



RETURNING MIGRANTS' ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION: MAPPING OF STAKEHOLDERS, PROGRAMMES AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

THE GAMBIA

ALTAI CONSULTING FOR THE EUTF – 2022



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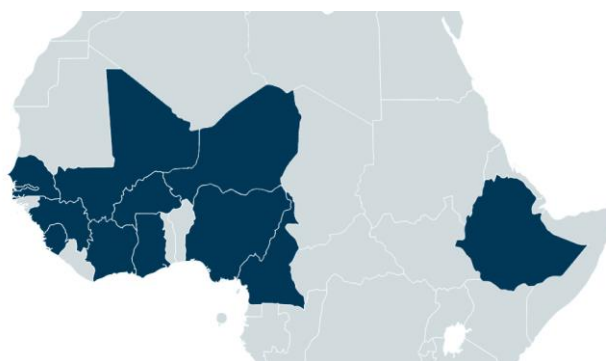
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This report is part of a regional study covering 12 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. For each country of the study a report has been elaborated, based on a document review and interviews conducted in the field. The country reports are accompanied by a regional synthesis, identifying key trends, good practices, and recommendations at the regional level.



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ABBREVIATIONS

AfDB: African Development Bank

AICS: Italian Agency for Development Cooperation

AU: African Union

AVRR: Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

CfW: Cash for work

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

CFS: Child Friendly Space

DSA: Data Sharing Agreement

DSW: Department of Social Welfare

EUTF: European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

GCCI: Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry

GID: Gambian Immigration Department

GIEPA: Gambia Investment & Export Promotion Agency

GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

GLFS: Gambia Labour Force Survey

GLMIS: Gambia Labour Market Information System

GTHI: Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute

GTMI: Gambia Telecommunications and Multimedia Institute

GTTI: Gambia Technical Training Institute

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

IGA: Income generating activities

ILO: International Labour Organization

IPs: Implementing Partners

IMAP: IOM Migrant Assistant Portal

IMVF: Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr

IOM: International Organization for Migration

ITC: International Trade Centre

JI: Joint Initiative

KM: Kanifing Municipality

KOICA: Korea International Cooperation Agency

LGA: Local Government Area

LRR: Lower River Region

MHPSS: Mental Health Psycho-Social Support

MIMOSA: Migrant Management Operational System Application

MoA: Ministry of Agriculture

MoBSE: Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education

MoFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoFEA: Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
MoH: Ministry of Health
MoHERST: Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
Mol: Ministry of Interior
MoJ: Ministry of Justice
MoTIE: Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment
MoYS: Ministry of Youth and Sports
MSMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises
NAATIP: National Agency against Trafficking in Persons
NAQAA: National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority
NBR: North Bank Region
NCM: National Coordination Mechanism on Migration
NDP: National Development Plan
NEAP: National Employment Action Plan
NEDI: National Enterprise Development Initiative
NEET: Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training
NEP: National Employment Policy
NMP: National Migration Policy
NRM: National Referral Mechanism for the Protection and Assistance of vulnerable migrants
NYC: National Youth Council
NYSS: National Youth Service Scheme
OVP: Office of the Vice-President
PFA: Psychological First Aid
PIA: President's International Award
PSS: Psycho-social support
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SOPs: Standard Operating Procedures
TVET: Technical and vocational education and training
TWG: Technical Working Groups
UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNPBF: United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
URR: Upper River Region
WCR: West Coast Region
WHO: World Health Organization
WTO: World Trade Organization
YEP: Youth Empowerment Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under-employment and poverty are the predominant push factors towards irregular migration from The Gambia. Almost 60% of the 2.2 million people living in The Gambia are under 25 and nearly half of them are unemployed. Gambians migrate at a higher rate per capita than any other country in Africa. From 2017 to 2022, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) supported over 6,000 stranded migrants in their return to The Gambia – approximately four times the initial target set at the beginning of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative (1,500). Although the number of Gambian migrants arriving irregularly to Europe progressively decreased since 2016, the desire to leave remains common.

Increased consideration for returnees' individual profiles and aspirations and to local labour market needs is key to ensure the creation of sustainable reintegration pathways. Barriers to accessing training opportunities have been identified, that future programming could contribute to address. Entrepreneurship and self-employment are considered the most viable reintegration option for returnees, but the overall Gambian entrepreneurship ecosystem remains weak and access to finance limited. The low absorptive capacity of the labour market made the funding of employment and vocational training projects such as YEP and Tekki-Fii particularly relevant. Such initiatives should be renewed and/or further developed to tackle the root causes of irregular migration.

While the Government has an ambitious vision for “The new Gambia”, significant shortcomings in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) can be identified. Developed following the adoption of the NDP, the National Employment Policy (NEP) and its Action Plan (NEAP) reiterated the Government's commitment to boost job creation and employability – concrete achievements are however limited yet. Similarly, if a National Migration Policy has been developed, its content remains too vague to be readily actionable, thus making support to the effective implementation of the NDP and the NEP the most appropriate tool to tackle the root causes of irregular migration.

Although interesting initiatives have been launched, labour intermediation mechanisms remain, overall, relatively weak and should be further supported. The online outward referral system prepared the ground for the creation of synergies with new international programmes and already established national actors to serve returnees. To help jobseekers, the Employment Service Unit (ESU) – the first public job centre to be established in The Gambia – was launched in October 2020 and the Gambian-German Advisory Centre (GGAC) officially opened in June 2022. Further support to national institutions and improved coordination with international initiatives is needed.

The importance of TVET in the government's youth employability strategies is emphasized in several national policies, but the sector continues to face considerable challenges. Geographical coverage remains a major challenge with a very limited number of TVET institutions operating in the regions. No data on government spending in the sector is available, but the overall low public expenditure on education contributes to the underfunding of TVET. The EU should continue funding youth skills development as part of its strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration and offer adequate reintegration pathways for returnees – it could notably do so through support to the implementation of the Gambia TVET Roadmap as well as the national TVET policy.

The entrepreneurship ecosystem in The Gambia is nascent. An increasing number of structures working on the creation of a favourable business environment should be further supported. Strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem is key to foster economic development and reduce youth unemployment. The major gaps concern the scarcity of incubators and accelerators programs, as well as limited access to finance. Support to existing incubators as well as further support to the financial supply and development of microfinance in The Gambia will be key to creating sustainable reintegration pathways.

Finally, PSS services tend to be provided separately from reintegration assistance: improved collaboration and coordination between economic actors and PSS providers are needed to take into account the specific vulnerabilities of returnees and improving their chances of long-term reintegration.

1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT AND OF THIS REPORT

- Capitalise on the key lessons of return and reintegration programming gained through the support provided by Altai Consulting in the framework of the MLS and TPML exercises deployed since 2018;
- Identify, in each target country, key actors and programmes in the vocational training and job creation sectors and assess their position, capacity and interest in partnering with the EU in future reintegration initiatives;
- Identify the most promising partnership and referral opportunities for future EU-funded reintegration programmes;
- Identify local actors (public, private and civil society) that could be integrated into future programming to build sustainable reintegration systems in the medium and long term.

1.1. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The field trip to The Gambia took place from 13 June to 1 July 2022 and collected, triangulated, and analysed data from the following sources (see details in annex):

- **62 interviews with key informants:** national and local authorities, development partners, employment agencies, training institutions, innovation hubs, financial institutions, and non-governmental and civil society organisations (NGOs and CSOs);
- **23 documents** related to the reintegration of returnees, vocational training, and in-country entrepreneurship;
- **32 field visits and observations** of local employment agencies, training centres, innovation hubs, etc.

Based on this data collection, the selection of potential partners able to participate in the reintegration of returnees under the umbrella of the next EU programming phases was made based on a set of criteria including the following:

- The **quality of the support** provided by potential partners as measured by the successful integration rate of their beneficiaries on the labour market;
- The **adequacy** of their beneficiaries' selection criteria with the profile of returnees;
- The **experience** of these structures in providing support to vulnerable groups;
- The **availability** of these institutions in the short or medium term to integrate returnees into their programming.

These structures are presented in section 4 and in the appendix to this report in the form of 'Partner Fiches'. In addition, several key actors involved in vocational training, entrepreneurship, support to the development of the private sector or support for vulnerable groups have also been identified as relevant partners for the European Union. Coordination with these actors could, in the medium term, contribute to increasing labour market opportunities for returnees, as well as to preventing irregular migration. These actors are presented in section 4 and in the annex to this report in the form of 'Actor Fiches'.

2. MIGRATION CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

2.1. DYNAMICS OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Almost 60% of the 2.2 million people living in The Gambia are under 25 and nearly half of them are unemployedⁱ. The Gambian youth face significant challenges exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis and the fragile political and social environment. The country remains strongly dependent on foreign aid, which resumed after the 2016 democratic transition. However, poverty incidence remains high with 8.4% of the population living under the poverty line in 2019ⁱⁱ. The Gambia's economy mainly relies on subsistence agriculture, adversely affected by climate change in recent years, as well as on tourism and international remittances – the latest reached 22.7% of GDP in 2020ⁱⁱⁱ.

Under-employment is the predominant push factor towards irregular migration from The Gambia. Youth unemployment is pervasive and affects about 41.5% of the youth population, with a much higher percentage in rural areas (69.4%) than in urban areas (30.6%)^{iv}. Young workers are mostly employed in low quality and informal jobs, especially girls. School drop-out between the age of 15 and 19 is common, particularly in rural areas, due to a widespread perception of low returns on education. School non-attendance often translates into inactivity and unemployment, which expose young people to greater risks of social exclusion and irregular migration. Although the new Government's vision for The Gambia is ambitious, with planned structural reforms to boost the economy and the labour market, irregular migration remains an attractive alternative to limited opportunities within the country.

Since early 2017, IOM supported over 6,000 stranded migrants in their return to The Gambia – approximately four times the initial target set at the beginning of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative (1,500). Between January 2017 and December 2020, the number of IOM-supported Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVR) to The Gambia amounted to more than 5,000, with an additional 1,162 cases between January 2021 and July 2022. Among the 297 Gambian returnees surveyed by Altai Consulting in 2019-2021, 88% were aged between 18 and 35, and 95% were men^v. The main areas of return are Brikama Local Government Area (LGA) in West Coast Region (WCR), Kanifing LGA, and Basse LGA in Upper River Region (URR). AVR generally remains motivated by family considerations and safety concerns mainly, reflecting the dire situation in transit countries such as Libya, and mistreatments experienced by migrants in prisons and detention centres^{vi}.

Although the number of Gambian migrants arriving irregularly to European borders has been decreasing since 2016^{vii}, migration rates remain high. For returnees, the desire to leave remains common. For returnees, it highly depends upon the success of the reintegration process. Almost 35,000 Gambians arrived irregularly in Europe between 2009 and 2016, and almost 12,000 between 2017 and end 2020^{viii}, representing more than 2% of the entire country's population. Return to The Gambia is not always the end of the migration process but can represent an intermediate stage before another departure. Most Gambian returnees interviewed by Altai Consulting indicated a willingness to remigrate, although mainly through legal channels, while only a fraction indicated a possibility to make a new attempt at irregular migration^{ix}. The success of reintegration is influenced by numerous factors, such as the conditions of the journey, the attitude of the family, but also indebtedness. In a 2020 study, IOM reported that 55% of returnees contracted debts, mostly for migration purposes, but also to implement personal and professional projects^x. The loans, which are mainly contracted through informal channels of relatives and friends, are interest-free and amount, on average, to approximately USD 1,000. Repayment ability has a strong influence on the social and psychological wellbeing of returnees, as it represents a symbolic reparation and restoration of family and community ties. Conversely, failing to repay entails a second failure, which adds to the already unsuccessful migration project.

2.2. MAIN RESULTS OF EUTF PROGRAMMING IN TERMS OF JOB CREATION AND SUPPORT FOR REINTEGRATION

The EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) started operating in The Gambia in January 2017 in the aftermath of the country's democratic transition, with the election of President Barrow. EUTF programming was based on three different, but intertwined approaches: 1) Migration prevention, through the implementation of awareness raising initiatives; 2) Protection of migrants, to facilitate the return and reintegration of Gambian nationals and strengthen migration management capacities at the national level; and 3) Support to the development of employment opportunities for the youth, with the objective to tackle the root causes of migration. Three national projects (Table 1) were designed to address these objectives and provide assistance to different categories of returnees.

Table 1: EUTF programming towards job creation and reintegration support in The Gambia

Projects	EU-IOM Joint Initiative (JI) for Migrant Protection & Reintegration	Gambia Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)	Building a Future, Make it in The Gambia (Tekki-Fii)
Ips	IOM	International Trade Centre (ITC)	GIZ, ENABEL, IMVF, ITC
Beneficiaries	Migrants who returned voluntarily with IOM	Migrants who returned voluntarily, but without IOM assistance	Migrants who returned involuntarily from Europe
Services provided	Received direct return assistance and were eligible for IOM reintegration assistance. Could benefit from referrals or self-application to YEP and Tekki-Fii.	Could request assistance from IOM, YEP and Tekki-Fii.	Could receive post-arrival and/or reintegration assistance from IOM, if formally referred from an EU Member State. Could benefit from referrals or self-application to YEP and Tekki-Fii.

The return and reintegration assistance programming in The Gambia faced considerable challenges, both due to the particularly high and unexpected caseload and the recent establishment of international partners in a country undergoing a major political transition. However, thanks to the positive collaboration between Implementing Partners (IPs) and Government actors, resources were quickly mobilized to successfully manage the return of migrants and facilitate the implementation of the reintegration process. Based on recent assessments and beneficiary surveys from IOM and Altai Consulting^{xi}, the main lessons from the EUTF-funded economic reintegration assistance, and areas for improvement, are as follows:

- **Delays between returns and the practical start of reintegration assistance constituted one of the main challenges in the reintegration process.** Cash-for-Work initiatives (CfW), implemented by different actors funded under the EUTF, remain an interesting option to be pursued but have not been sufficient to alleviate often long waiting times for most beneficiaries.
- **Increased consideration for returnees' individual profiles and aspirations, and better connexion with local labour market needs is key to ensure the creation of sustainable**

reintegration pathways. Returnees' job counselling and orientation is a critical step for a successful economic reintegration, but resources and methods used by IOM and its partners to analyse the demand and needs of returnees and of the local labour market could be further improved. The establishment of the Migrant Assistance Portal (IMAP) facilitated both outward and inward referrals and contributed to significantly strengthen collaboration between IOM and other IPs. However, the number of referred returnees remained low, and more job placement opportunities need to be found for those who do not wish to become entrepreneurs. This requires a good command of the Gambian employment ecosystem as well as dedicated programming to support the strengthening of the private sector in that perspective.

- **Several barriers to accessing TVET opportunities have been identified, that future programming could contribute to address.** Most TVET centres are located in urban areas, which precludes a number of returnees based in rural areas from accessing training opportunities. In addition, trainings usually require a full-time commitment, making it difficult for returnees to maintain a parallel income-generating activity. Mitigation measures such as the provision of stipends during trainings enabled to overcome these challenges and should be pursued. However, short-term *curricula* have raised concerns among training providers, some of whom were concerned that short-term programs were insufficient for students to acquire the necessary qualifications to successfully enter the job market. In parallel, challenges for IPs included finding training centres offering quality courses and modern *curricula*, qualified trainers, and adequate equipment. Finally, although informal partnerships with the private sector have been established, these should be further developed in order to maximize chances of post-training integration into the labour market.
- **Entrepreneurship and self-employment are considered the most viable reintegration options for returnees, but the overall entrepreneurship ecosystem remains weak and access to finance limited in The Gambia.** Although EUTF programming managed to achieve a number of positive results, further support is needed to further strengthen the sector. Future programming could involve support to the development of incubators / accelerators and, most importantly, to the development of microfinance in The Gambia.
- **The low absorptive capacity of the labour market made the funding of employment and vocational training projects such as YEP and Tekki-Fii particularly relevant. Such initiatives should be renewed and/or further developed.** One of the core hurdles to The Gambia's economic development is the lack of opportunities for its labour force: job creation is needed, particularly in rural areas. YEP and Tekki-Fii adopted a relevant two-pronged approach on employment promotion, targeting both the demand side (measures in support of the Gambian private sector) and the supply side of labour (measures to improve education and on-the-job training for selected professions and sectors with high growth potential).
- **Overall, the capacity of government actors and local stakeholders was strengthened, and synergies created to foster migration management and collaboration, improved.** A Steering Committee and migration-focused Thematic Groups were established to discuss key issues and improve coordination among the different stakeholders. The drafting of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration to The Gambia (AVRR) allowed the implementation of a common approach to return and reintegration and outlined roles and responsibilities. The establishment of a permanent Migrant Resource and Response Centre to serve as reception / transit centre for returnees has not succeeded but remains a priority.

3. GOVERNANCE OF REINTEGRATION AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

3.1. NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Government’s vision for “The new Gambia” is broad and ambitious and outlined in eight strategic priorities listed in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021. This strategic framework has been extended until the end of 2022, while the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) has started consultations for the formulation of a new medium term NDP (2023-2027). The 2018-2021 NDP is the result of a concerted effort between the Government, the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners. It includes a results framework, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism outlining roles and responsibilities for its implementation, as well as a budget amounting to USD 2.4 billion^{xii}. The eight strategic priorities and the seven cross-cutting enablers are purposely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Agenda 2063. The Plan explicitly addresses Gambian citizens, including the diaspora, and echoes the Government’s aspiration to “deliver good governance and accountability, social cohesion and national reconciliation, and a revitalized and transformed economy for the wellbeing of all Gambians”^{xiii}.

The strategic priorities cover a large spectrum of sectors, including the development of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the youth. The first strategic priority emphasizes the restoration of good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. Stabilizing the economy, transforming the private sector, reducing poverty, improving education, health, infrastructures, and empowering the youth also are presented as key intervention areas. Priority #7 specifically addresses the youth^{xiv} and lists several key interventions which include supporting the development of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, strengthening capacities of youth service agencies, and improving access to finance. These objectives are embedded in the overarching priority of strengthening the private sector to boost economic growth and job creation. The implementation of the NDP is placed under the technical responsibility of government actors, while the Cabinet and the National Assembly retain political oversight.

Developed following the adoption of the NDP, the National Employment Policy (NEP) 2022-2026 and the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) reiterate the Government’s commitment to boost job creation and employability. As stated in NDP Priority #8, the NEP aims at “making the private sector the engine of growth, transformation and job creation”^{xv}. The NEP is implemented in pair with the NEAP, which ambitions to create 150,000 decent and dignified jobs by 2026. To achieve this result, the Government intends to “support sectoral growth and investments”¹, “support the micro, small, and medium-size enterprises (MSME) ecosystem”² and “reinforce the structure and governance of the labour market”³. Through these objectives, the Government ambitions to create an enabling environment to enhance competencies and employable skills, promote entrepreneurship and access to finance, and strengthen linkages between the labour market and the development of education and skills.

¹ In particular, the government intends to promote public investments in the most productive sectors (agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture); support the development of agriculture-driven industrialization with linkages with other sectors such as tourism and education; carry out an assessment on green energy generation and creation of “green jobs”.

² To achieve this, objectives are to: improve access to training, technology, and capital for MSMEs; enhance the participation of MSME in public procurement; Create a fund to support the development of MSME; Increase the registration and formalization of businesses; organize a national MSME Forum for the development of the MSME ecosystem.

³ Link education and skills development to labour market needs by identifying and developing skills and qualifications required; Improve labour administration systems by establishing Regional Labor Offices; Collect labour market data periodically to populate the Labour Market and Migration Information System (LMMIS).

Concrete achievements following the implementation of the four-year plan have been shared in March 2021 through a mid-term evaluation, which highlighted significant shortcomings⁴. Strategic Priority #8, which aims at “making the private sector the engine of growth, transformation and job creation” is tracked by 16 indicators across five outcomes. The evaluation report states that only 6% of these objectives were attained, while 25% are on track, and 69% may not be achieved during the implementation period. Outcome 1 (“The upgrade of policies, laws, regulations for efficient functioning of labour market”) has the highest achievement rate with 66% on track, while Outcome 4 (“Enhance employment and employability”) scored 0%. Progress was negatively impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and the availability of resources was hindered by the necessity to readdress funds to unplanned interventions. Due to limited budget allocations, some interventions were carried out through project funds, which tend to limit governmental leadership and long-term sustainability.

If a National Migration Policy (NMP) has been developed, its content remains too vague to be readily actionable, thus making support to the implementation of the NDP and the NEP the most effective tools to tackle the root causes of irregular migration. Although neither the NDP nor the NEP tackle migration directly, both focus on youth employability to mitigate the risks associated with irregular migration. The NMP was drafted and adopted in 2019, and officially launched in December 2020. However, it only became publicly accessible in September 2021. Reasons for the delay were officially attributed to the Covid-19 crisis, but a lack of internal coordination and prioritization may have played a role. The document includes over 20 main topics described through a list of goals, objectives and strategies. However, the result is a long and imprecise document significantly lacking action-oriented measures. To date, neither an Action Plan nor a budget for its implementation are available.

The issue of return and reintegration is mentioned in the NMP, but the document does not provide any guidance on how to approach it, thus making the SOPs for AVRR developed under the EU-IOM JI the key policy document. To ensure a coordinated response, the SOPs for AVRR adopted in October 2018 under the EU-IOM JI have clarified the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the process of assisting the return and arrival of migrants. SOPs on Post-Arrival and Reintegration Assistance (PARA) were adopted to ensure that non-IOM returnees could also benefit from IOM reintegration support. However, it is unclear to what extent other actors providing reintegration assistance such as ERRIN or COOPI are using these SOPs, which may result in a lack of coordination. Overall, governmental stakeholders have expressed satisfaction with the reintegration assistance provided by IOM and their collaboration under the EU-IOM JI, but the process is still mainly IOM-driven and sustainability beyond EUTF funding remains uncertain.

3.2. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK: GOVERNMENT ACTORS AND SECTORAL DYNAMICS

Despite significant challenges in the first years, the government managed to coordinate efforts towards the implementation of the NDP through the establishment of a dedicated mechanism. Coordination and oversight of interventions related to its implementation is placed under the responsibility of the National Assembly, the Cabinet, and several other inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholders’ committees – which include regional and municipality levels. National and Regional Technical Committees are tasked with its practical implementation, alongside representatives from the private sector, CSOs and development partners. A national M&E mechanism has also been set-up.

The NEP and NEAP are implemented by two main actors: the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MoTIE) and the Department of Labour (DL), in

⁴ Mid-term achievements of the NDP have been presented in the Mid-Term Evaluation commissioned in December 2019 by MoFEA with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and published in March 2021. The evaluation has been conducted through the collection and review of background documents associated with the NDP, but also through key informant interviews and focus-group discussions.

collaboration with the Platform for Employment Networking Dialogue and Action (PENDA). The creation of the PENDA was envisioned in the NEP 2010-2014 as a partnership framework to engage and facilitate a permanent dialogue between state and non-state actors. The platform supports the development and implementation of employment policies, providing technical advice to the dedicated ministries.

- MoTIE serves as PENDA's Secretariat and oversees the formulation of investment, trade, and industrial policies and, as such, plays a leading role. It supervises the regulation of the labour market, the development and implementation of employment policies as well as strategies dedicated to the strengthening of the private sector. It plays a coordination role for the actions of political platforms and international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the African Union (AU), ITC, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to facilitate regional integration and the implementation of multilateral programs.
- The DL is a public agency placed under MoTIE's umbrella, which acts as the Ministry's implementation body. The MoTIE provides the DL with budget support, supervision and guidance. A first Job Centre was established in 2020 and provides registration, placement and counselling for job seekers and employers, including information on the labour market and labour migration mobility.
- Other ministries are also involved in the implementation of the NEP, particularly the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS). It plays a major role and provides guidance, technical and financial support through its satellite bodies, in particular the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS), the President's International Award (PIA), and the National Enterprise Development Initiative (NEDI).

The establishment of a National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) on migration brought relevant actors together. However, the NCM remains largely dependent on donors' funding and impulse, thus making the sustainability of the structure beyond EUTF programming uncertain.

- Established in November 2019 with IOM technical support and funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF), the NCM aims at acting as a platform for inter-ministerial coordination on migration. Placed under the aegis of the Office of the Vice President (OVP), the NCM aims at addressing the lack of communication between actors through the promotion of a whole-of-government approach taking into consideration the transversal nature of migration issues. Its mandate includes addressing emerging migration issues in a coordinated and timely manner; ensuring policy coherence as well as mainstream migration policies into development plans. The establishment of eight Thematic Working Groups (TWG) – including one on Return and Reintegration, led by the Ministry of Interior (Mol) – enables relevant stakeholders to be brought together, coordinate their actions, exchange, and provide mutual feedback and recommendations on emerging migration issues.
- However, the lack of financial commitment from the Government to support the functioning of the NCM remains a major challenge. All meetings are still logistically and financially supported by IOM through UNPBF funds, which are planned to end in 2022. Having external agencies as the sole funders of the mechanism leads some stakeholders to see the NCM as a platform for project implementation rather than a true Government-led coordination mechanism. To date, no sustainability plan has been established.
- Other ministries are involved in different migration aspects, such as the Gambia Diaspora Directorate placed under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) or the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP) under the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Migration focal points have been appointed in other relevant ministries, but the lack of financial incentives and capacities have hindered their effectiveness.

3.3. LABOUR INTERMEDIATION MECHANISMS AND SERVICES

3.3.1. ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN THE ORIENTATION OF RETURNEES

To provide assistance to job seekers, the Employment Service Unit (ESU), first public job centre to be established in The Gambia, was launched in October 2020. Placed under the DL, its mission is to provide employability-related services. To facilitate the registration and placement of job seekers, a website has been designed to create a virtual community where job seekers and employers are connected. To this end, IOM, through Italian funding, provided material support to the MoTIE for the renovation of the centre and the provision of IT equipment. However, the website is not yet functional. In its absence, registration can only be done offline on an Excel document, which serves as a database.

ESU's mandate is to provide career guidance, counselling, and soft skills training, but the lack of functioning equipment and funding largely limits its actions. The computers provided by IOM are used for soft-skills capacity trainings (such as writing a cover letter), but they cannot be used for job searching as internet is not available at the centre. Other services include the provision of labour market information, opportunities for labour migration and mobility, and general advisory services. After almost two years of existence, the centre is still in need of financial support and institutional capacity building in order to be able function effectively and fulfil its mandate. In 2022, a second job centre was opened in Basse, in the Upper River Region, with the same funding scheme, channelled through IOM in support of MoTIE. It is still early to evaluate the impact that the centre will have in enhancing job opportunities, but it represents an important step towards the establishment of multiple job centres at the regional level. However, in the absence of long-term support from the Government and international donors, it is likely that its impact will remain limited too.

The Gambian-German Advisory Centre (GGAC), which officially opened in June 2022 as a result of the collaboration between GIZ and MoTIE, should offer a wide range of additional opportunities to returnees in The Gambia. The GGAC is financed by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) within the framework of its 'Returning to New Opportunities' program, which aims to support people returning to their countries of origin by providing economic opportunities.

Focus Box 1: Gambian-German Advisory Centre (GGAC)

The 'Returning to New Opportunities' program includes a Migration for Development component, which targets both returnees from Germany and other returnees, as well as young jobseekers in The Gambia. Over a period of three years (2020-2023), the Program targets 3,000 beneficiaries, of which 30% are returnees (either from Germany, from other EU member states, or from other countries – including returns facilitated by IOM) and 70% locals. The GGAC currently collaborates with IOM for referrals of beneficiaries in need of psycho-social support.

The 'Returning to New Opportunities' program offers a wide range of services:

1. Vocational training, information, and advice for returnees while in Germany

Supports vocational training and pre-departure counselling services for individuals looking to return to their countries of origin. Information is provided through different channels; for instance, the 'Startfinder' website targets people wishing to return, but also locals seeking new opportunities. At the moment, information is available for 12 countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and The Gambia in West Africa. Return- and reintegration-related information is provided through advice centres located in Germany and in the 12 targeted return countries.

2. Initial point of contact, matching, and advice in countries of return

Advisory Centres like the GGAC are the main point of contact for returnees and they deal with questions related to jobs, migration, and reintegration. In The Gambia, the GGAC's team is trained to provide support on available job and entrepreneurship opportunities, but also on how to get medical and psychological assistance, care and education for children, and housing.

3. Education/job promotion on the ground

In The Gambia, the GGAC provides individual advice, information, and career guidance for clients seeking employment, vocational training, start-up/entrepreneurship support. The advice is provided by email or phone and is free of charge. The GGAC works closely with different organizations in-country to facilitate referrals to existing initiatives opportunities. Currently, partners include IOM, ITC and the YEP program, Caritas, IMVF, ENABEL, and the German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (DSIK).

4. Support to entrepreneurs

The Centre sponsors a two-day soft-skills training targeting 200 beneficiaries over a period of 10 months (20 people are trained each month). The training is provided by SMD Policy Management Group, an international consultancy firm. In-depth coaching sessions are available through the "Economic Inclusion of returned and potential migrants in Ghana and The Gambia" project run by DSIK. The Centre indirectly provides financial support to businesses through its PME project that finances already existing structures. The DSIK-led project, which targets returnees and potential migrants, offers business trainings and facilitates access to finance in partnership with the National Association of Cooperatives Credit Unions (NACCUG). The PME project also supports the TVET Mini-Grants competition, which is the result of a collaboration between ITC and NACCUG. The initiative is part of the "Activating Skills and Employment Opportunities" implemented by ITC and targeting 200 TVET graduates to help them establish their own businesses.

PEM Consulting, a German private consulting firm, supports the work of the GGAC and works closely with the MoTIE to implement the NEP and organize job fairs to foster coordination among existing actors and promote employment. Through PEM Consulting, the GGAC organized a pitching competition for start-ups and existing businesses in The Gambia. 20 selected winners received Design Thinking training and in-kind support of up to EUR 1,000.

3.3.2. ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE ORIENTATION OF RETURNEES

The landscape of private recruitment agencies is extremely limited in The Gambia. These structures do not play a significant role on the labour market as they mainly target highly educated, skilled workers. The online portal "Access Gambia" lists a number of job vacancies websites, such as *Gamjobs*, a platform designed for job seekers and potential employers to liaise. The website enables profile registration, job search and CV transmission. Available jobs are mainly from the development and cooperation sector, although a few companies and schools – including the University of The Gambia – regularly post vacancies. Other websites accessible from the portal advertise vacancies from a wide range of employers including banks, hotels, embassies, research centres, and seasonal jobs in the tourism sector. These job vacancies however mainly target highly educated, skilled Gambians and/or international workers. They could constitute realistic opportunities for members of the Gambian diaspora wishing to relocate, but they match less adequately with lower-skilled/educated individuals, which includes most returnees supported by IOM.

3.3.3. ORIENTATION MECHANISMS ESTABLISHED UNDER THE EUTF

At the outset of the EU-IOM JI, due in large part to the heavy influx of returnees, information sessions were grouped together and waiting times were generally long but decreased with time. This trend was reflected in past surveys Altai Consulting conducted in 2019-2021^{xvi}. Beneficiaries who returned to The Gambia in 2017 – at the beginning of the implementation period of the EU-IOM JI – were the most dissatisfied with the assistance received. Only half of these beneficiaries reported having benefited from a reintegration counselling session (this figure is below the regional average of two thirds). The main reasons indicated were not being aware of this assistance, or still waiting to be given a session to attend. Among those who benefitted from such a session, 85% of them declared having waited over six months upon arrival. The situation improved among surveyed beneficiaries who returned in 2018 and 2019^{xvii}. One third of respondents who returned in 2017 and benefitted from a counselling session reported having been presented with enough options to choose one that suited their interests; this proportion gradually improved (50% for those returned in 2018, 82% for those returned in 2019).

This can illustrate that, as the caseload progressively decreased and programs implemented by other IPs became available, IOM was able to diversify its reintegration assistance: for instance, TVET started in 2018; collective and community-based assistance started in 2019 and CfW activities began in 2020. This diversification was made possible by the establishment of more partnerships with private and public organisations providing training or support to MSMEs (EMPAS Poultry Processing, NYSS, and Sterling Consortium) and with other EUTF-funded actors (YEP and Tekki-Fii projects). These were formalised through the online outward referral system, which allowed for easier referrals of returnees among partners.

The online outward referral system prepared the ground for the creation of synergies with new international programmes. In August 2019, IOM The Gambia signed a data sharing agreement with ITC, GIZ, IMVF and ENABEL. Connected to IOM's case management system (MiMOSA), the platform provides partners with basic and limited data about returnees. The design process included all EUTF-related actors as well as mapping sessions to assess potential matching in terms of geographic locations and assistance opportunities. Since 2019, additional partners have approached IOM to be included in the system, including COOPI, YMCA The Gambia and Catholic Relief Services. An MoU was subsequently signed with COOPI. Given the success of this pilot, IOM launched the platform regionally under the name Migrant Assistant Portal (IMAP), with subsequent training occurring across the region from July 2020 onwards. The database requires information entered in the system to be kept up to date, but this is a challenge that the program has faced since its launch. Another limitation is the lack of a monitoring system to track the evolution of the returnee after the referral is done, with no obligation for the partner to notify IOM about the results achieved.

Focus Box 2: Opportunities for action related to the governance of the labour market and the reintegration of returnees

The EU should agree with the government and IOM on a gradual transition that would allow the Government to progressively take over more responsibilities in reintegration management. In particular, the EU could consider:

- Supporting the development of the new NDP (2023-2027), enhancing coordination among government and development partners to ensure appropriate financing of the Plan and avoid overlaps;
- Intensifying capacity-building activities for the ministries involved and/or members of the TWG, particularly the one focused on return and reintegration;

- Continuously providing systematic and sustained capacity building to civil servants (*ad hoc* short-term trainings yield limited results due to current capacity gaps and high levels of turnover); especially those from the MoI and the Gambian Immigration Department (GID).
- Ensuring that future migration-related programmes are designed to support the implementation of specific aspects of the NMP, to ensure they are aligned with national priorities and avoid duplication of efforts between programs/donors.

The EU could support the strengthening of existing referral mechanisms and platforms, for the youth in general, as well as for all types of returnees (and not necessarily IOM-assisted returnees):

- The EU could contribute to building-up capacities of the ESU based in Banjul and support the establishment of the ESU in Basse.
- The EU could support increased collaboration between IOM and the Government around the management of the IMAP platform and encourage its accessibility to non-EUTF partners in order to increase knowledge sharing and referral opportunities.
- Building on the IMAP Platform established under the EU-IOM JI, a reintegration structure could be established at the national level for all returning migrants. This type of structure could be in charge of advising all returnees (forced returns, AVRs, ‘qualified diaspora members’) on the services they can access, ensuring referrals to relevant public and private services depending on the needs of the returnees. Such an architecture could build upon the existing Migrant Information Centres (MICs), provided they are given appropriate and adequate resources to be dedicated to returnees, aside from their current focus on potential migrants. Significant resources would be needed, as the profiles of returnees (and therefore the range of advice needed) would be more diverse than those the MICs are currently supporting.

The EU could support the implementation of the NDP, the NEP and the NEAP. More specifically:

- **The EU should continue funding youth skills development and employment programmes as part of its strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration.** This is critical to raise interest and support from the Gambian government on the EU migration agenda. It is also needed to strategically complement its support to reintegration and economic development programmes and those of other development partners.
- **Programs and projects focused on TVET, and youth employability should align with existing Government frameworks and policies.** MoBSE, MoHERST, MoTIE, MoYS and the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA) should be leading the process with international actors supporting Government-led initiatives, according to the identified needs and opportunities. In addition, the EU could better align its programming with the priorities of the Gambian government, notably on migration for development, which currently receives little EU funding. This could be done through, for example, encouraging diaspora entrepreneurship, funding pilot labour and student mobility schemes towards Europe while remaining aware of risks related to brain drain, and supporting the lowering of remittances costs.

4. ANALYSIS AND MAPPING OF KEY ACTORS IN THE LABOUR MARKET AND REINTEGRATION ECOSYSTEM

4.1. TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRAINING (TVET)

4.1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

With the support of the EU, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and ITC mainly⁵, the Government developed the national TVET Roadmap 2020-2024, which provides a solid foundation for the development and implementation of TVET policies. The development of the roadmap has been led by MoHERST, together with MoTIE, MoBSE and NAQAA. It focuses on four strategic priorities: 1) strengthening coordination frameworks for a demand driven TVET system responsive to labour market needs; 2) reinforcing training and learning resources for promising value chains with high youth employment opportunities; 3) improving urban and rural access to skills development programmes and their perception and; 4) increasing labour market monitoring through sector advisory arrangements. As part of objective #4, a Gambia Labour Market Information System (GLMIS) has been established by MoTIE, the DL, the Gambian Bureau of Statistics, the National Training Authority, and the Social Security. Its role is to collect and analyse labour market data and improve statistics and indicators. According to the NEP 2022-2026, a project is underway to upgrade the existing database into a Labour Market and Migration Information System (LMMIS) to include data on migration and to analyse existing linkages between migration dynamics, status of the labour market, and employment.

The importance of TVET as part of the Government's youth employability strategies is emphasized in several national sectoral policies, including the 2021 Gambia TVET Policy. Launched by MoHERST in partnership with UNESCO and the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the policy is rooted in the NDP strategy, which lists the improvement of education and the modernization of the TVET sector among its key priority areas. The NDP 2018-2021 identifies some of the key challenges to be addressed to strengthen the TVET system, including: improving the adequacy of TVET with the needs of the labour market through the revision of curricula and the training of trainers; expand the establishment of TVET centres across the country; and build partnerships with the private sector. Although there is already some degree of involvement of the private sector⁶, both the NDP and the NEP advocate for a stronger collaboration. The National TVET Committee, which represents more than 20 national institutions in the country, including Ministries, TVET centres, national agencies, and associations, contributes to the implementation of the 2021 TVET Policy. It provided its contribution in the formulation of the TVET Roadmap developed by ITC, under the aegis of MoHERST.

The TVET system is regulated by the NAQAA Act of 2015, which aims at harmonizing and standardizing education at the post-secondary level, by ensuring that programs meet national quality standards and labour market requirements. NAQAA is the backbone of the Gambian TVET system and supervises the quality of both public and private training institutions. It operates under the umbrella of MoHERST. NAQAA's mandate is broad and encompasses: 1) quality assurance and accreditation of all tertiary and higher education institutions and programmes; 2) registration of education and training providers, trainers and assessors, in line with the National Qualifications

⁵ With the support of the EU, the "Jobs, Skills and Finance (JSF) for Women and Youth in The Gambia" project implemented by UNCDF in partnership with ITC.

⁶ Through, for example, acting representatives in the NAQAA's Governing Council as well as involvement in quality assurance and informal collaboration through post-training internships and placements

Framework; 3) coordination of internships and apprenticeships; 4) conduction of training needs assessments and educational research to inform policy and ensure fast readjustments of the TVET system to economic needs; 5) engagement in curriculum development to ensure a smooth transition between pre-vocational, vocational, and technical education and training^{xviii}.

Geographical coverage remains a major challenge as there are a very limited number of TVET institutions operating in the regions. Although no updated official figures on TVET enrolment seem to exist to date, the 2018 Gambia Labour Force Survey (GLFS) shows that the rate of youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) at the national level stands at 56,8%, with higher rates for women and youths living in rural areas. There are currently 92 tertiary-level institutions accredited by NAQAA, but access to TVET education remains challenging, especially for rural youth, as 90% of the service providers are located in or around the capital city. Despite the availability of training opportunities in the Banjul area, post-training employment opportunities remain scarce⁷. Some of the largest TVET institutions located in the Banjul Area (Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute – GTHI, Gambia Technical Training Institute – GTTI, and Insight Training Centre) have regional antennas, but their coverage remains insufficient to meet the demand of TVET education in the regions.

No data on government spending in the sector is available, but the overall low public expenditure on education contributes to the underfunding of TVET⁸. TVET institutions are funded through annual subventions, tuition fees and, in some cases, by external donors mainly through scholarships and the provision of equipment. Adequate funding remains a key challenge for both public and private institutions. All TVET centres met during this study declared needing stronger support from the Government and from donors, particularly in terms of trainers' capacity building and the provision of new, modern equipment.

4.1.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH TVET

While most TVET centres presented in this section have already collaborated with EUTF IPs, new additional ones have been identified and could constitute potential reintegration partners. Almost all EUTF-funded actors in The Gambia implemented vocational training programmes aiming at equipping returnees (and youths) with skills to either start a business or seek a job. IOM has established partnerships with TVET centres, including NYSS, EMPAS and the Sterling consortium. Additional institutions identified for this study include SOS CV Regional Mother and Adult Training Centre, Real Tech Gambia, Gambia Songhai Initiative, and Gaye Njorro Skills Academy (Partner Fiches #2, 3, 12 and 15). These institutions present interesting features, particularly because of their geographical location and/or their collaboration with the private sector. For example, the Gambia Songhai initiative offers training in the agricultural sector, while the Gaye Njorro Skills Academy train youth on a wide range of technical skills; both institutions are supported by UNDP. The SOS CV Regional Mother and Adult Training Centre has developed interesting partnerships with the private sector (particularly in the tourism industry), while Real Tech Gambia LTD's curricula includes a solid entrepreneurship component.

All partners listed below (Table 2) are certified and accredited by NAQAA, which means that the curricula, trainers, and certifications provided meet quality standards and are officially recognized at the national level. Identified partners include both public and private institutions offering trainings in a wide range of competencies and skills. Most of these institutions are located in the Greater Banjul Area, but references have been made to TVET institutions located in the regions, which have both the capacity to reintegrate returnees and to provide certified quality trainings. The length of training

⁷ Results from GTTI's tracer survey indicate that in 2018 only 39% of its graduates in 2015-2016 had a regular job, 19% were self-employed and 13% had occasional employment. 20% unemployment rate. State of Skills, Gambia (ILO, p. 30)

⁸ According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in 2016, The Gambia spent only 2.1 % of GDP on education, a share which is lower than in other countries in West Africa, such as Sierra Leone (3.1 %), Senegal (5.1 %), or Burkina Faso (4.2 %). See: ILO, 'State of Skills in the Gambia', available here.

ranges from six months for short programs to four years for degree level certificates. However, most trainings last between 1-2 years (for Certificate and Diploma levels, respectively). The admission criteria and literacy levels required for the different trainings vary, but most institutions indicated being flexible so long as it does not impact the learning process.

Several institutions have established partnerships with the private sector through job placements and internship opportunities, while others have included entrepreneurship trainings into their curricula. To date, partnerships and referrals still function informally, but they contribute to facilitate the transition between training and entry onto the labour market. Some TVET centres, such as GTHI – which is the main tourism and hospitality training facility in the country – receive requests from private companies looking for trained graduates to be employed in hotels, restaurants, and touristic facilities. The development of this type of dialogue and collaborations between TVET centres and companies enhances employability and facilitates recruitment processes. For graduates interested in self-employment and/or entrepreneurship ventures, several TVET centres, such as SASS Cosmetology and Skills Academy or Ida's Ideas Fashion and Design Training Institute, provide basic entrepreneurship trainings as well as career guidance and counselling. In addition, skills development and entrepreneurship capacity building through enterprise-based training has also yielded interesting results that could be capitalized upon in the next phases of programming (see Focus box 3).

Focus Box 3: EMPAS / partnerships with the private sector

In 2018, IOM developed a partnership with the company EMPAS Poultry Processing. The program provided on-the-job training to 64 returnees for a period of three months, where they acquired the technical skills needed to breed poultry and to set-up small businesses. After the training, graduates received poultry farming and production kits consisting of 500 chickens, chicken feed, poultry medication, equipment, and tools for the construction of a chicken coop. The program had a 70% success rate: returnees were able to set up their businesses, two even decided to combine their resources and start a larger business. The main challenges experienced during the program were the insufficient training period and the lack of financial resources to maintain and scale up the business over time.

The company welcomes youths, both males and females, for on-the-job trainings provided by the Department of Livestock, under leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture. Trainings, apprenticeships/internships are already available at the company, but they are not formalized. Further collaborations could be established with TVET institutions working in the agricultural sector and with NAQAA to develop a formal partnership framework to regulate the exchange of students between the TVET centres and the company for apprenticeship/internship periods and eventual job placement.

The company is however confronted with severe financial challenges, exacerbated by the lack of governmental investment in the private sector. In 2010, the company counted more than 100 employees; it has now around 30 staff, both in the management/administration and poultry processing unit, and struggles to operate, due to the lack of financial resources. Partnerships with international organizations like IOM do not provide support to its operations, as the organization commits to covering training and equipment costs only. A potential EU partnership could consider reinforcing the business through the coverage of overhead costs or through larger financial investments to allow the business to grow.

Avoiding dropouts and ensuring a sustainable integration of returnees into the labour market remain the key challenges of the process. To minimize dropouts and maximize chances of a sustainable integration in the job market, TVET institutions recommend that returnees be sponsored by IPs for the entire training period. Several IPs, such as GIZ, ITC and IMVF, provide living allowances for the length of the training as well as compensation for transportation costs. This financial support has

been considered essential by both IPs and TVET providers to ensure beneficiaries' commitment throughout the trainings. In addition, given the generally lower level of education of returnees compared to that of their traditional audience, several TVET institutions adapted their *curricula* for short-term trainings, added introductory modules, and emphasized the practical aspect of trainings provided to returnees. However, key missing features in most TVET centres remain the absence or weakness of monitoring systems that can provide reliable statistics on job market integration of graduates and/or dedicated units in charge of following-up with beneficiaries and providing them with mentoring and counselling to seek a job and/or set-up their own businesses.

Table 2: Training institutions that could be involved in returnees' reintegration in The Gambia

Organisation	Donors / IPs	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
(PF #1) Chigambas Skills Training Centre	GIZ	Tailoring, Welding, Carpentry	Basse, URR
(PF #2) Gambia Songhai Initiative	UNDP	Poultry farming, Ruminant management, Crop and vegetable management, Agroforestry	Chamen, North Bank Region (NBR)
(PF #3) Gaye Njorro Skills Academy	UNDP MoHERST	Beauty cosmetology, Massage therapy, Hairdressing, Catering, Tailoring and garment Construction, Customer care, Energy efficiency, Creative arts, Public speaking	Brusubi, WCR Farafenni, NBR Soma, LRR
(PF #4) GTHI	IOM ITC, YEP	Tourism and Hospitality	Serrekunda, KM Basse, URR
(PF #5) Gambia Telecommunications and Multimedia Institute (GTMI)	GIZ ITC, YEP IOM, EUTF	Satellite installations, IT repairs, IT, Vocational training, Business management	Kanifing, KM
(PF #6) GTTI	GIZ, World Bank, ECOWAS, UNESCO	Business studies, Community design and building, Construction, Engineering, IT, Professional development, Rural development	Serrekunda, KM Mansa Konko, LRR Basse, LRR
(PF #7) Ida's Ideas Fashion and Design Training Institute	GIZ	Fashion design, Garment making, Sewing and tailoring, Entrepreneurship and business plan development, Career guidance and Counselling	Serrekunda, KM

(PF #8) Insight Training Centre	GIZ, IMVF, ENABEL, ITC, YEP, UNDP, MRC Holland, Dutch Embassy, NAQAA, US Embassy	KM: Access program, IT, Management, Journalism, Construction, Electrical Installation, HR, Architecture, Plumbing, Banking, Hospitality, Marketing NBR: Agriculture, IT, Electrical and satellite installation	Sinchu Alhagie, KM Kuntaya, NBR
(PF #9) Njawara Agricultural Training Centre	ITC, YEP, IOM, GTTI, COOPI, Red Cross, MoA	Agriculture	Kerewan, NBR
(PF #10) President's International Award	GIZ IOM through NYSS	Auto-mechanic, Bakery, Electrical installations, Hairdressing, Beauty therapy, Carpentry, Construction, Plumbing, Hospitality, IT, Office management, Fashion design	Bakau, KM
(PF #11) Rural Development Institute	IOM	Home craft, Development studies and Rural development	Mansa Konko, LRR
(PF #12) Real Tech Gambia	Maxim Nyansa IT Solutions	ICT repairs, Web design and Content management, ICT for beginners	Farato Village, WCR
(PF #13) SASS Cosmetology and Skills Academy	IOM GIZ	Beauty therapy, Make-up artist, Massage therapy, Customer services, Entrepreneurship, Hairdressing	Serrekunda, KM
(PF #14) Sterling Technical Training Centre	GIZ, ITC, IOM, UNDP, NYSS, Child Fund, US Embassy	Installation, Electronic security, Plumbing, Repairs, Tiling, Auto-mechanic, Hairdressing and Beauty therapy, Construction, Cyber security, Road construction, Welding fabrication, Architectural craftsmanship	Busumbala, WCR Basse, URR Janjanbureh, CRR
(PF #15) SOS CV Regional Mother and Adult Training Centre	University of the Gambia, UNFPA, GTHI	Literacy and numeracy, Social work, Catering and hotel management, Sewing and craftwork	Bakoteh, KM

4.1.3. ONGOING INITIATIVES AND OTHER KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE TVET SECTOR

Initiatives implemented under the EUTF significantly contributed to strengthen the vocational training sector in The Gambia. Both the YEP and Tekki-Fii projects (which ended in 2021) focused on enhancing youth employability and self-employment opportunities, while strengthening the TVET sector. The GIZ component, in particular, targeted skills training (through TVET and apprenticeships) and business development. Efforts to participate in the reform of the TVET sector involved competence needs assessments, the revision of *curricula*, the training of trainers and the development of new skills training courses. Equipment was also provided to several TVET institutions, including GTMI, GTTI, Insight Training Centre, PIA, and the Sterling Technical Training Centre. The YEP program focused on the support to specific value chains, such as tourism, agriculture and creating industries, by reinforcing existing institutions, sponsoring training for youths, and facilitating access to entrepreneurship opportunities as well as financial services.

Other key actors play a significant role in the TVET sector in The Gambia. For instance, EU support to UNCDF has been allowing for the provision of more training opportunities to both individual youths and MSMEs. The 2018-onwards five-year flagship program “Jobs, Skills and Finance for Women and Youth” is implemented in three regions (Central River, North Bank, and Lower River) and aims at promoting sustainable and equal employment opportunities by improving the quality of TVET education and making it more accessible. To date, UNCDF has accompanied a training of trainers for four training institutions (Gambia College, the Gambia Songhai Initiative, Njawara Agricultural Training Centre, and the Department of Livestock Services) and has reviewed six of their training curricula. Around 3,500 beneficiaries have been targeted with skills development training and over 900 had been supported by May 2021. Training opportunities have also been offered to MSMEs and linkages have been established at the local level to strengthen economic development.

Along with UNCDF, UNESCO – with funding from KOICA – is playing a central role in the reform of the TVET sector through its support to the implementation of the TVET Roadmap and the elaboration of the TVET policy. In line with the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025, UNESCO Dakar has partnered with the MoHERST, MoBSE and other stakeholders through the implementation of the ‘Youth Empowerment through TVET’ project. The initiative aims at 1) improving the relevance of the TVET system by supporting the development of the TVET policy in The Gambia; 2) improving quality of TVET through enhanced institutions management, TVET teacher training and provision of pedagogical resources and equipment and 3) improving the perception of TVET and attractiveness of TVET pathways through skills competition, an incubator system, and communications campaigns. UNESCO has contributed to the review of occupational standards and teaching curricula in seven areas⁹ and to the development of new ones in three additional areas¹⁰.

Table 3: Key actors involved in the TVET sector with whom coordination could be increased

Structure	Project	Geographical location	Projects' status
(AF #1) UNCDF	Jobs, Skills and Finance for Women and Youths	LRR, NBR, CRR	Ongoing
(AF #2) UNESCO	Youth Empowerment through TVET	Banjul, Kanifing (KM), Mansa Konko (LRR), Kerewan (NBR), Janjanbureh (CRR), Basse (URR)	Ongoing

⁹ Welding and fabrication, Plumbing and pipe fitting, Building construction, Adult education and teacher training, Carpentry and joinery, Electrical installation, and Auto-mechanic.

¹⁰ Web application development, Road construction, and Industrial electronics

Opportunities for action to further adapt the TVET offer to needs of returning migrants

The EU should continue funding youth skills development as part of its strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration and offer adequate reintegration pathways for returnees:

- Building-up on the UNESCO ‘Youth Empowerment through TVET’ programme experience, the EU could consider funding additional information campaigns to increase the attractiveness of TVET among returnees; particularly at the information / orientation / referral stages.
- As part of its future return and reintegration programming, the EU should encourage future IPs to continue taking measures to avoid drop-outs. Such measures include providing stipends and/or living allowances to returnees, as well as compensation for transportation costs.
- The EU could consider supporting partner TVET institutions in setting-up dedicated units in charge of offering follow-up support to graduates. After the completion of trainings, TVET institutions should remain available for follow-up mentoring and/or guidance to beneficiaries to access additional services (incubators, accelerators, etc. – see section 4.2.).

Opportunities for action to further support the development of the TVET sector

The EU could support the implementation of the Gambia TVET Roadmap as well as the national TVET policy, through the following actions:

- **Contribute to the improvement of labour market information.** The EU could consider supporting – along with NAQAA and MoTIE – the development of the GLMIS, including data on TVET. GLMIS has limited human and financial resources, which hinders its capacities to conduct surveys. Data on graduates’ access to the labour market are needed to improve TVET curricula and make the system more responsive to the labour market demand.
- **Contribute to an improved access to TVET in rural areas.** In line with the NDP 2018-2021, a reform of the TVET system could benefit youths in rural areas, especially in sectors with a potential for rural employment, such as agriculture. In addition, affirmative policies, such as preferential compensation schemes in rural areas could help to attract teachers outside of the Banjul area.
- **Increase public TVET funding and remove financial barriers to participation.** Based on other experiences in the sub-region, for instance in Senegal^{xix}, the EU could consider supporting the establishment of sustainable sources of funding for the TVET sector, including through the establishment of public-private partnerships. This would allow for greater access to TVET for the youth, the cost of tuition fees being a significant barrier in many cases.

4.2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SELF-EMPLOYMENT, AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

4.2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

The private sector in The Gambia is limited and characterized by a majority of MSMEs, operating mostly in the informal sector. The country’s economy relies on tourism, agriculture, and remittances, with most of the population working in the informal sector. The inability of existing industries to provide sufficient jobs has resulted in an increase of internal migration, particularly among the youths^{xx}. In the

last 30 years, the urban population has increased from 39% to 54%, largely due to migration from rural areas, thus contributing to a saturated labour market in urban areas. Employment creation largely depends on the ability of the Government to support the expansion of the private sector, through the implementation of reforms and incentives to support MSMEs.

MSMEs in The Gambia contribute to approximately 20% of the GDP and employ the largest share of the active labour force, of which 70% is self-employed^{xxi}. The Government has committed to “strengthen MSMEs, develop the industry and create employment^{xxii}”. A study conducted in 2014 demonstrated that among the almost 90,000 MSMEs operating in the country, about 70% were micro or small¹¹ structures, unregistered and operating in the informal sector. Most of them are located in the Greater Banjul Area and owned by men aged between 18-35, while women owners account for only 34%. Only about a third of business owners declared having attended a formal entrepreneurship training before or while running their businesses.

In this context, strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem is key to foster economic development and reduce youth unemployment. To this end, a number of national policies have been developed. The first National Policy for MSMEs was formulated in 2014 and the National Entrepreneurship Policy was developed in 2016. The latter is the result of a joint effort led by UNCTAD, in partnership with MoTIE, and the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA). Its vision for 2026 is that The Gambia “will have an enabling entrepreneurship environment, quality entrepreneurship education and a thriving entrepreneurial spirit, embracing all parts of the country^{xxiii}”. The key recommendations of the policy include integrating entrepreneurship competencies and skills into formal and informal education as well as promoting access to funding for innovation and sustainable development. Later, the Strategic Youth and Trade Development Roadmap (SYTDR) was developed in 2018 under the leadership of the MoTIE, with the support of the MOYS. The roadmap was drafted with the technical support of the ITC, within the framework of the EUTF-funded YEP project. The roadmap aims to tackle the root causes of irregular migration through increased job opportunities for youth. One of its key strategic objectives is to foster youth entrepreneurship and access to pro-youth financial services.

Based on common categories for start-ups in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, The Gambia is placed at the first stage of country maturity called “Awakening & Manifesto”^{xxiv}. At this stage, the country has developed increased knowledge and awareness of the start-up culture and demonstrated interest in global trends related to innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up development. However, institutional capacity supporting the entrepreneurship ecosystem remains weak, which hinders the creation of a common understanding and alignment among government actors, international donors, and financial institutions. The creation of the necessary conditions for a favourable entrepreneurship environment depends on the capacity of relevant institutions to coordinate, thus allowing more entrepreneurs to start businesses, by building their skills and facilitating access to finance and to international markets and networks.

4.2.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES

The entrepreneurship ecosystem in The Gambia is nascent, but there is an increasing number of structures working on the creation of a favourable business environment. In July 2019, ITC published a mapping of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in The Gambia^{xxv}. The document provides an analysis of the institutions that play a key role in the development of the entrepreneurship sector. Although The Gambia is still at an early stage of maturity, its small size, its large young population, and the increasing awareness of the role of entrepreneurship in job creation and economic development

¹¹ The size of the enterprise is considered micro and small when the average investment falls between GMD 75,000 (USD 1,362) and GMD 150,000 (USD 2,722). Medium enterprises can count up to five employees and have an average investment of more than GMD 150,000.

represent an advantage. Both the public and private sectors drive initiatives, with the support of donor agencies. Most actors are located in the Greater Banjul Area but operate countrywide through regional antennas.

Major gaps identified are the scarcity of incubators and accelerators programs, as well as limited access to finance. Incubators and accelerators programs are needed to scale up and grow existing businesses and linking them to international markets. In addition, access to financing remains difficult, with a very limited number of financial institutions and investors providing credits to start-ups. Although entrepreneurship trainings are offered by several institutions, the approach is not coordinated, and the *curricula* not standardized in terms of content and quality. The lack of coordination is however partly compensated by geographical proximity which facilitates informal exchanges and collaborations. Experienced institutions like GIEPA and the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) are leading the process of what is becoming a diversified ecosystem, which notably includes gender-oriented programs targeting women entrepreneurs.

Youth entrepreneurship and employability is fostered through access to training, mentorship, and to financial resources. The organizations listed below appear to be relevant and able to work with youths and returnees. However, all raised significant challenges related to insufficient funding and equipment to fulfil their mandates.

- The **Gambia Youth Chamber of Commerce (GYCC)** is a public institution created in 2016 with the support of NEDI. It represents the interest of young Gambian entrepreneurs and supports them in the establishment of their businesses. GYCC provides training, coaching, mentoring, market space, and linkages for young entrepreneurs and advocates for the development of a business-friendly environment. GYCC organizes the National Youth and Women Trade on Agribusiness and Tourism Fair bringing together more than 500 businesses to showcase their product and services. It also organizes regional exhibitions in rural Gambia to provide the same networking opportunities to rural youths and women, with a special focus on tourism and agribusiness. Lastly, GYCC is involved in the organization of market linkages workshops that bring together businesses, hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets to discuss ways of possible collaboration. However, funding remains a significant challenge for the organisation, as it mainly depends on membership subscriptions.
- The **Global Youth Innovation Network, Gambia Chapter (GYIN Gambia)** is the Gambian chapter of the Global Youth Innovation Network, a youth-led global initiative. GYIN provides young entrepreneurs with business advisory services providing support to funding applications, coaching & mentoring services, digital literacy trainings and support to building market linkages (particularly in the agricultural sector, through the Agri-Food Value Chain Programme). Underfunding and outdated training materials however limit the capacities of the network.
- The **National Enterprise Development Initiative (NEDI)** is a public institution established by an act of Parliament in 2013 and placed under the umbrella of the MoYS. NEDI facilitates the establishment of businesses to increase employability and economic development, targeting women and youth specifically. It provides entrepreneurs with the opportunity to plan, establish and grow their businesses. It focuses on developing skills through training, providing advisory services and mentoring, supporting access to financial services (loans and grants) and creating linkages with relevant organizations for additional support and collaboration. It is equipped with a business hub open to entrepreneurs. NEDI plans to expand its geographical coverage by establishing a regional business hub in Lower River Region but lacks capacity and resources.
- Created in 2015, the **Start-up Incubator Gambia** started as project funded by the US Embassy in Banjul and the Gambian American Chamber of Commerce. The project was then extended after its initial phase of implementation and the centre is now registered as an NGO. The Incubator provides pre-incubation design thinking bootcamps, a six-month business incubation, and an accelerator and scale-up program that includes hands-on entrepreneurship training,

access to mentors, co-working spaces, facilitated access to financial and technical resources and networks. Since its inception, the project supported over 1,600 existing and 570 new businesses and created 500 new jobs.

- **The National Association of Cooperative Credit Unions of The Gambia (NACCUG)** is a member-based organization whose mandate is to promote and support the development of Credit Unions across the country. NACCUG provides financial services that serve as investment windows for credit unions, its members, as well as beneficiaries sponsored by development partners. NACCUG also provides education on the operating principles of credit unions as well as specialized training packages based on the needs of development partners (e.g., management, governance, and entrepreneurship). In collaboration with development partners, NACCUG provides short and long-term loans at affordable and competitive interest rates, compared to those offered by conventional banks. Beneficiaries are not requested to become members of a credit union to benefit from the financial services. Capacity building and entrepreneurship training are available for youth between 18-35, and for returnees, before the loan is disbursed.

Table 4: Structures that could be involved in returnees' reintegration in The Gambia

Organisation	Donors / IPs	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
(PF #16) GYCC	NEDI	Entrepreneurship training, Coaching and mentorship programs, Business advocacy, Access to markets and finance, Networking opportunities	Mainly Greater Banjul Area with regional outreach
(PF #17) GYIN Gambia	UNDP, ITC, YEP, IMVF, GIZ, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), others	Business advisory, Entrepreneurship Bootcamp, Coaching & mentorship, Digital literacy training, Market linkages	Mainly Greater Banjul Area with regional outreach
(PF #18) NEDI	GIZ, Tekki-Fii, ITC, YEP, IOM, MoA, others	Training in entrepreneurship and investment, Loans to operate business in the informal sector, Investment advice to ensure sustainability	Mainly Greater Banjul Area with regional outreach
(PF #19) Start Up Incubator Gambia	ITC, YEP, IMVF, COOPI, ENABEL	Business incubator centre	Mainly Greater Banjul Area with regional outreach
(PF #20) NACCUG	ITC, YEP, DSIK, GIZ, UNICEF	Financial institution	Mainly Kanifing Municipality with regional outreach

4.2.3. OTHER KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP, ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In 2021, at the end of the EUTF funding, the GIZ Tekki-Fii team was dismantled but GIZ continues to play a key role in the provision of services to the youth, including returnees. Through DSIK, GIZ is implementing the 3-year 'Economic Inclusion of Returned and Potential Migrants' program which targets 1,400 youths and returnees in Ghana (1,000) and The Gambia (400). The program is built on a 3-steps model that includes entrepreneurship training, business coaching sessions, and facilitated access to financial opportunities. During the training, participants are monitored, and their performances are assessed. The best students move on to the second phase, where they benefit from a 5-day coaching designed to help them develop their business ideas and business plans. The plans are evaluated by NACCUG which awards a maximum amount of GMD 50,000 (USD 918), 75% of which is disbursed as loan and 25% as a grant. Beneficiaries are granted two years to repay the loan and are subjected to a monthly interest rate of 1%. The organization performs regular follow-ups to ensure that businesses are running well and provide necessary assistance and guidance. Referrals of returning migrants are done through GIZ that orients returnees from Germany to the program, but also from IOM, even though no formal agreement between the two organizations is yet in place.

The development of the NEP has mobilized synergies between national and international actors to build a stronger national entrepreneurship ecosystem in The Gambia. The drafting of the Policy was facilitated by UNCTAD, while its implementation remains under the responsibility of the GIEPA, with MoTIE providing guidance, technical and financial support. In 2014, two years prior the launching of the NEP, the Empretec entrepreneurship program, targeting MSMEs in The Gambia, was launched by UNDP for a period of three years. The final evaluation highlighted interesting: 58 entrepreneurial workshops completed, 1,980 entrepreneurs trained based on the Empretec model (developed and certified by UNCTAD), 300 farmers trained, and 900 entrepreneurs and farmers advised. To ensure sustainability, the project became a full-fledged programme that is now located at GIEPA and continues to provide training and business development services to existing and aspiring entrepreneurs. Under the EU-IOM JI, Empretec supported entrepreneurship training, which were delivered over a 6-day period by GIEPA trainers. The training curriculum included notions on financial literacy and management, the set-up of a business, and accounting. Returnees were referred to the programme by IOM, as part of their reintegration package.

Other international actors such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), UNCDF, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as the World Bank, support economic development interventions through programs that could benefit returnees. These actors provide substantial assistance to local economic development through large-scale programs aiming at strengthening key economic sectors, particularly in the food and agriculture industry. Improving sustainability and growth in this sector enables the country to decrease its dependency on foreign imports and reduce food insecurity, while mitigating migration flows from rural areas. By strengthening and restructuring value chains, sustainable and equitable employment opportunities are created, which mainly benefit women and the youth.

- The AfDB targets the production, processing, and marketing of rice to improve farmers' income, rural livelihood, food and nutritional security. Co-financed by the Gambian Government, the project involves around 500 youth, including returnees. Beneficiaries are trained by NEDI on entrepreneurship and business development so that they can produce, market, and sell rice, thus ensuring income and livelihood.
- The FAO "Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security/Nutrition to Mitigate Migration" aims at supporting local development and contributing to the reduction of youth migration. The project is carried out in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and the Gambia Songhai Initiative. Young graduates from the Gambia Songhai Initiative are recruited by FAO to get

practical experience working in the FAO gardens located in CRR, NBR, and CRR. After one year, they are given financial support to start their own businesses in the agricultural sector.

- The World Bank has committed large funding to strengthen local economic development. Currently, the organization targets the creation of resilient agriculture value chains and the diversification of the tourism sector. The promotion of resilient agriculture is carried out with a funding envelop of USD 40 million and is focused on the promotion of competitive value chains for smallholder farmers and agribusinesses. USD 68 million have been engaged to support the diversification of the tourism offer in The Gambia, while strengthening its resilience against climate change.
- The UNCDF “Jobs, Skills, and Finance for Women and Youth” Flagship Programme includes an entrepreneurship component aiming at creating employment for women and the youth through green and resilient economics. UNCDF support local communities in rural areas to develop climate resilient investments through the promotion of Cash for Work activities and financial support to MSMEs. Targeted financial services and products are also developed to facilitate the creation of businesses led by rural women and youth.

Table 5: Key actors involved in the entrepreneurship sector with whom coordination could be increased

Structure	Project	Geographical locations	Projects' status
(AF #3) DSIK	Economic Inclusion of Returned and Potential Migrants in Ghana and The Gambia	Countrywide	Ongoing
(AF #4) GIZ	Returning to New Opportunities	Countrywide	Ongoing
(AF #5) UNCTAD	Empretec Gambia	Countrywide	Ongoing
(AF #6) AfDB	Rice Value Chain Transformation	CRR, URR	Ongoing
(AF #1) UNCDF	Jobs, Skills and Finance for Women and Youths	CRR, NBR, URR	Ongoing
(AF #7) FAO	Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security/Nutrition to mitigate migration	CRR, LRR, NBR, URR	Ongoing
	Support the sustainable production & Marketing of Fish and Vegetable Products for Urban/Peri-urban women	WCR	Ongoing

The EU should continue funding youth entrepreneurship development as part of its strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration and offer adequate reintegration pathways for returnees. As part of these programs, the EU could consider:

- Providing financial and technical support to the leading structures in the entrepreneurship ecosystem such as the GYCC, GYIN, NEDI, and Start-up Incubator Gambia.
- Regarding access to finance – a key component of a successful entrepreneurship-based job creation strategy – the EU could consider further supporting the financial supply and development of microfinance in The Gambia. This could be done, for example, through mini-loan schemes that would replicate the principle of YEP mini-grants.
- The entrepreneurship ecosystem and TVET should be strongly linked to facilitate the establishment and growing of businesses. As the formal labour market is still too small to absorb the job demand, TVET graduates should be supported in the establishment of their own businesses through skills and acquisition and improved access to finance. This could be achieved through the establishment of incubators within TVET institutions and/or focal points in charge of following up and providing mentoring to graduates.
- The variety and scope of programmes to support entrepreneurship in The Gambia developed by international development partners such as AfDB, FAO or the World Bank offer many possibilities for collaboration and potential synergies in the context of future EU programming. The EU could consider playing a more central role in coordinating international stakeholders' interventions, which would lead to a more optimal use of resources and a more coherent strategy among partners.

4.3. ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE RETURNING MIGRANTS

4.3.1. STATUS OF ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE RETURNEES

The NMP recognizes the right to health and mental well-being for all migrants, including returnees. It advocates for inclusive health policies addressing migration-related vulnerabilities, including non-communicable diseases, mental health, occupational and environmental health. These objectives are consistent with those of the Health Sector Emergency and Response Plan, the National Contingency Plan, and the Emergency Operation Centre^{xxvi}. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) helps individuals (including children, victims of trafficking, and migrants) by providing shelter, counselling, family tracing (for unaccompanied minors), as well as reintegration and financial support. However, funding remains limited and the capacity of the DSW to effectively assist vulnerable migrants insufficient.

Under the EU-IOM JI, IOM worked closely with the Government to increase the availability and provision of psycho-social support (PSS) to returnees, to compensate for the scarcity of mental health services available in the country. The SOPs for AVRR outline the roles and responsibilities of actors involved in the reception of returnees. IOM conducts, together with the DSW, the identification and assistance of vulnerable returnees such as children, victims of trafficking, and single-headed households. DSW is also involved in family tracing and assistance to returnees with disabilities. The Ministry of Health is directly involved in the provision of medical assistance through a first health screening; individuals in need of assistance are referred to health facilities for further assessment and treatment. Psychological First Aid (PFA) and basic counselling are placed under the responsibility of

the National Youth Council (NYC), a satellite institution of the MoYS. Under the JI, IOM has led several capacity building activities on PSS, identification, and referrals to the GID and other institutions. At the national level, a sub-working group on Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) has been created and MHPSS focal points were trained at the regional level.

In 2021, The Gambia launched the National Referral Mechanism for the Protection and Assistance of Vulnerable Migrants, including Victims of Trafficking (NRM). Funded by the EUTF, this coordination mechanism is placed under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Its role is to provide a comprehensive framework that outlines roles and responsibilities of state and non-state actors in the promotion and protection of the rights of migrants. The development of the NRM lays the foundation to bring policy coherence and ultimately joint long-term actions by various stakeholders involved in migration-related interventions. Validated in December 2020, the NRM has the objective of strengthening the government's migration governance system. It provides an operational method on how the government can effectively manage vulnerable migrants, and notably, two SOPs for the management of stranded vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking were validated in June 2020, and technical workshops were held for government officials and NGO representatives.

4.3.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE RETURNEES

In addition to the support provided under the EU-IOM JI, MHPSS assistance has been delivered by the Italian NGO COOPI, which could constitute an interesting partner in the future. COOPI has extensive experience related to returnees' assistance: under ENABEL's component of the Tekki-Fii project, COOPI provided PSS to returnees benefitting from CfW activities in NBR. In addition, COOPI implemented two projects under Italian funding: "No more Back Way" and "Invest in the Future", both implemented in North Bank Region (NMB) and Central River Region (CRR). These two programs allowed returnees, including unaccompanied minors to receive PSS. Several trainings were organized to enhance PSS capacity of COOPI staff and other key stakeholders. Additional training activities were conducted at the community level to raise awareness on the relevance of MHPSS in facilitating reintegration. COOPI is currently providing assistance to unaccompanied minor migrants in Farafenni (NBR) at the Child Friendly Space (CFS), supported by Save the Children, and in CRR. Activities include PSS, recreational activities, reception, and accommodation of child migrants at the CFS centre, family tracing and reunification. To date, a sustainability plan for the CFS is not available and its future existence will depend on the availability of funds.

Several local NGOs and youth led CSOs have also developed substantive experience in the support to vulnerable migrants and could play a key part in future programming.

- **Peace of Mind:** The MHPSS component of the COOPI projects was managed by Peace of Mind, which is a national NGO that provides MHPSS, professional counselling and capacity building for organizations working in the MHPSS field. In the current context of shortage of mental health professionals and facilities in The Gambia, Peace of Mind represents a valid option to ensure that vulnerable returnees are assisted and accompanied in their reintegration process. Peace of Mind has several ongoing partnerships with national and international organizations, such as UNFPA, COOPI, and the Ministry of Health, with whom an MoU has been recently signed to formalize the already existing collaboration.
- **Activista:** Under the EU-IOM JI, IOM collaborated with Activista, a Gambian CSO working to promote the rights of women and men through campaigns and solidarity actions. Activista notably set-up a hot-line pilot project where it provided information on available opportunities in the country for young people (referrals to YEP and Tekki-Fii programmes). It also shared information related to the risks of irregular migration and available regular alternatives. At the community level, Activista's volunteers, who benefitted from a 3-day PSS training delivered by IOM through the NYC, organized sensitization sessions to create an enabling environment for

communities to learn about returnees’ stories and challenges faced during their travel, and to foster community dialogue on migration. Activista collaborates with other youth organisations, such as ‘Youth Against Irregular Migration’, a grassroots association that creates awareness on the causes, risks, and effects of irregular migration through artistic means. They work to provide young people with reliable information on irregular migration and provide information on possible alternatives. They also contribute to the well-being of returnees by providing them with basic PSS and counselling. Although such organizations are not experts in MHPSS, they can constitute a valuable resource for peer-to-peer communication and awareness-raising.

Table 6: Structures that could be involved in vulnerable returnees’ reintegration in The Gambia

Organisation	Donors / IPs	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
(PF #21) COOPI	AICS (Italian Cooperation Agency) / Private funds	Child protection, PSS, family strengthening	NBR and CRR
	Save the Children	Child protection, PSS, family strengthening	Farafenni, NBR
(PF #22) Peace of Mind	UNFPA	MHPSS	Countrywide

4.3.3. OTHER KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE RETURNEES

Extensive capacity building has been conducted by IOM under the “Strengthening the Sustainable and Holistic Reintegration of Returnees in The Gambia” UNPBF-funded project. Under this project, implemented between December 2018 and March 2022, a national MHPSS framework was developed by the MoH with financial and technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and IOM, as well as associated training curricula. This enabled IOM to expand its social inclusion and cohesion activities in communities, particularly through the launch of the mobile health caravan initiatives. The mobile teams, composed of community health volunteers and doctors, provided free medical consultations, PSS, and complimentary medicine to over 200 community members in Farafenni (NBR) and Brikama (WCR)^{xxvii}.

In parallel, other donor-led projects provide support to vulnerable migrants.

- The PROTEJEM project, led by Save the Children¹² is a EUTF-funded initiative implemented in Farafenni (NBR) and Soma (LRR). Its objective is to create a protective environment for children and young migrants through adapted, accessible, and good quality basic services.
- Save the Children collaborates closely with the Spanish and Gambian Red Cross, which are managing a similar EUTF initiative but focusing on adult migrants on the move. They work in Kanifing Municipality (KM), WCR and URR. Referrals are made mostly by police officers and GID, responsible for border management. This ongoing collaboration allow for referrals of child migrants to Save the Children.

¹² “Improving the protection of children and young migrants on the main migratory routes in West Africa” (2020-2023).

- The GGAC is in the process of formalising a collaboration with the Gambian Red Cross to be able to offer PSS support to returnees (from Germany and other EU Member States). In the meantime, returnees in need of PSS are currently being addressed to IOM, which has the human and technical capacity to provide adequate assistance.

Table 7: Other key actors involved in the socio-economic integration of vulnerable returnees

Structure	Project	Geographical location	Projects' status
(AF #8) Save the Children	PROTEJEM: Improving the protection of children and young migrants on the main migratory routes in West Africa	Soma (LRR), Farafenni (NBR)	Ongoing
(AF #9) Red Cross	<i>Appui à la protection des migrants les plus vulnérables en Afrique de l'Ouest</i>	KM, WCR, URR	Ongoing

Focus box 6: Opportunities for action for an improved reintegration assistance of vulnerable returnees

PSS services tend to be provided separately from reintegration assistance. Improved collaboration and coordination between economic actors and PSS providers are needed to take into account the specific vulnerabilities of returnees and improve their chances of long-term reintegration.

- Based on the GGAC's model, the EU could explore the possibility of supporting the establishment of partnerships between economic actors – such as incubators or TVET providers – and PSS professionals and/or NGOs providing PSS services. Recommended partners such as GYCC, GYIN, NEDI or Start-up Incubator Gambia (section 4.2.) could be sensitized on the need to train designated focal points within their staff on basic PSS needs.
- Similarly, TVET providers should be equipped with basic modules on PSS. Based on previous experiences with referrals of returnees, many TVET centres' representatives expressed the need to have PSS experts available among their staff, in order to accompany returnees facing difficulties integrating training courses. In their experience, many returnees started trainings shortly after their return, without having had the time and means to process their often difficult, if not traumatic, experience. Such situations have created challenges for both returnees and TVET institutions, increased risks of dropouts and overall, significantly jeopardized chances of a successful economic reintegration. Holistic approaches have, for example, been implemented by the GIZ in Ethiopia and could constitute an interesting model¹³.
- Finally, the EU could engage in a dialogue with national authorities to pursue partnerships developed by IOM with public structures, and support the more recently created structures (SYPEG, CNTPPA), which could play a leading role in the reintegration of vulnerable profiles.

¹³ "Qualifications and Employment Perspectives for Refugees and Host Communities in Ethiopia Programme (QEP) – Special Initiative Tackling the Root Causes of Displacement, Reintegrating Refugees". Under this program, in order to structurally anchor psychosocial services in the Ethiopian vocational training system, counsellors are trained to provide basic PSS.

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- i Afro Barometer, 2022, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad521-gambians-say-government-must-do-more-to-help-the-youth/>
- ii World Bank, 2021, Poverty and equity brief
- iii World Bank, 2020 - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=GM>
- iv The Gambia National Employment Policy 2022-2026
- v Altai Consulting, Third Party Monitoring and Learning mechanism for the EUTF in the SLC region – The Gambia final country report, 2021
- vi IOM, 2018, Mapping and socio-economic profiling of communities in The Gambia
- vii Frontex Database, 2020
- viii *Ibid.*
- ix Altai Consulting, Third Party Monitoring and Learning mechanism for the EUTF in the SLC region – The Gambia final country report, 2021
- x IOM, 2020, Return migrants debts and reintegration
- xi Altai Consulting, ‘Third-Party Monitoring and Learning’ (TPML), cycles 2 and 3
- xii The Gambia National Development Plan (2018-2021)
- xiii *Ibid.*
- xiv *Ibid.*
- xv The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021, p.12
- xvi Altai Consulting, Third Party Monitoring and Learning mechanism for the EUTF in the SLC region – The Gambia final country report, 2021
- xvii *Ibid.*
- xviii ILO, 2020, State of Skills in The Gambia
- xix Altai Consulting, *Réintégration des migrants de retour: Cartographie des acteurs, programmes et partenaires potentiels – Sénégal, 2022*
- xx ITC, Strategic Youth and Trade Development Roadmap of the Gambia (2018-2022)
- xxi UNCTAD, Formulating the National Entrepreneurship Policy
- xxii The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021
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- xxiv ITC, 2019, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in The Gambia
- xxv *Ibid.*
- xxvi The Gambia National Migration Policy.
- xxvii IOM, 2019, Psychosocial reintegration of Gambian returnees strengthened through mobile health caravans.