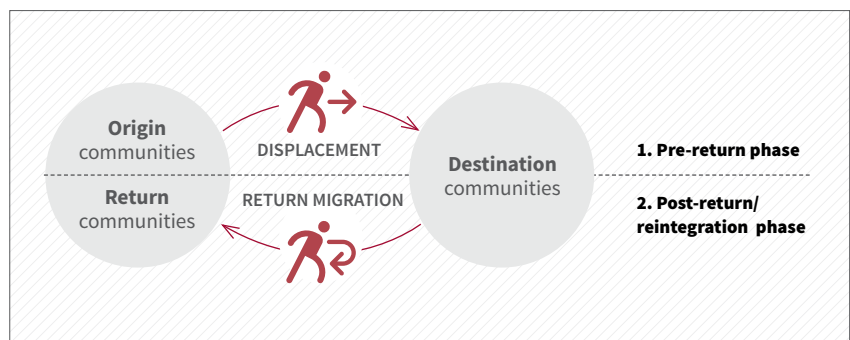
participated in the IOM assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme (IOM, 2021)

For many of the millions of people forcibly displaced by conflict and disaster each year, either within their own country or across international borders, the hope and desire to eventually return home to their rural communities and rebuild their lives and livelihoods remains strong. For some, due to the increasingly protracted and recurring nature of conflict, returning home may not be possible, safe, or even desirable, especially after many years living in another country or community.

However, when conditions allow for a safe and dignified return, substantial support is required for those who choose to do so, in order to ensure that their reintegration is sustainable and forms part of a larger approach to post-conflict and post-disaster recovery and development strategies. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with its expertise in rebuilding resilient rural agricultural livelihoods in forced displacement contexts, can play a fundamental role in ensuring sustainable reintegration of returnees into rural communities.

If sustainable in the long term, return and reintegration can be a durable solution to displacement. However, for this to be possible, return and reintegration must be addressed in a comprehensive manner throughout the different stages of the return cycle, from the pre-return phase in countries of transit or destination, to the reintegration phase in countries of origin. Return and reintegration projects must take into account the different needs and perspectives of both returnees and receiving communities, while contributing to broader processes linked to socioeconomic development, resilience, peacebuilding and reconciliation and governance structures.

**Figure 1. The process of return: from the pre-return to the reintegration phase**



Source: Author's own elaboration.

<sup>1</sup> There are no accurate estimations of return migration at global level. Beyond a general lack of data, this is also due to the absence of a unitary definition of migration among different datasets and to the fact that a large portion of return migration occurs without the involvement of states or other international actors, so it is not recorded. The major gap that exists is on post-return data, partially because there is no universal definition of the term "reintegration" nor commonly agreed indicators for measuring it.

# Key messages

- ▶ A sustainable return and reintegration process is a key element of local peacebuilding and the rebuilding of agricultural livelihoods.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Return migration<sup>3</sup> to rural areas interlinks with broader issues such as governance of natural resources, land tenure, lack of available infrastructure and services, the multiple dimensions of food insecurity and malnutrition, climate change and environmental management.
- ▶ FAO's technical mandate and competences give the Organization an impartial entry point to support return and reintegration in rural areas while promoting cooperation and collaboration on issues such as the management of natural resources, climate change adaptation, the improvement of agriculture production and addressing food insecurity and malnutrition, among others.
- ▶ FAO recognizes the importance of ensuring that its partners are aware of and respect human rights and adhere to protection standards.
- ▶ In conflict and post-conflict recovery contexts, return migration can act as a trigger for local disputes and tensions, particularly in rural areas already characterized by underinvestment and limited services and infrastructure. Therefore, the adoption of a conflict-sensitive approach is a crucial element of any intervention on return and reintegration.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “agriculture” includes cultivation of crops and animal husbandry as well as forestry, fisheries and the development of land and water resources (FAO, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The term “return migration” is used both for migrants and forcibly displaced people who are returning to their country and/or community of origin. An extensive definition is provided below.



- ▶ To ensure the sustainability of the reintegration process, FAO cooperates with national and international stakeholders who are active in different stages of the return cycle. United Nations (UN) agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are crucial partners with valuable experience in designing and implementing protection-sensitive return programmes in collaboration with countries of destination and return.
- ▶ Some of the areas where FAO is working closely with other UN partners include:
  - strengthening returnees' contributions to local peacebuilding processes;
  - improving returnees' and host communities' abilities to prevent and manage tensions and conflict;
  - strengthening returnee and host community livelihoods in communities of return;
  - addressing gender barriers in reintegration interventions; and
  - improving data and evidence generation to better inform reintegration in rural areas.

# Definitions<sup>4</sup>

## **Refugee (1951 Convention)**

A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

## **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

## **Return**

In a general sense, the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. This movement can be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning IDPs and demobilized/ex-combatants;<sup>5</sup> or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees or asylum seekers.

- ▶ **Voluntary return:** The assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee:
  - Spontaneous return: The voluntary, independent return of a migrant or a group of migrants to their country of origin, usually without the support of States or other international or national assistance.
  - Assisted voluntary return and reintegration: Administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin.

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<sup>4</sup> From the Glossary on Migration (IOM, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Recognizing that demobilized/ex-combatants have sometimes been active across international borders, and thus can fall into the second category.

- ▶ **Forced return:** The act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person. This is generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision (such as a deportation, expulsion or removal order).

### **Repatriation**

The return of a civilian, refugee, prisoner of war or civil detainee to his or her country of nationality under specific conditions laid down in various international instruments. It can be considered as voluntary repatriation only when it is based on a free and informed decision.





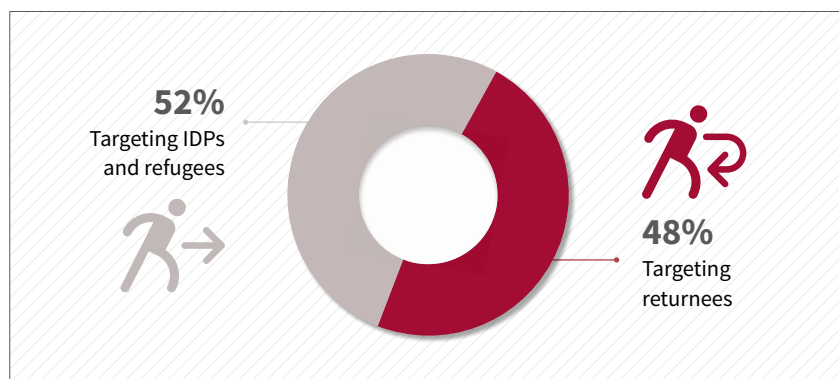
# FAO's approach to supporting sustainable reintegration in forced displacement contexts

Reintegration can be defined as a process that enables individuals to re-establish their economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood, dignity and inclusion in civic life (IOM, 2019). It is a multidimensional process and its success depends on a wide range of factors unfolding at three different levels:

Reintegrating displaced people in rural areas presents specific challenges that are linked to broader issues such as rural development and the governance of land tenure. As a technical agency with significant expertise in rural and agricultural livelihoods recovery and development, FAO is uniquely placed to address these challenges and support the reintegration of displaced people in rural areas.

- **Individual factors** – such as how long returnees have lived abroad as well as their personal abilities and resources.
- **Community factors** – such as the acceptance by returnees' family, peers, and community.
- **Structural factors** – such as the economic opportunities available in the country of origin or the availability and quality of local infrastructure and resources.

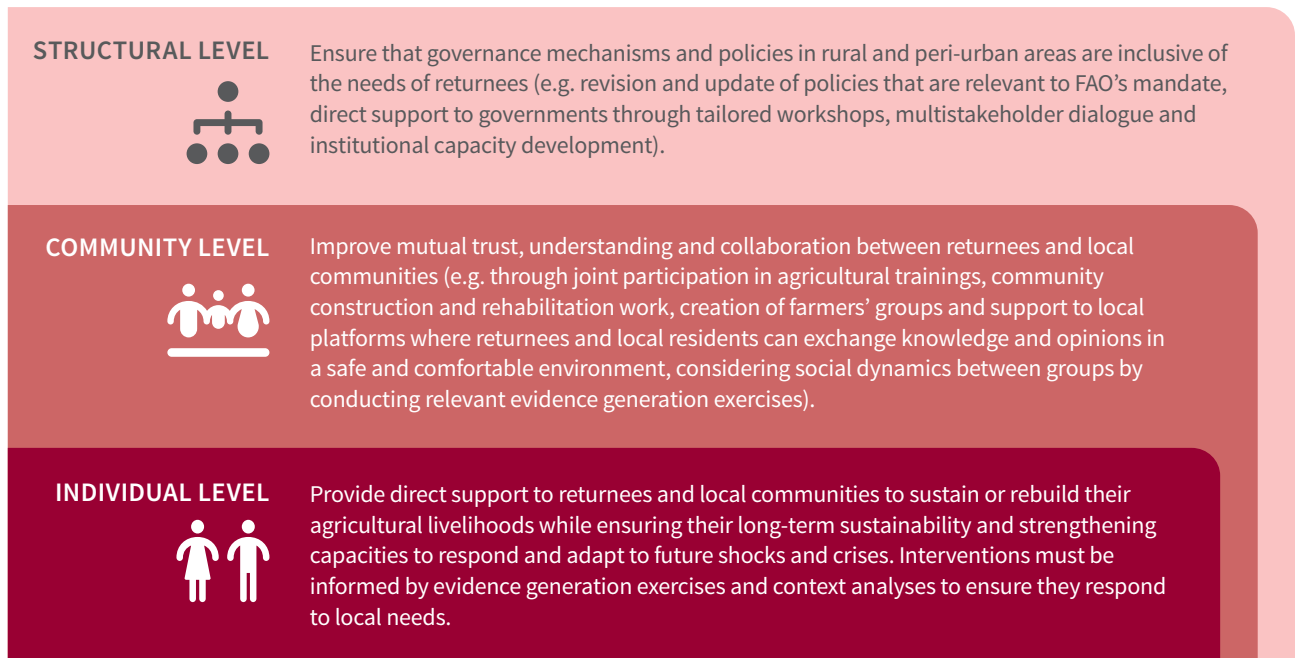
**Figure 2. Percentage of FAO's forced displacement projects targeting returnees**



Source: Author's own elaboration.

FAO's current priority areas in reintegration contexts are highlighted in Figure 3. Although it does not provide an exhaustive list of FAO's actions to support returnees' reintegration in rural areas, it highlights what has been the Organization's focus in these contexts, to date.

**Figure 3. FAO priority areas in reintegration contexts**



Source: Author's own elaboration.

## **Sustainable reintegration in the global compacts for refugees and migration**

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) are internationally negotiated agreements that were adopted in December 2018. The global compacts detail a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions, including return and reintegration. Even if not legally binding, they represent crucial instruments to advocate for the rights of migrants, displaced people and returnees worldwide and advance the global search for durable solutions to displacement. With regards to return and reintegration, FAO supports Members in achieving these objectives:

### **Global Compact on Refugees**

Chapter 3.1 “Support for countries of origin and voluntary repatriation” stresses that it is the responsibility of the international community as a whole to provide support to countries of origin, upon their request, to remove obstacles to return, to enable conditions favourable to voluntary repatriation (para. 88) and to facilitate sustainability of return (para. 87). Support should also be provided with respect to social, political, economic and legal capacity to receive and reintegrate returnees, notably women, youth, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. This may include support for development, livelihood and economic opportunities and measures to address housing, land and property issues (para. 89).

### **Global Compact for Migration**

Objective 21 “Cooperate in facilitating dignified and sustainable return, readmission and reintegration” contains the commitment to create conducive conditions for personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities to ensure that reintegration of migrants upon return to their country is sustainable.

## Individual level

At the individual level, FAO provides direct support to returnees for creating or rebuilding their agricultural livelihoods. This might include immediate assistance, such as the provision of agricultural inputs and services or cash and voucher assistance. However, to be sustainable, emergency assistance must be coupled with longer-term development and local peace-responsive approaches. Technical training in agriculture must invest in returnees' skills development and strengthen returnees' capacities to respond or adapt to future shocks and crises such as natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, technical training should be accompanied by capacity development in business, entrepreneurial, financial, organizational and language skills, and knowledge of national and local frameworks.

To become self-reliant, returnees need to be supported in developing sustainable livelihoods. This can be done by strengthening their access to local markets, supporting their inclusion into local value chains, and facilitating their integration and participation into local farmers' groups or other community groups or organizations, which can support their reintegration into receiving communities.



## PAKISTAN

For almost seven decades, the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has been a semi-autonomous region in northwestern Pakistan. Conflict between militant groups and the Government of Pakistan has displaced a significant number of people to the neighbouring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.<sup>6</sup> As the Government of Pakistan gradually established control over FATA,<sup>7</sup> an increasing number of IDPs started to return to their communities of origin, despite livelihood sources and local infrastructure having been severely affected by the prolonged armed conflict. In this context, as part of a wider multisectoral project,

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<sup>6</sup> Between 2008 and 2017, the number of people displaced from FATA was more than 5 million (OCHA, 2017). As of December 2019, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that there were 106 000 IDPs in Pakistan, including IDPs living in protracted displacement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA (IDMC, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> In 2018, the Government of Pakistan amended the Constitution and decided to merge FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province within a timeframe of two years.





FAO assisted returnees to rebuild their agricultural livelihoods by providing inputs, building productive assets and infrastructure, and strengthening local service providers and public-sector led extension services. A specific focus was placed on increasing the resilience of returnees' agricultural livelihoods through the adoption of climate-smart agriculture approaches, including the analysis of climate risks, given the exposure of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to natural hazards such as flooding. FAO developed the capacity of returnee farmers to adopt climate resilient practices such as tunnel farming.<sup>8</sup> A close collaboration with the Alliance of Biodiversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture led to the preparation of a study on the climate-smart agriculture profile of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, climate risk analyses conducted at the district level and local plans for setting-up climate-smart villages. These documents are an important asset for national and local decision-makers to support the development of adequate adaptation and mitigation measures in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and sustain the agricultural livelihoods of returnees.

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<sup>8</sup> Tunnel farming is a method used to grow crops in the off season in a controlled environment by using polythene/plastic sheets and a frame to make a tunnel.

## Community level

Communities play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of returnees. They can either hamper the process (for example, when returnees are stigmatized or perceived as competing actors over the use of natural resources), or create an environment conducive to sustainable reintegration, characterized by inclusivity and acceptance, and with access to community safety nets, strong social networks and financial resources. Therefore, reintegration interventions must be based on a contextual understanding of local community dynamics surrounding return and existing resources within the local community which can facilitate reintegration of returnees, while ensuring that it is beneficial (or at least, not harmful) to communities. As such, the local receiving community (and returnees) should be involved in all stages of the project cycle. A contextual analysis which focuses specifically on the local dynamics surrounding return and reintegration should be conducted during the inception phase, and should be supported by monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks capable of tracking return-related community dynamics and levels of social cohesion throughout the project lifecycle.

At the community level, FAO works to improve mutual trust, understanding and collaboration between returnees and local communities by promoting activities that range from participation in technical training, to community farming, setting up of producers' groups and marketing collectives and joint rehabilitation work. Bringing together returnees and local communities through joint construction and rehabilitation work pursues the double objective of contributing to the reactivation and proper functioning of local agricultural infrastructure, while supporting the role of returnees as active contributors to the local economy and community. Likewise, joint capacity development activities with returnees and local communities have proved successful in strengthening trainees' skills, while challenging pre-existing negative perceptions and prejudices towards each other. Establishing local spaces where returnees and members of local communities can meet and exchange opinions in a safe and comfortable environment is also instrumental in strengthening

community relations. FAO has done this through Dimitra Clubs,<sup>9</sup> village saving organizations and farmer field schools.<sup>10</sup> These initiatives also represent an excellent platform to organize trainings on the prevention and management of conflicts and encourage dialogue and cooperation on potentially contentious issues such as access to land and the shared management and access of natural resources.



## IRAQ

After years of conflict, the Iraqi agricultural sector has suffered massive damage and loss of farm assets and infrastructure. Likewise, many of those who had been displaced from rural areas have had their agriculture-dependent livelihoods destroyed. While many people are still displaced, an increasing number of IDPs are gradually returning to their communities of origin. IDPs returning to their communities are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity given their loss of productive assets and the financial, physical and psychological costs associated with displacement. FAO is currently working in governorates with the highest returnee populations including Salah al-Din, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Anbar and Diyala, to support returnees' reintegration and promote the rehabilitation of water infrastructure (e.g. irrigation canals, water drainage canals, river embankments) crucial to the resumption of agricultural livelihoods. The goal of FAO's activities is to facilitate sustainable return and reintegration in rural areas by creating income-generating opportunities and improving food security and nutrition. Through cash-for-work, FAO has brought together both returnees and members of the receiving community to contribute to the revitalization of the local economy. Cash-for-work activities also help returnee farmers make ends meet while regaining self-confidence and economic independence, and provide them with the opportunity to once again be active and productive members of

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<sup>9</sup> Dimitra Clubs are informal groups of women and men, who come together on a voluntary basis to identify common problems, discuss, seek solutions and take collective action to resolve them. FAO facilitates their set up and provides them with training and coaching. More information is available at [www.fao.org/in-action/dimitra-clubs](http://www.fao.org/in-action/dimitra-clubs).

<sup>10</sup> For example, in Pakistan, returnees have taken part in farmer field and farm business schools, farmer marketing collectives and producers' marketing organizations, where they not only acquired agricultural, entrepreneurial and marketing skills, but also improved their negotiation and bargaining skills, while dealing with market intermediaries and other value chain actors.



their local community. FAO's activities included the provision of food kits and agricultural inputs (such as seeds and fertilizers) as well as technical training in agricultural practices and techniques (including greenhouse vegetable production, livestock production, veterinary services, microgardening, soil and water use management and the use of photovoltaic panels to power water pumps).

## Structural level

The reintegration process is heavily influenced by structural factors in the external environment. These include political, institutional, economic and social conditions at the local, national and international level (e.g. the level of cooperation between various government departments at the local and national level, the presence or absence of returnee-oriented policies and legal instruments, the availability of employment and basic services) (IOM, 2016).

At the structural level, FAO works to ensure that governance mechanisms and policies, both at the local and national level, are inclusive of the needs of returnees in rural areas. This includes the revision and update of policies relevant to FAO's mandate. Areas of policy support include governance

and management of natural resources, customary land tenure systems, animal health and veterinary services,<sup>11</sup> rural and territorial development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk management and prevention, food systems and rural development.

FAO's support at the structural level can also include direct support to government and local authorities in responding to the needs of returnees in rural and peri-urban areas through tailored workshops, multistakeholder dialogue and institutional capacity development. To encourage returnees' involvement and active participation in local governance mechanisms, FAO also provides targeted training to returnees and local communities on how to engage in and contribute to local decision-making procedures, and promotes closer cooperation between different policy sectors and government levels.



## COLOMBIA

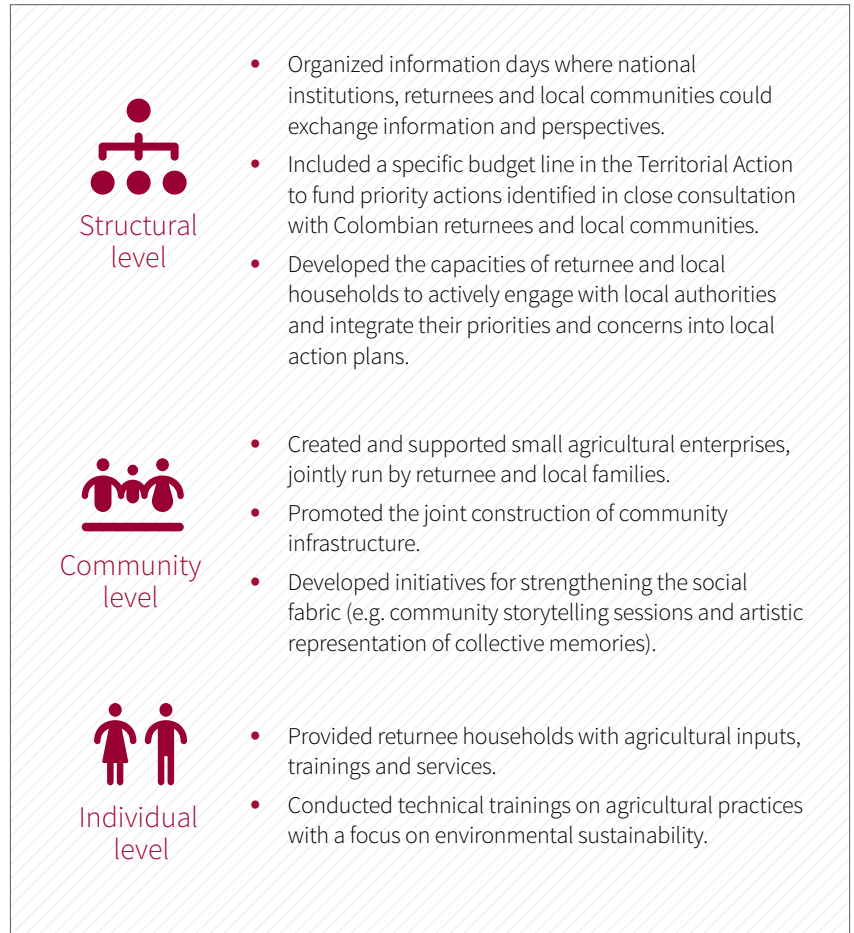
Fifty years of internal conflict and violence in Colombia have caused massive displacement, with approximately 6.8 million people remaining internally displaced within their country's borders as of the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2022a). In 2011, the Colombian government adopted the Land Restitution Law for Victims, which provides for the restitution of land to Colombians who have been dispossessed and forced to move because of the armed conflict.

At the structural level, FAO supported the post-restitution process by facilitating the coordination among different entities at the national and local level to jointly identify and implement specific actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of the land restitution process. Activities such as the organization of information days supported sustainability, allowing national institutions to visit communities to raise awareness on services available, and discuss ways of improving their support at the local level.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, as part of FAO's reintegration activities in Iraq, support was provided for the introduction of regulatory frameworks governing animal health, as well as improving collaboration and communication between veterinary services and public health services on zoonotic diseases.

**Figure 4. Overview of FAO's support to the process of land restitution to Colombian returnees**



FAO also promoted the development of interinstitutional coordination plans and advocated for the inclusion of a specific budget line in the Territorial Action Plans at the department and municipal level to fund priority actions identified in close consultation with Colombian returnees and local communities.

At the community level, returnees and local families received agricultural production support and took part in joint economic and social initiatives such as working together to build community infrastructure, setting

up small agricultural enterprises, and organizing community sessions of storytelling and art laboratories to share memories from the armed conflict and promote healing. As a result, 1 733 beneficiaries formed 28 agricultural cooperatives and organized in a network of local producers to coordinate their production outputs and strengthen their commercialization techniques.

At the individual level, returnees received agricultural inputs and technical training on agricultural practices with a focus on environmental sustainability. This was particularly important to ensure that agricultural activities were in line with environmental protection standards and the sustainable management of natural resources. Returnees also received training on engaging with local authorities to contribute to the development of local action plans. This training also included targeted capacity development for women returnees in an effort to challenge traditional gender structures and encourage them to take an active role in the consultations with local authorities.







# Ensuring a protection-sensitive approach to reintegration programming

There are many reasons that can motivate the return of displaced people to their country of origin – economic, social, family related and others. While the prohibitions on collective expulsion and *refoulement* establish important limitations on the ability of states to return or repatriate migrants or refugees forcefully, there are other important procedural safeguards and protection protocols that must be applied to ensure that return is truly voluntary.

First of all, it is essential to ensure respect of a returnee or potential return migrant's right to free, prior and informed consent. In order to do so, individuals must be provided with complete and relevant information in a language and format accessible to them. This includes being able to fully understand the options available to them and their possible consequences and, very importantly, it also includes the access to accurate information regarding any potential risks to their safety and security which they may face upon return to their country or community of origin.

This is a particularly important consideration for reintegration actors such as FAO, as they may have access to crucial contextual information regarding the conditions in rural communities of origin, which can better inform potential return migrants, or may be involved in information campaigns where potential return migrants are being targeted. This highlights the importance of strong coordination and information exchange between actors facilitating voluntary return or repatriation such as IOM and UNHCR, government authorities and organizations such as FAO, who will be providing assistance to individuals upon their return to communities or countries of origin.

In order to be properly informed, returnees or potential return migrants must also have access to legal assistance, interpreters, translators and other support necessary to make an informed decision, be able to express their will to return in an unequivocal manner and have the ability

to revoke their consent at any point during the process. Information provided to returnees or potential return migrants must also be provided in a gender-sensitive or child-sensitive manner, where appropriate. Any decision to return must be made without coercion, undue pressure, threats, intimidation or any other means that effectively denies voluntariness.

While FAO is not directly involved in the design of return programmes, ensuring that its partners are aware and comply with procedural safeguards and protection protocols is of the utmost importance in order not to compromise the principle of voluntariness and ensure FAO is not tacitly endorsing forced return. A hypothetical example of such risk might be designing and implementing an intervention that targets returnees who have not expressed their free, prior and informed consent to return to their rural areas of origin and have instead been pressured by government officials (either in their community of destination or origin) to do so. It is also important for FAO to ensure that robust local protection risk analysis systems are put in place in areas of return, in order to promptly identify and mitigate potential and current protection risks for returnees at any time during their return and reintegration process.



## **Non-refoulement, the prohibition of collective expulsion and the principle of voluntary return**

It is the state's right to determine which non-nationals enter and remain on its territory. However, this right must be exercised in compliance with human rights standards, including the principle of non-refoulement. By virtue of the principle of non-refoulement (enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international legal instruments), no one may be extradited, deported, expelled, returned or otherwise removed when there are substantial grounds for believing that the individual would be at real or foreseeable risk of death, torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance or other irreparable harm, at the hands of state or non-state actors. Under international human rights law, the principle does not admit any exceptions or derogations, and it applies during all phases of the migration cycle, including during return and at international borders.

Linked to the principle of non-refoulement is the prohibition of collective expulsion. States must conduct individualized assessments to fully and meaningfully consider all possible real and foreseeable risks of death, torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearance or irreparable harm in the country where they would like to return a person.

The principles of non-refoulement, voluntary return and prohibition of collective expulsion are also upheld by the two global compacts:

### **Global Compact on Refugees**

Supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity is among the four main objectives of the GCR (para. 7). Chapter 3.1 on “Support for countries of origin and voluntary repatriation” emphasizes the commitment to promote enabling conditions for voluntary repatriation in full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, to ensure the exercise of a free and informed choice and to mobilize support to underpin safe and dignified repatriation (para. 87).

### **Global Compact for Migration**

Objective 3 states that relevant information should be made available to migrants on possibilities for voluntary return, in a language the person concerned understands. Objective 21 “Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as reintegration” upholds the prohibition of collective expulsion, and the principle of voluntary return over forced deportation. It also promotes assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes, guaranteeing that all voluntary returning migrants are fully informed of their return and reintegration process (para. 37d) and stresses that return decisions must be carried out by competent authorities and removal orders must follow an individualized assessment of the circumstances that may weigh against the expulsion, such as risks of torture or other irreparable harm, in compliance with due process guarantees (para. 37e).





# The importance of conflict-sensitivity in reintegration programming

The return of people who have been forcibly displaced to their communities of origin can affect social relations, create or exacerbate tensions (e.g. around access to natural resources, jobs and livelihoods opportunities, social protection programmes) and alter the previous composition of ethnic, religious, social and economic groups. In turn, this can disrupt or alter balances of power, levels of social acceptance and trust between different groups.

Reintegrating ex-combatants, victims of violence, or returnees who have been displaced for many years also presents specific challenges such as overcoming stigma, diffidence or animosity among the receiving community, and the consequences of psychological trauma. When returnees have lived abroad for a long time, they might find it particularly difficult to re-adjust to local customs and ways of life, particularly if local frameworks (cultural, legal, social, political) have significantly changed. Returnees can also easily become a focus of community resentment and discriminatory practices, which can divert people's resentment and frustration away from underlying social, economic, political and structural issues.

Moreover, without conflict-sensitive programming approaches,<sup>12</sup> return migration can also create local tensions over receipt and distribution of humanitarian and development assistance. This reality can be particularly harsh in rural receiving areas of developing countries, which are often characterized by limited services and infrastructure, and are

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<sup>12</sup> Conflict sensitivity refers to the ability to have a sound understanding of the interaction between the context and project interventions, and to act to minimize the potential negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts of an intervention on conflict. To be conflict-sensitive is to apply a contextual understanding across all FAO interventions to reduce potential unintended negative side-effects and, where possible, accentuate positive impacts in the community. The Programme Clinic is FAO's approach to applying conflict sensitivity. Further information is available at [www.fao.org/3/ca5784en/CA5784EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca5784en/CA5784EN.pdf).

particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and its impact on agricultural livelihoods. Competition can be fierce in situations of climate change-induced natural resource scarcity and is often exacerbated by poor or unsustainable natural resource management practices. This is further compounded in conflict and disaster contexts, where crucial rural infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed.

Given the dependency of rural areas on agricultural livelihoods, access to land and water resources can become major sources of tension between returnees and receiving communities. This is particularly evident where conflict and displacement has disrupted land tenure and occupancy systems, altered water rights or access arrangements, or destroyed critical agricultural infrastructure.

For example, land belonging to people who were forced to flee conflict or disaster may have been seized or controlled by combatants or other armed groups, or may now be occupied by other members of the community or displaced groups, which can result in tensions and resentment and become a potential source of local disputes or conflict. Furthermore, returnees might find themselves unable to access their land if legal or customary rules over land rights have changed or have been eroded during their absence. In such cases, they may also lack the necessary means<sup>13</sup> to access or utilise land restitution or governance processes.

Therefore, in order to be sustainable, reintegration interventions must be informed by a localized context analysis and designed to positively contribute to inter and intra-community relations. Context analysis and subsequent project design should also be informed by participatory processes that consider and incorporate returnee and receiving community voices, which is crucial to ensuring project design is inclusive and responsive to the needs of both groups. Ensuring inclusive and balanced approaches to beneficiary targeting is also important. Indeed, when only one group (returnees, for example) are receiving socioeconomic support, resentment within and between communities can be created.

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<sup>13</sup> Such as available and easily understandable information or legal and economic support.

As societal relations and insecurity can change quickly and with little notice, it is equally important to monitor the interaction between the local context and the intervention over the course of the project cycle. Without ongoing context monitoring and, where necessary, adaptation of the project to the changing context, there is a risk that local tensions will be created or exacerbated, which could potentially contribute to new displacement from communities of origin.

When reintegration processes in rural and peri-urban areas interlink with competition over access to natural resources and livelihoods, the multiple dimensions of food insecurity, the lack of investment by governments in marginalized areas, and the impacts of climate change or environmental mismanagement, FAO can make a unique peace-contributing impact. Its technical mandate and competences give the Organization an impartial entry point in which to engage with local stakeholders and support cooperation and collaboration on issues such as the management of natural resources, climate change adaptation and the strengthening of resilient agricultural livelihoods.



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# Partnerships

To ensure the sustainability of reintegration processes, FAO leverages its relationships with government, civil society, UN agencies and other national and international stakeholders to address the needs of individuals and communities at various stages of the return cycle. UN agencies such as IOM and UNHCR are important partners for FAO, as they fulfil a crucial role in the implementation of assisted voluntary return and repatriation programmes, in agreement with countries of destination and origin.

Strong partnerships and collaboration with other national and international actors are also important to ensure comprehensive and sustainable support to returnees and receiving communities, and allow various return and reintegration actors to complement each other's expertise and respective comparative advantages. The examples below highlight successful partnerships between FAO and other UN agencies, which aim to maximize the benefits of return migration, respond to the specific vulnerabilities of returnees and collect relevant data and evidence to inform and develop appropriate reintegration interventions. These examples illustrate how the UN Peacebuilding Fund has proved instrumental in facilitating UN partnerships for the implementation of return and reintegration projects.

## Contributions to local peacebuilding: from pre-return to reintegration

Sustainable and comprehensive return and reintegration processes are a key element for local peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, as they can have significant positive impacts on reconciliation dynamics, economic recovery efforts, governance structures and community level social cohesion. For this reason, return and reintegration projects should be designed and implemented with the aim of feeding into ongoing peacebuilding and sustaining peace processes in countries and communities of return. However, to make substantive peace-related contributions, targeted and comprehensive actions are needed from the pre-return through to the reintegration phase. For example, returnees





and receiving communities can be supported in moving towards reconciliation and assisted in maximizing the benefits and opportunities of return migration if the reintegration process is preceded by sensitization campaigns and skills development around conflict management and resolution. In this respect, pilot projects can be particularly useful to test different approaches to support local peacebuilding and can have a catalytic effect, leading to a scaling up of larger return and reintegration programmes.

## SOMALIA

Building on the tripartite agreement between the Government of Kenya, the Federal Government of Somalia and UNHCR (UNHCR, 2013), FAO collaborated with UNHCR, the United Nation's Children's Fund, the World Food Programme (WFP), IOM and the International Labour Organization to facilitate the return and reintegration of Somali refugees from Dadaab, Kenya to the Baidoa district in Somalia. This pilot project was intended to enable returnees to actively contribute to local peacebuilding in their communities of origin, by training them on conflict management and resolution prior to their return to Somalia.

The Baidoa district was selected because of its proximity to the border with Kenya, its potential in terms of agricultural livelihood development and the high numbers of Somali refugees returning to this area. Before returning to Somalia, returnees participated in the design of vocational trainings and employment schemes, based on updated market analysis conducted in the Baidoa district. During the reintegration phase, both returnees and local communities benefited from the provision of basic services, livelihood support and skills training. They were also involved in the joint rehabilitation of community infrastructure through a cash-for-work programme. The six UN agencies worked together to complement each other's respective expertise, with FAO taking a leading role in the rebuilding of the agricultural livelihoods of returnees who wished to resettle in rural areas, and providing them with agricultural and livestock inputs, including small ruminants and training on basic animal health support, water and post-harvest management.



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## Strengthening conflict management and prevention in communities of origin

Return migration, without appropriate and comprehensive reintegration assistance, can act as a trigger for local disputes and tensions, especially in conflict and post-conflict contexts where communities have been severely divided along cultural, religious, ethnic, or social fault lines. Strengthening the ability of returnees and receiving communities to prevent and manage conflict and establishing or reinforcing existing mechanisms for conflict resolution can thus be essential elements for a successful reintegration intervention. FAO's methodological approaches, such as farmer field schools, community production centres and Dimitra Clubs, represent ideal fora for conducting capacity development on conflict management and prevention. Furthermore, they can become a community gathering point to exchange knowledge and foster intergroup relations by promoting regular, positive interactions. This lays the foundations for strengthening social cohesion in the longer term – not only between returnee and receiving populations, but also between diverse (ethnic/livelihood/political/religious) groups within local communities.



### CAMEROON

Following ongoing conflict in the Sahel, the Far North Region of Cameroon has been affected by violence, insecurity and forced displacement. In the context of an already fragile social fabric, the return of people who were forcibly displaced can generate local tensions, particularly in relation to access of natural resources. In this context, FAO, IOM and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are working together to support local dialogue and prepare communities to reintegrate those who choose to return. While FAO focuses on economic support to households by strengthening their technical capacities through farmer field schools and providing agricultural inputs, IOM and the UNFPA are establishing community mediation and participation mechanisms to prevent and manage local tensions and disputes. These mechanisms are important fora for promoting dialogue between different population groups and contributing to social cohesion at the community level.



## MALI

In the central regions of Mopti and Segou, FAO works together with WFP and IOM to support the return and reintegration of IDPs who fled their communities of origin following inter and intracommunity violence. Through its Displacement Tracking Matrix, IOM is providing a valuable tool for the collection of data on the needs of the returnee population. Under the leadership of WFP, joint Participatory Community Planning sessions are conducted to actively involve returnees and local communities in project planning and implementation. Through Dimitra Clubs, FAO is creating spaces for dialogue within the community and utilising this community forum for the delivery of training on conflict prevention and management. It is also supporting returnees and local communities with the provision of agricultural and livestock inputs in an effort to rebuild and sustain their agricultural livelihoods. To complement the above-mentioned activities, IOM is conducting sensitization campaigns to prevent and combat stigmatization of returnees, and is providing support to local authorities to develop or update local-level action plans to facilitate the return of IDPs.

### Addressing gender barriers in reintegration interventions

Upon return to their communities of origin, women and girls might face specific gender barriers, negatively impacting their ability to access their rights, assets, training, relevant information and development aid. Restrictive gender norms in communities of origin may mean that women returnees – particularly those who have been independent income-earners elsewhere – might find it particularly difficult to resume traditional roles and responsibilities. In conflict and post-conflict contexts, returnee men, women, children and youth who have been associated with armed groups (including child soldiers) or have been victims of violence, exploitation or human trafficking can be further hampered by stigma, discrimination or exclusion. However, if reintegration programmes are responsive to these particular challenges and are conducted in a protection-sensitive manner, return and reintegration can represent an opportunity to overcome such barriers and even change unequal gender structures. Returnees can become agents of transformation in their own communities, if they receive relevant and appropriate services (including skills development

and livelihood support, sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial counselling) and they are supported, together with the receiving community, in addressing discriminatory social structures.



## **SOUTH SUDAN**

In most areas in South Sudan, access to and use of land are still governed by customary law and administered by male traditional leaders. Women who have been displaced and wish to return to their areas of origin are at particular risk of being left landless because they often lack the required resources to access the land entitlement process. This reality also negatively impacts their ability to generate income. In collaboration with UN Habitat, FAO seeks to improve land management and administration at state and local level in order to make it more gender-responsive and facilitate the return and reintegration of women IDPs. After having mapped women's land tenure rights at the community level, a legal assessment was conducted to identify gender barriers to access of land rights. Based on this information, a training curriculum on gender-sensitive land administration was developed, and targeted radio announcements were broadcast to increase awareness on women's land rights. Legal counselling and information centres were also established to provide legal support and information. Furthermore, a local technical committee on land governance was established to facilitate collaboration and information exchange between the community and different land authorities.



## **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

Recurring conflict in the Central African Republic has exacerbated discriminatory practices within social structures and increased the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. In this context, FAO and UN Women are working together to support women and girls (including returnees) to access economic opportunities. FAO supports women's access to cultivable land,<sup>14</sup> agricultural inputs and

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<sup>14</sup> The project contributed to the development of land charters and to guaranteeing access to 500 hectares of cultivable land for women's groups.



production equipment as well as to information and extension services. It also supports the creation and strengthening of women's agricultural groups and the setting-up of Village Savings and Loan Associations to support their engagement in agricultural livelihoods. UN Women focuses on women's access to financial products and services that are adapted to their needs. This includes the establishment of a dedicated fund which acts as a financial guarantee to women who wish to access credit or loans, conducting a training on financial, entrepreneurial and managerial skills, and supporting women's cooperatives in developing their business plans and promoting the use of the e-commerce platform "Buy From Women".

## Improving data and evidence generation to better inform reintegration

Given the complexity of return and reintegration contexts and processes, sound data collection and analysis are essential first steps to ensuring that the proposed interventions are relevant, effective and sustainable. This must be done throughout the return migration cycle and target both returnees and the receiving communities. On the one hand, returnees' individual profiles should be carefully assessed in order to identify specific vulnerabilities, take into account their perspectives and preferences, assess their personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, previous vocational training and skills, social networks, aspirations, financial situation, beliefs, etc.) as well as their circumstances of return (e.g. the length of their absence, the level of return preparedness, access to adequate information). On the other hand, the needs and perspectives of the receiving communities must also be analysed in combination with a general assessment of the socioeconomic and security conditions in the area of return, and specific assessments which can guide returnee-focused livelihood interventions. This includes an analysis of existing and potential sources of disputes and conflicts as well as the identification of local peace drivers.<sup>15</sup>



### IRAQ

To assist the Iraqi government in addressing the challenges faced by those returning to their rural communities of origin, FAO and IOM have collaborated on a joint study to identify the needs of returnees and formulate policy recommendations on how to best support the recovery of agricultural production and livelihoods in the rural areas of return (FAO and IOM, 2022). The study investigated the role agriculture can play as a source of livelihoods for returnees, and the drivers and challenges confronted by returnee households who are resuming agricultural

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<sup>15</sup> A comprehensive contextual understanding is integral to conflict-sensitive interventions, as highlighted in the above section “The importance of conflict-sensitivity in reintegration programming”. FAO’s Guide to Context Analysis is a practical learning tool to analyse the local context for a specific project or programme. It is considered as an essential precursor to FAO’s Programme Clinic approach to design conflict-sensitive interventions. Further information is available at [www.fao.org/3/ca5968en/CA5968EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca5968en/CA5968EN.pdf)

activities. It found that, among returnee households that were farming before displacement, the percentage of return remains low, suggesting the presence of specific obstacles for farmers who wish to return to their area of origin.

Most returnee households who have resumed farming indicated their primary source of income as either public service jobs or private, non-agricultural businesses. A new challenge faced by returnee farmers is the low prices offered at markets for agricultural products, a situation probably caused by fierce competition with cheap products imported from neighbouring countries through illegal channels. Another major obstacle is the lack of irrigation infrastructure, as a result of massive damage to farm assets and infrastructure associated with the recent conflict. The study also provides policy recommendations on the rehabilitation of the Iraqi agricultural sector, with a view to creating an enabling environment for returnees who wish to resume agricultural livelihood activities. In Iraq, FAO also continues to collect important complementary data on agricultural livelihood activities of returnees through its monthly monitoring of the COVID-19 impacts on food security and through its Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis.











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