

The Abuja Knowledge Paper on Sustainable Reintegration

Partnering for sustainable reintegration: Advancing national reintegration systems led by countries of origin

Key messages

- **Sustainable reintegration is a shared priority for countries of origin, transit, and destination** and a core pillar of comprehensive, balanced migration governance.
- **National ownership is a precondition for sustainable reintegration:** development-oriented, country-of-origin-led reintegration systems can strengthen coherence, accountability, and long-term outcomes when anchored in national priorities and policies.
- **Fragmented, short-term reintegration assistance limits impact**, underscoring the need to shift toward coherent, system-based and longer-term approaches.
- **External partners remain essential**, not only for funding but as strategic partners in co-designing programmes, aligning interventions with national frameworks, and reinforcing coordination across institutions and borders.
- **Transition toward country-of-origin-led systems must be gradual and context-specific**, requiring sustained technical and financial support and continued dialogue among all stakeholders.

Context

Return and reintegration remain strategic priorities across the Rabat Process region. For EU Member States, effective return is a core pillar of migration management and an integral component of broader efforts to address irregular migration. Within this framework, reintegration assistance has become a key element of voluntary return programmes, with the aim to foster return effectiveness, and – to some extent – development in countries of origin.

Since 2017, large-scale return flows from North Africa and the Sahel have significantly reshaped policy debates in many African countries of origin. Reintegration has gained visibility as a national policy issue, prompting stronger political engagement. This shift has led to the development of national strategies, coordination mechanisms, and institutional frameworks.

Within the Rabat Process, return and reintegration are anchored in **Area 5 of the [Cádiz Action Plan \(2023-2027\)](#)**. Dialogue partner countries have consistently emphasised shared responsibility, national ownership, protection and human rights of migrants, and stronger linkages between reintegration and broader socio-economic development and employment programmes.

Scope and methodology of the Abuja Knowledge Paper

Under its Chairmanship of the Rabat Process, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has identified sustainable reintegration as a strategic priority for strengthening migration governance across the region. Developed in close coordination with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), as Secretariat of the Dialogue, the *Abuja Knowledge Paper on Sustainable Reintegration* seeks to inform policy discussions by:

- Assessing recent evolutions in reintegration policy and practice;
- Examining the concept of sustainable reintegration and persistent challenges;
- Analysing the role of countries of origin in leading and governing reintegration systems;
- Identifying enabling conditions, partners role, and practical limitations.

The paper provides policy and programme-oriented considerations for policymakers and practitioners in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

The analysis draws on a comprehensive desk review of policy, programme, and research literature, complemented by consultations with Rabat Process partner governments, international organisations, donors, and research institutions. It also draws on field research conducted in Nigeria, including stakeholder interviews in Abuja and Lagos, and site visits.

Reflecting Nigeria's commitment to evidence-based policymaking and regional cooperation, the paper offers a **balanced analysis of country-of-origin-led reintegration approaches**, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in developing inclusive, coordinated systems that respond to the realities of returning migrants and their communities.

While grounded in the Rabat Process context, the findings are relevant to broader regional and global debates on return and reintegration. The paper is intended to serve as a **key reference document** to support continued dialogue and engagement, within the Rabat Process and beyond.

What enables effective and sustainable national reintegration systems?

The paper identifies **national ownership** as a key enabling condition for sustainable reintegration outcomes. Effective country-of-origin-led systems are characterised by the progressive establishment of interlinked elements, including:

- High-level political commitment;
- A clear policy or strategic framework on migration and reintegration;
- A mandated lead institution with coordination authority;
- Inclusive engagement across government, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector;
- Accessible, responsive public services, adapted to returnees' needs and host communities;
- Robust coordination, referral, and accountability mechanisms;
- Mainstreaming reintegration into sectoral policies;
- Decentralised implementation reflecting local contexts;
- Dedicated national budgetary allocations.

Given their scope, these elements require a **phased and incremental approach**, tailored to national capacities, and policy priorities.

The key role of external support

While most countries of origin are not yet in a position to fully lead reintegration efforts, for various reasons, the paper highlights the importance of sustained external support, including from the EU and its Member States:

- **Financial and technical assistance remains essential** to build institutional capacity and operationalise national reintegration systems;
- Reintegration programmes should be **co-designed, co-implemented, and co-monitored** with country-of-origin authorities;
- Partner support should be **aligned with national policies** and development frameworks, and coordinated among donors to reduce fragmentation and duplication;
- **Transitions toward national leadership should be phased**, supported by transition plans, exit strategies, and sustained technical assistance.

In the short term, this approach will not reduce the need for sustained partner support; in the long term, it may lead to more efficient resource use and progressively reduce reliance on external funding.

Limits and policy considerations

The paper also advances that country-of-origin-led reintegration systems are **not suitable in all contexts**:

- Political will, institutional capacity, and the availability of public services are key preconditions;
- In fragile or low-capacity contexts, alternative or hybrid approaches may remain necessary to ensure protection and continuity of assistance;

- Some destination countries express concerns related to due diligence, continuity of care, and migration management objectives if responsibilities are fully transferred.

These considerations reinforced the need for **flexible, context-specific approaches**, rather than uniform models of reintegration governance.

Looking ahead

The Abuja Knowledge Paper demonstrates that country-of-origin-led reintegration systems, when supported through sustained, coherent, and well-coordinated partnerships, offer a **viable pathway toward more sustainable and accountable reintegration outcomes**. While not universally applicable, this approach aligns with Rabat Process commitments to shared responsibility and comprehensive migration governance.

The paper invites **continued engagement among Rabat Process partners** to translate these insights into context-appropriate policies and programmes.

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