GCERF
Preventing Violent Extremism and Terrorism

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WORKING WITH RETURNEES FROM NORTHEAST SYRIA AND IRAQ: REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION LESSONS FROM GCERF

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ACRONYMS

CSOs	Civil society organisations
EPC	Elman Peace & Human Rights Centre
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
FTFs	Foreign terrorist fighters
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRP	Independent Review Panel
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISKP	Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP)
LMTS	Local Multi-disciplinary teams
LTFs	Local Task Forces
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NEG	National Expert Group
NES	Northeast Syria
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
PCVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
R&R	Rehabilitation and Reintegration
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TCNs	Third-country nationals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

FOREWORD

The global environment is more conducive to violent extremism today than at any point since the Arab Spring. Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) is rapidly evolving in Afghanistan into the most active external affiliate of the organisation; the Sahel continues to be an epicentre for violent extremism with the risk of spillover into West Africa; the ongoing conflict in Gaza risks radicalising a generation of youth; and almost 40,000 former Islamic State fighters and their families remain in camps in Northeast Syria, a state itself in rapid flux.

Of these dilemmas, and without underestimating the challenges, resolving the camps is the least insurmountable. But this must be sustainable, with regard to guarding against the risk of recidivism for those released from the camps. This policy guidance shares the experiences of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) in supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from the camps, in contexts ranging from Iraq to the Western Balkans.

The holistic case management model developed by GCERF is demonstrated to be effective, against the basic threshold of preventing recidivism, by providing psychological, economic, and social support, and developing the capacity of local communities. Sharing lessons is intended to sustain the efforts of return communities to continue to reintegrate returnees; lay the foundations for new community programmes especially in Syria, where large-scale returns from the camps are expected to commence soon; and allay some of the concerns that still prevent many states from taking back their nationals from the camps.

Former terrorist fighters from Northeast Syria are not the only violent extremists who have defected, deserted, or disengaged. At least 600 fighters left Al Shabab in Somalia last year, 3,500 have defected across the Lake Chad Basin, and the number of returnees from Abu Sayyaf in Mindanao is increasing. Globally it is estimated that there is fifteen per cent turnover in terrorist groups each year. Reasons cited include a breakdown of leadership, exhaustion, hunger, fear, unmet expectations, disillusionment, loss of public support, family, renewed trust in the government, a desire to live a normal life, a desire to clear their names, and ageing.

The significant proportion of third country nationals in the camps in Northeast Syria pose a particular legal challenge, and context always matters, but this paper also shows how the principles of rehabilitation and reintegration for returnees through a holistic case management from Syria may also guide successful return programmes elsewhere in the world.

Even as the risks of radicalisation are rising, so too are returns. These trends at first sight are contradictory. In our experience, however, they need not be independent. If returnees can be effectively mobilised, they can offer unique insights into the causes, and consequences of radicalisation, and promote trust across return communities, thus helping thwart new recruitment. Ending the cycle of violent extremism for one person, may stop it from starting for another.

Khalid Koser
Executive Director - Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy guidance results from several years of work on Reintegration and Rehabilitation. It congregates the experiences shared by the GCERF network of civil society organisations, partner governments and the GCERF Independent Review Panel (IRP) experiences, which we thank for the work and support. We would also like to especially thank GCERF colleagues: Basile Ema Ebede, Cholpon Kainazarova, Fares Mahouachi, Gianluigi Lopes, Kim Saado, Mickael Amar, Mohamad Rizki Maulana, Nizar El Laz, Oksana Orozbaeva, Sumaiya Tanim, Tariq Hassan, Vese Kelmendi and Wanja Manarin who have worked on the programmes, supported the information-gathering for this document and were consulted during its production and review.

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INTRODUCTION

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) is the global fund to prevent violent extremism. GCERF's approach to preventing violent extremism is dedicated to addressing its root causes and fostering lasting peace. Operating through grants to civil society organisations in partner countries, GCERF provided funding for the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of foreign terrorist fighters and their family members in different partner countries. Over the past years, GCERF's programming in this area has expanded from one country to eight countries, and the overall objective has shifted from R&R programming in partner countries to emptying the detention camps in Northeast Syria.

GCERF's approach to rehabilitation and reintegration is based on prioritising R&R for former combatants and their families to disrupt the cycle of radicalisation. R&R reduces recidivism and recruitment, and also addresses the drivers of radicalisation in communities, such as ideological influences, socio-economic disparities and political grievances, enhancing community resilience.

All GCERF partner programmes are operated by civil society organisations (CSOs) that provide tailored rehabilitation services for individuals (case management) and reintegration programmes with local and national institutions (community engagement) by frontline service providers. GCERF's approach to rehabilitation and reintegration tailors the initiatives to the country's contexts, supporting programmes with R&R components in 15 countries[i] since 2017. Such programmes include former combatants, communities and frontline workers in the Sahel, Western Balkans, East Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

In eight[ii] out of the 15 countries where GCERF has supported R&R initiatives, the work is focused on the hundreds of returnees from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-held territory. These programmes utilise different approaches depending on the particular requirements in different countries, including whether services are provided directly by state agencies or primarily through CSOs.

The initial returnee programmes supported by GCERF were in the Western Balkans: Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021), Kosovo (2017), North Macedonia (2020), and Albania (2019), where GCERF supported 19 programmes worth USD 14 million. The focus of these initiatives was the rehabilitation and reintegration from formerly ISIS-held territory. After initial returnee programmes in the Western Balkans region provided effective results, GCERF expanded its investment in the rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly ISIS-held territory. It now works with partner programmes in eight countries, including Kyrgyzstan (2024), Indonesia (2024), Iraq (2024) and Northeast Syria (2024). This expanded the investment to 14 more programmes, with a total amount of USD 11.8 million, to work with returnees from Syria and Iraq only.

GCERF's work in R&R is based on the complementarity principle, working in cooperation with national and local authorities to complement efforts of governments, other international organisations, civil society and aid agencies. Another pillar of the work is the dissemination of good practices and learnings to strengthen efforts in the R&R space. Therefore, this paper is a compilation that aims to outline the good practices and lessons learned from eight years of programming supporting returnees of Northeast Syria (NES) and Iraq and the communities they rejoin.

GCERF's experience makes us well positioned to share recommendations and lessons learned with those interested in conducting or financing similar initiatives. Beyond the support of programming, GCERF has also developed a Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Elman Peace & Human Rights Centre (EPC) and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) – Swedish Government, providing support to those designing, negotiating and managing support to reintegration processes.

This publication is intended to support and enhance GCERF's work in producing recommendations to practitioners and partner governments interested in pursuing reintegration processes.

The recommendations presented in this document are based on the programmes and experiences shared by our network of civil society organisations, partner governments and the GCERF Independent Review Panel (IRP) at events on the theme of good practices in R&R. In 2024, GCERF convened Global Community of Practice sessions for governmental and CSO partners to exchange insights and promote good practices with partners in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia joining currently- supported returnee programmes in the Western Balkans. In September 2024, representatives of twenty CSOs from all eight countries where GCERF provides support, governments and other representatives from a country with upcoming investment [iii] met for three days in Erbil, Iraq. The in-person event was followed by an online one, again with the presence of CSOs and partner governments.

Frontline workers speaking about psychosocial support for returnees, North Macedonia

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LIST OF CSOs

The list of CSOs that joined both in-person and online events, whose personnel provided the insights in this document, includes:

ALBANIA	Counselling Line for Women and Girls Initiative Arsis Terre des Hommes
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	The Atlantic Initiative
IRAQ	Aid Gate Organisation AL-Tadhamun Iraqi League for Youth Ashor Iraqi Foundation for Relief and Development Iraqi Institution for Development Peer Organisation for Youth Development Soqya Foundation for Relief and Development The United Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development
KAZAKHSTAN	Aqniet Foundation
KOSOVO	Advocacy Training and Resource Center Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Community Development Fund Syri i Vizionit / Edu Task
KYRGYZSTAN	Childhood Institute Foundation for Tolerance International The Women's Progressive Social Union "Mutakalim"
NORTH MACEDONIA	Association for Active and Healthy Development of Women and Children "Pleiades" Macedonian Young Lawyers Association
SYRIA	Amal Organisation for Relief and Development

Participants learned from each other's successes and challenges and discovered that their programmes share a great deal in common despite national differences. This knowledge paper congregates the results of seven years of learning, providing the reader with the context of the interventions, as well as the main good practices identified. This document was created using Chatham House Rules for the note-taking process. As a result, no specific programmes will be attributed in the notes. Additionally, it is important to note that the figures related to the R&R process are inherently imprecise, although an effort has been made to include the most up-to-date data available.

ISIS RETURNEES

The ISIS terrorist organisation captured and controlled significant amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2019, which included as much as 110,000 square kilometres with 12 million residents during the group's peak in 2014 [iv]. It also had as many as 35,000 third-country nationals (TCNs) travel from abroad to join the group. These included not only foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), but their family members, including wives and minor children, with many more children born inside ISIS territory.

While most FTFs were ultimately killed, more than 70,000 individuals, mostly women and children, were placed in detention in Northeast Syria after the ISIS so-called caliphate fell in 2017, awaiting repatriation. According to data from the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve, by 2025, more than 34,000 still remained in detention.

The camps in Northeast Syria

The primary centres for ISIS detainees are two refugee camps in Northeast Syria, Al Hol and Al Roj. The Al Hol camp was initially established in 1991 for Iraqi refugees during the Gulf War and was claimed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in 2015. In 2024, it held approximately 42,000 detainees on 3.3 square kilometres. Two sectors of the Al Hol camp hold Iraqi nationals (approximately 12,200 individuals), two hold Syrian nationals (around 13,000 individuals), and three annexes hold the various TCNs (around 6,385 individuals) as of April 2025. Due to security difficulties preventing a full census of detainees, these figures represent estimates offered by the service providers who operate camp facilities.

Al Roj camp was initially established in 2015 to accommodate displaced people fleeing ISIS, but subsequently included detainees. In 2024, there were approximately 2,619 detainees, including 823 households. Detained TCNs included 89 different nationalities.

Al Hol Camp in Syria

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Of the two camps, Al Hol faces greater security and reintegration challenges due to the number of detainees who remain loyal to ISIS and willing to use violence against other detainees who they deem to be disloyal.

Particularly with instances of ISIS supporters marrying boys to single women in an effort to perpetuate the Caliphate population, children are removed from the camp at age 12 and sent to other facilities to prevent sexual abuse. Children in this age range are also perceived to potentially become militants or at least more capable of doing so. Orphans whose parents did not survive the Islamic State were also sent to rehabilitation centres.

The initial goal for TCN children was to ensure they achieved pre-departure fluency in their home languages. However, service providers redirected their focus to foundational instruction in English due to security constraints in the camps to prevent covert communication and limited government commitments to repatriation. Nevertheless, informal transmission of home languages continues, as mothers frequently communicate with their children in their native tongues or Arabic.

Security conditions vary between the two camps. In Al Hol, it is not considered safe to move between sectors of the camp, so reintegration programmes must be delivered by nationality. Long-term interventions are typically necessary to build enough trust for detainees to provide even basic information about themselves.

Most people in both camps have contact with their families on the outside. Al Roj has formal money transfer mechanisms so that relatives can send support to detainees.

Challenges of reintegration efforts

A range of different challenges face reintegration efforts. Particularities vary by country and region, but these include:

Returnee trauma

Returnees have wounds and health issues from both physical health challenges and mental health challenges. For example, in the Western Balkans, many returnees arrived with both post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the war, and visible disabilities, including still having shrapnel lodged in their bodies.

While physical health problems may create more immediate difficulties in rehabilitation, untreated mental health issues also impede rehabilitation, and can perpetuate inter-generational trauma in children. Mental health professionals have diagnosed some returnees as suffering from anxiety and feeling guilty for having left their families behind. Untreated mental health issues can also hinder acceptance and reintegration within the wider community.

Returnees face stigma

In some cases, the community may stigmatise returnees and their children, making reintegration more difficult. This is particularly the case when survivors of ISIS violence live in the communities and have their own traumas and security concerns. There may be political costs associated with providing social services to returnees. A lack of justice for survivors of ISIS violence amplifies community discontent.

Principal work with minors

Initially, some countries with returnee programmes were only willing to accept children under 12 years of age, or orphans who had no ISIS-supporting parents returning with them. While reducing the odds of violence, these approaches also required social services to assist children and families even though this had not been part of the work of security services previously. Educational needs, health, and psychological needs must be addressed to avoid lifelong and intergenerational problems. If parents are still with the child, they may require rehabilitation as well.

Children with unrecorded births abroad or without valid family identity documentation can lack the legal status to return home or to receive services. Lack of ID cards prevent returnees from basic access to services such as attending public schools or health services. Furthermore, in countries like Iraq, unregistered marriages further complicate the issue.

Unique security challenges

In some countries, state security concerns mean that CSOs cannot administer reintegration and rehabilitation projects directly. Instead, state institutions provide many of these services, and it is necessary for both to develop collaborative relationships.

Having returnees serve as prison inmates and receive probation services requires developing relations with correctional facilities. Some service providers who work with conventional criminals are uncomfortable working with individuals associated with armed groups engaged in political violence.

Challenges of reintegration after ISIS

There is a lack of resources for R&R programmes and a lack of personnel to work on these efforts. GCERF participated in a case management approach for individual returnees by providing support for needs identified by partners, including paying for apartments to provide stable housing arrangements for returnee families. A community engagement approach is also needed to address the wider challenges of reintegrating returnees with their home societies. These challenges include:

Stigmatisation

- End-receivers of returnees, including their family and neighbourhood communities, may stigmatise and reject returnees in some cases.
- Addressing stigmas caused by association with ISIS, or prison time, that can make it difficult to find employment and reintegrate children into family circles and schools.

Denial of family status and services

- Returnee families in some countries may be denied food and other services because of the father's association with ISIS, or because of active criminal cases, leaving them reliant on informal networks connected to armed groups. This is leading some women to request divorce and their husbands to agree so that their children can receive social services, but this can be a costly and time-consuming process.

- Inability to access benefits due to lack of documentation of the death of a husband or relative, or the affiliation/nationality of children. In these circumstances, women cannot dissolve a marriage, issue property or access their husband's pensions. In some cases, ISIS did stage the deaths of some fighters, so it is necessary to permit thorough investigations of death benefits cases.
- The death or overseas detention of the father in the conflict can also complicate obtaining benefits and guardianship of minor returnees. However, some children are listed as orphans so that they can receive benefits that they would not in the absence of the head of household. Some countries rely on genetic tests to determine parentage and benefits eligibility.

Specific challenges facing women

- Women without family support and employable skills experience continuing vulnerability.
- Women who wear niqab can face employment challenges in some communities where it is associated with ISIS, while some women wore it for cultural identity long before the group existed.
- Women may find it easier to work from home due to cultural barrier but lack the necessary tools and training.
- Some governments restrict the employment of women unless they are divorced, which can impact women returning from ISIS without husbands or recognised documentation of divorce.
- Marriages between returnee women and local men can indicate community acceptance, but it is necessary to ensure that these are mutually consensual relationships. Women in these marriages may face unique vulnerabilities and require full social and legal protections.

Educational support for returnee children in Kosovo

A TAILORED R&R APPROACH

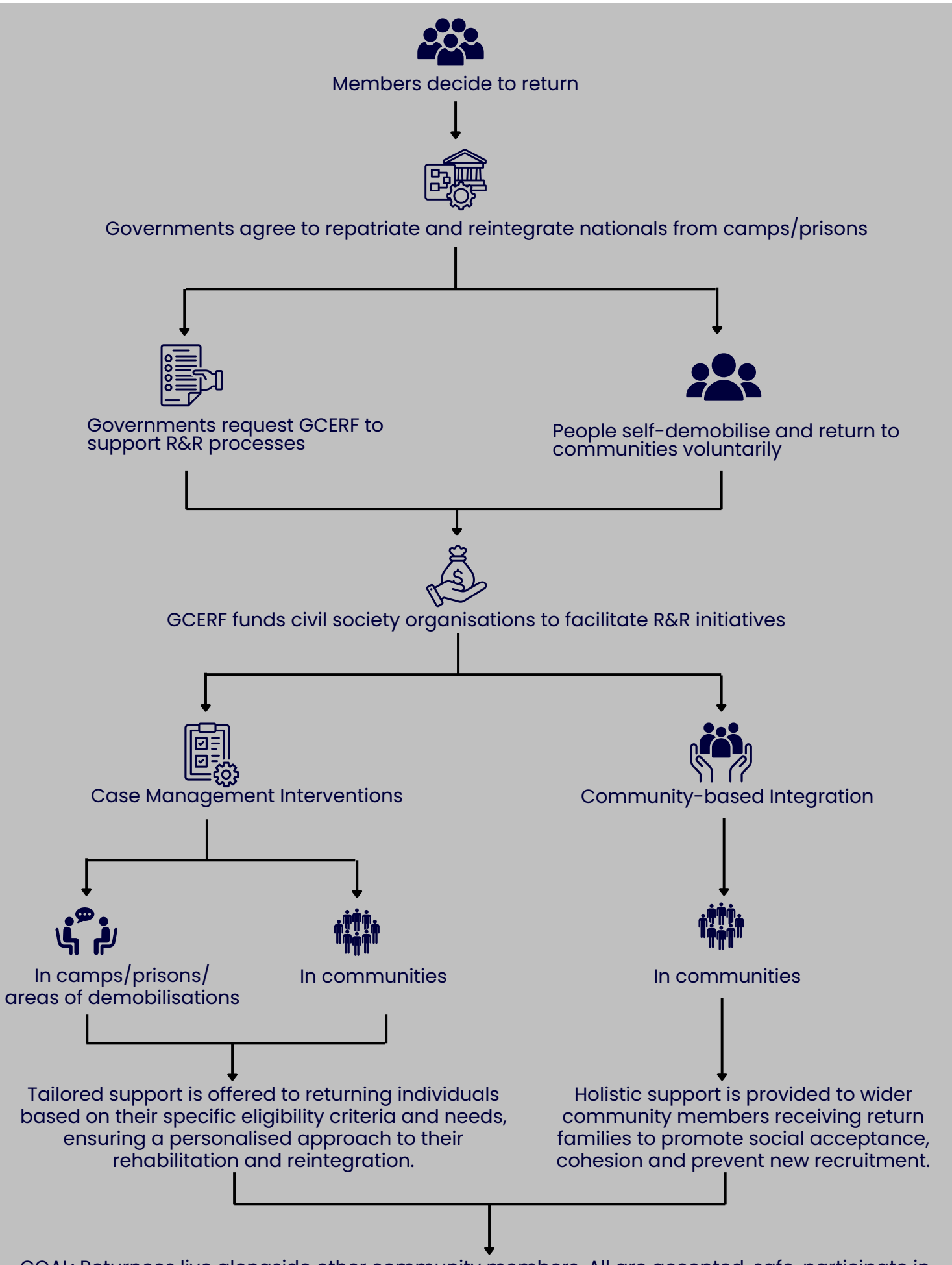
In response to identified needs, GCERF funds locally based CSOs to address these challenges for the returnees in their respective countries. GCERF-supported partners provide both individual-level case management to rehabilitate returnees and community-based interventions to facilitate reintegration. For example, in the Western Balkans, the successful approach included cooperation and capacity building between state and local CSOs on R&R programmes. This coordination is something that did not happen in the past, but currently, R&R programmes are fully aligned with National Strategies for P/CVE and supported by both sides.

This hybrid approach offers a combination of services tailored to the specific national context and needs. It also addresses the individual as well as the social drivers that can lead to association with armed groups. With the importance of providing different types of services, frequent and long-term communication with all sectors of providers, including in multiple locations in some countries, is integral to a well-functioning reintegration framework.

For example, the cost of two years of intensive reintegration programming funded by GCERF in the Western Balkans region cost 2,000 Euros per returnee, with a recidivism rate of less than 0.5 per cent. Recidivism is defined here as being under surveillance for suspicion of re-engaging with armed groups, and not necessarily committing an offence.

A returnee mother supporting her child's education in Iraq

How does R&R of returnees work?



Case management

A Case Management approach identifies individual returnees and others directly affected by violent extremism and provides them with a suite of services which individuals need to recover from trauma, including connecting them with services provided by governmental agencies and CSOs. Although individual interventions require intensive management by trained professionals, GCERF-supported programmes have demonstrated that case management interventions are cost-effective.

The two components of case management are individual assessment and an individualised plan. Needs may include a suite of services that extends beyond immediate medical care to needs, such as food and shelter, to reintegrate returnees into society. Case management links returnees and others affected (family, broader communities) with the psychological, social, economic, administrative, legal, educational, and clinical services they need. Community-based approaches are particularly important in Iraq because of wartime social impacts, economic impacts, impacted infrastructure and community trauma. In Iraq, it also includes the pre-departure phase for TCNs who aim to return to their country of origin.

Below is a representation of the cycle of the holistic case management process, as well as the services available in a partner programme funded by GCERF.

Source: Based on Aid Gate Organisation's Holistic Case Management Approach (2024)

Community-based interventions

Effective reintegration requires assisting returnees with their immediate needs and also working with local and national communities to provide sustainable opportunities to ensure that returnees fully reintegrate. We can consider that, in fact, all reintegration processes are community-based, because a major aspect of an individual's reintegration is to reconnect as a civilian with the community[v]. CSOs can help individuals to build skills that enable them to be safe and productive, but community acceptance and understanding are necessary for reintegration to succeed in the long-term.

Successful coordination often requires a comprehensive effort involving a wide range of stakeholders (Government agents, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social and/or Family Affairs, Prisons Administrations, Child Services, Provinces, Municipalities, International Organisations, Religious Leaders, Academia among others), and between the national level authorities and local level authorities. Comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) might be necessary if they do not exist yet. The competition for scarce resources might hinder efficient collaboration.

Community needs are much greater in instances when the community suffered direct attacks or occupation by armed groups. Frontline service providers, including teachers and psychosocial health workers, carry their own traumas from violence, and they may require interventions to work with returnee populations effectively. Community concerns that returnees are being unfairly 'rewarded' with services for joining ISIS may be exacerbated.

Returnee children in their classrooms, Iraq

Children who have never lived in their home countries but only in detention facilities, or who attended ISIS-run schools, will have additional educational needs. These children require tutoring to close the gap in their basic education before they can be mainstreamed into classes of children their age. Some require language immersion as well because they speak only Arabic and not their national language. Although these are individual needs, the solutions require community interventions and policy coordination.

Community-Based Reintegration can be supported by enhancing broader processes. According to the Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups[vi], such broader support could include:

Measures to improve human security.
Improving effectiveness and transparency of governance of communities and local government.
Supporting community coherence, social acceptance and collaboration and trust among groups.
Supporting transitional justice processes, social justice, protection of human rights, reconciliation, conflict transformation, social inclusion and political participation.
Investing in economic revitalisation, generating employment and other economic opportunities.
Rehabilitating infrastructure which would particularly benefit the young, such as educational facilities, health centres, sport facilities and community centres.

NATIONAL CASES

Reintegration support to community-based organisations

Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia)

The Western Balkans Case Management programme was established in 2017 as the first GCERF returnee portfolio. At this point, detention camps in Northeast Syria had not yet been established, but people were returning to the region on their own. As of February 2025, GCERF has supported six programmes in Albania, one in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 in Kosovo, and two in North Macedonia.

Initial rounds of returnees consisted primarily of women. Not only did more TCN women survive ISIS, but more home countries were, at least initially, willing to accept women returnees as survivors of ISIS. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, male returnees were arrested, but women were not and retained custody of their children. In Kosovo, more men returned in subsequent rounds of repatriation. According to data received by GCERF, as of February 2025, out of 443 who have left for Syria and Iraq, 257 people have returned to Kosovo, either through repatriation or voluntarily. In the case of North Macedonia, 69 returned over a total of 143 people. In the case of Albania, the 38 returnees identified represent only women and children and another figure of around 50 people represents those men who voluntarily returned. Bosnia and Herzegovina received 26 people in 2019 and around 80 returnees before, who went back on an individual basis.

In the Western Balkans, reintegration efforts assume that it was not religious beliefs or political ideology that caused people to travel to Syria. Instead, the view that ISIS exploited social and economic challenges means that reintegration requires social services and targeted support. Most of the governments were not entirely prepared to receive returnees, and so have been supported by international organisations, including GCERF.

International donors established different mechanisms in all Western Balkans countries for return and reintegration services, as well as for PVE. In Albania, GCERF supported the establishment of a national mechanism for P/CVE through a CSO. In Kosovo, GCERF continues to support channel training programme led by a local CSO, and in North Macedonia support is provided by Local Multi-disciplinary Teams (LMTS) that existed previously but were brought to full capacity through support from GCERF. In some instances, individuals participating in local mechanisms also hold positions in various state institutions. This means that many of their members are affiliated with different departments, such as police, religious institutions, social welfare, and education and are also involved in counter terrorism and R&R initiatives. It showcases the involvement of public officials in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) programmes at the national and sub-national levels.

Case management was initially supported directly by governments, but staff were trained and have been part of different workshops supported by GCERF and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on how to work with returnees. Along with successes in reintegrating hundreds of returnees to date, experience in the Western Balkans has also highlighted specific lessons learned in working with returnees:

Returnee community dynamics

Returnees remain socially connected and provide a network of support and loyalty to each other. It can be helpful for them to see the successes of other returnees and provide role modelling and hope for positive change. However, the dynamics work in reverse as well. Observations show that if someone refuses a service, within a week everyone else in their network does as well. Complimenting one woman on her success has generated negative reactions if the entire group does not receive praise as well. Service providers note that any programming needs to take a group mentality into account.

Women and children

Returnee populations consisting primarily of women and minor children face particular psychosocial and economic reintegration challenges. Women returning from ISIS displayed trauma in the form of panic. They tend to mask feelings of aggression but, when they express it, they express it toward the institutions working with them. Because returnee women are often head of their household but lack financial planning or job skills, it is essential to provide their families with assistance while they undergo training.

Minor children in returnee families were not actually returnees, but nearly all had been born in Syria. As such, they lacked identification documents, basic native language skills, and had no education or socialization in regular schools. These children were at particular risk of stigmatisation even after they had been successfully mainstreamed into community schools. To prevent this, their status as returnees was withheld even from school directors and teachers. The drawback is that teachers and service providers will not be aware of trauma disorders if minors experience social difficulties in schools.

Establishing community support

Some communities struggle to accept returnees.[vii] The host community may see the reintegration programme in a negative light because it provides direct benefits to returnee families but not to the community as a whole.[viii] A forthcoming paper on the WB programming showed mixed results from community surveys in Albania. While a study on one programme showed improvement, another, based on a different programme, demonstrated a decreased level of community acceptance of returnees compared to the baseline.[ix]

Sometimes there are complaints about “positive discrimination” towards the returnees because children receive additional support from schools and returnee women receive services and training that locals do not. It is important to educate local communities about the particular challenges of reintegration.

Iraq

Iraq became a GCERF partner in 2024 and began a process of reintegration of 2,400 returnees. As of January 2025, GCERF partners were managing 820 cases. Iraq faces two unique reintegration challenges distinct from other GCERF partner countries: Because ISIS controlled territory in Iraq, there are another 25,000 Iraqis remaining to be integrated instead of the hundreds of returnees that other countries must absorb, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). And some of the communities hosting returnees also home to survivors of ISIS with their own traumas, including those who have engaged in revenge attacks against returnees.

Rehabilitation camps and case management service centres

The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, working with CSOs, addresses the needs of returnees from Syria and IDPs. In 2024, Iraq started the Returning with Hope Project for returnees from Al Hol. Before GCERF engages, the government completes its checks and places returnees in transitional rehabilitation camps such as the Amal Rehabilitation Centre (previously designated as the Jedda 1 Camp, and then as Jedda 1 Rehabilitation Centre). After this, returnees are moved either to their original areas or to other locations and GCERF engages with them.

Iraqi returnees and IDPs are sent to facilities within Iraq for security and rehabilitation needs assessment before continuing to one of three communities with targeted reintegration programmes. Al-Amal Rehabilitation Centre is the primary facility. More than 2,635 families (around 9,735 individuals) had left the centre by 2025. Anbar Transition Camp processed more than 773 families in 2024. By 2025, thousands more in detention in Syria were awaiting transfer.

The processing sequence at the transition camps begins with a national security inspection in detention camps in Syria to screen each family for radicalisation and to verify identification. Second, the Ministry of Interior arranges transportation of families to Iraqi camps. The Border Force provides another layer of checks during transport. Once on Iraqi soil, military intelligence conducts more identity verification checks, as well as an analysis of the returnees' communications and social networks. Once returnees have passed security screenings, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement provides rehabilitation and psychosocial support services. After returnees are evaluated as sufficiently rehabilitated to leave the transition camps, they are sent to the care of local committees to continue reintegration.

Reintegration programmes

Multiple Iraqi state agencies provide services in partnerships with CSOs, including those for displaced persons, health, and legal services, but reintegration remains foremost as a national security concern. It is important to provide standard levels of reintegration assistance throughout Iraq to avoid local perceptions that some communities are favoured because of their sectarian or tribal affiliation. The government plans to build organisational capacity for 20 local CSOs to address different community needs. Livelihood and shelter were always mentioned with high priority.

There was a very high need for shelter programmes. Also, psychosocial support and mental health support were a need. Such services require international support to have sufficiently-trained professionals to meet the large need. There is no religious discourse component, but local religious leaders are involved in the programmes.

Reintegration is predicated on reconciliation between returnees and their extended family members who never left. For example, if the identity of the male head of a household can be established, even if he remains in detention in Syria, the family is sent to his relatives. This approach only applies if the father is Iraqi and not a TCN.

Local CSOs work in poorer communities with mostly women participants in the projects. They provide basic needs rehabilitation services to entice people to visit the community centres initially, such as haircuts and agricultural goods. Once returnees are regular visitors to the centres, the focus shifts to expanding the suite of reintegration services. Officials report that the community centres have been popular in the local communities, with offers of contributions to keep them open when funding expires.

Despite the number of checks facing returnees before they arrive in their communities, identity verification, and follow-up interventions by security forces, continues during reintegration. Some returnees still lack identity documents and require verification to obtain services, while other people claim to be returnees from Al-Amal Centre when they were not in Al Hol and are only trying to obtain services.

Establishing mechanisms and bridges of cooperation among different social groups, Albania

© Arsis

Country-specific challenges

As in other countries, reintegration programmes in Iraq are vulnerable to political pressure because of the perception in local communities that reintegration resources are coming at the expense of spending on other community programmes.

However, Iraq faces incomplete transitional justice challenges as well. Because so many Iraqis became IDPs as a result of ISIS control there are two streams of returnees: those who joined ISIS, and those who had crimes committed against them by ISIS, including by returnees from their own communities. Some IDPs lost their homes. Others are now in the position of teaching or providing security for families of people who committed acts of violence against them.

Revenge attacks and ongoing hate speech against returnees have occurred. Anything negative, such as a wave of theft in a community, is often blamed on returnees. In Ninevah Province, returnees are observed to be more reluctant to seek assistance because ISIS was most active there, and returnees fear retaliation by the wider community.

Child welfare and education

Children who have been gone from their home communities for a long-time face stigma, especially if they are perceived by peers to be from families linked to ISIS. They may also face socioeconomic and ethnic discrimination. A lack of documentation compounds this problem because many returnee children cannot provide legal documentation to register for benefits or schooling at the secondary level.

CSOs find that more social support in returnee homes is needed. Seventy-two percent of returnee households reported struggling to cover basic living costs. Forty percent of returnee parents do not check regularly to see if their children are experiencing stigma, and one-third do not provide regular emotional support. Some children do not trust their parents enough to discuss reintegration challenges, and physical abuse of children in returnee households may go unreported. Some children must be taken long distances by bus to community centres because of inadequate support at home.

Teachers in returnee communities require specialised training for behavioural issues, including sports participation. Children arriving from Syria do not necessarily share the ideology of ISIS, although some mothers do attempt to indoctrinate them. But children continue to be affected by the social experience of living under ISIS control and in camps. This reintegration problem is acute because once children are beyond the age of compulsory education, it becomes more difficult to reach them with psychosocial support and training if they do not have to attend school.

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Northeast Syria

In January 2024, GCERF started a pilot project in Northeast Syria to support partner governments in the identification and the predeparture efforts for their nationals in the Al Roj camp. The programme works with a local civil society organisation that has legal registration in Northeast Syria with the Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria. Al Amal Organisation for Relief and Development is headquartered in Erbil with offices in various areas in Syria.

While the project was established to run through 2024, it was extended initially until June 2025 with a total budget of 570,000 USD. The project aims to support the identification process of TCNs from partner countries, involving females and children in vocational trainings, mental health and psychosocial support activities to enhance their preparedness to return to their countries of origin. Throughout the life of the project, it targeted work with TCNs from Western Balkans, Indonesia and other nationalities. The activities organised include training on sewing machines so that returnees will be able to provide for themselves when they arrive in home communities and providing family support to women. Because the security conditions in the camps make it difficult to collect personal information from detainees, longer-term intervention programmes are also meant to foster enough trust in detainees to get them to provide the information needed for their return and reintegration.

Returnee child actively participating in school activities, Iraq
© Ashor Foundation for Relief and Development

Kyrgyzstan

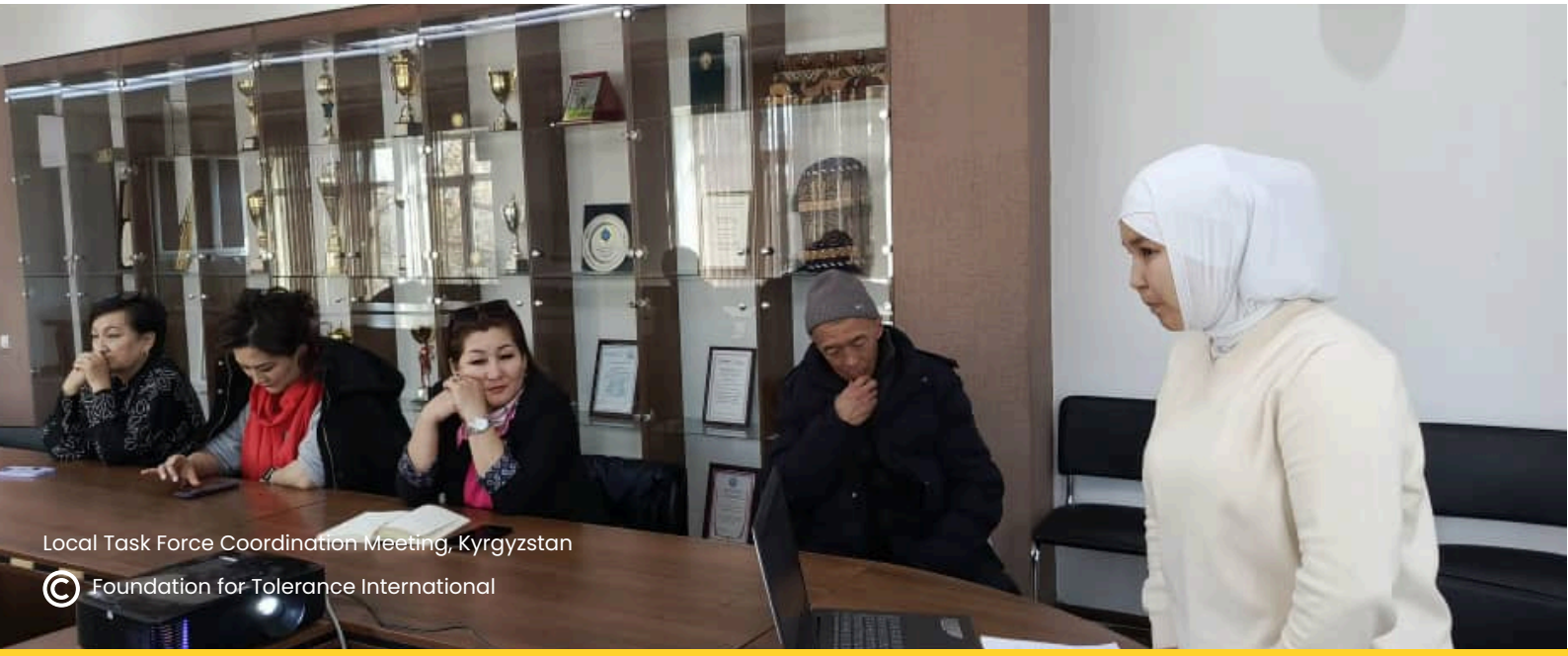
Kyrgyzstan repatriated approximately 517 children, and adult Kyrgyz citizens from Syria and Iraq, beginning reintegration programmes in 2021 and becoming a GCERF partner in 2024. Initial efforts focused on providing services through community rehabilitation centres. These include psychosocial support working with theologians to counter extremist narratives, and professional and life skills development for returnees.

GCERF support will contribute to developing national reintegration strategies focusing on the increasing number of women returnees, developed by women community leaders, and community capacity for resilience against violent extremism. The National Expert Group (NEG) and the Local Task Forces (LTF) will coordinate these efforts, with CSO partners facilitating reintegration.

The NEG, made of theologians, psychologists and lawyers, will strategise the R&R process and identify indicators of the effective R&R process; and develop standard inter-agency protocol that integrate effective alternative narratives and conflict sensitive R&R processes. LTFs, composed of local specialists and frontline workers, will be able to develop and implement community-based action plans on R&R to improve the environment in the community.

Finally, there will be the ITIREK, led by women from the community. I-TIREK (I-SUPPORT) is a community-based initiative to empower women and foster community resilience. The term "ITIREK" translates to "support" or "assistance" in Kyrgyz and embodies the goal of creating a supportive environment for women, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. The initiative of ITIREK Women's Community Groups consists of influential and active women within target communities. The groups are trained and supported to lead collaborative R&R efforts, provide psycho-social services, and develop community initiatives.

The ITIREK initiative aims to create a more inclusive and resilient society where women play a pivotal role in community development and peacebuilding through capacity-building, small grants, and fostering support networks. Bringing together women leaders and women returnees will shape the process of finding common ground. The 'small talks' around different topics will help the participants break down silos and establish new contacts. As a result, women returnees will start communicating with women leaders, project staff, LTFs, and NEG members. Two children's villages are planned as well.



Local Task Force Coordination Meeting, Kyrgyzstan

Indonesia

The Indonesian framework for returnees is to create a sense of community resilience among service recipients, and to establish skills like digital literacy and critical thinking to prevent susceptibility to terrorist groups. In 2020, the Indonesian government established its approach to citizens who had gone to Syria with the adoption of three policies: the verification of the identities of Indonesian nationals in conflict zones; prioritising the return of children under age ten, unaccompanied minors, and orphans; and preventing the return of FTFs. A task force of 16 ministries was established in 2021 to implement these policies. In 2023, the focus of reintegration programmes expanded to include social conditions that permit the growth of violent extremism. This included strengthening capacity at the border and implementing case management for returnees. In 2024, Indonesia became a GCERF partner country.

Reintegration efforts build on the infrastructure of existing social welfare programmes. The main problem for individuals who need to be reintegrated is their ability to sustain themselves financially. One of the main challenges is determining the right social welfare programmes for these individuals, as many of them are not very interested in becoming entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile on the aspect of prevention programmes, the upcoming programmes are mostly focused on young people of both sexes ages 15-30 who are unemployed. These include Peace Villages and engagement with religious leaders. One challenge is that it is difficult to engage with prevention of religious extremism because the only relevant criminal charges that can be brought against individuals are terrorism, incitement to terrorism, and violent extremism leading to terrorism.

Indonesia has a long experience of rehabilitation and reintegration of domestic terrorists, dating back to the 2002 Bali Bombings. Approximately 2,000 went through the prison system, with an average sentence of 2-6 years. [x] Even though some gaps exist, Indonesia is currently building on this experience to rehabilitate and reintegrate FTFs. There is no official policy yet. Nonetheless, the country had to face several waves of spontaneous returns, or returns of Indonesians arrested in foreign lands, like Turkey. Those who were repatriated were individuals who intended to join radical groups in Syria affiliated either with Al-Qaeda or ISIS. This has been the case since 2017.

Initially, in implementing the rehabilitation programme for these returnees, the Indonesian government used two rehabilitation centres. These two centres were used to separate returnees who were unmarried from those who had families (bringing their children and wives when deciding to go to Syria). However, in the process only one rehabilitation centre was used, in Jakarta, another one might be used in the coming years.

GOOD REINTEGRATION PRACTICES

Lessons from programming

Good practices for providing legal services to returnees

Legal services lay the groundwork for the returnees' relationship with the state. What status the returnees have should be finalised before they arrive in the country, including whether returnees have a criminal status, and the citizenship of the children who never lived in the country but have parents who are returnees. The legal status of the individuals will determine other services that they may need when in the country.

The need for provision of legal services to returnees depends on whether they violated the laws of their home countries when they departed. Some countries, such as Kosovo, provide free legal aid to returnees. In North Macedonia legal aid is given when requested and approved by the office of National PVE Coordinator. In Albania, GCERF supported a programme that dealt with the legal status of 37 returnees in Albania. Iraq requires documentation and monitoring of returnees to ensure that they remain disengaged from armed groups and do not have outstanding criminal charges against them.

Even in countries where returnees do not face criminal charges, like Indonesia and Kazakhstan, legal services are still necessary to replace missing or destroyed national identity documents so that individuals can receive benefits.

One common approach across partner countries to the challenge of children facing stigmatisation and benefits eligibility questions is to obtain new birth certificates for children born in ISIS-held territory. Countries may elect to omit information from birth records, such as the identity of the father (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or the birthplace (Kyrgyzstan) that may lead to stigmatisation of children.

Although legal assistance relies on the state, civil society can increase the capacity of legal practitioners and advocacy initiatives to improve the legal framework related to returnees.

Good practices for holistic case management and data protection

Creating a confidential and streamlined case management process is essential for cultivating trust and buy-in from the returnees. The central communication process needs to protect the identity of returnees in reintegration programme. Assigning each case a code for departmental communication or utilising pseudonyms are examples of confidentiality in case management. Creating and maintaining avenues of communication between necessary departments should be done before returnees' arrival if possible. Coordination of services provided by multiple government agencies and CSOs requires effective central coordination and accurate record-keeping.

Coordination of case management

Kyrgyzstan has developed a case management instrument for comprehensive assessment of returnee needs. The national repatriation centre conducts intake assessments through the Ministry of Education and, from the assessment, a development plan for the various assistance sectors is created. A web platform for service providers permits them to share information, and the National University offers a 72-hour certification course for providers working with returnees.

GCERF partners in the Western Balkans region have developed centralised service management approaches to address multi-agency coordination challenges. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, case managers communicate between providers on behalf of returnees. This is particularly helpful when the head of a household is a woman who encounters difficulty obtaining services. Alternatively, in North Macedonia, reintegration services are provided by state agencies in cooperation with frontliners, CSOs manage case files and refer individuals to the agencies using pseudonyms to identify them.

In Albania, returnees receive a code number for their case from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to provide anonymity and effective tracking of services, and the case is not closed until the individual is deemed to have reintegrated effectively. This approach is beneficial in counties like Albania that have multiple regional and municipal level agencies providing services, and because national security agencies do not share information with social services until a certain extend.

Communications with returnees

Albanian CSOs developed profiles and goals for each family before sending social workers to their doors. Home visits proved to be essential for determining service needs. While women were prepared to cooperate with social workers at the outset, male members of returnee families required more time to engage. Therefore, having families work with the same service providers consistently is helpful to reintegration efforts.

Case management requirements in Iraq are identified in the Al Amal Transition Centre. After return, the area case management teams coordinate services with local stakeholders. Case management includes actor mapping for service providers in each reintegration community and examining referral pathways to identify any service gaps. Key personnel in ministries tasked with service provisions also receive case management training and coordination with other service providers. Iraq has also partnered with the US in developing an online case management platform for registration, needs assessment, implementation and review.

In Iraq, one of the main challenges of intake in Al Amal was communicating with returnees who turn off their phones for fear of security services contacting them. Facilitators addressed this by distributing cards with project goals and contact information for local government agencies to be provided to returnees who could not be reached before leaving Al Amal. The National Committee publishes a journal that provides regular updates in various languages for outreach purposes.

Good practices for health support

On arrival, within days, returnees should be offered physical and psychological health support because they may need significant care. Preventative care also should be part of the health support offered. Psychosocial support will take various forms including language learning and parenting classes. Therapeutic and non-therapeutic treatment for mental health should be available but be offered in a contextually specific manner.

Good practices for providing medical support to returnees

In Kosovo, emergency support is available on arrival for the first 72 hours after returnees arrive in the country, including medical care and temporary housing. This period is also used to identify and arrest FTFs.

Maintaining children's health is particularly challenging if parents are unprepared or do not cooperate. In Albania, service providers assisted with basic nutritional requirements for children's diets because their mothers were uneducated about dietary health. North Macedonia compels returnee parents to vaccinate their children by cutting off the family's social welfare benefits if they do not.

Good practices for providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to returnees

Based on the experiences that returnees had in ISIS-controlled territory and in detention camps, it is vital that providers should be knowledgeable in trauma-informed care and how to address conflict zone-specific stress disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Results from the WB programme demonstrated the importance of psychosocial support for returnees. On average, most adult returnees who received psychological support reported an improvement in their recovery from psychological trauma at the end of the programmes.[xi]

Some countries, including Kazakhstan and Albania, incorporate theologians who provide peaceful religious perspectives on difficult matters. In North Macedonia, a certified military psychiatrist who had previously been deployed to war zones was assigned as the mental health provider for rehabilitation. Returnees are hosted in a reception centre for 2-3 months for intake testing to address psychiatric care for PTSD and to determine whether they are employable. Psychotherapy is still not widely accepted in North Macedonian society, so practitioners focused on trust-building for the first year after returnees arrived.

In Iraq, psychotropic medications are also prescribed to returnees for PTSD-related issues. Centre staff perform blood tests on children to ensure that they are not being medicated inappropriately by parents. Monthly community psychosocial support activities like picnics are organised, along with complementary activities for children such as colouring and sports. Services are administered at the neighbourhood level because most returnee families lack the ability to travel. Non-therapeutic support consultations are also offered by telephone hotline.

Broad psychosocial support offerings are necessary to help many children to integrate into their host community. This includes supporting children who might be isolated because they cannot speak the local language and have not developed skills for meeting new people. Adolescents also need support, especially those who are unaccustomed to personal freedoms.

Positive parenting and positive discipline models are demonstrated for parents who do not have appropriate parenting skills after living in ISIS-controlled territory in North Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, and Iraq.

Good practices for providing educational support to returnees

It can be particularly difficult to integrate returnee children into community schools because they are of varying ages but are uniformly behind their peers in basic education and sometimes do not speak the language taught in classrooms. In Kosovo, the Catch-Up Programme prepares children for mainstreaming with their own age group by offering tailored curricula to bridge the gap in what the students had not covered. Mainstreaming children as quickly as possible provides a social benefit in having them associated with regular and high-achieving peers. Additionally, mothers who were eager for their children to reintegrate found employment so that they could afford to hire private tutors for their children to accelerate mainstreaming.

In Iraq, CSOs worked with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to develop school curricula to counter the effects of curricula in ISIS-run schools. The new curriculum on Ethics, including citizenship and tolerance, will provide a framework of discussions of issues that are difficult to include in the formal curriculum. The approach has been supplemented by using comic books so that young children can identify processes and risks of radicalisation. Parent-teacher groups incorporating returnees and other members of host communities provide input on curriculum development and participate in peer-teaching exercises with their children's teachers.

A teacher working with returnee children in Iraq

Good practices for providing livelihood support to returnees

GCERF-supported programmes begin assisting returnees to be self-sufficient while they are still detained in Northeast Syria. Staff provide interventions for job skills, such as with tools and sewing machines. For Iraqis, part of the transition process at Al Amal Centre is multiple service provisions including cash for family support immediately after relocation. In Indonesia, the approach is that every individual returnee should have a business plan to make a living based on their assessed competencies, even if this means delaying release from detention until they are prepared.

In Iraq, CSOs provide job training and economic assistance to young people, and sheikhs provide work projects for members of their own tribe, limiting reintegration programming to one year before male returnees must be employed. Iraqi programmes also educate returnees to help them avoid financial scams. Kazakhstan provides mental health screening so that returnees can be determined as fit for employment and also hires returnees to work in radicalisation prevention programmes. Albania encourages professional skills employment, including offering women the opportunity to earn a culinary license.

Government programmes to help returnees develop their own businesses are also available in some countries. In Kazakhstan, returnees receive the same consideration as other citizens in public procurement of grants for small business development. In Kosovo, CSOs funded by GCERF offer small-scale grants for self-employment, vocational training, capacity training for parents and caregivers. They also make disbursements to non-returnees to avoid the risk of stigmatising recipients.

A returnee in Iraq supported with resources to start a new livelihood activity of raising goats for improving income
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Good practices for communications

Open communication about returnees before they arrive with community members is an essential part of the successful process of community acceptance. GCERF partners have undertaken multiple approaches to ensure that host communities have realistic understandings of the challenges that returnees face, as well as the risks and benefits of maintaining these programmes.

Programmes in Kosovo and in North Macedonia have enlisted community influencers such as athletes, doctors, lawyers, and religious leaders to help educate the public. GCERF has also supported community workshops and student training sessions about returnees, including for doctors and imams on how to prepare for their arrival. Other in-person events include discussions between returnees and other community members. Although the most recent GCERF assessment of results in North Macedonia on awareness-raising campaigns is not consistently positive regarding improved community acceptance [xii], there is also no compelling evidence suggesting that awareness raising had an adverse effect. Our conclusion based on other contexts is that awareness raising must continue for multiple stakeholders to show progress and societal integration.

Indonesia is focusing on settings of high schools, universities and pesantren (religious schools) students with digital literacy and critical thinking skills, to prevent the spread of radical ideas among the youths. Another approach is also to create planned dialogues reconciling terrorism survivors and perpetrators.

In Iraq, strategic communications rely on community elders, government actors and tribal leaders to influence different segments of community opinion.

Social media campaigns are useful in reaching both the wider society and at-risk populations. CSOs in the Western Balkans have produced short documentary films to educate the broader society about the experiences of returnee adults and children, including programme success stories.They have also provided counter-messaging for continuing communications by extremists. One CSO in the Western Balkans produced short videos about risks of travelling to Syria and about how to address problems of radicalisation in the community.

Working with media professionals and government actors to enhance storytelling and reporting about returnees

Lessons from R&R programming experience

As initially mentioned, GCERF's extensive work in R&R makes us well-positioned to share recommendations and lessons learned with those interested in conducting or financing similar initiatives. International organisations, civil society organisations and other government actors working on R&R have different, but also very similar lessons learned.

Common recommendations for programming in this area include:

Ensure systems are in place to support returnees with obtaining legal documentation, and that the process for obtaining legal documents is expedited.Mobile teams of government service workers can help to expedite the legal process, along with paralegal support.

Reintegration and rehabilitation approaches must be tailored to each context.

Service providers report that returnees need frank and honest discussions, not promises of success.

In small countries, you can rely more on personal connections to meet the needs of returnees. Personal connections at the local level are also vital to successful holistic case management.

Local civil society organisations that are already known in the community for other services will begin work with reintegration, enjoying a greater level of trust in the community.

Law enforcement for security screenings is necessary even when providing social services.

Adding theologians to care items helps address gaps in knowledge about the religious aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration that are important to returnees.

There is a need to ensure adequate support for frontline service providers. As with many public health approaches to PVE, professionals for these programmes express burnout and require professional and psychosocial support.

Evaluation is required to assess the needs for full recovery. The standard of whether returnees are back to 'normal life' is problematic because it cannot be measured, and it is not clear that their past normal is desirable. How the programme defines normal and how the returnee defines normal can be very different as well. Similarly, the satisfaction of the project participant as an appropriate metric is also unreliable, especially for children. Developing accepted metrics of success should be a priority across the practice.

It is important to establish and support standard operational procedures (SOPs), strategies, and frontline workers' training, ensuring psychosocial/CSO workers receive tailored training and fostering trust with project participants.

Invest and work with host communities through community-based interventions is needed in order to reduce the stigma towards returnees, build trust in the community, foster a sense of security, and foster prevention.

A returnee woman supports her child's learning journey, rebuilding their lives through education and resilience

CONCLUSION

GCERF has provided funding for the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of former combatants' programmes in different partner countries. Interventions have addressed the drivers of radicalisation in communities, reduced recidivism and enhanced community resilience over the past years. GCERF-funded tailored R&R support has produced a myriad of good practices and recommendations. Good practices include:

- National and sub-national ownership of the process and service delivery is essential.
- Engaging civil society in R&R processes is essential. CSOs can play a crucial role in the various areas mentioned in this document. As local actors, they are usually well-known in the communities and enjoy community trust and contextual understanding.
- Legal services to returnees: Although legal assistance relies on the state, civil society can increase the capacity of legal practitioners and advocacy initiatives to improve the legal framework related to returnees.
- Holistic case management and data protection: Creating a confidential, coordinated, and streamlined case management process is essential for cultivating trust and buy-in from the returnees. Keeping a regular flow of communication with returnees is important and mechanisms on how to do that must be tailored to each context.
- Health support: Returnees should be offered both physical and mental health support. Preventative care also should be part of the health support offered. Psychosocial support will take various forms including language learning and parenting classes. Therapeutic and non-therapeutic treatment for mental health should be available but be offered in a contextually specific manner.
- Educational support: Mainstreaming children as quickly as possible in the school system provides a social benefit in having them associated with regular and high-achieving peers. Programmes that prepare children for mainstreaming with their age group offering tailored curricula are essential to bridge the gap. Parent-teacher groups incorporating returnees and other members of host communities are also important to provide input on curriculum development and participate in peer-teaching exercises.
- Livelihood support: it is important to assist returnees to be self-sufficient while they are still detained in Northeast Syria, including interventions for job skills. Back to the communities, other interventions are needed, such as business development, self-employment, vocational training, and capacity training tailored to the returnees' needs and the market assessment of their surrounding communities.
- Communications: Open communication about returnees before they arrive with community members is an essential part of community acceptance. Approaches can include engagement with community influencers, community workshops, training sessions, and social media campaigns.

Future programming can build on these good practices and on the recommendations shared in this document, tailoring the type of interventions to the community context and needs.

END NOTES

[i] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Niger, North Macedonia, Philippines, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

[ii] Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia, Syria.

[iii] Kazakhstan

[iv] Wilson Center (2019). Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State, Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State | Wilson Center

[v] Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Armed Groups (2024), pg. IV, https://www.undp.org/publications/guidance-note-supporting-community-based-reintegration-former-members-armed-forces-and-groups

[vi] Ibid, pg. IV.

[vii]Ibid, pg. 16.

[viii]GCERF (2023), BM.19/DOC.07: GCERF'S APPROACH TO REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION, pg. 3

[ix]GCERF. BM.22/DOC.11/ANNEX.01. WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL PORTFOLIO REPORT, ROUNDS 1 & 2 (2020-2025), pg. 8.

[x] Chalmers, I. (2017). Countering violent extremism in Indonesia: Bring back Jihadists. Asian Studies Review, 41(3), 331–351.
Quoted in G. Barton et al. (eds.) (2021), Countering Violent and Hateful Extremism in Indonesia, New Security Challenges, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2032-4_3

[xi] GCERF. BM.22/DOC.11/ANNEX.01. WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL PORTFOLIO REPORT, ROUNDS 1 & 2 (2020-2025), pg. 7.

[xii] Ibid, pg. 13.