Return, Reintegration and Re-migration

UNDERSTANDING RETURN DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

OECD

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

Return is a frequent part of migration, although return from destination countries is far less studied and monitored than migration flows to destination countries. Policy attention has increased around return migration, especially in assistance for voluntary returns and reintegration. To better explore return dynamics and provide evidence to guide policy, the OECD Secretariat, with support from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ), conducted a study in 2022-23. The study included three country workshops on the dynamics of return migration and re-migration. The workshops explored why migrants decide to return to origin countries, the specific role of families and communities in these decision-making processes, what motivates returning migrants to leave again, and how policy frameworks influence these patterns. The first two country workshops took place in Tunisia (February 2023) and Morocco (May 2023), including visits to structures providing services to returning migrants and potential migrants. A third workshop was held in Brussels (June 2023) and focused on the role of return in Ukraine's post-war recovery and reconstruction, followed by an expert workshop. These workshops brought together more than 150 stakeholders: Ministries of Interior and development actors from OECD countries, government officials from the countries covered, representatives of the EU, implementing partners of AVRR programmes and scholars and researchers. The OECD also carried out statistical analyses of return migration and exits from OECD countries, submitted a policy questionnaire to OECD member countries in January 2023, and analysed return corridors to Morocco and Tunisia.

This report is based on the findings of these country workshops, the two corridor reports, the policy questionnaires, and the statistical analysis of return patterns from OECD countries.

This report has been drafted by Mona Ahmed under the co-ordination of Jonathan Chaloff. The statistical analysis of return patterns from OECD countries was conducted with support from Mahamat Moustapha. Background reports on return and re-migration in Tunisia and Morocco were drafted by Ali Belhaj and by Saâd Belghazi, Ali Bouazzaoui and Saïd Malki. Additional support during the country workshops were provided by Mustapha Kaaniche, Ali Bouazzaoui and Cedric Fontaine. The report benefited from comments from BMZ and GIZ as well as contributions from delegates to the OECD Working Party on Migration.

Table of contents

FIGURES

TABLES

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACS	American Community Surveys.
ANAPEC	Agence nationale de promotion de l'emploi et des compétences.
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration.
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development.
CIM	Centre for Youth Integration.
CSAEM	Centre sénégalo-allemand d'Information pour l'Emploi, la Migration et la Réintégration
CTPES	Centre des Très Petites Entreprises Solidaires.
DELMI	Swedish Migration Studies Delegation.
DIMAK	Deutsches Informationszentrum für Migration, Ausbildung und Karriere.
DReM	Database on return migrants.
EEA	European Economic Area.
EFTA	European Free Trade Association.
EU	European Union.
ENADID	Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica.
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.
HCP	Haut Commissariat au Plan
HDI	Human Development Index.
IMDB	The Longitudinal Immigration Database.
ILO	International Labour Organization.
IOM	International Organization for Migration.
IPUMS-International	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series – International.
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean.
LFS	Labour Force Surveys.
MENA	Middle East and North Africa.
MED-HIMS	Household International Migration Surveys in the Mediterranean countries.

NGOs	Non-governmental organisations.
NSOs	National Statical Offices.
SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme.

Executive summary

Over the past decade, return migration has emerged as a critical policy concern for both destination and origin countries. While much attention has been devoted on assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs, particularly for migrants with expulsion orders, these movements represent only a fraction of broader return movements which occur for many reasons. Return migration encompasses movements driven by a variety of factors, including employment, family, and retirement. Any policy measures designed to support return from OECD countries need to take into account the broader context of return migration.

To address knowledge gaps regarding return migration, this report assesses return flows by analysing exit rates of migrants in OECD countries and return rates to origin countries in different regions. The report also sheds light on the various determinants of return migration. It examines the specific role of family and local communities in these decision-making processes, bearing in mind that return migration has a potential to lead to subsequent migration.

Empirical evidence presented in the report underlines the scale of return migration, revealing that hundreds of thousands of settled migrants exit OECD countries each year, in addition to those whose shorter stays have concluded. Forced and voluntary returns are just a small fraction, and AVRR beneficiaries are an even smaller fraction of this total, even if they are one of the priorities for policy in OECD countries. Families emerge as the primary driver of return migration, whether or not this involves assistance. In AVRR, they provide extensive reintegration support in many areas, but can also pose barriers to reintegration. Local communities to which migrants return to also influence the return decision and reintegration experience, both in terms of the way returnees are perceived and the resources available for their reintegration. Local community organisations are often the best placed actors to provide certain forms of support to returnees. Within AVRR, they are the main implementers of activities – but may not have sufficient flexibility within programmes to define and adapt activities according to the profile and needs of return migrants. Finally, while little is known of the scale of subsequent redeparture, aspirations to re-migrate are common among return migrants. The availability of channels for re-migration are a factor in spontaneous return decisions.

1 Assessment and Recommendations

This chapter presents the overall assessment and recommendations.

With the absolute global increase in migration and mobility, a new perspective on return migration is necessary. Data on exits and returns is very scarce in OECD countries. Migration movements are registered primarily as entries, with few countries recording exits or returns. Origin countries capture return only sporadically if at all.

In the absence of records on return migration, an alternative way to address this knowledge gap is to **calculate exit rates from OECD destination countries**. Exits are a proxy for returns, even if some exits are for onward movement to third countries. Exit rates can be calculated for major OECD destinations in Europe and North America, for migrants who resided in these countries for at least a year.

For migrants who arrived in 2010-14, **in Europe the average exit rate was about 50%**, although this differed substantially across destination countries with the Netherlands (75%) and Germany (67%) leading, and France (26%) at the lowest exit rate. The exit rate from the United States was lower than in any European OECD country. From 2010-19, the exit rate after five years was about 15% in the United States. In Canada, it was higher – at about 21%.

At least 300 000 migrants depart annually from European OECD countries, and about 150 000 from North America. These figures are lower-bound, since they refer only to those migrants who had arrived within five years and exclude short-staying migrants. Taken cumulatively, they indicate a very large scale of exits.

Exits vary according to the origin country of migration. From European OECD countries, about one in four migrants from North Africa has left after five years, and almost two in five from Sub-Saharan Africa. The exit rate was lower for migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, and higher (about 45%) for migrants from Asia.

The category of arrival affects propensity to stay: students are least likely to remain, while family migrants and those arriving for humanitarian reasons are most likely to remain.

These exit rates are much higher than those on return migration reported by available origin country surveys. Recent surveys in Morocco and Tunisia estimated the number of residents who have returned from abroad since 2000 at 210 000 and 180 000 respectively. Considering the scale of short-term migration from these countries and the evidence of returns, these figures appear low, and census and other administrative sources suggest much higher numbers more in line with the estimates of exits obtained from European countries.

In these broad return movements, **forced and assisted voluntary returns comprise only a small part**. Migrants receiving return and reintegration assistance are very limited in the total return population. At its peak in the pre-pandemic years, returns from European countries – forced and voluntary – were no more than 70 000 annually.

Re-migration – movement after return, whether back to the same original destination country or to a third country – **is little studied and not monitored**. Destination countries may note absence of legal residents but do not track or report this. Circularity of migrants using regular channels is well-known but not quantified. Among beneficiaries of reintegration assistance, re-migration is partially captured in follow-up evaluation of outcomes, but has not been systematically analysed. Stronger follow-up of beneficiaries of AVRR to better capture re-migration is necessary.

The role of families and communities in reintegration

Migrants return to families and communities, and many returning migrants – especially those returning spontaneously – bring resources. For others, it is the **resources available in families and communities which can assist their reintegration**. Families provide reintegration support in the form of housing, financial support and even co-operation in business activities. Family support for reintegration is particularly important for those receiving reintegration assistance and for vulnerable returnees who do not qualify for AVRR programmes.

Even in reintegration programmes, the **family may sometimes be expected to help address return migrants' needs without any direct support**. The family role in AVRR is not always recognised by the design of reintegration assistance. Prior to return, a focus on the lead migrant in the family unit may comport gender-based exclusion, especially of women, from the decision-making processes and negatively affect subsequent reintegration. Upon return, most mainstream measures do not contemplate involving the extended family in the project, through direct funding, even if this may be the most promising route to reintegration.

It is communities which ensure that services are in place to support returning migrants. **For spontaneous returnees, reconnecting with communities is crucial to building social networks**. Community members can be the bridge to connect returnees, some of whom have been abroad for many years, with the right people to set up businesses or social development projects. Their advice is also helpful in dealing with administrative procedures.

For returning migrants who receive reintegration assistance, community actors, and in particular community organisations, are implementers. However, even for this group, **community support goes beyond the scope and timeframe of implementation of reintegration assistance**.

Not all community organisations have the capacity to qualify as implementation partners of reintegration assistance funded by donors, even if they are already providing community services and would be well positioned to participate. The **high demand in terms of project management capacity by funders of implementing partners of reintegration assistance may exclude some organisations**.

Civil society organisations addressing general needs of communities, including those of all migrants, may also be attracted to the niche of reintegration assistance of assisted returnees. In such cases, development

assistance donors and actors contracting reintegration support for beneficiaries of assisted voluntary return may **fund the same organisation, with different objectives and implementation approaches**.

As implementers, **community organisations covered in this study reported limited ability to influence the direction of strategies or policies at the national level**. Opportunities for networking and experience-sharing have been created, but there remain barriers across regions or between organisations funded exclusively by one donor.

Drivers and factors behind return, reintegration and re-migration

Family and community play a role in the return decision. Family is one of the main overall drivers of return decisions. In spontaneous and planned returns, longing for family and the need to support family are major factors. The social and cultural conditions of family life in the origin country may attract migrants back home to raise their own families. These same conditions may also discourage some migrants from returning with their families – especially in the case of mixed couples.

Migrants facing the prospect of forced return must deal with different family considerations. Family preferences may be for the migrant to stay in the destination country, complicating communication and co-ordination with the family prior to the decision to use assisted voluntary return. When the family unit is in the destination country, the expected impact of return on children influences the decision.

Communities also play a role in the return decision, particularly in influencing perceptions of return. The perceived welcome of the community of origin might influence the decision of those considering voluntary return assistance. Community stigma can be an obstacle to considering return, although stigmatisation is far from universal. Spontaneous, unassisted returns attract less attention, even if returnees may initially struggle to find their place especially after a long absence. **Communities can reinforce the legitimacy of return for this group** and provide examples of successful capitalisation of the migration experience which can inspire return. Some spontaneous returns are driven by a desire to use the skills and resources acquired abroad to engage in meaningful work within their communities and contribute to local development. An expectation that returnees should return to contribute to their communities may however discourage return by those who are unable to meet such expectations.

The ability to re-migrate is a factor contributing to the decision to return for all categories of return migrants. Those who maintain rights in the destination country have no restrictions on re-migration and can move back and forth. Those whose return is due to having no right to stay in the destination country face restrictions on re-migration (visa ban). The visa ban is shorter for those who take voluntary return than those who are forced returns. A re-migration ban can negatively affect uptake of voluntary return assistance. The shorter re-migration ban is meant as an incentive for uptake of voluntary return, but eligibility for re-migration after the ban has expired is by no means assured.

Re-migration – or a re-departure of return migrants – is known to be common. Surveys find that close to half of return migrants consider re-migration. Re-migration is a frequent intention among return migrants, whether they have returned spontaneously or with assistance through voluntary return. Among beneficiaries of assisted return and reintegration, re-migration intentions are high in post-conflict and fragile contexts, if the original push factors persist. But other factors play a role: time spent abroad, the success of reintegration, family dynamics, and living conditions.

Recommendations for the different stakeholders

Development co-operation actors can enhance the effectiveness of their reintegration activities by aligning them with broader development co-operation objectives. This strategic alignment involves identifying the main obstacles facing returnees, particularly those related to structural factors in countries of origin, such as weak political institutions, inadequate education and health systems, and poor social protection systems. Structural factors affect all return groups and their reintegration, with different implications. For migrants with financial, human and social capital who have been abroad for longer periods, addressing structural factors can provide incentives for long-term return. For migrants who receive reintegration assistance, addressing structural factors can help create an environment conducive to sustainable reintegration.

Development co-operation actors can **strengthen capacity-building initiatives** in countries of origin, focusing on areas where gaps in reintegration support have been identified. A key aspect of this capacity building should be the development of psychosocial support services, which are often difficult to access in countries of origin. Capacity building in psychosocial support could enhance sustainable community support for all returnees who need such services. Psychosocial support is necessary for vulnerable returnees, whether or not they have returned through a channel that provides reintegration assistance. It is also important for their family members, who rarely receive it even when the returnee is supported.

To address the lack of co-ordination among activities to support reintegration, the origin country authorities have a clear role in providing co-ordination of services available. Strengthening national partner governments to better take on this coordinating role themselves is one means to improve policy coherence. However, development co-operation actors are particularly well positioned to **improve policy coherence among donors and the projects they support**. There is a space for more exchange among community organisations, development actors, funders of reintegration support and national authorities to circulate information, build capacity and allow community actors to influence policy development at the local and national level and among destination countries. This should be done in co-ordination with migration actors in destination countries.

While development actors have a view of the structural level, migration actors are more focused on providing services and addressing the situation of individual migrants and return migrants.

Providing reintegration assistance can represent an opportunity for capacity building, but also carries the risk of diverting attention from higher priority issues for local community development. **Funders of reintegration assistance should consider the impact of their intervention on the social ecosystem**. To ensure greater participation of community organisations, there is a clear role for capacity building in participating in tenders and in project management.

On the issue of regular channels for migration, the enhancement of regular channels for migration in origin countries through partnerships with destination countries has led to a variety of structured regular channels for short-term and longer-term migration. These channels are developing in a context where non-migrants and return migrants of different profiles are interested in accessing legal channels. **Community organisations can help publicise and identify appropriate profiles for participation in these channels**.

Legal channels are an opportunity to foster spontaneous returns, since returnees know they will be eligible for future migration opportunities. **Increasing re-migration opportunities can increase return**. This is true even if regular channels are not designed to serve beneficiaries of assisted return and reintegration support.

AVRR packages may be insufficiently flexible in involving a range of actors and services. Reintegration assistance including economic reintegration support should consider providing **direct support for family partnering** in the returnee's business activity especially where co-managing the business. Packages

should ensure flexibility in terms of allowing vocational training or education rather than business creation. A sufficient margin should be included to provide adequate psycho-social support when this is a priority for the individual case.

A final point can be made on the perception of re-migration, which is not necessarily seen positively within AVRR, which aims at sustainable reintegration. If it occurs through regular channels whether or not to third countries, it **should not be accounted exclusively as a failure of reintegration**. As regular channels are improved, re-migration should be included as a possible eventual success of reintegration.

2 Introduction

Return migration has become a critical policy concern for both destination and origin countries. AVRR programmes continue to expand, although their scope is limited within the broader spectrum of return movements motivated by a variety of factors. This chapter also presents conceptual models of return migration, highlighting that return to origin countries only materialises when the desire and aspirations of migrants are supported by tangible and intangible resources.

2.1. Context

Migration is a multidirectional phenomenon. Millions of migrants arrive in OECD countries every year with the prospects of settling permanently. Millions of others arrive for temporary purposes, with plans to return home. In OECD countries, even permanent type movements often turn out to be temporary, with migrants returning to their origin country or moving to another destination (OECD, 2023[1]).

The fate of return migrants was long of little interest to destination countries. Migrants who naturalised remained part of consular responsibility along with other nationals, but other categories of migrants whose bonds with the destination countries lapsed were not of concern. Some OECD countries have focused policy attention on facilitating the return of persons subject to expulsion, and in some cases, have provided assistance in this process. Only in recent years have other aspects of return migration – especially what happens to return migrants after they return – emerged as a critical policy concern for many countries involved in migration pathways.

In origin countries, too, little attention has been historically devoted to returning migrants. The past two decades have instead seen not only rapid development of institutional frameworks for managing migration, but also those for supporting the return of nationals and their post-return integration.

Two major policy trends, especially those in Europe, have also influenced interest in post-return outcomes and decisions to re-migrate. First, major destination countries have taken a proactive role in influencing the decisions of potential migrants in origin countries. They engage in information provision and targeted campaigns to discourage unsafe migration, sometimes through promoting or even proposing legal migration channels. In addition, reintegration assistance programmes in origin countries have expanded, putting destination countries in the novel position of working with migrants after their return. Both approaches incorporate a development-oriented perspective.

The adoption of specific policy documents reflects this increased attention to return migration in OECD countries (Table 2.1). Government priorities on return have mostly been incorporated in broader migration policies rather than standalone return strategies.

Simultaneously, AVRR programmes in OECD countries have expanded. This marks a significant shift from the earlier AVRR initiatives of the late 1990s, which primarily facilitated return transportation. Current AVRR programmes reflect a more comprehensive approach, integrating various services to enhance the sustainability of returns. At the EU level, co-ordination mechanisms and networks, such as the European Return and Reintegration Network (2018-22) and its successor, the Return and Reintegration Facility, have emerged to improve the effectiveness of AVRR efforts. Frontex has been providing reintegration assistance through the Joint Reintegration Services since April 2022.

Table 2.1. Policy documents with reference to return migration

Country	Policy documents	Period
Austria	Sicher Österreich: Strategie 2025 | Vision 2023	2021-30
Belgium	Note de politique générale: Asile et Migration et Loterie Nationale	2020
Czechia	The Czech Republic's Migration Policy Strategy	2015
Germany	Germany's Coalition Agreement	2021-25
Lithuania	Lithuania's Migration Policy Guidelines	2014
Mexico	Migration Law (Article 2)	2011, last updated in 2022
	Sectorial Programme of the Ministry of the Interior	2020-24
	Sectorial Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2020-24
Netherlands	Comprehensive Agenda on Migration	2018
Norway	Return Strategy (Returstrategi)	2017-22
Poland	Law Dz.U. 2013 poz. 1 650	2013
Spain	Royal Decree 557/2011	2011, last updated in 2022
Slovak Republic	The Slovak Republic's Migration Policy	2021-25
Sweden	Sweden's Tidö Agreement (Tidö avtalet)	2022
Switzerland	Directive on removal enforcement	2008, last updated in 2022
	Directive on return assistance	2008, last updated in 2022
Türkiye	Strategy Document and National Action Plan on Irregular Migration	2021-25
United Kingdom	Guidance Document: Voluntary and Assisted Returns	2021

Note: Mexico's Migration Law (Art. 2) and sectoral programmes of the Ministry of the Interior and Foreign Affairs concern the return of Mexican citizens living abroad.
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Remigration (2023).

Many OECD countries continue to adapt their AVRR approach. The most visible changes relate to adjustments in programme and project design, while budget allocation, strategic direction and co-operation with non-state actors remain steady (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Reported changes in AVRR since 2019

	Strategic direction	Programme and project design	Institutional processes	Cooperation with non-government stakeholders	Budget
Austria	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Belgium	X	✓	X	X	X
Czechia	X	X	X	X	✓
Denmark	X	✓	✓	X	X
Germany	X	✓	X	X	X
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Lithuania	X	X	✓	X	X
Mexico	X	✓	X	X	X
Norway	X	✓	X	X	X
Sweden	X	X	X	X	X
Switzerland	X	✓	✓	X	X
Türkiye	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
United Kingdom	X	✓	X	X	X

Note: The table refers to the 13 OECD countries that reported changes in their AVR approach.
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Remigration (2023).

The past decade has also seen a significant increase in research on return migration, often in the context of reintegration assistance. However, there is a mismatch between this growing knowledge base and the evolving policy landscape. Key gaps remain in understanding why migrants decide to return to their origin countries and the factors that lead them to re-migrate. This report examines the role of families and communities in decision-making processes and in post-return and reintegration outcomes.

2.2. Definition of return migration and re-migration

There is no standard definition of return migration. Researchers agree that return migration describes a phenomenon in which migrants leave host countries to resettle in origin countries. Return migration embraces many motivations and can be temporary or permanent. Migrants may choose to return to their origin countries after retirement to reunite with their families or to engage in community work. International students may choose to return and use the skills they have acquired abroad for job opportunities in origin countries. Circular migrants move back and forth between host and origin countries. Cultural reasons and the search for a higher quality of life can also shape return decisions (Klinthäll, 2006[2]; Cobb-Clark and Stillman, 2013[3]; OECD, 2017[4]; Azevedo, 2022[5]; Vega and Hirschman, 2019[6]; Remennick, 2022[7]; OECD, 2015[8]).

Return migration also embraces many statutory circumstances established by policy. Return may be spontaneous, initiated by migrants without state involvement, or organised or enforced by state authorities (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Key terminology: Forced, Voluntary and Assisted Voluntary Return

Forced return is "a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion."

Voluntary return is "the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee." (IOM, 2019[9]). Voluntary return can be either spontaneous or assisted: **Spontaneous return** is "the voluntary, independent return of a migrant or a group of migrants to their country of origin, usually without the support of States or other international or national assistance." (IOM, 2019[9]). **Assisted voluntary return (AVR)** is the "administrative, logistical, financial and reintegration support to rejected asylum seekers, victims of trafficking in human beings, stranded migrants, qualified nationals and other migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country who volunteer to return to their countries of origin" (IOM, 2019[9]).

Assisted return programmes have come to include *reintegration* assistance in addition to *return* assistance. In addition to pre-departure counselling, return and travel assistance, **Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)** programmes offer cash and/or in-kind assistance to support reinsertion in their country of origin. Assistance may involve some or all of these: business start-up coaching and counselling, labour market counselling, vocational training – including on-the-job training – internships and job placement, housing, healthcare and children's education.

In practice, return categories are not always distinct and involve varying degrees of voluntariness among the beneficiaries of both AVR and AVRR programmes (Newland and Salant, 2018[10]). For migrants in an irregular situation or asylum seekers with little chances of obtaining protection, AVRR may be a compelled choice, even in the absence of physical coercion. Some see return as voluntary only when individuals have alternative legal options and can make decisions based on a free and informed choice. As persons in these situations represent an expanding group of beneficiaries of AVRR, the line between forced and assisted voluntary return blurs. In contrast to the above terminology, there is no agreed or universal definition of the term "**re-migration**", which has been used to refer to different forms of subsequent migration movements. In this report, the definition of "remigration" is redeparture from the origin country following a return. It does not refer to departure from a destination country.

Source: (OECD, 2020[11]), *Sustainable Reintegration of Returning Migrants: A Better Homecoming*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5fee55b3-en.

Re-migration, on the other hand, takes place when return migrants decide to leave their origin country again. Return migrants may choose to re-migrate:

- to the same destination country where they previously resided;
- to a closer country (e.g. neighbouring country);
- to a new country without specific links (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015[12]).

The decision to re-migrate may be part of the initial migration decision or due to the conditions in the origin country, including post-return outcomes (Vadean and Piracha, 2010[13]).

2.3. Methodology used for the report

AVRR has been the focus of many studies in the past, including to explain the objectives of AVRR programmes, eligibility and the type of support provided to beneficiaries (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015[12]; Kuschminder, 2017[14]; Lietaert, Broekaert and Derluyn, 2017[15]; Caselli, Kadio and Rizzo, 2022[16]). The OECD also addressed this issue in 2020, publishing a report on the sustainable reintegration of returning

migrants (OECD, 2020[11]). It examined factors that contribute to improving the sustainability of reintegration at the individual and programme levels. Beyond AVRR, this report aims to provide a new perspective on return migration by looking at different return categories. For this purpose, the report draws on the following sources:

1. Statistical analysis: The aim of the statistical analysis is to assess the scale of return movements and to draw an indicative portrait of return migrants using data collected in countries of destination and origin, and to have a reference range for comparison of the scale of overall return movements relative to other return categories, such as forced return and AVRR. In destination countries, these measures are based on indirect estimates using changes in the migrant population stock obtained through Labour Force Surveys (LFS) and specialised surveys. Returns reflect migrants leaving the territory (exit rates). In origin countries, population censuses are used to capture the return of native-born persons entering the country (return rates).
2. Literature review: The literature review provides an overview of the drivers of return migration and re-migration. These drivers, as reflected in research, are not specific to AVRR, but concern return migration and re-migration more broadly. The second aim of the literature review was to identify any references to the role of families and local communities in the decision to return or re-migrate.
3. Policy questionnaire: authorities in 19 OECD countries responded to the policy questionnaire. The questionnaire covered these areas: provisions for legal residents to leave for extended periods without losing their residence status; AVRR programmes (changes, role of community organisations, use of regular channels for re-migration); reintegration support outside AVRR programmes; and national data sources to measure return migration.
4. Country reports: Reports on Tunisia and Morocco were commissioned in preparation for the country workshops. The country reports use primary data collected through surveys (MED-HIMS) analysing return rates to Morocco and Tunisia since the 2000s. These surveys distinguish between voluntary and forced returns more broadly, but contain no information on AVRR. The reports also include key informant interviews with Tunisian and Moroccan return migrants, implementing partners and national authorities.
5. Workshops: The main purpose of the project was to conduct workshops bringing together different stakeholders working on return and reintegration. These workshops focused on examples from three countries (Tunisia, Morocco and Ukraine) and more general expertise from multiple contexts. Workshops were meant to build networks and involved national government officials, implementing partners – some of which are local community organisations – diaspora organisations, development co-operation agencies and representatives from OECD countries. Discussions focused on the role of families, communities, and opportunities for re-migration, and did not explicitly address AVRR programmes. However, much of the interaction with origin countries is related to AVRR beneficiaries, who inevitably have an outsized voice in some of these discussions. Where possible, other aspects were covered, including spontaneous return, regular channels available for re-migration, and the role of diaspora organisations. Visits were also organised in Tunisia and Morocco to meet with national and local structures providing services to returnees. Workshops were meant also to identify gaps in the understanding of return migration and re-migration that have been understudied. Workshop findings are by nature highly context-specific and not necessarily representative.

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3 Patterns of return migration from OECD countries

The scale of return migration from OECD countries is significant. Exit rates in destination countries vary considerably and are closely linked to the composition of immigrants in each country. In European OECD countries, retention rates are higher for immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), North Africa and the Middle East than for those from North America. Comparing the number of migrants returning to their origin countries with the total number of immigrants in the respective destination countries suggests that return rates in origin countries are generally low. Several indicators suggest that return migrants have a more favourable economic situation than the general population, with higher levels of education and employment rates.

Key findings

- Return migration can be estimated by different methods. The sets of estimates presented in this chapter are based on two: exit rates based on data from destination countries (labour force surveys and specialised surveys), which tend to exclude transient and short-staying migrants, and return rates based on data from origin countries (population censuses and specialised surveys).
- In European OECD countries, exit rates within five years of residence vary considerably, with the Netherlands and Germany having the highest average exit rates (75% and 67%) and France having the lowest (26%) over the 2010-19 period.
- Retention rates in European OECD countries vary by region of origin, with immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and the Middle East showing higher retention rates, while immigrants from North America have the lowest retention rates.
- In the United States, the average exit rate of immigrants within five years is between 12.5% and 16%, depending on the method used. More recent entry cohorts show a higher exit rate than earlier periods. Chinese, Indian and Canadian immigrants are more likely to leave within five years.
- In Canada, 21% of migrants who arrived in 2010 left the country within five years. Of the 79% who stayed, 44% became Canadian citizens.
- In Latin America, return rates vary by country of origin and destination. Ecuadorians who emigrated to Spain have the highest return rate (32%) in contrast to Mexicans returning from the United States (3%).
- In Morocco, the total number of return migrants since 2000 is estimated at 188 000, with an average of 10 000 return migrants per year. In Tunisia, the MED-HIMS survey estimates the number of return migrants at 210 848, 55% of whom have returned between 2000 and 2020.
- Among the census findings from Sub-Saharan African countries considered for this section, Mali has the highest number of return migrants from OECD countries (14 730) in the five years preceding the last census, followed by Senegal (10 830) and Mauritius (4 810).
- Most return migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa return from European countries, particularly France and the United Kingdom. However, these return rates appear relatively low when examined from the destination country perspective: Senegalese and Malian immigrants in France, for example, have a return rate of 4% and 9% respectively after five years of residence.

While return migration is an important component of migratory flows and a key policy concern for OECD countries, knowledge about the extent and nature of return remains limited. Most OECD countries monitor the outflows of migrants through a variety of sources, such as registers for foreigners and administrative data. Yet, there is no comprehensive overview of return patterns, which is a prerequisite for more effective migration policies in both countries of origin and destination.

This section seeks to fill this knowledge gap by conducting a statistical analysis of return patterns. The analysis is similar to that conducted by the OECD in 2008 (OECD, 2008[1]). Return migration is measured by using data that was collected in both destination and origin countries. These measures are based on indirect estimates reflecting changes in migrant population stocks. Returns that are identified from data in destination countries are based on immigrants leaving the territory (exit rates). These exit rates are obtained through Labour Force Surveys (LFS) and specialised surveys, such as the American Community Surveys (ACS). Data that are collected in origin countries, on the other hand, reflect returns identified based on native-born persons entering the country (return rates). These return rates are obtained from

both population censuses which include a question of residence five years prior to census date and representative surveys with information on individuals' previous place of residence. Despite methodological limitations (Annex A), the indirect estimates draw an indicative portrait of return migrants, including their main socio-economic characteristics and length of stay.

3.1. Exit and retention rates of migrants in OECD countries

This section examines exit and retention rates from OECD countries with a focus on European countries, the United States and Canada.

3.1.1. European OECD countries

Exit rates for European OECD countries are estimated from the International Migration Database and LFS covering the period 2010 to 2019. As Table 3.1 shows, exit rates after five years of residence vary across EU countries. The Netherlands and Germany have the highest average exit rates, with 75% and 67% of immigrants leaving within five years. In contrast, France has the lowest average exit rate, at 26.5% over the same period. At approximately 31%, exit rates in the United Kingdom and Sweden are also relatively low.

Table 3.1. Estimates of exit rates in selected European OECD countries after five years of residence

Country	Entry period	Average exit rates after five years (%)
Netherlands	2010-14	75.13
Germany	2010-14	67.16
Italy	2010-14	63.18
Spain	2010-14	62.43
Austria	2010-14	59.93
Norway	2010-14	51.08
Belgium	2010-14	48.51
Finland	2010-14	48.05
Switzerland	2010-14	43.07
Sweden	2010-14	31.12
United Kingdom	2010-14	30.80
France	2010-14	26.53

Note: Population aged 15 and over. See Annex A for more information on methodology.
Source: Own calculations based on Labour Force Surveys and OECD International Migration Database.

Box 3.1. Variation of retention by category of admission – First residence permits in France

The method presented in Table 3.1 indicates an average exit rate of 27% for France for the 2010-14 arrivals. These estimates are lower than the exit rates shown by an analysis of first residence permits for the 2008 and 2011 cohorts. The analysis shows significant differences between entry categories. While family migrants have the highest retention rates for both cohorts, highly skilled workers have the lowest retention rates overall. Employees and temporary workers who received their first permit in 2011 are also less likely to remain in the country. This is the case for less than half of them after four years, compared with two-thirds of the 2008 cohort (Table 3.2).

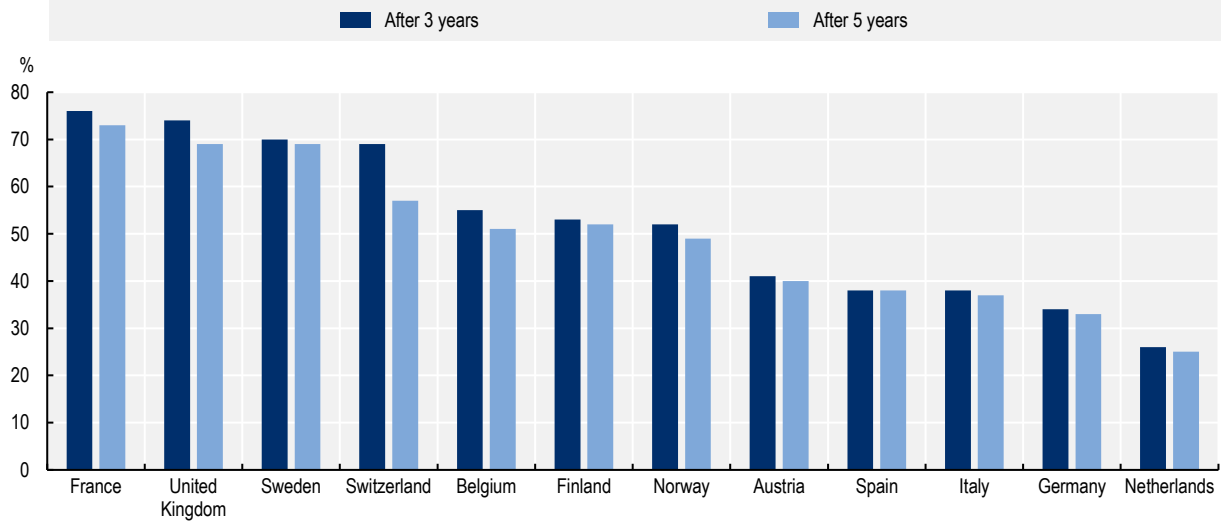
Table 3.2. Retention rate by type of first residence permit, four and seven years after obtaining first residence permit

Type of permit	2008 cohort		2011 cohort
	2012	2015	2015
Highly qualified (%)	23	10	25
Other work permits (%)	72	66	66
Of which: employees and temporary workers (%)	63	55	47
Family (%)	89	79	90
Study (%)	42	27	37
Other (%)	73	65	75
Total (%)	71	61	67

Source: AGDREF, Ministry of the Interior

The results further suggest that retention rates of immigrants slightly decrease after five years (Figure 3.1). These findings are consistent with those of (OECD, 2008[1]) and underline that most immigrants who leave their host country do so within a short period of time after arrival.

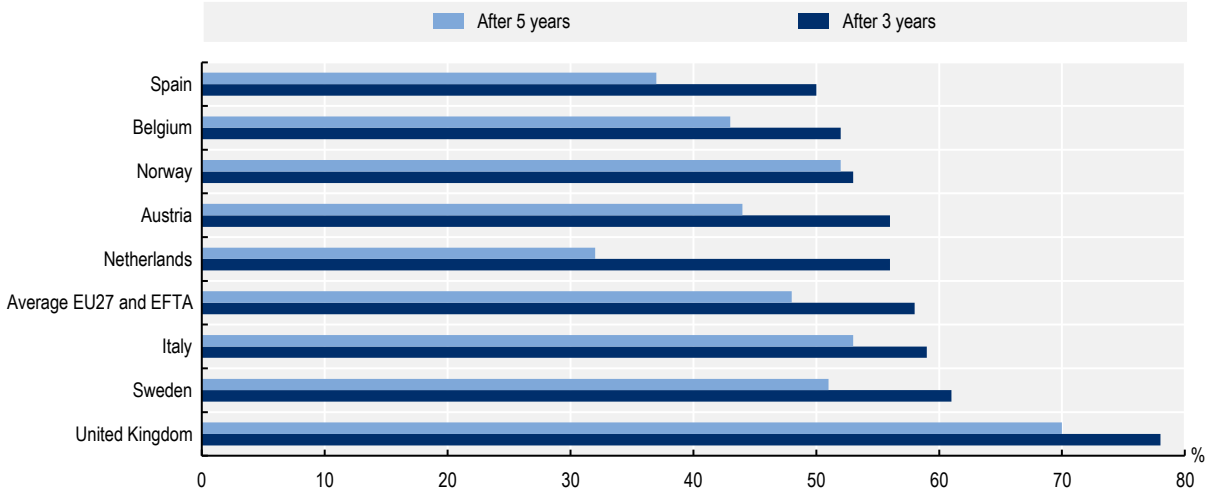
Figure 3.1. Retention rates after three and five years of residence in selected European countries



Note: Entry period 2010-14. Population over 15 years.
Source: Own calculations based on Labour Force Surveys and OECD International Migration Database.

Retention rates also vary by region of origin. In the intra-European context, the results show that, on average, 58% of EU immigrants[1] remain after three years and 48% after five years. This gap in retention rates at three and five years is most pronounced in the Netherlands, Spain, and Austria. Whereas the United Kingdom and Sweden tend to retain a high proportion of EU migrants overall, Spain and Belgium have relatively high exit rates (Figure 3.2).

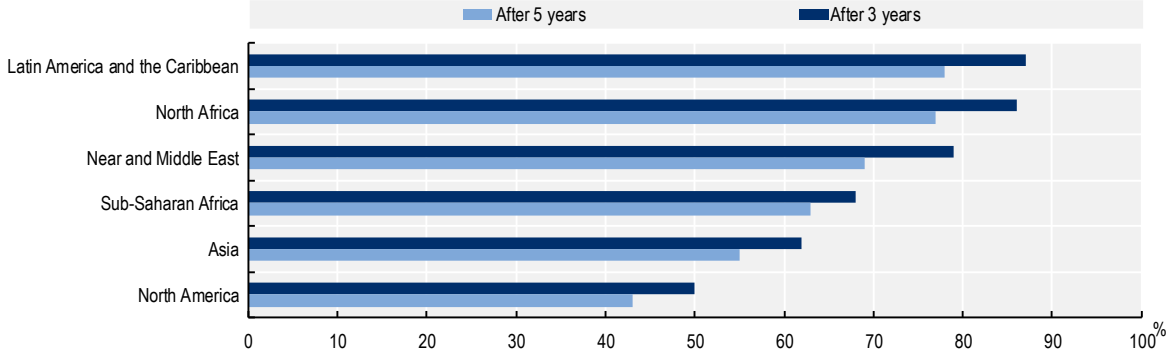
Figure 3.2. Retention rates for EU-27 and EFTA immigrants in selected European countries



Note: Entry period 2010-14. Population aged 15 and over.
Source: Own calculations based on Labour Force Surveys and OECD International Migration Database.

As this report does not focus on patterns of return migration within European countries, it is important to examine the retention rates of immigrants originating from other regions. Figure 3.3 shows that the highest retention rates after three and five years are recorded for migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), at 87% and 78% respectively. This is closely followed by migrants from North Africa with rates of 86% at three years and 77% at five years. The lowest retention rates are found among North American immigrants, with only 43% still in the destination country after five years.

Figure 3.3. Retention rates in selected European countries by region of origin



Note: Entry period 2010-14. Population over 15 years. EU countries include Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
Source: Own calculations based on Labour Force Surveys and OECD International Migration Database.

The retention rates of immigrants from different regions are likely to vary according to the destination country. In France, retention rates after five years are consistently high from any region, exceeding 70% for immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa. Italy, on the other hand, has lower retention rates than other selected European OECD countries. Retention rates vary by category of admission, and Italy provides an example of this (Box 3.2).

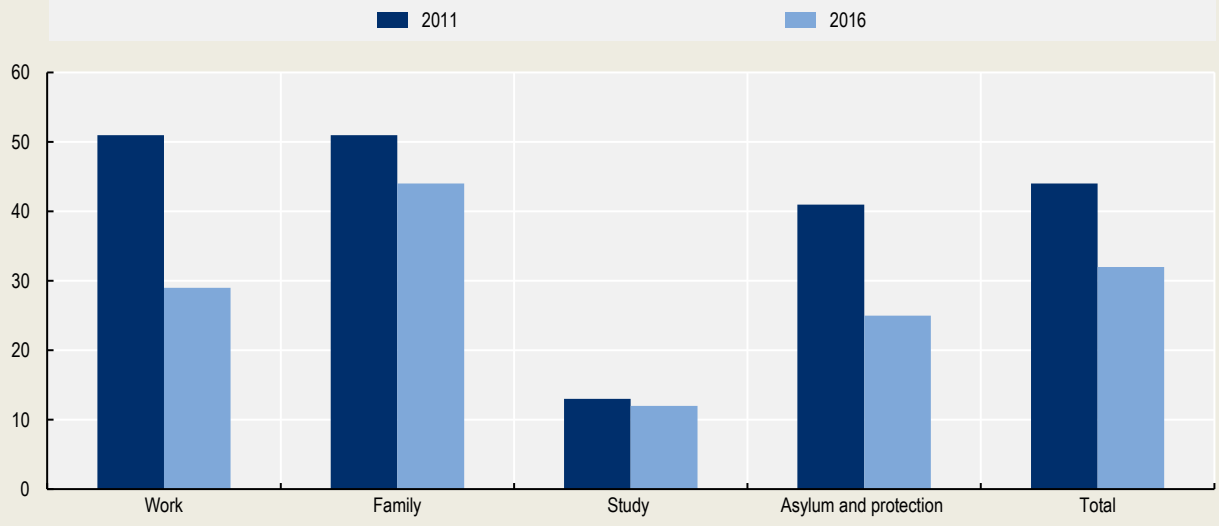
The scale of exits from European countries covered in this analysis are substantial. On average, of the migrants captured using this survey method, about 300 000 migrants exit annually during the first five years. While some may move to a third country, this figure gives an idea of the magnitude of exits of migrants who have spent enough time in the destination country to appear in the survey population.

Box 3.2. Variation in retention by category of admission – Italian residence permits

The method shown above (Figure 3.1) provides an average exit rate of 63% for Italy for the 2010-14 arrivals. This is slightly higher than the actual exit rate shown by an analysis of residence permits for the 2011 cohort (56%), but close to the 65% rate shown for the 2016 cohort (Figure 3.4). The analysis of residence permits also shows the difference between category of entry. Family migrants had close to 50% retention, while labour migrants had retention rates of about 51% for the 2011 cohort and 29% for the 2016 cohort. Those who entered as students also had a high exit rate – of almost 85% for both cohorts. The differences reflect not just the composition of migrants but also the shifting economic circumstances in Italy and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to higher five-year exit rates for the 2016 entry cohort.

Figure 3.4. Retention rates vary by purpose of arrival and cohort

Share of immigrants still present in Italy 5 years after arrival, by cohort (2011 and 2016) and initial purpose of stay



Source: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, Statistiche Report Cittadini non comunitari in Italia, Anni 2022-23

3.1.2. United States

The United States does not track or report retention of migrant populations, and longitudinal surveys have focused only on specific groups of migrants. There are no administrative datasets indicating how many migrants remain in the United States. To estimate immigrant exits, data from the ACS used covering the period 2010 to 2019. The retention rate is obtained by comparing the size of the immigrant population at entry in a given year with the size of the immigrant population five years later with five years of residence. Entry cohorts were in the range of about 1 million annually. The ACS captures resident immigrants regardless of status, although the sampling method has poor coverage of transients and others in non-typical dwellings. In terms of scale, the method yields numbers close to the scale of permanent migration, but less than the temporary and irregular inflows to the United States, so should be taken as a minimum and reflect those whose stay is at least one year. The results presented in Table 3.3 show that the average exit rate over the period is close to 13%. Exit rates are higher for more recent periods. The scale of outflows from the United States based on this method suggest that, of migrants who have been in the United States for more than one year and less than five years, 130 000 on average exit annually.

Table 3.3. Exit and retention rates of immigrants in the United States after five years of residence

Entry cohort	Deaths (%)	Exits (%)	Retention (%)
2010-15	0.34	5.66	94
2011-16	0.32	13.45	86.22
2012-17	0.35	9.78	89.87
2013-18	0.33	14.97	84.70
2014-19	0.34	18.55	81.12
Average	0.34	12.48	87.18

Note: Entry period 2010-15. Population aged 15 and older.
The columns add to 100%
Source: Own calculations using American Community Surveys.

Comparing the top ten origin countries of immigrants at entry with the top countries of immigrants remaining in the United States after five years shows that Chinese, Indian and Canadian immigrants are more likely to return (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. Top 10 origin countries of immigrants at entry and after five years

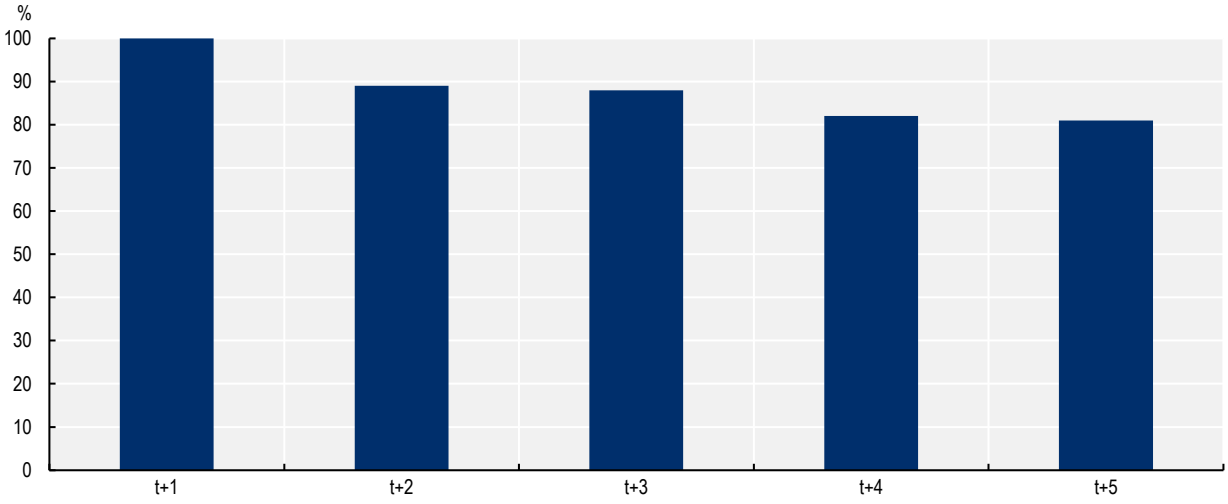
At Entry		Five years later	
Country of origin	Share (%)	Country	Share (%)
India	11.66	Mexico	13.73
Mexico	11.52	India	10.49
China (People's Republic of)	10.24	China (People's Republic of)	8.03
Philippines	3.81	Philippines	4.08
Cuba	3.06	Cuba	3.97
Canada	2.76	Dominican Republic	3.32
Korea	2.69	El Salvador	2.92
Viet Nam	2.20	Guatemala	2.81
Dominican Republic	2.16	Viet Nam	2.79
El Salvador	2.03	Honduras	2.02

Note: Entry period 2010-15. Population aged 15 and older.
Source: Own calculations using American Community Surveys.

Several differences can be observed between immigrants at entry and those who remained five years later. While there is no major difference in the gender ratio at entry, there is a higher proportion of women (55%) after five years of residence. In addition, immigrants who arrived prime-aged are more likely to remain in the United States after five years than the younger or older arrivals (15-24 and over 65). Similarly, the share of tertiary graduates is slightly higher among those who stayed after five years (58%) compared to at entry (55%).[2] As a higher proportion of the remaining group is employed (66%) than at entry (42%), it can be assumed that many immigrants who have stayed entered the labour market or that a significant proportion of those who have left were inactive.

Retention rates fall over time, as shown in Figure 3.5. Of those who arrived in 2014, 89% are still in the United States after two years. After three and four years, retention rates drop to 88% and 82% respectively. After five years, 81% of those who arrived in 2014 are still in the country.

Figure 3.5. Retention rates over time for immigrants entering the United States in 2014

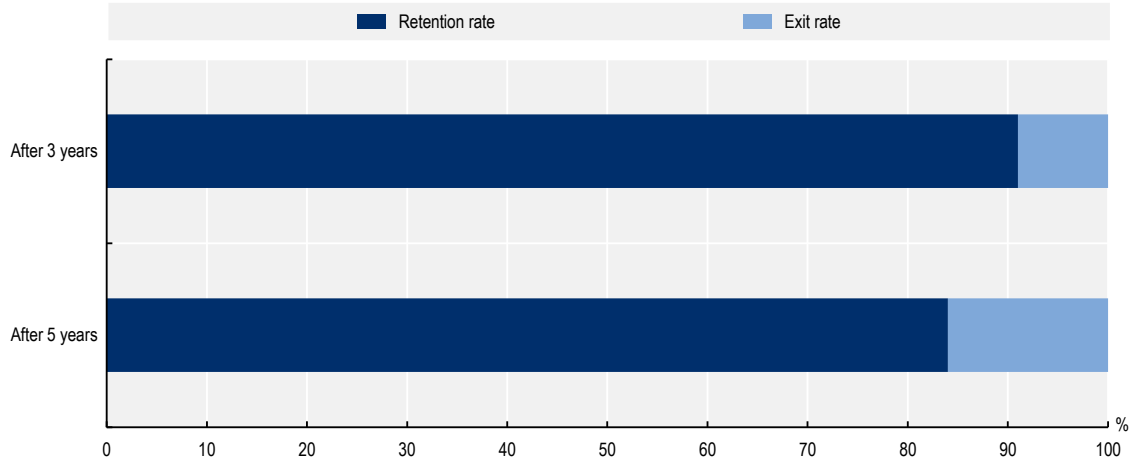


Note: Population aged 15 years and over.
Source: Own calculations using the 2014-20 American Community Surveys.

Average exit and retention rates of immigrants in the United States can be measured using a different method[3] that accounts for possible over-representation in the third and fifth year.

Figure 3.6 shows that the exit rate rises to 16% after five years, with 84% of immigrants still residing in the United States. The exit rate obtained by this method is slightly higher than the rate of 12.5%, which can be attributed to the lower exit rate of 6% observed between 2010 and 2014.

Figure 3.6. Retention and exit rates of immigrants after three and five years in the United States



Note: Population aged 15 and over. Entry period 2010-15.
Source: Own calculations using American Community Surveys.

3.1.3. Canada

The same analysis to estimate exit rates and identify main socio-economic characteristics of immigrants at entry and five years later was conducted for Canada, using data from the 2011 and 2016 general population censuses. The results summarised in Table 3.5 reveal that 21% of the 223 390 immigrants who arrived in Canada in 2010 had left by 2015. Of the 79% who remained in the country, 44% became Canadian citizens and 35% remained immigrants.

Table 3.5. Status of immigrants who entered Canada in 2010, five years later

Variables	Number	Share (%)
Inflows	223 390	100
Deaths	393	0.2
Total remaining	177 082	79.3
of which		
Naturalised	97 384	43.6
Remaining immigrants	79 698	35.7
Return migrants	45 915	20.6

Note: Deaths in the cohort are estimated using the age-sex specific death rate for the same period from the Human Mortality Database.
Source: Own calculations using a 2.7% sample from 2011 and 2016 Canadian General Population Censuses.

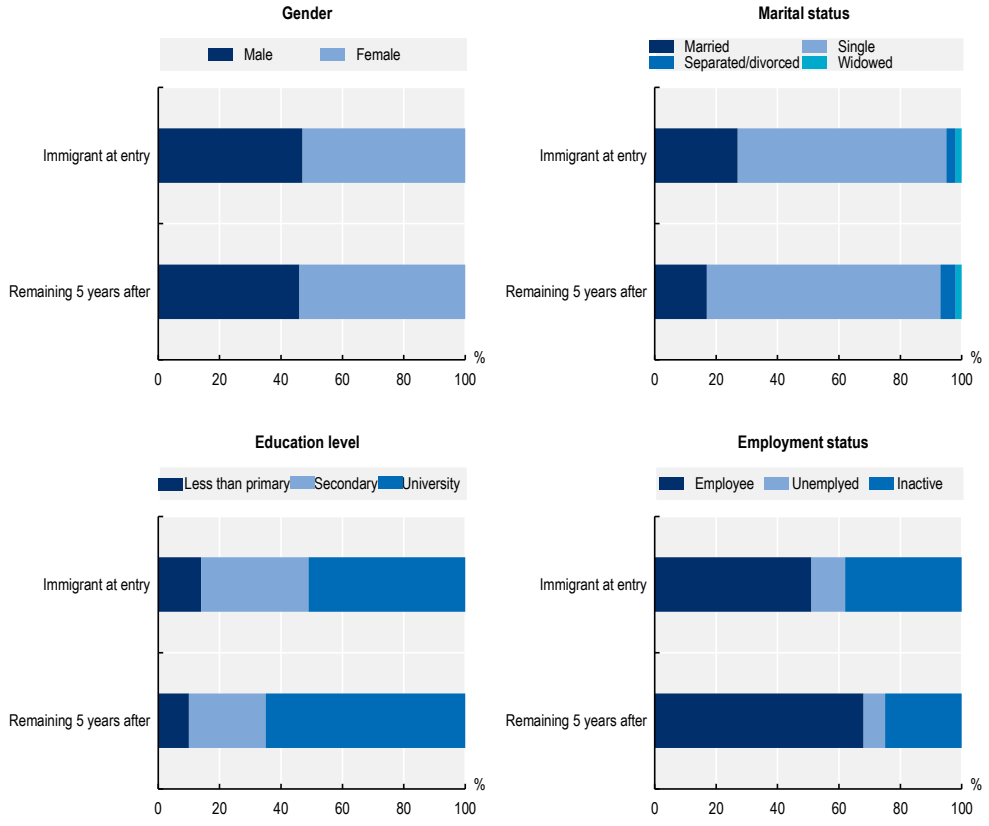
Table 3.6 displays the proportion of immigrants from the top ten origin countries at entry and those who remained after five years. The results suggest that immigrants from India and the People's Republic of China (hereafter "China") were less likely to leave Canada within five years of arrival, while immigrants from the Caribbean and other Asian countries were more likely to leave in the same period.

Table 3.6. Top ten origin countries in Canada in 2010 and 2015

At entry (2010)		Five years later (2015)	
Country of origin	Share (%)	Country of origin	Share (%)
Philippines	16.94	Philippines	16.21
China (People's Republic of)	10.97	India	12.87
India	10.16	China (People's Republic of)	12.18
Other Asian countries	9.93	Northern Africa	6.35
South America	5.25	West Central Asia and the Middle East	6.29
Sub-Sahara Africa	5.08	Central/Eastern Europe	4.53
Central and Eastern Europe	4.86	Sub-Sahara Africa	4.28
Northern Africa	4.82	Other Asian countries	4.26
Caribbean and Bermuda	4.11	South America	3.99
Eastern Africa	16.94	Caribbean and Bermuda	3.11

Note: Entry period 2010. Population over 15 years.
Source: Own calculations using 2011 and 2016 Canadian General Population Censuses.

Figure 3.7. Main characteristics of immigrants at entry and after five years



Note: Entry period 2010. Population over 15 years.
Source: Own calculations based on 2011 and 2016 Canadian General Population Censuses

The main socio-economic characteristics of immigrants at entry and after five years are summarised in Figure 3.7. Men are more likely than women to leave within five years. The proportion of Canadian singles among those who stayed (76%) was higher than at arrival (68%). Unsurprisingly, immigrants who remained after five years had higher levels of education than when they first arrived and were more likely to be employed. This is not only due to selection – they also had a chance to complete more education and to find work.

Box 3.3. Retention rates of immigrants with pre-admission experience in Canada

Canada's Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) provides information on immigrants' pre-admission experiences, such as work and study permits or asylum claims. The IMDB also documents the characteristics of immigrants at the time of admission and their economic outcomes and regional mobility over time. To calculate immigrant retention rates at the provincial and Census Metropolitan Area levels, administrative data files on immigrant admissions and non-permanent resident permits are combined with tax files from the Canada Revenue Agency.

Table 3.7 shows that 85% of the immigrants admitted in 2014 filed taxes in their original province or territory of admission five years later. Overall, Ontario had the highest provincial retention rate (94%), followed by British Columbia (90%) and Alberta (89%). The Atlantic provinces had lower retention rates than the rest of the country.

Higher retention rates were observed among immigrants with asylum claims (93%) or work permits only (90%) prior to admission, while lower retention rates were observed among immigrants with study permits only (79%) or study permits in addition to work permits (81%) prior to admission.

Table 3.7. Five-year retention rates, by pre-admission experience and province or territory, for the 2014 admission year

	All (%)	Study permit (%)	Work permit (%)	Asylum claim (%)	No pre-admission experience (%)
Canada	85.5	79.1	90.2	81.3	93
Newfoundland and Labrador	46.2	N.A	46	45	N.A
Prince Edward Island	28.1	22.2	50	33.3	N.A
Nova Scotia	62.8	58.3	74.4	51.6	N.A
New Brunswick	42.4	41.2	65.8	61.9	N.A
Quebec	79.1	61.9	92.3	83.1	92.2
Ontario	93.7	89.9	94.9	92.8	94.9
Manitoba	72.8	58.7	67.2	55.9	66.7
Saskatchewan	62.7	54.5	67.3	43.1	50
Alberta	89	89.2	92.7	79.5	89.8
British Columbia	89.7	87.8	90.7	88.5	91.1
Territories	67.1	N.A	65.7	40	N.A

Source: Canada's Longitudinal Immigration Database 2020

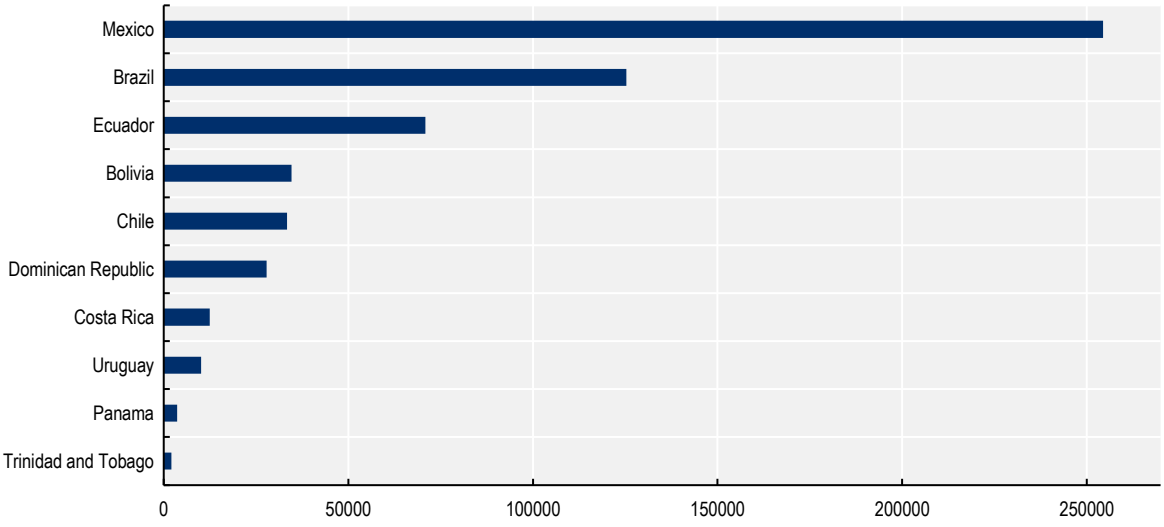
3.2. Return migration to origin countries

Another approach to examining return patterns is to analyse return rates to origin countries, which is done in this subsection for three regions: Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These indirect estimates are based primarily on census data, which include a question on country of residence five years prior to the census date and supplemented, where possible, by more recent survey data.

3.2.1. Latin America and the Caribbean

Return rates to LAC countries were estimated indirectly through general population censuses, which include information on previous residence. For Mexico the estimates were obtained from the 2018 National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID). The review of evidence suggests that Mexico has the highest number of returning migrants in absolute terms (Figure 3.8): A total of 254 422 prior migrants present in Mexico at the time of the survey had returned in the five years prior to the survey.[4]

Figure 3.8. Number of return migrants in selected LAC countries in the five years preceding survey



Note: The census and survey dates are as follows: Mexico (2018), Brazil (2010), Ecuador (2010), Bolivia (2012), Chile (2017), Dominican Republic (2010), Costa Rica (2011), Uruguay (2010), Panama (2011), Trinidad and Tobago (2010). See Annex B for more details.
Source: Own calculations based on census and national survey data.

60% of all returning migrants in LAC had previously lived in the United States. For four out of ten countries, Spain was the main destination from which migrants returned.

Table 3.8 shows calculation of return rates based on surveys of migrants present in the destination country. Although these surveys have limitations as mentioned above, they are useful to provide a general indication of return rates, which vary considerably. Ecuadorians who have emigrated to Spain have the highest return rate (32%), while Mexicans returning from the United Status have the lowest return rate (3%).

Table 3.8. Proportion of return migrants among migrants from selected Latin American countries

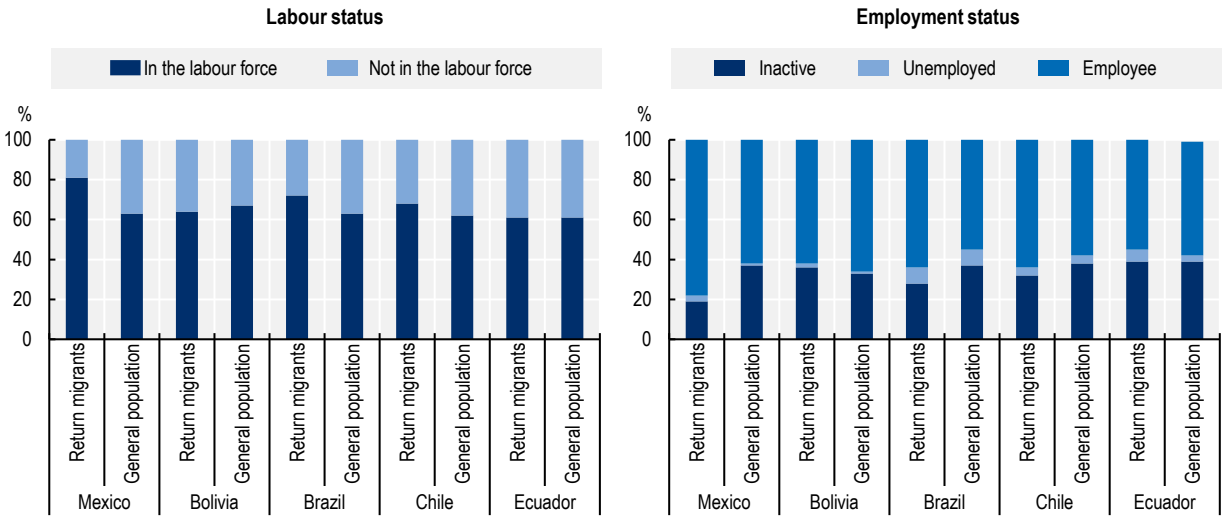
Destination countries: United States and Spain

Origin country	Census year t	Migrants resident in the destination country and arrived before year t – 5		Migrants returned from the destination country after year t – 5		Share of migrants returned in year t among migrants living in the destination country in t – 5 (%)	
		United States	Spain	United States	Spain	United States	Spain
Bolivia	2012	32 278	274 704	4 359	23 634	13.50	8.60
Brazil	2010	179 049	38 409	39 112	8 192	21.84	21.33
Chile	2017	35 484	62 307	7 000	10 240	19.73	16.43
Ecuador	2010	218 592	93 067	24 280	29 780	11.11	32.00
Mexico	2018	6 768 484	49 165	211 902	11 085	3.13	22.55

Source: American Community Surveys (2010, 2012, 2017), Spain's Census of Population and Housing (2011), International Migration Database and origin country population censuses.

Socio-economic characteristics in all five countries show that men are over-represented among return migrants. In Mexico, for example, 76% of those who return are male. The estimates further suggest that return migrants are more likely to be married than the general population. The employment rate of return migrants is higher than that of the general population: In Brazil and Chile, more than 60% of return migrants are employed, and in Mexico the employment rate is over 80%. In contrast, return migrants in Ecuador are more likely to be inactive which can be partly explained by returning at a slightly older age than the other three groups (Figure 3.9). Lastly, return migrants tend to have higher levels of education, particularly in Chile, where more than 80% of return migrants have at least secondary education.

Figure 3.9. Labour and employment status of return migrants in selected LAC countries



Note: The census and survey dates are as follows: Mexico (2018), Bolivia (2012), Brazil (2010), Chile (2017), Ecuador (2010). See Annex B for more details.
Source: Own calculations based on national census and survey data.

3.2.2. North Africa: Tunisia and Morocco

Indication on return to North Africa can only be derived from surveys conducted in Tunisia and Morocco. The Household International Migration Surveys in the Mediterranean countries (MED-HIMS), a regional programme of co-ordinated international migration surveys, were requested by the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of most countries in the European Neighbourhood Policy – Southern Region. The surveys were conducted in different regions of Morocco and Tunisia and cover a representative sample of households with at least one returning migrant. Given the very different migration profiles of other North African countries, the results cannot be generalised.

In Morocco, the survey estimated the total number of return migrants between 2000 and 2018 at 188 000,[5] or an average of 10 000 returns per year (

Table 3.9). France (32%), Italy (22%) and Spain (19%) are the three main countries from which Moroccan migrants return.

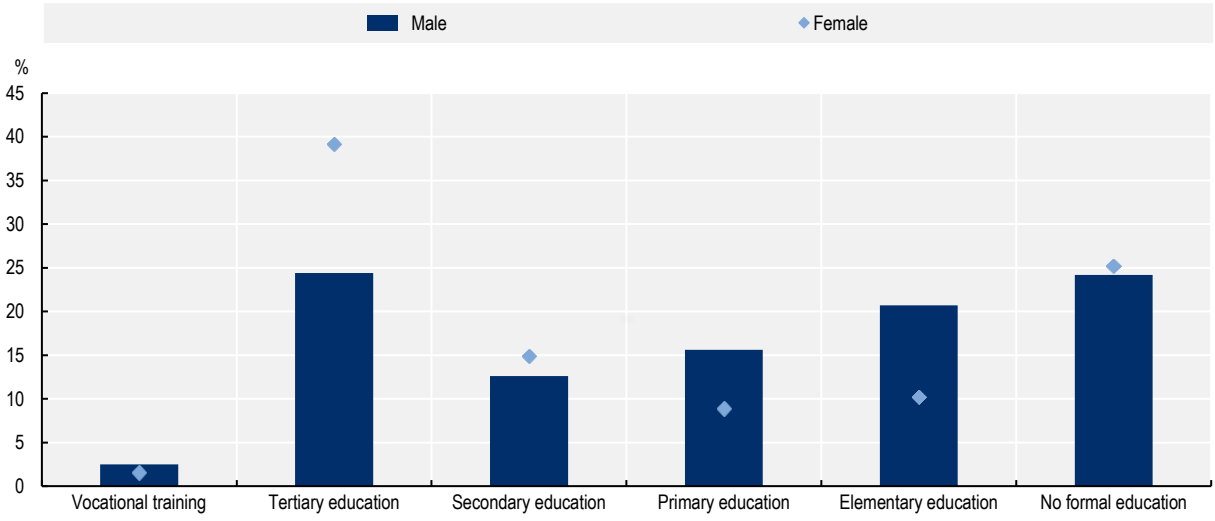
Table 3.9. Moroccan return migrants and immigrants in 2018, by region

Destination country	Return migrants		Current migrants		
	Number	Share (%)	Number	Share (%)	Return rate of current migrants (%)
Traditional European countries of immigration	74 260	39.5	2040 703	41.7	3.6
New European countries of immigration	77 644	41.3	2060 278	42.1	3.8
North America	8 272	4.4	362 139	7.4	2.3
Middle East and North Africa	16 356	8.7	185 963	3.8	8.8
Other countries	11 468	6.1	244 689	5	4,7
Total	188 000	100	4 893 773	100	3.8

Note: The new European countries of immigration are Spain and Italy, which attracted massive migration during the 1990s and thereafter. Traditional European countries immigration are Western Europe countries of the first wave of immigration, mainly France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

Most return migrants are male (72%) and are aged between 30 and 49 (40%). The survey suggests that the return migrant population includes both highly educated and low educated Moroccans (Figure 3.10). While almost a quarter of Moroccan return migrants have no formal education, close to 30% have completed tertiary education. Female return migrants are more likely to have a university degree (39%) compared to their male counterparts (24%).

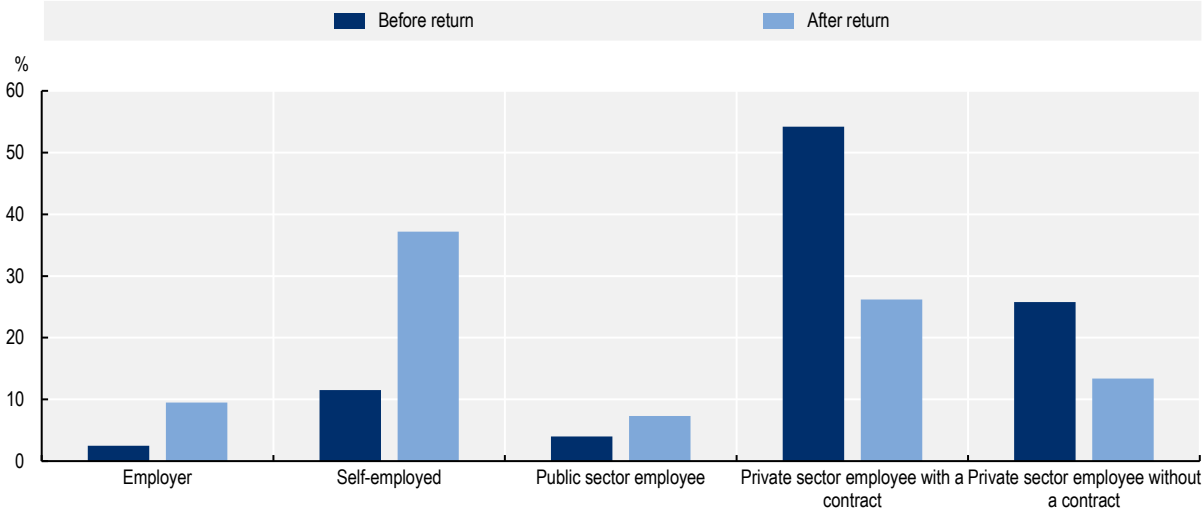
Figure 3.10. Education level of Moroccan return migrants, by gender



Note: N= 188 000.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

Moroccans who return to their home country do not take up the same jobs they had before they left. There is a clear shift in the occupational structure of Moroccans after their return. In destination countries, 84% were employed and only a small proportion were self-employed (14%). This proportion increased to 47% after return.

Figure 3.11. Employment status of Moroccan return migrants



Note: N=188 000.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

The MED-HIMS survey also sheds light on return patterns in Tunisia. The survey estimates the number of return migrants at 210 848. Most return migrants are male (83.5%). Many of the return migrants have been back in Tunisia for more than two decades: only 55% returned between 2000 and 2020. This may explain why such a large share are retired (60%).

Tunisian migrants return mainly from three countries: Neighbouring Libya (34%), France (32%) and Italy (12%). In addition, return migration from the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, accounts for 12% of all returns. Almost 50% of Tunisians who returned lived abroad for less than five years, as shown in Table 3.10. These findings may indicate that the propensity to return decreases with the number of years spent in the destination country or may reflect that emigration has become more frequent in recent years and a larger number of Tunisians are now abroad, increasing the number of potential returns after short stays.

Table 3.10. Tunisian return migrants according to the length of stay in destination countries

Number of years spent abroad	Number	Share (%)
0-2	57 594	27.3
2-5	41 853	19.9
5-10	38 246	18.1
10-15	19 932	9.5
15-20	11 748	5.6

Source: Institut National de la Statistique, l'enquête nationale sur les migrations internationales (MED-HIMS), 2021.

The socio-economic characteristics of Tunisian return migrants show that the majority are low educated, with 17% having no formal education and 38% having completed primary education. Tunisian return migrants are also less likely to work than before they emigrated. This may be explained by a higher proportion of retired people and a much lower employment rate and higher share of inactive women (Table 3.11), even if women only comprise a small part of the total. Of those in employment, 65% have a formal work contract and 35% are self-employed.

Table 3.11. Employment status of Tunisian return migrants

Status	Male (%)	Female (%)
Employed	46.1	18.9
Unemployed	8.9	6.7
Inactive	45	74.4
Total	100	100

Note: N= 210 848.
Source: Institut National de la Statistique, l'enquête nationale sur les migrations internationales (MED-HIMS), 2021.

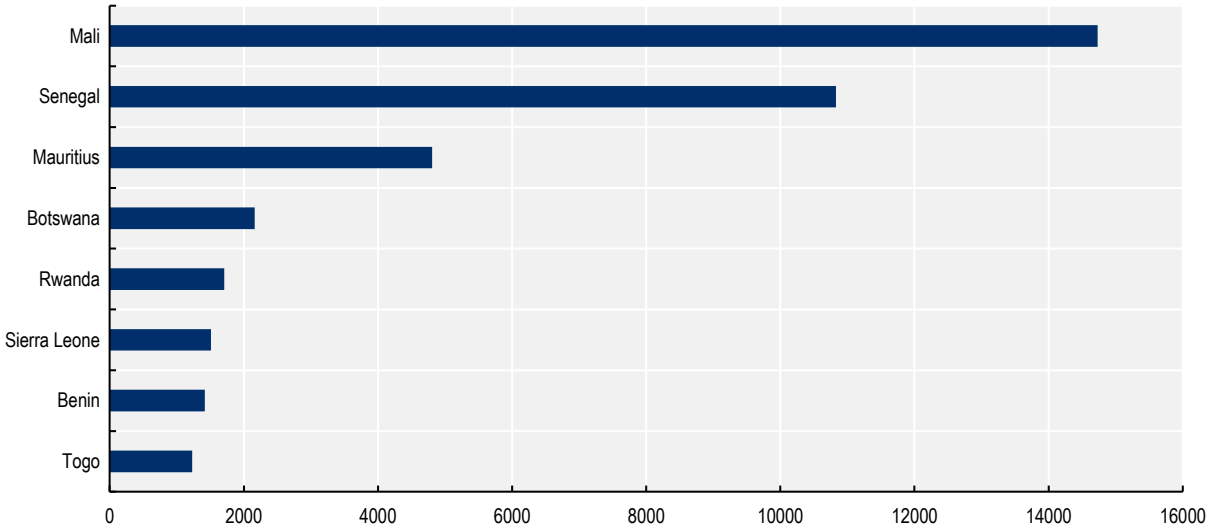
This section presented the results of surveys. These surveys indicate return flows which are more modest than those suggested by other sources, such as censuses and by the exits from major destination countries in the OECD. This indicates that much of return migration is not captured by existing statistical systems or by the surveys designed to examine migration movements.

3.2.3. Sub-Saharan Africa: analysis of 8 countries

For Sub-Saharan Africa, return rates can be estimated indirectly using a 10% sample of general population censuses.[6] The information on residence five years prior to the census can be used to estimate the number of return migrants for different countries of previous residence and to compare it with the number of people who never left the origin country (general population). However, as most of these censuses were conducted more than a decade ago, they do not reflect return patterns in recent years. These returns appear low in absolute numbers.

Mali has the highest number of return migrants among the Sub-Saharan African countries covered in this report. According to the 2009 census, 14 730 migrants returned in the five years prior to the census. Significant numbers of Senegalese and Mauritanian migrants also return from OECD countries (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12. Return migrants from selected Sub-Saharan countries in the five years preceding the census

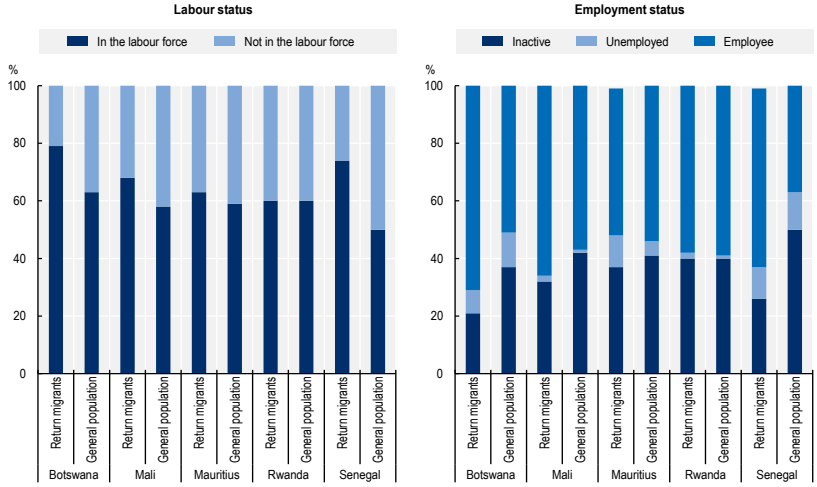


Note: The census year for each country is as follows: Mali (2009), Senegal (2013), Mauritius (2011), Botswana (2011), Rwanda (2012), Sierra Leone (2015), Benin (2013), Togo (2010). See Annex B for more details.
Source: Own calculations based on national census data.

Europe was the main destination for most Sub-Saharan African migrants. Malian migrants primarily return from France (36%), as do Senegalese return migrants (37%). A significant proportion of Senegalese also returned from Italy (34%). The United Kingdom is the main destination for Mauritian (46%) and Botswana (30%) return migrants. In Rwanda, 46% of return migrants resided in European countries, with at least 17% returning from Belgium.

The average age of return migrants varies across countries. In Botswana, Mauritius and Rwanda, return migrants are on average 30 years old, while in Mali there are three peaks in the age distribution: at 30, 45 and close to retirement. The gender distribution also differs between countries. Senegal and Mali clearly stand out with a very high proportion of male return migrants (80% and 66% respectively), while in the other countries the gender ratio is almost the same as in the general population. Lastly, the employment rate of return migrants is higher than that of the general population in all five countries (Figure 3.13).

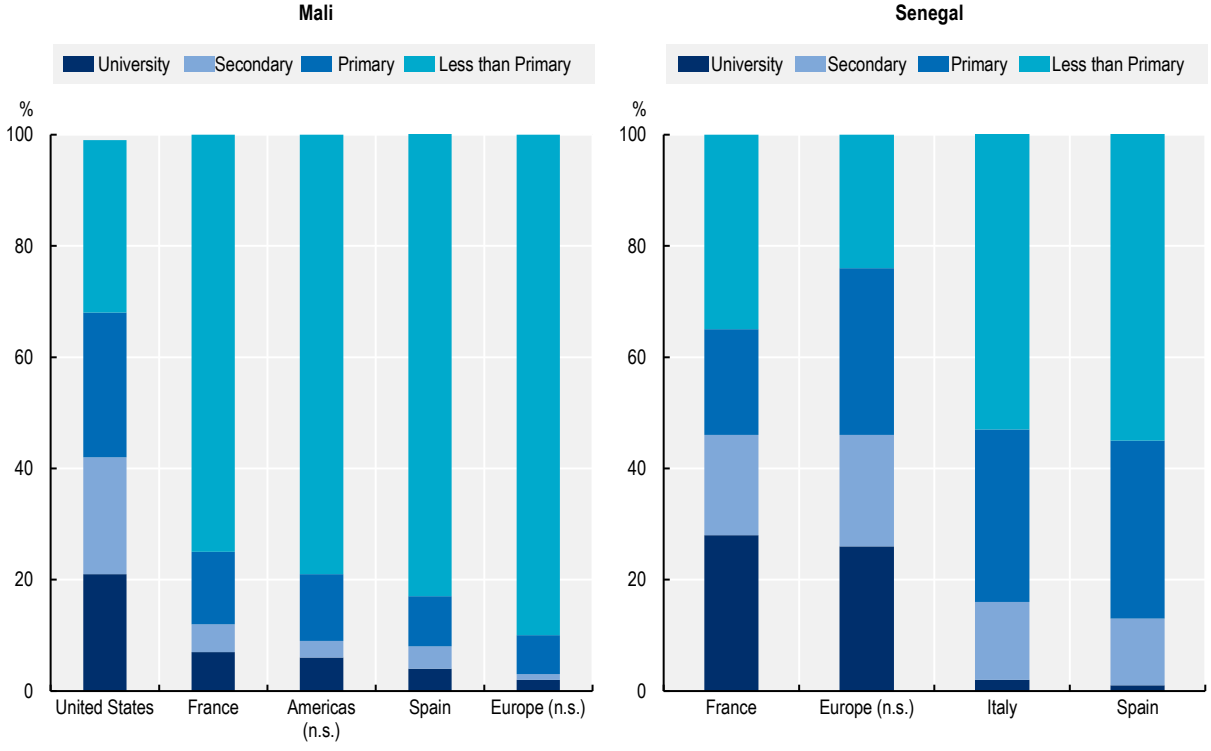
Figure 3.13. Labour and employment status of return migrants, Sub-Sahara Africa

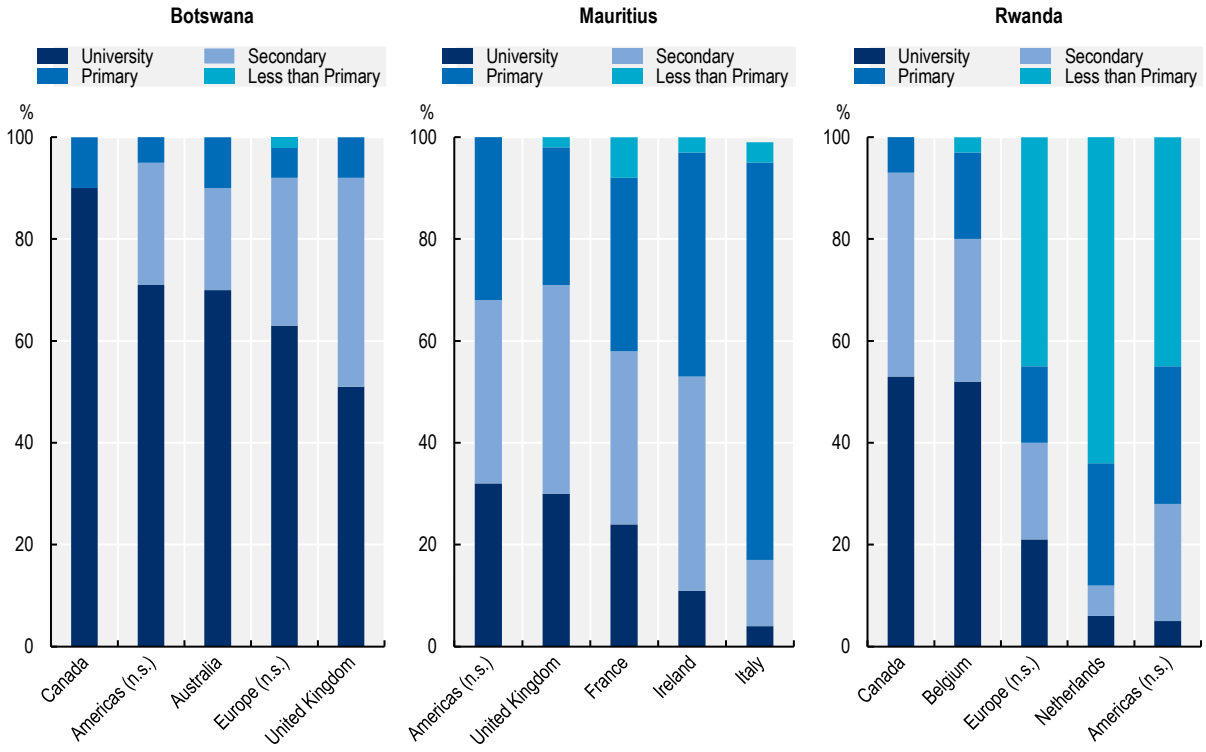


Note: The census year for each country is as follows: Botswana (2011), Mali (2009), Mauritius (2011), Rwanda (2012) and Senegal (2013). See Annex B for more details.
Source: Own calculations based on national census data.

The results also suggest that the educational attainment of return migrants is higher than the national average. In Botswana, almost 90% of return migrants from Canada have completed tertiary education compared to 50% of those who emigrated to the United Kingdom. In Rwanda, the most educated return migrants have previously lived in Canada and Belgium (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14. Education level of return migrants, Sub-Saharan Africa





Note: The census year for each country is as follows: Botswana (2011), Mali (2009), Mauritius (2011), Rwanda (2012) and Senegal (2013). See Annex B for more details.
Source: Own calculations based on national census data

This section presents analyses based on the limited data available, much of which dates back more than a decade. Surveys are thin, and administrative data limited, so it is difficult to draw a more detailed picture of return migration.

3.2.4. The scale of return of third-country nationals leaving the EU

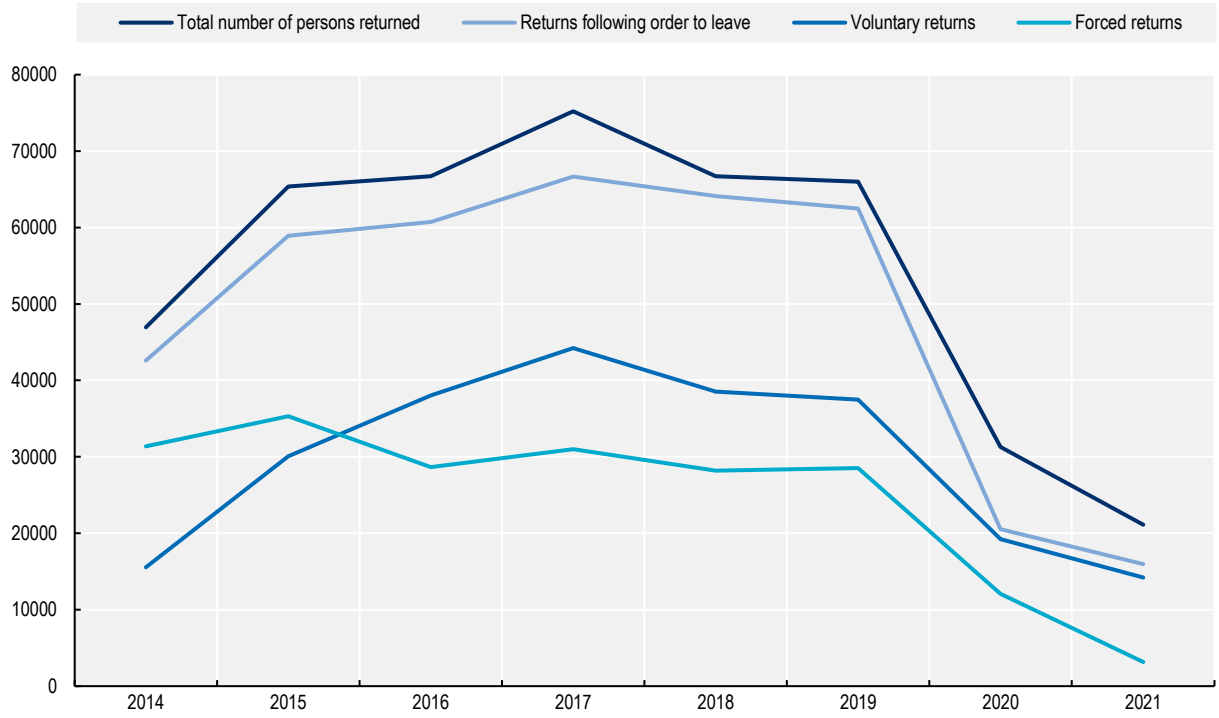
Eurostat has since 2014 collected data on the return of third-country nationals from EU countries. Return movements in this dataset cover forced and voluntary returns. The data also capture persons who returned following an official order to leave (Figure 3.15). However, the voluntary nature of data reporting leads to some gaps. EU Member States with significant migration flows, such as Germany, Greece and the Netherlands, have partial data: while there is data on third-country nationals who have returned following an order to leave, it is unclear which returns are voluntary and which are forced. Spontaneous departures are usually not recorded.

Despite these limitations, Eurostat data provides some indication of trends in the return of third-country nationals. Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (2014-19), the average number of documented returns across EU countries was 82 000, peaking in 2017 with an average of 93 000 returns. Due to pandemic-related restrictions, the actual number of returns decreased significantly in 2020 and 2021, averaging 47 000 and 29 000, respectively, across EU countries with available data. Almost 90% of all reported returns correspond to third-country nationals returning following an official order to leave the country.

Eurostat data further highlights that forced returns are relatively small compared to overall return movements. Between 2014 and 2021, there were on average 35 000 forced returns per year across

EU countries. This figure is low compared to the estimated exits rates of migrants in OECD EU countries (Section 3.1.1). However, forced returns appear to account for at least half of the returns reported in the Eurostat data. Only in 2021 does the share of forced returns decrease (21%) in the COVID-19 context.

Figure 3.15. Number of third country nationals returned in selected EU countries, by type of return, 2014-21



Note: The figure shows the number of annual returns reported by 16 EU OECD countries for which data was available in all four categories.
Source: Eurostat.

3.2.5. The scale of AVRR in return movements

There is a separate data source indicating the scale of AVRR. Compared to estimates of return migration derived from surveys and census data, AVRR in origin countries appear to comprise a very low share of returns (Table 3.12). In Mexico, for example, the 2018 National Survey of Demographic Dynamics reported that an estimated 254 422 migrants had returned five years prior to the survey, while only 178 return migrants received AVRR assistance between 2013 and 2018.

In Morocco, annual return estimates since 2000 range from 10 000 to 40 000 depending on the data source, far exceeding the 4 800 return migrants who have received AVRR assistance between 2013 and 2022. In Tunisia, the MED-HIMS survey indicates that approximately 115 966 migrants returned between 2000 and 2020, with an average of 5 800 returns per year, which is much higher than the annual average of 183 return migrants who received AVRR since 2013. These figures suggest that AVRR represents only a small fraction – at best 5% – of total return movements in these regions. The fact that not all migrants qualify for AVRR support explains part of this discrepancy.

As for Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a noticeable increase in AVRR beneficiaries – particularly in Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone – but outdated census data complicates comparisons of AVRR with other return movements. Estimates of exit rates from EU countries suggest that 32% of immigrants from Sub-Saharan African leave within 3 years and 37% within 5 years (Figure 3.3).

Table 3.12. Assisted voluntary returns, by country of origin, 2013-22

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total (2013-22)
Latin America and the Caribbean											
Bolivia	225	183	79	53	47	22	15	21	19	38	702
Brazil	1 418	881	578	496	700	810	815	1 249	556	1 249	7 503
Chile	169	120	66	69	38	69	45	46	19	29	670
Costa Rica	1	7	4	4	6	1	4	38	29	19	113
Ecuador	356	276	88	30	37	27	35	9	16	88	962
Mexico	56	45	13	16	18	30	55	20	49	63	365
Uruguay	42	33	25	22	22	8	6	41	23	14	236
North Africa											
Morocco	482	416	308	1 395	477	348	310	184	258	640	4 818
Tunisia	609	139	79	109	120	160	149	123	113	232	1 833
Sub-Saharan Africa											
Botswana	12	3	4	9	4	3	3	2	3	5	48
Benin	73	19	19	38	84	185	816	341	338	231	2 144
Mali	173	126	719	408	724	4 041	6 799	3 249	4 453	6 624	19 614
Mauritius	58	31	21	8	17	15	8	13	8	1	180
Rwanda	35	21	18	16	15	30	18	10	17	10	190
Senegal	328	283	743	1 527	1986	1 495	1 206	695	1 104	1 064	9 327
Sierra Leone	37	23	32	97	177	829	1 823	1 259	1 793	2 249	5 267
Togo	74	31	21	36	104	121	153	118	140	122	920

Source: IOM, Return and Reintegration Highlights 2022, Annexes.

3.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section examined exit rates from OECD countries and return rates to origin countries, highlighting the factors that influence return patterns. The analysis shows that exit rates vary considerably between countries, ranging from 12.5% in the United States to 75% in the Netherlands. The low exit rates in the United States can be explained by the large number of migrants from Mexico, the Philippines and Cuba, whose return rates are generally lower. In contrast, the Netherlands has a higher proportion of immigrants from high-income countries such as Poland, Germany and China, who are more likely to return within five years. Retention rates also vary by region of origin. In European OECD countries, immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa and the Middle East have higher retention rates than those from North America.

The retention rate continues to decline between three and five years. A large part of the exits is of migrants who are therefore departing with 3-5 years of experience in the destination country – a period long enough to have potentially acquired human capital in the form of language, education or professional experience.

The analysis of return migration to origin countries highlighted that a significant number of return migrants from LAC countries have previously resided in the United States and Spain, while European countries are the main destination for African return migrants. The subsection also showed that return rates for LAC countries are slightly higher than for sub-Saharan African countries when considering the total number of immigrants residing in the selected destination countries. Compared to the general population, return migrants tend to have higher levels of education and higher employment rates.

The magnitude of the return migration phenomenon is indicated by these rates. For large countries like the United States, where well over a million new migrants enter annually, even an exit rate of one in eight represents hundreds of thousands of returning migrants each year. Similarly, in Europe, even with low exit

rates for many non-EU born migrants, the magnitude of inflows is similar to that of the United States and the exits still amount to hundreds of thousands annually. The picture which emerges from this analysis is that of OECD destinations from which there are very significant outflows. Not all exits are for return to the origin country – some may be secondary movements within the OECD or to new destinations. However, return migration from OECD countries to origin countries is in the order of many hundreds of thousands per year.

References

OECD (2008), *International Migration Outlook 2008*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2008-en. [1]

Notes

[1] EU-27 and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries.

[2] This is calculated on population age 15 and over, so some have not had the chance yet to complete their education.

[3] The envelope method, similar to the one used by (OECD, 2008[1]) consists in reallocating non-response proportionally to the weights of the different length-of-stay responses to maintain the total number of immigrants. To account for sample size volatility, the data is smoothed by constructing an envelope around the initial cohort so that the number of immigrants retained for a given length of stay is the average between the maximum and minimum values in the envelope.

[4] For more information on methodology see Annex A.

[5] The HCP survey defines a return migrant as a household member born in Morocco who has lived in another country for at least three months and has returned to Morocco since the beginning of 2000.The survey counts 187 566 return migrants to Morocco since 2000, an average of around 10 000 per year. These numbers are than those estimated by the 2014 General Census of Population and Housing, which reported the number of return migrants between 2000 and 2014 at 200 000, an average of 40 000 return migrants per year.

[6] These are drawn from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International (IPUMS-International), the largest collection of publicly available individual-level census data.

4 Family dynamics in return migration

Return migration is strongly influenced by family dynamics. While it may be driven by factors such as family reunification and caring for ageing parents, family expectations may act as a disincentive to return. Once migrants return to their origin countries, families play a complex role, as both a potential pillar of extensive support but also as an obstacle to reintegration. For vulnerable return migrants with trauma, mental health problems or addiction, it can be particularly challenging to regain a place in the family. Reintegration challenges, such as language barriers and adapting to a new school system, are common for children who have grown up in host countries.

Return decisions are rarely individual choices, but are shaped by social networks of migrants, including family and community ties. In literature, the determinants of return migration are mainly described through push and pull factors and, more recently, through deterrent and stay factors. Push factors can result from economic hardship and lack of social contacts in host countries. Return policies or specific programmes – including AVRR programmes – affect migrants at the macro level. Pull factors can be linked to the desire for family reunification or improvements in livelihood opportunities in origin countries (IOM, 2018[1]; Kox, 2011[2]; Black and King, 2004[3]).

Building on the push and pull model, stay and deterrent factors explain why some migrants decide not to return (Van Wijk, 2008[4]). Migrants are more likely to stay in host countries when economic opportunities are more promising compared to origin countries (Kox, 2011[2]; Song and Song, 2015[5]). Sociocultural integration and social networks are other important factors that increase the propensity to stay in host countries (de Haas and Fokkema, 2011[6]). Deterrent factors are often structural and may reflect unstable economic, political and security situations in origin countries. Migrants who have not been able to maintain social networks in origin countries, nor meet family and community expectations, are also less likely to return (Kox, 2011[2]; Van Wijk, 2008[4]).

4.1. The impact of families on return decisions

The main driver for return migration to origin countries is family related. Homesickness, family reunification or formation, and family obligations are recurring reasons stated by migrants across countries (Fernandez-Sanchez et al., 2022[7]; Konzett-Smoliner, 2016[8]; Fleischer, 2008[9]). A review of evidence in Mexico suggests that most migrants returning from the United States cite the desire to be with family members or the wish to start a family in a familiar environment as the main reasons for return. The propensity to return is higher among migrants who are unable to travel back and forth due to immigration border enforcement (Hazán, 2014[10]; Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015[11]).

Similar patterns can be observed among respondents to surveys of Moroccan and Tunisian return migrants. In Morocco, approximately 60% reported their return as voluntary. Of these voluntary returns, 40% are for family reasons. Family reunification is the driving force for many return migrants, particularly those returning from North America (38%) and traditional European countries of immigration (24%) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Main reasons for return of Moroccan migrants

	Traditional European countries of immigration (%)	New European countries of immigration (%)	North America (%)	Middle East and North Africa (%)	Other countries (%)
Family reunification	24	21	38	19	20
Education/Training (including for children)	8	3	14	2	19
Nostalgia/Sense of belonging/Integration	8	7.5	11	5	7
Marriage/Spouse search	5.5	4	3	4	1
All voluntary returns linked to family reasons	46	36	66	29.5	48

Note: N= 188 000.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

In Tunisia, where a large proportion of the respondents are retired, family was still the main cited reason for returning (31%) (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Main reasons for return of Tunisian migrants

	Share (%)
Family	31
Precariousness in host country	24
Employment	16
Retirement	10
Expulsion	8
Education and vocational training	5
Other	6

Note: N= 210 848.
Source: Institut National de la Statistique, l'enquête nationale sur les migrations internationales (MED-HIMS), 2021.

Migrants whose residence status does not allow family reunification in the host country may have a higher propensity to return for family reasons. A study on return intentions of Nigerian migrants in the People's Republic of China (hereafter "China"), for example, underlines how the lack of physical proximity to children

and spouses makes permanent settlement challenging for male migrants. They face the dilemma of returning to Nigeria to be with their family or staying in China for the economic well-being of the entire family (Adebayo, 2020[12]).

Family obligations to provide care can also push migrants to return to origin countries. In the Armenian context, female return migrants reported to have felt pressured to fulfil "their social duty" and responsibilities to care for family members (Fleischer, 2008[9]). Another study on return migration to Morocco draws similar conclusions: when the health situation of parents or in-laws deteriorates, female migrants feel obliged to return to provide care (Vantoni, 2016[13]).

Adverse family circumstances can also influence return decisions. When visas are linked to marital status, family migrants may have to leave host countries after divorce (Vantoni, 2016[13]). This depends on legal and temporal factors, as illustrated in the Dutch context by Bjiwaard and van Doeselaar, who examined the divorce and migration patterns of 100 392 family migrants. They categorised immigrants according to three Human Development Index (HDI) tiers of origin countries. Their results show that family migrants from developed countries are more likely to move after divorce despite having fewer restrictions on residence permits. There is an increase in the divorce rate for all groups after three years of marriage, when migrants have stayed long enough to obtain a permanent residence permit. For family migrants from less developed countries, the timing of divorce is crucial: migrants who divorce after two years in the host country, have a 20 percentage point higher probability of leaving within ten years than those who divorce after three or more years in the host country (Bijwaard and van Doeselaar, 2014[14]).

However, families in the origin country can also discourage migrants from returning. In low- and middle-income countries, the emigration of one family member is often co-financed by other family members as a collective investment. Migrants are expected to send remittances and return with capital and consumer goods. This may explain why rejected asylum seekers may refrain from returning to avoid family scrutiny and feelings of guilt and shame (IOM, 2018[1]). Families may expect migrants to preserve even when faced with great difficulties. During the workshop in Tunisia, social attachés who had previously worked in European consulates reported that some family members explicitly ask migrants to stay in the host country, even when there is little chance of the migrant obtaining a legal residence permit.

4.2. Interplay of supportive and challenging factors in reintegrating return migrants

Families play a central but ambivalent role in the reintegration process of returning migrants, whether they are beneficiaries of AVRR or return without any support. In the first months after return, when returning migrants are still adjusting to the new circumstances, family support is particularly visible. However, families can also pose significant challenges to the reintegration process.

Family support can be summarised in four categories. On the one hand, families in origin countries provide moral and psychological support to returning migrants. Many studies confirm this, including interviews with 350 Armenian return migrants (Fleischer, 2008[9]). During the workshop in Morocco, the civil society organisation Fondation Orient-Occident described three stages in accepting return, for which family support is crucial.

1. The shock phase: Return migrants have mixed feelings and do not fully understand the implications of their return. Living conditions in Morocco can be very different from those in the host country. Return migrants often justify their return to family members and neighbours, while trying to understand how this is perceived by them.
2. The anger phase: Return migrants have doubts about their return and family tensions may arise. Attitudes towards family members and AVRR service providers can be aggressive, especially if the promised financial assistance does not materialise as quickly as expected.

3. The acceptance phase: Return migrants reflect on their priorities and take stock of their personal skills. They accept their return and move forward.

Mothers of returning migrants often provide moral support at all these stages. During the workshop in Tunisia, for example, implementing partners of AVRR support reported that it is common for mothers to accompany their returning child to preliminary interviews. Mothers also help with the administrative procedures involved in preparing the economic reintegration project, which allows return migrants to regain their place in the family and to contribute to the family's expenses.

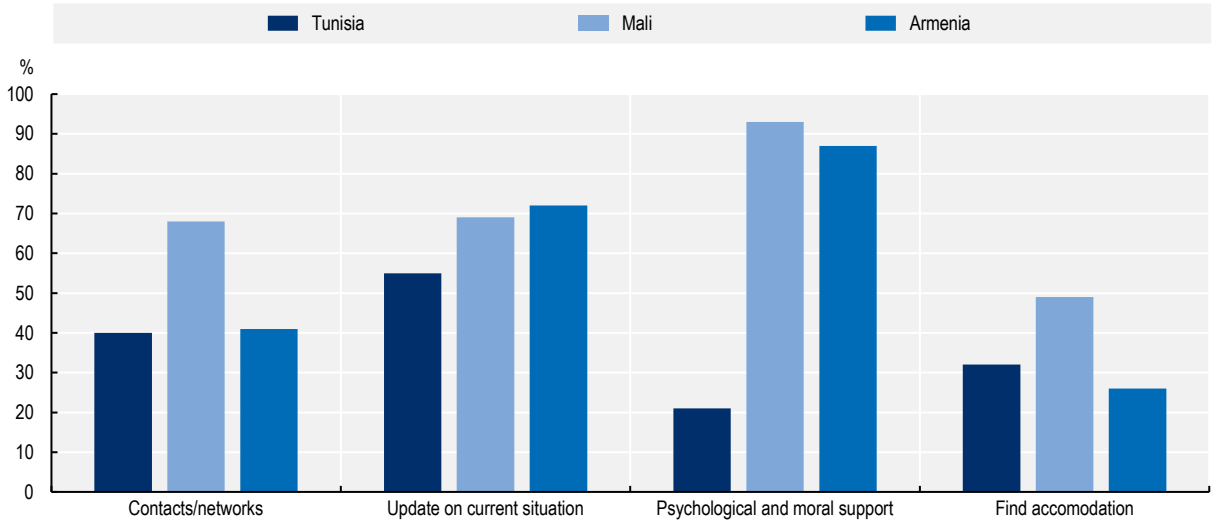
In addition, families help return migrants to establish social networks. Of the 350 return migrants interviewed in Armenia, 29% had family support to reconnect with local communities (Fleischer, 2008[9]) (Fleischer, 2008[9]), as in Tunisia, where families explain the evolving economic environment. In Morocco, families often provide practical guidance and assistance in dealing with administrative procedures that go beyond AVRR activities.

Where socio-economic conditions allow, families provide financial support to return migrants. In Armenia, a third of the return migrants interviewed received money from their families in the absence of unemployment benefits (Fleischer, 2008[9]) (Fleischer, 2008[9]). During the workshop in Tunisia, local civil society organisations also highlighted how parents incur debt to finance a safe migration route for their children. If the migration process fails, some parents go back into debt to cover the travel expenses for their children's return. This observation was also echoed during the workshop in Morocco, where local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) explained that families usually cover basic needs, including for healthcare, in the first months after return.

Another area in which families support returnees is through income-generating activities. For those who start small businesses as part of the AVRR package, it is not uncommon for other family members to provide the physical space or contribute to rental costs. They may also undertake planning activities prior to the migrant's return. This includes liaising with local implementing organisations to ensure that the economic reintegration project is operational upon the migrant's return. During the workshop in Tunisia, however, implementers of AVRR support pointed out the risk of failure if the returning migrant gives up the project, becomes disabled or dies. In such cases, the provisions of AVRR programmes do not formally allow family members to continue the project as co-actors.

While reintegration assistance focuses on the individual returning migrant and, where relevant, the family unit, it could also benefit family members in countries of origin. By extending some of the services offered within the reintegration package, such as financial literacy training, family members could better support the returnee throughout the process of setting up a business (ERRIN, 2022[15]). The database on return migrants (DReM) illustrates the extensive support from family members for returnees in Tunisia, Mali and Armenia (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Type of support received by return migrants in Tunisia, Mali and Armenia

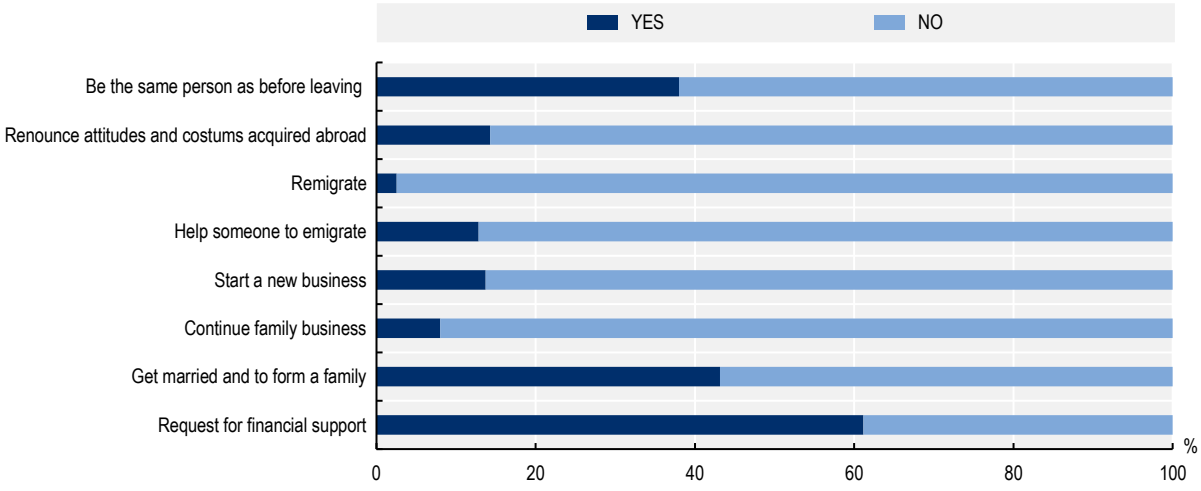


Note: The question has four response options ("very much", "somewhat", "a little" and "not at all"). This figure shows the average of first and second response options. Sample sizes are as follows: Tunisia (N=232), Mali (N=153), Armenia (N=187), Field data were collected in the framework of two research projects, the MIREM project (2005 – 2008) and the CRIS project (2011 – 2014).
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

Despite the wide-ranging support, return migrants also face challenges in the family context. When family members perceive their return as a failure and an abandonment of the family project, return migrants often feel guilt and shame (IOM, 2018[1]). In some cases, this perception is linked to misrepresentation or lack of transparency about the migration experience. Difficulties are concealed by giving false information about material possessions and living conditions in host countries (Scarneci Domnisoru and Csesznek, 2017[16]). Upon return, family members may react with surprise to the apparent circumstances which could ultimately lead to rejection (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[17]).

Evidence suggests that family pressure is more prevalent among involuntary return migrants. They are often labelled as coming back "empty-handed", especially when their return has significant livelihood implications for other family members (Kleist, 2017[18]; IOM, 2018[1]). In Mali, for example, out of 350 return migrants, more than 60% reported that family members had asked for financial support which they could not provide (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Reported family expectations for Malian return migrants



Note: N=350.
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

Family tensions are a particular challenge for vulnerable return migrants. Trauma, mental health problems or addiction are additional barriers to re-finding their place in the family. In the absence of overarching support mechanisms provided by public services, families can become overwhelmed by the situation and, in the worst cases, reject vulnerable migrants. Exchanges with psychologists from Doctors of the World have shown that returning migrants are often reluctant to talk about their experiences in host countries and may even deny that they are suffering from declining mental health.

Involving families in therapeutic care is one approach to restoring fragile family bonds, as highlighted by psychologists and AVRR implementers during the workshop in Tunisia. Family mediation has great potential to better inform and sensitise on a wide range of return issues but has not been mainstreamed in AVRR programmes. One way to mainstream family mediation is to include it as a tool of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPS) pillar in AVRR programmes. Concerns about family tensions or rejection could be identified and discussed during the return counselling sessions offered by AVRR to migrants planning to return to their origin country. This information can be shared with case workers in countries of origin, who can co-ordinate with available psychologists or other support resources. Upon return, and with the consent of all parties, a psychological pre-assessment could determine whether family members can make a positive contribution to the healing process of returning migrants.

4.3. The presence of children

Return decisions and reintegration outcomes are affected by the presence of children. Policy design and AVRR programmes usually focus on individual return migrants, or address children's perspectives only when the parent has agreed to return. The return decision is also strongly influenced by partners, especially when the couple is mixed – and mixed couples are a major barrier to considering return.

Several studies indicate that the age of children influences the willingness to return. In the Netherlands, rejected asylum seekers living in family locations consider returning when their children are not yet of school age (IOM, 2018[1]). This is also the case in the Danish context, where Nikolka highlights that return is most likely when children are either very young or close to school age (Nikolka, 2018[19]). Avoiding

potential disruptions in children's lives when return migration is unavoidable explains why some Moroccan migrants choose to return when children are young (Vantoni, 2016[13]). Austrian migrants returning from EU and non-EU countries also report that their children's age made it easier to reconnect with former friends. Bonding through parenthood helped to overcome feelings of alienation (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016[8]).

The type of education available to children in origin countries is another concern for families. Some migrant groups in Europe, such as Bosnians and Eritreans, are reluctant to return not only because of social and economic challenges, but also to ensure that their children complete their education in host countries (Al-Ali and Black, 2001[20]). Nikolka affirms that the propensity to return among migrants in Denmark is positively related to the quality of schooling in the origin country (Nikolka, 2018[19]).[1] Half of the respondents in a large-scale survey of Latvian emigrants also expressed reluctance to return due to doubts about adequate support for children in adapting to the Latvian education system (Hazans, 2015[21]). This concern was higher among immigrants with lower education and from minority groups (59% and 57%) than among those with higher education and without minority background (49% and 46%).

Concerns about children's well-being can influence return decisions in different ways. Some migrants may decide to return without their children. In such cases, the spouse remains in the host country and continues to work there. Table 4.3 illustrates this in the Moroccan context.

Table 4.3. Main reasons for spouse's non-return to Morocco

	Male (%)	Female (%)
Spouse works	19	64
Children's schooling	19	10
Other	34	21.5
Unsure	27.5	5

Note: N=188 000.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

In other cases, migrants decide to return for the benefit of their children. During the workshop in Tunisia, AVRR implementers identified three scenarios in which children are the main reason for return:

1. Migrants have children born in the host country: The family faces hardship and precariousness (e.g. difficulties in obtaining legal residence status). To protect their children, migrants return to Tunisia.
2. Migrants have children born in Tunisia: The more difficult it is for the children to integrate culturally and academically in the host country, the more likely parents are to return to Tunisia.
3. Migrants are in the host country without their children: As a result of this separation, children may face challenges, including dropping out of school. When migrants become aware of these problems, they often decide to return to Tunisia.

While some parents decide to return for their children's well-being, they have limited control over the unique challenges of reintegration. These challenges faced by children are well known, but interventions in this area are not comprehensive. AVRR programmes assign responsibility for mediating to ensure that children of returnees are enrolled in school, which can be complicated, especially for those arriving during the school year. However, the additional problems faced by children – especially if their language skills are below grade level or if they are accustomed to different pedagogical approaches – are not so easily addressed (OECD, 2020[22]).

Local structures are not always available to manage these reintegration issues. This raises the question of the extent to which parents can prepare for their children's return. In the Moroccan context, Vantoni distinguishes between families that speak Arabic with their children in the host country and have gathered

sufficient information about the school system before returning. In these cases, children reintegrate relatively easily. Conversely, when children do not speak their mother tongue, parents face difficulties in finding a suitable school upon return. Families are forced to invest in private tutoring, and it can take several years for children to catch up with their peers (Vantoni, 2016[13]). While readiness certainly influences children's reintegration outcomes, parents do not always have the choice to decide when and under which circumstances to return.

In addition, migrants who have established relationships in the destination country may be deterred from return by the perceived difficulty of integration of their partner.[2] In the Latvian context, there are indications that return intentions are lower among migrants with foreign partners. This is of consequence, since of the 136 000 Latvians living abroad with a spouse or partner in 2015, at least a third were non-Latvian. Table 4.4 shows that the propensity to return within five years is significantly lower among migrants with foreign partners, especially among women (Hazans, 2015[21]). The survey did not examine which specific factors act as a disincentive to return. The barrier represented by language, however, is one of the main ones raised by researchers on this topic (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej and Daly, 2023[23]; Hu and Pizzi, 2022[24]; Mukhamejanova and Konurbayeva, 2023[25]).

Table 4.4. Return intentions of Latvian emigrants with a foreign spouse

Variables: foreign spouse or cohabiting partner and main language used at home

Variables	Model 3			Model 4		
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
Spouse/cohabiting partner abroad is a foreigner	-0.476***	-0.555	-0.510***	-0.477***	-0.591	-0.517***
Latvian and Russian	-0.268**	-0.488***	-0.065	-0.286**	-0.518***	-0.066
Russian	-0.390***	-0.462**	-0.343**	-0.423***	-0.518**	-0.384**
Other	-0.384***	-0.282	-0.428***	-0.406***	-0.295	-0.437***

Note: *p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01. Model 3 includes the following explanatory variables: destination country, type of settlement abroad, living with family members abroad, family members in Latvia, current main status, education status (abroad and in Latvia), downskilling (self-reported), real estate in Latvia, business or job in Latvia and main language used at home abroad. Model 4 includes the same explanatory variables as Model 3 with addition to the financial situation abroad.
Source: (Hazans, 2015[21]), "Return intention of post-2000 emigrants", University of Latvia.

4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section shows that families have a significant impact on migrants' decisions to return. At each point in the return decision process and the return experience, they intervene with roles that can push the return migrant in one direction or the other. They are often the main driver for return, but they can also act as a disincentive if migrants fear that they cannot live up to family expectations. Once the migrant has returned, families support them in many ways, especially in the first months after return. However, certain family perceptions, such as return being a failure, can hinder reintegration outcomes. Returning migrants may isolate themselves out of shame and guilt, hampering their ability to rebuild social networks. Rejection by families can also be a barrier to economic reintegration of returnees, especially if income-generating activities require additional support from family members. Family pressure can particularly affect vulnerable groups, including those who have experienced trauma or have mental health and addiction problems. Families of returnees may be overwhelmed by the needs of the return migrant, but family mediation is rarely offered in return programmes or by public services in origin countries. Reintegration challenges are also prevalent for children, who may struggle with school integration and language barriers.

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Notes

[1] Nikolka uses PISA test scores as reference category for schooling quality.

[2] If mixed couples do decide to return to the origin country of one of the partners, they face specific reintegration challenges – the same which discourage return. The limited literature on this issue focuses primarily on return to developed countries of mixed couples where one partner is not from that country. Here, in mixed couples, structural obstacles to economic integration and the complexity of unfamiliar administrative procedures may lead the partners to physically separate to pursue their careers, with negative consequences for family composition, or renegotiate family roles (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016[8]). The

specific Austrian example shows reintegration challenges for mixed couples can be linked to the organisational difficulties of rebuilding family life, especially when one partner is unfamiliar with the country. Similar to first arrival in the host country, finding suitable accommodation, opening a bank account, applying for insurance, organising childcare and finding a job for the partner are overwhelming tasks. The difficulty for non-EU/EEA spouses to obtain work permits and non-recognition of their qualifications create additional tensions in families.

5 Returning to local communities

Assessing return to local communities requires considering regional contexts, community capacities and possible links with diaspora groups. Relationships between community members and return migrants may be shaped by certain perceptions of what successful and unsuccessful return looks like and could lead to social stigma. Local community organisations in origin countries often implement AVRR activities, with a particular focus on economic reintegration. Leaving aside the frequent insufficiency of financial and human resources, their scope of action is tied to a predefined framework that offers little flexibility.

5.1. Key factors in reconnecting with local communities

Unlike the extensive study of the role of families, there is much less research on the extent to which local communities influence return decisions. The type of reception the returning migrant is likely to receive from community members has been studied. However, there is limited understanding of the potential role of communities in encouraging or discouraging return.

In literature, the concept of "community" is generally understood to encompass three dimensions:

1. A common place where return migrants and other members of society interact
2. Regular social support, especially during life-cycle events
3. Interdependence through shared resources and ideas (Wanki, Derluyn and Lietaert, 2022[1])

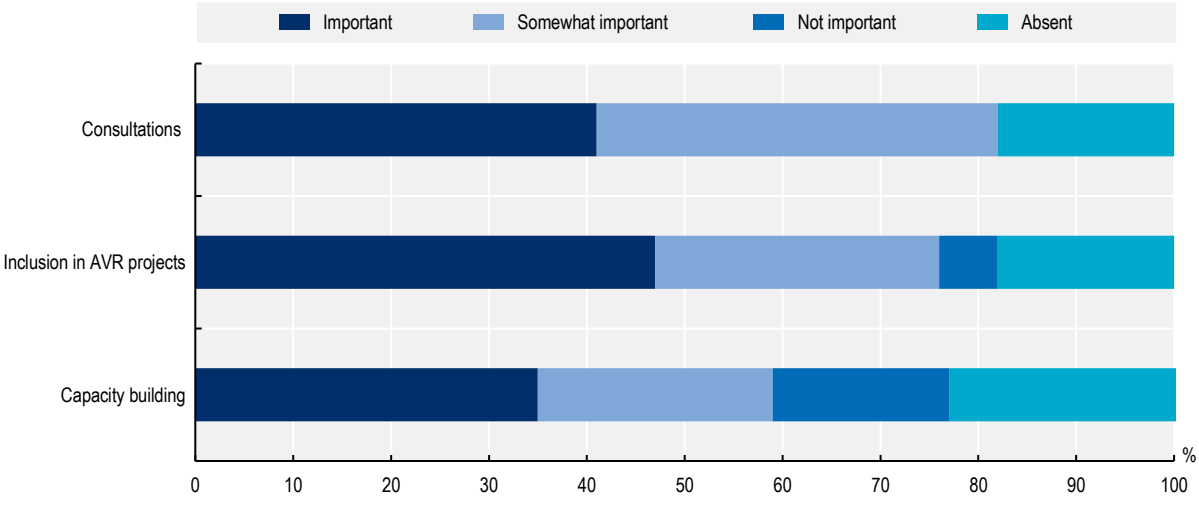
However, policy makers and development actors have limited access to community life in origin countries. Most interactions involve local civil society organisations that represent return migrants and other community members. These exchanges, while important, are not sufficient to capture the complexity of community dynamics. The way the term "community" is used in the context of return and reintegration is

often reduced to refer to community organisations – principally those with which donors and contractors engage.

The regional context is another factor influencing the openness of local communities to engage in return and reintegration. Not all communities experience return migration on a scale that attracts special interest. Even in such cases, accompanying the reintegration of return migrants is less of a concern in particular when other forms of migration are more visible. In Morocco, for example, the region of Béni Mellal-Khénifra receives significant emigration flows from Sub-Sahara Africa, while the region of Oujda serves as a transit point for migrants (Jacobs, 2024[2]). Return migrants in this region may have access to services provided for immigrants to meet basic needs, but it is rare for these services to address their specific circumstances.

Community capacities also influence the level of support provided to return migrants. Those with strong social networks and access to resources tend to have fewer difficulties in supporting and protecting return migrants. It is more challenging for communities that lack resources and experience political and security upheaval. Competition for jobs, and strains on services and infrastructure in areas of high return, are significant barriers to reintegration (Sohst and Le Coz, 2022[3]; OECD, 2018[4]). Despite these limited capacities, AVRR programmes rely on community organisations as service providers (Figure 5.1). They implement most of the reintegration services, particularly those related to the economic reintegration of returnees. However, AVRR programmes rarely address the broader capacity challenges faced by local community organisations, which are often overwhelmed by providing services to different vulnerable groups simultaneously. During the workshop in Morocco, local community organisations highlighted a notable lack of co-ordination, as many of these organisations do not work with each other. This raises the question of whether the use of NGOs for AVRR support is truly helping to build their capacities or, conversely, distorting their core missions.

Figure 5.1. The role of local community organisations in AVRR programmes



Note: Of the 19 OECD countries that responded to the questionnaire, 17 OECD countries reported that local community organisations in origin countries have a formal role in their AVRR programmes.
Source: Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Re-migration (2023).

Another, less considered factor is the added value return migrants can bring to local communities (Box 5.1). Some migrants choose to return with the intention of making a positive impact in their origin country. This may be the case for migrants who have spent significant periods of time abroad, either for educational or professional reasons, and who seek to use the knowledge and expertise gained abroad to create local

businesses (Gevorkyan, 2022[5]; Akom Ankobrey, Mazzucato and Wagner, 2022[6]; Mekonnen and Lohnert, 2018[7]). In other cases, the motivation to engage in meaningful work is shared by returnees who fled their countries because of conflict, persecution, or other circumstances that led them to seek refuge in host countries. Following the resolution of conflicts, it is not uncommon for migrants to express a desire to return to participate in post-conflict reconstruction efforts (Schwartz, 2019[8]; Shindo, 2012[9]). Return driven by a commitment to make a meaningful contribution to local communities, however, is limited to a select group of returnees who have often acquired permanent residence or citizenship (Keles, 2022[10]). They have the flexibility to re-migrate or live between their home and host countries – a privilege that involuntary returnees and AVRR beneficiaries do not have.

Box 5.1. Connecting diasporas to local communities in the Western Balkans

Diaspora School in Kosovo*

In 2017, the first Diaspora School was organised in Kosovo* by the association Germin, the centres of competence in Prizren and Malishevë, and GIZ. The aim was to bring together young professionals from Kosovo*, the diaspora and the Western Balkans to connect, share knowledge and create community solutions that address pressing issues at the local community level. Specifically, the project sought to facilitate the exchange and co-creation of ideas between diaspora professionals and their Kosovo* counterparts in areas with the greatest potential impact on local economic growth. In turn, the exchanges intended to help young professionals expand their professional networks.

Serbia's "Returning Point" (Tačka povratka)

Returning Point was created in March 2020 with the joint support of the Government of Serbia and UNDP Serbia in close co-operation with Serbian Entrepreneurs, Science and Technology Park Belgrade, Westminster Fund for Democracy and individuals from the diaspora. The main goal is to assist to assist young people from the diaspora who wish to return to Serbia.

The organisation focuses on five aspects:

1. Mapping and Information Sharing: Improving two-way communication between Serbia and highly qualified individuals, while providing information relevant for their return and co-operation
2. Networking: Connecting local partners from public and private sector with diaspora-based initiatives and individuals through programmes that aim at fostering co-operation and innovation
3. Regulations and Incentives: Identifying legislative gaps and obstacles to return and co-operation to positively impact regulatory amendments and affect policies that are essential for diaspora-related issues, coupled with active support of the public and private sector in providing incentives and assistance to repats.
4. Investments: Supporting the efforts to promote Serbia as a viable destination for potential diaspora investments, by providing relevant information on opportunities, interested parties and potential for connections with local talents and partners.
5. Promotion: Sharing success stories of our return migrants, diaspora organisations, companies and individuals who have co-operated with local talents, seized opportunities and contributed to the development of the society, science and economy in Serbia.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.
Source: www.kosovodiaspora.org/?s=diaspora+school; https://tackapovratka.rs/en/o-nama/

5.2. Social stigma and community expectations

When analysing the return of migrants to their local communities, one of the key dimensions is how return is perceived by community members. In literature, many reflections point to social stigma and possible impacts on the mental health of return migrants (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]; Wanki, Derluyn and Lietaert, 2022[1]; Suárez and Alaminos, 2020[12]; Kunuroglu, van de Vijver and Yağmur, 2021[13]). As these findings are based on ex-post analyses, it is unclear to what extent concerns about social stigma affect return decisions.

Social stigma tends to be more likely for involuntary return migrants. A review of evidence in Afghanistan suggests that involuntary return challenges the image of migrants as successful adventurers and of destination countries as places where individuals improve their own lives and those of their families. Those stigmatised often face uncomfortable questions about the reasons for returning "empty-handed" and comparisons with other "successful" return migrants are common. Community members in origin countries are often unaware that deportation is a risk for anyone who entered the country without legal documentation. It is easier to portray return migrants as lazy, unlucky or criminal than to discuss the actual factors that led to their return (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]). When the conditions in which returnees will arrive are unclear – for example, if there is uncertainty about their mental health – community members tend to be suspicious (ERRIN, 2022[14]) Evidence from Cameroon also underlines that deportation is associated with criminal behaviour, contributing to a collective feeling that return migrants do not deserve to be socially reintegrated (Wanki, Derluyn and Lietaert, 2022[1]). The stigma of "contamination" is another form of social exclusion. It often concerns return migrants who left at a young age and who show visible and invisible signs of cultural change (e.g. in clothes, behaviour or accent). Community members may interpret these changes as "contamination" by a foreign culture (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]).

Return migrants cope with social stigma in different ways. They sometimes deny their involuntary return to avoid scrutiny, as shown in country studies on Afghanistan, Cameroon, and Mexico. This includes hiding their identity from the public or pretending to be visiting and leaving soon. In other cases, return migrants internalise social stigma: they succumb to their own frustration and shame at having "failed" by isolating themselves. It is also possible for return migrants to reverse the stigma by pointing out rampant corruption in their origin country (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]; Wanki, Derluyn and Lietaert, 2022[1]; Suárez and Alaminos, 2020[12]).

In addition to social stigma, community members may have specific expectations towards return migrants. In most cases, community expectations are based on perceptions of what constitutes a successful and unsuccessful return. This categorisation is partly linked to the experiences return migrants share with community members. A study of return migration to Romania, for example, describes how return migrants construct the reality of their lives abroad to meet the expectations of their friends, relatives, and communities. They display their experiences with expensive clothes and cars that they can barely afford (Scarneci Domnisoru and Csesznek, 2017[15]). Self-imposed expectations of tangible outcomes, such as returning with capital and material assets, can also fuel the image of successful return (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]).

Community members often measure successful return by economic success. In Cameroon, return migrants are expected to be visible by spending lavishly, driving luxury cars, donating, and building houses in local communities. Communities can also expect return migrants to create a positive impact with their financial resources. By maintaining networks with community members and visiting families regularly during their time abroad, return migrants are expected to understand local realities to accompany any changes in the community. Other expectations include engaging in community activities, linking communities of origin with the "outside world" to facilitate the receipt of donations, investing in businesses and teaching income-generating skills to community members. Unsuccessful return, on the other hand, implies returning "empty-handed". In these circumstances, return migrants have neither the financial means to help family or community members, nor have they acquired new skills to create local businesses.

This may force return migrants into businesses that require limited skills, capital and technology ("survivalist businesses") (Wanki, Derluyn and Lietaert, 2022[1]; Adebayo, 2020[16]).

The ability of return migrants to meet community expectations has a significant impact on their reintegration outcomes, including social status. Assessments from community members can be an obstacle to finding employment through networks and, in some cases, starting a family (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[11]). In the Turkish context, Kunuroglu et al. explain how the social status of return migrants gradually evolved: in the early stages of emigration, Turkish migrants lacked formal education and came from economically less developed regions. When they returned to Türkiye, their contributions to local communities were therefore limited. Third-generation return migrants, however, have little in common with the stereotypes of guest workers. Speaking several languages, being actively involved in the business sector and Turkish social life contribute positively to the social status of return migrants (Kunuroglu, van de Vijver and Yağmur, 2021[13]).

Despite the evidence that community expectations and social stigma negatively affect return migrants, very few OECD countries have awareness-raising campaigns as part of their return programmes.[1] Germany is among the few countries that has targeted campaigns for communities in origin countries, with the overall aim of promoting social cohesion at the community level (Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Community-based initiatives: Examples from Germany's Programme Migration for Development

"Building my future in my country": a radio programme about migration and opportunities in Senegal

Sama ellëg fi ma dëkk (Building my future in my country) is a Senegalese radio programme and podcast that was created in 2022 and reports on the risks of irregular migration and local job opportunities. The one-hour programme is broadcast on community radio stations across the country in French, in Wolof, Fulani and Diola.

The programme starts with the experience of a return migrant and the support received from the Senegalese-German Centre for Employment, Migration and Reintegration (CSAEM). The CSAEM offers counselling and a wide range of courses for job seekers, as well as support for those who want to start their own business. A representative of the House of Hope organisation also speaks on the radio programme to provide information about psychosocial counselling for return migrants. Towards the end of the programme, an expert discusses the root causes and risks of irregular migration.

A place for children and young people in Serbia: Café 16

In 2017, the Centre for Youth Integration (CIM) opened Café 16 as a focal point for young Serbs. CIM is a social initiative of Serbian citizens that has partnered with the German Information Centre for Migration, Education and Employment (DIMAK). Their common goal is to support children and young people living in Serbia or who have returned with their families.

CIM's main priority is education for children aged 5 to 15. When the 8-year primary education in Serbia ends at the age of 15, very few pupils go on to secondary school or university. Most of them immediately start working, often under precarious conditions. To improve the life prospects of young Serbs, Café 16 offers counselling and training in co-operation with DIMAK. As of November 2022, more than 60 young people and young adults have received special mentoring and support. Some are still working at the café, while many others have found new jobs after completing the training.

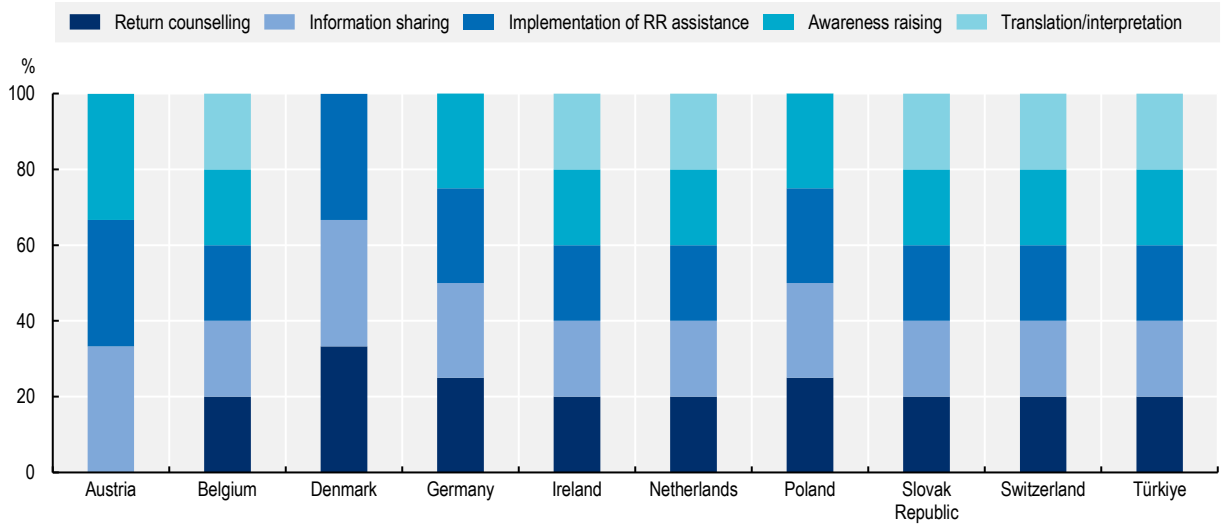
Source: www.startfinder.de/en/experiences/sen-building-my-future-my-country-programme-about-migration-and-opportunities-senegal; www.startfinder.de/en/experiences/ser-a-place-for-children-and-young-people

In addition, some civil society organisations in Tunisia are undertaking activities to raise awareness among community members. The association Shanti,[2] for example, has organised theatre performances in the city of Gabes to challenge the narrative that return is a failure and to reinforce the legitimacy of family and community support for returning Tunisians.

5.3. Provision of return and reintegration assistance

In the context of AVRR, reintegration services are often delivered with the support of local community organisations. The involvement of community members and local partners can have a positive impact on individual reintegration outcomes, as local actors can reach return migrants more easily, including those who settle in remote areas. The skills of local NGOs and civil society organisations are often complementary to those of the lead reintegration service, such as e.g. providing information in the local language (Sohst and Le Coz, 2022[3]). Of the 19 OECD countries that responded to the policy questionnaire, 10 assign formal roles to local community organisations as part of their AVRR programme (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Services provided by local community organisations in origin countries



Note: N= 10 OECD countries
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Re-migration (2023).

Community organisations in origin countries are the partners for implementation of assistance. As defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the services provided by local community organisations fall into three broad areas of reintegration:

1. Economic reintegration support: Services in this area aim to engage return migrants in income-generating activities. In many origin countries, activities focus on small-scale agricultural projects and other small ventures. Collective projects are useful where significant initial investment and working capital are required, as return migrants can pool their resources. Return migrants who lack the skills to start individual projects can benefit from the expertise of other return migrants or community members. Complementary financial support, such as financial literacy training and advice, micro-savings programmes, and collective investment schemes, can also help return migrants to become self-reliant.

2. Social reintegration support: Services in this area aim to improve the accessibility and availability of social services in return communities. This type of assistance is particularly important where physical and language barriers prevent return migrants from accessing services, or where community services are unable to meet the specific needs and vulnerabilities of return migrants. Social reintegration assistance covers many areas, including housing, education and training, health and well-being, public infrastructure, and social rights.
3. Psychosocial reintegration support: At the individual level, interventions aim to help return migrants with mental health problems or trauma to access therapeutic care, sometimes facilitated by local community organisations. At the community level, this includes activities to strengthen social networks to promote wider acceptance of return migrants. Community mobilisation activities (e.g. storytelling, theatre, visual arts) and peer support mechanisms are ways to promote inclusion and address potential stigma (IOM, 2019[17]).

Several challenges in providing these services were identified through exchanges with local community organisations in Tunisia and Morocco, who had the perception that standard AVRR packages rarely tailor services to the profiles and needs of return migrants. These profiles can vary considerably, as illustrated in the Moroccan context: First-generation Moroccans, usually of retirement age, typically need assistance in managing their pension and real estate assets. Moroccan return migrants wishing to start their own business need support understanding business practices, market dynamics and legal frameworks. Moroccan return migrants with a family strategy can rely on their social networks and the support of extended family members but may need additional support for their children. Communication can be a particular challenge for third and fourth generation Moroccans, who may not have a strong command of the Arabic language (Belghazi, Bouazzaoui and Malki, 2023[18]).

The workshops in Tunisia and Morocco also revealed that local community organisations report limited scope for action, as the intervention framework for AVRR activities is mainly defined by donor countries. Economic reintegration is often a priority, and local NGOs help return migrants identify a micro-business and advise them on how to get started (e.g. location, suppliers and costs). While focusing on micro-businesses is beneficial for return migrants wishing to become self-employed, there are few alternatives for those with other goals (e.g. enrolling in vocational training or higher education). Diversifying economic reintegration projects beyond micro-enterprises could have a positive impact on the sustainability of AVRR programmes. Another gap identified was the lack of regular follow-up once the micro-business was established and the quarterly visits were completed within the first year.

Not all local community organisations can meet the administrative requirements set by donor countries to implement reintegration assistance. This requires project management skills and human resources that smaller organisations may not have. As a result, the available pool of local community organisations remains limited, leading to recurrent reliance on the same entities by donor countries. Integrating training modules on administrative procedures into capacity-building initiatives for local community organisations could help to broaden the pool of implementers.

An integrated approach to reintegration seems elusive when most interventions focus on income-generating activities. In the Tunisian and Moroccan contexts, gaps have been identified in the accompaniment of retired return migrants (Belghazi, Bouazzaoui and Malki, 2023[18]; Belhaj, 2023[19]). In Morocco, they represent 25% of all returnees, yet the association Migrations & Développement is one of the few non-governmental actors in Morocco to assist them. Since 2016, the association has opened 11 migrant welcome and orientation offices in rural communes where retired return migrants tend to settle. These offices assist in accessing administrative rights, providing information on local investment potential, and helping to strengthen links between the region and diaspora groups. A comprehensive guide helps return migrants understand what services are available to them and their family members (Migrations & Développement, 2016[20]). As highlighted in the previous section, streamlining psychosocial support in AVRR programmes remains a challenge in many origin countries (Kroll and Veron, 2023[21]). Local civil

society organisations have little leeway and may refer return migrants to public services for therapeutic care, which are not always available.

Outside the AVRR context, local community organisations actively participate in broader developmental initiatives within their countries. Collaborating, at times, with international development partners, local community organisations implement interventions targeting prevalent developmental challenges such as high unemployment, fragmented social protection systems, and multidimensional inequality (Nguyen and Rieger, 2017[22]; Quispe Fernández, Ayaviri Nina and Maldonado Vargas, 2018[23]). In specific cases, national governments extend support to these grassroots initiatives. An illustrative case is the Centre des Très Petites Entreprises Solidaires (CTPES) in Morocco, established in 2015 and operational in multiple cities. CTPES provides workshops and spaces for young Moroccans in precarious situations with entrepreneurial skills and viable projects. Additionally, CTPES manages a separate and more restricted support programme specifically designed for selected Moroccan return migrants. While there is no dichotomy between assisting AVRR beneficiaries and contributing to broader development goals, the question is which should be prioritised when local organisations have limited resources.

Local community organisations further play a key role in post-conflict countries such as the Western Balkans. From addressing security concerns to promoting economic recovery and social reconciliation, local communities in the former Yugoslavia have played an essential role in shaping the trajectory of post-conflict return migration. In the early stages of return, they have advocated for property rights, provided legal assistance and guided return migrants through the restitution process. Economically, they have set up co-operatives, small businesses and agricultural initiatives to create employment opportunities for return migrants. Grassroots organisations and community-led initiatives have also facilitated inter-ethnic dialogue to promote social cohesion among diverse communities (Vracic, 2023[24]).

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section argues that returning to local communities is not a homogeneous concept, but varies according to national and regional contexts, community capacities and possible links with diaspora groups. Relationships between community members and returning migrants can be challenging due to differing perceptions (“successful” and “unsuccessful” return), and high expectations. If these expectations cannot be met, it can lead to social stigma and rejection. Many OECD countries rely on local community organisations to provide return and reintegration services. Although local community organisations should, in theory, take an integrated approach to reintegration, many of their interventions focus on economic reintegration. These economic reintegration projects prioritise the creation of small businesses, as defined by the intervention frameworks of donor countries. However, this approach may limit the flexibility of local community organisations to propose alternative solutions.

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Notes

[1] Only four countries (Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) out of 19 countries that responded to the policy questionnaire report having campaigns addressing community issues in origin countries. Recurrent topics include social stigma, fostering social cohesion, discussing the different types of return.

[2] For more information: https://shanti.tn/

6 Understanding re-migration

Re-migration does not receive much policy attention, except when it is measured to reflect failed reintegration, nor is data available to analyse patterns in a comprehensive way. Re-migration is a common aspiration and return migrants with specific skills and resources are remigrating independently through a variety of existing regular channels. Those who have benefitted from AVRR support have fewer options for regular re-migration channels than other migrants who have returned spontaneously.

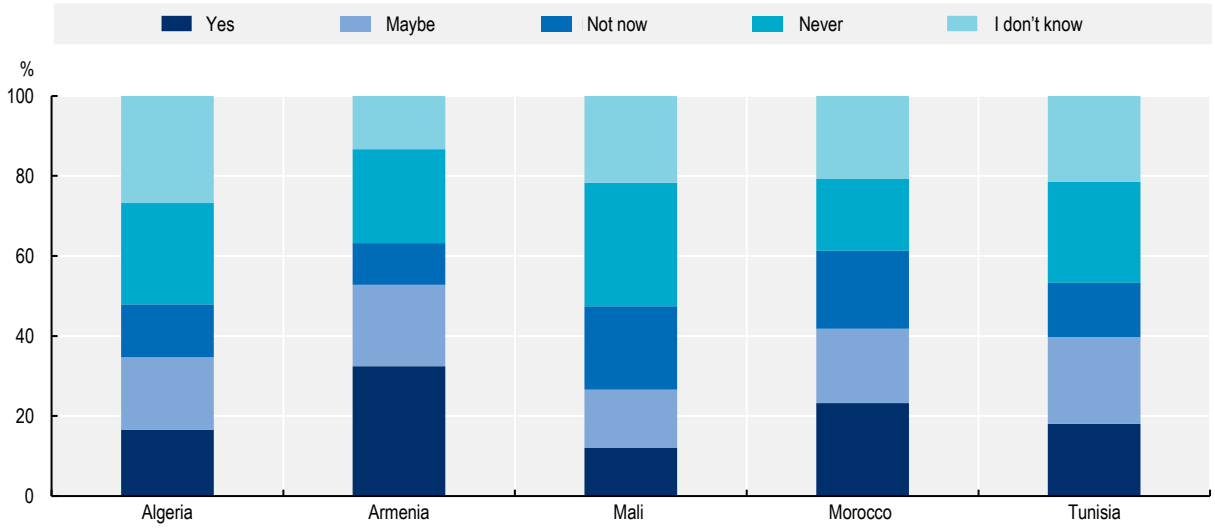
Reintegration assistance is designed to help returning migrants make a new start in their origin countries. While not all of them return permanently, re-migration receives little policy attention. The policy questionnaire, to which 19 OECD member countries responded, revealed that Türkiye is the only country that collects data on re-migration as part of its AVRR programme.[1] Service providers in origin countries usually have information about return migrants during the first 12 months of assistance. In the absence of comprehensive monitoring mechanisms, it is often unclear whether return migrants remain after the first year or move on to another destination.

The empirical evidence presented in this section is limited to the re-migration intentions of return migrants. The data is derived from the database on return migrants (DrEM), two national surveys conducted in Morocco and Tunisia (in 2020 and 2021), as well as the Migrant Border Crossing Study, which has collected data on Mexican migrants who cross the US-Mexican border unauthorised since 2007. The sample sizes of these surveys vary, ranging from 330 to 210 000 respondents. The results are not representative and do not capture actual re-migration behaviour.

6.1. Re-migration aspirations of return migrants

The limited evidence available suggests that most returning migrants do not have a clear position on re-migration, as shown in Figure 6.1. The majority is either unsure about a possible re-migration (21% on average) or state that they never want to emigrate again (24% on average). The findings for Tunisia are consistent with the data collected in the MED-HIMS survey, where 18% of the 210 848 return migrants has the intention to emigrate again.

Figure 6.1. Re-migration intentions of return migrants



Note: Sample sizes are as follows: Armenia (N=349), Morocco (N=330), Algeria (N=332), Tunisia (N=726) and Mali (N=350).
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

In Morocco, migrants tend to leave wage employment and 47% become entrepreneurs (Belghazi, Bouazzaoui and Malki, 2023[1]). As self-employment requires capital investment in productive assets and physical presence, at least in the initial stages, this group of returning migrants has a lower propensity to leave again. This may explain why the number of return migrants who are undecided or would like to re-migrate is in the minority (Table 6.1).

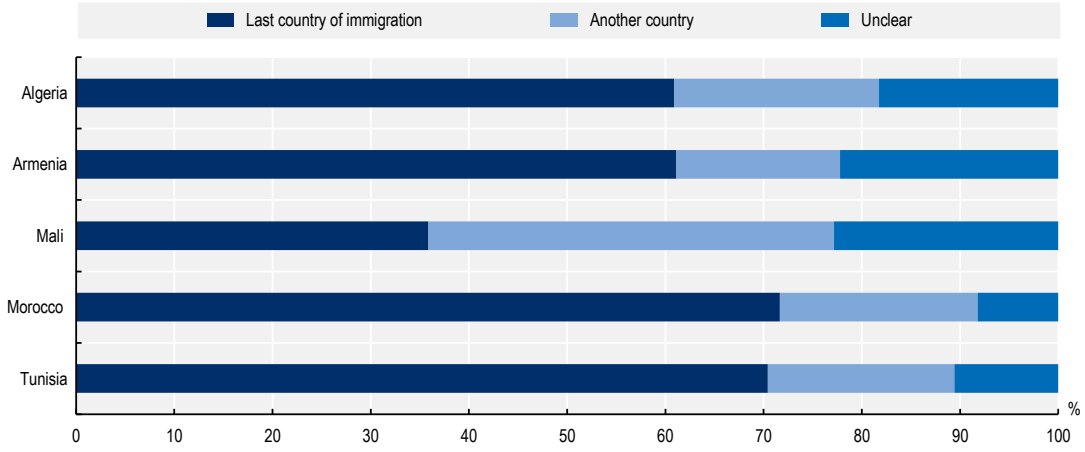
Table 6.1. Re-migration intentions of Moroccan return migrants

Intentions	Male (%)	Female (%)
No, want to stay in Morocco	55.3	60.9
Yes, return to last host country	17.2	12.8
Yes, leave for another country	7.1	4.5
Undecided	20.4	21.8

Note: N=188 000.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

On average, 60% of return migrants wishing to re-migrate intend to return to their previous host country. In Mali, this proportion is much lower: Only 36% intend to return to their last country of residence while 41% would like to settle in another country (Figure 6.2).

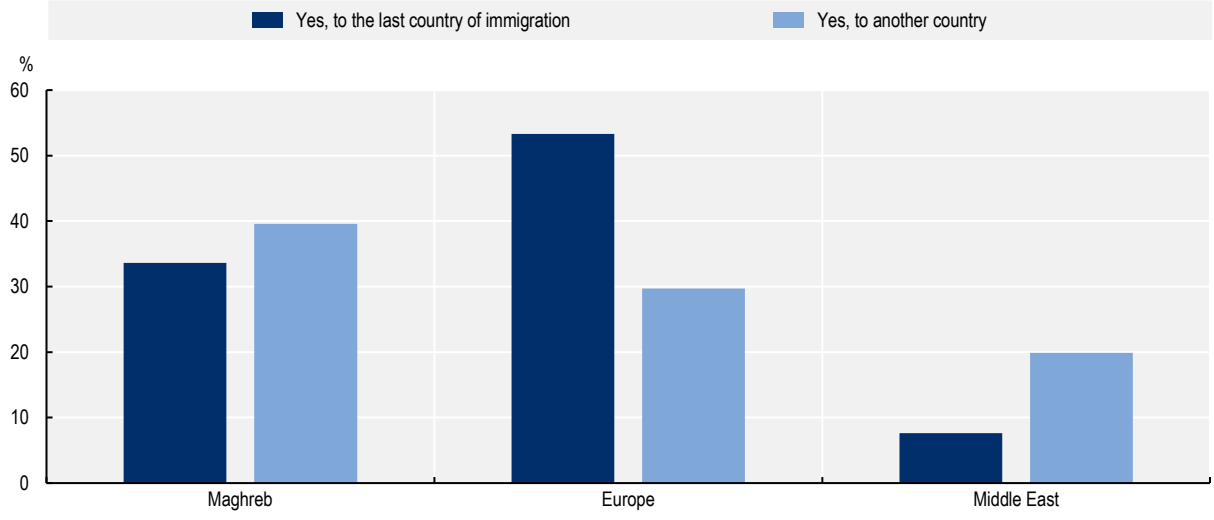
Figure 6.2. Location for potential re-migration



Note: Sample sizes for Algeria (N=115), Armenia (N=182), Mali (N=93), Morocco (N=135) and Tunisia (N=281).
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

The MED-HIMS survey provides similar results for Tunisian return migrants. Of the 18% who intend to re-migrate, 71% want to return to their previous country of residence. Migrants returning from European countries are more inclined to re-migrate there (53.5%) than those who previously resided in the Middle East (7.6%).

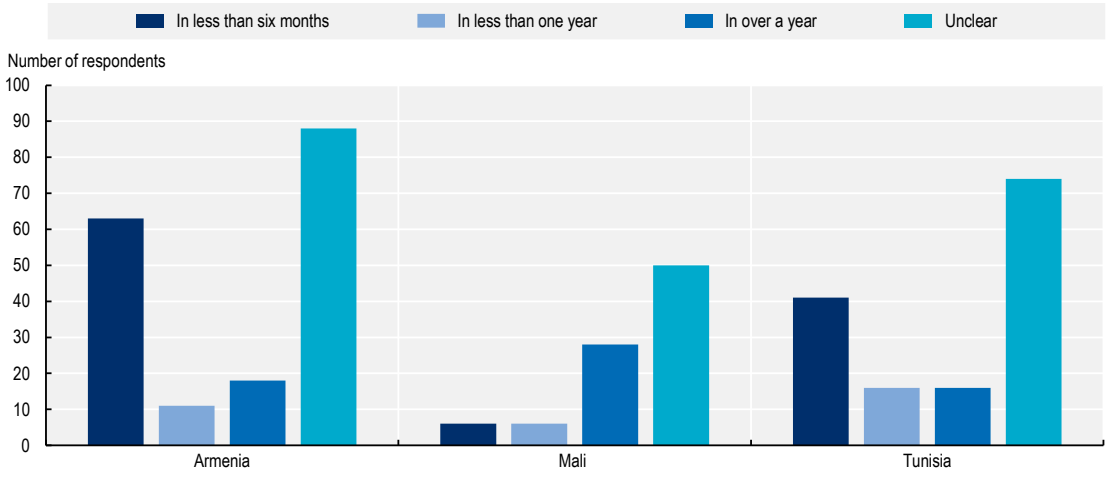
Figure 6.3. Re-migration intentions of Tunisian return migrants by previous region of residence



Note: N=210 742.
Source: Institut National de la Statistique, l'enquête nationale sur les migrations internationales (MED-HIMS), 2021.

Only a minority of those who intend to re-migrate are sure about the exact time frame. The DReM survey, for example, highlights that on average more than 50% of respondents are unsure about the timing of their departure.[2] Armenian return migrants are an exception, with a third planning to leave in less than six months (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. Timeframe for potential re-migration



Note: Sample sizes for Armenia (N=180), Mali (N=90) and Tunisia (N=147).
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

There is also some evidence of re-migration intentions among Mexicans. Since many Mexicans are seasonal workers in the United States and Canada, most studies have focused on economic factors to explain circular migration, as Molina and Jewell did in the 1970s. The authors examined the factors that influence the propensity of male Mexican migrants to stay in the United States ("single-trip migrants"), return permanently to Mexico ("stayers"), or engage in circular mobility ("multiple-trip migrants"). The results suggest that Mexicans who are older at the time of their first migration to the United States are less likely to engage in circular mobility or return permanently to Mexico. Not surprisingly, Mexicans who come from more agricultural labour markets are more likely to engage in circular migration. In contrast, married men with a spouse in Mexico have a lower propensity to stay in the United States, underscoring the importance of family factors in both return and re-migration aspirations. At the same time, remitters whose families depend on the income earned abroad are more likely to engage in circular mobility and less likely to be stayers (Molina and Jewell, 1970[2]).

More recent literature looks at re-migration intentions of Mexican migrants who involuntarily returned from the United States. Based on post-deportation surveys, Martínez et al. show that most returnees do not intend to re-migrate in the following week (55%), but the same proportion considers it for the future (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Re-migration intentions of deported Mexican return migrants

Variable	Options	Share (%)
Do you plan on crossing again next week?	Yes	30
	No	55
	Unsure	15
Do you think you will cross again sometime in the future?	Yes	55
	No	23
	Unsure	22

Note: MI was estimated with the inclusion of the dependent variables. Cases in which values for dependent variables were missing were omitted from the analyses (N=47), ultimately yielding a sample size of 1 062.
Source: Migrant Border Crossing Study II, weighted data.

In examining various social factors and the effects of immigration enforcement programmes in the United States on the re-migration intentions of Mexicans, the authors draw three conclusions. programme-First, place attachment and strong social ties in the United States appear to be important factors: return migrants who call the United States "home" (31%), those who have more experience living in the country, and those who have family in the destination country (40%) are more likely to intend to return than those without these ties. In addition, those who returned through Operation Streamline[3] are less likely to express re-migration intentions, and long-term detention appears to be a significant deterrent to future migration intentions. However, the absolute effect of detention appears to be offset by having family in the United States. Third, respondents from Mexican states with higher unemployment rates are more likely, in relative terms, to report that they will cross again within the next week (Martínez, Slack and Martínez-Schuldt, 2018[3]).

The results of these surveys, which suggest that most return migrants have re-migration intentions, need to be treated with some caution. Interviews provide a snapshot of respondents' perspectives and may not fully capture intentions, which may evolve over time. The limited scope of existing research, focusing on return migrants from a small number of origin countries, raises doubts about the representativeness of these findings. In addition, sampling issues arise as not all respondents answered questions on re-migration. In the DReM survey, for example, the sample size for the section on re-migration was smaller than for other topics such as reasons for return. There is a potential conflict of interest for respondents who are AVRR beneficiaries if they openly express their aspiration to re-migrate.

6.2. Determinants of re-migration

Despite the lack of data on realised re-migration, studies point to various determinants that influence the propensity to re-migrate. These include, but are not limited to, temporal factors, the mode of return, structural factors in origin countries, family and community dynamics, as well as individual characteristics of return migrants.

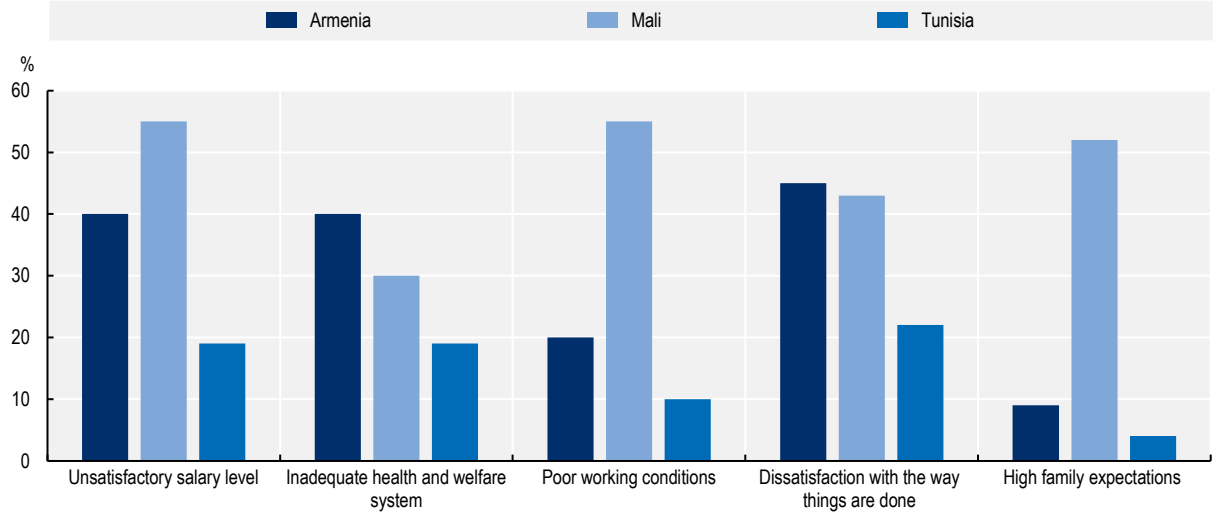
It has been shown that the number of years spent abroad increases the propensity to re-migrate. Ecuadorian return migrants, for example, who previously lived in Spain describe their long absence as challenging, while maintaining transnational networks helps to plan for re-migration (Mercier et al., 2016[4]). Other studies highlight that the propensity to re-migrate decreases with each year spent in the origin country. In Armenia, Fleischer explains that those who returned between 2003 and 2005 are less likely to consider leaving Armenia again than return migrants who returned between 2008 and 2012. For those who returned later, contrary to Mercier et al.'s findings, the length of stay abroad does not have a significant impact on re-migration intentions (Fleischer, 2008[5]).

The mode of return may also influence the propensity to re-migrate. Several studies underline that voluntary return migrants are less likely to re-migrate than those who returned involuntarily. The Swedish Migration Studies Delegation (DELMI), for example, interviewed 100 rejected asylum seekers who had returned to Iraq and Afghanistan. Re-migration intentions were high due to limited access to reintegration support, social stigma, and lack of trust in state institutions (Lindberg, Vera-Larrucea and Asplund, 2021[6]). Schuster and Majidi, on the other hand, stress that deportation does not automatically lead to re-migration, although it is the most likely outcome if fear, poverty, debt, and stigma persist. Particularly in the context of Afghanistan, re-migration to neighbouring countries is a common coping strategy for protracted conflicts (Schuster and Majidi, 2015[7]). A similar rationale can be observed among deportees from Libya, for whom involuntary return does not represent the end of a migration cycle, but rather an interruption of ongoing mobility (Kleist, 2017[8]).

Structural factors in origin countries, such as political instability and poor socio-economic conditions, can also trigger re-migration. These factors are particularly present in post-conflict and fragile contexts, such as Somalia, where return migration has been on the rise in recent years due to expulsions from Saudi Arabia and European countries, refugee repatriations from Kenya and Yemen, and evacuations from Libya. Many return migrants settle in informal camps in cities such as Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu, which continue to be plagued by violence and political unrest. High unemployment rates and the absence of social networks further complicate reintegration processes. While many return migrants aspire to re-migrate, those with strong family support and community ties are less likely to do so (Owigo, 2022[9]).

The DReM survey also shows that return migrants struggle with structural factors in their origin countries (Figure 6.5). Most of the difficulties reported relate to the employment situation, such as unsatisfactory salary levels (38% on average) and poor working conditions (28% on average), as well as inadequate health and welfare systems (30% on average).

Figure 6.5. Difficulties faced by return migrants in Armenia, Mali and Tunisia



Note: Sample sizes: Armenia (N=349), Mali (N=350), Tunisia (N=726).
Source: Own calculations based on the data base for return migrants (DReM), available on www.jeanpierrecassarino.com/datasets/dataset-on-return-migrants/.

In the Western Balkans, re-migration intentions of return migrants are partly linked to the diminishing prospects of economic convergence with EU countries, which, at current growth rates, could be decades or generations away. The global economic crisis of 2008 further damaged the region's economy, leading to austerity measures that prevented substantial growth. The lack of visible progress and limited prospects

for a better life and opportunities have created a deep-seated belief among return migrants that profound change is unattainable. In search of better living standards and greater opportunities, many return migrants are willing to re-migrate to other countries (Vracic, 2023[10]).

In addition to structural factors, family and community dynamics can influence the propensity to re-migrate. Many of the return migrants interviewed in Konzett-Smoliner's study wanted to stay in Austria long-term, but considered to leave again -due to limited work opportunities for their foreign partner and reintegration challenges of their teenage children (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016[11]). Family tensions can also be a catalyst for re-migration. In Iraq, return migrants who sought refuge in Jordan and Syria were able to gain physical distance and recover from the trauma of the 2003 war. In contrast, family members who remained in Iraq continued to show signs of post-traumatic stress, which negatively affected cohabitation (Iaria, 2012[12]).

Another reason for considering re-migration may be the lack of social cohesion in local communities. In the Western Balkans, for example, incidents of discrimination, prejudiced discourse and hate crimes inspired by religious bias are a persistent reality. It is not uncommon for these incidents to target religious places, which are symbols of a community's cultural and religious identity. This problem is particularly acute in areas inhabited by minorities and return migrants, which undermines fragile peace and reconciliation processes (Dyrstad, 2012[13]; Xhemaili, 2016[14]; Čermák, 2017[15]). Very few regions enforce laws against hate crimes and have adequate reporting mechanisms in place to protect vulnerable sites and communities (Vracic, 2023[10]).

The propensity to remigrate can also be attributed to individual characteristics of return migrants. Some studies analyse causalities between employment status and the likelihood of re-migration. Unsurprisingly, unemployed return migrants are more likely to express re-migration aspirations than those with stable employment in the origin country (Bilgili and Siegel, 2017[16]; Fleischer, 2008[5]; Mercier et al., 2016[4]). Return migrants who are self-employed, on the other hand, are more likely to remain in the origin country, as shown in (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3. Re-migration intentions of Moroccan return migrants by employment status

	Employee (%)	Self-employed with employees (%)	Self-employed without employees (%)
No	59	70	73
Yes, to last country	16	11	13
Yes, to another country	7	7	7
Unsure	18	11	7

Note: Sample size: 87 745.
Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-19.

Key informant interviews with Moroccans revealed two other factors that influence re-migration. First, Moroccans who have acquired EU citizenship are more likely to engage in circular movements. Dual citizenship provides access to different labour markets and a degree of flexibility to assess which work opportunities are more lucrative. If job opportunities in Morocco are more attractive and other social factors – such as having family there – are in place, Moroccans are likely to return permanently (Belghazi, Bouazzaoui and Malki, 2023[1]).

Other factors that affect re-migration include the employability of returnees and the absorptive capacity of local labour markets. In Morocco, re-migration appears to be a common episode in the professional careers of many young people. This applies particularly to Moroccans who have studied and gained work experience in EU countries. They are often looking to diversify their experience at the international level, which may involve working in different regions. For this group of Moroccans, working practices in Moroccan

companies seem to be a challenge and often the reason for seeking longer-term employment abroad (Belghazi, Bouazzaoui and Malki, 2023[1]).

Other individual characteristics include level of education and place of residence. In their study on return and re-migration patterns in Poland, Fihel and Górny found that return migrants with tertiary education living in rural areas were 50% more likely to re-migrate than highly educated return migrants living in urban areas. The propensity to re-migrate was highest for return migrants with vocational education and relatively lower, but still significant, for those with secondary education. These findings reflect the structural changes in Polish industry during the post-communist transition, characterised by rising unemployment and declining investment. Return migrants with high qualifications were in a privileged situation, in contrast to those with average qualifications who continued to seek employment opportunities abroad (Fihel and Górny, 2013[17]).

6.3. Policy responses to re-migration

The previous subsections show that a significant proportion of return migrants are considering re-migration. This raises the question of whether current policies address these aspirations and what regular channels are available.

6.3.1. Policies to allow return with re-migration possibilities in OECD countries

Many OECD countries have provisions that allow legal permanent residents to leave the host country for extended periods. The maximum length of absence varies across countries, ranging from six months to up to four years (Table 6.4). Norway is the only country without a fixed maximum period of absence. This depends on the validity of the residence permit, which can generally be up to two years after leaving Norway.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to allowed absences for permanent legally residents. Legal provisions vary across and within countries, depending on the different categories of permanent residents (former EU Blue Card holders, long-term residents and beneficiaries of international protection), the destination (EU, non-EU, origin country) and the calculation of absences (fixed or based on presence over a period of time).

Table 6.4. Maximum duration of absence for permanent residents

Country	Provisions	
Austria	6 years for EU long-term residents who reside within the EEA	12 months for EU long-term residents outside the EEA with possible prolongation (up to 24 months)
Belgium	12 months for recognised refugees under specific conditions	12 months for other permanent or long-term residents
Canada	3 years in 5-year period	
Czechia	12 months outside the EU / 6 years outside Czechia	24 months within the EU for former EU Blue Card holders (including family members)
Denmark	12 months	
Germany	Former EU-Blue Card holders with permanent residency in Germany: 12 months outside the EU and 24 months within the EU	Settlement permit holders (Niederlassungserlaubnis)
Lithuania	12 months outside the EU	6 months in general and 12 months for persons older than 60 years and in Germany since at least 15 years
Netherlands	6 months	

Country	Provisions	
Norway	No fixed maximum duration of absence	
Slovak Republic	6 months	
Sweden	12 months with possible prolongation (up to 24 months)	
Switzerland	4 years	
Türkiye	6 months within 1 year or 12 months within last 5 years	
United Kingdom	24 months	

Note: N=14 OECD countries.
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Remigration 2023.

Absences can be extended in some countries. The German Aliens Office can extend absences for settlement permit holders (Niederlassungserlaubnis), which is generally limited to six months. In Sweden, permanent residents must notify the Swedish Migration Agency for an extension of up to 24 months. In Austria, EU long-term residents can reside outside the European Economic Area (EEA) for up to 24 months for special reasons, including severe illness or military service. The Slovak Police Department decides on the extension of absences for permanent residents on a case-by-case basis.

The maximum period of absence may be waived for long-term permanent residents. In Germany, the residence permits of individuals who have been legally resident for at least 15 years do not expire if their livelihood is secured.

Returning to origin countries may bear risks for individuals who have been granted international protection. Recognised refugees in Belgium can generally be absent for 12 months, but any travel to the origin country must be reported to the municipality of residence during the first five years of residence. As a return to the origin country calls into question the grounds for granting international protection, there is a risk of losing refugee status.

Migrants are often reluctant to give up residence status for return if it prevents them from re-migrating back to the host country. This was evident in the limited uptake of return programmes offered to unemployed migrants during the economic downturn of the late 2000s (OECD, 2009[18]). Return programmes which grant financial assistance to return on the condition of not returning again may have little appeal (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1. When return assistance includes a re-migration ban, it is less attractive

Japan's Return Programme for Brazilians

Starting in the late 1980s, Japan opened the possibility for descendants of Japanese in Brazil and Peru (up to the third generation) to come to Japan for employment. The economic crisis of the late 2000s threw many of these "Nikkeijin" into unemployment at much higher rates than native workers. Retraining was difficult since few spoke Japanese. From April 2009 through March 2010, the Japanese Government offered grants to those who were willing to return to their home countries, on the condition they not come back to Japan on the same type of visa. The programme offered JPY 300 000 (about EUR 2 300 at the time) to each Long-Term Resident and an additional 200 000 (EUR 1 540) for each family member – and more for those entitled to unemployment insurance. Of those who departed Japan, 21 700 persons took the benefit, but about 80 000 preferred to return without taking a financial contribution, primarily due to the return ban. Japan lifted the ban in Oct 2013, allowing prior recipients to come back if they hold a labour contract for a year or more.

Source: Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare, Japan.

6.3.2. Legal channels to the EU available for third country nationals

In addition to policies that permit extended absences for legal permanent residents, there have been a growing number of initiatives to open regular migration channels. These initiatives have been launched to address skills shortages in the EU and to improve migration co-operation with partner countries. They vary in nature, ranging from skills mobility partnerships and international student programmes to circular mobility programmes. Circular mobility schemes target individuals with specific skills or seasonal workers, who are often employed in the agricultural sector (Box 6.2).

Germany, for example, has several initiatives for the admission of skilled workers from third countries. One such programme is the Partnership Approaches for Development-oriented Vocational Training and Labour Migration (PAM), which creates mobility models with partner countries in Ecuador, Nigeria, Viet Nam, and Jordan, including partnerships between public, private, and civil society actors (GIZ, 2023[19]). The THAMM project fosters labour migration and mobility with North African countries. It aims to provide a comprehensive approach to training and employment in co-operation with national institutions in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia (GIZ, 2022[20]).

At the European level, the EU Commission launched the EU Talent Partnerships in June 2021 as part of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Partnerships offer direct support for partner country nationals to study, work, or train in the EU. This is achieved through co-operation between public authorities, employment services, social and economic partners, and education and training providers. The partnerships also provide capacity building support to partner countries in areas such as vocational training, reintegration of returning migrants, and diaspora mobilisation. In April 2022, the EU Commission announced the launch of the first Talent Partnerships with North African partners, specifically Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia (European Commission, 2021[21]). Discussions with Tunisia began in May 2023 to establish the framework and content of the partnership (DG Near, 2023[22]). In July 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Tunisia, which includes the creation of a new visa programme for Tunisian citizens to work in the EU (European Commission, 2023[23]).

Box 6.2. Circular mobility schemes in the agricultural sector: examples from Spain and Canada

GECCO

Spain's GECCO Programme is managed by the Directorate General for Migration with the aim to recruit workers in sectors with labour shortages (e.g. agriculture) which are difficult to fill with the national labour force. Upon their return, foreign workers can capitalise the knowledge acquired in Spain for their employability in the local labour market. Spain is taking steps to facilitate entrepreneurial skills for women selected through GECCO.

WAFIRA

WAFIRA seeks to improve the GECCO programme. The project aims to address a critical policy gap in the reintegration of Moroccan women who harvest strawberries each year in Huelva, Spain. Through WAFIRA, 250 Moroccan women will receive targeted reintegration support through business skills and entrepreneurship development training and financial assistance. WAFIRA is being implemented by the Secretary of State for Migration of the Spanish Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and Migration, in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in co-operation with Spanish agri-food co-operatives in Andalusia (Spain) and the Moroccan employment agency ANAPEC.

Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme (SAWP)

Mexico and Canada have been promoting circular migration through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme (SAWP) since 1974. The Ministry of Labour and Social Well-being as well as the National

Employment Service in Mexico oversee recruiting and sending off agricultural workers to different provinces in Canada in accordance with the requirements of Canadian employers. The maximum stay allowed by the Canadian Government is eight months, during which Mexican workers are placed on different farms where they develop their activities. In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding, agricultural workers have the right to proper lodgings, a fixed salary and other work guarantees. They are similarly protected by Canadian provincial and federal labour laws and are covered by provincial medical insurance. As of November 2022, 25 669 Mexican workers migrated under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program.

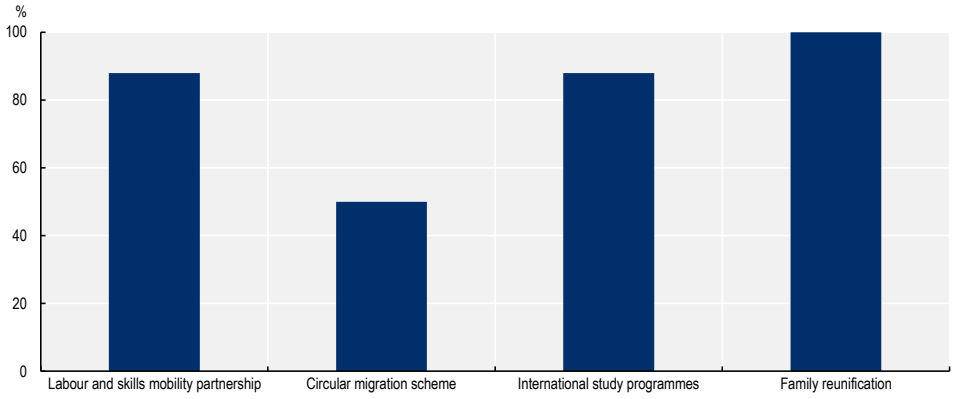
Sources: www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/news/launch-of-wafira-project; www.oecd.org/els/mig/2022-March-Joint-EMN-OECD-Inform-Skills-Mobility-Partnerships.pdf; https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/montreal/index.php/en/laboral-affairs

Despite the expansion of these initiatives, finding the right pool of candidates remains a challenge as highlighted during the workshop in Tunisia. One example is the young professional exchange programmes set up by France and Switzerland in co-operation with Tunisia. While these programmes offer young graduates the opportunity to do an internship abroad, they lack an integrated communication strategy to identify and reach suitable profiles. Circular migration programmes, on the other hand, show the opposite pattern: The programmes often benefit participants from the same regions or cities over several generations, limiting the opportunities for individuals without direct networks to find seasonal work in EU countries.

Outside of these structured initiatives, labour mobility faces fewer challenges in matching workers, as highlighted by private sector actors during the workshop in Morocco. Due to the growing demand for skilled labour, workers can be effectively matched to the needs of employers abroad without operating within the framework of a specific program. Prior migration experience strengthens candidate profiles. However, regular migration channels for third-country nationals often encounter obstacles that can complicate the migration process. These challenges include strict visa requirements, complex application procedures, and lengthy processes for recognising foreign qualifications, which can contribute to delays. Additionally, financial barriers, such as the need to demonstrate proof of financial means, can impede prospective migrants (Angenendt, Knapp and Kipp, 2023[24]).

There is limited evidence on the possibilities for AVRR beneficiaries to use these regular channels for re-migration. In theory, AVRR beneficiaries are eligible for regular channels, according to the policy questionnaire used for this report. 8 of the 19 countries refer to specific pathways, including family reunification, international study programmes and labour and skills mobility partnerships. Prior AVRR beneficiaries are also eligible for circular migration programmes in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic (hereafter “Czechia”) and Germany (Figure 6.6). Most OECD countries emphasise the need to fulfil legal conditions and visa requirements for re-entry, rather than focusing on specific pathways. In Sweden, AVRR beneficiaries who received financial support and decide to re-migrate may be liable for repayment.

Figure 6.6. Eligibility of AVRR beneficiaries to use regular pathways



Note: N=8 OECD countries.
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Return, Reintegration and Re-migration (2023).

However, the nature of the visa process makes it unlikely that AVRR beneficiaries would qualify for regular migration channels compared to those who have returned spontaneously. First of all, most AVRR beneficiaries are subject to a visa restriction for one to five years following return. Even when this visa restriction is lifted, rejection rates for visa applicants are already high for many origin countries (Table 6.5), primarily due to the perceived risk of overstaying. Discussions during the workshops in Morocco and Tunisia also showed that former AVRR beneficiaries, some of whom may have been rejected as asylum seekers, have an even higher risk profile for visa applications. The risk factors used by consular officials as grounds for refusal and not reported. However, applicants who have previously been removed or who have benefited from return assistance face a difficult task in convincing consular officials that they will comply with visa conditions. Their application is disadvantaged relative to applicants with no prior migration history.

Table 6.5. Schengen visas issued and refusal rates, by country of origin, 2022

Country	Uniform visas applied for	Total uniform visas issued (including multi-entry uniform visas)	Uniform visas not issued	Refusal rate for uniform visas
Algeria	392 053	191 187	179 409	48.2%
Benin	13 672	10 206	3 348	24.7%
Burkina Faso	13 784	9 801	3 355	25.5%
Cameroon	34 271	22 679	10 508	31.7%
Côte d'Ivoire	57 319	37 544	15 967	29.8%
Democratic Republic of Congo	33 817	20 102	10 715	33.5%
Djibouti	4 530	2 823	1 602	36.2%
Egypt	167 995	133 357	31 271	18.9%
Ghana	42 124	23 112	18 363	44.2%
Guinea	11 806	6 435	4 791	42.7%
Morocco	423 201	282 301	119 346	29.7%
Nigeria	86 815	46 404	39 189	45.6%
Senegal	56 866	30 256	23 683	43.8%
Tunisia	168 346	112 411	48 909	30.3%

Note: A short-stay visa issued by one of the Schengen States entitles its holder to travel throughout the 27 Schengen States for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. Visas for visits exceeding that period remain subject to national procedures.
Source: EUROSTAT 2023.

6.4. Conclusion

In summary, this section covers the limited evidence on drivers and intentions of re-migration in different contexts, both among return migrants in general and among migrants who have returned with assistance or through removal, as well as the options for re-migration within regular channels. While re-migration is clearly growing along with return migration, it is rarely captured. Studies on re-migration intentions suggest that most returning migrants prefer to remain in their origin countries, although small sample sizes and non-response rates make these hard to consider representative or definitive. Nonetheless, the determinants of the propensity to re-migrate are diverse, often rooted in structural factors in origin countries, as well as family and community dynamics.

In light of the scale of return to origin countries, and the strong interest in re-migration among different categories of returning migrants, re-migration is not highlighted in policies. Regular channels do not explicitly take re-migration intentions into account, Prior migration experience can be an advantage if return was spontaneous and compliant with conditions of stay, but a disadvantage if return was assisted or forced. Use of regular channels with third countries has expanded over the last two decades, but there is very little information on re-migration to a third country.

The large and visible investments in the context of AVRR are occurring at the same time as large investments in supporting regular channels for labour migration and mobility. While these occur on two separate tracks and with separate logic, they often involve the same institutional partners. Even without an explicit firewall – AVRR beneficiaries may be theoretically eligible to participate in some of these channels – no actor favours their participation in these programmes. In any case, AVRR beneficiaries are only a tiny fraction of all returning migrants.

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Notes

[1] The data on re-migration is not publicly available.

[2] For Tunisia, the MED HIMS survey reports a higher share of those who are unsure about a possible re-migration (66%), whereas 25% declared to wish to re-migrate in one year, and 9% in two years or more.

[3] Operation Streamline, created in 2005, is a joint initiative of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) in the United States, under which federal criminal charges are brought against individuals apprehended crossing the border illegally.

Annex A. Methodology to estimate patterns of return migration

Estimating immigrant exits using destination countries' data

United States

To estimate the exit rate from the United States, the following approach is used. First, the American community survey is used to determine an initial cohort (immigrants) that entered the United States in year t. Then, the number of immigrants remaining after five years is determined ($remainings_{t,t+5)}$ using the same survey. Third, age- and sex-specific mortality rate data is extracted from the Human Mortality Database to estimate the number of deaths in the cohort during the period of interest ($deaths_{t,t+5}$). Finally, the number of exits ($exits_{t,t+5)}$ is derived as follows:

Equation 1

$$\boldsymbol{exits_{t,t+5}} = \boldsymbol{immigrants_t} - \boldsymbol{remainings_{t,t+5}} - \boldsymbol{deaths_{t,t+5}}$$

The 5-year exit rate ($exit\_rate_{t,\ t+5)}$ is obtained by dividing the number of exits by the initial cohort:

Equation 2

$$\boldsymbol{exit\_rate_{t,t+5}} = \frac{\boldsymbol{exits_{t,t+5}}}{\boldsymbol{immigrants_{t,}}}$$

The entry periods considered are 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. It should be noted, however, that the number of cohorts in a given year t is determined using the t+1 survey data. This avoids the problem of partial coverage. The main limitation of this approach is that immigrants who returned before one year are not captured in the initial cohort. In addition, for the periods considered, there are no observations with missing information on the year of entry. Therefore, the treatment of missing values is not applicable.

Canada

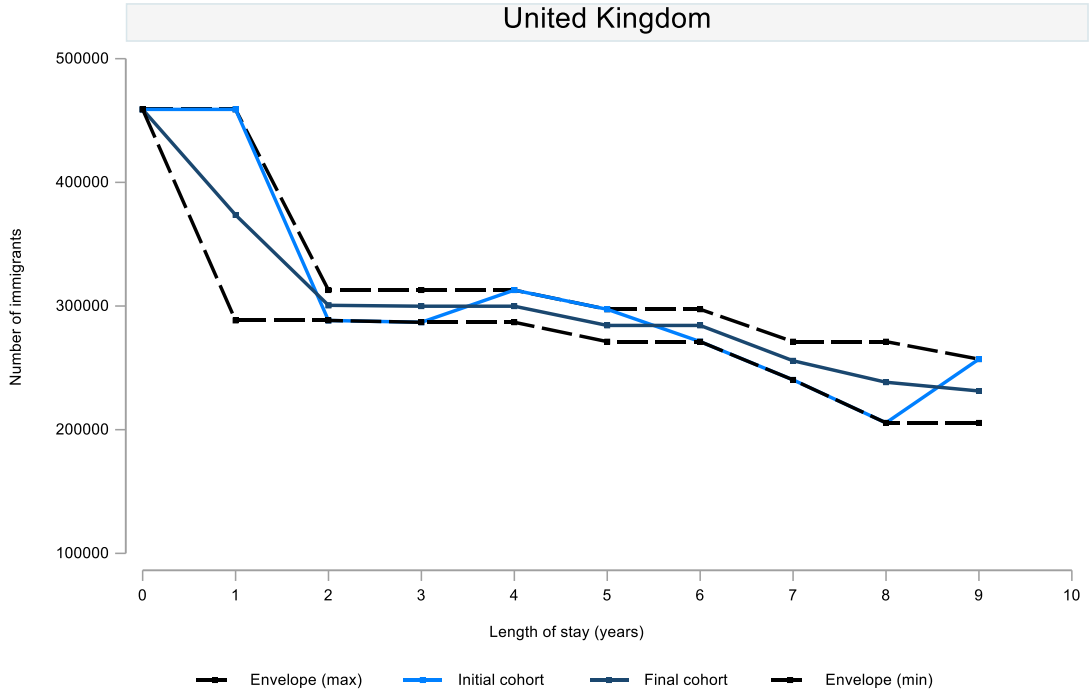
For Canada, the same approach as the United States is used to determine the exit rate. The main difference is that, in the case of Canada, the 2011 and 2016 national censuses are used. Specifically, the 2011 census is used to estimate the number of immigrants who arrived in 2010. Next, the Human Mortality Database is used to estimate the number of deaths by sex and age between 2011 and 2015. Third, the 2016 Census is used to determine the number of immigrants who entered in 2010 and were still in the country in 2015. Lastly, Equation 1 and Equation 2 above determine the number of leavers and the exit rate. Note that observations for which entry year information is not available are assigned proportionally to the weights of the different entry years available to keep them in the sample.

European OECD countries

Exit rates for European OECD countries are estimated from the International Migration Database and the Labour Force Surveys (LFS). Specifically, the international migration database is used to estimate the initial cohort flows to overcome the partial coverage issue inherent in LFS. Next, we use the LFS to estimate the size of the initial cohort in year t + k. Estimates based on LFS data, however, raise issues of non-response bias and sample instability, which must be accounted for in the analysis. To address these concerns, the same approach as (OECD, 2008[1]) is followed. First, non-response is reallocated proportionally to the weights of the different length-of-stay responses to maintain the total number of immigrants. To account for sample size volatility, the data is smoothed by constructing an envelope around the initial cohort so that the number of immigrants retained for a given length of stay is the average between the maximum and minimum values in the envelope. Figure A A.1 shows the adjustments made for the 2010 cohort of immigrants who entered the United Kingdom.

Figure A A.1. Evolution of the number of immigrants entering the United Kingdom in 2010

By length of stay



Source: Own estimates based on Labour Force Surveys and International Migration Database.

Estimating return migration using origin countries' data

For the analysis of return migration to origin countries, census or survey data is used to identify return migrants at date *t* in the origin country based on residence information at date *t-5.* Then, censuses and surveys in the receiving country can be used to determine the number of emigrants who arrived in the destination country before *t-5.* Once the number of returning migrants (return migrants$_{t-5,t)}$ and the number of immigrants in *t-5* in the destination country (immigrants$_{t-5)}$ are determined, the return rate (return_rate$_{t-5,t)}$ to the origin country can be calculated as follows:

Equation 3

$$return\_rate_{t-5,t} = \frac{returnees_{t-5,t}}{immigrants_{t-5}}$$

It should be noted that the mortality of immigrants between the two periods must be considered, but the methodological difficulties in measuring the mortality of this very mobile population may call the estimates into question. In most major host countries, the literature has shown that the mortality of foreign-born people seems to be lower than that of the host country. Therefore, and given the low mortality rate in OECD countries, deaths are negligible.

Annex B. Unweighted and weighted numbers of return migrants and the rest of population

Latin America and the Caribbean

Census data from the IPUMS-International database was also used for LAC countries, except for Mexico, where data are obtained from the 2018 National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID). The survey years and the unweighted and weighted numbers of return migrants and the rest of the population for each selected Latin American country are presented in Table A B.1.

Table A B.1. Unweighted and weighted numbers of return migrants and the rest of the population in selected LAC countries

Population over 15 years

Country	Census year	Return migrants		Rest of population		Total	
		Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
Mexico	2018	868	254 422	287 900	9 367,3 709	288 768	9,3 928 131
Bolivia	2012	3 483	34 618	685 139	6 776 524	688 622	6 811 142
Brazil	2010	12 632	125 325	15 485 906	1.37E+08	15 498 538	1.37E+08
Chile	2017	3 344	33 440	1 398 236	13 982 360	1 404 789	14 047 890
Costa Rica	2011	1 249	12 490	322 226	3 222 260	323 475	3 234 750
Dominican Republic	2010	2 786	27 860	660 294	6 602 940	663 080	6 630 800
Ecuador	2010	7 089	70 890	987 891	9 878 910	994 980	9 949 800
Panama	2011	364	3 640	240 956	2 409 560	241 320	2 413 200
Trinidad and Tobago	2010	192	2 112	93 082	1 023 902	93 274	1 026 014
Uruguay	2010	1 012	10 120	256 262	2 562 620	257 274	2 572 740

Note: The selection of these countries is based on the public accessibility of data and the availability of information on the previous residence of the population in the database.
Source: Own estimates based on the latest country census.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Return migration to Sub-Saharan Africa was obtained through a 10% sample from the general population census in the IPUMS-International database. Table A B.2 lists the survey years and the unweighted and weighted numbers of return migrants and the rest of the population in selected Sub-Saharan African countries.

Table A B.2. Unweighted and weighted numbers of return migrants and the rest of the population in selected Sub-Saharan African countries

Population over 15 years

Country	Census year	Return migrants		Rest of population		Total	
		Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
Botswana	2011	216	2 160	135 759	1 357 590	135 975	1 359 750
Benin	2013	142	1 420	539 388	5 393 880	539 530	5 395 300
Mali	2009	1 473	14 730	774 641	7 746 410	776 114	7 761 140
Mauritius	2011	481	4 810	99 751	997 510	100 232	1 002 320
Rwanda	2012	171	1 710	609 323	6 093 230	609 494	6 094 940
Senegal	2013	1 083	10 830	724 444	7 244 440	725 527	7 255 270
Sierra Leone	2015	151	1 510	421 204	4 212 040	421 355	4 213 550
Togo	2010	116	1 229	340 342	3 455 321	340 458	3 456 550

Note: The selection of these countries is based on the public accessibility of data and the availability of information on the previous residence of the population in the database.
Source: Own estimates based on the latest country census.

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Return, Reintegration and Re-migration

UNDERSTANDING RETURN DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Return migration has emerged as a critical policy concern for both destination and origin countries. While policy attention in destination countries has been focused on assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs, particularly for migrants with expulsion orders, these efforts represent only a fraction of broader return movements. This report, based on a project carried out by the OECD with support from the German Corporation for International Co-operation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH – GIZ), commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, analyses the scope and characteristics of different categories of return migration.

The report draws on three workshops, held in Tunis, Rabat and Brussels, that discussed return migration in different contexts. It examines the multiple factors that influence migrants' decisions to return to their countries of origin and their reintegration at home, including the role of family and community. The report emphasises the pre-existing structures and networks of returning migrants in origin countries and their role in supporting different types of return migrants. The report also looks at potential re-migration.

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