RRF
RETURN AND REINTEGRATION FACILITY

LOCAL OWNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION IN GHANA

LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT NAME	**RRF Local Ownership for Sustainable Reintegration in Ghana (RRF)**
DURATION OF PROJECT	**1 July 2022 -30 September 2023 (including no-cost extension)**
DONOR	**European Commission Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)**
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT (ICMPD) OFFICE	**ICMPD Brussels Mission and ICMPD Accra Mission**
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	**Ghana**
CONSULTANTS	**Silviu Kondan, Joseph Okafor and Rowena Symss**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This lessons learned report provides an overview of the insights derived from the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF) Local Ownership for Sustainable Reintegration project in Ghana, managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) Offices in Brussels and Accra and supported by the Government of Germany. The project aimed to reinforce collaboration among Government of Ghana institutions and actors involved in migrant return and reintegration.

Funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the project built upon the achievements of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) "Government to Government" project, extending certain activities and promoting institutionalisation of benefits from July 2022 to September 2023. Activities were well-designed to enhance collaboration between national return and reintegration actors as well as transnationally between the Government of Ghana and European Union (EU) Member States through capacity-building supports to institutions, such as the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO). For example, the project strengthened the role of the GIS Migration Information Centre for Returnees (MICR) at Kotoka International Airport and promoted the signing of memorandums of understanding between national actors.

This report outlines the scope, methodology, and outcomes of the lessons learned exercise, emphasising the tailored activities that were implemented under the project. The exercise incorporated a multi-faceted data collection approach involving a review of project documentation, and in-person and remote semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders, project team members, and subject matter experts. The report extracted good practices, lessons learned, and recommendations, offering a comprehensive understanding of the project's successes, challenges, and experiences. These insights have been identified to better inform future projects within the return and integration field while guiding the decision-making processes of national stakeholders involved in sustaining the project's overall benefits in Ghana.

A set of recommendations are shared in *Section 4.0. Recommendations*. The following lessons learned and good practices are highlighted and elaborated upon throughout the document:

ADDRESSING BENEFICIARY NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

◗ The RRF project effectively leveraged prior needs assessments, consultations and desk research conducted under ERRIN. These assessments informed the RRF project's design, ensuring its continued and expanding relevance for all stakeholders involved.

◗ The project facilitated enhanced collaboration between Ghanian institutions and external border management entities, including host countries. This was demonstrated with improved communication channels between GIS, the Government of Germany, and European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX), which were maintained throughout the project's implementation. This is also exemplified with the adoption of shared practices, such as the issuance of checklists to identify and verify returnees' belongings.

◗ The project demonstrates coherence with other similar projects by incorporating learnings in the project's design and activities, such as the use of material and content from other regional projects into training modules (e.g., PROSPECT in Nigeria).

◗ Efforts by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the EU Delegation in Ghana to promote the project and to convene relevant stakeholders facilitated improved cooperation and communication amongst transnational actors. Support from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia was noted as especially critical in designing the project and ensuring its relevance in the field of return and reintegration.

◗ The involvement of diverse entities like NADMO, Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service, among others, demonstrated a well-designed inter-agency collaborative strategy aimed at addressing the diverse needs of returnees. It emphasised the key role of an interconnected network of agencies collaborating cohesively to improve reintegration activities.

◗ The RRF project's iterative methodology, centred around continual discussions and assessments of institutional gaps, facilitated a sustained feedback loop, ensuring the ongoing relevancy of the project for beneficiaries and prioritising practical evolution of activities rather than the creation of entirely new systems or processes.

◗ The return and reintegration actors involved recognise the need for ongoing emphasis on reintegration services – given the predominant focus on return. Future activities may include improving access to reintegration services and supports by continuing to connect relevant actors, increasing opportunities for joint service provision, educating returnees on regular migration pathways and learning from other reintegration practices outside of Ghana.

IMPROVED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

◗ The local ownership project showcased effective stakeholder engagement through structured forums and regular meetings. It facilitated open discussions, improved internal communication, and clarified roles among stakeholders, fostering trust and collaboration that will contribute to the longer-term value of project results. The success of these communication methods was rooted in the trust and buy-in that was initially developed under the ERRIN project.

◗ Project activities were described as facilitating the standardisation of terminology used, enabling participants to identify and reconcile differences in definitions and services covered. This alignment helps in creating a common framework of understanding among stakeholders.

◗ By promoting local management and governance over project activities in Ghana, actors were better empowered and could apply their contextual experience and knowledge. This resulted in positive and efficient communications for beneficiaries and partners.

◗ Emphasis on collaborative platforms and clear Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for effective data sharing and reporting underscored the significance of transparent and structured collaboration among involved entities.

PERCEPTION OF LONGER-TERM IMPACT

- Informants shared that the local ownership project not only strengthened institutional coordination and operation capacities, but that it successfully shifted competitive dynamics among front-line return and reintegration actors towards more internal collaboration. This transformation enhanced trust among stakeholders and clarified their roles, fostering the likelihood at the benefits will be maintained longer-term.

- The project's efforts to strengthen the MICR's capacity resulted in more efficient processing of returnees and better connections to essential support services. The success of the MICR suggests its potential as a model for similar service desks in other contexts aiming to enhance return reception.

- Trainings offered through the project are described by informants as necessary, enabling stakeholders to understand referral processes, roles, and effectively support returnees. Informants highlighted the necessity of these trainings to continue and potentially expand in the future.

- The project's successes, grounded in local ownership, align well with the European Union Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration, offering valuable insights for future initiatives launched by EU Member States and/or ICMPD.

THE INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE PROJECT'S DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- The project strategically implemented customised training modules that comprehensively covered diverse experiences and characteristics of returnees. These modules were designed to equip personnel with the necessary skills to address returnees' vulnerabilities, encompassing psychosocial, social, and economic needs.

- The involvement of institutions, such as Port Health, National Ambulance Services and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, enabled targeted supports to be offered to some vulnerable returnees. Returnees are also better supported by NADMO's increased access to other reintegration actors across Ghana.

- Issues related to health care, accommodation, employment and secondary readmission continue to affect the ability of returnees to adequately reintegrate, especially those who were non-voluntarily returned. These are areas that both government institutions and non-governmental organisations seek as requiring ongoing attention and additional resourcing.

- Informants highlighted the importance of addressing the significant disparity between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees in accessing support, emphasising the disadvantage faced by non-voluntary returnees during their return and reintegration processes.

ENHANCING LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY

- Active involvement of high-level leadership within local institutions significantly contributed to the project's success. Their engagement fostered commitment and a sense of ownership among participating institutional stakeholders, amplifying support for the project.

- The project's success and the likelihood of its longer-term sustainability was strongly attributed to its emphasis on addressing genuine needs and requests of Government of Ghana institutions instead of imposing external agendas.

- Encouraging continuous learning within local institutions, and potentially identifying future areas of collaboration with ICMPD and other actors, is crucial for sustaining ownership, ensuring lasting impacts, and fostering self-reliant operational frameworks beyond project timelines.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
ERRIN	European Return and Reintegration Network
EU	European Union
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders
GIS	Ghana Immigration Service
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GOG	Government of Ghana
GPS	Ghana Police Service
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
MICR	Migration Information Centre for Returnees
MOGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NAS	National Ambulance Service
NCE	No cost extension
NIB	National Intelligence Bureau
RCN	Reintegration Coordination Network
RCS	Reintegration Coordination Secretariat
RIAT	Reintegration Assistance Tool
RRF	Return and Reintegration Facility
RRR	Return, readmission and reintegration
SEA	State Employment Agencies
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report provides a comprehensive set of lessons learned, good practices, and recommendations stemming from the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF) Local Ownership for Sustainable Reintegration project in Ghana, also known as the 'RRF local ownership project.' Managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) teams in Brussels and Accra, this project aims to strengthen collaboration among Government of Ghana institutions and agencies involved in return and reintegration of migrants. Funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the project's core objective is to enhance the ownership of the return and reintegration process by Ghanaian authorities.

The report first outlines the scope and methodology adopted for the lessons learned exercise. It subsequently presents the identified lessons learned, good practices and recommendations, specifically emphasising the various tailored activities and outputs under the RRF local ownership project. Integrated as a key project activity, this exercise presented a valuable opportunity to identify insights that can support future projects in the broader area of return and integration. Moreover, the report can inform the decision-making processes of national stakeholders and partners involved in sustaining the benefits of the RRF local ownership project in Ghana.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Description of RRF and the RRF - Local Ownership Project in Ghana

The RRF, implemented by ICMPD, seeks to facilitate the continued cooperation on return and reintegration amongst, and between, European Union (EU) Member States; Schengen-associated countries and various priority countries of origin. To do so, the RRF provides operational and financial support to national institutions to support return and reintegration programming, and enhancing synergies between existing, relevant initiatives. In parallel, the RRF broadly supports the implementation of the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration by:

◗ providing tailored assistance to specific needs;
◗ supporting strategy development to reach different target groups;
◗ embedding reintegration assistance in the context of the countries of origin;
◗ enabling local ownership;
◗ testing innovative approaches;
◗ and engaging new stakeholders.

In the context of Ghana, the RRF built on the results achieved by the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN)[1] "Government to Government" project in Ghana. The overall objective of the project was to improve the collaboration between the Government of Ghana (GoG) and EU Member States on return and reintegration related processes through:

1. the implementation of activities that strengthen institutional coordination mechanism and structures in Ghana dealing with return and reintegration;
2. and building operational capacities of the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) for supporting referral of Ghanaian citizens to relevant post-arrival services in the country.

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[1] The European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) was a network of 16 European partner countries, established to facilitate cooperation between migration authorities. ERRIN came to an end in June 2022.

The primary beneficiary of the ERRIN initiative was the GIS, which coordinates the reception of returnees with other government agencies such as:

◗ Port Health: for COVID testing and provision of other health related assistance to returnees;
◗ National Ambulance Service (NAS): for health emergencies;
◗ National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO): for psychosocial counselling of returnees and provision of stipends to cover local transportation from the airport to the returnee's final destination;
◗ National Intelligence Bureau (NIB): risk assessment of returnees;
◗ Ghana Police Service (GPS): risk assessment and profiling of returnees, and;
◗ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP): provision of shelter for stranded returnees and minors.

Following the end of the ERRIN "Government to Government" project in June 2022, ongoing project activities were carried forward and expanded through the RRF local ownership project from July 2022 to September 2023 (including the no-cost extension (NCE) period). The RRF local ownership project in Ghana sought to continue strengthening the collaboration between the GoG actors involved in the reception and reintegration of returnees, with the ultimate aim of increasing their ownership of the readmission and reintegration process, while addressing some of the gaps identified in the course of ERRIN project implementation.

RRF local ownership project activities included streamlining additional supports to build capacity within the GIS, including the Migration Information Centre for Returnees (MICR) at the Kotoka International Airport, in accordance with the project's overall objective of enhancing collaboration between GoG and EU Member States. The beneficiary group was also expanded under the RRF project to include NADMO, which is mandated to coordinate reintegration activities. NADMO approached the RRF project team to support their internal and external capacity building efforts, and better coordinate reintegration actors assisting returnees in the country.

In addition, while notable progress was made toward standardising reception services under ERRIN, reintegration assistance available to returnees were still fragmented post-arrival and there was limited government oversight over reintegration programmes in Ghana. To address these gaps, the RRF project team signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with NADMO, and renewed an existing MoU with GIS, to further strengthen reception coordination of returnees at the airport. Some of the key achievements under the RRF local ownership project include:

◗ *Mapping of reintegration service providers*: the mapping exercise helped to identify both government and non-government service providers, which the MICR can refer returnees to for further assistance as well as strengthen the knowledge of reintegration support landscape in the country to be used for referral purposes by mandated authorities (e.g., NADMO).

◗ *Reintegration roundtable*: the project supported NADMO in organising two reintegration roundtables, which helped identify the services available to returnees and raise their visibility among stakeholders. The roundtable led to the establishment of the Reintegration Coordination Network (RCN), chaired by NADMO. RCN members will send annual reports on their reintegration programmes to NADMO to help strengthen GoG oversight and decision making.

◗ *Trainings*: three training activities were organised, which included advanced IT training for MICR/GIS staff on data base management and data analytics; trafficking in persons, identification of vulnerabilities and trauma informed counselling training for GoG agencies; and psychosocial counselling training for NADMO case officers across different regions and districts in Ghana.

◗ *Stakeholder meetings*: under the RRF two stakeholder meetings were organised. One meeting brought together Immigration Liaison Officers from Europe (incl. Germany, Netherlands and the Czech Republic) with GoG agencies, and the second provided an opportunity for the FRONTEX Joint Reintegration Services to present their work to GoG agencies and explore referral pathways.

1.2 LESSONS LEARNED EXERCISE PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Purpose

Following the completion of project activities (September 30, 2023), this exercise presented an opportunity to draw lessons learned that can inform future projects and decision-making processes among the project stakeholders, and other actors focused on return and reintegration. The lessons learned exercise covered the full duration of the RRF project (July 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023). The exercise took stock of lessons and key findings under the design and implementation of the RRF project, with due consideration taken for the ERRIN "Government to Government" project's foundational support.

These lessons learned report seeks to enable a comprehensive understanding of the successes, challenges, and experiences encountered throughout the project's lifecycle by identifying good practices, lessons learned and recommendations. The data and findings from this exercise will also support aspects of the evaluation of other projects completed under ERRIN (specifically ERRIN Heritage projects), including the ERRIN Ghana component (spanning January 2020 to the end of June 2022).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The lessons learned report was developed using a multi-faceted data collection approach, incorporating primarily qualitative data analysis methods. Firstly, a comprehensive review of project documentation was conducted, including project plans, progress reports, and monitoring data, to gather information about the project's objectives, progress, milestones, and outcomes. Secondly, structured interviews and focus group discussions were completed (remotely and via an in-person field mission in Accra) with key stakeholders, project team members, and subject matter experts to capture first-hand insights, perspectives, and experiences related to the lessons learned categories shared in Figure 1 below.

These interviews were guided by a set of pre-approved interview/focus group questions designed to elicit detailed feedback and reflections on both successful practices and encountered challenges. The synthesis of responses was then utilised to identify overarching themes, patterns, and key learnings, forming the basis of the lessons learned report.

The designed methodology spanned approximately four weeks, including the in-person data collection component in Accra between November 6th and 10th 2023. The consultants ensured adherence to appropriate data confidentiality and privacy practices to protect the stakeholders involved in the lessons learned exercise (e.g., *including those promoted under the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Evaluation Standards and Codes of Conduct*). Interviewee and respondent data is being kept confidential and any identifying data will be appropriately deleted and discarded by the consultants.

2.1 LESSONS LEARNED CRITERIA CATEGORIES AND HIGH-LEVEL QUESTIONS

The following criteria table provides a preliminary and non-exhaustive list of high-level lessons learned-focused questions, which was approved by the RRF project team. These questions were tailored for accessibility and time constraints.

Figure 1. Proposed Criteria Categories and Aligned Questions

CRITERIA AREA	HIGH-LEVEL EVALUATION QUESTIONS
Relevance & Stakeholder Engagement	**Beneficiary Needs:** ◗ Do you believe that the project plan and outcomes were well designed to address the identified needs of the GoG? ◗ Are there any ways the project design could have been improved to better meet the needs of the GoG, in consideration of the project's objectives? **Stakeholder Collaboration:** ◗ How well did the project partners and stakeholders collaborate during the project's planning and implementation phases? ◗ Were there notable good practices related to stakeholder collaboration and engagement? ◗ Were there any areas for improvement related to stakeholder collaboration and engagement?

Project Management & Implementation	**RRF Project Success and Improvement:** ◗ What were the notable successes and areas for improvement in the RRF "local ownership" project in Ghana on planning, implementation, and management? (Please consider high-level lesson learned and recommendations for future initiatives related to project structure, timeliness/cost-effectiveness of activities, procurement process, multi stakeholder collaboration, etc.) - Successes: - Improvements: **RRF Project Outcomes and Outputs:** ◗ To what extent have the RRF targets been achieved in Ghana? (What are key facilitators and hindrances to effectiveness; was anything considered ineffective?) ◗ Please share any specific lessons learned or best practices related to: - Assessment process (stakeholder mapping for those in service provision):[2] - Trainings (incl. IT, return counselling, psychosocial support):[3] - Equipment provision:[4] - Reintegration roundtables (incl. leading to Reintegration Coordination Network): - Presentations from various organisations (incl. FRONTEX): - Other (incl. mailing list/online platform):[5]
Lasting Impact & Thematic Implications	**Long-Lasting Impact:** ◗ Do you believe that the RRF is likely to have a lasting impact, specifically towards its three objectives? If so, what do you believe the most significant impacts will be? - Objective level: SO-1 - To strengthen the institutional coordination mechanisms and structures in Ghana in the context of return and reintegration - Objective level: SO2 - To enhance the operational structures and capacities of GIS and NADMO for supporting the referral of Ghanaian citizens to relevant post-arrival services in the country and to improve their level of preparedness and responsiveness to assist returnees - Objective level: SO3- Facilitating coordination activities with key reintegration actors ◗ Do you have any recommendations on how this impact can be better realised/achieved in the future?

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2   Within RRF, this included an expansion in areas of needs/new stakeholders from the previous ERRIN needs assessment. Whereas ERRIN's focus on the stakeholder mapping was on the return/processing, RRF included mapping of reintegration actors (e.g., dealing with both short, medium and long-term reintegration).

3   Under RRF this included an expansion of trainings on the needs of those who return, alongside more IT trainings for MICR/GIS. For example, to empower NADMO and the Reintegration Secretariat they were given trainings that was oriented on longer-term psychosocial needs. There was also a training on trafficking in persons and vulnerabilities, spread across the different agencies not just GIS (MoGCSP, Port Health, Ambulance, etc.).

4   For NADMO, under the RRF this included the procurement of equipment.

5   Under ERRIN, they developed a shared mailing list with FRONTEX, which included contacts in Germany and Ghana to support correspondence. This was expanded and maintained under RRF.

	Addressing Vulnerabilities: ◗ Were there any mechanisms or strategies which have been employed to address the vulnerabilities of returnees, and how can these strategies be incorporated into broader policies and practices in the return, readmission and reintegration (RRR) field future-forward? **Policy and Programme Recommendations:** ◗ Based on project insights, what policy or programme recommendations can be made by the GIS or ICMPD to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of future return and reintegration facilities? **Cross-Project Learnings:** ◗ What other key lessons from this project can be applied to improve the broader field of return, readmission, and reintegration in both local and international contexts?
Local Ownership	**Local Ownership:** ◗ Were the main beneficiaries (i.e., Ghanaian authorities) able to enhance their sense of ownership throughout project implementation? Please describe (incl. reference to exit and sustainability planning). ◗ What mechanisms or strategies were used during RRF to engage and empower local organisations and authorities in the return and reintegration process, and how can these approaches be strengthened for future initiatives/ replicable in other contexts? ◗ What challenges or gaps have been identified in terms of transitioning ownership to local authorities, and what recommendations can be made to address these challenges more effectively in the future?
General/Other	Are there any other lessons learned, best practices and/or recommendations that you would share with teams embarking on similar projects?

2.2 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The following figure outlines the data collection methods utilised for the lessons learned exercise.

Figure 2. Outline of Data Collection Methods Proposed by Consultants

DATA COLLECTION TOOL	DETAILED ACTIVITIES
Desk Review	The consultants examined various project documents and publications, including those shared by the RRF project team. Relevant documents and data sources that were reviewed include (non-exhaustive list): ◗ Project document/plans: project proposal, log frame/RMF documentation, annual operational work plans, progress reports, meeting minutes, etc. ◗ Monitoring data and reports ◗ Relevant secondary data and external publications focused on regional and thematic context, such as those produced by other IOs/INGOs
Semi-structured 1:1 Interviews and Focus Groups with Key Informants	The consultants led interviews with 30 key informants, based on a register of stakeholders completed by the RRF project team who were deemed most relevant to interview. The list of key institutions interviewed is available in the Annex, this includes: ◗ Members of the ICMPD Ghana team; ◗ Members of the ICMPD Brussels team; ◗ Representatives from GIS, NADMO, Port Health, NAS, MoGCSP, GPS, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, FRONTEX, GIZ, AG Care, etc.

2.3 SAMPLING & CONFIDENTIALITY NOTE

Sampling

Purposeful (non-random) sampling was used to select interviewees respondents from targeted beneficiary and partnering institutions/entities. The selection of participating interviewees was informed by the RRF project team.

Confidentiality Note

To safeguard the confidentiality of informants, an approved confidentiality note was shared with informants before participating in interviews or focus groups. The confidentiality note served as a written document outlining the expectations and commitments related to the protection of information for interview and focus group participants.

During interviews and focus groups, the consultants outlined the purpose of the assignment and the various types of information that would be asked throughout the sessions. The consultants also shared their process and steps in maintaining the confidentiality of the information provided. This included protocols on how data is handled and kept secure, who has access to the data, the retention period of data, how the data will be shared, the voluntary nature of questions, contact information for providing input in an alternative format and the expectations and format of focus groups/interviews.

The consultant(s) informed focus group participants that they are expected to respect each other's confidentiality and not to share any details of the discussions outside the focus group setting.

3.0 LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

3.1 ADDRESSING BENEFICIARY NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

The consultants inquired about the specific lessons learned and good practices related to how the project's objectives and design addressed the needs of various stakeholders, particularly focusing on Government of Ghana institutions, within the framework of return and reintegration. Thorough consultations were conducted to gauge whether the project's aims and structure were adequately adapted to address the contextual factors influencing the evolving landscape of return and reintegration in the country. Overall, there was a consensus amongst all informants (30) that *the RRF local ownership project in Ghana was highly pertinent and well-designed to address various challenges related to return and reintegration.*

> *The RRF local ownership project effectively leveraged prior needs assessments, consultations and desk research conducted under ERRIN. These assessments informed the RRF local ownership project's design, ensuring its continued and expanding relevance for all stakeholders involved.*

Prior to the inception of the RRF initiative in Ghana, there were extensive needs assessment and evaluation-focused efforts led under ERRIN that were successfully leveraged to inform the RRF local ownership project. For example, the ERRIN Technical Working Group (TWG) Reintegration and Development Assessment Report, completed in May 2022, examined lessons learned, good practices and future areas of focus in ERRIN implementation countries. *The design of the RRF local ownership project was subsequently based on these ERRIN needs assessment and evaluation activities, which included consultations with relevant stakeholders and desk research.* In doing so, informants shared that the project team designed highly relevant project activities and outcomes for key stakeholders like the GIS and NADMO, among other pertinent actors.

Through the needs assessment findings and ongoing consultations during the RRF local ownership project's implementation, government stakeholders stressed, on multiple occasions, the critical necessity for improved information exchange and collaboration among stakeholders involved in return and reintegration processes. They highlighted issues stemming from a lack of institutional awareness regarding the various relevant actors engaged in these processes and noted the broader challenges resulting from a lack of systematic communication with actors in the host countries. As a result of the RRF local ownership project, there were advancements made toward enhanced collaboration between host countries and relevant institutions in Ghana.

> *The project facilitated enhanced collaboration between Ghanian institutions and external border management entities, including host countries. This was demonstrated with improved communication channels between GIS, Germany, and FRONTEX, which were maintained throughout the RRF local ownership project. This is also exemplified with the adoption of shared practices, such as the issuance of checklists to identify and verify returnees' belongings.*

To provide one example, having the opportunity to increase communication between the GIS, Germany institutional authorities and FRONTEX established a common practice for sharing checklists of returnees' personal belongings during the return process. This checklist serves as written and signed documentation regarding the status of returnees' belongings, providing Ghanaian authorities with crucial proof to address returnees' potential concerns. *More specifically, this measure has been described as resolving ongoing issues related to grievances that were raised surrounding returnees' financial assets and possessions.* However, government stakeholders also indicated that more work in this area is needed future-forward, such as the use of these checklists across other host countries, to increase return coordination efficiencies and better support returnees.

> *The RRF project demonstrates coherence with other similar projects by incorporating learnings in the project's design and activities, such as the use of material and content from other projects into RRF training modules.*

Informants also commended the RRF local ownership team's ability to foster coherence across various other projects, particularly within the West African region. *Notably, materials from the PROSPECT project in Nigeria (launched and implemented during ERRIN, currently under RRF portfolio) were integrated in RRF training modules.* Similarly, external organisations presented their work and key operational responsibilities in return and reintegration to GoG stakeholders (e.g., the International Organization for Migration, AG Care Ghana, International Labour Organization, FRONTEX, etc.).

> *Efforts by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the EU Delegation in Ghana to promote the project and to convene relevant stakeholders facilitated improved cooperation and communication amongst transnational actors. Support from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia was noted as especially critical in designing the project and ensuring its relevance in the field of return and reintegration.*

The Government of Germany played an important role in supporting both the ERRIN and RRF projects, contributing ongoing expertise and demonstrating substantial engagement with beneficiary institutions. The EU Delegation in Ghana also worked towards convening relevant stakeholders, supporting coordination between the national stakeholders and other international and non-governmental organisations (e.g., Immigration Liaison Officers from other Member States). Overall, this support has been described as better facilitating cooperation and communication between these actors and enabling a more wholistic understanding of national and supranational priorities across the full spectrum of return, readmission and reintegration.

Importantly, the human resource support provided to ICMPD throughout the implementation of both ERRIN and RRF by Government of Germany was considered substantial by informants. According to several informants, the support provided was critical in developing robust activity designs which are seen as prerequisites for functioning return and reintegration (e.g., transnational engagement and learning, establishing a network of actors, develop the capacity to respond to arrivals, mobilising strong commitment by GIS and pre-established structures to address gaps, etc). Specifically under RRF, informants shared that the engagement between European and Ghanaian actors became effortless, with neither set of actors feeling excluded or disregarded.

Enhanced engagement with Germany through the RRF project, notably involving the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, demonstrated a positive partnership due to the region's concentration of Ghanaian returnees. Moreover, there was pre-existing positive rapport between the Governments of Germany and Ghana, which led to interest and engagement by counterparts in both countries. In fact, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia proposed the idea of collaboration between Ghanian authorities and ERRIN.

"Moving forward, EU Member States are recognising that there needs to be a coherent approach – amongst Member States, and definitely in partnership with countries of origin. The RRF local ownership project in Ghana demonstrates how much we can learn from our partners overseas, and how we need to work with them in a manner that respects their needs and priorities, not just ours." – RRF project member

> *The involvement of diverse entities like NADMO, Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service, among others, demonstrated a well-designed inter-agency collaborative strategy aimed at addressing the diverse needs of returnees. It emphasised the key role of an interconnected network of agencies collaborating cohesively to improve reintegration activities.*

The project's design aligned well with the articulated needs of stakeholders engaged in return and reintegration, notably through the direct involvement of GIS, the primary institution overseeing the logistics of returns. GIS's early engagement from the project's inception, stemming from its role in the preceding ERRIN project component, was pivotal. Their thorough consultation process aided ICMPD to better understand Ghana's contextual needs. *Furthermore, the strategic selection of other institutional beneficiaries was guided by GIS's recommendations, emphasising the crucial role of identifying pertinent agencies to foster collaboration early in the project lifecycle, which was especially evident through NADMO's active participation.*

The RRF local ownership project's inclusion of NADMO was recognised as significant for enhancing coordination among stakeholders and defining clearer organisational mandates on returns and reintegration. NADMO's role in coordinating reintegration activities, including referrals, positioned it as a leading agency for institutional coordination. The integration of NADMO as a key beneficiary during the RRF local ownership project initially posed challenges in delineating mandates across various actors. However, this was eventually addressed through ongoing communication, leading to efficient organisation and operational reporting.

Recognising the pivotal importance of clearly defined roles within the national context after a person's return, the RRF project also aimed to significantly improve access to support services for returnees upon their arrival, with efforts to improve their reintegration.

There was a collective agreement to also involve all other pertinent institutions directly in the RRF local ownership project. *This included institutions like Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service, among others, specifically chosen for their specialised contributions to addressing the multifaceted needs of returnees.* As a result, stakeholders involved in handling returnees throughout the RRF implementation period began reporting to NADMO on their operations, further cementing collaboration and shared procedural understandings among stakeholders.

In turn, informants from these institutions shared that the project was particularly relevant as it builds inter-agency cooperation on return and reintegration, not previously common in Ghana, and advanced the understanding of the specific vulnerabilities and needs of returnees. Future-forward, informants stressed the continued expansion of stakeholder involvement, suggesting the inclusion of community-based organisations and agencies to enhance services across various entry points, beyond the point of arrival at the airport.

> *The project's iterative methodology, centred around continual discussions and assessments of institutional gaps, facilitated a sustained feedback loop, ensuring the ongoing relevancy of the project for beneficiaries and prioritising practical evolution of activities rather than the creation of entirely new systems or processes.*

The iterative methodology adopted by the project team was also described as instrumental in maintaining a dynamic feedback loop, allowing for continuous assessments of institutional gaps and ongoing discussions. This approach ensured that the project remained pertinent and adaptive to the evolving needs of its beneficiaries throughout its duration.

One of the standout achievements was the project's support for essential infrastructure development, notably the improvements made to the operations of MICR. *Instead of introducing entirely novel systems or processes, the project focused on enhancing and refining existing structures, reflecting a pragmatic evolution.* This emphasis on fortifying and improving the functionality of established frameworks underscored the project's commitment to practicality and sustainability.

Insights from the RRF project provide valuable lessons for future return and reintegration facilities. A key suggestion is, as mentioned, to promote and broaden existing structures built during project implementation. This can also involve strengthening operational capacity of relevant bodies by creating detailed SOPs to streamline return and reintegration processes. Key areas of focus for future SOPs, informed by research conducted under ERRIN across multiple countries, for example, are:

◗ The involvement of nationally led reintegration governance structures, which build stronger linkages with the employment sector, and place government institutions at the centre of the economic reintegration process.

◗ Expansion beyond the scope of voluntary returns, based on the case needs of returnees. Relevant actors should be involved in the revision or development of SOPs, which would reinforce inter-agency coordination and bring more coherence in their respective approaches.

> *The return and reintegration actors involved recognise the need for ongoing emphasis on reintegration services – given the predominant focus on return. Future activities may include improving access to reintegration services and supports by continuing to connect relevant actors, increasing opportunities for joint service provision, educating returnees on regular migration pathways and learning from other reintegration practices outside of Ghana.*

Informants have shared that States, more broadly, are progressively acknowledging the critical role of reintegration processes in mitigating risks associated with irregular migration and re-migration – rather than solely focusing on return. There is a notable emphasis on local ownership in the case of reintegration, with national authorities assuming a leadership role in reintegration endeavours. However, there are several identified challenges within the reintegration process that require further attention to ensure the sustainability of current positive strides in the future. Informants noted that reintegration remains a critical concern, not often supported by donors or host countries.

In the case of Ghana, logistical and sustained support for returning individuals is only seen as successful if there is active participation by diverse stakeholders. *Yet, to further advance the successes achieved through the RRF project, deeper integration of the various actors involved in reintegration is essential to notably enhance longer-term effectiveness of service provision – especially while resource remain scarce.* For instance, informants highlighted the need for assessing additional opportunities to better integrate GIS into reintegration operations, extending beyond just return processes. Moreover, by working collaboratively, there may be opportunities to reduce duplication of services and jointly implement services that are more cost-effective. Similarly, informants suggested that educating returnees and communities about legal migration pathways remains a necessary key action that will require collaboration and longer-term cooperation amongst institutions.

To further enhance ongoing or future reintegration-focused projects in Ghana, informants noted that an area of improvement could include cross-border learning opportunities by engaging with institutions participating in other RRF projects. Stakeholders have emphasised the significance of cross-context learning, underscoring its critical role in learning ways to improve reintegration efforts.

3.2 IMPROVED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

The RRF local ownership project showcased effective stakeholder engagement through structured forums and regular meetings. It facilitated open discussions, improved internal communication, and clarified roles among stakeholders, fostering trust and collaboration that will contribute to the longer-term value of project results. The success of these communication methods was rooted in the trust and buy-in that was initially developed under the ERRIN project.

Throughout both the planning and implementation phases of the RRF local ownership project in Ghana, there was a noticeable evolution in stakeholder collaboration and engagement described by informants, which stemmed from the foundational work established during first years of implementation. *This groundwork facilitated the creation of exchange forums and quarterly stakeholder coordination meetings led by GIS, establishing a structured channel to monitor progress and discuss aspects of return and reintegration.*

During ERRIN, these quarterly meetings also served as pivotal channel for stakeholders, including GIS personnel and others, to foster trust, develop institutional awareness of roles and responsibilities, and to allow for change management. As the project transitioned into the RRF local ownership project, the frequency of these meetings decreased to two per annual cycle, yet their effectiveness remained intact. *The decrease in frequency of meetings was a result of improved inter-agency communication, including the establishment of the periodic NADMO reintegration roundtable meetings.*

An inception meeting was convened to review the progress achieved during the ERRIN phase and the initial stages of the RRF local ownership project, aiming to pinpoint potential future activities. This meeting aimed to also bridge awareness between International Labour Organization and Ghanaian return and readmission actors. The objective was to facilitate comprehensive discussions spanning the entire return process, starting from the decision-making phase up to the returnees' arrival in Ghana. Subsequently, a follow-up meeting provided a platform for FRONTEX Joint Reintegration Services to introduce their initiatives to Ghanaian government agencies. The session aimed to explore collaborative pathways for referrals and exchange insights regarding reintegration services.

Collectively, these consultative meetings were regarded as a good practice because they brought together key stakeholders, relevant to the aims of each meeting, leading to practical discussions and actionable recommendations on how to improve return and reintegration services in Ghana. The meetings also allowed participating reintegration actors to gain a better understanding of existing processes and gaps and identify

actors who should be involved or more involved in similar communication efforts (i.e., meetings, trainings, roundtables) future-forward.

Two reintegration roundtables, led by NADMO, were also organised under the project in 2023, with the aim of bringing together various government, non-government and international organisations and agencies, working in reintegration, to enhance reintegration services in Ghana. This included:

Inception Meeting and Consultation with Reintegration Service Providers in Ghana – February 22, 2023
The aim of this meeting was to identify the relevant government and non-government reintegration service providers in Ghana and secure their buy-in for efforts led by NADMO to coordinate and harmonise reintegration services in Ghana. Organising this inception meeting was a successful practice because it was the first-time government and non-government reintegration service providers were brought together to discuss how best to coordinate and report on reintegration services provided to returnees. This success was made evident as the meeting was well attended by representatives from 16 key agencies and organisations and provided clarity on existing processes to these representatives through discussions.

Coordination Workshop for NADMO Reintegration Stakeholders – March 14-17, 2023
The objectives of this meeting were to clarify roles and processes across reintegration actors; discuss reintegration referral modalities; harmonise, document and coordinate all reintegration support or assistance into a common database for government policies and interventions; and discuss and validate a reporting template for reintegration actors.

The three-day event was a good practice as it once again gathered reintegration actors from 22 agencies and organisations to collectively achieve these objectives, contributing to enhanced coordination and service delivery for returnees. The reporting template is a particularly notable achievement; it is expected to improve planning and policy making efforts because it will allow NADMO to collect reintegration data from the different actors.

> *Project activities were described as facilitating the standardisation of terminology used, enabling participants to identify and reconcile differences in definitions and services covered. This alignment helps in creating a common framework of understanding among stakeholders.*

Furthermore, meeting participants noted that these roundtables were engaging because they supported discussions to standardise terminology by providing opportunity to identify differences in reintegration assistance definitions and the services this encompasses. The reintegration roundtables also enabled the establishment of the RCN (Reintegration Coordination Network), chaired by NADMO, to support longer-term engagement. With sustained engagement the RCN could lead to enhanced government oversight of reintegration programmes, inform strategic decision making in the area of migration management, and increase coherence in services for returnees across government and non-government reintegration actors. In the shorter-term, the Network is expected to improve centralised reporting on reintegration programmes across Ghana, through annual reports submitted by Network members.

Navigating discussions and communication around non-voluntary returns also revealed valuable lessons for the RRF project team. Engaging with institutional actors who might initially exhibit hesitancy or possess limited awareness of the vulnerabilities linked to non-voluntary returnees demands sensitivity. *A positive practice, demonstrated throughout the RRF project, involves having open discussions on common terminology and language. Moreover, providing practical and descriptive materials that outline the complexities of these terms, and their legal implications, was important.* These resources serve as a bridge, filling gaps in understanding and facilitating informed discussions and actions related to non-voluntary returns.

Across both the ERRIN and RRF projects, the ICMPD Ghana Office was able to lead the project's management and implementation. *Informants viewed this localised approach during implementation as highly positive due to the local team's familiarity with the Ghanian context, ongoing rapport with beneficiary institutions, and their adeptness in navigating the local landscape.* This model was described as inducive to inter-agency communication, and it promoted "a unified approach on-the-ground." Notably, the ICMPD national team was commended for transparent communication, adaptability in problem-solving, and facilitating strong stakeholder engagement.

"During RRF, we were sure to keep the doors open to all those who wanted to be involved. To achieve our objectives, we had to closely work with national stakeholders and ensure they felt represented. The project really fostered a spirit of collaboration beyond corporate relationships that we have outside of Ghana" – RRF project member.

Looking forward, stakeholders underscored the importance of regular in-person coordination meetings to address institutional barriers affecting return and reintegration activities. They emphasised the need for increased involvement with local organisations and stressed the importance of establishing clear MOUs to facilitate effective data sharing and reporting among involved entities. The project did in fact enhance referrals, yet some informants noted the limitations in accessing the subsequent monitoring data on these referrals—an area that could see improvements through the RCN and additional planning and consultation with NADMO and GIZ. The RRF project notably created a stronger link between these two institutions, which would enable such efforts. However, ongoing monitoring data remains crucial, providing vital information to diverse institutions involved in the referral processes. Annual reporting submitted by RCN members will be valuable in this regard.

3.3 PERCEPTION OF LONGER-TERM IMPACT

According to all informants, the RRF local ownership project has demonstrated significant potential for lasting impact, particularly in line with its primary goals of strengthening institutional coordination mechanisms, enhancing operational capacities of key entities, such as GIS and NADMO, and fostering collaboration with reintegration actors. Informants strongly suggest that the positive outcomes generated by this project are likely to endure in the longer-term, with recommendations for further enhancements and attention in areas where the project's tasks and responsibilities can be extended.

There was consensus amongst all informants that the project was crucial in shifting competitive interactions amongst front-line return and reintegration actors into collaborative efforts. This increased trust and provided a clearer definition of roles, ultimately enhancing cooperation in operational activities. For example, several informants specifically described feeling more confident in working with airport authorities when in-taking and referring returnees. As mentioned, the inclusion of non-governmental organisations also shed light on the diverse range of activities within the domain of return and reintegration in Ghana. Participation in the RRF project was enlightening for organisations not directly involved as institutional actors, as well; it provided valuable exposure to the diverse range of activities and work conducted by various organisations within this field.

> *The RRF project's efforts to strengthen the MICR's capacity resulted in more efficient processing of returnees and better connections to essential support services. The success of the MICR suggests its potential as a model for similar service desks in other contexts aiming to enhance return reception.*

A significant accomplishment shared by informants is the enhanced capacity of the MICR to screen and refer returnees. Previously, returnees, especially those non-voluntarily returned, faced limited support options upon their arrival in Ghana. However, the introduction of the MICR has substantially improved the government's ability to process returnees efficiently and establish connections with organisations providing support and assistance, such as AG Care Ghana and GIZ. Moreover, enhancements to MICR have also streamlined communication and coordination between MICR and European Member States, with information about persons returning with vulnerabilities or needs being regularly shared.

The success of the MICR model has generated interest in its potential replication in other regions, underscoring its scalability and the possibility of broader implementation. Recommendations for future expansion, particularly in the regions of Ashanti and Volta, highlight the need for a focal desk to support with returns beyond Kotoka International Airport. In addition, ICMPD plans to explore the MICR/airport desk model further through an activity under the named "*RRF Airport Facilities Assessment.*" This desk research activity aims to compare similar systems implemented across various airports in over a dozen countries.

Trainings offered through the RRF local ownership project are described by informants as necessary, enabling stakeholders to understand referral processes, roles, and effectively support returnees. Informants highlighted the necessity of these trainings to continue and potentially expand in the future.

The training workshops organised throughout the RRF local ownership project have been recognised as pivotal to supporting the project's long-term impact, improving technical capacities among GIS and NADMO staff; offering personnel a deeper understanding of referral processes, roles and responsibilities; and providing examples of more effective methods to support vulnerable returnees. Three trainings were organised under the RRF project:

◗ IT Training for Migration Information Centre for Returnees Staff of the Ghana Immigration Service – October 31- November 4, 2022, and November 7-11, 2022

◗ Training Workshop on Trafficking in Human beings and vulnerabilities to exploitation in Ghana –April 24 – 28, 2023

◗ Training Of NADMO Officers On Return and Reintegration Counselling – June 5 – 9, 2023

By design, these trainings were well aligned with the specific training needs of GIS/MICR and NADMO because these agencies identified the selected topic areas during consultations with ICMPD. The high level of relevance of these trainings to participant's daily work and operations will contribute to their longer-term value. This was further reinforced in project documentation and via interviews where participants shared their efforts to utilise and disseminate their learnings across their respective teams.

In addition, these trainings built on previous trainings offered under ERRIN, supporting continuity in learning processes among participating staff, and increasingly enhanced knowledge and technical skills related to return and reintegration processes.

To sustain and expand upon these successes, training participants and informants suggested that trainings should be organised on a continuous basis and should be expanded to include other return and reintegration actors. Future-forward, informants also expressed interest in trainings related to educating personnel on migration trends, relevant return legislation in key host countries, how to go about integrating gender perspectives into operations more effectively, and designing relief activities to address the complex needs of vulnerable returnees with limited resourcing.

The project's successes, grounded in local ownership, align well with the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration, offering valuable insights for future initiatives launched by EU Member States and/or ICMPD.

The RRF local ownership project in Ghana has been considered a success by all informants, highlighting the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination and institutional commitment. *By promoting the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration, this project directly serves as a strong model for future EU-supported initiatives.* Its achievements, stemming from collaboration between Ghanaian authorities, offer valuable insights for broader global initiatives in return and reintegration. These lessons can significantly benefit upcoming projects supported by EU institutions or Member States and organisations globally, emphasising the need for a unified approach in return, readmission, and reintegration efforts.

3.4 THE INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE PROJECT'S DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The RRF project strategically implemented customised training modules that comprehensively covered diverse experiences and characteristics of returnees. These modules were designed to equip personnel with the necessary skills to address returnees' vulnerabilities, encompassing psychosocial, social, and economic needs.

The RRF project strategically integrated concern for the vulnerabilities of returnees by implementing tailored training modules that cover various experiences and characteristics of returnees. These modules aimed to support personnel in handling and addressing returnees' needs with respect to their fundamental human rights. *By offering learnings from experts in managing such cases, personnel shared that they were better equipped with understanding and responding to returnees' vulnerabilities (incl. psychosocial, social and economic needs).*

This was particularly notable for the "Training Workshop on Trafficking in Human beings and vulnerabilities to exploitation in Ghana" and the "Training of NADMO Officers On Return and Reintegration Counselling". These trainings were specifically designed to equip participating staff with practical knowledge and practices to identify and support vulnerable returnees, based on the operational needs identified by GIS/MICR and NADMO. In addition, the reintegration roundtables and stakeholder meetings provided opportunities for service providers to discuss current gaps and potential solution related to returnees' vulnerabilities (e.g., supporting returnees with mental health concerns, health issues, or forced returnees that are disoriented and upset).

"The counselling training was invaluable in equipping us with the knowledge to offer support to returnees upon their arrival, something not typically covered in our standard training programs. I believe that it has significantly enhanced our approach to their processing, making sure we respect their human rights at all times. We often lack access to psychologists, so these trainings have been particularly impactful in filling our knowledge gap." – *RRF beneficiary*

The involvement of institutions, such as Port Health, National Ambulance Services and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, enabled targeted supports to be offered to some vulnerable returnees. Returnees are also better supported by NADMO's increased access to other reintegration actors across Ghana.

Institutions, such as Port Health and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, also significantly promoted learnings related to the vulnerabilities of returnees, including those confronting health issues or those of non-Ghanaian backgrounds. Informants noted that Port Health's medical experience and the Ministry's dedication to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, notably victims of trafficking, played pivotal roles in return operations.

In general, NADMO has established a comprehensive network of reintegration organisations through their engagement in RRF, creating a clear processing system where all returnees are handled through NADMO. NADMO then assesses and determines the referral path based on the returnees' profiles/needs and the available referral services. NADMO's proactive efforts in directing referrals to other actors, specifically those providing psychosocial supports, also demonstrated an integrated approach in aiding returnees grappling with specific issues and complex vulnerabilities, including trauma and shame. Additionally, NADMO's initiatives to reconnect lost returnees with their families through contact tracing showcased their interest in promoting the needs of vulnerable returnees who experience challenges in connecting with a social network in Ghana.

Issues related to health care, accommodation, employment and secondary readmission continue to affect the ability of returnees to adequately reintegrate, especially those who were involuntarily returned. These are areas that both government institutions and non-governmental organisations seek as requiring ongoing attention and additional resourcing.

Despite notable progress, several significant challenges and constraints have been identified by informants in respects to addressing the vulnerabilities of returnees. One major issue is centred around healthcare access, compounded by delays in activating their health insurance upon return. For returnees arriving with pre-existing health conditions and limited financial resources, timely healthcare access poses a considerable barrier. *Despite improved coordination among GIS, NADMO, the National Ambulance Services and Port Health to address vulnerabilities, resource constraints within these institutions also remain a pressing issue, shared by most informants.* Future discussions need to focus on effective resource allocation for critical services provided to returnees, particularly in the medical domain.

Another pivotal concern highlighted was the substantial employment gap among returnees. It is suggested that relevant institutions establish partnerships to better equip returnees with utilising their existing skills, formed abroad, to enhance their employability. Accommodation was also shared as an ongoing challenge, particularly for those who had been away for extended periods without access to friends or relatives who can provide immediate or longer-term lodging. Additionally, the return of non-Ghanaians continues to require improved bilateral coordination with counterparts to address return and readmission process gaps.

A notable disparity between the support available for non-voluntary and voluntary returnees was shared by informants as another significant challenge. While States generally aim to promote voluntary returns with support and financial packages, a significant number of people are involuntarily returned. Unfortunately, these individuals have limited access to reintegration support, with one informant highlighting: "for a non-voluntary returnee, we noticed that they come back feeling hopeless, thinking the world is coming to an end. Through the RRF project, we are beginning to slowly provide practical support through referrals and sharing helpful information on what is available to them."

Informants highlighted the importance of addressing the significant disparity between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees in accessing support, emphasising the disadvantage faced by non-voluntary returnees during their return and reintegration processes.

The disparity between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees in accessing support was brought up on many occasions, noting how non-voluntary returnees are at a disadvantage during their return and reintegration. The persistence of these challenges after the project closure emphasises the ongoing necessity for coordinated efforts to address this support gap and tailor assistance for non-voluntary returnees. *Informants stressed the importance of inclusive services that cater to all returnees regardless of their status, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and equitable support mechanisms.*

3.5 ENHANCING LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY

Active involvement of high-level leadership within local institutions significantly contributed to the project's success. Their engagement fostered commitment and a sense of ownership among participating institutional stakeholders, amplifying support for the project.

Throughout the RRF project design and implementation, a key strategy was fostering local ownership. *The project team aimed to transfer knowledge and expertise to local institutions, which would have value beyond the project timeline. The collaboration between ICMPD and GoG institutions, with the involvement of high-level leadership within the GIS and NADMO, played a crucial role in securing strong support for the project.* This collaboration led to significant milestones, including the handover of critical structures like the MICR and the Reintegration Coordination Secretariat (RCS) to government institutions, demonstrating ownership that will outlive the project.

In creating the RCS, alongside NADMO, the RRF project supported the institutionalisation of government oversight of reintegration programmes in Ghana and is expected to bridge service provision gaps between the MICR and reintegration service providers. Through its main objectives, the RCS will also contribute to local ownership through the following avenues:

◗ Collection, analysis and dissemination of reintegration data: using data gathered from RCN members/ service providers, NADMO can inform policy and programmatic decision-making related to return and reintegration.

◗ Manage referrals and coordinate with government and non-government reintegration service providers: in doing so, the RCS will contribute to enhanced communication and coordination between these actors, who led relatively fragmented operations in Ghana prior to the RRF project.

◗ Monitoring of reintegration activities of stakeholders: NADMO will have the capacity to oversee operations across Ghana, allowing the institution to better identify service gaps and challenges, and implement well-designed solutions in a coherent manner.

Additionally, the stakeholder coordination platform was described as "instrumental" in facilitating communication and cooperation between government agencies supporting readmission. In leveraging this platform, government stakeholders were able to independently enhance reception services for returnees at the point of arrival, the airport, and continue identifying areas for service improvements. However, membership within this platform does not include reintegration stakeholders, and as such does not support referral processes.

> *The project's success and the likelihood of its longer-term sustainability was strongly attributed to its emphasis on addressing genuine needs and requests of GoG institutions instead of imposing external agendas.*

Informants highlighted that Ghana's success in the project was also attributed to its clear plan, strong political leadership, and structured approach, all rooted in genuine needs and requests of Ghanaian government institutions rather than being externally imposed. This highlights the commitment shown by these institutions through their active participation and engagement. Furthermore, the responsibility for internal dissemination and absorption of project insights primarily lies with these institutions, indicating a shift towards self-sustained growth instead of reliance on external entities.

As mentioned, the project's training initiatives were also well-designed to address the distinct requirements of the GIS/MICR and NADMO, effectively addressing vulnerabilities and enhancing operational effectiveness. The training material encompassed a spectrum of thematic and practical areas, identified during consultations with the leadership of these institutions. Informants and training participants shared that the acquired knowledge and innovative approaches introduced during the project have been disseminated internally and persistently put into practice. They described the trainings as fostering a shared comprehension of streamlined practices, replacing outdated methods with more efficient ones.

> *Encouraging continuous learning within local institutions, and potentially identifying future areas of collaboration with ICMPD and other actors, is crucial for sustaining ownership, ensuring lasting impacts, and fostering self-reliant operational frameworks beyond project timelines.*

Informants did share that the complete transfer of ownership to local authorities still faces challenges, requiring future activities to optimise this transition. *Strengthening collaboration between external entities such as ICMPD and local authorities, through future projects on return and reintegration, can potentially support a smoother transfer of skills, knowledge, and responsibilities.* Promoting a culture of ongoing internal learning and skill transfer within local institutions was also described as crucial for maintaining ownership and maximising project benefits in the longer-term.

Finally, the involvement of key actors such as government delegations and agencies, academic institutions (e.g., Centre for Migration Studies at the University of Ghana), and international entities such as FRONTEX, can provide valuable support in increasing the technical and theoretical capacities of return and reintegration actors in Ghana. Maintaining and building relationship with these actors will be a key area of focus to facilitate ongoing capacity building activities such as presentations, study visits, trainings and workshops, etc., in addition to enhancing coherent service provision for returnees.

Improving communication and fostering stronger partnerships with FRONTEX and host country authorities is also critical. Establishing platforms for information sharing and facilitating study visits between authorities can align practices concerning return and readmission, benefiting returnees and the overall reintegration process. Advocating for legal pathways to encourage regular migration and discourage irregular migration remains essential for long-term solutions to returnees' complexities.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were provided by those participating in the RRF lessons learned exercises as well as those who provided their input during ongoing RRF meetings and/or trainings.

Building Interconnected National Networks for Sustainable Return and Reintegration

▶ **Transnational Cooperation and Communication:** As demonstrated through the RRF local ownership project, strengthening communication channels between government institutions, host countries, and international organisations is vital for enhancing return coordination. It is recommended to continue expanding collaboration to reflect the successes of this project focused on EU Member States with additional host countries (incl. those in West Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region). Most importantly, regular and systematic communication among stakeholders coordinating the full spectrum of the return and readmission process is crucial. For example, this can encourage host countries to adopt the practice of providing GoG institutions with a checklist of returnees' belongings to minimise complaints related to missing possessions.

▶ **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** GoG institutions should maintain and expand the interconnected network of agencies involved in return and reintegration efforts, ensuring the adequate representation of entities like GIS, NADMO, Port Health, Ghana Police, National Security, and the National Ambulance Service. It is also important to consider extending this collaborative approach to include community-based organisations, particularly those tasked with addressing the longer-term needs of vulnerable returnees.

▶ **Structured Stakeholder Engagement:** Maintain structured engagement forums and regular meetings among stakeholders to uphold the collaborative momentum established during the RRF local ownership project. Consider an annual forum involving all relevant organisations involved in return and reintegration activities within Ghana, to better build awareness and consensus on next steps. facilitating training sessions, awareness building, experience sharing, and issue advocacy. Importantly, current stakeholders should prioritise scheduling upcoming stakeholder meetings following project closure to sustain the current momentum.

▶ **Reintegration Coordination Network (RCN):** Stakeholders should continue leveraging the RCN, chaired by NADMO, for sustained engagement and centralised reporting on reintegration activities and interventions. Regular annual reports submitted by RCN members will offer valuable insights into referral processes and outcomes.

▶ **NADMO's Referral System:** It is important to sustain internal efforts to ensure that NADMO's comprehensive network of reintegration organisations and its proactive referral approach is effectively used and maintained future-forward.

▶ **Continuous Learning and Collaboration:** Wherever possible, it will be important to organise opportunities to promote a culture of continuous internal learning within national institutions and facilitate collaborations between external entities, such as ICMPD, FRONTEX and GIZ with local authorities. These partnerships can support ongoing skill transfer, knowledge exchange, and ensure sustained ownership and optimised project benefits.

▶ **New Partnerships:** GoG stakeholders may wish to expand into new partnerships with new and non-traditional actors, including academic institutions, diaspora groups and private firms, to enhance technical capacities, conduct capacity-building activities, and ensure coherent service provision for returnees, especially in the area of longer-term reintegration.

Driving Transnational Interventions and Global Collaboration in Return and Reintegration

▶ **Needs Assessment and Agile Methodologies:** ICMPD, and other international actors, can promote the RRF local ownership project's iterative and localised methodology as a model for future interventions, ensuring ongoing relevance by addressing evolving needs and institutional gaps through extensive consultations with national actors, identifying their most pressing needs and ensuring they lead project activities. The team can also emphasise continual change management and re-assessments to adapt strategies as the needs of beneficiaries expand or change.

▶ **Cross-Context Learning and Collaboration:** To showcase lessons learned and good practices, it will be important to leverage how findings from across other return and reintegration projects, including those under ERRIN and RRF, demonstrate synergies and common challenges and solutions in this area of work. In the future, opportunities to promote transnational learnings amongst front-line ministries with similar purviews (e.g., through study visits) may promote new approaches in national contexts.

▶ **Informing Global Initiatives and EU Strategies:** Given the RRF local project's successes, international actors may wish to demonstrate how the success of the RRF local ownership project aligns with the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration. This can offer insights and a robust model for future initiatives, not limited to EU-supported projects, but beneficial for global efforts in return and reintegration.

▶ **Expansion of Successful Models:** Designing return and reintegration mechanisms and entities, such as the MICR, was highlighted as a potential practice that can be replicated in other contexts, including in other airports and at border checkpoints. ICMPD can continue to explore the scalability and broader implementation of the MICR/airport desk model, assessing its potential in various regions.

Enhancing Operational Effectiveness in Return and Reintegration: Comprehensive Strategies for Sustainable Impact

▶ **Strengthen Sustainable Infrastructure and SOP Development:** Future-forward, GoG stakeholders may wish to support and enhance existing infrastructure developed resulting from RRF, like the enhancements provided to MICR, as well as to develop detailed SOPs to streamline return and reintegration processes. SOPs, in particular, can be developed nationally to better define reintegration processes and structures, potentially expanding the scope of what services and assistance is available to vulnerable returnees, including those who returned non-voluntarily.

▶ **Assess Priority Reintegration Services:** As the area of reintegration continues to require significant support, GoG stakeholders may wish to address challenges in this domain by coordinating cost-effective joint service provision, reducing any concerning service duplication, educating communities on regular migration pathways, and learning from successful practices beyond Ghana. Areas that continue to require support include healthcare, employment, accommodation, as well as readmission for non-Ghanian returnees. To address some of these concerns, GoG stakeholders may wish to:

- Consider establishing waiting areas near reception centers for returnees to ease fatigue, aid data collection, and support informative discussions for referrals.
- Continue prioritising access to essential health care supplies for returnees upon arrival, including those who may not have immediate access to their health insurance.
- Continue working with external agencies to establish referral protocols for returnees with mental health concerns.
- Provide access to accommodation for those who do not have social networks or cannot afford regular lodging and accommodations in Accra.
- Explore tailored skill development programs aligned with returnees' acquired skills abroad to enhance their employability and smooth reintegration.

- Enhance bilateral coordination with countries whose nationals are categorised as non-Ghanaian returnees and collaborate with international organisations and host countries to improve support systems offered to them.

◗ **Supporting Non-voluntary Returnees:** By designing and sharing inclusive services that address the specific needs of non-voluntary returnees, GoG institutions and partners may bridge the service gap between voluntary and non-voluntary returnees over time with targeted supports and activities.

◗ **Data Collection and Sharing Frameworks:** Relevant institutions may wish to establish robust frameworks for data collection and sharing among stakeholders to effectively monitor returnees' reintegration. This will require the enhancement of existing monitoring processes and the standardisation of data collection procedures for comprehensive information exchange.

Optimising Training Approaches for Effective Returnee Support

◗ Lastly, there were several recommendations that were identified relating to future trainings that are organised by GoG institutions or partners:

- When possible, maintain a blend of local and international trainers to enrich the material covered while enhancing training comprehensiveness and accessibility.
- Implement standardised trainings across various border points to ensure consistent skill development and knowledge transfer, particularly vital amid staff turnover in institutions like GIS.
- In the future, organise specialised training modules to equip personnel in addressing various vulnerabilities—psychosocial, social, and economic needs. Facilitate practical knowledge-sharing sessions specifically addressing identification and support for vulnerable returnees.
- If possible, include sessions where reintegrated returnees share firsthand experiences to enrich future training programs, providing invaluable insights for participants.
- Ensure that training initiatives first provide material and discussion covering the standard use of migration-related terminology.
- Encourage a deeper understanding of asylum systems among personnel to provide more informed support for returnees navigating asylum-related challenges.
- Prioritise specialised training for MICR officers focusing on handling vulnerable returnees, conflict resolution, and familiarity with EU asylum procedures.