



LOCAL OWNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION IN GHANA

LESSONS LEARNED REPORT SUMMARY



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This lessons learned report provides an overview of the insights derived from the RRF Local Ownership for Sustainable Reintegration project in Ghana, managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) Offices in Brussels and Accra and supported by the Government of Germany. The project aimed to reinforce collaboration among Government of Ghana institutions and actors involved in migrant return and reintegration.

Funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the project built upon the achievements of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) "Government to Government" project, extending certain activities and promoting institutionalisation of benefits from July 2022 to September 2023. Activities were well-designed to enhance collaboration between national return and reintegration actors as well as transnationally between the Government of Ghana (GoG) and European Union (EU) Member States through capacity-building supports to institutions, such as the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO).

RRF LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN GHANA

ICMPD advocates for effective cooperation and partnerships along major migration routes through both bilateral and multilateral approaches. With a membership of 20 states and operations in over 90 countries, including key regions such as Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Mediterranean, the Western Balkans and Türkiye, ICMPD has an expansive scope in leading research, dialogue, and capacity-building initiatives related to migration governance and management.

The RRF, implemented by ICMPD, seeks to facilitate the continued cooperation on return and reintegration amongst, and between, EU Member States; Schengen-associated countries and various priority countries of origin. To do so, the RRF provides operational and financial support to national institutions to support return and reintegration programming, and enhancing synergies between existing, relevant initiatives. In parallel, the RRF broadly supports the implementation of the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration.

In the context of Ghana, the RRF built on the results achieved by the ERRIN "Government to Government" project in Ghana. The overall objective of the project was to improve the collaboration between the GoG and EU Member States on return and reintegration related processes.

Following the end of the ERRIN "Government to Government" project in June 2022, ongoing project activities were carried forward and expanded through the RRF local ownership project from July 2022 to September 2023 (including the no-cost extension (NCE) period).

LESSONS LEARNED METHODOLOGY



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DURATION

October-November 2023



NUMBER OF INFORMANTS

30



DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Desk review, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (in-person and remote)

The RRF local ownership project in Ghana sought to continue strengthening the collaboration between the GoG actors involved in the reception and reintegration of returnees, with the aim of increasing their ownership of the readmission and reintegration process, while addressing some of the gaps identified in the course of ERRIN project implementation.

RRF local ownership project activities included streamlining additional supports to build capacity within the GIS, including the Migration Information Centre for Returnees (MICR) at the Kotoka International Airport, in accordance with the project's overall objective of enhancing collaboration between GoG and EU Members.

In addition, while notable progress was made toward standardising reception services under ERRIN, reintegration assistance available to returnees were still fragmented post-arrival and there was limited government oversight over reintegration programmes in Ghana. To address these gaps, the RRF project team signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with NADMO, and renewed an existing MoU with GIS, to further strengthen reception coordination of returnees at the airport. Some of the key activities under the RRF local ownership project include: mapping of reintegration service providers, launching the ongoing reintegration roundtable and consultative stakeholder meetings, organizing various trainings for GoG staff.

LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

This section describes the exercise's key lessons learned and good practices.



ADDRESSING BENEFICIARY NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

1. The RRF project effectively leveraged prior needs assessments, consultations and desk research conducted under ERRIN. These assessments informed the RRF project's design, ensuring its continued and expanding relevance for all stakeholders involved.
2. The project facilitated enhanced collaboration between Ghanaian institutions and external border management entities, including host countries. This was demonstrated with improved communication channels between GIS, the Government of Germany, and European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX), which were maintained throughout the project's implementation. This is also exemplified with the adoption of shared practices, such as the issuance of checklists to identify and verify returnees' belongings.
3. The project demonstrates coherence with other similar projects by incorporating learnings in the project's design and activities, such as the use of material and content from other regional projects into training modules (e.g., PROSPECT in Nigeria).
4. Efforts by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the EU Delegation in Ghana to promote the project and to convene relevant stakeholders facilitated improved cooperation and communication amongst transnational actors. Support from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia was noted as especially critical in designing the project and ensuring its relevance in the field of return and reintegration.
5. The involvement of diverse entities like NADMO, Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service, among others, demonstrated a well-designed inter-agency collaborative strategy aimed at addressing the diverse needs of returnees. It emphasised the key role of an interconnected network of agencies collaborating cohesively to improve reintegration activities.

6. The RRF project's iterative methodology, centred around continual discussions and assessments of institutional gaps, facilitated a sustained feedback loop, ensuring the ongoing relevancy of the project for beneficiaries and prioritising practical evolution of activities rather than the creation of entirely new systems or processes.
7. The return and reintegration actors involved recognise the need for ongoing emphasis on reintegration services – given the predominant focus on return. Future activities may include improving access to reintegration services and supports by continuing to connect relevant actors, increasing opportunities for joint service provision, educating returnees on regular migration pathways and learning from other reintegration practices outside of Ghana.

IMPROVED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

8. The local ownership project showcased effective stakeholder engagement through structured forums and regular meetings. It facilitated open discussions, improved internal communication, and clarified roles among stakeholders, fostering trust and collaboration that will contribute to the longer-term value of project results. The success of these communication methods was rooted in the trust and buy-in that was initially developed under the ERRIN project.
9. Project activities were described as facilitating the standardisation of terminology used, enabling participants to identify and reconcile differences in definitions and services covered. This alignment helps in creating a common framework of understanding among stakeholders.
10. By promoting local management and governance over project activities in Ghana, actors were better empowered and could apply their contextual experience and knowledge. This resulted in positive and efficient communications for beneficiaries and partners.
11. Emphasis on collaborative platforms and clear Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for effective data sharing and reporting underscored the significance of transparent and structured collaboration among involved entities.



PERCEPTION OF LONGER-TERM IMPACT

12. Informants shared that the local ownership project not only strengthened institutional coordination and operation capacities, but that it successfully shifted competitive dynamics among front-line return and reintegration actors towards more internal collaboration. This transformation enhanced trust among stakeholders and clarified their roles, fostering the likelihood that the benefits will be maintained longer-term.
13. The project's efforts to strengthen the MICR's capacity resulted in more efficient processing of returnees and better connections to essential support services. The success of the MICR suggests its potential as a model for similar service desks in other contexts aiming to enhance return reception.
14. Trainings offered through the project are described by informants as necessary, enabling stakeholders to understand referral processes, roles, and effectively support returnees. Informants highlighted the necessity of these trainings to continue and potentially expand in the future.
15. The project's successes, grounded in local ownership, align well with the European Union Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration, offering valuable insights for future initiatives launched by EU Member States and/or ICMPD.

THE INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE PROJECT'S DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

16. The project strategically implemented customised training modules that comprehensively covered diverse experiences and characteristics of returnees. These modules were designed to equip personnel with the necessary skills to address returnees' vulnerabilities, encompassing psychosocial, social, and economic needs.
17. The involvement of institutions, such as Port Health, National Ambulance Services and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, enabled targeted supports to be offered to some vulnerable returnees. Returnees are also better supported by NADMO's increased access to other reintegration actors across Ghana.
18. Issues related to health care, accommodation, employment and secondary readmission continue to affect the ability of returnees to adequately reintegrate, especially those who were non-voluntarily returned. These are areas that both government institutions and non-governmental organisations seek as requiring ongoing attention and additional resourcing.
19. Informants highlighted the importance of addressing the significant disparity between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees in accessing support, emphasising the disadvantage faced by non-voluntary returnees during their return and reintegration processes.

ENHANCING LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY

20. Active involvement of high-level leadership within local institutions significantly contributed to the project's success. Their engagement fostered commitment and a sense of ownership among participating institutional stakeholders, amplifying support for the project.
21. The project's success and the likelihood of its longer-term sustainability was strongly attributed to its emphasis on addressing genuine needs and requests of Government of Ghana institutions instead of imposing external agendas.
22. Encouraging continuous learning within local institutions, and potentially identifying future areas of collaboration with ICMPD and other actors, is crucial for sustaining ownership, ensuring lasting impacts, and fostering self-reliant operational frameworks beyond project timelines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section describes recommendations for institutionalised return and reintegration actors.

BUILDING INTERCONNECTED NATIONAL NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

1. **Transnational Cooperation and Communication:** As demonstrated through the RRF local ownership project, strengthening communication channels between government institutions, host countries, and international organisations is vital for enhancing return coordination. It is recommended to continue expanding collaboration to reflect the successes of this project focused on EU Member States with additional host countries (incl. those in West Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region). Most importantly, regular and systematic communication among stakeholders coordinating the full spectrum

of the return and readmission process is crucial. For example, this can encourage host countries to adopt the practice of providing GoG institutions with a checklist of returnees' belongings to minimise complaints related to missing possessions.

2. **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** GoG institutions should maintain and expand the interconnected network of agencies involved in return and reintegration efforts, ensuring the adequate representation of entities like GIS, NADMO, Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service. It is also important to consider extending this collaborative approach to include community-based organisations, particularly those tasked with addressing the longer-term needs of vulnerable returnees.
3. **Structured Stakeholder Engagement:** Maintain structured engagement forums and regular meetings among stakeholders to uphold the collaborative momentum established during the RRF local ownership project. Consider an annual forum involving all relevant organisations involved in return and reintegration activities within Ghana, to better build awareness and consensus on next steps. Facilitating training sessions, awareness building, experience sharing, and issue advocacy. Importantly, current stakeholders should prioritise scheduling upcoming stakeholder meetings following project closure to sustain the current momentum.
4. **Reintegration Coordination Network (RCN):** Stakeholders should continue leveraging the RCN, chaired by NADMO, for sustained engagement and centralised reporting on reintegration activities and interventions. Regular annual reports submitted by RCN members will offer valuable insights into referral processes and outcomes.
5. **NADMO's Referral System:** It is important to sustain internal efforts to ensure that NADMO's comprehensive network of reintegration organisations and its proactive referral approach is effectively used and maintained future-forward.
6. **Continuous Learning and Collaboration:** Wherever possible, it will be important to organise opportunities to promote a culture of continuous internal learning within national institutions and facilitate collaborations between external entities, such as ICMPD, FRONTEX and GIZ with local authorities. These partnerships can support ongoing skill transfer, knowledge exchange, and ensure sustained ownership and optimised project benefits.
7. **New Partnerships:** GoG stakeholders may wish to expand into new partnerships with new and non-traditional actors, including academic institutions, diaspora groups and private firms, to enhance technical capacities, conduct capacity-building activities, and ensure coherent service provision for returnees, especially in the area of longer-term reintegration.



DRIVING TRANSNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND GLOBAL COLLABORATION IN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

8. **Needs Assessment and Agile Methodologies:** ICMPD, and other international actors, can promote the RRF local ownership project's iterative and localised methodology as a model for future interventions, ensuring ongoing relevance by addressing evolving needs and institutional gaps through extensive consultations with national actors, identifying their most pressing needs and ensuring they lead project activities. The team can also emphasise continual change management and re-assessments to adapt strategies as the needs of beneficiaries expand or change.
9. **Cross-Context Learning and Collaboration:** To showcase lessons learned and good practices, it will be important to leverage how findings from across other return and reintegration projects, including those under ERRIN and RRF, demonstrate synergies and common challenges and solutions in this area of work. In the future, opportunities to promote transnational learnings amongst front-line ministries with similar purviews (e.g., through study visits) may promote new approaches in national contexts.

10. Informing Global Initiatives and EU Strategies: Given the RRF local project's successes, international actors may wish to demonstrate how the success of the RRF local ownership project aligns with the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration. This can offer insights and a robust model for future initiatives, not limited to EU-supported projects, but beneficial for global efforts in return and reintegration.

11. Expansion of Successful Models: Designing return and reintegration mechanisms and entities, such as the MICR, was highlighted as a potential practice that can be replicated in other contexts, including in other airports and at border checkpoints. ICMPD can continue to explore the scalability and broader implementation of the MICR/airport desk model, assessing its potential in various regions.



ENHANCING OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION: COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

12. Strengthen Sustainable Infrastructure and SOP Development: Future-forward, GoG stakeholders may wish to support and enhance existing infrastructure developed resulting from RRF, like the enhancements provided to MICR, as well as to develop detailed SOPs to streamline return and reintegration processes. SOPs, in particular, can be developed nationally to better define reintegration processes and structures, potentially expanding the scope of what services and assistance is available to vulnerable returnees, including those who returned non-voluntarily.

13. Assess Priority Reintegration Services: As the area of reintegration continues to require significant support, GoG stakeholders may wish to address challenges in this domain by coordinating cost-effective joint service provision, reducing any concerning service duplication, educating communities on regular migration pathways, and learning from successful practices beyond Ghana. Areas that continue to require support include healthcare, employment, accommodation, as well as readmission for non-Ghanian returnees. To address some of these concerns, GoG stakeholders may wish to:

- a. Consider establishing waiting areas near reception centers for returnees to ease fatigue, aid data collection, and support informative discussions for referrals.
- b. Continue prioritising access to essential health care supplies for returnees upon arrival, including those who may not have immediate access to their health insurance.
- c. Continue working with external agencies to establish referral protocols for returnees with mental health concerns.
- d. Provide access to accommodation for those who do not have social networks or cannot afford regular lodging and accommodations in Accra.
- e. Explore tailored skill development programs aligned with returnees' acquired skills abroad to enhance their employability and smooth reintegration.
- f. Enhance bilateral coordination with countries whose nationals are categorised as non-Ghanaian returnees and collaborate with international organisations and host countries to improve support systems offered to them.

14. Supporting Non-voluntary Returnees: By designing and sharing inclusive services that address the specific needs of non-voluntary returnees, GoG institutions and partners may bridge the service gap between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees over time with targeted supports and activities.

15. Data Collection and Sharing Frameworks: Relevant institutions may wish to establish robust frameworks for data collection and sharing among stakeholders to effectively monitor returnees' reintegration. This will require the enhancement of existing monitoring processes and the standardisation of data collection procedures for comprehensive information exchange.



OPTIMISING TRAINING APPROACHES FOR EFFECTIVE RETURNEE SUPPORT

16. Lastly, there were several recommendations that were identified relating to future trainings that are organised by GoG institutions or partners:

- a. When possible, maintain a blend of local and international trainers to enrich the material covered while enhancing training comprehensiveness and accessibility.
- b. Implement standardised trainings across various border points to ensure consistent skill development and knowledge transfer, particularly vital amid staff turnover in institutions like GIS.
- c. In the future, organise specialised training modules to equip personnel in addressing various vulnerabilities—psychosocial, social, and economic needs. Facilitate practical knowledge-sharing sessions specifically addressing identification and support for vulnerable returnees.
- d. If possible, include sessions where reintegrated returnees share firsthand experiences to enrich future training programs, providing invaluable insights for participants.
- e. Ensure that training initiatives first provide material and discussion covering the standard use of migration-related terminology.
- f. Encourage a deeper understanding of asylum systems among personnel to provide more informed support for returnees navigating asylum-related challenges.
- g. Prioritise specialised training for MICR officers focusing on handling vulnerable returnees, conflict resolution, and familiarity with EU asylum procedures.

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