Forum: International Organisation for Migration

Topic: Facilitating safe and voluntary Migrant Repatriation and Reintegration

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Filippos Timotheos Stafylas, an IB2 student in Athens College, and I am honoured to serve as a Deputy President of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). I have participated in six Model United Nations conferences, and these experiences have strengthened my passion for humanitarian issues by giving me insight into the challenges and opportunities within international policymaking.

I have a personal connection to migration, having been born in Finland and lived for extended periods in Pakistan, Türkiye, and Greece, particularly in the diverse neighborhood of Kipseli. Growing up in communities with large migrant populations has shaped my understanding of the complexities of migration, integration, and human rights. Academically, I am pursuing Global Politics at the Higher Level in the IB programme, where my Internal Assessment focuses on migration issues and refugee rights. Additionally, I have conducted independent research on safe and voluntary migrant repatriation and reintegration.

I encourage all delegates to approach this topic with creativity, diplomacy, and respect for international law. You may contact me at faihello@yahoo.com for any questions or guidance as you prepare for the conference. Furthermore, feel free to contact the President of IOM, George Skourletos, at georgeskourletos@gmail.com. I look forward to working with you all to find innovative and practical solutions and strongly encourage you to carry out some research in order to feel much more prepared.

Filippos Timotheos Stafylas.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Migration—whether forced or voluntary—affects millions worldwide. In mid-2023, a record of 115 million people were forcibly displaced, including refugees and internally displaced persons.[1] Refugees are individuals who cross an international border to escape conflict, persecution, or danger, while internally displaced persons (IDPs) are those who flee their homes for similar reasons but remain within their own country's borders.[2] Although over a million refugees return home each year, return rates remain low compared to the total number of displaced people. For instance, in 2022, only around 339,000 refugees voluntarily returned to their countries of origin, even as tens of millions remain displaced. Many returns also happen in precarious conditions, highlighting the dramatic gap between displacement and durable solutions.[3] Migrants stranded in camps or foreign cities for years face deteriorating conditions and legal limbo, and host countries bear heavy social and economic costs, such as increased pressure on public services, housing markets, and employment systems. According to UNHCR and IOM, safe and voluntary repatriation—supported by effective reintegration programmes—is considered one of the most sustainable long-term solutions for displaced people.[4] It respects refugees' human rights by allowing them to return home freely and safely, while also helping reduce long-term pressures on host countries by preventing re-displacement and supporting stable reintegration. Ensuring that returns are dignified, safe, and truly voluntary is crucial because forced or unsafe returns can expose people to renewed danger, human rights violations, or conditions that may trigger re-displacement. When refugees choose to return freely and with confidence in their safety, reintegration is far more likely to be successful, stable, and sustainable. Statistics highlight the scale and persistence of global displacement. In 2020, only 250,000 refugees returned to their home countries out of 26.4 million worldwide, far fewer than in previous decades. UNHCR data shows that forced displacement has

[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Mid-Year Trends 2023: Global Forced Displacement at Mid-Year*. UNHCR, 2023. www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Mid-year-trends-2023.pdf
[2] Ferris, Elizabeth. *Traditional Approaches to Displacement Are Not Working.* Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 21 Feb. 2024, pp. 1–7.
[3] Ferris, Elizabeth. *Traditional Approaches to Displacement Are Not Working.* Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 21 Feb. 2024, pp. 1–7.
[4] "Returnees." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/returnees.

reached unprecedented levels: from around 26 million people in 2010, the total number of refugees and internally displaced persons exceeded 115 million by mid-2023. Despite this dramatic increase, only a small fraction of displaced individuals achieve durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation or resettlement, with less than 10% returning to their countries of origin in most years. These figures underscore that displacement is not only widespread but often protracted, highlighting the urgent need for effective policies to facilitate safe and sustainable return.

The challenge of migrant repatriation and reintegration extends beyond humanitarian considerations, serving as a critical measure of international collaboration, respect for human rights, and collective responsibility. Each displaced individual embodies a narrative of loss, endurance, and the aspiration for a more secure and dignified future. Protracted refugee situations, which now last on average over 20 years, demonstrate that temporary measures are no longer enough.[5] Host countries such as Türkiye, Lebanon, and Bangladesh struggle to sustain their capacities, while origin countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan often lack the stability or infrastructure to welcome returnees.[6]

Moreover, climate change has become an increasingly powerful driver of displacement, compounding existing crises. Floods, droughts, and extreme weather events have forced people to leave their homes across regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific.[7] Many of these individuals are not protected under current refugee law, leaving them particularly vulnerable when attempting to return.[8] Reintegration, in these cases, requires not only social support but also adaptation measures—such as rebuilding homes in safer areas, restoring agricultural land, and ensuring access to clean water and healthcare.

In addition, the growing politicisation of migration has complicated international cooperation. Some nations, like Hungary, Poland, and Greece. have turned to restrictive

[5] *GLOBAL TRENDS FORCED DISPLACEMENT in 2021*.
[6] UNHCR. "Global Trends Report 2024 | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2024, www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024.
[7] "Climate Crisis Fuels Flooding and Deepens Displacement." *UNHCR*, 22 May 2024,www.unhcr.org/news/stories/climate-crisis-fuels-flooding-and-deepens-displacement.
[8] United Nations. "UNHCR - the UN Refugee Agency." *Unhcr.org*, 2023, www.unhcr.org/.

border policies, emphasising deterrence rather than assistance.[9] This shift has made voluntary repatriation harder to achieve, as refugees fear being coerced into unsafe returns. It also undermines trust in the global migration system, making it crucial for international organisations like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to reaffirm the principle of voluntariness and dignity.

Safe and voluntary repatriation cannot exist without sustainable reintegration. "Safe" repatriation means that returnees are not exposed to ongoing armed conflict, persecution, or environmental hazards when they go home, while "voluntary" means they are returning by choice, without coercion, and with access to accurate information about conditions in their communities. When returnees go back to areas still affected by war, extreme poverty, or environmental degradation, they may struggle to access housing, livelihoods, healthcare, or education, increasing the risk of repeated displacement. Sustainable reintegration programs—such as providing vocational training, psychosocial support, or housing assistance—are essential to make returns both genuinely safe and truly voluntary. Successful reintegration requires coordinated support—access to housing, education, healthcare, legal documentation, and livelihoods. It also calls for collaboration between humanitarian and development actors to ensure long-term stability rather than short-term relief.

The issue of safe and voluntary migrant repatriation and reintegration directly reflects the theme "Beyond Borders." Migration challenges do not stop at national boundaries, and addressing displacement requires international cooperation that transcends borders. By ensuring that returnees are supported socially, economically, and legally, countries and organisations move beyond mere border control toward shared responsibility and human security. The theme reminds us that durable solutions depend on collaboration across borders—between origin, transit, and host countries—and on a commitment to global solidarity. Delegates are encouraged to consider not only the movement of people, but also the broader humanitarian, legal, and development frameworks that operate beyond geographic boundaries.

[9] "Access to the Territory and Push Backs." *Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, asylumineurope.org/reports/country/hungary/asylum-procedure/access-procedure-and-registration/access-territory-and-push-backs/.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Voluntary Repatriation

"The return of refugees to their home country of their own free will following the stabilisation of the situation in their home country."[10] In other words, migrants choose to go back when it is safe to do so, with no coercion.

Reintegration

The process of socially and economically re-absorbing returnees into their home communities. This includes providing support so that returned migrants can build sustainable lives.[11]

Refugee

"An individual who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted … is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of its protection."[12]

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

"A person forced to flee their home for similar reasons as refugees but who remains within their own country's borders and has not crossed an international boundary."[13]

Durable Solutions

Long-term solutions for people displaced by conflict or disaster. They are achieved when a person "has moved refugee status to a permanent legal status and has access to fundamental rights." The three traditional durable solutions are voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement.[14]

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[10] Hanatani, Atsushi. *A NEW WAY of WORKING to SUPPORT REFUGEES PUTTING the HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS into ACTION in AFRICA JICA PROJECT HISTORY SERIES No.5*. 2023.
[11] IOM. "International Organization for Migration." *International Organization for Migration*, 2018, www.iom.int/.
[12] OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Glossary: Refugee.* OSCE/ODIHR, 2015.
[13] Wikipedia, s.v. "Internally Displaced Person," updated Oct. 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internally_displaced_person.
[14] UNHCR. "Solutions." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

The issue of forced migration and displacement has deep historical roots, shaped by wars, colonial legacies, state formation, and evolving international norms. Mass refugee movements were documented as early as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when populations fled political upheaval, ethnic persecution, and emerging nation-states' territorial conflicts. The two World Wars produced unprecedented refugee flows in Europe and the Middle East, prompting the creation of the League of Nations' Refugee Agency in 1921, which laid the foundation for later international refugee governance. After World War II, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol codified the rights of refugees and host-state responsibilities, establishing the principle of non-refoulement and defining the legal framework for voluntary return. In the decades that followed, global displacement crises—from the partition of India in 1947 to conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Rwanda—highlighted the recurring link between persecution, war, and economic instability in driving forced migration.[15] These historical experiences have shaped the development of international mechanisms for protection, durable solutions, and reintegration, including UNHCR programs, bilateral return agreements, and multilateral frameworks aimed at combining humanitarian assistance with long-term development strategies.

Root Causes of Migration and Displacement

People migrate or flee for a complex interplay of factors, including armed conflict, targeted persecution, economic deprivation, and increasingly frequent environmental disasters such as droughts, floods, and storms driven by climate change. Wars in Syria, civil unrest across the Sahel and Horn of Africa, and political instability in Afghanistan and Myanmar have generated massive refugee flows, while environmental shocks—ranging from earthquakes to progressive desertification—disrupt livelihoods and force communities to relocate. Often, these drivers interact, as violence undermines economic opportunities, persecution limits safe choices, and

[15] "Number of People Uprooted by War at Shocking, Decade-High Levels – UNHCR." Unrefugees.org, 2025, www.unrefugees.org/news/number-of-people-uprooted-by-war-at-shocking-decade-high-levels-unhcr/.

environmental stress exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, producing multidimensional crises in which displacement becomes both a survival strategy and a symptom of broader structural instability.

Conflict

Conflict is one of the primary drivers of forced displacement worldwide. By 2025, over 73 million people were internally displaced due to conflict and violence, with large-scale crises in countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Ukraine uprooting millions of people. Conflicts displace individuals through a combination of direct and indirect mechanisms: active fighting, shelling, or airstrikes destroy homes and infrastructure, while targeted attacks, ethnic cleansing, or systematic human rights abuses force specific groups to flee for their lives.[16] Even when physical harm is not imminent, the collapse of public services, scarcity of food, water, and medical care, and economic disruption compel communities to move in search of safety and survival. Conflict-driven displacement often occurs suddenly, giving families little time to prepare or bring possessions, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, or secondary displacement. Moreover, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within their national borders, where they lack the formal protections afforded to refugees under international law. This can trap them in cycles of violence, poverty, and insecurity, as they are often confined to overcrowded camps, informal settlements, or contested territories with limited access to humanitarian assistance, education, or employment. Long-term displacement can fracture social networks, erode community cohesion, and impede prospects for safe return or reintegration, creating protracted crises that can persist for years or even decades.[17]

Persecution

Persecution based on ethnicity, religion, political opinion, or other factors is another major cause of migration. Many asylum seekers come from countries where they face

[16] "Number of People Uprooted by War at Shocking, Decade-High Levels – UNHCR." Unrefugees.org, 2025, www.unrefugees.org/news/number-of-people-uprooted-by-war-at-shocking-decade-high-levels-unhcr/.
[17] "Number of People Uprooted by War at Shocking, Decade-High Levels – UNHCR." *Unrefugees.org*, 2025, www.unrefugees.org/news/number-of-people-uprooted-by-war-at-shocking-decade-high-levels-unhcr/.

systemic human rights abuses, such as political repression in Afghanistan or ethnic violence in parts of Africa. By 2025, over 122 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, driven in part by persecution.[18] Persecution—whether on the basis of ethnicity, religion, political opinion, or social group—directly undermines fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression, security, and protection from arbitrary detention or violence. Individuals facing targeted persecution are often forced to flee suddenly, without the ability to secure property, documentation, or livelihoods, leaving them extremely vulnerable both during displacement and upon return. Even when refugees find asylum abroad, the effects of persecution can persist, manifesting as long-term psychological trauma, disrupted family structures, and loss of social and economic capital. For example, ethnic minorities who flee systematic discrimination may struggle to reclaim their homes or property if political conditions in their country of origin remain hostile, and children of persecuted families often bear the consequences through interrupted education, social marginalization, and intergenerational trauma.[19]

Economic Hardship

Economic hardship also drives migration. Many people flee poverty, lack of job opportunities, or failing economies in search of a more stable life. Low- and middle-income countries that host refugees often struggle economically, which both pushes out migrants and limits their capacity to assist. For example, in conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan, soaring unemployment and widespread food insecurity make return or local integration extremely difficult. Economic migrants who do not qualify for refugee status may receive less formal protection, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation during migration or upon return.

Environmental Disasters

Environmental disasters are increasingly a driver of displacement. Over the past decade, weather-related disasters such as floods, droughts, and storms have caused more than 220 million internal displacements worldwide. Large-scale flooding in parts of Africa

[18] "Number of People Uprooted by War at Shocking, Decade-High Levels – UNHCR." Unrefugees.org, 2025, www.unrefugees.org/news/number-of-people-uprooted-by-war-at-shocking-decade-high-levels-unhcr/.

[19] "Five Takeaways from the 2024 UNHCR Global Trends Report." *Unrefugees.org*, 2024, www.unrefugees.org/news/five-takeaways-from-the-2024-unhcr-global-trends-report/.

and Asia has forced many people to flee temporarily or permanently. Climate-displaced populations are often not protected under traditional refugee law, and without durable solutions, they may face repeated displacements. The combination of environmental stress and weak infrastructure in highly exposed regions means that communities may never fully recover, creating a cycle of disaster and displacement.[20]

Challenges of Repatriation and Reintegration

Achieving safe repatriation is difficult. First, security and stability in the origin country are often lacking. Refugees cannot return until conflicts and governments consent to repatriation. As Elizabeth Ferris's, a senior scholar in forced migration analysis notes, "most fundamentally, conflicts have to end for refugees to return and the country of origin's government has to agree".[21] Even when gunfire stops, infrastructure may be destroyed and communities fragmented. Land mines or damaged buildings can make it unsafe to live. Moreover, returning refugees must have their rights respected. Without guaranteed safety and property restitution, many hesitate to go home.

Even after returnees arrive, reintegration poses major hurdles. Returnees often face economic barriers: jobs may be scarce in their home area, or skills they learned abroad do not match the local market. They may lack housing or land, and small businesses or farms might have been taken over in their absence. Without livelihood support or grants, sustaining themselves is hard. Socially, returnees may feel alienated; families left behind or local communities might not accept them readily after a long absence. Health and education systems, already strained, must absorb returning children and the injured or trauma-affected.

The importance of reintegration is widely recognised but under-resourced. For instance, a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) report notes that although millions returned in the past, progress has slowed: about 1.5 million refugees found solutions in the 1990s, 1 million in the 2000, but only 400,000 in the 2010s. By 2020, just 250,000

[20] "No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict and Forced Displacement | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2024, www.unhcr.org/publications/no-escape-frontlines-climate-change-conflict-and-forced-displacement

[21] Ferris, Elizabeth. *Traditional Approaches to Displacement Are Not Working.* Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 21 Feb. 2024, pp. 1–7.

refugees returned to their home countries.[22] Funding shortfalls also hamper reintegration programs. Without sustained economic assistance, many returns are unsustainable, and some refugees end up re-migrating.[23]

Reintegration Programmes

A variety of programmes attempt to ease return and reintegration. The International Organisation for Migration runs Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes in dozens of countries. IOM provides returning migrants with travel support and often with cash grants, vocational training, or equipment to start business. For example, a returning family might receive an allowance for transportation and two years of business training. UNHCR also supports returnees through shelter, legal aid, and coordination of local services. These measures are important because they help returnees re-establish their livelihoods, regain stability, and rebuild a sense of security in their communities. Without such support, returnees may struggle to access basic needs, face economic hardship, or even be forced to leave again, perpetuating the cycle of displacement. By providing practical and social assistance, organisations help ensure that repatriation is truly sustainable and that returnees can reintegrate successfully. Development agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have supported job-creation projects in areas with high returnee populations. Some governments tie development aid to migration management: the EU's development funds for West Africa include projects aimed at reducing irregular migration by improving conditions at home.[24]

NGOs and the Red Cross play vital roles too. In several countries, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) helps with reintegration by tracing families, reuniting them, and providing initial relief (food, clothes, healthcare) to returnees. Specialised NGOs like Kinder in Need of Defence assist child migrants returning home, offering legal and

[22] United Nations. "1 in 100 People in the World Are Displaced: UNHCR Global Trends Report." *United Nations in Ukraine*, 19 June 2020, https://ukraine.un.org/en/49781-1-cent-humanity-displaced-unhcr-global-trends-report.
[23] Hanatani, Atsushi. *A NEW WAY of WORKING to SUPPORT REFUGEES PUTTING the HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS into ACTION in AFRICA JICA PROJECT HISTORY SERIES No.5*. 2023.
[24] "EU-Africa Relations." *Europa.eu*, European Council, 2017, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-africa/.

psychosocial support. In sum, although a patchwork of initiatives exist, coordination is often weak and funding limited.

Perspectives of Host Countries and Countries of Origin

Host countries (where migrants are located) bear immediate costs: crowded camps, welfare expenses, and sometimes social tension. Many hosts hope that some migrants will return home to ease pressures. For example, after 2011 Türkiye expressed willingness to gradually let some Syrian refugees return if the situation in Syria stabilised. The EU has also linked development aid to return agreements.[25]

Origin countries, by contrast, may be ambivalent. On one hand, they want their citizens back to rebuild society and economy. On the other hand, they may lack resources to reintegrate them or may fear political unrest if large groups return at once. Moreover, some origin governments have been slow to rebuild; without economic incentives at home, many displaced families hesitate to come back. International frameworks (like the UN's 2018 Global Compact on Refugees) emphasise that origin countries should create safe conditions to encourage return.[26] In practice, cooperation varies widely: some states actively invite return, while others erect barriers.

Case Study: Syrian Refugee Returns

The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, provides a contemporary example of the complexities surrounding repatriation and reintegration. Millions of Syrians sought asylum in neighboring countries, particularly Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan. Türkiye, hosting the largest population of Syrian refugees, has facilitated some voluntary returns by constructing housing in northern Syria's so-called "safe zones," while international organizations like UNHCR and IOM provide reintegration support, including documentation, livelihood assistance, and psychosocial care. Despite these efforts, the pace of return has been slow: concerns about security, ongoing hostilities, destroyed infrastructure, and the lack of social cohesion in areas of return have limited uptake. Many returnees have faced housing disputes, limited access to schools and healthcare,

[25] European Commission . "EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye." *Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood*, 6 Jan. 2025, enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-support-refugees-turkiye_en.
[26] Ferris, Elizabeth. *Traditional Approaches to Displacement Are Not Working.* Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 21 Feb. 2024, pp. 1–7.

and challenges in reclaiming property. The case of Syria illustrates how durable solutions require more than transportation or shelter; they demand coordinated efforts between host states, origin countries, and international actors to ensure that returns are safe, voluntary, and sustainable, while also addressing economic, social, and legal reintegration needs.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of the Event	Event
July 28th, 1951	The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This landmark treaty defines who is a refugee and outlines their rights. While it emphasises protection, it also recognises voluntary repatriation as a durable solution.[27]
January 31st, 1967	The Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by the UN General Assembly, removing the geographical/time limits of the 1951 Convention, making its protections universal.[28]
April 17th, 1998	The UN issues the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, an authoritative, though non-binding, framework. Principle 29 explicitly calls for IDPs to be allowed to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity, and

[27] *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137. UN General Assembly.
[28] UNHCR. "The 1951 Refugee Convention." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention.

	to receive needed humanitarian assistance.[29]
September 19th, 2016	The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly. This declaration, pledging to protect migrants' rights and to expand safe channels for movement. It affirms that countries should cooperate to assist voluntary returnees and to promote reintegration support in home countries.[30]
December 17th, 2018	The Global Compact on Refugees, which is the first UN framework focused on refugee solutions, was adopted by the UN General Assembly under UNHCR auspices. Among its objectives are easing host-country burdens and supporting conditions in countries of origin for refugees to return in safety and dignity. The GCR encourages development aid for refugee-hosting areas and for vulnerable areas of origin as part of comprehensive solution strategies.[31]

[29] "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.

[30] "Press Release: New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants Adopted by All Member States at Historic UN Summit." *Refugees and Migrants*, 19 Sept. 2016, refugeesmigrants.un.org/press-release-new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants-adopted-all-member-states-historic-un.

[31] Ferris, Elizabeth. *Traditional Approaches to Displacement Are Not Working.* Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 21 Feb. 2024, pp. 1–7.

December 19th, 2018	The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is the UN General Assembly's first intergovernmental migration agreement. Objective 21 specifically addresses return: it urges states to cooperate on "ensuring that return, readmission and reintegration are safe, dignified and in full respect of human rights".[32]

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Türkiye

Türkiye hosts one of the largest Syrian refugee populations in the world. While earlier estimates cited around 3.6 million Syrian refugees under temporary protection, recent figures indicate that number has declined slightly due to limited returns and onward migration.[33] Ankara has periodically supported voluntary return programs, working with UN agencies to facilitate safe and organised repatriation. Since 2011, tens of thousands of Syrians have crossed back into Syria under these schemes, though the scale remains small compared to the total population.[34]

The Turkish government's approach to return is shaped not only by humanitarian concerns but also by political and strategic considerations. Some returns are linked to Turkish-led infrastructure and housing projects in northern Syria, described as "safe zones," intended to provide conditions for voluntary return.[35] However, international

[32] "United Nations Network on Migration." *Migrationnetwork.un.org*, migrationnetwork.un.org/.
[33] "Republic of Türkiye | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 13 June 2025, www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/republic-tuerkiye.
[34] UNHCR. *Syria Refugee Returnees.* UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/syria-returnees
[35] Anadolu Agency. "Türkiye Prepares Homes in Northern Syria for Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees." *AA.com.tr*, 26 May 2023, www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-prepares-homes-in-northern-syria-for-voluntary-return-of-syrian-refugees/2906813.

organisations and independent observers caution that these zones may not be fully safe or sustainable, and that the voluntariness of some returns can be questioned, particularly given ongoing insecurity and limited public services in many areas.[36]

Domestically, refugee return has become a highly politicized issue, with rising anti-refugee sentiment influencing public policy and elections, while returnees themselves often face severe challenges. In Germany, for example, early 2025 saw protests and legal opposition in villages such as Rott am Inn when plans were announced to house 300 refugees in a disused facility, with local petitions and media coverage highlighting perceived strains on infrastructure and social services. This unrest contributed to growing support for anti-immigration political parties, such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD), demonstrating how refugee presence can shape electoral outcomes. Similarly, in Turkey during July 2024, violent riots targeting Syrian refugees erupted in multiple cities after a high-profile incident, leading to attacks on homes and shops, hundreds of arrests, and dozens of injuries.[37] Many refugees reported fear and considered returning to Syria despite ongoing conflict, illustrating how hostility in host communities can undermine the safety, voluntariness, and dignity of returns. These cases show that political pressure, social hostility, and economic stress in host countries not only affect public perception and policy but also create real barriers to sustainable reintegration for returnees.

Overall, Türkiye's strategy represents a complex balancing act: it seeks to reduce domestic pressures from hosting refugees, gain leverage in reconstruction negotiations in Syria, and maintain a humanitarian appearance through cooperation with UN agencies. While the programmes have enabled the return of some Syrians, their overall success is mixed, with questions remaining about safety, sustainability, and the extent to which returns are genuinely voluntary.

[36] Choudhury, Samrat. "The "New Syria": Should Turkey Be Repatriating Syrians? - 360." *360*, 13 Jan. 2025, 360info.org/the-new-syria-should-turkey-be-repatriating-syrians/.
[37] Choudhury, Samrat. "The "New Syria": Should Turkey Be Repatriating Syrians? - 360." 360, 13 Jan. 2025, 360info.org/the-new-syria-should-turkey-be-repatriating-syrians/.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh hosts over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.[38] Dhaka insists on "safe, dignified" return of the Rohingya and has repeatedly pressed Myanmar to accept them back. It also participates in joint working groups with UNHCR and IOM on repatriation conditions, but many Rohingya cite lack of citizenship and fear of persecution as barriers to going home.[39] Beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, Bangladesh faces environmental and social pressures from hosting such a large refugee population in the Cox's Bazar region. The strain on local resources, rising tensions between host and refugee communities, and frequent monsoon-related disasters have made long-term hosting unsustainable.

Consequently, Bangladesh has advocated internationally for stronger accountability mechanisms against Myanmar and for increased global support. Its government has also initiated pilot relocation programmes, such as transferring refugees to Bhasan Char Island, as part of its broader repatriation management strategy. The Bhasan Char relocation programme is Bangladesh's initiative to ease extreme overcrowding in the Cox's Bazar camps by moving Rohingya refugees to a newly developed island in the Bay of Bengal. The government constructed purpose-built housing, cyclone shelters, solar power systems, and basic services, and by 2024 more than 30,000 Rohingya had been transferred there. The programme has produced some benefits, particularly by reducing pressure in mainland camps and providing more permanent structures than tarpaulin shelters.

However, it remains highly controversial. Human rights groups warn that the island's geography makes it vulnerable to cyclones and flooding, and services such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities remain limited. Concerns also persist regarding restrictions on movement and doubts about how voluntary the relocations truly are, as some refugees feel compelled to move due to insecurity and deteriorating conditions in Cox's Bazar. Overall, the initiative represents a significant

[38] *"Bangladesh: Refugee Figures."* UNHCR,www.unhcr.org/bangladesh-refugee-figures.html
[39] "Bangladesh | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2017, www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/bangladesh.

logistical achievement by Bangladesh but delivers only partial success, with its long-term viability dependent on strengthened protections, expanded services, and full respect for refugee rights.[40]

Pakistan

For decades Pakistan was the main host of Afghan refugees. Between 2002 and 2024, UNHCR-facilitated voluntary returns numbered over 4.45 million Afghan nationals. Islamabad's strategy combined offering proof-of-registration cards with working with IOM on return. In recent years, Pakistan has collaborated closely with Afghanistan to repatriate remaining refugees and undocumented migrants, emphasising reintegration training funded by international donors.[41] Moreover, Pakistan's approach has evolved due to shifting regional politics and economic challenges. The recent repatriation of undocumented Afghans in late 2023 sparked controversy over humanitarian conditions, prompting renewed discussions between UNHCR, IOM, and both governments. Pakistan has called for international assistance to support reintegration in Afghanistan, stressing that sustainable return depends on long-term stability and job creation. Despite criticism, Pakistan remains a key actor in the region's migration diplomacy and a testing ground for large-scale repatriation coordination.

United States (USA)

The USA is a major destination for migrants coming from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. U.S. immigration policy includes expedited deportations of unauthorised migrants and some voluntary return counseling. Immigration and Customs Enforcement plays a central role in this system by carrying out detentions, removals, and enforcement operations inside the country. ICE also partners with international organisations and foreign governments to coordinate repatriation logistics and ensure that return procedures follow established legal and security protocols. Agencies like the Department of Homeland Security fund reintegration projects in origin countries. U.S. interests include border security, and it works with Mexico and other countries on

[40] Human Rights Watch. ""An Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea."" *Human Rights Watch*, 7 June 2021, www.hrw.org/report/2021/06/07/island-jail-middle-sea/bangladeshs-relocation-rohingya-refugees-bhasan-char.

[41] UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Pakistan – Afghan Repatriation." *UNHCR*, Dec. 2024, data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

migration flows.[42] Additionally, the United States plays a dual role as both a host and a policy influencer in international migration governance. Through agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the U.S. funds reintegration and protection programmes in Central America, Africa, and Asia. The U.S. funds several reintegration and protection programmes aimed at helping returned migrants rebuild their lives and reducing the pressures that lead to re-migration. Through USAID and partnerships with organisations like IOM and the International Rescue Committee, these programmes provide reception-center services, psychosocial support, education reintegration for children, vocational training, and livelihood assistance in regions such as Central America, Africa, and Asia. Evidence shows that these initiatives have had meaningful impact, particularly in improving short-term support systems and strengthening local government capacity, which helps returnees reintegrate more sustainably. However, effectiveness varies by country, and a U.S. Government Accountability Office review found that many reintegration projects still lack rigorous monitoring and long-term evaluation, making it difficult to measure outcomes such as reduced re-migration or economic self-sufficiency. Overall, the most promising results come from programmes that combine humanitarian support with skills training and community-based reintegration strategies, as these provide both immediate stability and long-term opportunities.[43] It has supported initiatives addressing root causes of migration, including poverty, violence, and corruption in the Northern Triangle. Domestically, the U.S. also continues to face political divisions over migration policy, balancing enforcement with humanitarian obligations, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and refugee resettlement programs.

Germany

Germany is Europe's largest refugee-resettling country. Germany operates one of Europe's most structured voluntary return systems through the REAG/GARP

[42] House, The White. "FACT SHEET: Update on the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America | the White House." *The White House*, 25 Mar. 2024, bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/03/25/fact-sheet-update-on-the-u-s-strategy-for-addressing-the-root-causes-of-migration-in-central-america-3/.

[43] Office, Accountability. "Central America: USAID Assists Migrants Returning to Their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined." Gao.gov, 2018, www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-62.

programme, administered by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. This scheme provides voluntary returnees with paid travel, departure grants, and medical assistance, ensuring that even migrants with limited resources can return safely. Eligible returnees may also receive StarthilfePlus, an additional reintegration payment that supports housing, basic needs, or small start-up activities once they are back home. Germany further partners with GIZ to offer pre-departure vocational training through the Learning for Returning initiative, which equips migrants with skills that improve their chances of stable reintegration. Together, these programmes form a multilayered approach that combines logistical, financial, and skills-based support, making Germany's system relatively effective, although outcomes still depend heavily on the conditions in the country of return.[44] It helped finance reintegration projects in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and elsewhere, aiming to reduce irregular migration. Germany also champions the UN's Global Compacts and funds IOM/UNHCR projects globally. Germany has positioned itself as a leader in humanitarian migration policy within the EU. It advocates for "humane returns," emphasising that repatriation should be voluntary and accompanied by socio-economic reintegration aid. Through GIZ, Germany has implemented community-based projects offering training and startup funding to returnees. The German government also works closely with African and Middle Eastern states to create bilateral frameworks linking return assistance to development cooperation, reflecting its broader strategy of combining migration management with global development goals.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) coordinates safe, voluntary returns and reintegration on a global scale through its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, which have assisted over 1.7 million migrants in more than 170 countries since 1979. In practice, these programmes combine logistical support—including travel, documentation, and reception—with tailored reintegration assistance such as vocational training, small business grants, temporary housing, education, and medical care. For example, between June 2016 and September 2017 in Greece, over 2,000 migrants returned voluntarily, with the majority receiving support to

[44] "REAG/GARP 2.0." *BAMF - Bundesamt Für Migration Und Flüchtlinge*, BAMFWEB, 16 Feb. 2024, www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Rueckkehr/FoerderprogrammREAGGARP/reaggarp-node.html.

establish small businesses and access counselling, housing, and healthcare. In Azerbaijan, IOM facilitated the return of 295 nationals in 2024, while more than 5,400 had been assisted since 2018, many of whom received reintegration support to restore livelihoods and access public services. On a regional scale, the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration has supported over 15,000 voluntary returns in Africa, pairing return with community-based reintegration, vocational training, and micro-grants to enhance economic and social integration. These examples demonstrate IOM's approach of addressing both the individual needs of returnees and the broader community context, combining immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term, sustainable reintegration. In addition to operational support, IOM partners with over 100 governments, provides data-driven assessments of migration trends, and engages in policy and capacity-building activities, highlighting its dual role as both a service provider and a global migration governance actor committed to returns grounded in safety, dignity, and development.

Evidence suggests that IOM's programs have been largely effective in providing structured support to returnees, particularly in reducing immediate vulnerabilities such as lack of housing, income, or legal documentation. Studies and reports show that participants in AVRR programs are more likely to successfully reintegrate into their home communities compared with those who return without assistance. However, the long-term success of reintegration often depends on conditions in the country of return, including political stability, economic opportunities, and social acceptance, meaning outcomes can vary significantly between contexts.[45]

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UN refugee agency focuses on refugee protection and durable solutions. It advocates for voluntary repatriation as a solution when feasible, provides return assistance (transport, documents, shelter), and sets guidance for successful future actions. UNHCR's role is primarily one of coordination and support.[46] It also works on IDPs, supporting local integration or return. UNHCR's involvement extends far beyond

[45] "Evaluation." *Iom.int*, 2023, evaluation.iom.int/.
[46] Hanatani, Atsushi. *A NEW WAY of WORKING to SUPPORT REFUGEES PUTTING the HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS into ACTION in AFRICA JICA PROJECT HISTORY SERIES No.5*. 2023.

logistical coordination—it ensures that all returns uphold the principle of voluntariness and do not place returnees in harm's way. The agency also conducts assessments of return conditions through protection monitoring missions and post-return surveys. UNHCR partners with governments to rebuild essential services such as schools and clinics in areas of return and supports legal reintegration through citizenship documentation. Its emphasis on long-term solutions underlines that repatriation must be part of broader peacebuilding and development efforts.

Evidence shows that UNHCR has had moderate success in facilitating safe and voluntary returns: in 2023 alone, over 1 million refugees returned to their origin countries with its support, many of whom received cash, documentation, shelter, and post-return monitoring. Independent evaluations, such as the 2015–2021 review, note that while UNHCR's repatriation programmes are valuable for enabling return and laying the groundwork for reintegration, long-term impact is often limited by fragile peace, weak public services, and underfunding. Returnee monitoring data indicates that many face persistent challenges—loss of land, limited livelihoods, and continuing insecurity—especially once initial assistance runs out. These findings suggest that UNHCR plays a critical and generally effective role in enabling dignified return, but the sustainability of reintegration remains highly dependent on national political and economic contexts.[47]

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRC/IFRC)

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises two distinct but complementary entities that support displaced populations during and after crises. The ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) operates primarily in conflict settings, leveraging its mandate under the Geneva Conventions to protect civilians, detainees, and other vulnerable groups. In the context of returns, the ICRC focuses on restoring family links, providing emergency aid, facilitating safe access to conflict-affected areas, and supporting local health systems, all while maintaining strict neutrality to operate in zones of active violence or political tension. The IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), by contrast, works mainly through national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies to address humanitarian needs arising from natural

[47] United Nations. "UNHCR - the UN Refugee Agency." *Unhcr.org*, 2023, www.unhcr.org/.

disasters, health emergencies, or post-conflict recovery. Its support for returnees often includes community-based reintegration assistance, psychosocial support, and programs to rebuild livelihoods and infrastructure. While the two organizations differ in mandate and operational focus, grouping them under one subheading highlights their combined contribution to ensuring that repatriation is safe, dignified, and humanitarian-centered, with the ICRC addressing immediate conflict-related protections and the IFRC supporting longer-term reintegration and community resilience.

European Union (EU)

As a supranational body, the EU influences migration flows through policy and funding. The EU's external agreements (e.g. with Türkiye and North African countries) aim to curb irregular migration and often include provisions for returns and reintegration. EU agencies (like Frontex) coordinate deportations, and EU budget lines (AMIF and NDICI) fund reintegration projects in third countries. The EU's interest is both in controlling migration and promoting stability in neighboring regions. Additionally, the EU has sought to balance its internal migration management goals with its global human rights obligations. It has launched the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, which has assisted over 120,000 returnees across Africa since 2017. The EU also funds training programmes for migration officials and supports reintegration projects focusing on women, youth, and vulnerable groups. Despite criticism over its externalisation policies, the EU remains a key financial and diplomatic actor shaping global return and reintegration frameworks.

African Union (AU)

Several African states refer to the Kampala Convention when designing national policies. The AU also holds summits on migration (e.g. the Africa-Europe Summit) which address repatriation and reintegration as part of broader development cooperation. In addition, the AU has worked to strengthen continental coordination on migration through its Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA). It encourages member states to integrate migration issues into national development plans and promotes regional partnerships to support reintegration programs. The AU collaborates with the EU, IOM,

and regional economic communities such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish safe corridors for voluntary return. By framing migration as both a humanitarian and developmental challenge, the AU continues to push for African-led solutions emphasizing dignity, security, and sustainability.

Overall, EU-funded return and reintegration initiatives have shown mixed effectiveness. Programmes like the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration have successfully assisted tens of thousands of returnees with cash support, vocational training, and social services, demonstrating that structured, well-funded programs can facilitate safer and more dignified reintegration. However, long-term success often depends on conditions in the countries of return, including political stability, employment opportunities, and access to basic services, which can vary widely. Critics also note that some EU externalisation policies prioritize border control over migrant welfare, creating tension between security objectives and sustainable reintegration. Nevertheless, EU support has generally improved coordination, provided crucial financial and technical assistance, and set standards for reintegration programs that other countries can emulate.[48]

RELEVANT UN TREATIES CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol have been highly influential in shaping international refugee protection, establishing clear legal standards and obligations for host states. The 1951 Convention originally applied only to refugees displaced in Europe before 1951, while the 1967 Protocol removed this geographic and temporal limitation, extending the Convention's protections to refugees worldwide. By defining who qualifies as a refugee and embedding the principle of non-refoulement, the Convention and Protocol provide a baseline of safety and rights, ensuring that voluntary return is only considered when conditions in the country of origin are secure and sustainable. Their effectiveness is evident in the widespread adoption of these standards, which guide national asylum systems and inform UNHCR operations globally. However, their impact can be limited by states' capacity or willingness to fully

[48] "United Nations Network on Migration." *Migrationnetwork.un.org*, migrationnetwork.un.org/.

implement protections, particularly in regions experiencing large-scale displacement or political instability. While the Convention and Protocol set the framework for voluntary repatriation and durable solutions, successful returns still depend heavily on complementary measures such as reintegration assistance, security guarantees, and the rebuilding of infrastructure and public services in countries of origin, highlighting the need for integrated humanitarian and development strategies.[49]

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is a key UN human rights treaty. Article 12 of the ICCPR guarantees freedom of movement, including the right to leave any country and the right to enter one's own country. Crucially, paragraph 4 of Article 12 states that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country," which upholds the principle of a human right of return for citizens or long-term residents.[50] In practice, this obliges governments to allow their nationals or long-term residents to repatriate, regardless of their current location, which is directly relevant for discussions on return and reintegration. While the obligation is not absolute — some restrictions may be allowed for national security or public order — the ICCPR provides a strong legal foundation for protecting the right of people to return home without coercion.

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is a UN treaty that, while not yet universally ratified, sets important standards for the treatment of migrants, including their right to return. Article 8 explicitly affirms that every migrant has the right to return to their state of origin, reinforcing the principle that return is an integral and legitimate part of the migration process. Beyond the act of returning, the Convention recognises that all stages of migration—departure, transit, stay, and return—require protection and support to ensure human dignity. It obliges states to facilitate repatriation by issuing

[49] *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137. UN General Assembly.

[50] "United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law." Un.org, 2019, legal.un.org/avl/ha/iccpr/iccpr.html.

necessary travel documents, providing information about the conditions in the country of origin, and coordinating with relevant authorities to make the process safe, legal, and organised. By framing return as a protected right, the Convention emphasises that migrants should not face coercion, discrimination, or legal obstacles when choosing to go home, highlighting the responsibility of both host and origin countries to support reintegration and respect human rights.[51]

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, 2016

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 2016, represents a landmark political commitment to strengthen international cooperation on migration and refugee protection. The Declaration sets out broad obligations for states, including the protection of fundamental human rights, the expansion of legal pathways for migration, and the provision of safe and dignified returns when repatriation is appropriate. Importantly, it emphasises shared responsibility, urging countries to work together to manage migration flows, support host communities, and assist countries of origin in reintegration efforts. The Declaration also explicitly links humanitarian protection with sustainable development, recognising that long-term solutions require investment in livelihoods, education, and local infrastructure. By establishing these principles, the New York Declaration laid the groundwork for the negotiation of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, providing a concrete framework to operationalise voluntary return and reintegration as part of a comprehensive migration governance strategy.[52]

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 2018

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the UN General Assembly as resolution A/RES/73/195, is the first intergovernmental agreement to establish a comprehensive framework for international cooperation on migration. While non-binding, it reflects broad consensus on guiding principles, including human

[51] United Nations. "Ukraine: Behind the Numbers." *OHCHR*, 2024, www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr
[52] United Nations. "United Nations." *Un.org*, United Nations, 2025, www.un.org/en/.

rights, state responsibility, and international solidarity.[53] Objective 21 specifically addresses return and reintegration, urging states to ensure that all returns are safe, dignified, and conducted in full respect of human rights. It also emphasizes the need to provide sustainable reintegration support, including access to housing, employment, education, and social services, so that migrants can rebuild their lives effectively in their countries of origin. By embedding reintegration into the broader migration governance framework, the Compact highlights that voluntary return is not just the physical act of going home, but a process that requires planning, assistance, and cooperation between origin and destination states, as well as engagement with international organizations.[54]

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998

Although not legally binding, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, endorsed by the General Assembly, provides a widely recognised framework applying international humanitarian and human rights law to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Principle 29 explicitly affirms that IDPs "have the right to be assisted in their voluntary return or resettlement" and obliges national authorities to support reintegration into their communities in a manner that is safe and dignified.[55] The Principles emphasise that returns must be genuinely voluntary, and that displacement should not be perpetuated by coercion, discrimination, or inadequate preparation. In practice, they guide governments, UN agencies, and NGOs in designing reintegration programs, including the provision of shelter, livelihood support, documentation, and access to education and health services. While the Guiding Principles do not create legally enforceable obligations, their influence is significant, shaping national policies, informing humanitarian operations, and providing a standard against which the protection of IDPs and the quality of reintegration efforts can be assessed.[56]

Global Compact on Refugees (2018)

[53] United Nations General Assembly. *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.* A/RES/73/195, 2018. *UN Digital Library*, www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_73_195.pdf.

[54] United Nations. "United Nations." *Un.org*, United Nations, 2025, www.un.org/en/.

[55] United Nations. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 1998. United Nations, 1998. *UN Digital Library*, www://digitallibrary.un.org/record/535577

[56] "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.

The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, provides a policy framework for improving conditions in countries of origin so that return becomes a viable option rather than a forced outcome. Although non-binding, it contains four central objectives, including Objective 4: "support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return" (para. 8). This is translated into concrete commitments such as Strengthening the humanitarian–development nexus to rebuild infrastructure, services, and governance in places where refugees may ultimately return (paras. 21–23), as well as mobilising predictable financing for national systems (para. 18) to ensure that schools, health facilities, and livelihoods programmes can absorb returning populations. The Compact also highlights the need for voluntary, informed and dignified repatriation (paras. 87–94), calling for pre-return counselling, monitoring of safety conditions, and cooperation between UNHCR, host and origin states through tripartite agreements. While the Compact's primary focus is responsibility-sharing for host countries, it repeatedly notes that expanded economic opportunities, infrastructure investment, and restoration of basic services in origin states can facilitate return when conditions permit (para. 92). Its limitations stem from its non-binding character, reliance on state goodwill, and uneven implementation; however, it remains the central global policy instrument guiding how UNHCR and states approach sustainable solutions, including voluntary repatriation.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programmes

IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes function through a standardized operational chain designed to make voluntary return both logistically feasible and socio-economically sustainable. The process usually begins while migrants are still in host countries, where IOM provides individual counselling on rights, risks, and reintegration prospects, followed by assistance with documentation, exit permits, and travel bookings. A charter or commercial flight is arranged, with vulnerable individuals—such as unaccompanied children, victims of trafficking, or those with medical needs—receiving escorts and tailored protection measures. Upon arrival, migrants are met at reception points by IOM staff or local partners who distribute immediate cash allowances, temporary accommodation if needed, and referrals to

national services. The reintegration phase is central: returnees can access business start-up kits, vocational training, or education grants, with monitoring over 6–12 months to track whether livelihoods are stable.[57] The EU–IOM Joint Initiative in the Western Balkans illustrates this model: returnees to South and Southeast Asia were offered individual reintegration plans, training on business skills, and micro-grants to open small enterprises such as grocery shops, tailoring services, or poultry farms, combined with mentoring by local NGOs to reduce the risk of business failure. Evaluations of AVRR programmes show that short-term outcomes—safe travel, family reunification, and temporary income—are generally positive, and beneficiaries report higher satisfaction when they receive tailored economic support rather than uniform cash payments. However, long-term success depends heavily on local labour markets, access to land or credit, and wider development context; businesses may collapse when funding or mentoring ends, and structural barriers such as insecurity or discrimination cannot be solved by micro-grants alone. As a result, AVRR is most effective when embedded within broader local development strategies, linked to labour market demand, and coordinated with national authorities, rather than treated solely as a migration management tool.[58]

UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Programmes

UNHCR voluntary repatriation programmes operate through a structured, protection-focused model designed to ensure that movement is genuinely voluntary, safe, and sustainable. Before any return is promoted, UNHCR conducts in-depth assessments of security conditions, legal obstacles, access to services, and property restitution issues in areas of origin; tripartite agreements between host governments, countries of origin, and UNHCR often formalise roles and safeguards. Once conditions allow, UNHCR supports informed decision-making through counselling, information campaigns, and "go-and-see" visits so that refugees can judge safety for themselves. The operational phase includes documentation support, identity verification, transport,

[57] "Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2023 – Executive Summary." Iom.int, 2020, publications.iom.int/books/return-and-reintegration-key-highlights-2023-executive-summary. Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.
[58] "Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2023 – Executive Summary." Iom.int, 2020, publications.iom.int/books/return-and-reintegration-key-highlights-2023-executive-summary. Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.

family tracing, and reception arrangements such as temporary transit centres, immediate medical screening, and initial relief packages. Reintegration assistance follows, typically combining cash grants, shelter repair, housing restitution mechanisms, livelihoods training, and referral to national services, with monitoring teams tracking protection issues and adjustment outcomes in the months after return. The post-war Bosnian repatriation demonstrates how this model functions in practice: beginning in 1995, UNHCR coordinated the return of nearly one million people through a phased approach that paired transportation and reception facilities with reconstruction programmes, legal guidance on reclaiming homes, and donor-funded rebuilding of local infrastructure. The programme enabled large numbers of refugees to resettle, but it also exposed structural limitations—many returns occurred along ethnic lines, reinforcing segregation; property claims were slow and uneven; and fragile local economies struggled to absorb returnees, requiring years of follow-up support. This evaluation highlights key lessons: voluntariness must be monitored at all stages, reintegration requires multi-year investment beyond immediate relief, and political cooperation from national authorities is crucial for land, documentation, and non-discrimination guarantees. Where insecurity persists or state institutions are weak, UNHCR's ability to ensure durable solutions is constrained, demonstrating that successful repatriation depends not only on transport and assistance, but on long-term rebuilding of communities to which refugees return.

Government-Led Development Initiatives Linked to Reintegration

Several governments have attempted to anchor return not only in humanitarian support but in specific national development initiatives targeted at areas of high return. In Afghanistan, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) has been operationalised through concrete programmes such as the Citizens' Charter National Priority Programme, which channels development funding into return-affected villages by restoring basic services, creating community development councils, and financing labour-intensive public works that hire returnees. A complementary initiative, the Land Allocation Scheme, provides plots of state land to returning refugee families, linked to housing construction support and access to water and electricity, thereby addressing both shelter and livelihoods. In Colombia, the government's approach to Venezuelan

displacement includes the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (2021), which grants regular status and work authorization to nearly two million Venezuelans and facilitates return or local integration by enabling access to formal employment, banking, and public services. For Colombian returnees, the "Renacer" (Rebirth) programme under the Special Administrative Unit for Migration provides documentation, vocational training, and referrals to regional employment centres, while municipalities are encouraged to develop territorial return plans that match labour needs with the skills of those coming home. These initiatives show that reintegration becomes more sustainable when tied to concrete, funded programmes that improve services and jobs in the communities receiving returnees, rather than relying solely on national policy statements.[59]

Regional Frameworks Supporting Safe and Sustainable Return

On the African continent, the 2017 Kigali Declaration on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and the African Union's Kampala Convention provide a formal legal and policy basis for managing displacement and facilitating voluntary return. Rather than remaining aspirational, these instruments could be operationalised through national implementation plans that require states to establish return procedures, allocate budget lines for reintegration, and embed displacement considerations in local development strategies. The Kigali Declaration, for example, calls for improved data collection on population movements and for governments to coordinate with humanitarian actors; states could translate this into mandatory national registries tracking conditions of return and monitoring reintegration outcomes. The Kampala Convention goes further by obliging governments to prevent displacement and ensure access to land, restitution mechanisms, and compensation for affected communities. Together, these frameworks provide a solid normative foundation, but they require political will, technical assistance, and peer review mechanisms to ensure that commitments translate into practical support for returnees.

[59] "Afghanistan | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2021, www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/afghanistan.

Civil Society and NGO-Led Support for Returnees

At the level of direct assistance, NGOs have demonstrated how specialized, targeted programs can make returns more humane and sustainable. Kinder in Need of Defense (KIND), originally focused on legal representation for unaccompanied children in the United States, has expanded its work to include reintegration services for minors who voluntarily return or are repatriated to Central America. These services include legal case management to obtain identity documents, school enrollment assistance, psychological counseling, and referrals to child protection agencies. KIND also collaborates with local organizations to develop safety planning for children facing risks of gang violence or family abuse after return. This model illustrates how civil society can fill gaps that state systems often cannot address, especially in contexts where returnees are young, traumatized, or lack family networks. Scaling such initiatives would require predictable funding, deeper partnerships with host and origin governments, and robust safeguards to ensure that participation remains voluntary.

Bilateral Instruments and Operational Return Agreements

In addition to multilateral frameworks and NGO initiatives, bilateral agreements have been used to structure the logistics and conditions of return. The U.S.–Mexico Repatriation Program, which operated between 2004 and 2008, did not simply coordinate deportations; it also financed reception centres, temporary accommodation, and medical services in Mexican border cities for those returned from the United States. Lessons from this program could inform future agreements by demonstrating that providing short-term assistance reduces immediate vulnerability and can improve perceptions of fairness. Similarly, contemporary readmission agreements between EU member states and transit countries such as Mali or Niger increasingly include development components, such as job placement schemes or vocational training linked to local labour demand. While these agreements can be contentious and often depend on political leverage, they show that return can be coupled with investment in local economies rather than treated solely as a border control measure. Their effectiveness, however, depends on transparency, safeguards against coercion, and monitoring of post-return conditions to ensure that reintegration is genuine rather than merely formal.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Creating a Global Reintegration Fund

A promising approach to supporting voluntary return and reintegration is the establishment of a Global Reintegration Fund, jointly managed by international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR, with contributions from wealthier states, development banks, and philanthropic partners. The Fund would provide targeted financial and technical assistance to returnees and their communities, including microloans or grants to start small businesses, vocational training programmes, housing support, and access to basic services such as healthcare and education. It could also finance infrastructure projects in areas of high return, such as schools, clinics, and community centers, which would benefit both returnees and local populations.

The advantages of this approach include standardizing reintegration support across countries, reducing the risk of ad hoc or uneven assistance, and creating incentives for origin states to actively participate in planning and supporting returnees. It would also allow donors to pool resources, increasing efficiency and avoiding duplication of efforts.

However, the Fund has limitations. Its effectiveness would depend on strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms, ensuring funds are used appropriately and reach the intended beneficiaries. Success would also rely on the stability, security, and economic opportunities in return areas—without these, even well-funded reintegration projects could fail. Political will from both donor and origin states would be crucial, as would partnerships with local NGOs and community organizations to ensure culturally appropriate and sustainable interventions.

By creating a dedicated, multilateral financing mechanism, the Global Reintegration Fund could help make voluntary return a realistic and dignified option for migrants worldwide while contributing to sustainable development in host and origin communities.

Establishing a Return Monitoring Mechanism

To ensure that returns are truly safe, voluntary, and dignified, a formal Return Monitoring Mechanism should be established, ideally coordinated by a neutral, multilateral body such as a joint UN–migrant agency commission. This mechanism would deploy independent observers to track the conditions of return both at departure and upon arrival, verifying that migrants are not coerced and that safety standards are met. Monitoring would also include post-arrival assessments of housing, access to food, healthcare, education, and other essential services, ensuring that reintegration is sustainable.

The mechanism would be complemented by strengthened legal safeguards, guaranteeing returnees clear rights such as valid documentation, access to justice, and avenues for reporting abuse or denial of services. Funding for humanitarian actors like IOM, UNHCR, and the Red Cross would be increased to provide immediate support upon arrival, including shelter, medical care, and psychosocial assistance.

The advantages of this approach include enhanced transparency, accountability, and trust in return programmes, while also providing data for improving reintegration policies over time. Limitations include the need for sufficient resources and political cooperation from origin and host countries, as well as logistical challenges in conflict-affected or remote areas. Nevertheless, a structured monitoring mechanism would be a critical step toward ensuring that voluntary return programs are ethical, rights-based, and effective.

Local Enterprise and Cooperative Development for Sustainable Reintegration

To create resilient livelihoods for returnees and prevent renewed displacement, governments and international partners could implement Local Enterprise and Cooperative Development Schemes in areas of return. Rather than leaving individuals to compete for scarce jobs, these schemes would support the establishment of worker-owned cooperatives in sectors with strong demand, such as construction, food processing, transport, and small-scale manufacturing. Start-up capital, machinery, and basic training would be provided through joint funding from national authorities,

development agencies, and impact investors. Markets would be secured through public procurement policies that prioritise purchasing from cooperatives employing returnees, and technical advisors would assist with accounting, marketing, and quality standards. This model encourages shared responsibility, keeps profits circulating within communities, and supports the creation of decent, fairly paid jobs. It also reduces economic vulnerability, which is often a driver of re-migration, thereby contributing to durable reintegration.

Agricultural Value Chain Development to Strengthen Economic Resilience

In parallel, a comprehensive programme for Agricultural Value Chain Development could enable returnees to become active participants in local and regional markets rather than subsistence producers. Governments, agricultural ministries, and private-sector partners could work together to identify high-potential commodities—such as dairy, horticulture, poultry, or cash crops—and support the entire production cycle. Assistance would include access to land and irrigation, distribution of quality seeds and livestock, and training in modern cultivation techniques, while cooperatives or agribusiness firms could guarantee purchase of outputs at fair prices. Processing hubs, cold storage facilities, and packaging units located near return communities would create additional employment in logistics, transportation, and retail, ensuring that value is retained locally rather than exported elsewhere. Although initial investment costs are significant, the long-term benefits include greater food security, higher incomes, and regional market integration, all of which make return sustainable and reduce the likelihood of economic exclusion.

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