



REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF FORMER COMBATANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

WHAT IS REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION ?

Thousands of people have left their places of origin to join violent extremist and terrorist organisations. When they (and their families) disengage from these groups and/or leave conflict zones to return home, governments and other stakeholders work together to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R).

GCERF pioneered a comprehensive, holistic **case management system** that creates an enabling environment for reintegration and directly engages returnees in the process. This process typically involves a combination of **psychological, social, educational, civic and economic support**. The overarching goal of this process is to prevent individuals from returning to terrorism or engaging in violence and **mobilise their experiences to counter the risk of radicalisation and recruitment among other community members**. Failing to invest in rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants and their families perpetuates a cycle of radicalisation, by increasing their sense of grievance, isolation and lack of other opportunities.

WHY IS REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES IMPORTANT ?

Supporting R&R of returnees is critical to:



Reducing recidivism, new radicalisation and recruitment.



Promoting inclusion, tolerance and social cohesion, which are essential for fostering community resilience against violent extremism.



Reducing stigma towards returnees, building trust within communities and fostering a sense of security.



Addressing the drivers of radicalisation such as ideological influences, socio-economic disparities and political grievances.

WHO IS REACHED THROUGH R&R PROGRAMMES?



Returnees: people formerly associated with terrorism and violent extremism, including those returning from conflict zones and individuals disengaging from terrorist and violent extremist groups, and their families.



Communities and the community members to which they are returning.



Frontline workers working with returning combatants, family members and victims.

WHAT IS GCERF'S R&R APPROACH?

GCERF has supported the **rehabilitation and reintegration** into their communities of origin of **thousands of former terrorists and their family members from Al Hawl and Al Roj camps in Northeast Syria, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Iraq, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and the Philippines**. This will also be a priority for new investments in **Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**. GCERF also supports people who disengage from terrorist and violent extremist groups and either have been given amnesty or are going through prosecution. GCERF supports community-based integration in **Burkina Faso, Mali and Somalia**.

GCERF's R&R approach rests on two pillars:



Case management support

The case-management approach creates an enabling environment for effective R&R. It connects returnees to the psychiatric, psychological, social, economic, administrative, legal, educational, and/or clinical services and support they need to recover from trauma. For child returnees, the emphasis is on providing education and language skills to familiarise them with the local culture and facilitate a smoother integration process.



Community-based (re)integration

Community-based integration places control in the hands of communities as they absorb and integrate people. Communities lead this process and should also expect to benefit from it, harnessing opportunities alongside returnees. Because community acceptance is key, benefitting from social, economic, civic and/or cultural services by both returning families and wider community members are key to fostering lasting peace.

Through grants to civil society organisations, GCERF:

- Assigns case managers to link returnees with frontline professionals providing services and support to return home and integrate.
- Strengthens capacity of frontline workers (psychologists, educators, public health professionals) to support case-management process for individuals, by providing these professionals with specialised training in trauma- and violence-informed care.
- Based on assessed needs, provides vocational training and entrepreneurship support to both vulnerable community members and returnees to their support economic integration.
- Offers extracurricular opportunities and enhanced educational and language learning support to returnee and vulnerable children.
- Provides legal and administrative support to families for reintegration into education and other public services.
- Supports community and cultural events, meetings and reconciliation steps to build social acceptance and solidarity.

2,000

Frontline workers (psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers) trained on trauma and violence informed care, conflict resolution and psychosocial support.

79%

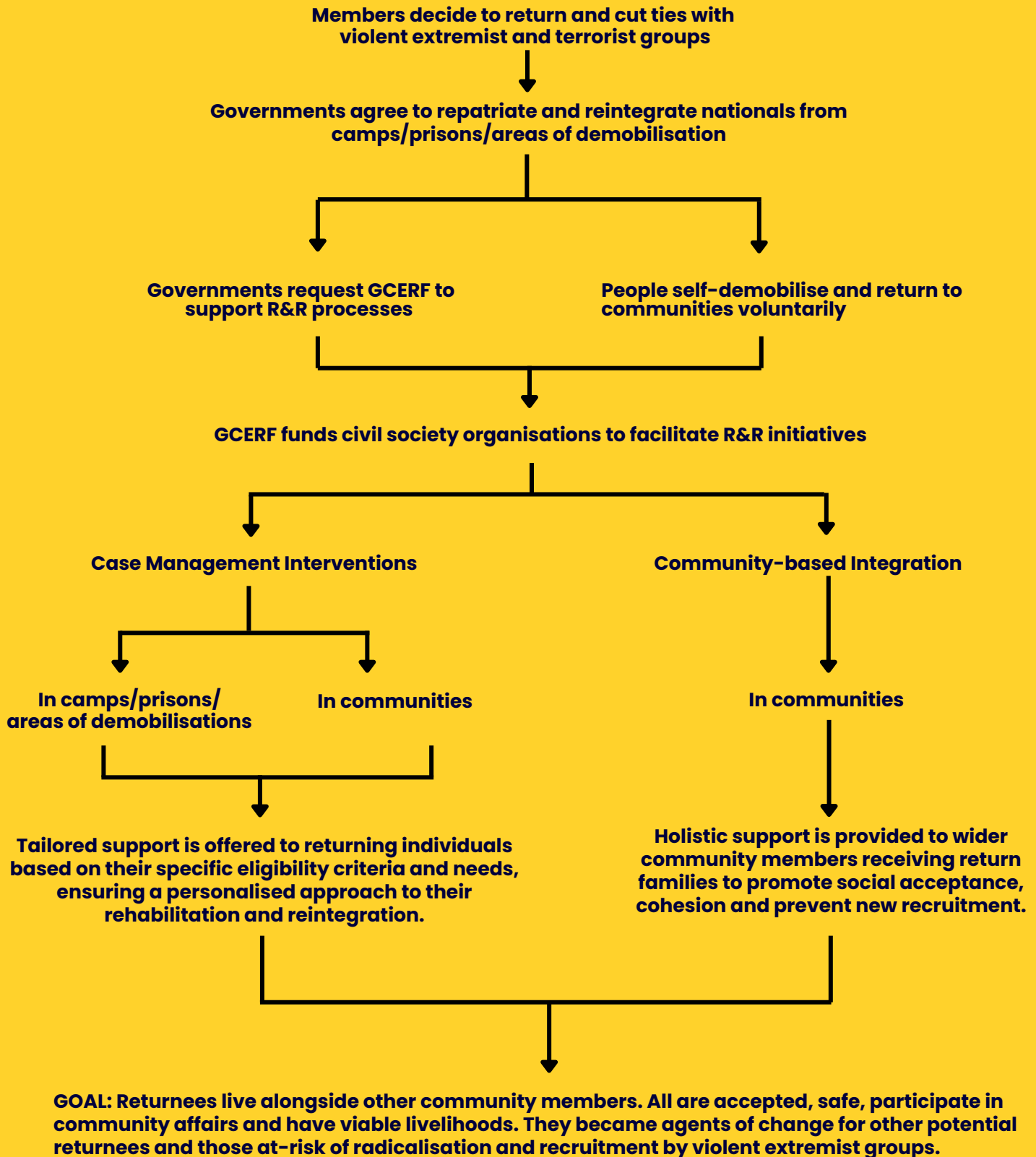
Of frontline workers reported that they now have sufficient knowledge and capacity to deliver services (averaged across projects).

85%

Of returnees reporting a positive outlook in life and sense of reintegration in communities, representing an average increase from the baseline.

To date, there have been Zero cases of recidivism to violence from foreign terrorist fighters who have gone through GCERF's case management system.

HOW DOES R&R OF RETURNEES WORK?



WHAT PRINCIPLES GUIDE GCERF'S R&R PROGRAMMES?

- **Complementarity and National Ownership:** GCERF's investment in R&R is conducted in cooperation with the national and local authorities, aligning with government-led strategies. GCERF's efforts complement those of local governments, other international organisations, civil society and aid agencies.
- **Sustainability:** GCERF focuses on interventions that strengthen capacity of local institutions and organisations.
- **Conflict-sensitive approaches:** GCERF adheres to the principle of 'do no harm', as well as human-rights-based and whole-of-society approaches.
- **Inclusivity:** GCERF interventions call upon funded programmes to consider the needs of all demographics: women and girls as well as men and boys, in a gender and age-sensitive manner.
- **Accountability:** GCERF ensures excellence in measurable and trackable indicators associated with harmonised outcomes and outputs
- **Dissemination and knowledge sharing:** GCERF brings together civil society organisations, governments, international organisations and academia to share good practices and learnings for strengthening collective efforts in the R&R space.

STORY OF CHANGE

Sara's journey of reintegration and hope

Once the wife of a foreign terrorist fighter, Sara found herself repatriated to her homeland, burdened by uncertainty and fear. She arrived in Albania with her five children, carrying the weight of the past that she wished to leave behind and a future she struggled to imagine. With five children to care for, she had no source of income, no sense of stability and no clear path forward. Arriving in Tirana, Sara and her children were provided with essential services—psychological and emotional support, food, clothing, healthcare and shelter. Terre des Hommes (TdH), through a GCERF-funded programme provided these necessities that helped her navigate the challenges of resettling in an unfamiliar environment. Sara slowly began to reclaim her sense of self.

At first, adapting to her new reality was overwhelming. She had never seen herself as an independent woman, let alone who could provide for her family on her own. Under the guidance of a psychologist, she started to recognise the importance of self-care and self-recovery. "At first, I found it difficult to adapt, but each passing day I discovered the importance of dedicating more time to myself," she recalls. Her parents played a crucial role, standing by her side. "My parents and my children became my strength to move forward," she says.

The idea of working always seemed distant even impossible but she managed to get her first job. "Initially, I was a little afraid if I would be able to perform and learn the processes quickly," she admits. However, as the months passed, she learnt a lot and the employer is happy with her. She felt a deep sense of accomplishment. "Now, I feel independent and valuable, both for myself and my children," she says.

Today, Sara and her children live in good conditions, something she never thought was possible. Her older children attend elementary and high school, while the younger ones go to kindergarten. Most importantly she is happy that her family is accepted by their community and no one judges them. She feels privileged that the support from TdH has made her hopeful about her future. "I am happy that my children have opportunities for a better future in their homeland."

Returnees especially women and children face stigma, economic hardship and psychological trauma when trying to rebuild their lives. Through holistic support including the provision of mental health support, vocational training, education and employment opportunities, GCERF-funded programmes create pathways for individuals like Sara to leave their past behind and contribute positively in society.