National study of Reintegration Outcomes among returned migrants in Georgia

IOM Georgia | Spring 2021

Foreword

Migrant return and reintegration have become increasingly prominent in the global migration governance agenda, as well as locally, in countries of origin including Georgia. Mirroring the accelerated rate of emigration from Georgia, in the last five years the scale of returns to Georgia has been growing significantly. Though precise numbers are hard to estimate, it is safe to state that thousands of migrants return annually from their migration journeys through assisted voluntary return programmes, readmission, as well as by deportation or spontaneously. Reintegration can be and frequently is challenging. Returnees struggle to readapt and rebuild their lives once back home, especially because many of the same economic, social, and psychosocial factors that prompted them to migrate in the first place have remained unchanged. At the same time, returnees bring with them skills and experiences gained abroad, looking for opportunities to apply and develop them in their country of origin, indicating that successful reintegration can bring with it a great promise for their communities of origin and Georgia as a whole.

The Government of Georgia has made reintegration of returning citizens its key priority, especially in light of its European integration agenda and efforts to curb irregular migration from Georgia and decrease the number of applications for asylum lodged by Georgian citizens in the Member States of the European Union (EU), which increased in the aftermath of the EU-Georgia visa liberalization of 2017. Indeed, return and reintegration figure prominently in the Government's Migration Strategy and for 2021-2030.

In the context of such efforts, IOM Georgia presents the first nationally representative study of reintegration outcomes among returnees in Georgia who have benefited from reintegration assistance programmes presently available in the country. We sincerely thank the State Reintegration Programme of the Government of Georgia, the Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII) in Georgia, and Caritas Georgia for their cooperation.

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes as well as reintegration assistance (RA) programmes play a key role in supporting the immediate and mid-to-long-term needs of returning migrants and supporting their sustainable reintegration in a country of origin. IOM's standardized methodology for measuring the outcomes of such programmes has only recently been developed and applied globally. Georgia is among the first countries in the world to partake in a national study of reintegration outcomes, capturing a representative sample of returnees who benefited from diverse types of reintegration assistance provided by a number of different stakeholders - the Government of Georgia, OFII Georgia, Caritas Georgia, and IOM.

IOM has been at the center of designing and delivering assisted voluntary return and reintegration worldwide for 40 years, and in Georgia since 2003. In line with its long-standing mandate and multisectoral expertise, IOM advocates the adoption of sustainability-oriented reintegration policies that respond to the economic, social, and psychosocial needs of returning migrants, while also benefiting communities of origin and addressing structural challenges to reintegration. Over the last few years, there has been an important progression towards more comprehensive policies and practices on reintegration, in Georgia, and globally. This is mainly the result of an improved understanding of this phenomenon among policymakers, donors and practitioners and the increased complementarities between different policy portfolios, namely those responsible for return management and those supporting cooperation for development. As a result, reintegration is now recognized as a tool that can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We at IOM Georgia sincerely hope that the findings presented in this report will support the efforts of the Government of Georgia and other relevant stakeholders to make reintegration assistance programmes even more effective, for the benefit of the returning migrants as well as the country as a whole. We remain committed to providing technical expertise and support, and facilitate continued monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the sphere of sustainable reintegration in Georgia and worldwide.

Sanja Celebic Lukovac
Chief of Mission
IOM Mission to Georgia

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Executive Summary

The number of migrants who return to Georgia has been growing significantly in the last five years, mirroring a recent rise in emigration[1] attributed to a rise in available opportunities for international mobility and prevalence of local migration drivers. In the context of Georgia's negative population growth[2] and ongoing need for socio-economic development, **the return of international migrants represents an important opportunity** for communities of return and for Georgia as a country. Reintegration is also highlighted as a priority by the **Government of Georgia's Migration Strategy for 2021-2030** in the context of efforts to further develop the migration management system in Georgia and efforts to accelerate the process of Georgia's approximation with the European Union (EU)[3]. The reintegration of migrants has also gained political importance on the international agenda. This is reflected in numerous key international frameworks, most importantly in **the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**, and in its Objective 21, which calls on governments to cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return (…), as well as sustainable reintegration, and in **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, which sets out in its Target 10.7 the need for implementing planned and well-managed migration policies, including the reintegration of migrants.

The process of reintegration is challenging for returnees, especially so for those whose migration plan has been interrupted by a sudden need or pressure to return. Re-establishing one's life in a community of origin in a sustainable manner requires that returnees reach levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Accordingly, three dimensions of sustainable reintegration are to be examined at the individual level - economic, social, and psychosocial. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) asserts that having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity[4]. Chapters I. and II. present the concept of sustainable reintegration in full and introduce the key trends which shape the context of reintegration in Georgia.

Each year, a small share of Georgian returnees is eligible for reintegration assistance provided by the Government of Georgia, international organizations, or NGOs in the country. To date, however, no comparative study had been conducted to capture the mid-to-long-term outcomes among the beneficiaries of such assistance. In 2020, IOM thus conducted conducted representative research among Georgian returnees who benefited from reintegration assistance in Georgia between May 2017 and May 2020. The principle aim of the study was to shed light on the outcomes of reintegration among beneficiaries of reintegration assistance available in the country, identifying factors which contribute to or hinder their sustainable reintegration following return. The study also aimed at identifying vulnerabilities faced by specific sub-groups of returnees in order to identify opportunities for enhancing existing support programmes.

Previously no generalizable information was available on the long-term outcomes of reintegration among returnees assisted by different reintegration assistance programmes in Georgia due to the diversity (incomparability) of programme monitoring tools used, and due to the general lack of tools focused on the monitoring of reintegration outcomes. This research utilized IOM's *reintegration sustainability scoring index[5]* tool in addition to focus group discussions to assess outcomes among returnees who benefited from assistance provided by the State Reintegration Programme of the Government of Georgia, the IOM, Caritas, and Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII) – all major reintegration assistance providers in Georgia. The sample captured is large enough to permit generalization of findings on the national level. Methodology is described in detail on pages 15-18.

The report presents **a detailed profile of returnees who receive reintegration assistance in Georgia**. Beneficiaries of reintegration assistance in Georgia are equal part male and female, though significant differences are observed between the

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[1]   SCMI (2019), Migration Profile 2019.

[2]   World Bank notes -0,2% population growth for Georgia in 2019.

[3]   SCMI (2020), Migration Strategy of Georgia, 2021-2030.

[4]   IOM (2017) Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in context of return, available online.

[5]   IOM (2019) Reintegration Handbook, pp.49-50, 311-322, available online.

length and nature of migration journeys of Georgian men and women – men typically staying abroad for a short amount of time, returning at a younger age, and women returning after on average twice as long of a stay abroad at an older age. Only one third of beneficiaries return to a rural area, while the majority return to urban centers (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Telavi, Rustavi, Batumi). The survey revealed strong migration links between particular regions in Georgia and specific host countries (e.g. Imereti and Greece). Returnees largely indicate that they returned primarily to attend to family obligations, but a third of all returnees also cited a negative decision on their asylum claim abroad or even a departure order as their motivations for return. On average, returnees surveyed received 2.8 different reintegration services each, business grant being the most common type of assistance received. The results highlight a continued prevalence of the "business start-up model" approach in reintegration programmes available in Georgia, and limited availability of alternative support services such as psychosocial assistance (referral to a psychologist), or job placement (a wage subsidy), which have been shown later in the study to be both commonly desired by returnees, and very effective in supporting reintegration. Further details on trends in reintegration assistance are available on pages 19-24.

The study brings **solid evidence on reintegration outcomes among Georgian returnees who benefited from reintegration assistance in Georgia** – quantitative findings from the reintegration sustainability scoring index are accompanied and explained by qualitative findings from focus group discussions. The results confirm that Georgian returnees struggle most with reintegration in the economic dimension, while highlighting difficulties with assessing true psychosocial reintegration among returnees due to strong presence of desirability and cultural biases. Overall, Georgian returnee outcomes are poorer than global reintegration score averages available to date, especially so in terms of perceived access to services 12-36 months following return. Female returnees systematically score higher than male returnees, and older migrants show better reintegration outcomes than those younger, who continue to harbor strong re-migration desires. Urban returnees have poorer reintegration outcomes than rural returnees, largely due to high costs of living and inability to rely on subsistence farming to complement their household income. Significant differences in reintegration outcomes are also found between different regions of Georgia. Returnees to Kvemo Kartli achieve poorest outcomes, while returnees in Mtskheta-Mtianeti perform best overall, as well as across all dimensions of reintegration (economic, social, psychosocial).

The study does not to aim compare the "effectiveness" of various reintegration assistance programmes in Georgia. Such exercise is not possible given the large differences between the modalities of each programme and between individual, often need-based entitlements as well as systematic differences in characteristics of beneficiaries of different programmes. On the other hand, the study does show that **certain reintegration services are linked to higher or lower reintegration outcomes**. More can be found on pages 29-36.

Thanks to the robustness of evidence collected, in chapter IV this report also presents **predictive models which estimate reintegration outcomes for individuals based on a combination of key factors** such as age, gender, reason for return, length of absence, or type of assistance received. The complexity of one's reintegration experience cannot be fully explained by statistical analysis, but nevertheless, the predictive models are useful as indicators of the positive or negative influence of independent factors on an individual's reintegration outcome and could be used by practitioners at the outset of counselling to estimate the level of assistance necessary to support a migrant's sustainable reintegration.

Cognizant of the ongoing efforts of the Government of Georgia and other stakeholders and partners existing reintegration assistance available in Georgia, **IOM presents this report to contribute to the evidence-based development of reintegration programmes in Georgia**[6]. The wealth of evidence in this reports will benefit policy-makers and programme implementing actors in the sphere of return and reintegration in Georgia, as well as other readers and practitioners interested in the application of innovative data approaches in migration research.

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[6] Further guidance on the design, implementation, and monitoring of Reintegration Programmes can be found in the IOM Reintegration Handbook (available online).

Understanding Reintegration

Return migration is an integral part of human mobility. When people leave their countries, it is often with the expectation that they will return at some point, especially if leaving for reasons other than crisis or violence. Migrants make a decision to leave on the basis of diverse and highly individual factors. Some leave to pursue opportunities unavailable to them in their own country – such as education or employment. Others, however, leave because they feel that the situation in their community of origin does not allow them to live the lives they would like to live, or because they seek ways to better provide for their family.

Following return, factors at the individual, community, and structural levels impact the ease with which a migrant can re-establish their life in a country of origin. Migrants' age, gender, health, specific vulnerabilities, attitudes, and skills make a big difference in facilitating reintegration. Similarly, the nature of the migration experience and especially the modalities and context of return impact a migrant's chances at sustainable reintegration. A migrant who returns spontaneously (without a push factor such as deportation order), independently (without assistance), and/or in a planned fashion, may have a very different reintegration experience from a migrant who had been deported or who returned abruptly due to external circumstances. The conditions in the community of origin also play a significant role in enabling reintegration, including factors such as positive attitude of the family and neighbors to the migrants' return, or rate of depopulation in the place of residence. Finally, structural factors such as access to health care, services, or justice, employment opportunities, or perceived safety form the back-bone to sustainable reintegration. Economic, social, and psychosocial factors shape reintegration experiences of all migrants, in some cases supporting, and in other cases hindering sustainable reintegration.

For the purpose of this study, *returnees* are defined as migrants who have returned to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border.

For some returnees, return is fraught with challenges, and for others it is easier (see Case Studies 1 and 2). In recent years there has been greater recognition of the challenges that confront returning migrants in Georgia. There is more awareness of the need for support to facilitate sustainable reintegration among those more vulnerable, as well as recognition of the fact that reintegration support can be beneficial not only for returnees and their families, but also for their communities and local development. Understanding the multi-dimensional and multi-level nature of the reintegration process that accompanies return migration is necessary for developing and implementing successful reintegration assistance.

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1 Case study

A 42-year-old woman returned to Tbilisi after 2 years abroad in Germany. Upon her arrival, she received medical support from the State Reintegration Programme facilitated by the Government of Georgia. Nevertheless, since her arrival, she has been struggling with hard economic conditions in her place of residence. She is unemployed and continues trying to find a job, but in vain. She is not able to borrow money formally or informally. She does not have her own place to live. She doesn't trust the police, the justice system, and the court: *"Years ago, in 2013 I was a victim of domestic violence from my husband. He worked in the Police Department and settled the case illegally, so I was not able to find justice,"* she says. She is suffering from cancer and can't afford to get proper treatment. She does not have a sense of belonging and regrets returning to Georgia. She considers that her present conditions don't allow her to stay in Georgia. *"I prefer working as a slave abroad rather staying like a useless person in my country."*

2 Case study

A 37-year-old woman has returned to Tbilisi after 1.5 years abroad in Belgium. She received reintegration support from IOM, including a job placement. She passed training courses in Management and Accounting and now works as a manager of a restaurant. She is very satisfied with her economic situation and is not looking for another job. Even the COVID-19 pandemic did not influence her income. She has taken a loan from bank, and she does not have trouble making monthly repayments. She declared having good access to different social services and is satisfied with her reintegration progress. She has high living standards and a strong support network, which also enables her to deal with any difficulties.

In 2017, IOM revised its approach to reintegration sustainability in the context of return – the so-called Integrated Approach to Reintegration[7]. It acknowledges that the various factors influencing a person's ability to reintegrate in their country of origin are not dissimilar from those that resulted in the decision to migrate in the first place. **Reintegration can therefore be considered sustainable when "returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re) migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity[8]" .** This definition highlights the multi-dimensional nature of a reintegration process – economic, social and psychosocial – and the need to approach migrant reintegration in a comprehensive manner, considering the factors that can affect reintegration at the individual, community and structural levels.

The economic dimension of reintegration covers aspects of reintegration which contribute to economic self-sufficiency. These include the ability to borrow money, the debt-to-spending ratio, need for food rationing, adequacy of employment, ownership of productive assets, etc.

The psychosocial dimension encompasses the emotional, mental, and psychological elements of reintegration. "Psychological"-related needs – such as the need for therapy due to a mental health concern – are just one component of the broader psychosocial dimension.

The social dimension reflects the extent to which returnees have reached social stability within the community, including access to services relating to housing, education, justice, health, and other public infrastructure services.

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7   IOM (2007), The Integrated Approach to Reintegration.

8   ibid.

Reintegration in Georgia:
context of return and support available

Recent return trends

Except for the capital city Tbilisi and coastal city of Batumi, all regions in Georgia have experienced severe **depopulation** in the last two decades (latest available data show that on average, 25% of population left every region between 2002and 2014[9], with emigration on further rise since), with most of those who leave moving abroad. Depopulation and loss of human capital has led to market deterioration in the most vulnerable regions in Georgia, further destabilizing communities already affected by persistent poverty and lack of opportunity. Communities experience economic insecurity in the form of unemployment and chronic underemployment, lack of access to credit and other economic opportunities, food insecurity manifested through dependence on unreliable/unskilled self-production, low level of preparedness for crop-damaging natural disasters, and reported food rationing (95% of returned migrants in IOM's 2019 assessment indicated some level of food rationing in their household), as well as health insecurity due to prohibitive costs of health insurance and high cost of medical services.

The socio-economic conditions lead affected communities down the spiral of destabilization and further depopulation. Indeed, an assessment conducted by IOM in 2019 suggests that households in the most affected parts of Georgia rely extensively and often exclusively on remittance income, further exacerbating emigration trends and pushing additional individuals to consider labour migration as a means of supporting their families. Indeed, **reliance on remittances** and international mobility is a common livelihood practice across Georgia – emigration is widely seen as a means of securing income for families in communities marked by depopulation and lack of local livelihood opportunities. In 2019, remittances to Georgia amounted to an estimated 10.5% GDP. As the National Bank of Georgia reports, personal remittances sent to Georgia grow each year, mostly wired from Russian Federation, countries of the European Union (Italy and Greece with the largest shares), Israel, Turkey, the USA, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and others. Similar sending countries were reported in 2020. Return of Georgian bread winners thus represents an interruption to a long-standing lifestyle and threatens remittance-dependent households with a drop into poverty unless returnees reintegrate and find alternative sources of income locally.

Mirroring the accelerated rate of emigration from Georgia, in the last five years also the **scale of returns** to Georgia has been growing significantly. The vast majority of Georgian asylum seekers in Europe (over 20,000 applications in 2019[10]) receive negative decisions on their claims and subsequently depart spontaneously, face departure orders, or enroll voluntarily in assisted return programmes.

Capturing **data on return migration** is notoriously difficult. Data available capture returns of assisted nature – those facilitated through programmes of voluntary return, such as the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, and those capturing numbers of deportations. Data on spontaneous (non-assisted) return movements which form the majority of the return migration dynamic are not currently recorded[11].

In 2019, IOM assisted 2,592 Georgians with their return trip to Georgia (41% female, 59% male), and additional returnees were assisted by the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII), and Caritas. In addition to those assisted, others have returned independently without support.

Of all regions in the country, Tbilisi (urban), Imereti (rural) and Kakheti (rural) have experienced the highest rates of international returns, while Guria (rural) and Adjara (rural) are among the regions experiencing the highest rates of seasonal, circular migration dependency.

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9   Latest data available from Geostat, 2014 Census.

10   Eurostat

11   IOM (2020) Report on Reintegration System of Returning migrants: challenges and ways to overcome.

In addition to the above trends, many Georgian migrants decided to return to their country of origin in face of insecurity or inability to afford staying abroad during the 2020 global pandemic. According to official statistics capturing COVID-19 repatriation channels under the auspices of the Government of Georgia, more than 23,300 Georgian migrants are known to have returned to the Georgia on formal repatriation flights between March and August 2020 alone (no flights were organized since September 2020). Complete figures capturing returns inspired by COVID-19 are expected to be higher, considering returns by land, and returns realized independently via limited commercial airline flights. [12].

Reintegration assistance available

For migrants who need to return home but lack the means to do so, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes provide a solution to their immediate plight. Beneficiaries of AVRR assistance include individuals whose application for asylum was rejected, under appeal, or withdrawn, stranded migrants, students, those who overstayed their visa, victims of trafficking, and other vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied migrant children, or those with health-related needs. Additional programmes in Georgia offer a stand-alone post-arrival reintegration assistance disconnected from the migrant's return (for example the State Reintegration Programme offered by the Government of Georgia).

The post-return services available to returnees are determined by modalities particular to each programme. Eligibility criteria for different types and levels of assistance vary considerably: the types of services offered, monetary amount of reintegration assistance to which each individual or family is entitled, intensity and frequency of follow up and monitoring services, as well as payment modalities differ significantly between reintegration assistance programmes.

Four main reintegration programmes are available to returnees in Georgia[13]: The Government of Georgia's State Reintegration Programme, the OFII's reintegration programme, a project supporting reintegration of returnees implemented by Caritas, and the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme implemented by the IOM Mission to Georgia. A total of 2,042 migrants returned and subsequently benefited from reintegration assistance provided by the above institutions upon voluntary return to Georgia between May 2017 and May 2019[14]. This study is based on the representative sampling of this population of returned migrants and their reintegration experiences and outcomes.

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[12]   For more information on returns during or due to the COVID-19 pandemic, please see IOM Georgia's information brief dedicated to the experiences, needs, and reintegration outlooks among this group (link in footnote) . IOM Georgia (2021) Return in times of COVID-19, Issue Brief, available online.

[13]   In addition, Charity Humanitarian Centre "Apkhazeti" and NGO "Apkhazeti Intercontinental" offer some reintegration services to returning migrants in Georgia but assist only a very small number of migrants each year (<10/year). They are not included in this analysis.

[14]   40-12 months since return.

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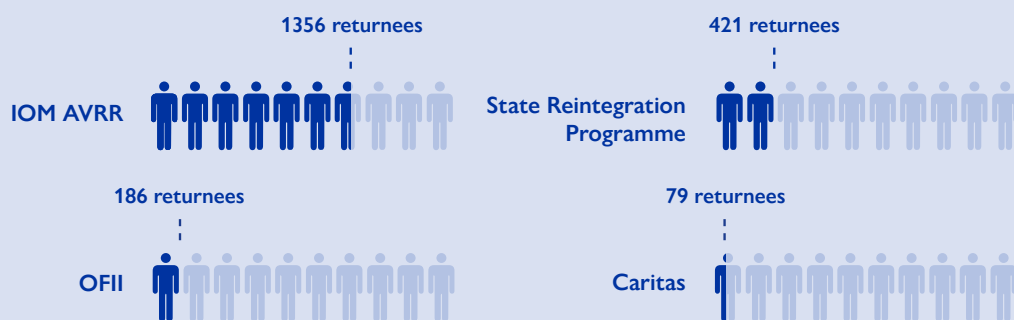
Figure 1. Reintegration assistance programmes by number of migrants assisted (May 2017-May 2019)

In programmes run by IOM, OFII, and Caritas, beneficiaries are approached in host countries by partner organizations or directly approach the organizations with a request for assistance. On the basis of individual interest and profiles, types and level of reintegration assistance are determined. Pre-conditions and criteria for participation in the reintegration programmes are often determined by the host country from which migrants are returning. The organizations' offices in Georgia then receive returnees and facilitate delivery of the reintegration services previously assigned to them as part of their reintegration support. In case of the State Reintegration Programme, returnees apply for support directly from the Government of Georgia following their independent return to the country. This makes the State Reintegration Programme slightly different by design and influences the profile of returnees who benefit from its services: more proactive, independent migrants are typically assisted.

Reintegration programmes	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
IOM AVRR	496	207	558	817	529
State Reintegration Programme	191	228	207	162	199
OFII	0	52	72	125	354
Caritas	35	65	190	349	93

Table 1. Reintegration assistance beneficiaries in Georgia per programme (2015-2019)

The section below introduces each programme in more depth, in a decreasing order by number of migrants assisted during the period relevant for this study (May 2017 - May 2019):
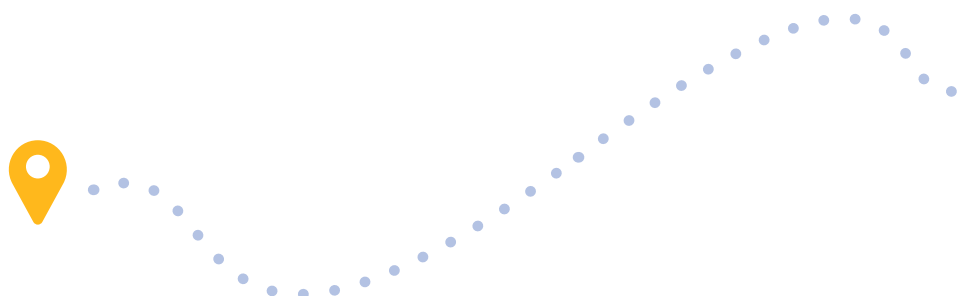
IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)

IOM implements Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes to Georgia since 2003. IOM's offices in host countries are often the first point of contact for migrants wishing to benefit from the AVRR programme. IOM offices in host countries coordinate all case management with IOM Georgia to ensure a realistic, individualized reintegration plan is designed even prior to the migrants' return. Emphasis is placed on the migrants' ability to make an informed decision on the basis of information on return and reintegration conditions and assistance availability.

In 2020 IOM Georgia provided post-arrival reintegration assistance to 530 cases (600 persons) returning from 12 countries in Europe. Most returnees assisted by IOM Georgia returned from Greece, followed by Germany and Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, and Poland. The modalities of assistance differ based on the host country's AVRR programme, as well as on the profile of the returnee. Migrants with medical vulnerabilities, for example, are typically entitled to higher levels of reintegration assistance. An overview of entitlements per programme/country is provided in table 2.

Country of Return	Reception assistance	Reintegration assistance	In-kind amount	Post arrival cash assistance
Belgium	No	Yes	700 - 2200 EUR	No
Belgium (medical)	No	Yes	500 EUR	No
Finland	Yes	Yes	2500 EUR	300 EUR pp
Germany (StarthilfePlus Level D)	Yes	Yes	1000 EUR housing 1500 EUR Medical pp	2000 EUR Corona top-up
Germany (Medical Assistance)	Yes	Yes	2000 EUR	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	3000 USD (+3000 CHF cantonal assistance)	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	From 500 USD medical	No
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	250-1000 EUR medical	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	1500 EUR	No
Estonia	No	Yes	1400 EUR	No
Ireland	No	Yes	600 EUR	No
Latvia	No	Yes	600 EUR	No
Czech Republic	No	No	51400 CZK	No
Poland	No	Yes	7500 PLN	300 PLN
Israel	No	Yes	700 EUR	No

Table 2. AVRR Projects from Europe to Georgia (active in 2020)

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IOM Georgia provides virtual counseling to Georgian returnees in host countries prior to their departure if needed, as well as feedback to various questions from sending missions about reintegration possibilities and assistance costs for vulnerable migrants. IOM Georgia also organizes medical travel escorts for returnees with severe health issues. Upon arrival, reception at the airport and secondary transportation throughout Georgia is offered to migrants, as well as ambulance on tarmac and transportation to hospitals for those with medical needs. Reintegration plans are developed in coordination with returnees through multiple counseling sessions. Individualized reintegration assistance is then disbursed mostly in-kind and either in one or in multiple installments depending on the type of assistance. Returnees are in close contact with their case workers at one of five IOM offices in Georgia (Tbilisi, Telavi, Kutaisi, Poti, or Batumi).

Once reintegration assistance is fully disbursed, IOM connects with returnees once more to assess their reintegration outcomes. Beneficiaries are surveyed from 12 to 18 months after return. Contact with returnees is maintained for up to 2 years following return or even longer in case of medical assistance or skills training and job placement activities.

State Reintegration Programme
Since 2015 the Government of Georgia has been allocating special funds from the state budget for supporting returned Georgian migrants. The program focuses specifically on irregular Georgian migrants - those returned who lived abroad without a legal immigration status, or whose status had expired even prior to their return to Georgia. Between 2015-2018 the Programme was implemented by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia. Since 2019 elaboration and implementation of the reintegration programme was transferred under the competency of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Department of Internally Displaced Persons and Eco migrants. Since March 2020 the "IDP, Eco migrants and livelihood Agency" under the same Ministry is responsible for implementing the programme. A returned Georgian migrant is eligible to participate in the state program if:

● She/he is a citizen of Georgia or a stateless person with the residence permit in Georgia.
● She/he resided abroad illegally for more than one year, or had an asylum application abroad.
● She/he arrived in Georgia less than one year ago.

The State Reintegration Programme provides the following services for the returned Georgian migrants:

● Temporary accommodation maximum for 6 days (maximum allocated budget 240 GEL). This type of assistance is provided only in Tbilisi.
● Medical needs coverage and basic medicine, Psychosocial rehabilitation.
● Income generation projects, facilitation of self-employment opportunities for the returned Migrant (allocated budget- from 500 GEL to 4000 GEL). Not all applicants can be awarded business grants. Consideration of the business applications and final decision for the grant assignment is made by the specially founded committee following additional criteria.
● Professional training for job seekers and re-training opportunities (maximum budget - 1000 GEL).

The French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII)
OFII has been implementing "Voluntary Returned and Reintegration Project in Georgia" since 2016 through designated NGO providers: IDP Women's Association "CONSENT", People in Need Georgia, Caritas Georgia, and AIDE.
OFII aims to accompany Georgian nationals who, being in a precarious situation in France, express their will to return to their country and seek sustainable reintegration. The programme support aims at "contributing to the successful and sustainable reintegration of the beneficiaries who, in their efforts, contribute to the economic development of their country by creating micro enterprises/ or by following professional training adapted to the local market."[15] OFII operates similar programmes in 10 countries of origin, including Georgia. The representation of OFII in Georgia is managed by the Armenian office.

Types of the assistance provided by the OFII:

● Social assistance, including medical assistance, purchase of basic supplies, and rental cost coverage
● (Assigned amount for is 400 EUR for each adult and 300 EUR for each child)
● Vocational education – allocated budget for Vocational education training and apprenticeship is 1000 EUR.
● In case of higher education, up to 2500 EUR is available.
● Business Projects can be funded in value up to 3000 EUR. The grants are awarded on the basis of additional eligibility criteria, such as working experience in the same sector, and willingness to co-fund the venture from own resources.

Caritas Gorgia
Caritas Georgia has been implementing "Voluntary Return and Reintegration Project in Georgia" since 2006, originally focusing solely on Georgian migrants returning from Belgium to Georgia, and later including Georgian migrants in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and France. The project renders material support to all Georgian migrants who voluntarily decided to return to their home country. The support of Caritas Georgia and its partners to the returning migrant is aimed at "improvement of living conditions following return"[16].

Assistance offered by the project is not limited and depends on the needs of every individual returnee. The necessity and priority of assistance for every case are assessed through a social consultation and a mutual agreement between a counsellor and the returnee. Assistance may include:

● Contacting and meeting returnees from various European countries in Georgia.
● Providing social consultancy and assessing their needs.
● Assisting returnees in their housing problems.
● Providing medical, social, psychological, and legal assistance.
● Providing opportunity for vocational training.
● Providing opportunity for professional reorientation training.
● Assisting the returnees in their search for the job, assisting children in their training.

With the kind support of the Government of Georgia, OFII, and Caritas Georgia, beneficiaries of all four programmes have been included in this study of reintegration outcomes.

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15   Additional information can be found on OFII website.

16   See additional programme info on the Caritas website.

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Methodology:
Measuring sustainability of reintegration

This analysis aims to fill an evidence gap in understanding of the reintegration trends and outcomes among voluntary returnees in Georgia who have benefited from reintegration assistance following return. The approach combined findings from IOM's standardized Reintegration Sustainability Survey with additional quantitative and qualitative survey data and in-depth insights gained from focus group discussions. Economic, social, and psychosocial factors which could support or undermine an individual's ability to reintegrate sustainably have been examined alongside key demographic characteristics of the respondents, information relating to their migration experience, information on types of reintegration assistance received, as well as a brief inquiry into the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on individuals' reintegration.

Measuring sustainability of reintegration

In order to monitor and evaluate the extent to which returnees have reached sustainable reintegration, IOM developed the Reintegration Sustainability Survey (RSS) and scoring toolkit, evaluating sustainable reintegration of individual returnees along the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions. This toolkit enables comparison of beneficiary reintegration across individuals, assistance programmes, dimensions, country contexts and over time.

Based on global protection frameworks and a broad-spectrum data collection in diverse contexts of return, the RSS survey contains 15 indicators and 30 measurement elements relating to the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration, together with a weights system for measuring reintegration outcomes that facilitates the measurement of returnees' progress towards sustainability. Designed to be easily deployed in global reintegration programming, the scoring system generates a composite reintegration score and three dimensional scores measuring economic, social and psychosocial reintegration, as outlined in the definition of sustainable reintegration[17].

The RSS survey is designed for application at different points of the reintegration process. Scoring after the conclusion and in the aftermath of reintegration assistance is perhaps the most valuable, however, because it reflects the outcome - the sustainability of the returnee's situation. These scores can also feed into final programme evaluation. They can be analyzed to indicate the effectiveness of different types of reintegration assistance for different categories of returnees, in different contexts. Data generated through the scoring system also provide the necessary evidence of the influence of community and structural-level factors on the reintegration of individuals (for example, poor access to health care is systematically reported in a set area) and can therefore feed the development of targeted community and structural-level interventions. Trends in reintegration scores can be easily analyzed in relation to basic profile information. Reintegration scores can be compared across sex, gender and age. They can compare patterns for returnees assisted through voluntary return and those returning through other means. The recommended variables for an analysis of reintegration sustainability are listed below:

- Sex and gender
- Date of return
- Age at time of return
- Host country prior to return
- Country of origin
- Length of absence from country of origin
- Mode of return
- Community of return same as community of origin?
- Possible situations of vulnerability (determinants/triggers)
- Type of occupation

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17 For details on IOM's RSS methodology, including the survey itself, see IOM (2019) Reintegration Handbook, pp.49-50, 311-322 or Majidi, N., Nozarian, N. (2019), Measuring Sustainable Reintegration, Migration Policy and Practice, Vol. IX, Number 1, January–March 2019, pp. 30-39.

In this research, the RSS survey was complemented by questions capturing the respondents' profile and migration experience, assistance received, and perceived impact of COVID-19 pandemic on respondents' reintegration.

To complement the results of survey data collection, IOM organized nine (9) focus group discussions across the territory of Georgia to validate the quantitative findings and explore reintegration experiences in depth[18]. In each focus group, seven to ten (7-10) participants discussed the highs and lows of their reintegration experience, and their experiences in the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration. In addition, questions were asked about the communities to which they returned, and structural conditions of their environment which impacted them following return to Georgia.
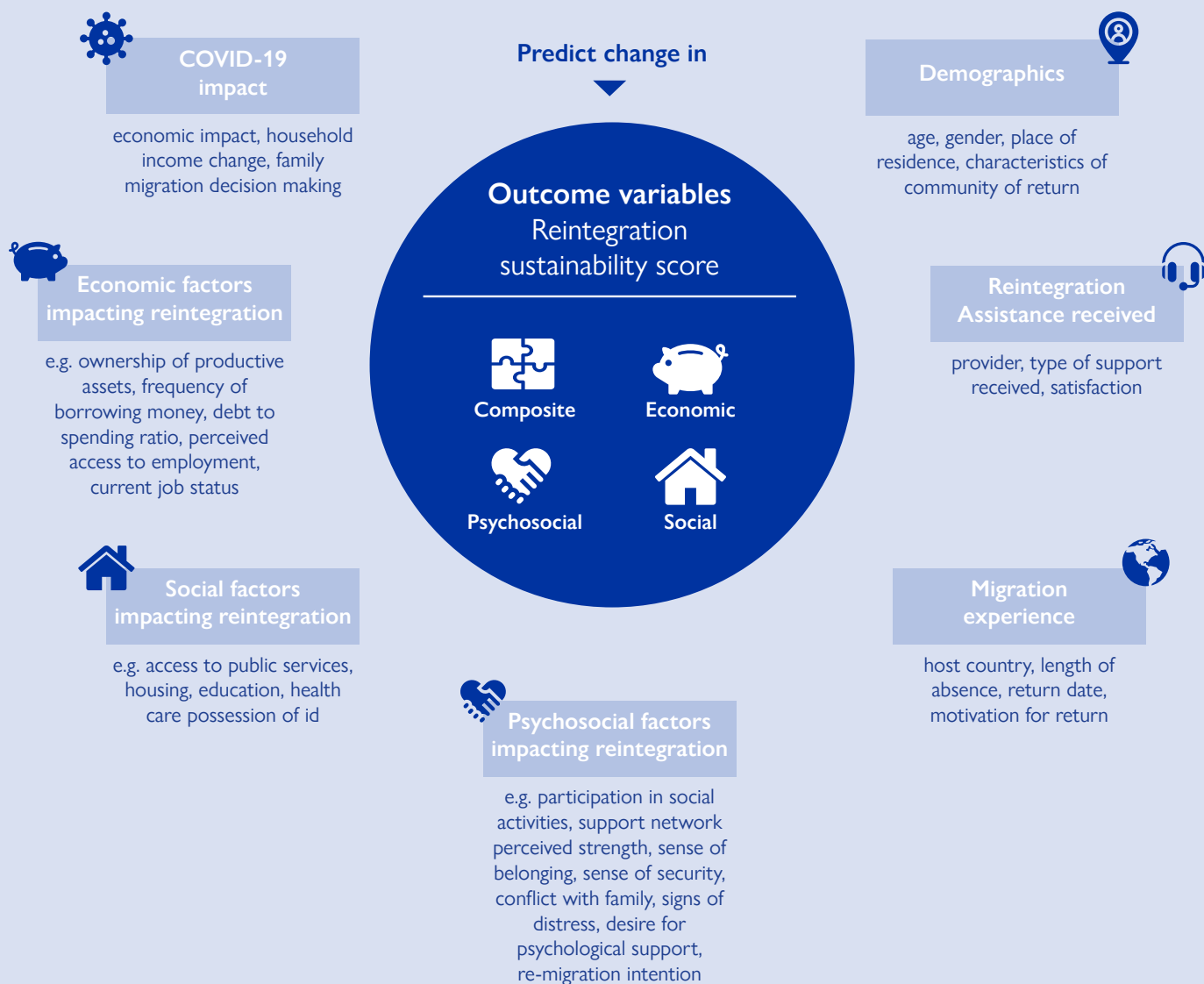
COVID-19 impact

economic impact, household income change, family migration decision making

Predict change in

Outcome variables
Reintegration sustainability score

Composite   Economic

Psychosocial   Social

Demographics

age, gender, place of residence, characteristics of community of return

Economic factors impacting reintegration

e.g. ownership of productive assets, frequency of borrowing money, debt to spending ratio, perceived access to employment, current job status

Reintegration Assistance received

provider, type of support received, satisfaction

Social factors impacting reintegration

e.g. access to public services, housing, education, health care possession of id

Psychosocial factors impacting reintegration

e.g. participation in social activities, support network perceived strength, sense of belonging, sense of security, conflict with family, signs of distress, desire for psychological support, re-migration intention

Migration experience

host country, length of absence, return date, motivation for return

Figure 2. Diagram of study methodology

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18   The distribution of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was planned to correspond loosely to the geographic distribution of returning migrants across Georgian regions. Regions with fewer returns are slightly over-represented, however, two FGDs were organized in Tbilisi and in Imereti each, and one FGD per region was organized in Kakheti, Shida Kartli and Mtskheta Mtianeti (Joint) Kvemo Kartli, Guria and Adjara (joined), and in Samegrelo.

Sampling and data collection

This study is focused on the population of migrants who returned to Georgia between 12 and 36 months prior to the data collection (May 2017- May 2019) who benefited from reintegration assistance.

A probability-based stratified cluster sample method was used to select migrant respondents. The target group was stratified by the regions of origin (within Georgia) and within each region target members were selected randomly, so that each individual had the same probability of being chosen in the sampling process. Gender, age groups, type of assistance and host country of the migrant were taken into account to ensure a balanced sample during the selection process in the regions.

The above-mentioned sampling methodology was applied for the beneficiaries from the AVRR and State Reintegration Programmes. All returnees of Caritas and OFII were contacted as the total number of beneficiaries of these programmes was low and the study desired to reach representativeness at 95% confidence level with 10% margin of error. All those reachable who agreed to participate were surveyed.

Reintegration programmes	Response rate (%)	Non-Response rate (%)	Not reachable (%)	Re-emigrated (%)	Passed away (%)
IOM AVRR	64.1	3.4	23.8	6.2	2.5
State Reintegration Programme	84.7	5.3	9.5	0.5	0.0
OFII	48.9	6.0	44.6	0.0	0.5
Caritas	24.4	5.1	69.2	1.3	0.0
Overall	**62.0**	**4.4**	**28.8**	**3.4**	**1.4**

Table 3. Response rate by different Programmes

Returnees were contacted by phone. An average response rate from the selected respondents was 62 %. Nearly a third of all returnees were unreachable and 4.4 % of returnees refused to participate in the survey. The highest response rate was among beneficiaries of the State Reintegration Programme (84.4 %). This may be due to the fact that only those beneficiaries were contacted who provided a preliminary consent for participation in the research to the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons, Labour, Health, and Social Affairs.

Participants for focus group discussions were selected at random from among contact lists of IOM, Government of Georgia, OFII, and Caritas in a stratified manner to ensure that composition of participants was akin to that of the study population.

Representativeness

Between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2019, a total of 2,042 migrants returned to Georgia and benefited from received reintegration assistance from IOM, Caritas, OFII, or from the State Reintegration Programme of the Government of Georgia (population size). This study's dataset is composed of observations collected among **591** such respondents, achieving a scientifically high level of overall representativeness at 95% confidence level with 10% margin of error.

Reintegration programmes	Target population	Sample collected	Representativeness
IOM AVRR	1356	326	95% CL, 5% MoE
State Reintegration Programme	421	154	95% CL, 10% MoE
OFII	186	92	90% CL, 10% MoE
Caritas	79	19	Programme sample not representative – cannot be analyzed as a stand-alone category
Overall	2042	591	95% CL, 10% MoE

Table 4. Representativeness of sample, stratified by programme

Results can also be analyzed separately per programme in the case of IOM, OFII, and the Government of Georgia, with differing levels of representativeness.

Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data was followed by an exploratory assessment of the Pearson (linear) correlation between independent and dependent variables, and identification of relationships within the sample for further examination. Explanatory variables which exhibited statistically significant correlations with the outcome variables (reintegration scores) were included in a linear regression model, which in turn allowed us to assess the level of influence which particular reintegration factors imposed on the sustainable reintegration among respondents. Findings from the statistical analysis were verified and complemented by in depth qualitative observations extracted from focus discussion transcripts, enriching the overall analysis.

Limitations

While unprecedented in terms of representativeness, scale, and detail, findings of this study shall be interpreted in light of the below limitations:

This study does not capture the reintegration experiences of those migrants who did not benefit from reintegration assistance. From among the population of returnees eligible for reintegration assistance, the survey only captures the experiences of those willing to be surveyed without incentive.

As the centerpiece of this study, the RSS is particularly prone to self-reporting bias and social desirability bias, because it takes the form of a self-evaluation by the returnee. Indeed, stigma seems to be severely affecting especially results in the psychosocial dimension and may positively inflate overall scores as well. Respondents severely under-report reintegration challenges, likely due to social desirability bias affecting respondents' answers related to relations with family, psychological wellbeing, and sense of belonging to a community. IOM consistently observes a strong discrepancy between individual survey responses (overwhelmingly achieving high scores in psychosocial dimension) and difficult experiences shared in focus group discussions where safe space was created for sharing deeper layers of experience in this dimension. Strong emphasis on the family in Georgian culture and lack of sufficient space to build trust between an enumerator a respondent in a phone survey may be at fault.

Returnee profiles:
Who benefits from reintegration assistance in Georgia?

This section presents a profile of the population of returnees who have benefited from reintegration assistance in Georgia in the last three and half years. Characteristics of the sample can be generalized due to sufficient representativeness outlined in the previous section and are presented alongside findings from focus group discussions and operational observations.

Migration and demographic profiles

Migration flows in Georgia are strongly gendered. Among those who received reintegration assistance, a different migration pattern is noticeable as well. On average, male returnees spend 31 months abroad prior to their return, while female returnees had typically stayed abroad more than twice longer than men (66 months). As a result, we observe significant differences in the return ages of Georgian men and Georgian women – while male migrants typically return between the ages of 32 and 43[19], women returnees tend to stay abroad until later stages of life (majority returning between 34 and 61 years old[20], with a median age of 46). A trend of elderly Georgian women returning from Greece illustrates the divergent pattern quite well: indeed, 77% of returnees who returned from Greece in this sample are women, with an average age of 62.2 years (see case study 3). Returnees from Poland and Belgium, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly male, with an average age of 33.
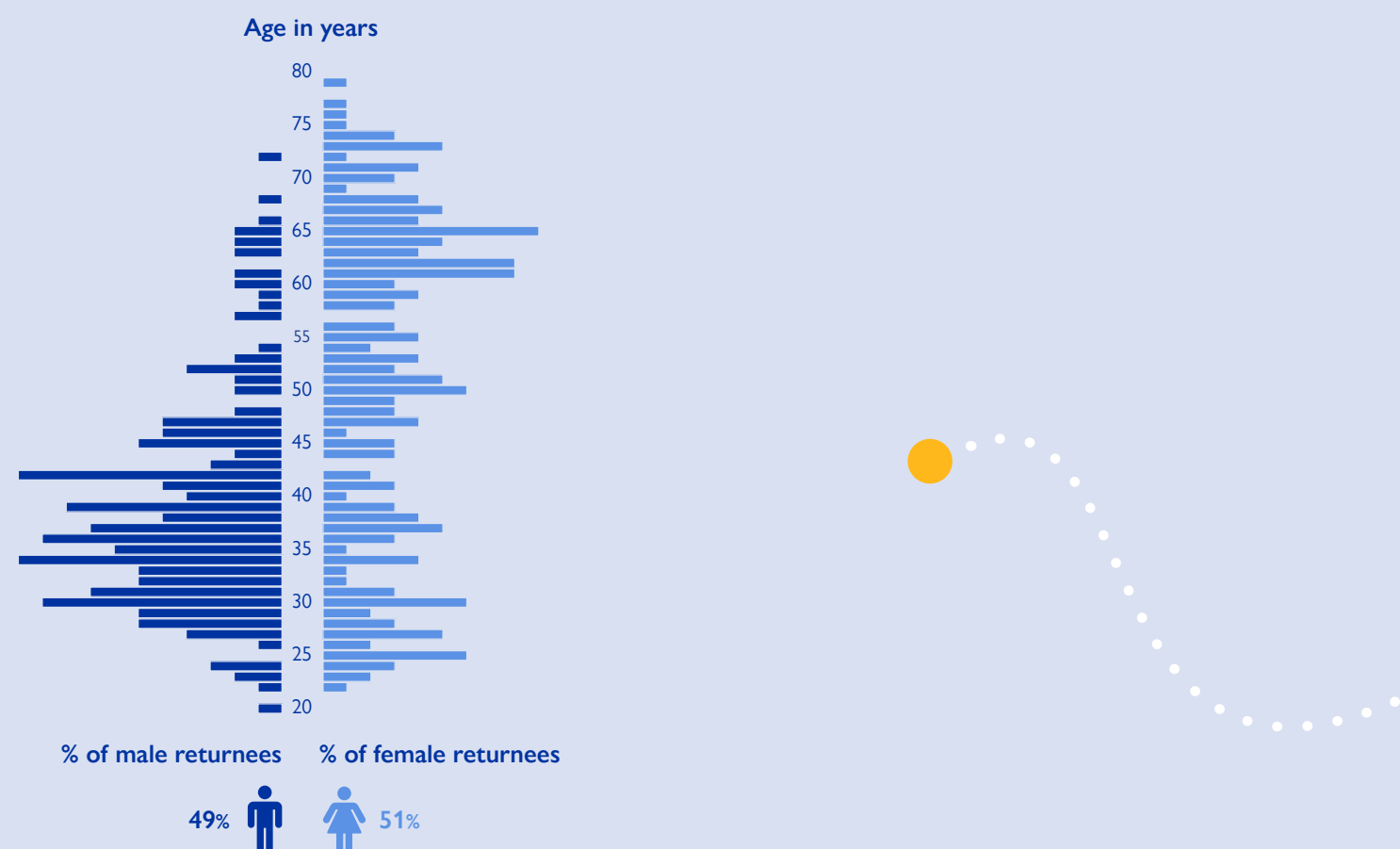

Figure 3. Gender and age of reintegration assistance beneficiaries in Georgia

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19   These values represent the interquartile range, median age of return for men is 37.

20   These values represent the interquartile range.

3 Case study

Greece is among countries hosting the largest number of Georgian migrants. The profile of Georgian migrants who travel to and return from Greece differs from the profile of migrants who emigrate to and return from other countries, however. Returnees from Greece are largely elderly women who left Georgia and went abroad early in life to provide an economic lifeline to their families, including often the children they left behind. Emigration is frequently seen as a reliable income-generation strategy in Georgian households, and it is often women rather than men, who sacrifice themselves for their family. The journey from Georgia to Greece was very difficult for some, especially for those who travelled prior to the EU-Georgia visa liberalization in 2017: *"I had to travel for 17 days. Initially, I went by bus, hidden in the boot, then we walked and afterwards we went by boat. Another boat was coming behind us, which turned over. 4 Georgian women drowned, and another 2 women were eaten by wolves. Eventually, we arrived in Greece. I had to pay 3600 USD to get to the destination. In addition, I had to pay an interest of the loan I took out to cover my journey."* Almost all Georgian migrants in Greece work in clandestinity as domestic workers. They take care of elderly people, work as housekeepers, or look after children, working 24 hours a day, for 6 days per week. It is not uncommon for Georgian women to remain in Greece for more than 15 or 20 years, far from their own children and families. Georgian migrant women In Greece typically return only once they are no longer able to physically continue working and sending remittance back to Georgia.

Eighty-eight per cent (88.53%) of respondents returned from countries within the European Economic Area, with the remaining share split predominantly between Israel (5.2%), Turkey (3%) and Russia (2.3%)[21]. Among countries with longest average stay are Cyprus, Russia, Greece, and Italy. Luxembourg, Latvia, Poland, Finland on the other hand, see Georgian migrants staying for the shortest length of time.

In Georgia, returnees typically settle in **urban rather than in rural** areas. Only over a third (32.72%) of respondents returned to communities of return which can be classified as rural[22], with remaining 67.28% returning to urban centers (especially Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Telavi, Rustavi, Batumi). This sample distribution is in line with IOM's operational observations. Nearly all (87%) of returnees return back to the same community from which they emigrated. Only 12.3% of returnees chose to return to places other than their community of origin, with a majority of those favoring cities over rural communities of origin[23].

Migration flow analysis indicates that the region of Imereti has a particularly strong migration link with Greece, for example (58.4% of returnees who returned to Imereti came from Greece). The region of Shida Kartli, on the other hand, has a strong migration link to Israel (22% returnees from Israel), and Kvemo Kartli has a comparable link with Germany (37% returnees from Germany). Returnees to Adjara frequently return from Turkey or Russia, and Tbilisi as the largest receiving region has strong links to nearly all top host countries, except for Turkey.

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[21]   This distribution mirrors the existence of assisted voluntary return programmes in countries of the EEA, as many returnees can be presumed to return without assistance and un-captured by statistics from Russia and Turkey, large labour migration destinations.

[22]   Returnees' communities of return were classified according to the classification of administrative units used by the Government of Georgia - small towns in the regions were also regarded as urban.

[23]   67% of those who reported not returning to communities of origin now report residing in urban contexts.
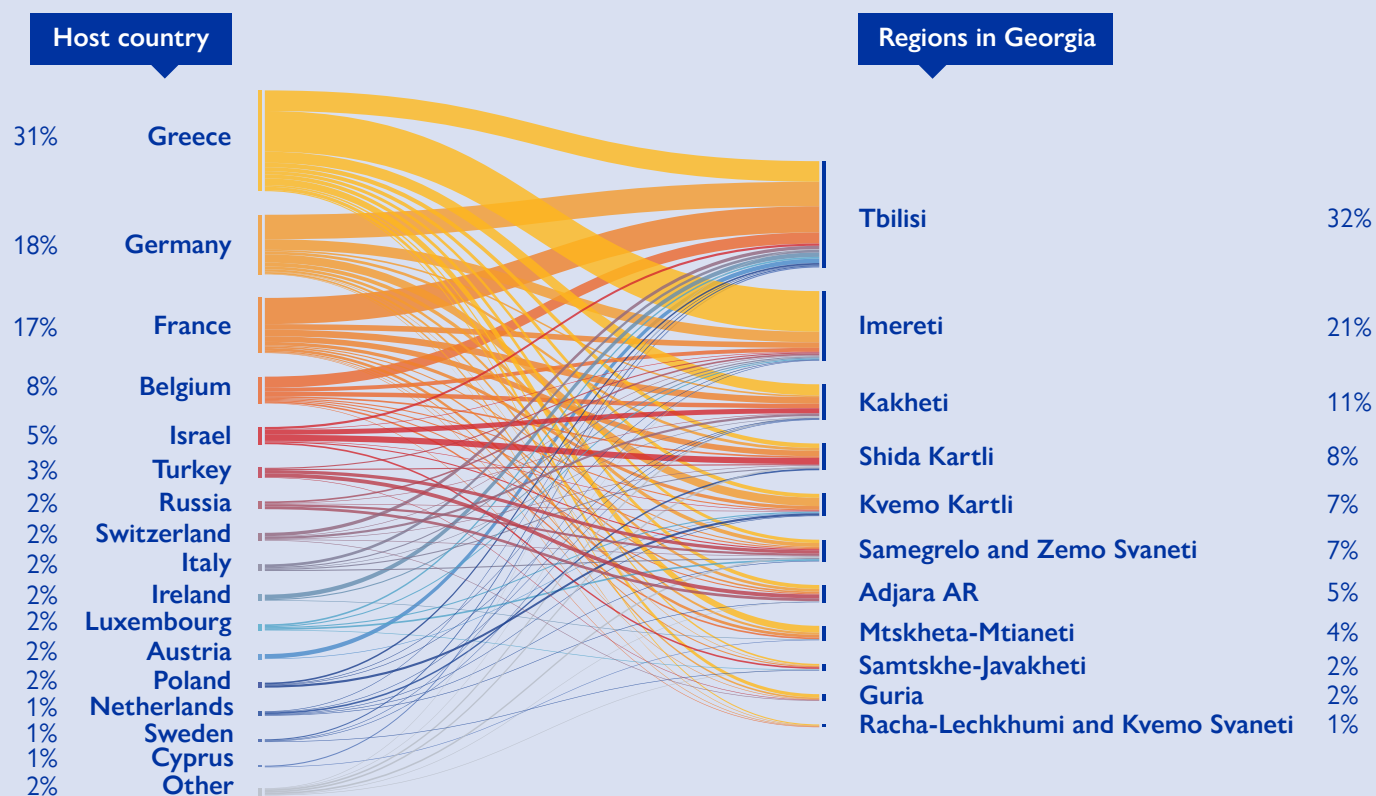
Host country

Regions in Georgia

31% **Greece**	**Tbilisi** 32%
18% **Germany**	**Imereti** 21%
17% **France**	**Kakheti** 11%
8% **Belgium**	**Shida Kartli** 8%
5% **Israel**	**Kvemo Kartli** 7%
3% **Turkey**	**Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti** 7%
2% **Russia**	**Adjara AR** 5%
2% **Switzerland**	**Mtskheta-Mtianeti** 4%
2% **Italy**	**Samtskhe-Javakheti** 2%
2% **Ireland**	**Guria** 2%
2% **Luxembourg**	**Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti** 1%
2% **Austria**	
2% **Poland**	
1% **Netherlands**	
1% **Sweden**	
1% **Cyprus**	
2% **Other**	

Figure 4. Return flows from host countries to regions in Georgia

Region	Returnees in sample	% of sample
Tbilisi	191	32.21%
Imereti	125	21.08%
Kakheti	64	10.79%
Shida Kartli	48	8.09%
Kvemo Kartli	40	6.75%
Samegrelo and Zvemo Svaneti	39	6.58%
Adjara AR	48.9	5.23%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	26	4.38%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	12	2.02%
Guria	12	2.02%
Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti[24]	5	0.84%

Table 5. Return flows from host countries to regions in Georgia

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24 For the purpose of analysis, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region and Samegrelo and Zvemo Svaneti region have been analyzed jointly given their geographical proximity and sample population size.
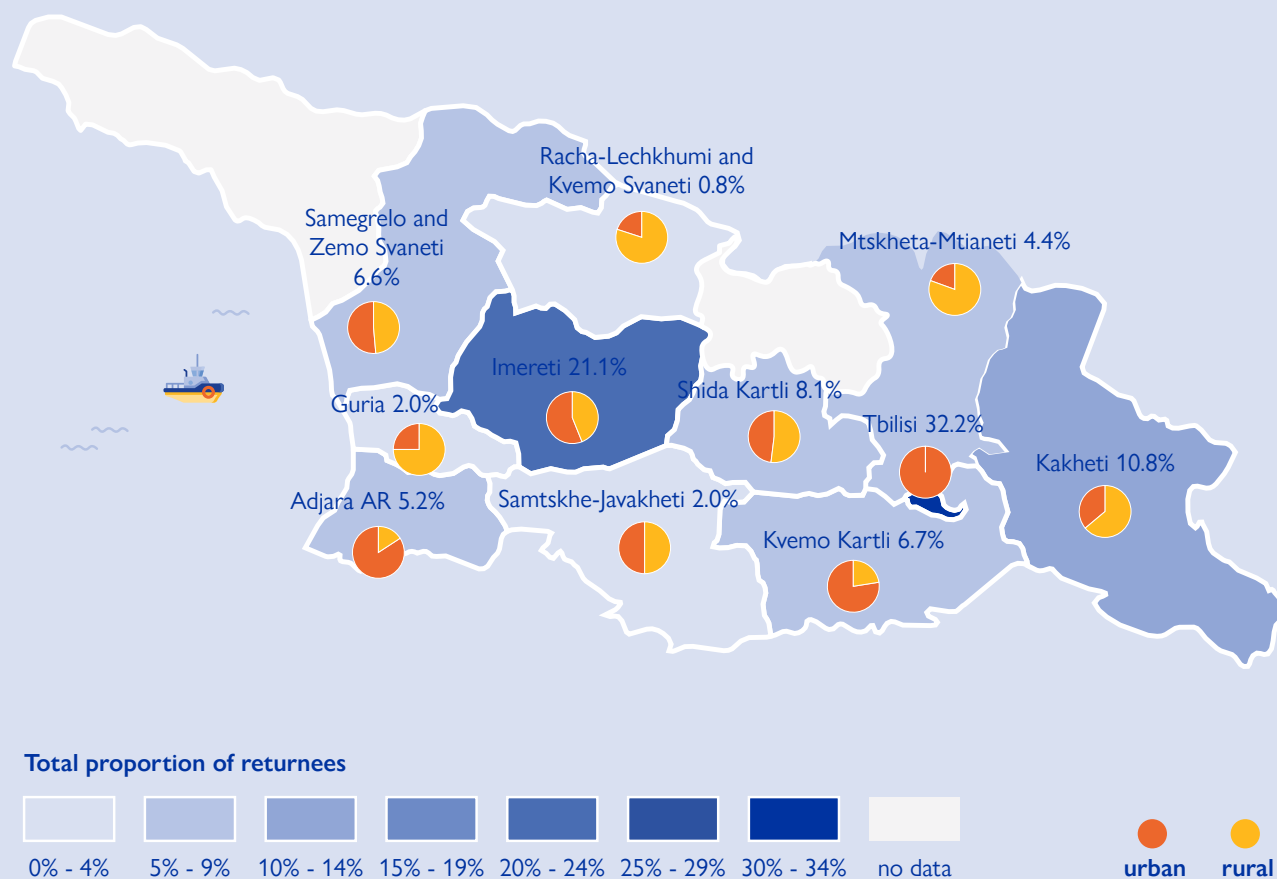
Figure 5. Returns to Georgia – geographic distribution with rural/urban ratio indicated per region (illustration approximate)

Migrants most frequently cite family obligations as one of **their reasons for return** (36%), followed by reception of a negative asylum decision in the host country (23.4%). A substantial proportion (15%) of returnees report having received a formal departure order and decided to return voluntarily with reintegration support as a means of avoiding the threat of deportation. On the other hand, only 7.6% of returnees report that they decided to leave their host country because of hardship (*"life was difficult abroad"*).
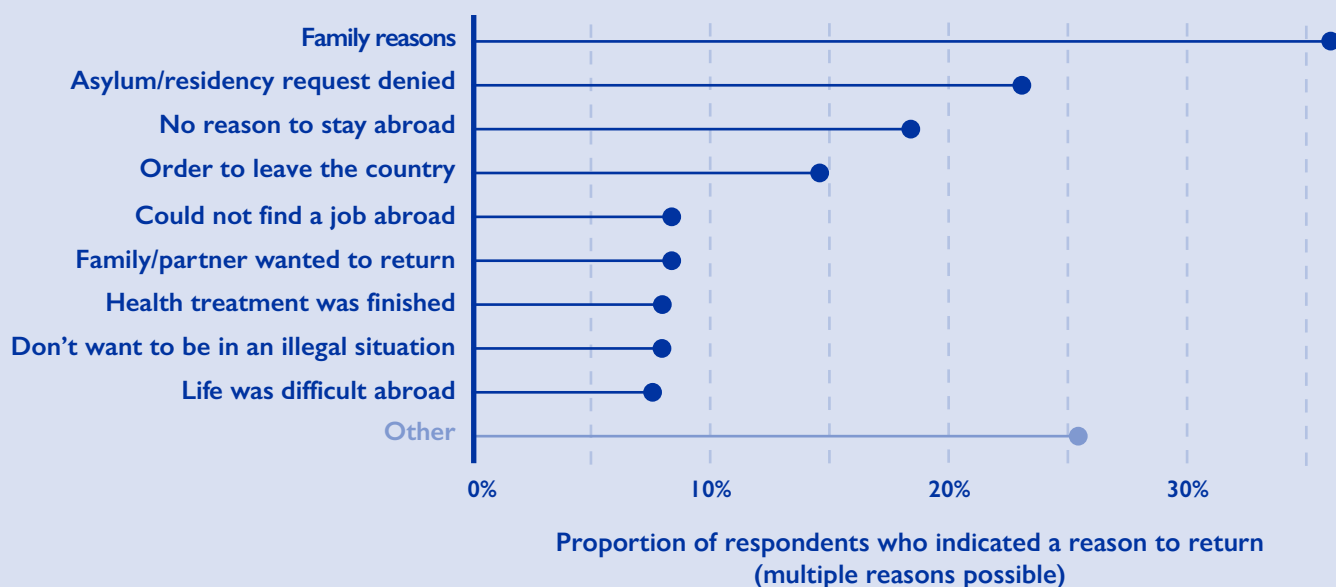
Proasion of respondents who indicated a reason to return
(multiple reasons possible)

Figure 6. Reasons to return to Georgia

Reintegration assistance received

Reintegration programmes in Georgia offer assistance in line with particular programme modalities (see pages 12-14). On average, each returnee benefited from 2.8 different support services. Across all programmes, however, predeparture counselling and reintegration counselling upon return, as well as individual business grants are the most common form of reintegration assistance received.

Of all returnees surveyed, 81.9% received a business grant, male and female beneficiaries benefiting from this opportunity at an equal rate (50.3% male, 49.7% female recipients). That said, this type of assistance is more frequently allocated to those returnees who return to a rural context rather than to those returning to cities - while 73% of rural returnees received a business grant, only one half of urban returnees benefited from this form of assistance. Business grants typically take the shape of purchase of cattle, farming equipment, bee families with hives, land cultivator machinery, mini tractor, or materials and equipment for setting greenhouses, grape plants for vineyards etc. A considerable part of business are also funded in the service sector. In such cases, typical purchases include secondhand vehicles for taxi service, equipment for beauty salons, set up for grocery and other sales businesses, etc. Interestingly, only 77% of business grant recipients indicated at the time of the survey that they own land, animals, trees, vehicles, equipment, tools or other productive assets, indicating that at least 23% of recipients had suffered a loss of the items purchased for them by as part of their reintegration assistance.

Housing assistance was provided almost exclusively (in 91% cases) to migrants who returned to cities, as those returning to villages typically reside in family-owned properties. Housing renovation and furniture purchase assistance was distributed to both rural and urban returnees, however. Education grants (skills training) were typically allocated to younger female returnees (average age of 33) residing predominantly in urban areas.

591
returnees in the study sample

1606
reintegration services the returnees jointly benefited from

2.8
services on average were received by each returnee

Types of reintegration services

Pre-departure counselling in host country

Airport reception

Transportation from airport to community of return

Cash - financial assistance received after arrival

Assistance with documents and Georgian paperwork

Housing assistance (rent)

Household renovation or equipment (furniture)

Subsidized wages - job placement/referral

Reintegration counselling in Georgia (one session)

Reintegration counselling in Georgia (multiple sessions)

Psycho-social assistance (e.g. psychologist referral)

Health care assistance (including addiction treatment)

Education support for returnee's children

Education, training courses for adult returnee

Micro-grant for a small business

Other

IOM UN MIGRATION

Qualitative findings:
The economic, social, and psychosocial reintegration experiences of Georgian returnees

While individual needs and considerations are typically taken into account when designing reintegration plans and determining precise composition of a reintegration package, distribution of services received cannot always be interpreted purely as a response to and reflection of need. Rather, it highlights a continued prevalence of the "business start-up model" approach in reintegration programmes available in Georgia. Accordingly, psychosocial assistance (referral to a psychologist), and job placement (a wage subsidy) were reported received by only one respondent each. This section presents details on the experiences among Georgian returnees in the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration through survey findings and insights from focus group discussions.

To complement the reintegration sustainability survey, IOM Georgia conducted nine focus group discussions (FGDs) within the study sample of returned migrants assisted by IOM, The State Reintegration Programme, OFII, and Caritas. The FGDs took place in different regions across Georgia to capture diverse experiences and migration profiles corresponding in composition to the full survey sample. The conversations confirmed that reintegration in Georgia has not been an easy process for the majority of returnees. Throughout Georgia the majority of respondents stated that that return to their homeland was the only positive aspect in the post-return period. *"Upon my arrival, listening to Georgian conversations made me feel happy; being in one's own country makes one feels as a person, an individual. You feel as a second-rate individual anywhere outside your own country,"* a participant stated. Despite the joy from having returned to their country of origin, returnees reported that hard living conditions and economic problems which inspired their emigration emerged again as soon as they arrived. Structural problems: unemployment, economic hardship, lack of medical services and opportunities are still drivers for emigration like in earlier years.

Economic dimension
The economic dimension of reintegration covers aspects of reintegration which contribute to economic self-sufficiency. These include the ability to borrow money, the debt-to-spending ratio, need for food rationing, adequacy of employment, ownership of productive assets, etc.

Every other returnee surveyed (49.5%) is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their present economic situation. This sentiment is strong among those unemployed (56% of sample), but those who report having a job (including those self-employed) are not significantly more satisfied. Over a third of those employed have reported that they are looking for a different job. Of those, 18% are unhappy with the type of a job they currently have, 18% are unhappy with their present salary, and 10% are unhappy with their work conditions (such as location or working hours). The lack of a desired and well-paid job was indeed mentioned by many during the focus group discussions as the main cause of their reintegration difficulties. Many of the returnees are convinced that connections are critical to finding a good job in Georgia. *"Even if you are a qualified person who commands several languages, you face difficulties in finding a job."* Returnees also consider age as a key barrier to securing employment. *"I've tried to find a job several times. Although I am less than 40, I feel that I am somehow lost. This makes me feel frightened. I have become useless for my children. I will even work as a cleaner, as I am not ashamed of any position. I have been to a lot of interviews, but nobody called me back. I speak five languages with a degree in Philology, and I still can't find a job."* Gaps between migrants' qualifications and relevant working experiences are considered another key obstacle to finding a job in Georgia. *"I was asked about work experience in one of the institutions. As I was abroad for many years, I do not have work experience in Georgia. I can speak several languages but this does not give me any advantage during the selection process."* Returnees also agreed that vacancies are available in the service sector (especially in urban areas and in big cities), but remuneration is too low to cover living costs in those areas or time spent on the job. Many stated that they prefer to stay unemployed rather than to take a poorly paid position.

A significant proportion (41%) of returnees reported that they have limited access to loans. During the FGDs, returnees clarified that they are severely indebted already and not eligible to receive or to re-pay additional loans, formal and informal. Nevertheless, over 33% of returnees still reported in the survey that they borrow money "often" or "very often". A significant proportion (39%) of returnees surveyed indicated that since their return they reduced the quantity or quality of food products their household consumes "very often" or "often". Additional 25% reduce food quality or quantity "sometimes". During the FGDs, returnees who have children stated that they try not to reduce quality, but others confirmed that they have been consuming less or worse quality food since their return. *"There are many things I buy without even checking the quality of the products. We do not have such income to control the quality."*

The majority of returnees reported ownership of at least one productive asset, with 37,8% owning land, 28.9% reporting ownership of livestock animals, 29.8% reporting ownership of fruit-bearing trees, 46% reporting owning buildings, 25% being the owners of vehicles, and 13% owning equipment and tools.

Psychosocial dimension

The psychosocial dimension encompasses the emotional, mental, and psychological elements of reintegration. "Psychological" needs – such as the need for therapy due to a mental health concern – are just one component of the broader psychosocial dimension.

The FGDs provided evidence of a strong bias observed in the psychosocial dimension of the RSS questionnaire. While in the survey, 92% of returnees stated that they "rarely" or "never" experience tensions in their family upon return, prompted by presence of others with similar experiences and a skilled facilitator, during group discussions, many returnees opened up about their struggles with family reunification and experiences with depression. Both of these topics are considered very private and a source of shame in the Georgian society. It is therefore not surprising that they were under-reported by returnees in the phone survey. In other cases, the body language of FGD participants revealed their misery even though they may not have stated their specific problems verbally.

Parents who travelled abroad without their children have shared details about communication problems with their children upon return. A mother who left her 4-year-old daughter is not able to communicate with her child 8 years later, for example: *"She will be 12 soon and she doesn't realize that I'm her mum. She suffers from alienation and she calls me "aunt" instead of "mum". Could you imagine how hard it was for me when I left my 4-year-old child and emigrated?"* The practice of leaving small children behind in care of grandparents is common among Georgian female migrants who travel to support the family financially from abroad. *"My daughter was in the 4th grade when I placed her with my mother. I lost my child several years after that. Leaving was my fault. It has been a year and few months since I came back. Still my daughter is a stranger to me. She is a 13-year-old girl and when I ask her anything and try to talk to her she is locked in herself."*

During the group discussions, returnees have also shared their experiences with alienation from adult family members. Elderly female returnees in particular opened up to say that upon their return, the decreased financial assistance caused tensions and conflicts in their families. Many stated that they feel they are not a desirable family member anymore since their contributions to the family budget have stopped.

Nearly 70% of returnees reported in the RSS survey that they are "rarely" or "never" invited to social activities, celebrations, and other gatherings in their communities. This could be partially explained by social distancing recommendations and general decrease in social gatherings at time of survey data collection. During the FGDs, however, returnees mentioned additional issues in relation to participation in community life. During the discussion, some returnees revealed that they abstained from going to a social event due to the lack of resources. *"It's good to be in your native country, but we have not been able to attend social events like wedding receptions or*

birthday parties, as you need to wear proper clothes and buy a present. We earn a salary that is not enough to buy even basic food and products." The attendance of the events, such as wedding and funeral is often considered a cultural and family obligation in Georgia.

The survey showed that 63% of returnees "never" or "only rarely" experience signs of psychological distress (anger, sadness, etc). During the FGDs, however, returnees felt free to point to their economic hardship as a source of increased tensions, conflicts within their families, as well as feelings of sadness and depression which they experience. *"Of course, economic problems do influence our relationships. Any topic that is touched upon in the family is related to money. Without money, you are no one, you don't possess anything and you aren't able to do anything"* a returnee shared. Another admitted: *"Sometimes I don't even want to communicate with my wife and daughter. I shout at them to stop talking because I am in a bad mood. In this case one can easily develop neurosis and have disagreements with family members".* Only 20% of survey respondents indicated that they would wish to receive specialized psychological support. Notably, the FGDs showed that it was especially returnees in west Georgia who perceive psychological care as shameful, through a stigmatized lens. On the other hand, FGD participants in urban areas consider psychological support as essential for all returnees.

A majority of migrants reported feeling that they belong to their community (73%). Interestingly, those who stayed abroad longer have reported such sense of belonging at a higher rate than those who stayed abroad for a shorter period of time. That said, discussants mentioned that the broader community of return did not play any role in their reintegration process. The returnees consider that they have only been supported by their family members, relatives, and friends.

Social dimension
The social dimension reflects the extent to which returnees have reached social stability within the community, including access to services relating to housing, education, justice, health, and other public infrastructure services.

Nearly all returnees reported in the survey that they have easy access to basic commodities and services such as documentation, education, or drinkable water. A sizeable proportion of beneficiaries declared that they have "poor" or "very poor" access to housing (27% and 13%, respectively), however, especially those returning to urban areas. During FGDs, returnees indicated that their housing issues mostly result from having sold their dwelling prior to emigration. Following their return, migrants were not able to purchase a new apartment or a house.

Families in Georgia often travel abroad to seek healthcare that is not available, trusted, accessible, or affordable in Georgia (high costs not covered by insurance in Georgia). Correspondingly, access to qualified heath care services in Georgia is also reported as a significant challenge for returnees. During the FGDs, the majority of participants declared that a doctor is easily accessible to their local municipality, but that they do not trust them. For qualified health care services, they feel they have to come to Tbilisi or at least the nearest big city. Nevertheless, not all returnees can afford to receive the recommended treatments (77% of those who declared poor access name cost as a primary barrier). *"I do not have money to deal with the diagnosis confirmed in Italy,"* a returnee shared during the conversation. *"I've had a health problem since I arrived from Germany,"* shared another. *"I had 3 surgeries in 11 months in Georgia, because initially I was not diagnosed properly. It cost us a fortune. If I had undertaken every treatment recommended or prescribed, I would have had to sell my kidney. I have not been able to solve my health problem so far."*

While access to education was generally evaluated positively by returnees (76% indicated "very good", "good", or "fair" access in the survey), returnees do encounter a number of problems, as shared during the FGDs. Accessing state kindergartens is difficult for returnees, for example, due to the complex registration procedures. Occasionally, returnee children face a language barrier and struggle with return to an environment they are not familiar with. Moreover, children have experienced problems with registering in suitable grades at school if lacking an official certificate from schools abroad.

A significant number of families returning had originally gone abroad to seek treatment or care for children living with a disability. Upon return, these families agree that integration of persons with disabilities remains a severe challenge in Georgia. Relevant environment, infrastructure, and attitudes towards persons/children with disabilities change very slowly. *"I faced a problem with a kindergarten, as my child with autism spectrum has a behavioral disorder. If my acquaintance had not worked there, it would have been very difficult to enroll my child in any school in Georgia."* Children with disabilities who return following a stay abroad are not provided with adequate environment and services in Georgian schools. A returnee participant in one of the FGDs shared a story of her child who lives with a physical disability (movement disorder). They returned to Georgia two years ago, but her son still cannot go to school, despite living in Tbilisi. *"My son doesn't go to school because his classroom is on the third floor. At first, I took him in my own arms to the third floor. Later he was appointed a special teacher and afterwards he became a bit aggressive as he wanted to be with other children."*

During the FGDs, returnees also highlighted diminishing trust towards the police and justice system in Georgia. Returnees mentioned that they are afraid of letting their young children go out to play, fearful of the rise in crime in the country. Overall, 10% of surveyed returnees indicated that they feel their access to law enforcement and justice is "poor" or "very poor".

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Quantitative analysis:
Reintegration outcomes among Georgian returnees

This survey provides a snapshot of reintegration outcomes among individuals who have completed their reintegration plans and received all assistance allocated to them within their reintegration programme[25]. Returnees to Georgia surveyed achieved an average composite reintegration score of 0.61 (on a scale between 0 minimum and 1 maximum), with scores varying heavily between individuals as well as across dimensions. The results confirm Georgian returnees struggle most with reintegration in the economic dimension and indicate scores in psychosocial dimension to be highest on average.
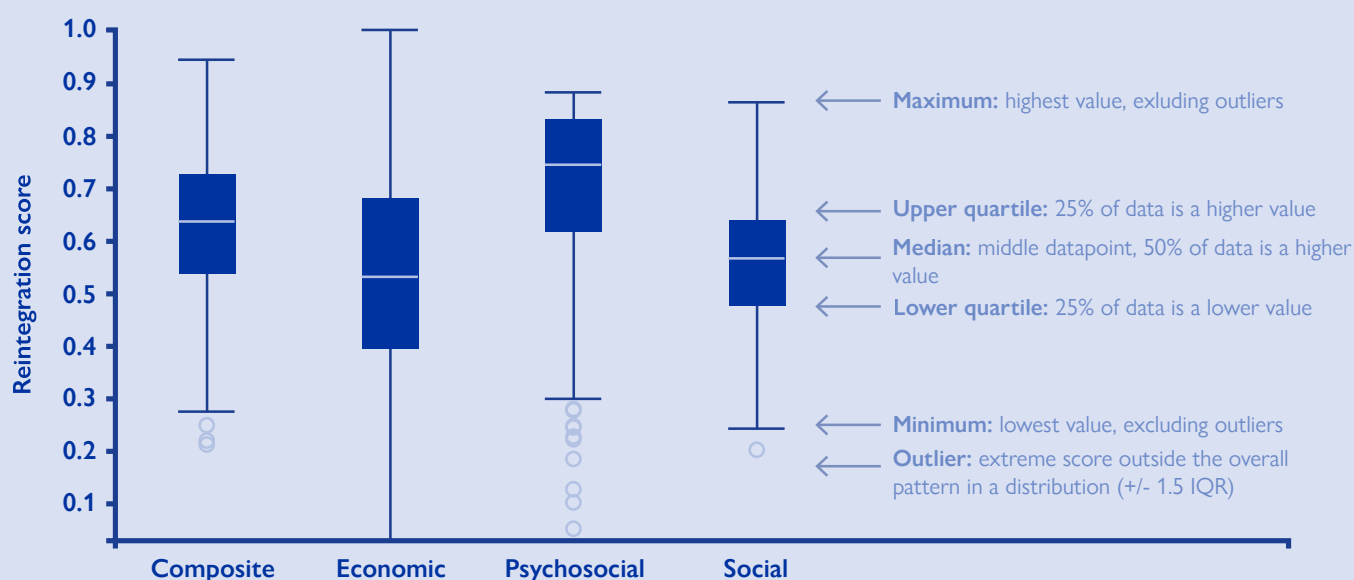

Figure 7. Distribution of reintegration scores in sample

Scores received in the psychosocial dimension of reintegration raise suspicion of a strong bias, however. While composite scores and scores in the economic and social dimensions are distributed along the normal curve, scores in psychosocial dimension are heavily skewed towards the positive extreme of the spectrum. As also outlined in *Limitations* (p. 18), IOM assumes strong social desirability and cultural bias in responses relevant to this dimension and expects that the extent of psychosocial reintegration is lower among the sample and population than indicated in the data. This theory is also supported by the presence of numerous extreme outliers in this dimension in the sample, as well as by evidence gathered through focus group discussions[26].

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[25]   RSS are also useful when comparing individual scores across time (e.g. immediately following return and after reintegration assistance provision has ended), providing an understanding of individual progress prior to and following reception of assistance. This research project only administered the RSS to returnees following their reintegration programme completion.

[26]   These findings raise questions regarding the reliability and comparability of results obtained using the RSS methodology in contexts where cultural biases may strongly impact individuals' RSS scores. For purpose of country-level analysis the comparability concerns are not relevant since we assume the cultural bias direction to be same in all observations in the sample, and results are analyzed with awareness of the limitations. For future cross-country studies, however, researchers are encouraged to anticipate and address the potential of bias in the psychosocial dimension data, e.g. through triangulation with focus groups and other data sources.
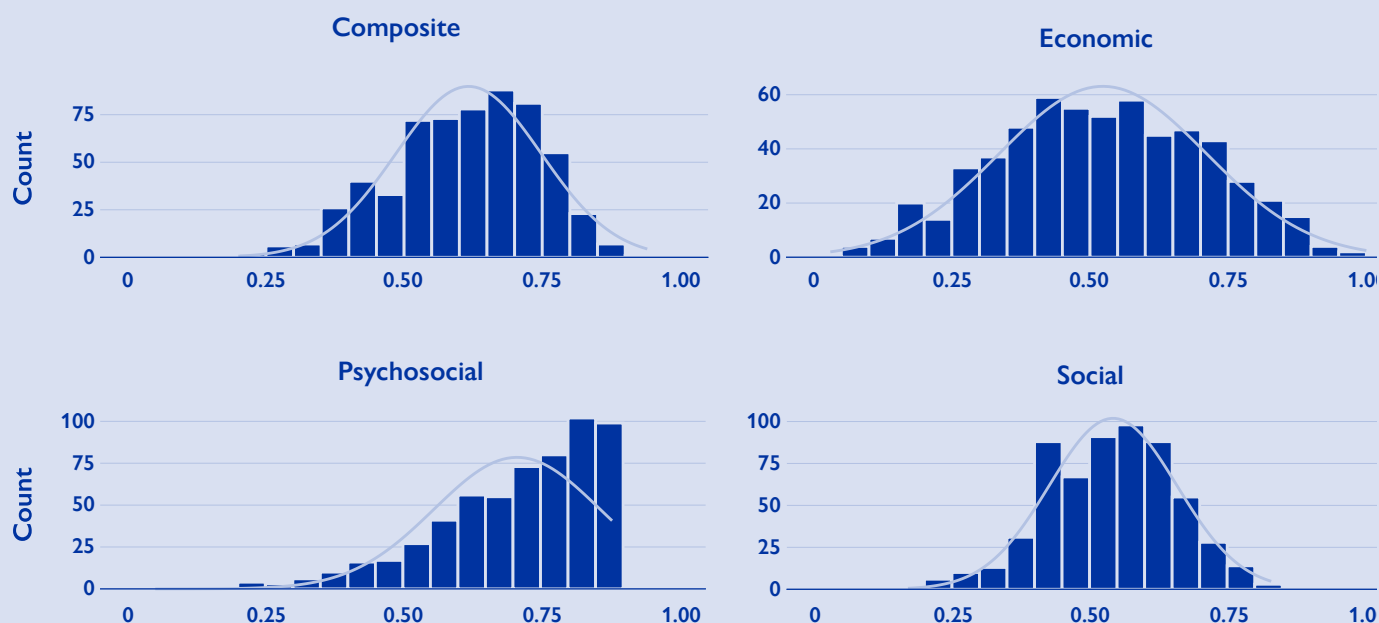
Figure 8. Distribution of observed scores across dimensions

The RSS methodology enables comparison of reintegration outcomes between migrants returning to diverse contexts. In October 2020, IOM published the results of a first high-level cross-country analysis of reintegration scores collected between 2018 and 2020 in sixteen countries of origin across four global regions (West and Central Africa, East and Horn of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Southern Africa), capturing a sample of 4,938 reintegration assistance beneficiaries[27]. Georgian returnees scored on average 0.049 points lower in the composite reintegration score in comparison to this only available global sample. The Georgian sample average is higher than global scores only in the psychosocial dimension, in which, as discussed above, results can be considered inflated and unfit for cross-country comparison.
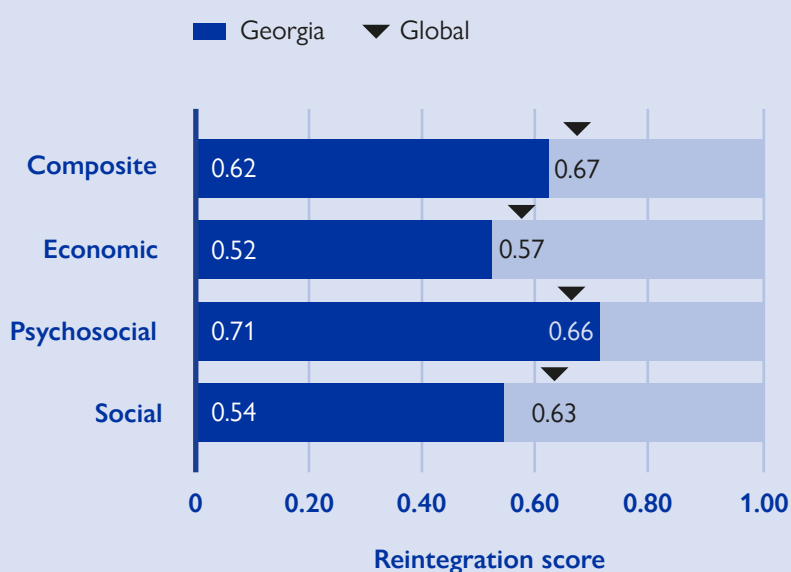

Figure 9. Reintegration outcomes: Georgia in global comparison

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27   IOM (2020), Knowledge Bite #1, Sustainable Reintegration Knowledge Bites Series, available online. Standard deviations were nearly identical in both studies in composite scores (Global Std. Dev 0.125, Georgian Std. Dev. 0.131) as well as in scores in the economic (Global Std. Dev 0.184, Georgian Std. Dev. 0.187), social (Global Std. Dev 0.149, Georgian Std. Dev. 0.115), and psychosocial dimensions (Global Std. Dev 0.150, Georgian Std. Dev. 0.151).

Personal characteristics and migration journey in relation to reintegration outcomes (correlations analysis[28])

Women's and men's reintegration outcomes differ in a statistically significant manner: women systematically score higher than men in the economic and social dimensions of reintegration[29]. Statistically significant differences can also be observed between **age groups** of returnees, with returnees aged 60+ achieving higher levels of reintegration, even though age alone is not a strong explanatory factor for reintegration outcomes[30].

Returnees who return to **rural areas** score higher than returnees who returned to **urban centers**, with largest difference between the groups observed in the economic dimension. Interestingly, difference between urban and rural returnee outcomes was not significant in the social dimension, in which score is calculated on the basis of perceived access to services and opportunities. A plausible explanation for the results observed may be the comparative ease of reaching economic stability through self-employment in the agricultural sector in villages. The majority of returnees in rural areas are self-employed, working their own land to earn income, and living in family-owned housing. This facilitates their economic empowerment following return. On the other hand, beneficiaries who return to cities typically struggle with high cost of living and low levels of income. Returnees residing in the rural area also have a higher reintegration score in the psychosocial dimension when compared with the returnees from the urban area. This may be due to the more traditional lifestyle in villages, where rural population has closer relations with their relatives and community. Accordingly, they may experience fewer feeling of loneliness, stress and alienation from their families and society.
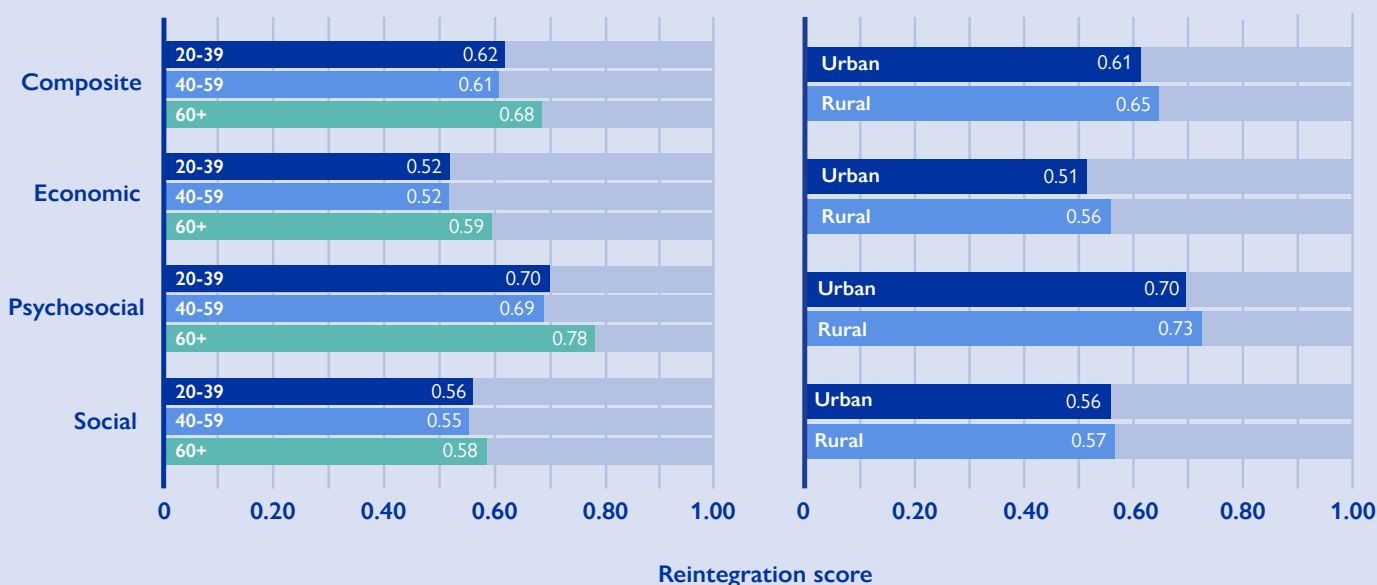

Figure 9. Reintegration outcomes for age groups and urban and rural areas.

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28   All correlations and group differences reported are statistically significant (p>0.005).

29   Women's mean scores are 0.55, and 0.58 in economic and social dimensions of reintegration, compared to 0.51 and 0.55 mean values for men. Difference Significance is 0.032 for economic and 0.001 for social scores (robust equality of means test).

30   r=0.11 for composite reintegration score. The stronger the association of two variables, the closer the coefficient r will be to -1 or +1, depending on whether the variables are positively or negatively correlated.

Significant differences were nevertheless observed in reintegration scores achieved by migrants returning to different **regions of return** in Georgia[31]. Shida Kartli, registering 8.09% of returnees, shows lowest composite reintegration scores overall (with a mean of 0.57) and second lowest economic reintegration scores in the sample (0.47). Returnees in Kvemo Kartli (6.75% of sample) show lowest economic reintegration scores (0.46), lowest social scores (0.54), and second lowest composite scores (0.58). Tbilisi, registering 32.21% of all returns, ranks third lowest in terms of composite reintegration scores (0.59). On the other hand, returnees in Mtskheta-Mtianeti (4.38% of sample) perform best across all dimensions except social (3rd strongest score mean), with a mean composite score of 0.68.
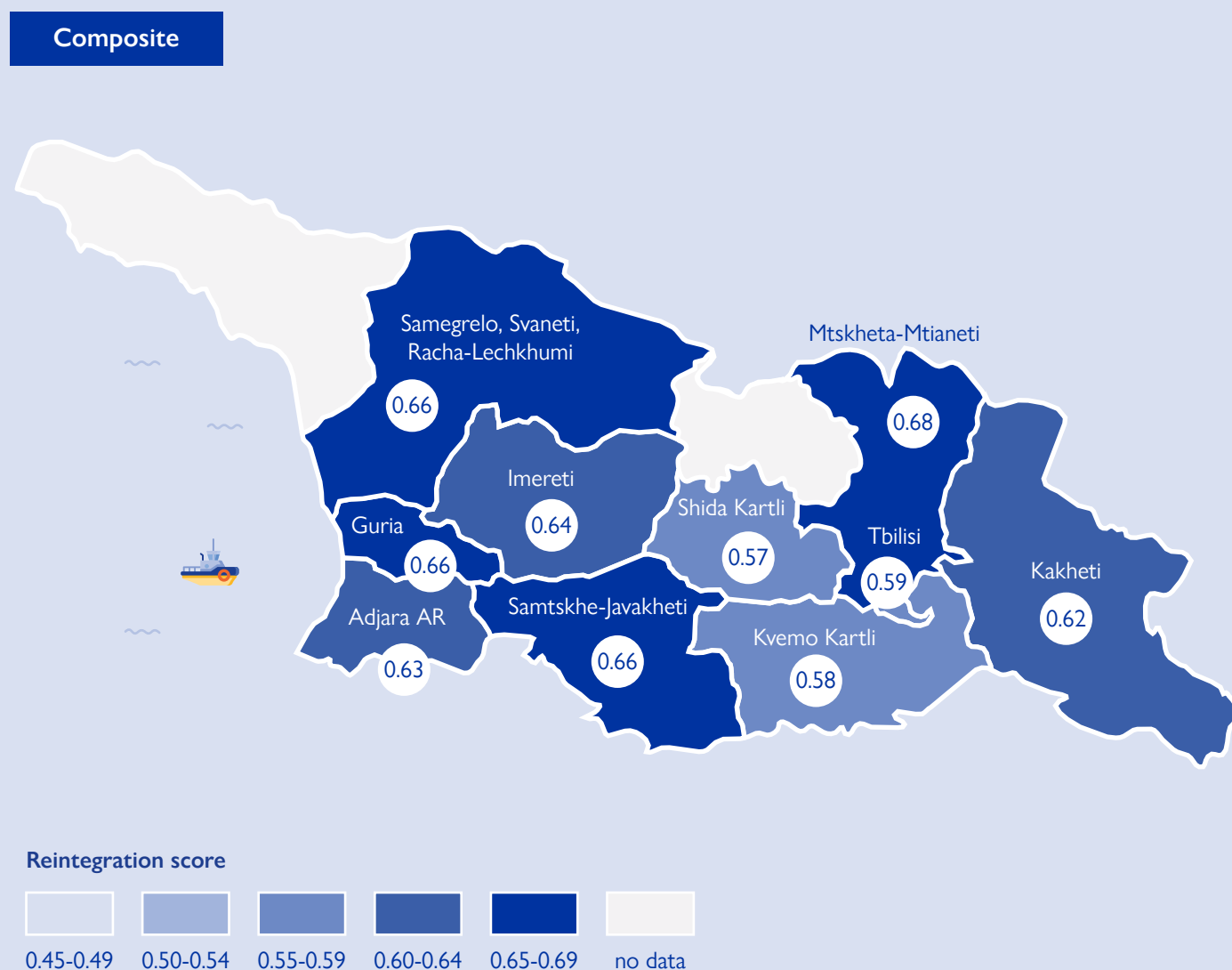
Composite

Reintegration score

| 0.45-0.49 | 0.50-0.54 | 0.55-0.59 | 0.60-0.64 | 0.65-0.69 | no data |

Figure 10. Composite reintegration scores by region (illustration approximate)[32]

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[31] Robust tests of equality of means show differences between outcomes of returnees in different regions are significant in the economic (sig. 0.002), social (sig. 0.035), and psychosocial (sig. 0.001) dimensions of reintegration scores as well as in the composite RSS (sig 0.001).

[32] Since the regions Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti and Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti are least represented in the sample and similar in characteristics they have been analyzed as single unit in this analysis.
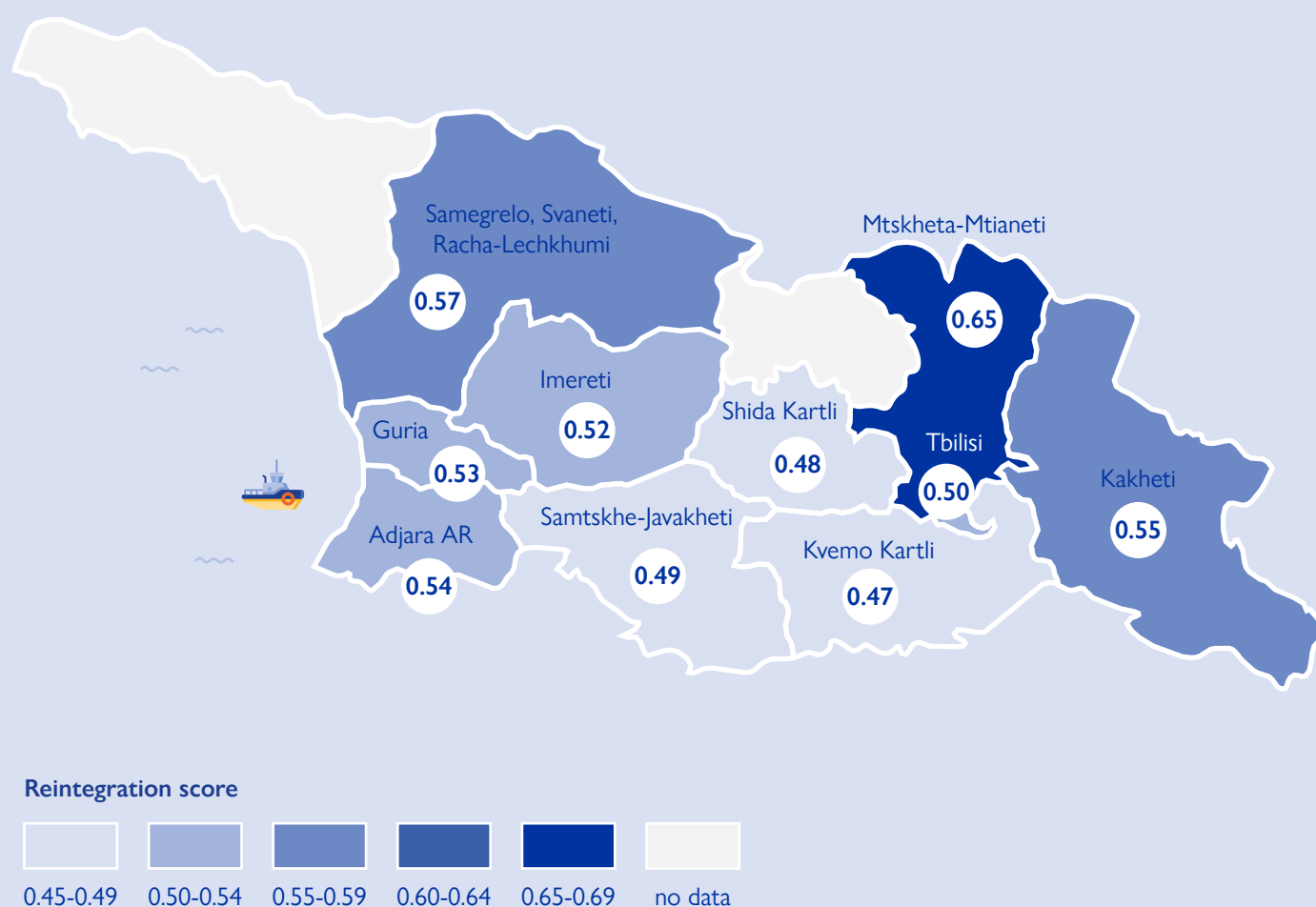
Economic

Reintegration score

| 0.45-0.49 | 0.50-0.54 | 0.55-0.59 | 0.60-0.64 | 0.65-0.69 | no data |

Figure 11. Economic reintegration scores by region (illustration approximate)

When examining outcomes based on **country of migration**, it becomes clear that Georgian migrants who returned from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) achieve better reintegration outcomes on average than those who returned from Europe. Returnees from outside EEA have achieved a composite reintegration score higher by 0.063 points as compared to returnees from within the EEA, with most significant difference between the groups observed in the economic dimension (0.115 point difference). A more detailed analysis of outcomes across countries of migration follows the above pattern: among highest scoring in terms of composite RSS are returnees from Israel (mean composite score of 0.67) and Turkey (0.66), while among lowest-scoring in the sample are returnees from France (0.57) and Germany (0.60)[33,34]. These findings reflect the difference in the profiles of migrants who return from EEA and from elsewhere: returnees in the sample who returned from Europe were largely beneficiaries of AVRR programmes targeting more vulnerable, irregular migrants and facilitating assisted return in addition to reintegration assistance. On the other hand, returnees in the sample who returned from outside the EEA typically returned independently (due to lack of assisted voluntary return programmes to Georgia from outside the EEA) and showed initiative in seeking reintegration opportunities on their own following arrival to Georgia.

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[33] Robust tests of equality of means show differences in dimension scores between different host countries significant at levels ranging from 0.000 to 0.002.

[34] Returnees from Cyprus, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia are represented in such low numbers (<5) in the sample that the inclusion of these countries in the ranking is meaningless – comparison with other groups of returnees is not statistically significant.
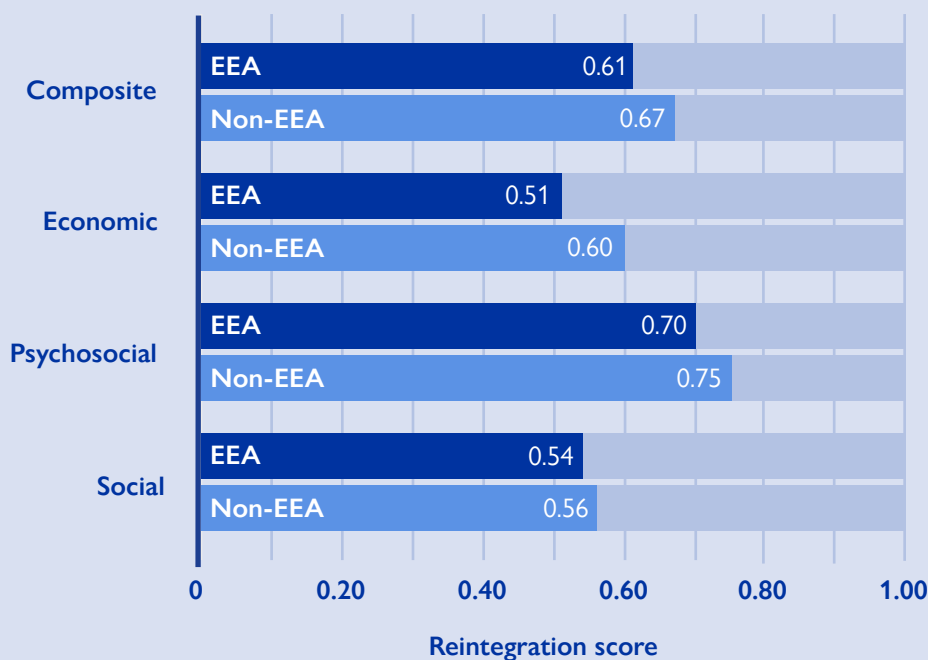
Figure 12. Reintegration score differences between migrants who returned from countries of the European Economic area and returnees from other host countries.

Length of stay abroad has a small but statistically significant, positive effect on reintegration outcomes of Georgian returnees[35]. The shorter a migrant stayed abroad the lower reintegration score they achieved. This finding contradicts a commonly held notion that return after a longer period of time would be more difficult due to loss of social and economic links to country of origin. Instead, those who remained abroad for a long period of time seem more likely to reintegrate sustainably following return to Georgia. It must be noted that the explanatory power of the variable *length of absence* is very low, however, suggesting other factors are at play. Secondary investigation of this phenomenon suggests that this effect may be observed as a result of the population profile: returnees who stay abroad longer tend to be older upon return, as well as female, with both age and gender having a strong positive effect on reintegration outcomes. Another explanation points to the circular nature of migration patterns among younger Georgian migrants. Those who stayed abroad for a shorter amount of time may not be looking to reintegrate in Georgia, but rather, look for opportunities to re-migrate.

Contrary to expectations and findings of IOM's global study of reintegration outcomes[36], **time since return** does not have a statistically significant effect on composite reintegration scores of Georgian returnees[37]. These results indicate that returnees in Georgia do not experience an improvement in their reintegration experience in the time period between 1 and 3.5 years following return. To firmly validate this observation, a longitudinal study tracing the progression of individual scores over time would be necessary, however.

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35 r= 0.010, Sig 0.001, R2=0.01.

36 IOM (2020), Knowledge Bite #1, Sustainable Reintegration Knowledge Bites Series, p. 8, available online.

37 Regression visualized in Figure 13 returns a coefficient value close to 0, with a high probability of no influence on outcome variable, correlation insignificant.
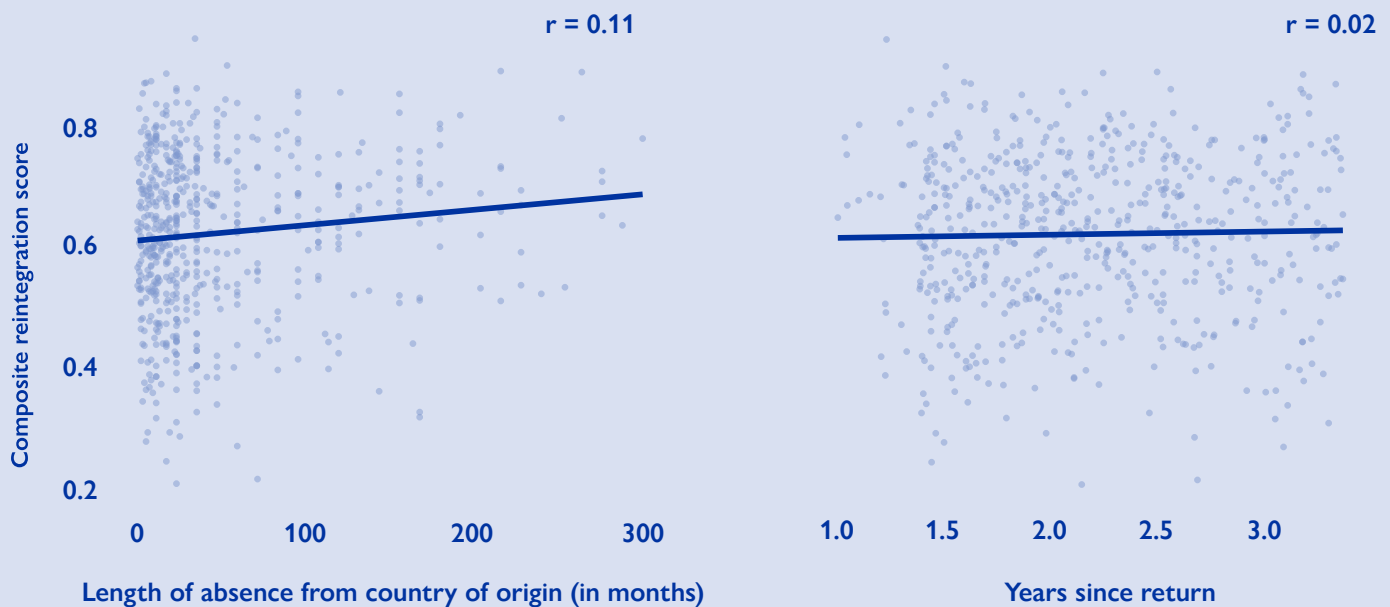
Figure 13. Correlation of reintegration scores and length of absence (left) and years since return (right)

Reintegration assistance received in relation to reintegration outcomes

Discalaimer: The RSS scores serve as unique evidence which may enable the evaluation of reintegration assistance measures and approaches. The results below indeed highlight that some assistance types are highly correlated with better or poorer reintegration outcomes, but due to the high level of complexity contained within this study (demographic and migration profiles, types and level of assistance received), any interpretation of findings must be done carefully and with awareness of the descriptive nature of the relationships observed. The returnees surveyed received assistance on the basis of diverging individual needs and eligibilities within each programme, and the effect of such assistance therefore cannot be sufficiently isolated from other factors impacting individual outcomes. For example, it can be said that only returnees with high medical needs typically receive health care assistance. Accordingly, the association between medical assistance and recipients' outcome scores is negative. This does not mean that medical assistance hinders returnees' reintegration, but rather indicates that medical assistance is often allocated to returnees who are due to their medical condition less successful in their reintegration. Indeed, returnees in the sample who received medical assistance (including addiction treatment) score on average 2.4% lower than returnees who had not received medical assistance. No causality is implied. In order to study causal impact of reintegration assistance, a rigorous impact study would be recommended, ensuring that the effect of a particular type and amount of reintegration assistance is observed between comparable treatment and control groups of beneficiaries.

Beneficiary outcomes do differ by **programme of assistance**[38]. These (statistically significant) group differences are not necessarily result of the characteristics and effectiveness of the programmes themselves, however, as causality is not examined (impact assessment is not integrated in this research study). Rather, these differences can be at least partially associated with the personal characteristics of migrants who are assisted by each of the organizations. The State Reintegration Programme, reaching highest mean scores across all dimensions, assists beneficiaries who show initiative following un-assisted return to Georgia, and make the independent effort to seek the support of the reintegration programme, for example. OFII, IOM, and Caritas, on the other hand, assist beneficiaries with their return travel as well as reintegration assistance, likely reaching a pool of returnees who are less independently minded and can be expected to face higher obstacles in their reintegration. Paradoxically, the State Reintegration Programme offers smaller valuer of reintegration packages than programmes run by other institutions. The Caritas programme sample in this survey is too small to offer a meaningful insight into the outcomes of its beneficiaries as a stand-alone category.

Some **types of assistance received** are strongly associated with higher level reintegration outcomes. Psychological support (e.g. through a referral to a psychologist or a psychiatrist), for example, is associated with a 0.11 point increase in composite reintegration scores at a high level of statistical significance[39]. On the other hand, pre-departure counselling in a migrant's host country is associated with lower composite reintegration scores, indicating that more vulnerable migrants typically benefit from it rather than any negative effect of the assistance itself. Recipients of business grants can be expected to reach approximately 0.1 points higher economic reintegration scores and 0.04 points higher overall composite reintegration scores[40]. Cash grants and job placements (salary subsidies) have a statistically significant positive effect on returnees' social reintegration scores (by 0.02 points and 0.3 points respectively).

Predictably, those migrants who reported higher **levels of satisfaction** with the reintegration assistance they received show higher levels of reintegration overall, as well as higher levels of reintegration in each dimension. The difference between the outcomes of those whose assistance "fully met their expectations" and those whose assistance "did not meet their expectations at all" is highest in the economic dimension – on average the dissatisfied migrants scored 0.17 points lower than those satisfied.

Reintegration programmes	Composite Reintegration score	Economic Reintegration score	Psychosocial Reintegration score	Social Reintegration score
IOM AVRR	0.62	0.51	0.70	0.58
State Reintegration Programme	0.67	0.59	0.75	0.58
OFII	0.56	0.51	0.67	0.48

Table 6. Reintegration scores by programme of assistance

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[38] Sig. level <0.000 for composite and social reintegration scores, <0.002 for economic and psychosocial scores.

[39] Sig. level <0.001.

[40] Sig. level <0.007 and <0.000 respectively.

IOM
UN MIGRATION

Regression analysis:
Explaining variation in reintegration outcomes

In order to explain how combined factors such as *age*, *gender*, or *reasons for return* influence reintegration outcomes among returnees in Georgia, a multivariate regression analysis is used. Key demographic characteristics as well as returnee migration journey details and types of reintegration assistance received do jointly predict some of the variation in reintegration scores observed. The complexity of reintegration cannot be fully explained by statistical analysis, but nevertheless, the predictive models are useful as indicators of the positive or negative influence of independent factors on an individual's reintegration outcome (the RSS scores used as a dependent variable). Key demographic characteristics as well as returnee migration journey details and types of reintegration assistance received do jointly predict some of the variation in the reintegration scores observed among returnees in Georgia.

The model controls for individuals' personal characteristics (*gender, age*), the characteristics of their migration journey (*length of absence, host country, reasons for return, time since return*), the characteristics of their return environment (*urban/rural context*), certain types of assistance received (*counselling sessions in Georgia, business micro-grant, psychosocial assistance, job placement, medical assistance*), as well as additional explanatory factors (*whether a returnee currently has a job, their debt-to-spending ratio[41], desire to receive psychological support, their perceived ability to remain in Georgia long term, and income lost due to Covid-19*)[42].

Based on the regression analysis, female migrants are predicted to score up to 4.7%[43] higher than men in the social reintegration dimension, and up to 6.6% worse than men in the psychosocial dimension, all other factors held equal. This prediction is in line with findings from focus group discussions and operational experiences among reintegration counsellors – compared to male returnees, women are typically more agile and adaptable, keen to explore new fields of work and seek assistance where needed. On the other hand, female migrants may find deterioration in family relationship and psychosocial pressures of return more challenging. In line with findings outlined in the descriptive analysis, higher **age** is strongly and positively associated with higher psychosocial reintegration outcomes. This may be explained by lower ambitions for re-migration among older returnees, who are typically more satisfied with return and at peace with remaining in Georgia for the long term.

Migrants who declare that their **return to Georgia is motivated by family reasons** are predicted to score higher than returnees who do not indicate this factor as a reason for their return. On the other hand, returnees who indicate that they returned because of a **negative decision on their asylum application abroad** are predicted to score between 3-8% lower in the composite reintegration scores, between 2-8% lower in their economic reintegration scores, and between 1.6-9% lower in their psychosocial reintegration scores when compared to their peers with other declared motivations for return, all else held constant. Return due to negative decision on an asylum claim typically indicates that one's migration plan has been interrupted and ambitions unfulfilled – justifying the lower predicted reintegration scores. **Length of absence** carries only a very small, but significant positive effect on the economic reintegration score. A possible explanation for this prediction may be that returnees who spend a longer time abroad were able to gather experience, skills, or funds which may be contributing to their reintegration following return.

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[41] The variables Currently working and the Debt to Spending ratio are used to compute the returnee's composite reintegration score with a weight of 3% per cent and 4% per cent respectively. The interpretation of their coefficients require therefore careful interpretation.

[42] This model explains 32% of the variation in RSS composite scores in the sample, and 50% of variation in the RSS economic scores – high explanatory power for a real-world scenario with additional unknown (unmeasured) factors contributing to returnees' reintegration experiences and outcomes. R2 values are 0.32 for RSS Composite, and 0.498 for RSS Economic scores.

[43] Percentages reported indicate values of 95% confidence interval. Only variables with a statistically significant coefficient are reported.

The effect of different **host countries** is particularly interesting. Migrants who return to Georgia from one of the countries of the European Economic Area are predicted at a high level of statistical significance to score up to 14% worse in their composite reintegration score when compared to returnees who come from other countries, all other factors held constant. This effect is largely attributed to the different migration patterns and the fact that returnees from outside EEA have all returned to Georgia independently, and showed initiative in applying for reintegration assistance following their arrival. Rather than an effect of the host country, this prediction reflects the lower vulnerability and higher level of skill among non-EEA returnees when compared to those returning from EEA through an AVRR programme.

In line with the results of descriptive correlation analysis presented earlier in this paper, the results of regression analysis show **significant and positive effect of business micro-grants** on both composite and economic reintegration scores. Holding all else constant, a returnee receiving such form of assistance can be expected to gain up to 5% higher composite score and up to 8% higher economic score compared to a returnee who does not receive a micro-business grant. A returnee who receives a **job placement/salary subsidy** assistance can be expected to gain between 16% and 18% **higher social reintegration score**, compared to a returnee without such assistance, all else held equal. On the other hand, returnees who are **beneficiaries of medical reintegration assistance are predicted to systematically reach lower scores across all dimensions**. This reflects their underlining vulnerability and implies a need for a strengthened assistance in all reintegration dimensions among these returnees. Returnees who report **a desire to receive psychosocial assistance** (counselling, therapy, including addiction treatment) are predicted to reach lower reintegration scores across all dimensions, albeit the size of the effect is very small.

Employment status[44] of a returnee has a strong, positive effect on returnees' reintegration outcomes. Those employed are predicted to reach between 5.9-9.9% higher overall (composite) reintegration scores than those unemployed, all else held constant. The psychosocial dimension also reflects the strong predictive power of employment status – those employed are predicted to score up to 5.3% higher than their unemployed peers. These findings confirm that securing employment is critical not only for returnees' economic reintegration, but also important as a factor influencing reintegration in the social and psychosocial dimensions.

Full predictive models are available in the Annex.

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44   Self-employment included.

Special focus:
Effect of the coronavirus pandemic on ongoing returnee reintegration in Georgia

It is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, both ongoing at the time of data collection for this study, severely impacted Georgian returnees. Those who returned during or due to the global health crisis have arrived in a context unfavorable for reintegration as many travelled spontaneously in the face of an emergency without prior planning or preparation. (Please refer to IOM's *Return in times of COVID-19* issue brief for results of an assessment conducted among those who returned during or due to the pandemic[45].) Those who returned a year or longer before the pandemic (target group of this research report) have also been affected, however. Over a quarter (21.59%) of returnees surveyed reported that they or their family members lost "some" income (job, business) due to the pandemic. Additional 37.77% reported that they lost "most of" or "all" of their household income due to the pandemic. Among those who reported losses, the average loss amounted 42% of household income. Such significant decrease makes an impact on the returnees' ability to maintain economic self-sufficiency and hampers progress towards sustainable reintegration. Indeed, loss of income due to COVID-19 is associated with a statistically significant decrease in both composite and economic reintegration scores (see *regression analysis* chapter of this study and related Annex). As shown in the below table, overall outcomes of returnee reintegration as well as outcomes in the economic and psychosocial dimensions indeed are lower among returnees who reported higher income losses, though the difference in scores between least and most affected categories is smaller than 0.06 points across all dimensions.

During conversations in focus group discussions, returnees stressed that problems are common to not just themselves but are shared by other nationals as well. In their experience, the COVID-19 related loss of income mainly impacted residents of big cities. In rural areas it was less obvious because agricultural activities dominate local markets.

Loss of household income due to the pandemic	Composite Reintegration score	Economic Reintegration score	Psychosocial Reintegration score
Lost under 30%	0.641	0.545	0.724
Lost between 35-60%	0.626	0.516	0.712
Lost between 70-100%	0.584	0.486	0.679

Table 7. Reintegration scores among returnees, by % of household income losses

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45   IOM Georgia (2021) Return in times of COVID-19, Issue Brief, available online.

Special focus:
Re-migration intentions

A significant proportion of returnees participating in focus group discussions expressed an eagerness to re-migrate, especially as a result of and in the context of the present economic downturn in Georgia. *"We ask the government to open the border and give us an opportunity to emigrate and earn money to support our families."* Indeed, many of participating returnees are very skeptical about their ability to create and maintain a sustainable livelihood in Georgia. Returnees indicated that the problems they face in their communities are almost identical to those faced by their neighbors and other community members (migrant or non-migrant). They do not have high hopes for the future and they are disappointed.

Returnees are not eager to live in emigration in a foreign country, however. Quite on the contrary – focus group participants expressed very clearly that they have a strong desire to stay and live in Georgia, but that they feel they may have no other choice than to re-migrate in face of "economic hardship and poverty" (terms used by returnees themselves). Returnees agreed that earning a sufficient income in a stable job would mean they do not have to think about re-migration.

When surveyed, 33.72 % of all respondents indicated they believe they will not be able to stay in Georgia for the long term. Additional 6% are not sure. Among both these groups, respondents point nearly unanimously (96.9%) to lack of jobs; lack of security; low earnings; lack of essential services or family pressure to re-migrate as reasons for considering re-migration. On the other hand, over 60% of returnees stated that they feel they will be able to stay and live in Georgia.

IOM's social media outreach and contact with the Georgian population with a history of or interest in migration indicate that in the second half of 2020, motivated primarily by socio-economic difficulties, Georgians resumed actively seeking ways to return to or reach host country destinations, especially those in the European Union (following a brief hiatus in interest caused by the COVID-19 pandemic). Indeed, online fora have shown a rapid increase in interest and discussion of routes presently available to Georgian citizens attempting to reach destination countries. IOM's operational experience and direct contact with the population confirm that Georgian migrants are predisposed to make rushed travel plans to destinations in the EU in spite of the global pandemic situation due to the severity of their and their families' economic situation. High prices on flight tickets are at present moment a factor recognized as a barrier limiting Georgians' desired travel to the EU. Discussions among Georgians interested in (r)emigration have been and are likely to continue being marked by confusion and chaotic spread of misleading information. IOM reacts to false claims and conveys straightforward messages to correct any misleading information and provide referrals to relevant resources and recommendations. Intensified awareness-raising on safe and regular migration from Georgia will be key in 2021.

Annex

Annex:
Predictive reintegration outcome models
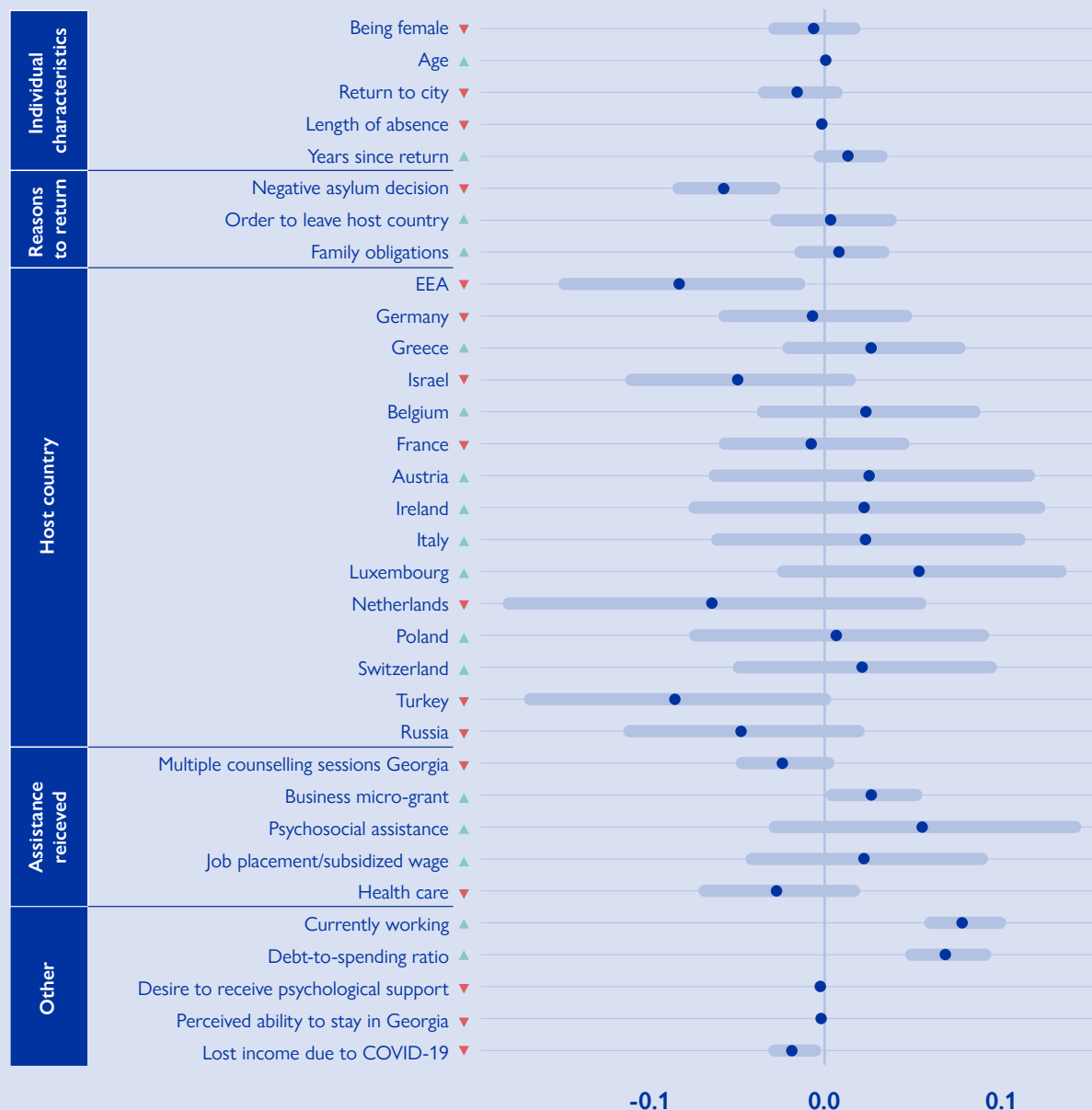
Composite

Figure 14. Regression analysis results (coefficients) for RSS Composite score

Economic

▼ Negative Coefficient   ▲ Positive Coefficient   ● Coefficient   ▬ 95% Confidence Interval

"The variables Currently working and the Debt to Spending ratio are used to compute the returnee's composite reintegration score with a weight of 3% per cent and 4% per cent respectively. Their coefficients therefore requires a careful interpretation"

Figure 15. Regression analysis results (coefficients) for RSS Economic score
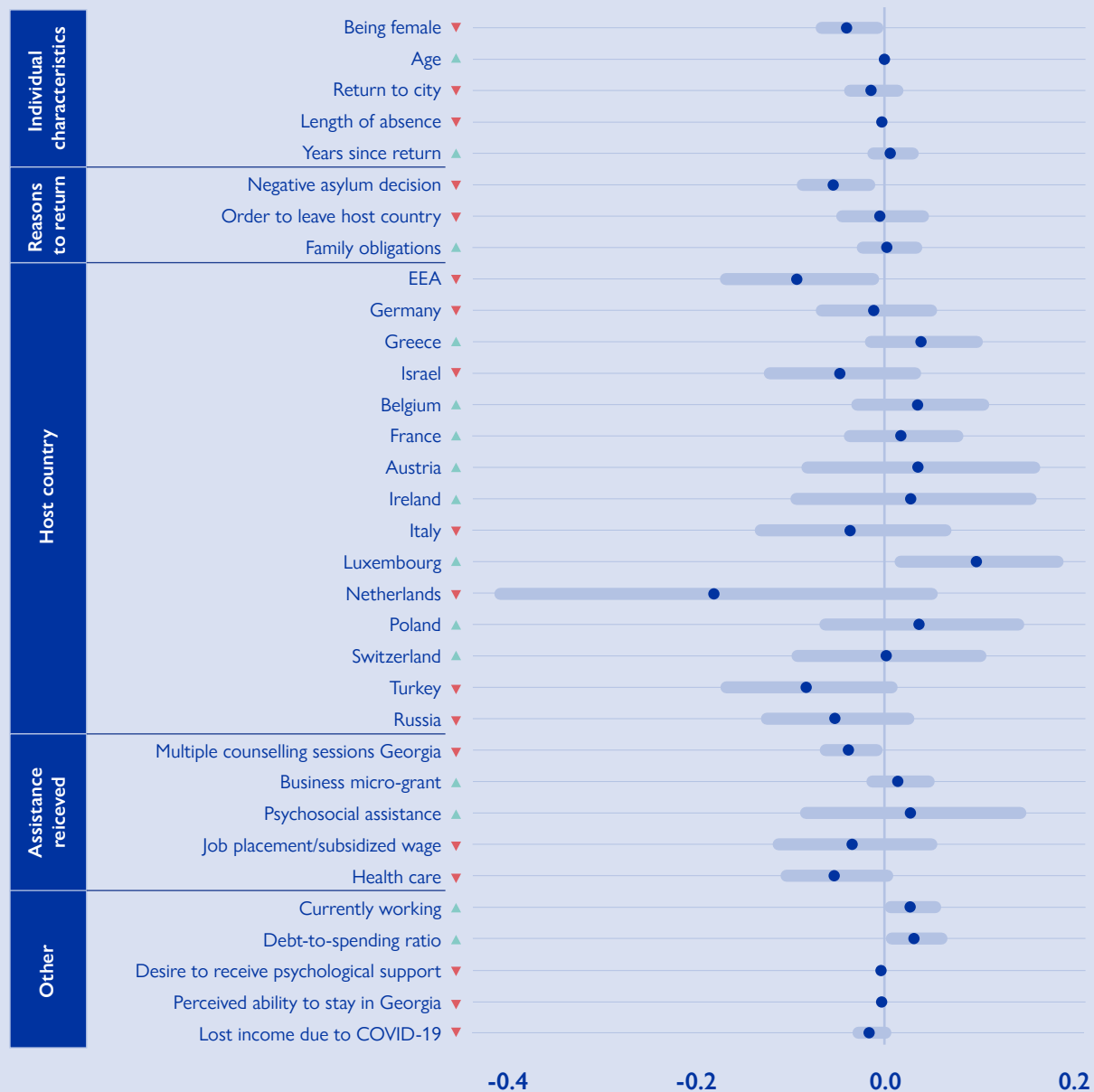
Figure 16. Regression analysis results (coefficients) for RSS Psychosocial score

Social

Figure 17. Regression analysis results (coefficients) for RSS Social score