



PRE-RETURN

Information Needs of Migrant Workers in
the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor

BACKGROUND REPORT



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This publication was made possible through support provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as part of the Better Regional Migration Management Programme (BRMM) "*Labour Mobility and Regional Integration for Safe, Orderly and Humane Labour Migration in East and Horn of Africa: East Africa Migration Management.*" The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM.

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This publication was issued without formal editing by IOM.

This publication was issued without IOM Publications Unit (PUB) approval.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication has been produced by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), within the framework of the The Better Regional Migration Management Programme (BRMM) "*Labour Mobility and Regional Integration for Safe, Orderly and Humane Labour Migration in East and Horn of Africa: East Africa Migration Management*", a regional, multi-partner, pilot project funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom. The BRMM programme aims to enhance labour migration governance and protection of migrant workers and their family members' human, social and labour rights through intra and inter-regional cooperation on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, to support regional integration and facilitate mobility for transformative inclusive and sustainable economic growth as well as youth and women empowerment.

Data collection and initial analysis for this report has been supported by Samuel Hall without whom this research would not have been possible. IOM expresses its sincere gratitude to its partners, particularly Government officials; civil society organizations; private employers; recruitment agencies; community leaders, and migrant workers, all of whom generally contributed their time, insights and knowledge throughout the development of this report. The research for this report has been undertaken with the financial support of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

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ACRONYMS

ADD	Abu Dhabi Dialogue
AUC	African Union Commission
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CIOP	Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme
CSOs	Civil society organizations
EHoA	East and Horn of Africa
GFMD	Global Forum for Migration and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LMRA	Labour Market Regulatory Authority
MPFA	Migration Policy Framework for Africa
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
PAO	Post-Arrival Orientation
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
PEO	Pre-Employment Orientation
PRO	Pre-Return Orientation
UAE	United Arab Emirates

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the decades, migrant workers in the Gulf have played critical roles in the development of these countries, supporting businesses as well as private households. As a popular destination of employment, migrant workers take up key roles across most sectors and make up the majority of labour forces across the region. In recent years, increasing numbers of nationals from the East and Horn of Africa (EHoA)* have been arriving in the Gulf for employment. As a result of the Gulf's labour migration management systems, the employment of migrant workers is typically temporary, with the expectation that once their work is complete, they return to their countries of origin or remigrate elsewhere. It is for this reason that voluntary return migration is widely recognized as an integral part of the experience of migrant workers, often acting as the final stage of the labour migration cycle.

The last phase of the labour migration cycle is the pre-return phase. During this stage, migrant workers decide to leave their countries of destination voluntarily, often returning back to their countries of origin. It is made up of several different components; it starts with a migrant worker in the country of destination who is considering leaving the country and returning home. This can be for a number of reasons, including but not limited to reaching the age of retirement, achievement of financial goals, personal well-being and mental health, desire to go home to families as well as employment contracts coming to an end or being terminated. Once this decision is made, there is the practical process of return and, subsequently, reintegration which includes familial, sociocultural and economic elements.

Due to the complexities and many factors that lead to, and impact return, this assessment set clear research parameters to ensure focus of analysis. It aimed to further understand the opportunities, challenges and information needs of return and reintegration of migrant workers who had left their country of employment voluntarily, typically after completing their employment contract. Additionally, as it revolves around labour migration and employment, this report focuses primarily on the economic and social dimensions of reintegration.

Throughout these experiences, information plays an essential role and shapes movements of persons in unprecedented ways. It accompanies migrant workers throughout their journeys, from the point of considering foreign employment at home, through to their return. At the time a migrant worker decides to leave their country of destination and either return home or look to remigrate, the information available plays a key role in forming their decisions and experiences, particularly with regards to reintegration. This report aims to better understand the information ecosystem associated with return, and the information gaps returning migrant workers currently contend with in the pre-return phase of their labour migration journey.

This report is informed by an information ecosystem approach that seeks to better understand the range of actors, institutions, channels, policies and programmes through which information is produced, disseminated and consumed. This includes formal initiatives like State-supported awareness campaigns, but also informal information flows, through community and kin networks, social media and word of mouth. This report argues that a healthy information ecosystem – within which accurate, accessible and actionable information flows freely between stakeholders – is a necessary precondition for the protection, empowerment and success of migrant workers.

***Note: For the purpose of this report, EHoA comprises the following countries from the subregion that were included in this mapping: Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda.**

COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION AND ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

This report is framed by the Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme (CIOP) approach of harmonizing the information migrant workers receive at four key stages of the labour migration cycle:



Pre-Employment Orientation (PEO): Equips prospective migrant workers with information to support well-informed decision-making processes on foreign employment and provide accurate information on safe and ethical recruitment.



Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO): Supports outgoing migrant workers to ensure their departure process is safe while also providing information on the upcoming journey, adjustment period and how to access support and assistance.



Post-Arrival Orientation (PAO): Provides newly arrived migrant workers in the country of destination with information regarding national labour laws, sociocultural norms and practices, workplace expectations and good conduct.



Pre-Return Orientation (PRO): Helps prepare returning migrant workers before leaving the country of destination, with useful information to support their access to social protection schemes, skills development opportunities and related resources.

Within the CIOP approach, this report is informed by key guiding principles for harmonized and tailored orientation:



Harmonized between countries of origin and destination to ensure that the information provided is accurate and relevant.



Tailored to distinct information needs and custom-made for specific labour migration corridors and industries.



Timely to deliver relevant information at the most appropriate point during the labour migration cycle.



Responsive to different learning needs, taking into account gender considerations and dimensions of possible vulnerability.



Rooted in a multi-stakeholder approach involving prospective and current migrant workers, employers, training institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), migrant associations and governments of countries of origin and destination.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As trends indicate an increase in the number of EHoA nationals engaging in labour migration, particularly to the Gulf region, effective systems to sustainably manage their eventual return and reintegration would be critical for returning migrant workers as well as other stakeholders. This report has captured key components of the complexities of decision related to voluntary return as well as the lived experiences of returnee migrant workers, particularly in navigating reintegration back home. Availability of tailored, accurate and useful information and resources related to this last stage of the labour migration cycle could be a crucial part of systems and programmes aimed at supporting returning and returnee migrant workers. Information programmes related to pre-return and return benefit from being harmonized between EHoA and Gulf countries to ensure accuracy of content and maximize outreach and accessibility.

This section takes the liberty to propose a series of key findings and recommendations for the consideration of stakeholders with regards to addressing decision-making and information needs associated with voluntary return and reintegration:

COMMON AND PRIORITY INFORMATION NEEDS AT PRE-RETURN

- End-of-service benefits, complaints mechanisms and assistance
- Healthy reintegration within changed family and community relationships
- Livelihood support and employment opportunities
- Guidance on use of skills acquired overseas
- Support to establish small businesses
- Ethical and safe recruitment for remigration

Key finding: There is currently an absence of formal and institutionalized information programmes that provide information to EHoA migrant workers who are considering returning from the Gulf or who have returned.



Recommendation: Gulf and EHoA countries should consider the development of information programming related to return, made available to EHoA migrant workers in the Gulf who are planning to return and who have already returned. This could be composed of information interventions spanning the country of origin and destination. These programmes can be key reference points and address information needs at the pre-return phase while still in the country of destination as well as support their return and reintegration back home. Its design and implementation should be informed by global good practices, based on the principles of accessibility, relevance and impact.

Key finding: While the benefits of information programming related to pre-departure and post-arrival are largely appreciated, the conceptualization of pre-return and return information initiatives remains less clear.



Recommendation: Opportunities should be created to bring together EHoA-Gulf stakeholders to discuss pre-return and return information needs, build a joint understanding of the benefits of information programming and identify mechanisms to effectively harmonize and coordinate across countries as well as PDO and PAO programmes.

Key finding: EHoA returning migrant workers and returnees rely heavily on their personal network and communities to gather information and guidance to support their return and reintegration.



Recommendation: A whole-of-society approach would be critical to incorporate when conceptualizing, designing, implementing and evaluating information programmes aiming to support EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase and after their arrival. Diasporas, CSOs, faith-based organizations and community associations are understood to be trusted sources of information for migrant workers. This approach would also help ensure the relevance and responsiveness of information that is being incorporated in PRO. Considerations should also be made on how these stakeholders could be key service providers and avenues of dissemination of relevant information in both countries of destination and origin.

Key finding: Many EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase are unaware of services and mechanisms available to them, particularly with regards to labour disputes and grievances.



Recommendation: Governments, in partnership with employers and other stakeholders, may consider the development of comprehensive and sustained communication strategies to ensure the regular provision of information to migrant workers throughout their stay in the country. This could then ensure that during the pre-return phase, migrant workers are already aware and able to effectively access services as well as conclude administrative requirements with ease before their departure from the country of destination. This could be particularly helpful in accessing their full entitlements after the completion of their employment contracts and settling any labour disputes.

Key finding: Returning women migrant workers employed in the domestic sector have increased difficulties in accessing relevant information related to end-of-service benefits, return and reintegration.



Recommendation: Targeted efforts should be made to cater to the information needs of migrant domestic workers, accounting for their workspaces being typically restricted to private households. This could involve orientation programmes catering to employers of migrant domestic workers, ensuring they have accurate information on end-of-service benefits they are obliged to provide to their domestic employees. Information on return, complaints mechanisms and assistance should be provided to domestic workers themselves, through sustained communication channels as well as integrated messaging in PDO and PAO programmes.

Key finding: After return to EHoA countries of origin, many returnee migrant workers reported a lack of awareness of existing services and programming provided by Governments or CSOs that could support their reintegration, particularly with regards to livelihood support. This appears to be linked to practical difficulties in disseminating information on these programming widely, including to difficult-to-reach geographical locations such as rural and remote areas.



Recommendation: In acknowledging that after return to countries of origin, returnee migrant workers may be harder to reach, EHoA diplomatic missions and/or partners in countries of destination may consider providing information on reintegration-related programmes and services during the pre-return phase. The information should also include details on eligibility and access. This would allow enhanced planning and empower returning migrant workers to accurately assess possibilities and livelihood options, particularly on establishing small businesses. Recommendations also were made to the benefits of information portals, acting as “one-stop shops” with consolidated information on return preparedness, and reintegration services available in countries of origin.

Key finding: Accurate and accessible information on employment opportunities appear as a top priority for EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase and after their return back home.



Recommendation: EHoA governments and stakeholders could view PRO and related information interventions after return as a vehicle to disseminate information on employment opportunities available in the country of origin. This information could be made available through stakeholders in countries of origin as well as destination. To ensure the accessibility of this information, it should be decentralized with the support of CSOs, recruitment agencies and training centres to name a few. Up-to-date information on various social media platforms could also help maximize outreach.

Skills development and recognition is seen as a crucial factor in supporting the return and effective reintegration of EHoA returnee migrant workers.



Recommendation: PRO should be seen as a space for participants to meaningfully reflect on the skills they have acquired through their time abroad. This self-assessment, with related resources, could help returnee migrant workers identify their potential and possible avenues forward, with regards to their economic reintegration. Additionally, EHoA and Gulf governments could consider advancing collaboration in the area of skills; the promotion of skills recognition and certification schemes would be beneficial for all stakeholders involved in labour migration.

Key finding: Comprehending information related to return can be challenging for EHoA migrant workers, particularly women domestic workers, who may have low education attainment or literacy skills.



Recommendation: PRO and related material should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all, including those with lower levels of literacy. This is critical to ensure that no one is left behind. All resources should be in languages and dialects understood by the returned migrant workers, their families and their communities. For those who would have difficulty with written products, audio-visual aids are beneficial in highlighting key messages.

Key finding: EHoA returnee migrant workers report difficulties in their reintegration experiences, including but not limited to their perceptions of success and failure related to their time abroad, lack of preparedness as well as stigma. This was more pronounced with women returnee migrant workers.



Recommendation: PRO is recommended to be seen as a key avenue to build healthy expectations with regards to reintegration, share guidance on how to address any stigma as well as equip participants with practical coping tools. This could also be accompanied with information on any programming or services that could provide psychosocial support, including grassroots initiatives led by those who have already returned back home.

Key finding: Many EHoA returnee migrant workers intend to remigrate for foreign employment.



Recommendation: In contexts without structured and formal PEO programmes, PRO could incorporate a refresher with key messages on how to engage in ethical recruitment and safe labour migration. Participants should be directed to relevant resources for their future reference.

BACKGROUND



INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, migrant workers in the Gulf have played critical roles in the development of these countries, supporting businesses as well as private households. As a popular destination of employment, migrant workers take up key roles across most sectors and make up the majority of labour forces across the region. In recent years, increasing numbers of nationals from the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) have been arriving in the Gulf for employment. The EHOA countries of origin included in this report are Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda.

As a result of the Gulf's labour migration management systems, the employment of migrant workers is typically temporary, with the expectation that once their work is complete, they return to their countries of origin or remigrate elsewhere. It is for this reason that voluntary return migration is widely recognized as an integral part of the experience of migrant workers, often acting as the final stage of the labour migration cycle.

There are multiple factors that influence the individual decisions of migrant workers to return, ranging from considerations of employment conditions and finances, mental health and well-being, family-related motivations as well as future planning. Like in other major countries of destination, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted migrant workers and dynamics of return migration. For many, their return was not planned at that particular point but was felt to be a necessity due to the economies, lockdown measures in countries of destination, contexts and personal circumstances in countries of origin as well as programmes for repatriation. This has led to a renewed focus among stakeholders on understanding patterns and trends relating to return and subsequently also to reintegration programming and efforts.

Importantly, voluntary return of migrant workers cannot be understood in silo. Often, it is intertwined with processes and experiences of reintegration, across various related dimensions, including social reintegration, economic reintegration and psychological integration (IOM, 2015).¹ It is an essential part of the return migration process as it generally contributes to the sustainability of the benefits of migration after the migrant worker's return. Those who have felt their labour migration experience was unsuccessful and have not prepared for reintegration into work forces at home may encounter more difficulties and challenges. For others, economic reintegration can take the form of capitalizing on their skill set gained abroad and even opening their own businesses and endeavours. Furthermore, return can also be linked with remigration for foreign employment. Many return home with the objective to return to the Gulf to continue to advance towards their financial goals and aspirations.

THE POWER OF INFORMATION

Throughout these experiences, information plays an essential role and shapes movements of persons in unprecedented ways. It accompanies migrant workers throughout their journeys, from the point of considering foreign employment, through to their return. At the time a migrant worker decides to leave their country of destination and either return home or look to remigrate, the information available plays a key role in forming their decisions and experiences, particularly with regards to reintegration.

While information is powerful, research carried out previously² has documented how inaccurate information and misinformation have the potential to lead migrants into difficult and dangerous situations, risking their health, well-being or even their lives.

OVERVIEW OF THIS MAPPING AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is within the above-mentioned context, a mapping and needs assessment was carried out to understand the information landscape at the last stage of the labour migration cycle related to return. It centres on migrant workers from the EHoA who have been employed in the Gulf. This was accompanied by information drawn from the Gulf countries, with a particular focus on Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Due to the complexities and many factors that lead to, and impact return, this assessment set clear research parameters to ensure focus of analysis. It aimed to further understand the opportunities, challenges and information needs of return and reintegration of migrant workers who had left their country of destination voluntarily, typically after completing their employment contract. Additionally, as it revolves around labour migration and employment, this report focuses primarily on the economic and social dimensions of reintegration.

This mapping and needs assessment adopted a multi-stakeholder and gender-responsive approach,³ ensuring the voices of returning and returnee migrant workers are at its very heart. It is envisioned that the findings and recommendations of this report will contribute to forming the basis for designing orientation programmes and information interventions that support and empower returning and returnee migrant workers. Additionally, the recommendations will inform future programmatic planning as well as policy and advocacy strategies for the consideration of governments as well as humanitarian and development actors in both regions.

Finally, this report is part of a series of mappings and information needs assessments to span the entire labour migration cycle. For this, it is recommended to be read in conjunction with the following:

- *Background Report on the Pre-Employment Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor.*
- *Background Report on the Pre-Departure Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor.*
- *Background Report on the Post-Arrival Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor.*



INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON INFORMATION

The central importance of the provision of timely and accessible information in the labour migration cycle has long been recognized. In addition to governments around the world developing innovative approaches to disseminating and making readily available key information at different points of the labour migration cycle, information itself has emerged as a key theme in international migration discourse. The International Labour Organization (ILO) *Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration* (2006), for example, highlights the importance of:

- Providing information to employers' and workers' organizations concerning the rights of migrant workers (10.9).
- Disseminating information on trafficking to warn potential victims of its dangers and raise public awareness on the issue (11.8).
- Facilitating migrant workers' departure, journey, and reception by providing, in a language they understand, information, training and assistance prior to their departure and on arrival concerning the migration process, their rights and the general conditions of life and work in the country of destination (12.1).

More recently, the *Global Compact on Migration* (2018) dedicated one of its 23 objectives to the theme of information. Five actions are laid out under Objective 3 – *Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration* – including:

(a) Launch and publicize a centralized and publicly accessible national website to make information available on regular migration options, such as on country-specific immigration laws and policies, visa requirements, application formalities, fees and conversion criteria, employment permit requirements, professional qualification requirements, credential assessment and equivalences, training and study opportunities, and living costs and conditions, in order to inform the decisions of migrants.

(b) Promote and improve systematic bilateral, regional and international cooperation and dialogue to exchange information on migration-related trends, including through joint databases, online platforms, international training centres and liaison networks, while upholding the right to privacy and protecting personal data.

(c) Establish open and accessible information points along relevant migration routes that can refer migrants to child-sensitive and gender-responsive support and counselling, offer opportunities to communicate with consular representatives of the country of origin, and make available relevant information, including on human rights and fundamental freedoms, appropriate protection and assistance, options and pathways for regular migration, and possibilities for return, in a language that the person concerned understands.

(d) Provide newly arrived migrants with targeted, gender-responsive, child-sensitive, accessible and comprehensive information and legal guidance on their rights and obligations, including on compliance with national and local laws, obtaining of work and resident permits, status adjustments, registration with authorities, access to justice to file complaints about rights violations, as well as access to basic services.

(e) Promote multilingual, gender-responsive and evidence-based information campaigns and organize awareness-raising events and pre-departure orientation training in countries of origin, in cooperation with local authorities, consular and diplomatic missions, the private sector, academia, migrant and diaspora organizations and civil society, in order to promote safe, orderly and regular migration, as well as to highlight the risks associated with irregular and unsafe migration.

The critical importance of orientation programmes has also been advocated for in Africa. In 2018, for example, governments in Africa adopted the *Migration Policy Framework for Africa* (MPFA) and its Plan of Action (2018 – 2030).⁴ To fulfil commitments under the MPFA, Member States are recommended to:

- Provide access to accurate information on labour migration at pre-departure and post-arrival stages, including terms and conditions of work, remedies and access to legal advice in the event of violations.
- Provide comprehensive socio-economic, psychological, legal, and orientation services to returning women and girls, before, during and after the returning process, with the aim of facilitating their reintegration.
- Provide access to complaints/reporting mechanisms that protect women against reprisals, identify and address coercion and abuse and ensure safe and sustainable reintegration, including services to recognize and certify the skills and competences of returning women and girls.
- Promote the integration of migrants into host societies, including through public information and education campaigns, in order to prevent xenophobia, foster mutual cultural acceptance and ensure that the rights of migrants are respected and protected.
- Promote informational/educational campaigns to raise awareness about the gender dimension of migration among migrants, those affected by migration, and policy makers and personnel involved in migration, especially in the managing of the migration process.

Additionally, article 7(a) of the *AU Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers* calls for AU Member States to **“Strengthen the capacity of [our] regional and national systems to provide free and accurate information about migration to migrant workers and members of their families that is gender responsive and includes information about the general working and living conditions in countries of destination, immigration laws and policies, terms and conditions of work, and access to legal advice and remedies in a manner and language that can be readily understood.”**

Following the *High Level Regional Ministerial Forum on Harmonizing Labour Migration Policies in East and Horn of Africa* in January 2020, a Communique and Call to Action Priorities (2020-2023) was signed by participation of the 11 countries within the EHofA (including the 10 countries covered in this report and Sudan).

A year later, the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) emphasized the importance of coordination between countries of origin and countries of destination, looking to the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), and in particular the Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme (CIOP) as best practices (Bisong 2021). The African Union Commission (AUC), in partnership with the Governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, announced their intention to partner with one another to pilot CIOP across key labour corridors.⁵ This demonstrates the growing recognition of the need to develop orientation programmes throughout key stages of the labour migration cycle, harmonized between countries of origin and destination.

THE CIOP APPROACH

IOM is a strong advocate for the provision of accurate, timely and relevant information and has extensive experience in developing orientation programmes for migrant workers in different contexts. Since 2017 and building on its history of over 70 years providing tailored migrant orientation at the request of governments, IOM has been acting as the management site for the implementation of the CIOP, under the patronage of the ADD. The programme was designed to strengthen the labour market integration and protection of migrant workers by addressing critical information gaps and misinformation among the migrant worker population arriving to the Gulf from ADD-participating countries of origin.

To accomplish this, CIOP takes a whole-of-cycle approach (hereafter referred to as the CIOP approach) of harmonizing the information migrant workers receive at four key stages of the labour migration cycle:



Pre-Employment Orientation (PEO): Equips prospective migrant workers with information to support well-informed decision-making processes on foreign employment and provide accurate information on safe and ethical recruitment.



Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO): Supports outgoing migrant workers to ensure their departure process is safe while also providing information on the upcoming journey, adjustment period and how to access support and assistance.



Post-Arrival Orientation (PAO): Provides newly arrived migrant workers in the country of destination with information regarding national labour laws, sociocultural norms and practices, workplace expectations and good conduct.

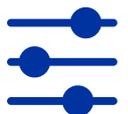


Pre-Return Orientation (PRO): Helps prepare returning migrant workers before leaving the country of destination with useful information to support their access to social protection schemes, skills development opportunities and related resources.

Guiding principles for CIOP



Harmonized between countries of origin and destination to ensure that the information provided is accurate and relevant.



Tailored to distinct information needs and custom-made for specific labour migration corridors and industries.



Timely to deliver relevant information at the most appropriate point during the labour migration cycle.



Responsive to different learning needs, taking into account gender considerations and dimensions of possible vulnerability.



Rooted in a multi-stakeholder approach involving prospective and current migrant workers, employers, training institutions, CSOs, migrant associations and governments of countries of origin and destination.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRE-RETURN PHASE

The last phase of the labour migration cycle is typically when migrant workers leave their countries of destination and return back to their countries of origin. It is made up of a number of different components; it starts with a migrant worker in the country of destination who is considering leaving the country and returning home. This can be for a number of reasons, including but not limited to reaching the age of retirement, achievement of financial goals, personal well-being and mental health, desire to go home to families as well as employment contracts coming to an end or being terminated. Once this decision is made, there is the practical process of return and, subsequently, reintegration which includes familial, sociocultural and economic elements.

While for many migrant workers, return is permanent and marks a new phase in their lives at home, for others, being home acts as a steppingstone before remigrating abroad for employment, often back to the same region or even country. In a circular fashion, pre-return and return can then feed into the pre-employment phase, starting the cycle of labour migration once again.

While experiences of return and reintegration are diverse, all start before leaving the country of destination. This can be a time of mixed emotions, determined also by the motives of return. When return is planned and an outcome of a successful experience of labour migration, pre-return can be a time of excitement and readiness to start a new chapter. When return is not necessarily planned but rather unexpected, it can be a period of shock, anxiety and uncertainty. How one goes through this pre-return phase can be influential in contributing to how seamless and organic return and reintegration is.

It is also important to note that this stage of labour migration has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last few years. With the significant jolt on labour markets and the private sector in the Gulf, the level of unemployment and underemployment has resulted in many migrant workers returning to their countries of origin.

At pre-return and after return, information is powerful. This becomes even more important against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic with health, employment and travel requirements evolving rapidly. Informing returning migrant workers prior to their return would be beneficial in two key ways:

1. Information on social protection, end-of-service benefits and complaints mechanisms in countries of destination gives them the opportunity to avail entitlements before they return.
2. Information on employment options, financial aid opportunities as well as support channels in countries of origin contributes to enabling more informed and conscious return and reintegration choices. Information, thus, becomes an important tool to reduce vulnerabilities and empower returning migrant workers, encouraging the utilization of skills developed in countries of destination to support economic reintegration in local labour markets in countries of origin.

INTRODUCING PRE-RETURN ORIENTATION

As highlighted, the experience of return is composed of three main components: the **pre-return phase**, **the practical process of return** and finally **reintegration in countries of origin or remigration for employment**.

Acknowledging that information would be crucial at the pre-return phase, this related orientation can be conceptualized to cater to two key components of the pre-return phase. Firstly, pre-return orientation should provide guidance to returning migrant workers to support return preparedness and secondly, provide guidance on various reintegration services that would support after their arrival in their country of origin. This would also include information on engaging in ethical recruitment for those looking to remigrate for labour migration.

As return is guided also by labour migration management systems and frameworks of countries of destination, it is crucial that PRO is tailored to specific countries, reflecting relevant processes and requirements.

Return preparedness: The labour migration management systems of the Gulf enable migrant workers to be employed in the country for a temporary period of time. While this can span to a number of decades, it is expected that migrant workers, once their employment period is complete, return to their countries of origin. For this, it is important to equip migrant workers with information that will help their repatriation, ensure the fulfilment of all necessary administrative requirements as well as minimize stress and anxiety. Orientation programmes at this stage will help prepare returning migrant workers before leaving the country of destination, with useful information to support their access to social protection schemes that they are eligible to in country of destination. Additionally, information on reintegration services that includes job availability, skills development opportunities and financial aid in country of origin would prepare returning migrant workers to access reintegration services upon return to their country of origin.

Reintegration support: Through our primary data collection carried out in different countries, it has been observed that migrant workers upon return face challenges to find jobs that match their upgraded skills in the local job market and financial aid to set up small scale businesses. Orientation programmes with information on available reintegration services and procedures to access such services would help guide returnee migrant workers and get maximum benefit by availing available services.

Objectives of PRO

- **Prepare for return:** PRO supports participants with the process of their return, including guidance on the practical process and requirements related to travel. This becomes even more paramount during global health emergencies as it acts as a platform to disseminate key information on health and travel requirements, tailored to both the country of destination as well as origin.
- **Provide information on complaints and assistance mechanisms:** At pre-return, migrant workers are finalizing or have recently finalized exit requirements and settlements with their employers, including end-of-service benefits. PRO should provide information on mechanisms

at their disposal in order to file any complaints or grievances with the governments of countries of destination. This information can support those with grievances to activate processes that allow them to continue following their cases even after their return back home, particularly with recovering unsettled end-of-service benefits.

- **Reflect on skills development and related resources:** Appreciating that many migrant workers have built important technical and soft skills while abroad, PRO should assist participants with reflections on how these skill sets can be capitalized to support their reintegration. This can be linked with considerations of skill demands in job markets in countries of origin as well as referrals to any skills development schemes, livelihood support and additional vocational training or entrepreneurship initiatives.
- **Support healthy reintegration:** Returning migrant workers may experience a wide variety of needs to support their reintegration, spanning from economic, sociocultural and psychosocial needs. PRO should act as an important point in providing guidance and building balanced expectations on what this process could look like, including challenges, particularly with reintegrating into changed family dynamic and communities. Where available, it should provide clear information on services, programming and resources available in countries of origin that could support after arrival. It can also be considered to include details on job vacancies available back home.
- **Assist in accessing social protection:** PRO can also provide information on processes to (re)enrol and access social protection and security schemes after their return to their country of origin.
- **Remind of safe recruitment and pathways:** Understanding that many migrate workers return home to then remigrate for foreign employment, PRO should provide a short refresher with key messages on engaging in safe recruitment and labour migration, also highlighting risks of irregular labour migration and signs of unsafe recruitment.
- **Provide gender-responsive information:** Noting that more women are embarking on foreign employment and also returning to their home countries, it is important to acknowledge that have different information needs must be catered for. PRO must provide gender-responsive information, particularly in reintegration challenges, family management and expectations as well as access to relevant resources.

THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

This report is informed by an information ecosystem approach that seeks to better understand the range of actors, institutions, channels, policies and programmes through which information is produced, disseminated and consumed (see Figure 1). This includes formal initiatives such as State-supported information and awareness campaigns and informal information flows, such as community and kin networks, social media and word of mouth. Adopted from fields as diverse as environmental studies, media and public health – and often referred to as ‘information ecology’ – an ‘information ecosystem’ can be defined as a **“loose, dynamic configuration of different sources, flows, producers, consumers, and sharers of information interacting**

within a defined community or space” (Susman-Peña et al. 2015). Recognizing the inherently social nature of information, the information ecosystem approach privileges the lived experience of information users; in this case, returnee migrant workers in EHoA countries. It seeks to understand the channels through which information flows, and the various ways in which information, or a lack thereof, impacts the well-being of migrant workers. As Susman-Peña et al. note, *“Without the ability to access, create, disseminate, and share critical information about the world around them, individuals are incapable of understanding the challenges they confront, adapting to an evolving environment, nor ultimately, improving their lives”* (2015).

Figure 1:
Information ecosystem



- **Information Needs**
Information needs of the target community
- **Information Landscape**
The organizations and infrastructures that underpin information production and flow
- **Impact of Information**
The effect of information on individual and community well-being and its potential to foster positive change
- **Dynamic of Access**
The range of power structures and dynamics that inform migrant workers' access to critical information
- **Production and Movement**
The variety of types and sources of information available
- **Use**
The factors that inform how relevant information is and how information is applied
- **Social Trust**
Influence of social dynamics and trust networks on the flow and use of information
- **Influencers**
The range of actors and institutions that influence how information is circulated and used

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to examine the situation of returnee migrant workers; how and why they return; their return experiences and their economic reintegration. It employed a qualitative research design to contextualize and interpret data using from both primary and secondary sources. The scope of this mapping and needs assessment included migrant workers from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda who had been employed in Gulf countries, particularly Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

To ensure an evidence-based and whole-of-society approach, primary data was collected from a wide range of stakeholders involved in the labour migration cycle between the Gulf and the EHoA. These groups included returnee migrant workers, government officials, CSOs, recruitment agencies, employers as well as academics. Data collection tools, including structured key informant interview and focus group discussion guides, were designed to understand the circumstances in which migrant workers had decided to return, their experiences as well as challenges and information needs related to their return and reintegration. As this assessment takes place within the framework of labour migration, a particular focus is given to economic reintegration of returnee migrant workers in the EHoA countries in focus. It is also important to note that the methodology centred on understanding the experiences and information needs of migrant workers who were not in situations of irregularity in countries of destination prior to their return.

Measures were put in place to ensure that the experiences, opinions and information needs of both returnee men and women migrant workers were captured adequately. This included target questions in all data collection tools as well as relevant analysis in this report. Data was collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions as well as relevant written requests for information. Interviews took place between December 2021 and March 2022. As a result of continuing COVID-19 restrictions and to safeguard the health of data collectors and respondents wherever possible, data was collected remotely.

An overview of those who contributed to this assessment are as follows:



An extensive desk review was also carried out focused on labour migration frameworks, policies and agreements as well as the latest trends and developments between the Gulf States and the EHoA, particularly with regards to return and COVID-19. This research applied a gender-sensitive lens in terms of both the methodological approach and the substantive analysis undertaken, endeavouring to understand

the particular challenges and information needs of returnee women migrant workers in the EHoA.

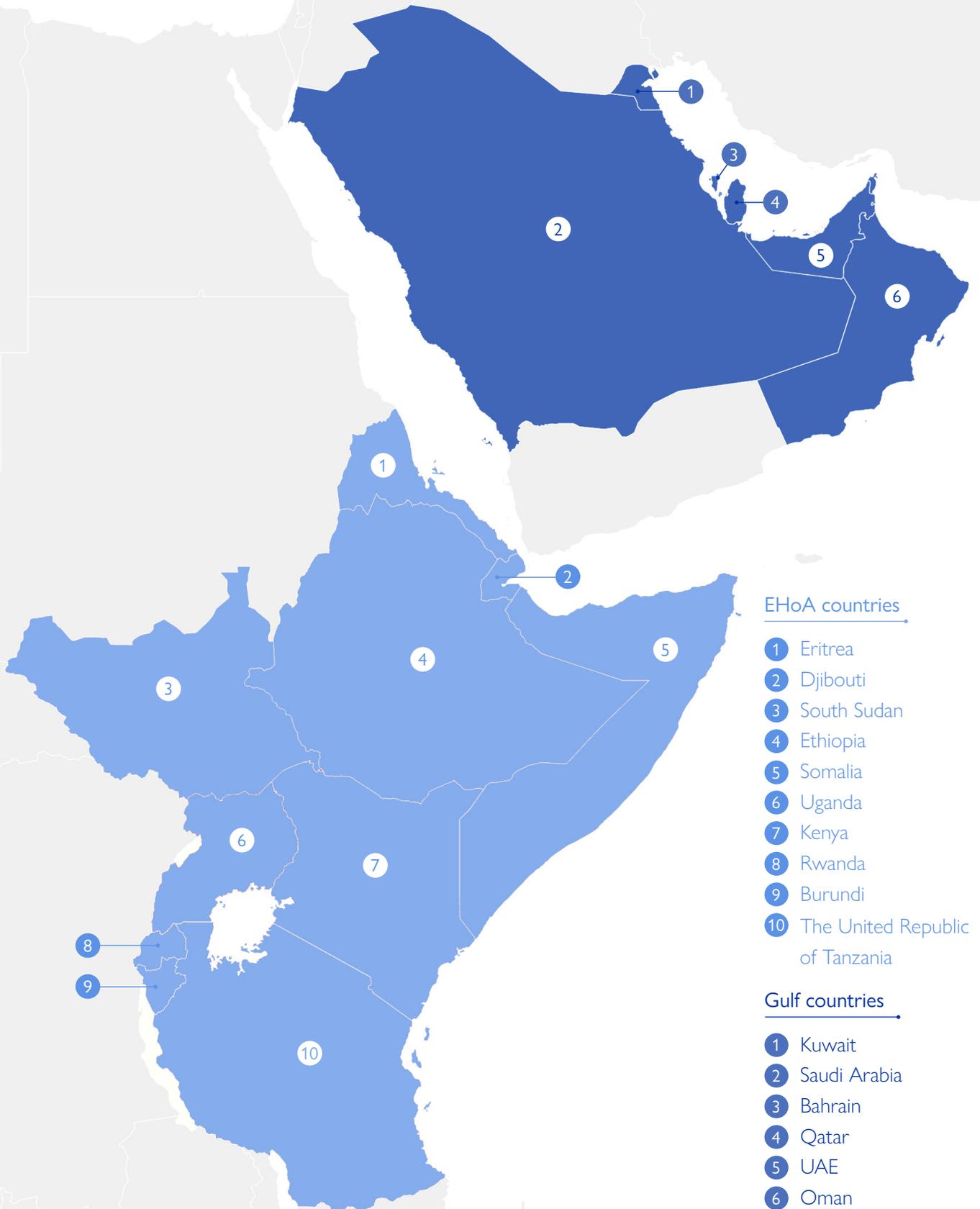
This research does not attempt to offer representative samples, rather it aimed to provide narratives of the experiences and challenges faced by migrant workers during their return and reintegration. The method of narrative analysis was employed to provide a qualitative understanding of the subjective perceptions and experiences of migrant workers who took part in the assessment, against the backdrop of the pandemic, noting that this may not be adequately captured by statistics.

PART ONE

OVERVIEW OF RETURN TO THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA FROM THE GULF



Figure 2: Map of the East and Horn of Africa and Gulf States

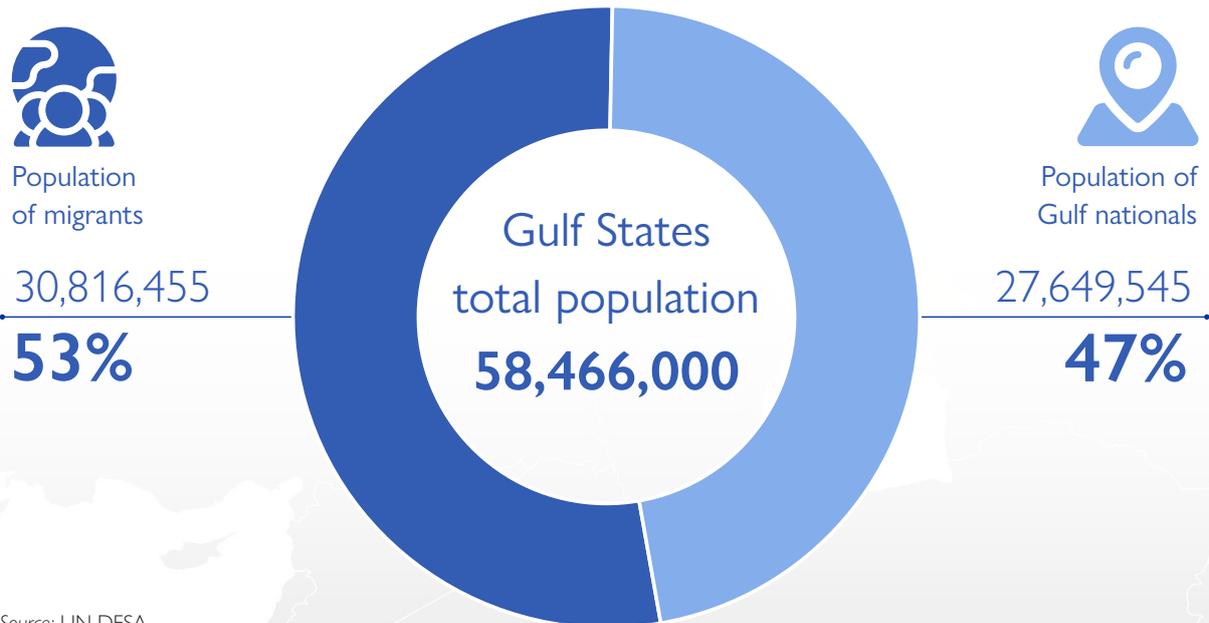


Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE REGION

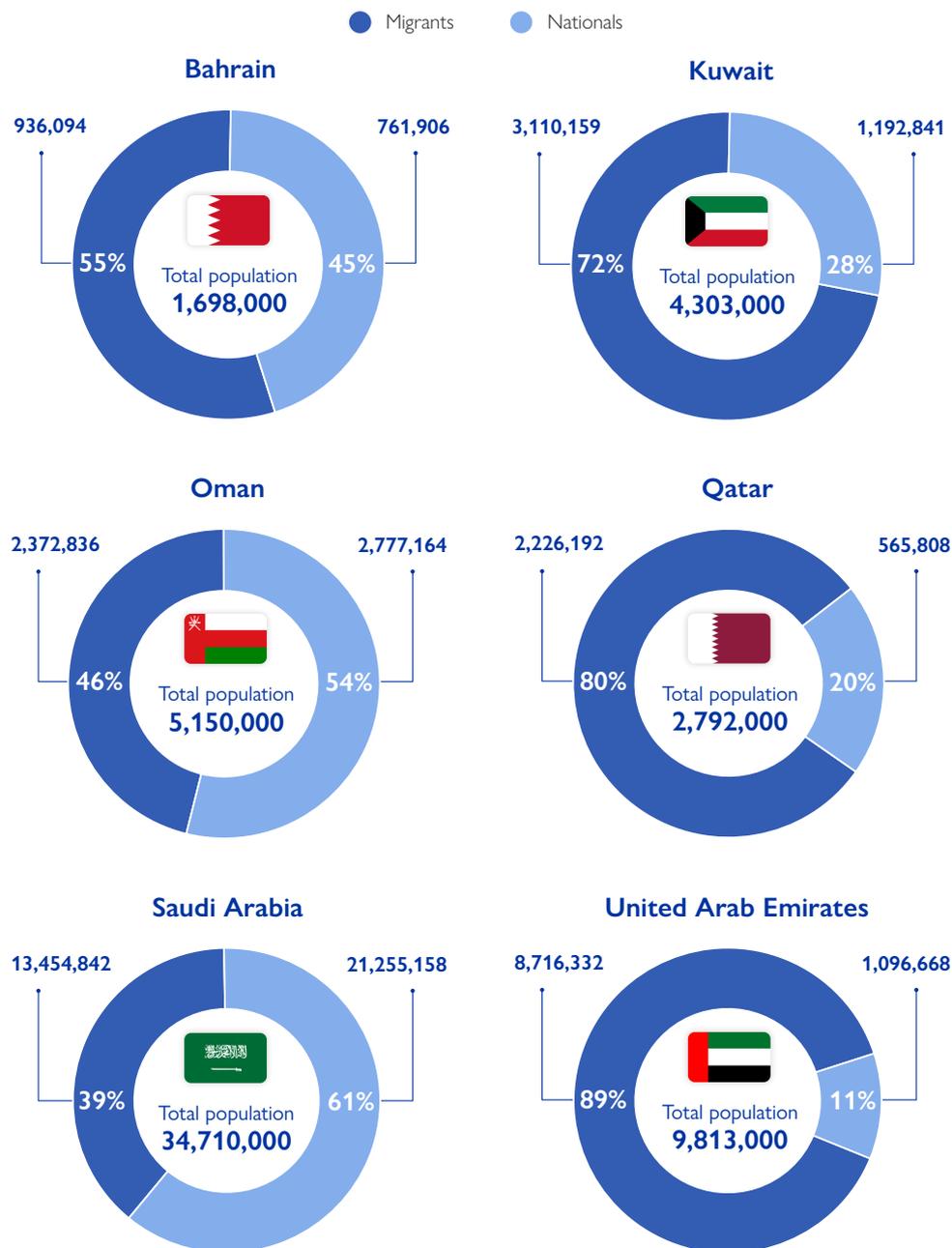
In 2020, the Gulf States were home to approximately 31 million migrants (see Figure 3), representing more than half of the region's total population and 8.3 per cent of global migrant workers.⁶ The majority of these workers are from Asia, with a sizeable number also coming from Africa, especially Egypt, and increasingly from countries in East Africa, particularly Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.⁷

Figure 3: Proportion of migrants in Gulf States (2020)



The Gulf States represent one of the main regions of destination globally for migrant workers, with flows of labour migration from the EHoA increasing substantially in recent years. Migrant workers have played important roles in contributing to the development of these countries, contributing to the public and private sectors as well as providing indispensable support to countless households across the region. Many of these migrant workers are low to semi-skilled workers, in sectors such as construction and hospitality, or domestic workers.⁸

Figure 4: Demographic breakdown of Gulf States (2020)



Migrant workers make up the majority – and in some cases, the overwhelming majority – of the Gulf States' total labour force. This is across all Gulf States, as illustrated by Figure 4. Employment in the region acts as a significant lifeline to family members, communities and the economies of countries of origin. Remittances flowing from the Gulf States amount to 115 billion in 2019, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia as two of the three top remittance-sending countries globally.⁹

According to ILO (2021),¹⁰ there are an estimated 6.6 million domestic workers in the Arab States. In Saudi Arabia alone, there are over 3.7 million domestic workers. Today, domestic workers account for more than 12 per cent of total employment in the region. Driven by increasing child and elder care needs, and underpinned by regional demographics and cultural norms, demand for home-based care and domestic workers is set to continue growing (Tayah and Assaf 2018), with increasing numbers coming from the EHoA. While progress has been made in recent years, domestic workers are yet to be fully included in the region's most progressive legislation and remain vulnerable to exploitation (Laiboni 2019).

According to the recently published ILO report on *Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers (2021)*:



8.7%

of global domestic workers are employed in the Arab States

Six countries in the region rank among the ten countries with the

TOP 10



highest proportion

of domestic workers among the employed population.



Domestic workers account for

12.3%

of total employment in the region, making it the region with the highest percentage of domestic workers as a share of total employment

The country with the highest share of domestic workers in the world is Saudi Arabia, where domestic work represents about



28%

of total employment.



In Saudi Arabia, between 2007 and 2017, the total number of domestic workers

increased

from 830,000 to 2.42 million

In Bahrain, the sector **more than doubled**

2x

from 50,000 to 111,000, between 2005 and 2016

Labour migration management in Gulf States is rooted in the sponsorship system, which provides the legal basis for both the residency and employment of migrant workers. This is a **“collection of laws, administrative regulations, norms and customary practices which places primary responsibility for regulating the relationship between worker and employer in the hands of the employer.”**¹¹ This structure traditionally ties the migrant worker’s employment status to their residency in the country. It also signifies a heavy reliance on employers or sponsors, often leading to migrant workers requiring permission to enter or exit the country as well as change employers. Over the years, a series of labour reforms have taken place across the region to strengthen labour migration management systems in order to foster suitable conditions for sustainable economic development and improve the migrant worker-employer relationship.

RETURN MIGRATION

“Return migration, like migration in general, is a complex phenomenon. However, it is by no means exceptional. For many people who leave their homes, it is often with the expectation that they will return at some point. This is true for people who migrate for positive reasons such as education or employment, but perhaps even more so for those forced to migrate, whose return is usually conditional upon an improvement of the situation that forced them to leave. Some migrants never return. But many others do, circumstances. But many others do and under a variety of different circumstances.”¹²

A key consideration in this decision appears to be an assessment of whether financial goals or plans have been achieved and if not, the determination of the most effective path in order to obtain these objectives.

Regardless of the legal frameworks that govern their return, migrant workers can opt to return for a variety of reasons. This decision is often complex, multidimensional and influenced by a variety of overlapping considerations across the country of destination and origin.

Related to the country of origin, these may include improved conditions, particularly with regards to perceptions of more economic opportunities and livelihood opportunities. Family factors, duties and urgencies also play an important role, as well as personal considerations, including well-being and mental health. Desire to spend the later years of one’s life at home along with familial duties (care of sick or elderly relatives, protection of vulnerable family members) are cited as common reasons for returning.¹³ Furthermore, many migrant workers who are close to reaching the age of retirement long to spend quality time with children and grandchildren.

In the country of destination, the conclusion or termination of employment contracts can act as a primary reason for return. Other factors include difficult living and working conditions, unsuccessful reintegration into the country’s society and culture as well as lack of sustained employment can also influence the decision of some migrant workers to return home.

While these factors have influenced decision-making processes at the pre-return stage, in recent years, nationalization programmes in the Gulf as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted considerations of return.

Workplace Nationalization Policies

With nationals making up a minority in the labour forces in the region along with increasing priorities on sustainable economic development, Gulf governments have been investing significant efforts in workplace nationalization policies. These look to reduce the reliance on foreign labour by putting in place the structure to encourage and/or compel businesses to recruit eligible nationals rather than migrant workers. This included significant training programmes to upskill nationals, recruitment quotas of nationals and migrant workers as well as efforts to create more jobs that appeal to Gulf nationals.

These policies and programmes have played a contributing role to an increasing number of migrant workers returning home over the years. For instance, 1 million migrant workers are believed to have left Saudi Arabia between 2017 to 2020, in part, due to updates introduced to the country's nationalization programme, Nitaqat.¹⁴

COVID-19

In the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on migrant worker populations. With the severe economic impact the pandemic has had globally, many migrant workers lost their jobs and have had to return to their countries of origin. This flow of return migration often took place without adequate operational systems and protocols in place to ensure safe repatriation and effective navigation of new travel restrictions, quarantine requirements and health checks. Over the course of the first year of the pandemic, more than 108,000 COVID-related international travel restrictions were put in place by countries along with the rolling internal movement restrictions within countries.¹⁵ Due to this, several migrants found themselves stranded in countries of destination, unable to get home. As of 13 July 2020, IOM's Return Task Force had identified at least 3 million stranded migrants globally, of which 1.2 million were understood to be in the Middle East.¹⁶

For migrant domestic workers, COVID-19 exacerbated structural vulnerabilities that existed before the pandemic. Domestic workers, in cleaning, cooking and caring for families, face elevated risks of exposure due to physical proximity with those who may have contracted the virus as well as often much heavier workloads as a result of employers and family members working and spending more time at home because of lockdown measures and mobility restrictions. Additionally, for many domestic workers "loss of employment has become as threatening as the virus itself"; concerns of transmission have caused many to stay home, either at the request of their employers and difficulties to navigate lockdown measures have led many to find themselves without employment and no income replacement.¹⁷

Media reports reveal that, since the start of the pandemic, almost half a million migrant workers have been repatriated from the Gulf to their countries of origin,¹⁸ many of them hurriedly and without compensation packages. Though movement-related public data of EHoA migrant workers in the Gulf appear to be scarce, organizations that provide return assistance have reported a number of beneficiaries who required support going back home after not being able to reach their target Gulf country of destination because of travel restrictions and border closures. For example, with increasing restrictions along the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, an increase of EHoA migrants have returned back to Djibouti and Somalia, as thousands remained stranded in Yemen, unable to continue their journeys.¹⁹

PART TWO

UNDERSTANDING RETURN



Extract from IOM Reintegration Handbook: Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance

Return migration is an integral part of human mobility. “Return” is the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. It is also often associated with the process of going back to one’s own culture, family and home.²⁰ This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of a person who has been internally displaced returning home; or across international boundaries, between a host country and a country of origin. This might be the case for migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers or irregular migrants.



Return types²¹

There are no universally agreed classifications of return. Yet various subcategories of return are linked to intended duration of the return, level of assistance received in the return process (if any), the various ways in which the return is implemented, as well as subcategories which describe who is participating in the return.

- **Intended length of stay:** Return can be permanent or temporary. For highly skilled migrants, for instance, who wish to contribute to the development of their country of origin by passing on knowledge and experiences they have gained abroad, temporary return may be the preferred option.
- **Return with or without support:** Spontaneous return occurs when individuals decide upon and implement the return themselves. Assisted return occurs when the State or a third party offer returnee migrant workers financial and logistical assistance for the return, and sometimes for reintegration measures.
- **Involuntary return:** *Involuntary or forced return* is the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, to a place of transit or to a third-country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision.
- **Voluntary return:** *Voluntary return* is the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee.²² However, a migrant’s decision to return does not necessarily mean that return is the migrant’s unambiguous wish. It is possible that other options are limited, for example if economic opportunities are scarce or if a migrant has no legal entitlement to remain on a State’s territory.²³ There is no agreed definition of voluntary return. Some actors consider return to be voluntary only when migrants still have the possibility of legally remaining in their host countries. According to these actors, when a migrant has the legal obligation to leave the host country and chooses to return of their own volition, return should be described as obliged, mandatory, compulsory or accepted return.²⁴ Others consider that voluntary return should be understood in a broader sense: that migrants can express their will, even in the absence of legal options to remain in a host country, as long as other conditions are met. Specifically, for IOM in the context of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), voluntariness is assumed to exist if two conditions apply: (a) freedom of choice, which is defined as the absence of physical or psychological pressure to enroll in an AVRR programme; and (b) an informed decision, which requires the availability of timely, unbiased and reliable information upon which to base the decision.

Return in the context of this research

Within the aforementioned framework, all migrant workers who participated in this mapping and needs assessment are understood to have returned to their countries of origin voluntarily. Most noted that their labour migration experience was not meeting their expectations and/or difficulties in their workplaces. Some cited the completion of their employment contract. The women who took part in this assessment had mostly been employed in the domestic sector in the Gulf. An influential factor that impacted their decision to return were familial duties back home.

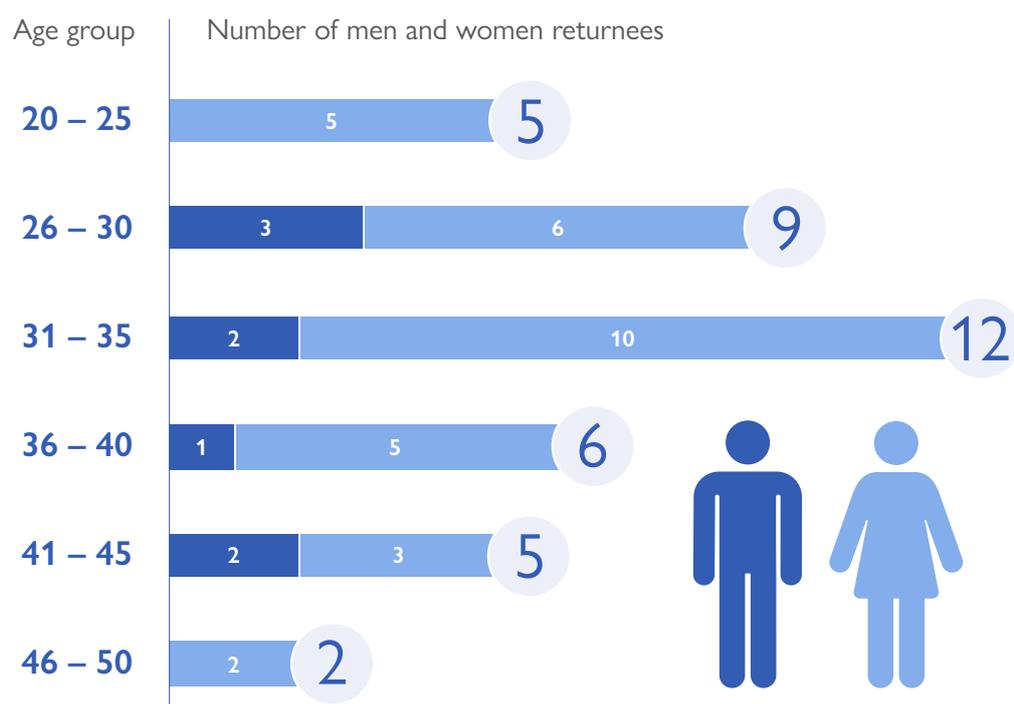
This report fully acknowledges that this is not representative of all returning and returnee migrant workers but seeks to provide insights based on this particular group of respondents. Therefore, the experiences and needs of both men and women respondents are elaborated throughout this report.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURNEE MIGRANT WORKERS

The experiences of migrant workers in the Gulf are heterogenous and diverse. Interviewed returnee migrant workers shared different motives that shaped their return migration decisions.

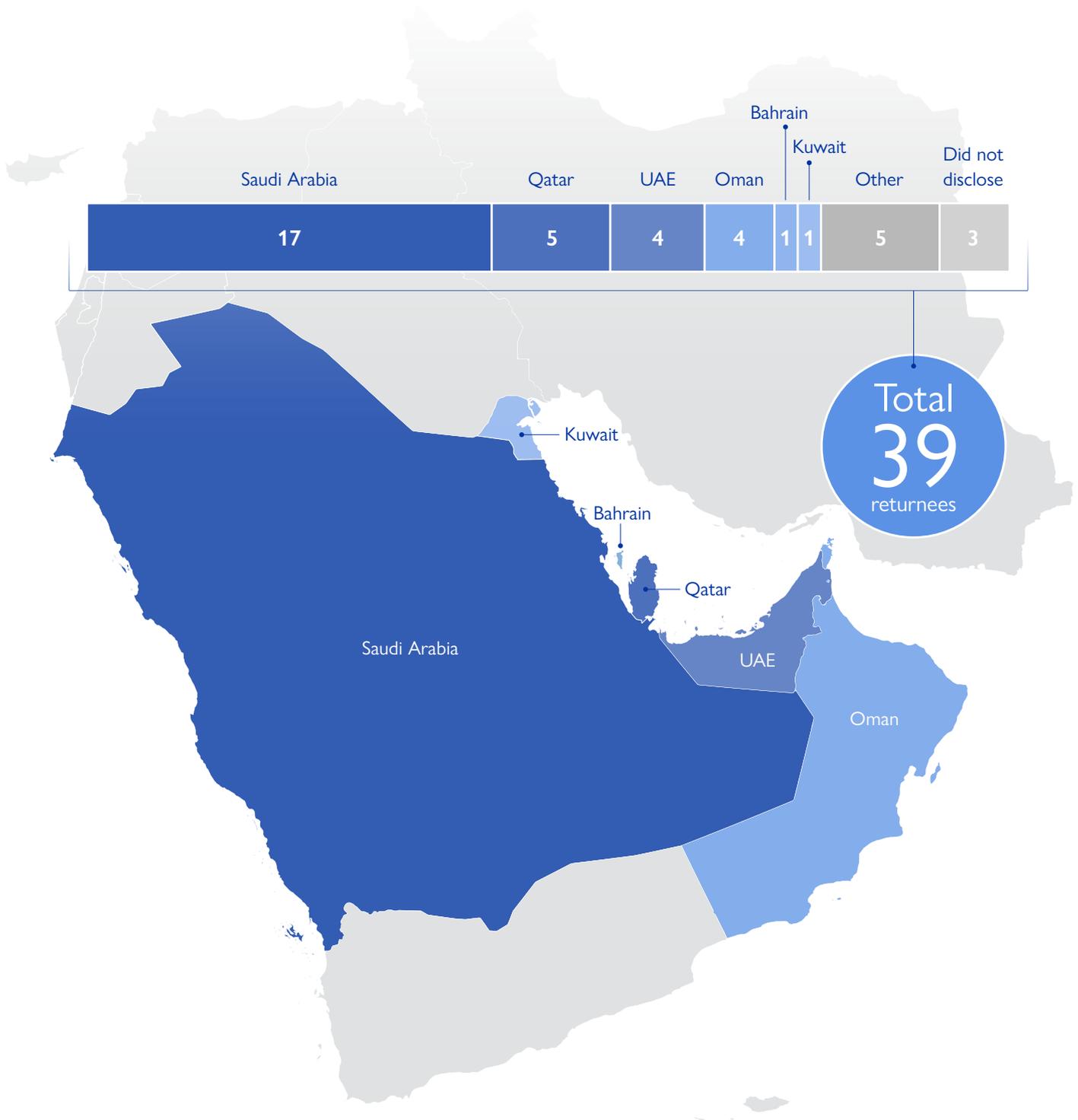
Based on the demographics of those who took part in this assessment (see Figure 5), the majority of those who have returned are between 30-35 years old. Women within this age bracket chose to return due primarily to childcare responsibilities back home. Whereas, in the cases of young men, it was noted that their choice is often part of a longer life plan which involves temporarily leaving their country of origin to increase financial prospects and then return a few years later to establish a business and/or start a family. Reflecting on their pre-migration experiences when they were planning foreign employment, the respondents often spoke about how their time in the Gulf was meant to be temporary and how, once they are able to earn enough to supplement their family income or invest in their own education or businesses, they will return.

Figure 5: Age distribution of returnee respondents



Most of the respondents who participated in the research have returned from Saudi Arabia (see Figure 6). The period spent in the country of destination ranged from six months to 19 years with women migrants stayed for longer length. This may be due to their responsibilities back home particularly for women headed households and their skill sets are limited to primarily domestic sectors. This narrows their job options in other sectors.

Figure 6: Countries of destination of respondents



MOTIVES FOR RETURN

In analysing the data collected from EHoA respondents, this assessment notes the following as key factors or reasons that motivated or accelerated their voluntary return:



Perceptions of unsuccessful labour migration experiences



Difficult working conditions



Family-related factors



Impact of COVID-19



Conclusion of contracts and/or meeting objectives

1. Perceptions of unsuccessful labour migration experiences

This assessment has found that the pre-return decision-making process is often interlinked to experiences of the migrant worker during the pre-employment phase. This phase is the very first stage of the labour migration cycle when a prospective migrant worker considers foreign employment as a possible livelihood option. It is a time of reflection, considering benefits and risks and ultimately making a decision on whether to pursue foreign employment or not.

Nationals from the EHoA decide to embark on labour migration for a number of reasons. However, many are driven by the desire to better support themselves and their loved ones along with perceptions of limited opportunities available locally or nationally.²⁵

This research has found that at pre-return, decision-making processes are typically seen through the lens of pre-employment, with migrant workers often revisiting their initial objectives and assessing the extent to which they have been achieved or if/how their expectations have been met.

“

I never wanted to return, and I'm not happy that I returned because there's nothing that I've accomplished. I can't mention saying 'I've accomplished this. Nothing was as expected, and nothing was successful for me. If your family [had become] self-sufficient, you would have accomplished something.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

”

The majority of respondents expressed that they felt their labour migration experiences abroad had not met their pre-employment expectations, particularly with regards to financial earnings and savings.

A misalignment of expectations can be linked to a lack of inadequacy of accessible and tailored information and guidance available to them at the pre-employment stage, particularly with regards to working conditions, salary expectations, sector-specific experiences, risks and assistance channels abroad. While all respondents had different individual circumstances and motivations that impacted their experience of pre-return, all went through this form of self-reflection; the relationship between pre-employment objectives and expectations versus the perception of success or attainment of aims, appear as one of the most significant factors that impact voluntary return.

2. Difficult working conditions

Approximately 50 per cent of those who took part in this assessment expressed difficult working conditions in their country of destination acted as major reasons in their decision-making process at pre-return. Challenging workplaces and difficulties with employers were particularly highlighted by EHoA women who had returned after working in the Gulf in the domestic sector. In discussions, these respondents expressed feeling overworked, inadequate breaks, non-payment/under-payment of their wages and dysfunctional employer-employee relationships, as key motivators for their decision to return home. Some also shared experiences of exploitation and abuse; for those who were in sustained or extreme situations, they report this as a tipping point in their decision to leave.

“

My expectation didn't match the reality. It was mistreatment both from the employer and the agency. When returned to the agency by the employer, the office would treat us like housemaids without pay until the day you'll get employed.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

”

3. Family-related factors

As the desire to better support families is at the heart for many in driving their journey abroad for employment, this assessment also finds that family-related factors are primary pull factors at pre-return. This could be in the form of acute events, such as emergencies and cases of illness, or accumulative circumstances, which could include pressure and desire to return home to spend time with and care for family members such as aging parents.

Considerations of return linked to family-related matters were particularly reported by EHoA women returnee respondents who highlighted that their family ties and responsibilities towards children and elderly parents, played a key part in their decision to return home. While this was consistent, it appears to also be accompanied by a dilemma at pre-return, between wanting to continue to provide financial support from abroad but also feeling the necessity to be physically closer to family at home. Some women also expressed feelings of guilt of being far away during difficult and trying times. Speaking about whether the decision to move and work abroad was the right one, one EHoA woman returnee said that: *“Yes, on the one hand because the conditions in which we lived were unbearable. But no (on the other hand), because as a mother, it is painful to leave your children behind.”* These findings reflect the trends of evolving family structures in the EHoA, with increasing trends of women-led households. For example, six in 10 Kenyan women are now likely to be single mothers by the age of 45, adding to the responsibilities and pressures felt by women to sufficiently provide for their families.²⁶

Men respondents noted family pressure to return home in order to spend time with family and/or to fulfil expected roles, such as getting married. This was seen with respondents who had elderly parents as well as those who had been in the Gulf and away from home for a long period of time.

“

I stayed in Saudi for 8 years, from 2012 to 2021. I longed for my parents who were growing old. Also, they wanted me to marry a lady [with whose they had talked to]. So, I decided to [answer] their calls and come back to Somalia.

Somali man reflecting on his time abroad

”

4. Impact of COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including unemployment/under-employment and national restrictions, was highlighted by interviewed respondents as a push factor to return. This mostly related to the declining economic situation of many sectors across the region as well as growing concerns of employment vulnerability.

Interlinked to this were also considerations on the impacts of COVID-19 back in the countries of origin and on families. Health concerns, lockdown measures, employment vulnerability and changing routines (particularly for children of migrant workers) are seen as further reinforcing the decision to return, in order to manage different aspects of family life.

“

Due to [the impacts of COVID-19] school was off for a long time. My contract was terminated, so I had to come back home (...) I was looking forward to seeing my children and my whole family. I had missed them. I was mostly anxious about COVID-19 and its implications back home.

EHoA returnee migrant worker

”

Some respondents also expressed worries directly related to COVID-19, including perceptions of not being able to minimize the possibility of transmission while in the country of destination which was typically related to overcrowded accommodation facilities. Others spoke of the impacts of having contracted the virus and how this played a role at pre-return.

“

My mother had an accident, and she was admitted to a hospital. The disparity of not being there just ate me up. I suffered from depression. When I moved to Dubai for work, I was being paid USD 660, which was a lot better, but shortly after I had started work, I contracted COVID-19. My employers isolated me; they left me alone without any help. I had to cook for myself and get myself medication. Luckily, I got better and returned to work. After suffering from COVID-19, my depression got worse, and I just wanted to go back home. After working for a month and a half at that job, I quit and booked my ticket home.

EHoA returnee migrant worker

”

5. Conclusion of contracts and/or meeting objectives

While the majority of respondents felt they did not achieve their pre-employment objectives, a few described their labour migration journey as successful.

Among this group, reflections appeared to centre on how their experience abroad allowed them to improve the standard of living for their families as well as gather the capital and skill sets necessary to open a business after their return. Dignified treatment from employers and healthy working conditions and culture were identified as components that contributed to a successful experience abroad.

“

I left Kenya knowing very well that I'm going to be a house help and the salary is 800 Saudi currency. I agreed and when I landed there, that's what I found out. But the boss increased my salary after a period of time, [which happens] if you stay well with them. I didn't [undergo] any torture. When my contract expired, I came back.

Kenyan woman returnee migrant worker

”

“

I was working in Saudi Arabia as a professional driver, typically I worked for 6 hours. I intended to stay there for as long as I would be able to raise the amount, I needed to support my family. I stayed there for 19 years. Yes, it's what I expected because I managed to take care of my family, my children were able to study. I am proud that my children managed to study, and I took care of them ably. I am also proud of the skills I learnt in driving. I don't feel I was exploited.

EHoA returnee migrant worker reflecting on his time in Saudi Arabia

”

Some respondents shared how their contract duration came to an end and their employer did not offer an extension. In discussions, they illustrated a sense of contentment, pointing to the positive of having had the opportunity to earn money in the time they were employed in the Gulf. Often, these reflections were accompanied by intentions for future remigration for foreign employment if possible.

EXPERIENCES AFTER RETURN

As this assessment reflects on the experience of pre-return and related information gaps, it deems crucial to delve into the experience of migrant workers who have returned voluntarily. This exercise allows the identification of different dynamics, challenges and opportunities that make up the lived experiences of return, as expressed by migrant workers themselves. Future programming that aims to address the information needs of returning migrant workers in countries of destination may refer to and consider these different aspects of migrant workers' experiences of return and reintegration. A particular focus is paid to livelihood considerations in line with labour migration.

These are as follows:



Notions of success and failure



Reception and roles of families and communities



Plans of remigration for employment



Remittances and financial management



Skills acquisition

1. Notions of success and failure

Labour migration cannot be seen simply as a measure to fulfill financial aspirations, but must be appreciated as a complex experience revolving around human emotions - emotions of families left behind and emotions of migrant workers who make the move. This is the case throughout the labour migration cycle; as this report has found, returning can be an emotionally challenging process, with questions of success and failure often heavily shaping the experience of returnee migrant workers.

In their reflections, the most common sentiment expressed by the majority of respondents who had returned was disappointment and feelings that their hard work in the Gulf had not transformed their financial circumstances as they had hoped. Many had devised savings targets for themselves, oriented around buying a house or starting a business, which they were eventually unable to meet. This also appeared to be exacerbated among the women respondents who expressed greater feelings of dismay of not having earned sufficiently while abroad. This could also be linked to increased demands on many EHoA women to care

for dependents and extended family members, increasingly taking up the role as primary breadwinner. Similarly, women who had been employed in the domestic sector in the Gulf expressed accompanying feelings of being physically and mentally drained after their return.

“

After I returned, I didn't immediately try to look for a job because I wasn't in a good mental state...I didn't accomplish my purpose. As I told you, I wouldn't say I have accomplished my targets.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

”

“

I never wanted to return, and I'm not happy that I returned because there's nothing that I've accomplished. I can't mention saying 'I've accomplished this. Nothing was as expected, and nothing was successful for me. If your family [had become] self-sufficient, you would have accomplished something.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

”

While common, it is important to note this disappointment was not universal. Some returnee migrant workers demonstrated a pragmatic approach in dissecting their experience of foreign employment, stating that, even if they were unable to do as much as they had hoped, they still felt that they had contributed to some extent, to their families.

In parallel to those notions linked to success, all respondents illustrated a range of different and sometimes conflicting emotions with regards to their immediate return. For example, many highlighted their joy and excitement to be reunited with their loved ones, particularly for those who had been away from home for longer periods of time. This was heightened for those who felt they had a successful experience abroad.

However, positive emotions were also often accompanied with mixed feelings of anxiety, worry, guilt and remorse. Frequently, migrant workers return with a sense of nostalgia, often expecting familiarity; in actuality, they encounter changes that span across most aspects of life, from family dynamics, community relationships, economic opportunities and sociocultural practices. Respondents gravitated mostly towards highlighting their experience and challenges with adapting to changed family relationships after their return. Examples were provided of feeling that their children had changed and grown up or their spouses had acclimatized to a routine without them. Without building healthy expectations and being adequately prepared before return to manage these changes, this process has the potential to cause much stress and anxiety for returnee migrant workers.

2. Reception and roles of families and communities

Within this whirlpool of different emotions associated with return, the perceptions and reception given to the returnee migrant worker by their family and community play a contributing role in shaping their reintegration experience. Many respondents observed a shift in their familial and community relationships, noting their experience navigating an unexpected set of challenges related to adapting to changes.

Upon their return, the reception provided by families and communities was varied in the different EHoA countries in focus. Across all countries, this assessment has found a broad relationship between the perception of success the communities have of the migrant worker, along with how they are then welcomed back home.

With some respondents shared positive experiences of being warmly welcomed and held in high esteem, others elaborated on not being accepted wholly back into their family units and community structure. During the time in which the migrant workers were employed abroad, demonstrations of financial success observed by their communities contributed to the type of reception they would subsequently receive after their return. Examples mentioned were the use of remittances to build a family house, buy land and provide schooling for their children.

Less positive receptions by societies were reported mostly by respondents who had returned earlier than planned, without having made considerable money. Observed as having a failed labour migration experience, respondents also noted the personal shame but also animosity faced from communities of returning without bringing gifts for family and friends.

“

Regarding the typical challenges that the migrants face upon their return, I think when these migrant workers return especially prematurely, they may not come back with what they wanted to achieve. So, most of them come back depressed, demoralized, exhausted, and the feeling that their dreams have been shattered. That is usually what happens.

CSO representative from an EHoA country

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A cross-cutting theme found in this assessment was the issue of return and stigma. Some returnee migrant workers shared their experience with facing stigma from their communities, rooted in embedded assumptions that they experienced issues while working abroad that will have left them ‘damaged’. Stigma surrounding mental health poses a significant challenge for returnee migrant workers in being able to openly access assistance and support should they require. It was observed that many feel reluctant to speak of their mental well-being and being able to seek help.

“

“You often hear labelling and negative connotations of returnee migrant workers. People often think that returnees have problems they brought from abroad. This negative connotation is often attributed to returnees from Gulf societies.

Government official from an EHoA country

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Additionally, returnee migrant workers noted that the societal attitude towards them also depended on the country from which they had returned. Those who had worked in a Gulf country reported facing more stigma than those who had returned from other countries of destination.

“

On returning to Uganda, when I arrived home [from Dubai], my mother was happy to receive me. Actually, Ugandans think women going to work abroad in countries other than developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and others, are going for sex work. However, it was not the case for me. I was happily received [by my family]. However, I think generally men are welcomed more warmly than women.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

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This seems to be particularly the case for women, especially those who had been a domestic worker. This subgroup appears to also be at higher risk of needing to manage stigma in the longer-term. For example, an EHoA civil society representative shared that *“When people find out one was a domestic worker, they immediately pair it with sexual practices, so they are looked [upon] as unclean, or people are afraid that they have health issues. Some fail to get married and start families as they would wish due this reputation.”*

With the growing number of EHoA women engaging in labour migration, this assessment has found a trend of women expressing a newfound sense of empowerment. This appears to be linked to their self-awareness of their enhanced skill set gained abroad as well as position within the household, contributing financially and having a say in family decisions. Upon their return, particularly in patriarchal settings, this sense of assertiveness is often not welcomed.

Lastly, another theme noted with a few respondents who took part in this assessment were challenges in dealing with reverse culture shock, particularly affecting those who had grown accustomed to living in the Gulf for a longer period of time. Readapting to changes in living conditions and sociocultural practices resulted in some feeling alienated as well as having strained relationships with community members who felt they had traded their home’s culture and traditions for that of another country.

“

One of the consequences of migration to Gulf societies is that it leads to cultural shock and conflicts. After they pass the shocks and address the conflicts, they will start to [associate] themselves with the new culture and make it their own. Upon return, again they face shocks and conflicts with the culture and living conditions here. The society here doesn't not understand and tolerate that, which leads to disagreement and conflicts.

Government official from an EHoA country

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“

The majority of those who suffer the consequences of negative migrant labour are women. The biggest problem is always the challenge of stigma, some come back, and they've been sexually molested. So, they find it difficult to settle back to their spouses. If they were not married, before they go, they find it difficult to get spouses...So usually they'll keep this part of their lives quiet.

CSO representative based in the EHoA

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3. Plans of remigration for employment

In appreciating the diversity of return experiences, it is important to see return through its many different typologies. Return can be a one-time event marked by permanence and ending a labour migration trajectory, as it can be a repeated occurrence between periods of time abroad. This understanding was reflected in the deliberations of the respondents of this assessment.

Some expressed no desire to leave the country again for employment. They cited difficult previous experiences abroad, not wanting to leave their families and feeling too old to go abroad again. Others highlighted their desire to remigrate, restarting their labour migration cycle by taking them through to the pre-employment stage once again.

Many felt their time in the Gulf had been cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied with a sense of anticipation and eagerness to return to the region to continue their employment. Some returnee migrant workers felt that they had “learned from their mistakes” related to previous work experiences and would be able to do things differently next time and increase their earning powers. For others, remigration appears to be motivated with difficulties in reintegration; one returnee exclaimed, “I'd like to migrate once more. How can one survive in this harsh living conditions?”

“

In a few months, I'll be moving. My child is four months old now, and when he becomes six, I'll leave it to my mother and remigrate. There are no work opportunities here, and the requirements to establish your own business are impossible to meet.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

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With regards to gender dynamics and intentions for remigration, this assessment found that men respondents appeared to show more confidence and assertion, leaning towards their skills already developed overseas. Women, however, seemed to focus more on improving their pre-departure experience and preparedness, reflecting on what they would do differently with regards to routes and/or recruitment. Many had already interacted with NGO groups to gather information on safe migration and, relatedly, some mentioned wanting to wait until they felt fully informed on how to engage in safe and legal labour migration along with familial

circumstances being suitable. Processes facilitated by registered private recruitment agencies were seen as safer options. Others, despite knowing the dangers of irregular migration, planned to leave using irregular routes and informal brokers.

4. Remittances and financial management

By working in the Gulf, migrant workers typically become the main income contributors to their households for at least the duration of their stay abroad. However, this fact alone does not give them control over their earnings; in fact, once remitted, earnings are largely in the hands of family members. As many migrant workers go to the Gulf with a primary motivation to earn and save as much money as possible, when their hard-earned wages are felt to have been misused by family members, it can cause significant strain in relationships as well as play a key role in influencing the return experience.

Many interviewed respondents reported that remittances were sent home to support their families as well as be put away for savings or investments. While this was the expectation, experiences were shared of finding out that all remittances were spent by households, often without the full knowledge of the migrant worker. This could have devastating impacts on the pre-return and return experience, with many feeling even further removed from their financial objectives.

While this report has touched upon the gender dynamics of decision-making and foreign employment, with regards to financial management, it notes that in many societies, intra-household decision-making, including related to finances, is made by the men of the family. It appears that generally women lack control over their money, which becomes more pronounced after return. With the completion of work abroad, this is when there is pressure to revert to traditional gender roles, often involving deferring financial decisions completely to husbands, fathers and/or brothers. An example was provided by a woman respondent whose work abroad financed the construction of her family home; the name listed on the property deed was not hers.

Finally, needs related to strengthening financial literacy was noted in this assessment as well; this not only related to the migrant workers but of their family members as well. Clear planning and consistent use of simple tools to track progress collectively would be paramount in supporting migrant workers to achieve their financial aims.

5. Skills Acquisition

As with all major life experiences, foreign employment can play a crucial part in enhancing the skill sets of migrant workers, better positioning them for reintegration into the labour markets of countries of origin.

Many respondents across the EHoA countries in focus felt they had grown personally, linking this also with strengthened soft or life skills. Many spoke of feeling more confident, more resilient, more independent and more able to navigate difficult decisions. Perhaps as a result of living in different cultural and societal practices and often surrounded by colleagues and peers from different countries and religions, some respondents also spoke of becoming more open-minded.

“

Even if I met a lot of hardships, I love that I got to travel and see what it is like. Now, when I make my decisions, I am more thorough in my thinking and in my way of asking for information so that the decisions I make are more informed.

EHoA woman speaking about soft skills

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“

It was the appropriate decision for me because I was committed to work in Arab countries, and it greatly aided me. Prior to migrating, I lacked any knowledge of household procedures and did not provide support to my mother. Working there taught me a lot of useful skills.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

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While there seems to be an appreciation of these skills, there was also apprehension of how these skills would feasibly help them in their countries of origin. Many felt these skills were not helpful in directly enabling them to find a suitable employment opportunity in local labour markets.

With regards to technical skill sets, occupation-specific skills were mostly underscored by respondents. Those with experience in the private sector noted driving, customer service and management skills as examples.

Overall, the women respondents who had worked in the domestic sector, did not feel they had developed additional skills during their time abroad. In fact, they felt that the household-related work that they were doing before moving to the Gulf was similar to the tasks they had to complete as domestic workers. This opinion was also coupled with the experience of struggling to find suitable jobs after their return. Unlike in sectors where international experience typically makes workers more attractive to employers, the value perception of domestic work remains more static, putting returnee migrant workers back in competition with domestic workers in their localities and/or not competitive for other occupations. This mismatch was pointed out by a government official of an EHoA country: *“A mismatch will occur if a person seeking an office job has prior domestic work experience. Domestic workers in Gulf countries are less likely to participate in domestic labour in their own country. The rivalry for jobs at hotels and restaurants is so fierce that they are frequently unable to get work there.”*

Other respondents pointed to the potential of programming supporting returnee domestic workers to reflect and capitalize on the skill sets they have acquired abroad. One civil society representative in the EHoA said: *“If this [skills development for returnee domestic workers] was taken seriously, the returning migrant workers have exposure that could be utilized to make them better citizenry, particularly within the vocational education system, which could help them build on whatever [skills] they earned back there, may be in baking, making different soups ad different foods including Middle Eastern food.”*

PART THREE

THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM RELATED TO RETURN



Appreciating the complexity of decision-making with regards to voluntary return and the multiple factors that influence this process, relevant and accurate information available at pre-return through to reintegration, would act as a crucial point of reference and support to migrant workers. As the process of return spans between the country of destination and origin, bilateral collaboration between stakeholders in both countries would assist in harmonizing and streamlining guidance. Information in countries of destination could support the pre-return decision-making process, detail complaints and grievance mechanisms available as well as initiate preparations for what can be expected.

INFORMATION NEEDS



Every phase of the labour migration cycle requires a degree of preparation. At the pre-return phase, returning migrant workers appear to need information to support their repatriation preparedness as well as consider how to effectively reintegrate back home, particularly with regards to economic reintegration. Information at this stage thus become crucial to effectively navigate return as well as engage their reintegration process with healthy expectations and tools to maximize success.

However, a recurring theme across most of the key informant interviews with migrant workers, government officials and CSOs, was a universal acknowledgement of information gaps associated with return; yet, for many, the notion of return-related orientation was not seen as a priority, particularly in countries of destination. One respondent rhetorically asked that with nationals returning to their homes, *"what information would they possibly need about their own countries?"*

Adopting a migrant-centric approach, this assessment has found the following to be common and priority areas of information needs, with a particular focus on the economic and financial dimensions of return and reintegration:

- **End-of-service benefits, complaints mechanisms and assistance**

When in countries of destination, EHoA migrant workers reported facing challenges, particularly with their employers and workplaces. Often, this was one of the primary motivators prompting their return. Relevant ministries in the Gulf provide services and make available mechanisms to address complaints and grievances of migrant workers.

As this assessment has found, many respondents were largely unaware of the services and assistance they could have accessed before their departure. This could help in recovering unpaid wages, receiving full end-of-service benefits and lodging, where required, labour complaints that they could then follow up on after their return to their country of origin.

- **Healthy reintegration within changed family and community relationships**

As this assessment has found, many returnee migrant workers face challenges adapting to changed family dynamics and roles as well as reintegrating back into their communities. From discussions with returnee migrant workers, it seems they did not feel they had the right expectations of what this experience could be like; they anticipated the process of reintegration to be much easier than what it ultimately was. Inadequate preparations to navigate the complexities of reintegration appears as a theme as well, with many respondents

linking feelings of anxiety to their experiences of return. This could be alleviated with tailored guidance to support fostering healthy expectations and equip returnee migrant workers with related coping mechanisms.

- **Livelihood support and employment opportunities**

A significant concern at the pre-return phase and after return centres on maintaining a source of income after the completion of foreign employment. The majority of returnee migrant workers who participated in this research cited a significant need for information and guidance on ways to generate income and maintain self-sufficiency upon return. This was often in the form of enquiring on where to find employment opportunities or any livelihood support programmes and schemes they could be eligible for. In EHoA countries, where these services are active, returnee migrant workers appeared to not be aware of them or how to access them. Accessible information available to returnee migrant workers while they are still in the country of destination would help make an informed decision as well as put in place necessary preparations.

- **Guidance on use of skills acquired overseas**

This assessment has found skills to be an important component related to return. While most of the respondents acknowledged their enhanced soft and/or technical skills based on their time abroad, there appeared to be a general hesitation or lack of clarity on how these skills could be capitalized on in their countries of origin. This seemed to be more pronounced with migrant domestic workers who felt their technical skill sets had not been developed due to the similarities of their day-to-day household responsibilities before they migrated and during their foreign employment. Providing tools and resources to returning migrant workers to allow them to structurally reflect on their own skill sets and identify avenues to capitalize on them at home, would be key.

- **Support to establish small businesses**

It appears that a common objective for many EHoA migrant workers, determined during their pre-employment phase, is to ensure enough capital to later establish their own business at home. This was the case for many of the returnee migrant workers who participated in the research. Asking them to reflect on their experiences, many pointed to a lack of information and resources on how to set up a business, opportunities of financial support (subsidized loans or microfinancing), regulations on required permits and licensing as well as entrepreneurship training, particularly on budgeting.

- **Ethical and safe recruitment for remigration**

While this was not expressed as an information need by the interviewed migrant workers themselves, their intentions outlined for remigration for foreign employment brings to light the opportunity for the pre-return phase and the return process to be a space to offer key information on engaging in safe and ethical recruitment. This is particularly against the backdrop of many sharing their deliberations on how they would do things differently at the pre-employment phase next time.

INFORMATION LANDSCAPE



As this assessment has found, there is a lack of structured programming focusing on the provision of pre-return and return-related information. For this, many returnee migrant workers appear to rely heavily on their personal networks as well as information provided through social media.

In the Gulf countries of destination, return-related information and support also is made available from the wider EHoA diaspora, employers, CSOs and faith-based organizations as well as from the governments of both countries of origin and destination. To varying degrees, EHoA diplomatic missions and Gulf Ministries of Labour provide information on end-of-service benefits, rights and obligations, grievance and complaints mechanisms.

After return, respondents pointed particularly to their family and friends for information and guidance to support their economic reintegration. Some mentioned leaning on members of their communities who had returned from working abroad and had been successful in setting up their own business. They were seen as reliable sources to provide information and advice, that otherwise is felt to be difficult to access.



Those who have already returned help those who are coming back after them, especially in terms of information, but not in other ways that I know of... for those who return, there is no training to my knowledge. They manage on their own by opening their small businesses, for example.

CSO representative from an EHoA country



PRODUCTION AND MOVEMENT



Within the aforementioned information landscape, it is understood that a number of different mediums and platforms are used to disseminate relevant information.

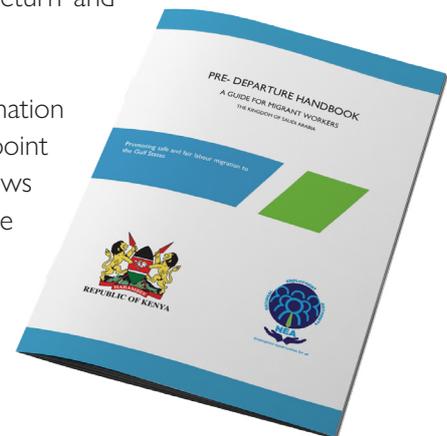
Gulf governments are seen to primarily use their official websites and social media accounts as the main information platforms for migrant workers. For instance, the Bahrain Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) web portal provides information on services available to migrant workers and information on end-of-service benefits and instructions on how to lodge complaints. Use of social media, like Facebook and messaging tools like WhatsApp, has proved to be an effective medium to provide information to the migrant workers in the country. Active EHoA diplomatic missions also use platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to provide key updates to their nationals, particularly on country-specific vaccination requirements, travel restrictions and documentation needed for return.

With regards to EHoA programmes that support returning migrant workers, this assessment has found their dissemination strategies do not sufficient reach potential beneficiaries. Respondents in this research showed a lack of awareness of services that could be beneficial to them.

Several NGOs run a number of microfinancing schemes, psychosocial counselling support and vocational training opportunities to returnee migrant workers, particularly victims of trafficking. Information related to these services appear to be provided through their websites, local radio stations and social media. Additionally, CSOs reach out to returnee migrant workers through their referral systems.

Some EHoA countries have formalized and structured PDO programmes, such as **Ethiopia** and **Kenya**. These act as platforms for EHoA governments to provide information on return, including financial management, skills and job opportunities after their return and tips on reintegration.

Some countries, such as Ethiopia, have set up information desks at the airports in order to act as an immediate point of reference for their returning nationals. This also allows for screening of potential victims of trafficking and those requiring assistance, after which they are referred to various service provision centres such as medical care, counselling and/or rehabilitation centres.



DYNAMICS OF ACCESS



While the information landscape of pre-return and return is currently limited, this research has found that women have increased difficulties in accessing information. Since many are employed as domestic workers abroad with their workplaces often restricted to private households, their exposure to support networks and information points are also limited. Additionally, communication methods, such as phones or access to the Internet can also be restricted or controlled by unscrupulous employers. This makes their pre-return experience and decision-making process particularly difficult. This can be compounded by lower levels of literacy, basic levels of education as well as a lack of Internet navigation skills to support in accessing helpful information.

Familial and community expectations present another challenge in access to information. Some returnee migrant workers shy away from seeking reintegration assistance, as this may be associated with an “*unaccomplished migration goal*,” especially related to family finances.

Respondents also highlighted that returnee women domestic workers face difficulties in accessing psychosocial support services, especially if trauma and sexual abuse was experienced abroad. This is, in part, driven by guilt and social stigma and misconceptions of prostitution.

In countries where reintegration programmes are available, it is understood that organizations face challenges in locating difficult-to-reach returnee migrant workers, particularly in peri-urban or rural areas. After landing back home, migrant workers make their way back to their home

areas, which can be dispersed across the country in different geographical locations. This may explain, in part, why returnee migrant workers who took part in this assessment were largely unaware of support programming and services available to them.

“

A friend of mine told me to try to get vocational training in cooking... [however] the [training location] is very far, and considering the current transportation cost, I'd have to spend 60 to 70 birr every day. It's very difficult, and I couldn't make such sacrifices.

EHoA woman returnee migrant worker

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GAPS IN THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

Overall, this needs assessment has found that currently information that could support EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase in the Gulf as well as during their return and reintegration back home, is limited. Adjacent to this, respondents highlighted the benefits of programmes and services that could support returnee migrant workers, particularly with regards to livelihoods. It is crucial that these programmes are accompanied with widespread communication strategies to ensure that eligible returnee migrant workers are aware of these opportunities and understand how to access them.

PART FOUR

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



As trends indicate an increase in the number of EHoA nationals engaging in labour migration, particularly to the Gulf region, effective systems to sustainably manage their eventual return and reintegration would be critical for returning migrant workers as well as other stakeholders. This report has captured key components of the complexities of decision related to voluntary return as well as the lived experiences of returnee migrant workers, particularly in navigating reintegration back home. Availability of tailored, accurate and useful information and resources related to this last stage of the labour migration cycle could be a crucial part of systems and programmes aimed at supporting returning and returnee migrant workers. Information programmes related to pre-return and return benefit from being harmonized between EHoA and Gulf countries to ensure accuracy of content and maximize outreach and accessibility.

This section takes the liberty to propose a series of key findings and recommendations for the consideration of stakeholders with regards to addressing decision-making and information needs associated with voluntary return and reintegration:

Key finding: There is currently an absence of formal and institutionalized information programmes that provide information to EHoA migrant workers who are considering returning from the Gulf or who have returned.



Recommendation: Gulf and EHoA countries should consider the development of information programming related to return, made available to EHoA migrant workers in the Gulf who are planning to return and who have already returned. This could be composed of information interventions spanning the country of origin and destination. These programmes can be key reference points and address information needs at the pre-return phase while still in the country of destination as well as support their return and reintegration back home. Its design and implementation should be informed by global good practices, based on the principles of accessibility, relevance and impact.

Key finding: While the benefits of information programming related to pre-departure and post-arrival are largely appreciated, the conceptualization of pre-return and return information initiatives remains less clear.



Recommendation: Opportunities should be created to bring together EHoA-Gulf stakeholders to discuss pre-return and return information needs, build a joint understanding of the benefits of information programming and identify mechanisms to effectively harmonize and coordinate across countries as well as PDO and PAO programmes.

Key finding: EHoA returning migrant workers and returnees rely heavily on their personal network and communities to gather information and guidance to support their return and reintegration.



Recommendation: A whole-of-society approach would be critical to incorporate when conceptualizing, designing, implementing and evaluating information programmes aiming to support EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase and after their arrival. Diasporas, CSOs, faith-based organizations and community associations are understood to be trusted sources of information for migrant workers. This approach would also help ensure the relevance and responsiveness of information that is being incorporated in PRO. Considerations should also be made on how these stakeholders could be key service providers and avenues of dissemination of relevant information in both countries of destination and origin.

Key finding: Many EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase are unaware of services and mechanisms available to them, particularly with regards to labour disputes and grievances.



Recommendation: Governments, in partnership with employers and other stakeholders, may consider the development of comprehensive and sustained communication strategies to ensure the regular provision of information to migrant workers throughout their stay in the country. This could then ensure that during the pre-return phase, migrant workers are already aware and able to effectively access services as well as conclude administrative requirements with ease before their departure from the country of destination. This could be particularly helpful in accessing their full entitlements after the completion of their employment contracts and settling any labour disputes.

Key finding: : Returning women migrant workers employed in the domestic sector have increased difficulties in accessing relevant information related to end-of-service benefits, return and reintegration.



Recommendation: Targeted efforts should be made to cater to the information needs of migrant domestic workers, accounting for their workspaces being typically restricted to private households. This could involve orientation programmes catering to employers of migrant domestic workers, ensuring they have accurate information on end-of-service benefits they are obliged to provide to their domestic employees. Information on return, complaints mechanisms and assistance should be provided to domestic workers themselves, through sustained communication channels as well as integrated messaging in PDO and PAO programmes.

Key finding: After return to EHoA countries of origin, many returnee migrant workers reported a lack of awareness of existing services and programming provided by Governments or CSOs that could support their reintegration, particularly with regards to livelihood support. This appears to be linked to practical difficulties in disseminating information on these programming widely, including to difficult-to-reach geographical locations such as rural and remote areas.



Recommendation: In acknowledging that after return to countries of origin, returnee migrant workers may be harder to access, EHoA diplomatic missions and/or partners in countries of destination may consider providing information on reintegration-related programmes and services during the pre-return phase. The information should also include details on eligibility and access. This would allow enhanced planning and empower returning migrant workers to accurately assess possibilities and livelihood options, particularly on establishing small businesses. Recommendations also were made to the benefits of information portals, acting as “one-stop shops” with consolidated information on return preparedness, and reintegration services available in countries of origin.

Key finding: Accurate and accessible information on employment opportunities appear as a top priority for EHoA migrant workers at the pre-return phase and after their return back home.



Recommendation: EHoA governments and stakeholders could view PRO and related information interventions after return as a vehicle to disseminate information on employment opportunities available in the country of origin. This information could be made available through stakeholders in countries of origin as well as destination. To ensure the accessibility of this information, it should be decentralized with the support of CSOs, recruitment agencies and training centres to name a few. Up-to-date information on various social media platforms could also help maximize outreach.

Key finding: Skills development and recognition is seen as a crucial factor in supporting the return and effective reintegration of EHoA returnee migrant workers.



Recommendation: PRO should be seen as a space for participants to meaningfully reflect on the skills they have acquired through their time abroad. This self-assessment, with related resources, could help returnee migrant workers identify their potential and possible avenues forward, with regards to their economic reintegration. Additionally, EHoA and Gulf governments could consider advancing collaboration in the area of skills; the promotion of skills recognition and certification schemes would be beneficial for all stakeholders involved in labour migration.

Key finding: Comprehending information related to return can be challenging for EHoA migrant workers, particularly women domestic workers, who may have low education attainment or literacy skills.



Recommendation: PRO and related material should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all, including those with lower levels of literacy. This is critical to ensure that no one is left behind. All resources should be in languages and dialects understood by the returned migrant workers, their families and their communities. For those who would have difficulty with written products, audio-visual aids are beneficial in highlighting key messages.

Key finding: EHoA returnee migrant workers report difficulties in their reintegration experiences, including but not limited to their perceptions of success and failure related to their time abroad, lack of preparedness as well as stigma. This was more pronounced with women returnee migrant workers.



Recommendation: PRO is recommended to be seen as a key avenue to build healthy expectations with regards to reintegration, share guidance on how to addressing any stigma as well as equip participants with practical coping tools. This could also be accompanied with information on any programming or services that could provide psychosocial support, including grassroots initiatives led by those who have already returned back home.

Key finding: Many EHoA returnee migrant workers intend to remigrate for foreign employment.



Recommendation: In contexts without structured and formal PEO programmes, PRO could incorporate a refresher with key messages on how to engage in ethical recruitment and safe labour migration. Participants should be directed to relevant resources for their future reference.

ENDNOTES



1. IOM, Reintegration — Effective approaches (Geneva, 2015).
2. Please refer to the “*Background Report on the Pre-Departure Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor*” and the “*Background Report on the Post-Arrival Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor*”.
3. Please see the Methodology section for details on [page 11](#).
4. African Union (AU), The Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA). 2018.
5. Emirates News Agency -WAM, Major new partnerships announced as UAE's Global Forum on Migration and Development Summit closes. 27 January. Available at www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302904917.
6. ILO, *Making decent work a reality for domestic workers: progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)* (Geneva, 2021).
7. ILO, *Labour Migration*. Arab States, Beirut. Available at www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm.
8. Ibid.
9. The World Bank, Migration and Remittances Data (accessed 9 February 2022).
10. ILO, *Making decent work a reality for domestic workers: progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)* (Geneva, 2021).
11. ILO, *Employer – Migrant Worker Relationship in The Middle East: Exploring Scope for Internal Labour Market Mobility and Fair Migration* (Beirut, 2017). Available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_552697.pdf.
12. IOM, *Reintegration Handbook: Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance* (Geneva, 2019).
13. Ibid.
14. Karasapan, O., Pandemic highlights the vulnerability of migrant workers in the Middle East. 17 September 2020.
15. IOM, *World Migration Report* (Geneva 2022).
16. Migration Data Portal, Migration data relevant for the COVID-19 pandemic (accessed 18 March 2022).
17. ILO, *Beyond contagion or starvation: giving domestic workers another way forward* (Geneva, 2020).
18. Castelier, S., Gulf migrant workers face crisis of unpaid wages amid pandemic. Al-Monitor, 10 August 2020.
19. IOM, *Migrant Movements Between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula* (Nairobi, 2021).
20. IOM, *Reintegration Handbook: Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance* (Geneva, 2019).
21. Ibid.
22. IOM, *Glossary on Migration, International Migration Law* (Geneva, 2019).
23. States must adhere to the principle of non-refoulement. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes need to take into account safety considerations, such as the general level of security, and operational challenges that may affect the provision of return and reintegration assistance. Returns to certain regions or countries may need to be limited or suspended if one or a combination of these factors amounts to a situation that poses a threat to the safety of returning migrants and/or staff involved in the provision of AVRR assistance.
24. Newland, K. and B. Salant, *Balancing Acts: Policy Frameworks for Migrant Return and Reintegration*. 2018.
25. For full analysis on decision-making processes, aspirations and information needs at the pre-employment stage, please see the “*Background Report on the Pre-Employment Information Needs of Migrant Workers in the East and Horn of Africa-Gulf Corridor*.”
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