



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

SIERRA LEONE

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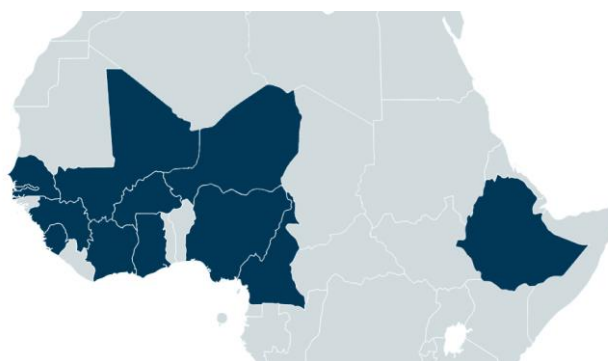
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This report is part of a regional study covering 12 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. For each country of the study a report has been elaborated, 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

CSO: Civil society organization

EEU: Employment Exchange Unit

EU: European Union

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

GIZ: *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (German cooperation agency)

ICMPD: International Centre for Migration Policy Development

ICT: Information and communications technologies

ILO: International Labor Organization

IOM: International Organization for Migration

IP: Implementing partner

JI: EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration

LMIS: Labor Market Information System

MLSS: Ministry of Labor and Social Security

MLS: Monitoring and Learning System (for the EUTF)

MTHE: Ministry of Technical and Higher Education

MTNDP: Medium Term National Development Plan

MoTI: Ministry of Trade and Industry

MoPED: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

MoU: Memorandum of understanding

MoY: Ministry of Youth

MSW: Ministry of Social Welfare

NEP: National Employment Policy

NGO: Non-governmental organization

NMP: National Migration Policy

NYP: National Youth Policy

SMEs: Small and medium enterprises

SLC: Sahel and Lake Chad

SOPs: Standard operating procedures

TPML: Third-Party Monitoring and Learning mechanism (for the EUTF)

TVET: Technical and vocational education and training

UNCDF: United Nations Capital Development Fund

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

USAID: United States' Agency for International Development

WHI: World Hope International

YWCA: Young Women Christian Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to a lack of evidence on irregular migration patterns from Sierra Leone available in 2015, the country was not included in the Sahel and Lake Chad (SLC) window of the EUTF and was not covered by the EU-IOM Joint Initiative (JI). However, returns to the country amounted to 5% of the total number of Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVR) at the regional level, ranking Sierra Leone 7th amongst countries of return. Systematic research on returnees' profiles remains limited but empirical data suggests that Sierra Leoneans returnees are highly vulnerable. The geography of migration patterns within Sierra Leone and the main regions of origin and return remain scarcely documented. Anecdotal evidence however suggests that all regions of the country are affected by emigration, but the Western region (Freetown area) is the main region of return. It is however unclear whether this is influenced by the fact that IOM reintegration assistance is only available in this particular region.

Compared with countries included in the EU-IOM JI, reintegration assistance in Sierra Leone was significantly impacted by chronic underfunding, which hindered the establishment of effective return and reintegration governance mechanisms, national ownership, and data collection/research on migration patterns. By the end of 2022, close to 6 000 returnees (nearly ¾ of the total caseload for Sierra Leone) had received reintegration assistance budgeted on IOM missions from transit countries (Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Libya). However, national ownership over return and reintegration assistance remained very limited, due to the lack of resources allocated to building governance mechanisms and strengthen capacities.

The emigration of young Sierra Leoneans is largely due the low absorption capacity of the labor market despite significant reforms undertaken by the Government. Although youth employment and migration dedicated policies have been developed in Sierra Leone, normative frameworks related to job creation and reintegration remain unclear and largely ineffective. The multiplication of normative frameworks in the fields of job creation, youth empowerment and migration has resulted in a fragmented normative landscape and overlapping institutional mandates undermining the operationalization of the objectives contained in these policies. In addition, international partners' interventions on job creation are anchored within various ministries and/or executed by different agencies, resulting in a compartmentalization of information, fragmented data collection and the absence of a global M&E framework. Finally, in the absence of an efficient Labor Management and Information System (LMIS), the Employment Exchange Unit (EEU) struggles to fulfil its mandate, is ill-suited to the informal structure of the market, and insufficiently equipped to provide guidance to job seekers – and returnees in particular.

The large caseload of returnees coming back to Sierra Leone makes the creation of sustainable partnership networks indispensable to provide an effective and timely reintegration assistance.

- A number of public and private TVET institutions supported by international donors could offer valuable reintegration options to returnees. There are, in addition, a number of donors promoting skills development for youth in Sierra Leone with which it is recommended that the EU facilitates or incentivizes collaborations and referrals
- Entrepreneurship and self-employment are supported by a wide range of actors which could be further involved in the reintegration of returnees. In addition, many programs tackle youth unemployment through entrepreneurship promotion, support to financial inclusion and private sector development. Coordinating actions and sharing lessons with these actors would enable to establish referral systems in favor of returnees.
- If significant efforts were made to improve financial inclusion, it remains limited. It is recommended that micro-credit agencies identified as part of this study be further involved in the definition of reintegration paths and the elaboration of returnees' business plans. This strategy would improve the chances of success for returnees wishing to start their own businesses.

- Besides the largely informal structure of the economy, the inaccessibility of jobs in the formal sector is also due to the ineffective matching between labor demand and supply. There are, however, potential opportunities for returnees in the private sector, which private job placement agencies could help identifying and accessing.
- Finally, to address the wide range of needs of vulnerable migrants, IOM secured several partnerships with national and international actors, which should be continued. Additional partnerships could be developed to strengthen social and psycho-social support.

1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT AND OF THIS REPORT

- Capitalize 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 programs 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 programs;
- 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.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

The field mission to Sierra Leone took place in October 2022 and collected, triangulated, and analyzed data from the following sources (see details in annex):

- **42 in-depth interviews with informants from key institutions;**
- **75 documents** related to the reintegration of returnees, technical and vocational training, and in-country entrepreneurship.
- **27 direct field visits and observations** in TVET centers across the country.

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 labor 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 economic reintegration opportunities for returnees. 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

While Sierra Leone was not included in the geographical scope of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative (EU-IOM JI), returns to the country amounted to 5% of the total number of Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVR) at the regional level, ranking Sierra Leone 7th amongst countries of returnⁱ. Over 8 000 stranded migrants returned to Sierra Leone with IOM assistance between 2017 and October 2022ⁱⁱ. Most AVR beneficiaries returned from Niger (over 5 000), but also from Mali, Mauritania, and Libya. A smaller number also came back from the Middle East, notably Lebanon and Gulf States countries, such as Kuwaitⁱⁱⁱ. During the same period, over 4 000 irregular Sierra Leonean migrants were detected crossing EU borders^{iv}. The number of AVR from North and West Africa and arrivals of undocumented Sierra Leoneans to Europe sharply increased in 2022 and were expected to exceed previous records by the end of the yearⁱ. Whilst the exact number of Sierra Leoneans currently stranded in West and North Africa is unknown, these recent figures suggest that the number of Sierra Leoneans on migration routes towards Europe is on the rise.

Migration from Sierra Leone is largely due to poverty, in the context of a rapid population growth, accelerated rural exodus and the low absorption capacity of the labor market. Approximately 3/4 of the population is aged under 35, including 42% under the age of 14^v. The population is growing at a rate of 2% per year, generating, in theory, the need to create 100 000 new jobs per year to maintain a decent employment rate^{vi}. In practice, however, the low absorption capacity of the labor market means that unemployment and underemployment are continuously rising². This situation, combined with low rural connectivity, the degradation of the environment and traditional means of subsistence, accelerates rural exodus to urban areas and contributes to the saturation of labor markets. According to the latest census data, rural-urban migration is accelerating in Sierra Leone with, for example, the Western area gathering more than half of internal migrants^{vii}. The lack of basic services and the high cost of living, as well as a lack of confidence in the ability of public institutions to find sustainable solutions to these issues, provide additional explanations for emigration.

Systematic research on returnees' profiles is limited but empirical data suggests that most Sierra Leoneans returnees are highly vulnerable. If most returnees are young men aged between 18 and 35 years old, a significant proportion of them are women (17%), often in need of specific protection and support. The number of unaccompanied minors is also significant, representing 6% of the total number of returnees assisted by IOM between 2017 and 2021. Sierra Leonean returnees often experience abuses during their journeys, particularly women returning from the Middle East and Gulf Countries, where they are particularly at risk of human trafficking^{viii}. The geography of migration patterns within Sierra Leone and the main regions of origin and return remain scarcely documented. Anecdotal evidence however suggests that all regions of the country are affected by emigration, but the Western region (Freetown area) is the main region of return. It is however unclear whether this is influenced by the fact that IOM reintegration assistance is only available in this particular region³.

¹ More than 1 800 AVR in 2019, and 1 300 irregular border crossings in 2017.

² Estimates included in the National Youth Policy highlight that 60% of the youth is either unemployed or living in extreme poverty and, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), unemployment and underemployment rates are higher than the total workforce.

³ So far, IOM has only been delivering reintegration assistance from its Freetown office, thus incentivizing returnees to stay in the capital city.

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

Due to the lack of evidence available in 2015 on irregular migration patterns from Sierra Leone, the country was not included in the EUTF SLC window, but indirectly benefitted, through the EU-IOM JI, from EUTF funding. By the end of 2022, close to 6 000 returnees (nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total caseload for Sierra Leone) had received reintegration assistance budgeted on IOM missions from transit countries (Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Libya). The main findings drawn from the reintegration assistance provided to Sierra Leonean returnees are the following:

- **Compared with countries included in the EU-IOM JI, reintegration assistance in Sierra Leone was significantly impacted by chronic underfunding, which hindered the establishment of effective R&R governance mechanisms, national ownership, and data collection/research on migration patterns.**
 - **Overall, national ownership over return and reintegration assistance remained very limited, due to the lack of resources allocated to building reintegration governance mechanisms.** Unlike in countries included in the EU-IOM JI, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have not been adopted, nor have coordination platforms designed to stimulate state involvement and coordination between relevant stakeholders been set up. This situation largely limited the long-term impact of reintegration assistance provided by IOM as well as the possibility to establish robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms.
 - **The lack of systematic research and data collection on migration patterns in Sierra Leone and returnees' profiling also impacted the quality and efficiency of reintegration assistance.** In the absence of reliable data concerning the profiles, needs and desires of returnees, IOM was not equipped with the necessary tools to design the best reintegration pathways. To date, economic reintegration assistance is mostly provided in the form of microbusiness support in the Freetown area: it does not cover other potential regions of return (which, in turn, may deter returnees from returning to their regions of origin); and is not tailored to returnees' profiles, particularly the most vulnerable ones.
- **Increased consideration of returnees' individual profiles and aspirations, and of local labor market needs is key to ensure sustainable reintegration.** Job counselling and orientation are critical steps for a successful professional reintegration, but IOM's capacity in Sierra Leone remains insufficient. With only seven staff overseeing all segments of the assistance to voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) process, and a very limited geographical outreach, individual coaching, follow-up, and monitoring are insufficient to inexistent for most returnees. Orientation and job counselling is further limited by the absence of an effective Labor Market Information System (LMIS) which limits visibility over promising sectors in which to train and support entrepreneurs and/or available job opportunities.
- **The large caseload of returnees coming back to Sierra Leone makes the creation of sustainable partnership networks indispensable to provide an effective and rapid assistance.** Limiting, to the extent possible, the waiting period between return and the start of the reintegration process is key to ensure both the trust and the effective involvement of returnees, as well as to avoid losing their track. However, the limited capacity of IOM to absorb the caseload of returnees may have had an impact on the waiting time before reintegration assistance started. This is partly because IOM Sierra Leone has not, so far, established any referral mechanism and, instead, directly provides assistance to all returnees. Referral mechanisms could be a solution to upgrade the quality of reintegration assistance, offer more economic reintegration pathways – primarily through donor initiatives and programs facilitating

youth employment and entrepreneurship, able to enroll returnees among their beneficiaries (list in section 4).

- **Entrepreneurship and self-employment are supported by a wide range of actors in Sierra Leone, which could be further involved in the reintegration of returnees, but communication and cooperation are lacking.** The availability of employment in the formal economy remains very limited in Sierra Leone, often making entrepreneurship and self-employment the best reintegration options for returnees. Greater coordination between stakeholders active in the entrepreneurship sector should be encouraged and supported to build a stronger entrepreneurship ecosystem that returnees could benefit from.
- **Several public and private technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions supported by international donors could offer interesting reintegration options to returnees.** Partnerships with these institutions and/or referrals towards these internationally funded programs should be further explored (see section 4.1.), with TVET being placed at the heart of the economic reintegration system. The strengthening of vocational training combined with 'life skills' modules is an essential dimension to increase the opportunities available to returnees, whether in the self-employment / entrepreneurship sector or in the formal economy.

3. GOVERNANCE OF REINTEGRATION AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Although youth employment and migration dedicated policies have been developed in Sierra Leone, normative frameworks related to job creation and reintegration of returnees remains unclear and largely ineffective. The multiplication of normative frameworks has resulted in overlapping mandates between ministries in charge of their implementation, a lack of coordination and a duplication of efforts undermining the optimization of resources and the achievement of results.

3.1. NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023 articulates the overall development vision for the country. To date, it has only been partially implemented. It seeks to take advantage of Sierra Leone's demographic dividend through eight priorities ('clusters') aiming at diversifying the economy, improving governance and accountability as well as empowering the most vulnerable. Among the eight clusters:

- The 'Human capital development' cluster has for objective to strengthen both the access and quality of education at all levels through increased resources; the review and standardization of *curricula* and certification; the development of national apprenticeships; the improvement of teachers' trainings; the support to grant and student loan schemes, etc.
- The 'Youth employment, sports and migration' cluster targets job creation and entrepreneurship through the strengthening of TVET institutions, the establishment of a Youth Empowerment Fund to support youth engagement in small and medium-sized entrepreneurship ventures, as well as in agriculture and policy developments on migration and trafficking in persons.

The progress in the implementation of the MTNDP has reportedly been limited by the global context (Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, economic challenges) and by the lack of an effective coordination mechanism¹ (section 3.2). When progress was achieved, especially under the 'Youth employment, sports and migration' cluster, international partners were instrumental².

3.1.1. JOB CREATION RELATED FRAMEWORKS

Two sectoral ministries are sources of normative frameworks in the field of job creation: the ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) and the ministry of Youth (MoY).

- **The National Employment Policy (NEP) was reviewed in 2020 by the MLSS.** The NEP is the key framework guiding efforts towards the creation of decent job opportunities in Sierra Leone. The new NEP extends until 2024 and relies on seven pillars³. It notably plans for the establishment of a Labor Market Information System (LMIS) among other ambitious objectives (investment in infrastructures, value chain and private sector development, skills development, access to finance and markets, etc.). Both GIZ and the International Labor Organization (ILO) supported the MLSS in the drafting process and in the initial implementation phase, but

¹ Various working groups (cluster, sub-cluster and district working groups) comprising local authorities and development partners were nevertheless foreseen.

² The World bank strongly supports technical and vocational training centers. UNDP is helping the MoY to establish the Youth Empowerment Fund. The FAO, IFAD and GIZ support rural entrepreneurship and IOM, the EU and the US Embassy intervened in favor of policy development on migration and human trafficking.

³ Strengthen the Regulatory and Institutional framework for Labor Administration; Linking Employment with Economic Growth; Labor Market policies: Skills Development for Job creation; Private Sector Development for job creation; Empowering Women, Youths and PWDs; Enhance Labor Standards and Social dialogue for Decent work; Enhance Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy for inclusive development and decent work.

progress and concrete results have been limited so far, in part due to the non-binding nature of the policy and the subsequent lack of resources allocated to its implementation.

- **Shortly after the review of the NEP, in 2020, the MoY launched the National Youth Policy (NYP) and its associated strategic plan¹, which contain their own sets of objectives on job creation.** The NYP was drafted and is currently being implemented with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). One of the three outlined priorities focuses on access to livelihood opportunities for the youths, notably through education, training opportunities, and entrepreneurship support (particularly in the fields of agriculture and fisheries). The policy also targets as promising sectors information, communication, and technology (ICT) as well as creative industries. Like the NEP, the NYP is still lacking a precise action plan and funding for its effective implementation.
- **The MLSS is also currently involved in the review of the legislation and requirements on employment through six news bills.** Three out of the six bills in preparation (the worked permit bill, the oversees employment and migrant workers bill, and the employment bill²) have been validated by the cabinet and are pending parliamentary review. Those bills aim at clarifying the rights and obligations of employers and workers but do not include any objectives or plans of action related to the development of job opportunities in Sierra Leone.

3.1.2. MIGRATION RELATED FRAMEWORKS

In 2018, a National Labor Migration Policy (NLMP) was adopted under the ‘Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa (FMM West Africa)’ program but remains largely unimplemented. Developed with the support of ICMPD, IOM, the EU and ILO, this policy supports four interventions areas: (i) migration governance, (ii) the protection of migrant workers, (iii) migration and development, and (iv) the establishment of a labor market and migration information system. The policy also envisioned to set up ‘Migrant Resources centers’ in charge of providing orientation services to potential emigrants, immigrants, and returnees. Most objectives did not materialize due to a lack of resources, insufficient coordination between ministries and the lack of adapted structures within the MLSS. The most significant results were achieved in favor of the protection of migrant workers under the impulsion of the Labor Migration Unit of the MLSS. The unit developed a regulatory mechanism designed to control the activities of overseas recruitment agencies involving background checks, agencies’ inspection, profiling, vetting and attesting of employment contracts. The overseas employment and migrant workers’ bill pending parliamentary review should mostly formalize this mechanism.

In 2022, the first National Migration Policy (NMP) was adopted, but no precise action plan nor budget dedicated to its implementation has been developed so far. Developed by the Immigration Department and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the support of both IOM and EU Migration Experts, its purpose is to improve migration management and encourage the capacity-building of relevant government institutions. While it mentions return and reintegration, it only contains high-level policy objectives such as the facilitation of return and reintegration through the development of dedicated frameworks and capacity building. It does not include any specific activities nor plan of action regarding the reintegration of returnees and therefore remains, as of now, largely unactionable.

In the absence of other operational documents dedicated to reintegration, the process described in the SOPs related to AVRR in Sierra Leone remains the key reference. Although these SOPs are not officially adopted yet, their development (which started in 2019) contributed to improving the coordination between national and international actors involved in each step of AVRR. The drafting

¹ The strategic plan will run until 2025.

² The three other bills pending cabinet validation are the occupational and safety and health bill, the industrial relations and trade unions bill, and the workers compensation bill.

process is led by government security agencies¹ placed under the authority of the National Security Council (NSC). It also involves key ministries (MLSS, ministry of Social Welfare – MSW, ministry of Foreign Affairs, ministry of Health) as well as IOM. As of October 2022, the reintegration procedure to be spelled out in the SOPs was not fully designed yet. Stakeholders interviewed by Altai Consulting highlighted an active involvement from the government in this process, notably from the NSC – implying that security issues might be prioritized over protection concerns².

3.2. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK: GOVERNMENT ACTORS AND SECTORAL DYNAMICS

The multiplication of normative frameworks in the fields of job creation, youth empowerment and migration has resulted in a fragmented normative landscape and overlapping institutional mandates, undermining the operationalization of the objectives contained in these policies.

- In the employment and youth sector, responsibilities are shared between the MLSS, the MoY (and the National Youth Commission under its authority) as well as the ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI). The MLSS and the MoY both developed policies (section 3.1) aiming to mainstream job creation objectives and facilitate engagement and coordination with other ministries. However, dialogue remains limited between the lead ministries and specialized agencies under their tutelage, as well as with sectoral departments (Mines, Agriculture, Fisheries, Tourism).
- With regard to migration governance, the Immigration Department and the ministry of Internal Affairs are responsible for the implementation of the NMP, while the MLSS is in charge of overseeing that of the LMP. The operational coordination between migration and employment programs remains weak³, with dedicated mechanisms mentioned in the LMP and the NMP not being operational to date. As for return and reintegration management, coordination meetings were held before 2020 but they stopped since and have not restarted yet. It remains, in this context, almost entirely dependent on IOM programming.

Theoretically in charge of coordinating international donors' development assistance to Sierra Leone, the MTNDP governance structure is not operational yet, thus limiting the effective coordination between international partners and the optimization of resources. Coordination efforts mostly take place within high level/strategic platforms called 'Development Partnership Committees' (held quarterly) chaired by the ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED). These committees are in charge of reviewing and monitoring development progress as well as challenges related to the implementation of the MTNDP. Lower-level cluster working groups entrusted with technical and operational coordination are not functional yet, which, in practice, significantly hinders progress. Most actors interviewed by Altai Consulting highlighted a lack of coordination between development actors active in the same sectors although sectoral platforms do exist (notably in the fields of agriculture, food security or private sector development). In 2018, in a bid to strengthen coordination and mutual accountability, the MoPED launched a 'Development cooperation framework', however still under discussion and not yet functional.

International partners' interventions on job creation are anchored within various ministries and/or executed by different agencies, resulting in a compartmentalization of information, fragmented data collection and the absence of a global M&E framework. Under the impulsion of the United Nations National Coordinator, a sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF)

¹ Notably the Office of National Security (ONS), the Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TOCU) and the Immigration department.

² The draft SOPs state that the ONS coordinates prior engagement with institutions/persons/group of people undertaking the repatriation exercise; conducts vetting/probity checks (prior to departure) in the interest of national security; (...) escalates early warnings from observations /passive threats and lessons identified to make informed decisions.

³ In the past, most of the support related to curbing trafficking in persons (TIP) under US funding. With US support, coordination platforms have been established and capacities strengthened to combat TIP.

for Sierra Leone (2020-2023) has been established to ensure the coordination of all UN agencies in line with the MTNDP¹. This initiative, however, has yet to improve coordination between UN agencies in the field of job creation. Overall, the country's main development partners each have their own programmatic agenda and work with different government counterparts, leading to interventions in silos². International partners tend to collect relevant data as part of their own program portfolios which, in the absence of a common framework, are not aggregated and analyzed in a coherent manner. Finally, the absence of a shared M&E system weakens the overall performance of activities and programs implemented by government and international actors, not allowing for the optimization of human and financial resources, nor for the capitalization of experiences.

3.3. LABOR INTERMEDIATION MECHANISMS AND SERVICES

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

In the absence of an efficient LMIS, the Employment Exchange Unit (EEU) struggles to fulfil its mandate, is ill-suited to the informal structure of the market, and insufficiently equipped to provide guidance to job seekers – and returnees in particular. Placed under the umbrella of the MLSS, the EEU is not yet able to play a significant intermediation role. Although a few partners (including the British Council, GIZ and the EU) conducted a diagnosis of its capacities and needs, few actually supported it³. Recently, the government and international partners, notably the EU, supported a study on the setup of a potential LMIS that represents a first step before material, financial, training and organizational support can be envisaged. A short concept note was also developed by the MLSS for a basic LMIS centralizing ILO's and the ministry's data entry points.

To date, the EEU is limited by its lack of material, human and technical skills and resources:

- **Limited human and material resources and insufficient geographical coverage:** With only 1% of the national budget dedicated to the MLSS⁴, the EEU is chronically underfunded. Only two EEU offices in the Western region are operational and employ only a dozen of agents to cover the whole country. Only two full time staff are working at the Central EEU in Freetown, with the support of interns. As a result, only a few hundred job seekers and job placements are registered quarterly. The main activity of the Unit consists in providing free labor cards as a certificate of registration and constituting a pool of job seekers. Job vacancies are rarely advertised since employers usually do not declare vacancies to the EEU (as required by law). When candidates apply for a job offer through the EEU, the recruitment process is usually managed by the companies themselves as they are better equipped than the Unit for screening applicants and selecting potential candidates. Finally, whilst it is part of the EEU's mandate to provide vocational/career guidance and counselling to job seekers, this service is mainly provided through informal communications when job seekers visit the offices.
- **Inadequate adaptation to the informal economy and lack of modern management and labor market analysis tools:** the EEU only advertises jobs available in the formal sector, and job offers are only published on paper made available at the EEU offices. The overall system is still manually operated (Excel-based) and no digital platform for internal or external use is available. This is particularly problematic given the absence of physical presence of EEUs outside of the Freetown area. As a result, very few job seekers and employers use EEU

¹ Oversight of implementation of the UNSDCF will be ensured at the strategic level by a Joint Steering Committee, co-chaired by the resident coordinator and the MoPED.

² For example, ILO works mostly with the MLSS through its Decent Work Country program (which second phase for 2023-2027 is being drafted) while UNDP mostly works with the ministry of Youth through its own country program.

³ The VET Toolbox initiative and the British Council supported a diagnosis and trained the EEU to help build a LMIS.

⁴ According to the Deputy Commissioner of Labor, only 1% of the national budget is allocated to the MLSS despite its large mandate.

services and no actionable data is collected through it. Most job placements are for the benefit of large companies, recruiting several dozens of employees, sometimes overseas. These activities generate potentially interesting data on the job market, but the EEU is not in a position to systematically analyze them. General surveys conducted by or with Statistics Sierra Leone (Integrated Household Survey, Labor Force Survey, and the Census) remain the only actionable datasets available.

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

A growing number of private recruitment firms and platforms connecting employers and job seekers in Sierra Leone, could play a more important role in the reintegration of returnees. These structures offer different services and have varying degrees of experience in the field of intermediation. Services range from e-platforms on which jobs are advertised to individualized support including coaching, career guidance and job-search trainings. Whilst these structures could help compensating the shortcomings of EEUs, particularly in mobilizing private companies, which are their main clients, they have not yet been approached by IOM for the reintegration of returnees. **They offer a relative wide range of services**, including identifying job openings, pre-selecting candidates, putting them in touch with companies, and providing short training sessions for candidates on the skills required for the positions available (see recommended structures in section 4.2).

3.3.3. INTERMEDIATION SERVICES AND REFERRALS ESTABLISHED BY IOM

In order to improve the reintegration assistance available to returnees in Sierra Leone, IOM's approach has evolved over the years:

- Initially held upon arrival at the airport, psycho-social support is now provided through a 1-day group session organized a few days after arrival at the MSW, in collaboration with World Hope International. Under this format, which provides a better environment and more time to collect data on returnees and identify their vulnerabilities, returnees tend to be more responsive to the information and assistance provided.
- Counselling and coaching also significantly evolved: in 2018, a mandatory 5-days business skills training was introduced to sensitize returnees on entrepreneurship opportunities and about the informal economy. This training is delivered by a specialized NGO (Informal Workers Organization) up to three months after arrival. It is participatory, practical and provides momentum to build a sense of community and solidarity among returnees. At the regional level, several country missions (notably in Algeria and Niger) started providing pre-departure counselling in order to prepare returnees to the reintegration process ahead of their return.
- Currently, IOM Sierra Leone is engaged in discussions with several organizations to build referral mechanisms, notably with NGOs and UN agencies. It is also targeting government institutions such as the MoY. However, referrals mechanisms are difficult to implement in Sierra Leone due to the structuration of funding: each returnees' reintegration plan has to be sent to the IOM mission in the country of departure (ex: Niger) for approval and funding, making the overall process fragmented and limiting the pooling of resources.

The main limitation to the existing reintegration system is its project-based approach. This situation makes the reintegration of returnees largely dependent on IOM programming and questions its sustainability beyond EUTF funding. Since 2017, the reintegration of returnees has been almost exclusively managed by IOM while the involvement of government actors remained marginal. Public institutions have mostly been mobilized by the IOM as service providers supporting the management of large number of returnees (notably as part of the psycho-social support sessions). To date, the reintegration of Sierra Leoneans is almost exclusively dependent on future EU programming with no public structure seeming yet capable of handling, orientating, and referring large numbers of returnees to structures in a position to offer reintegration pathways.

As part of its next phases of reintegration programming, the EU should include a gradual transition plan aiming to encourage the Government to progressively take over more responsibilities in terms of reintegration management. To this end, the EU could:

- Support the update of existing research on migration patterns in Sierra Leone (such as the 2017 ‘Migration Profile’) as well as additional data collection and research on returnees’ profiles (essential for future programming on migration in the country).
- Ensure that future migration-related programs are in line with national priorities designed to support the effective implementation of the NMP and the LMP and support the clarification of institutional roles to avoid overlaps and duplication of efforts.
- Support the development and practical operationalization of key return and reintegration frameworks, notably the SOPs on AVRR as well as dedicated plans of action supporting the effective implementation of the NMP and the NYP.
- Support capacity building of key government actors willing to engage in reintegration assistance – such as the National Youth Commission or the Labor Exchange Unit – and equip them with the necessary tools to play a more significant role in the management and referrals of returnees, particularly through the development of partnerships with TVET institutions, international actors, private sector institutions and NGOs (see section 4, recommended partnerships). The EU could adapt its capacity-building support to the LMIS based on the diagnosis already conducted (section 3.3.1). Additional research on labor market dynamics and growth sectors would also help orient returnees towards the most promising sectors.
- The EU could consider supporting the establishment of a coordination platform on return and reintegration, mandated to coordinate referrals of returnees with potential partners identified as part of this research (see section 4: TVET institutions, international donors’ programs, incubators, public institutions, micro-finance institutions, NGOs, etc.).

4. DIVERSIFYING FORMS OF ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

4.1. TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET)

4.1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

TVET remains largely underfunded and unattractive for the youth in Sierra Leone, despite political will and efforts to reform the sector. The government's political will is illustrated by the priorities outlined in the MTNDP, the development of the 2018 Free Quality School Education Program¹ and the recent adoption of two key frameworks: the 2019 TVET policy (and associated guidelines,) and the Education Sector Plan for 2022-2026. The Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) was created in 2018 to oversee the reforms. However, the effective implementation of these policies is jeopardized by the chronic underfunding of the sector² and its lack of attractiveness among the youth. TVET is still perceived as a back-up plan for school dropouts³: among the 11 000 trainees enrolled in the year 2020/2021, more than 8 out of 10 were early school leavers^{ix}.

The sector remains challenged by the following shortcomings:

- **Governance:** The MTHE and the National Council of Technical, Vocational, and other Academic Awards (in charge of overseeing the quality of TVET programs) lack the capacity to effectively oversee and harmonize practices in the sector. Over 300 TVET institutions operate at different levels and set their own entry requirements⁴. According to a 2022 NCTVA survey, most TVET institutions are privately-owned (faith-based organizations or NGOs) and their number keeps growing^x. In parallel, several networks of public TVET institutions coexist including MTHE's Government Technical Institutes (GTIs) and Universities. Overall, only a third of TVET institutions have been accredited by NCTVA and less than half are registered with the MTHE^{xi}.
- **Accessibility:** There are significant disparities across regions in terms of access to TVET, rural populations being largely excluded. Tuition or registration fees are sometimes high (particularly for private institutions), which further limits accessibility.
- **Quality of trainings (and limited TVET institutions' capacity):** In a number of key sectors / occupations, *curricula* have not yet been developed, and for those that do exist, only 25 have been updated and adapted to the competency-based approach. The number of available instructors is limited⁵, their level often insufficient⁶, and internships / apprenticeships opportunities rare. TVET institutions also lack material resources: according to a 2022 NCTVA survey, less than 2/3 of TVET institutions owned a computer and only 40% had access to the internet.

¹ It seeks to implement the MTNDP vision on education through two key objectives: ensuring free quality basic and senior secondary education; and strengthening tertiary and higher education.

² The total expenditure on TVET in 2019 amounted to SLe 23.8 billion, representing only 2.3% of the overall budget allocated to the education sector.

³ E.g., the students who failed the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or failed to enter tertiary institutions.

⁴ Vocational trade centers (VTC) and Technical and Vocational Centers (TVC) are equivalent to secondary education (for 12 to 17 years old) while Government Technical Institutes (GTIs) are tertiary institutions (for older students including adults).

⁵ According to the MTHE, the total number of full-time TVET instructors in Sierra Leone is 1 142, of which 40% employed by government-assisted institutions.

⁶ It is estimated that less than a third of TVET instructors are adequately trained in their technical disciplines (Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan (2022-2026)).

- **Insertion of trainees:** There is no integrated system at the central level to monitor the integration of trainees onto the labor market. Post-training follow-up and surveys are carried out by TVET centers themselves and are most of the time insufficient and/or unreliable.
- **Certification of vocational training:** A wide range of diplomas / certifications are awarded but their value on the job market remains limited. Bridges with other education branches (classic or non-formal) remain to be organized and facilitated. To this end, a National Qualification Framework is currently under development with the support of international partners, including GIZ and the World Bank.
- **Alignment with market demand and connections with the private sector:** According to the 2020 National Technical and Higher Education Census (NTHEC), only 40% of TVET institutions offer training programs that are relevant to market demand. The remainder focus on basic trainings such as soap making, weaving, tailoring, and catering, not aligned with the MTNDP and offering few prospects for a successful economic integration¹. As a result, employers have difficulties hiring technicians in the fields of mining, construction, and manufacturing, where most jobs are available^{xii, 2}.

Most TVET institutions offer two types of training: formal and non-formal³, xiii. Non-formal trainings are better suited to the needs of most returnees.

- **National certifications⁴ are awarded upon completion of formal TVET programs but entry requirements are restrictive:** documentation is required (previous qualifications) and programs are lengthy (one to three years). Enrollment periods are spaced out (thus making the waiting period possibility long), and no financial support is provided during the trainings. These programs may therefore be unsuitable for many returnees, often lacking identity documents and facing strong economic pressure (dependents, debts, etc.).
- **Non-formal trainings are usually shorter and more flexible than formal trainings but do not lead to national certifications. They are however better suited for reintegration support:** returnees often favor short and rapidly available training courses, accompanied by financial support and offering tangible and rapid professional prospects. Non-formal TVET programs target people in employment, school leavers, marginalized groups and adults wishing to pursue an alternative to formal education through employment-oriented programs. Many international donors have supported this type of training providing flexible entry requirements, per diems and certification, though not NCTVA-approved.

4.1.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH TVET

The public and private TVET centers listed below are located in all regions of the country and offer non-formal courses in which returnees could be enrolled.

4.1.1.1. Public Sector

Developing partnerships with TVET institutions already supported by international partners would enable to capitalize on past investments while ensuring the quality of training for returnees. The World Bank and GIZ have played a key role in the TVET sector in Sierra Leone. Through the 'Skills Development Project', the World Bank supported 200 TVET institutions throughout the country (including some listed below), trained over 10 000 youth and supported the creation of an

¹ Overall, a 2022 NCTVA survey suggested that TVET institutions focus on hospitality (67%), construction (35%) and agriculture (29%).

² According to a skill needs assessment study completed in 2018.

³ Most of the centers in the country (2/3) seem to provide both formal and non-formal programs.

⁴ National Technical Certificates (NTC), National Diplomas (ND), and Higher National Diplomas (HND). Several TVET institutions also award certificates for lower-level trainings.

Integrated Skills Information System (ISIS). The GIZ initiated the creation of the ISIS through the Employment Promotion Program (EPP). The fourth EPP is currently active in the Northern and Eastern border regions and aims to support private sector and skills development in parallel from institutional capacity at the national level.

The institutions listed below offer both formal and non-formal training programs in relevant sectors to youth with similar profiles to those of returnees. All offer formal training programs leading to official certification. Most of their trainees are young men following courses in construction, manufacturing, energy, or mechanics, in line with the MTNDP growth sectors.

- **GTIs** are a network of centers strongly supported by international donors¹, particularly the World Bank. They are located throughout the country, offer a wide range of courses and are relatively accessible (reasonable fees). The GTIs listed below were selected based on their location (where access to TVET is most limited) and recommendations from key stakeholders interviewed by Altai Consulting based on the quality of the trainings provided.
- **Freetown Polytechnic** is a former GTI and one of the most internationally supported TVET institutions. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is, for example, currently supporting its automotive repair and maintenance program (which could be of interest to a number of returnees).
- Placed under the supervision of NAYCOM (active in the youth development and entrepreneurship support), the **Obasanjo College** offers interesting perspectives for a multi-dimensional support combining coaching, entrepreneurship, and skills development support.
- The **Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) Vocational Institute** has a proven track record of supporting women. Whilst placed under the umbrella of the MTHE, it is supported and managed by the YWCA NGO and offers a wide range of training modalities (e.g., half-day or evening classes). Outside of Freetown, other institutions such as the **Maria Ines Vocational institute** (Lunsar) are also involved in training women and could be relevant.
- The **Armed Forces Technical and Education College (AFTEC)** is placed under the authority of the military and offer perspectives for returnees interested in joining the armed forces. The military environment is also valued for developing trainees' soft skills and employment readiness.
- Universities (such as the **Eastern Technical University**) offer both formal and non-formal TVET programs and enroll a significant number of trainees (several thousands). Compared with the GTIs, they have more autonomy, experience, and offer a wider range of courses.

Table 1: Structures with which referral mechanisms can be implemented for the reintegration of returnees

Organization	IPs/funders	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
Freetown Polytechnic (PF#1)	Government, GIZ, UNIDO, World Bank	Formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Western Urban
Obasanjo Skills Acquisition and Youth Transformation College (PF#2)	Government (NAYCOM), UNDP, World Bank, GIZ	Formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Western Rural

¹ The government has recently created new Government Technical Institutes (GTIs) in ten districts and plans to create six more. The first ten are operational since October 2019, although further capacity building is needed (tools, equipment, laboratories, etc.).

YWCA Vocational Institute (PF#3)	Government, World Bank, NGO	Formal and non-formal trainings for women in 6 courses	Western Urban
AFTEC (PF#4)	Government, World Bank	Formal courses in more than 20 courses	Western Urban
GTI Sahn Malen Pujehun (PF#5)	Government, World Bank	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 20 courses	Southern region
GTI Bo (PF#6)	Government, World Bank	Formal and non-formal trainings in 10 courses	Southern region
GTI Dorma – Koidu city (PF#7)	Government, World Bank, GIZ, private company	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Eastern region
GTI Kenema (PF#8)	Government, World Bank, GIZ, NGOs	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Eastern region
GTI Sundu Town (PF#9)	Government, World Bank	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Eastern region
Eastern Technical University (PF#10)	Government, World Bank, GIZ, UNDP, AfDB, NGOs	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 20 courses	Eastern region
Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (PF#11)	Government, World Bank, IOM, UNDP, AfDB, NGOs	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 20 courses	Northern region

4.1.1.2. Private training centers

The private institutions listed below present comparative advantages in terms of accessibility, content, accommodation capacity and/or governance (Table 2). Most have a proven track record of cooperation with international partners. They all train men and women in relatively equal proportions and offer both formal and non-formal trainings.

- The **Center of Digital Excellence (CODE)** is a privately owned Information Technology training center established in 2020 by an Indian Company, the Choithram Group of Companies. Training modalities are flexible and possibly well adapted to the situation of many returnees (2 to 6-months 100% practical trainings, 6 hours a week). Several other similar institutions in the Freetown area could also participate in reintegration assistance: **ICT Academy, FLS academy and BlueCrest college** (all interviewed by Altai Consulting).
- Faith-based organizations such as the **Murialdo Institute** and the **Saint Joseph Vocational Institute** in Lunsar demonstrate a proven track record in the provision of quality TVET. The networks of GTIs and faith-based organizations (particularly catholic TVET centers) have, together, the widest geographical coverage and could be involved in the reintegration of returnees in most regions outside of the Freetown area.
- Financially supported by the Sierra Rutile and Vimetco mining companies, the **Jackson and Devon Anderson (JADA) technical institute** has developed strong relationships with the private sector. The institute has developed a network of partnerships with local private

employers offering internship opportunities to its graduates. The institute has already collaborated with IOM and GIZ.

- The **Sierra Leone Opportunities Industrialization Centers (SLOIC)** has been operating four TVET centers since 1977. SLOIC trainings programs are diverse, easily accessible (reasonable fees) and can enroll a significant number of trainees. SLOIC and NAYCOM are already exploring potential for coordination of their activities.
- **Mankind’s Activities for Development Accreditation Movement (MADAM)** is a local NGO based in the northern region specialized in business development and entrepreneurship support in the agricultural, food processing, fish farming, auto-mechanic, livestock, and catering sectors. It also operates a TVET center. MADAM offers interesting perspectives for a multi-dimensional support combining coaching, entrepreneurship, and skills development support.

Table 2: Structures with which referral mechanisms could be implemented for the reintegration of returnees

Organization	IPs/funders	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
CODE (PF#12)	Private company	Formal and non-formal ICT trainings in 6 courses	Western Urban
Murialdo Institute of Management, Entrepreneurship and Technology (PF#13)	Government, World Bank, private donors, NGOs	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Western
JADA Technical Institute (PF#14)	Private company, World Bank, GIZ and IOM	Formal and non-formal trainings in 7 courses	Southern region
SLOIC (PF#15)	Private donors, government, World Bank, UNDP, NGOs	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 20 courses	Southern and northern regions
MADAM Youth Training and Service Center (PF#16)	NGOs, World Bank and GIZ	Formal and non-formal trainings in more than 10 courses	Northern region

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

Several donors are promoting skills development for youth in Sierra Leone; it is recommended that the EU facilitates or incentivizes collaborations with and referrals towards their initiatives.

These actors do not directly provide skills training but manage programs and support training institutions that do so in specific sectors, and sponsor target beneficiaries. There are experiences to be shared with these actors (e.g., on the best training institutions in certain regions or sectors, and best practices to boost post-training employment rates) and synergies and complementarities to be created in policy and institutional support – particularly regarding approaches that could be relevant for the sustainable reintegration of returnees, such as dual apprenticeship and the development of technical skills in high growth sectors.

- **The development of dual apprenticeship is supported by international partners, but it is still at an early stage.** According to the MTHE, a dedicated policy is under development, with

the support of international partners. It is expected to be adopted in 2023. Programs implemented by GIZ¹ and the World Bank have already tested this approach in partnership with TVET institutions and companies from the private sector. In parallel, the government supports the development of public-private partnerships (PPP). Despite these efforts, PPPs in the education sector and dual apprenticeship remain nascent, mainly due to difficulties related to building sustainable partnerships between training centers and the private sector; companies often being reluctant to take on interns / apprentices.

- **The pilot approach consisting in developing technical skills in specific high growth sectors is relevant and could benefit returnees.** Mainly implemented by the World Bank and UNIDO, this approach aims to develop TVET training capacities in specific high growth sectors with high demand for skills. UNIDO is supporting the development of a regional center of excellence for automotive technician training at Freetown Polytechnic, while the World Bank targets digital skills through the Sierra Leone Digital Transformation Project. This approach is time- and resource-consuming (conducting labor market studies and discussions with the private sector, building capacities [develop curricula, train trainers, upgrade infrastructures, provide equipment etc.] and roll out the trainings [on-the-job training, monitoring and follow up]) but can yield better results than the mass supply-driven approach applied until recently.

Focus box 2: opportunities for direct referrals with international donors' programs

In addition to programs supporting the quality and accessibility of TVET throughout the country, projects implemented by international donors could directly enroll returnees among their beneficiaries.

For example, in the Northern and Eastern borders areas, the **GIZ Employment Promotion Program IV (EPP IV)** could provide an opportunity for referrals. In four districts of intervention, GIZ offers short-term / integrated trainings to farmers, along with entrepreneurship support and grants through a network of partners. This type of support could be of interest to returnees from these districts and encourage returns to the regions of origin.

Table 3: Other key actors involved in the TVET sector with whom increased coordination could be envisaged

Structure	Project	Geographical locations	Projects' status
World Bank (AF#1)	Sierra Leone Skills Development Project	Countrywide	Running 2019 - 2024
	Sierra Leone Digital Transformation Project	Countrywide	Running 2022 - 2027
GIZ (AF#2)	Employment Youth Promotion IV (EPP IV)	Border districts of Kailahun, Kono, Falaba and Koinadugu	Running 2020 - 2024
UNIDO	Promoting Youth Employment through Automotive Maintenance Skills Training	Freetown	Running 2021 - 2024

¹ The EPP IV program implemented by GIZ includes a component on dual apprenticeship.

Opportunities for action to further adapt the TVET offer to needs of returnees:

Priority should be given to short-term courses, along with concrete support for job search and/or entrepreneurship trainings and access to micro-finance. As explained above, returnees' lack of interest in pursuing TVET and skills training is generally due to their desire to generate income quickly and the lack of guaranteed job security upon completion of the training. To respond to these challenges, job placement opportunities and access to microfinance options need to be supported, in parallel with trainings. In this perspective, the EU could consider:

- Funding studies on promising sectors and labor market needs in the main areas of departure and return to adapt the training offer to the needs of local job markets.
- Supporting the establishment and/or strengthening of dedicated units within TVET institutions in charge of orienting trainees and graduates and supporting their professional integration on the job market (either through employment or self-employment).
- Funding incubators directly within TVET institutions to strengthen the accompaniment of young graduates towards self-employment and financial inclusion (section 4.2).
- Supporting an audit of the relevance of the courses offered in training institutions and, where appropriate, encourage reforms in close consultation with the private sector.
- Supporting the 'National Qualification Framework' under development and encouraging the adoption of certificates of specialization to allow for the official recognition, through a national diploma, of short-term training courses provided by TVET institutions and to facilitate the professional integration of graduates of these courses.
- Promoting the development of a framework for consultation, coordination and monitoring-evaluation of actions funded by donors in the TVET sector to optimize invested resources as part of its future reintegration programming, potentially as part of the TVET Coalition.
- Funding information campaigns to increase the attractiveness of TVET among returnees; particularly at the information / orientation / referral stages (a similar experience was conducted in The Gambia through the UNESCO 'Youth Empowerment through TVET' program).

Opportunities for action in support of the TVET sector

The EU could support the implementation of the 2019 TVET Policy as well as the Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, through the following actions:

- Taking a more active coordination role among international stakeholders through the 'TVET Coalition' (chaired by the Commissioner of NAYCOM) to facilitate the establishment of referral mechanisms between actors and ensure capitalization of efforts (e.g., sharing curricula).
- Contributing to the improvement of labor market management and information system: data on graduates' access to the labor market are needed to improve TVET curricula and make the system more responsive to the labor market demand.
- Supporting an improved access to TVET in rural areas, especially in sectors with a potential for rural employment, such as agriculture.
- Increasing public TVET funding and removing financial barriers to participation. Based on other experiences in the sub-region, for instance in Senegal^{xiv}, the EU could consider supporting the establishment of sustainable sources of funding for the TVET sector, including through PPPs. 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, FINANCIAL INCLUSION, AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

4.2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

There is, overall, a need to develop a holistic and integrated approach to private sector development in Sierra Leone, based on the analysis of key growth sectors, labor market needs and the coordination of national and international interventions. There is, however, a lack of systematic research on growth sectors, value chains, and labor market dynamics. Quantitative and qualitative data collection is needed to inform interventions designed to support and link the reforms in the TVET sector, the efforts towards the development of an entrepreneurship ecosystem, financial inclusion, and the support to MSMEs.

Many projects aiming to support the development of an entrepreneurship ecosystem have been funded in Sierra Leone but the lack of coordination and leadership by public institutions limits the clarity and coherence of interventions, to the point that cumulative results remain unknown.

- **Large number of initiatives:** A mapping of those interventions was conducted by the World Bank in 2021^{1, xv}: 24 interventions and programs targeting over 210 000 youth beneficiaries were implemented between 2015 and 2021, mainly in the Western area². The study concluded that the projects were largely donor-driven and that government and private sector funding were significantly low, leading to the unsustainability of projects beyond donor support.
- **Lack of coordination and leadership within the government:** Several ministries are directly involved in entrepreneurship development: the MLSS, the MoY and the MoTI. In addition, sectorial ministries (ex: Agriculture) support the development of entrepreneurship in their own field. Specialized agencies operating under the tutelage of these ministries create a complex web of actors whose missions overlap on many occasions, as do the MoY's and NAYCOM's³.
- **Fragmented support by international actors:** a local ecosystem of private incubators or entrepreneurship support organizations (ESOs) has emerged with the support of a wide range of actors: multilateral and bilateral development agencies, private companies (e.g., Orange with Orange Digital centers), foundations, *ad hoc* funds (e.g., West Africa Bright Future Fund, PPP Fund for cooperation with companies in the Mano River Union countries), regional/continental initiatives (e.g., Youth Connekt, Jobs for Youth in Africa, Boost Africa). However, no formal coordination exists between these initiatives and no strategy aiming at collective results has been developed. As a result, there is no compiled data available on results related to support to entrepreneurship (e.g., number of people trained), no harmonization and control over the types of training offered, and no integrated M&E system.

Although Sierra Leone has developed institutional and strategic frameworks to promote financial inclusion, access remains very limited in practice.

- **Financial inclusion is a recent priority for the government** as highlighted in the MTNDP, the NEP and NYP. The implementation of these policies and the overall governance of financial inclusion is collaborative. Several working groups and coordination platforms involving all stakeholders (international, public, and private actors) have been established to implement the

¹ It reviewed youth employment programs implemented or funded by the government of Sierra Leone and donors between 2015 and 2020.

² Amongst the 16 districts, Western Area Urban and Western Area Rural had the highest concentration of programs implemented, followed by Koinadugu, Kono, Bo, Kenema and Bombali (10 each). This is consistent with the repartition of youth population and youth employment in the country.

³ For example, whilst NAYCOM is theoretically the operational implementation agency of the MoY, the Ministry started to directly implement its own projects which has led to confusion in terms of division of roles and responsibilities between the two structures.

policy, among which the Sierra Leone Association of Microfinance Institutions (SLAMFI) plays an important role¹.

- **Access and usage of financial services remains, however, lower than the sub-Saharan average².** Despite these recent efforts, access to finance remains one of the main limitations to the development of entrepreneurship. Financial services are still underdeveloped and expensive, and large portions (80%) of the population remain excluded from the financial sector. Commercial banks are very reluctant to grant loans to self-employed individuals and/or entrepreneurs in the informal sector. They require substantial administrative documentation and select projects to be funded based on solvency and profitability criteria, thereby potentially excluding returnees in precarious economic situations. In this context, Microfinance institutions (MFIs), Financial Services Associations (FSAs) and Community Banks (CBs) as well as digital financial services are the most appropriate structures for returnees.

4.2.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The local ecosystem of private incubators and/or entrepreneurship support organizations (ESOs) could further be involved in returnees' reintegration support. These ESOs have very different profiles, skills, and areas of specialization, but they all developed coaching capacities for small cohorts of beneficiaries (a few dozen at most). Their method is two-pronged: entrepreneurship/business skills training and follow-up support or coaching. Each of the following structures developed their areas of expertise, which makes their added value³:

- **Sensi Tech Hub** and **IDT Labs** are specialized in ICT training and value chains. Sensi is also the oldest ESO in the country, and one of the most financially viable operating its own programs.
- **Innovation SL** and **Aurora Foundation** are specialized in intensive individualized entrepreneurship requiring time and resources. They could therefore only support a few selected – and the most motivated – returnees.
- **Life By Design** possesses greater capacities with a FabLab and a training center⁴. It is also part of the LBD Group, which owns several private companies in Sierra Leone.

The main weaknesses of these ESOs are their limited financial autonomy, limited human resources and concentration in Freetown.

Government structures such as NAYCOM or the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDA) also offer a range of entrepreneurship support services, from business skills training to case management.

- **NAYCOM benefitted from strong international support and has developed experience through the implementation of several entrepreneurship development projects⁵.** It remains, however, a relatively weak structure in need of further capacity-building. Depending on donors to maintain its operational activities, it still lacks capacities in terms of research, planning, and M&E (as highlighted in its own Strategic Plan). In terms of service provision, NAYCOM's staff is insufficient, and the structure must rely on a network of partners, notably

¹ Commercial Banks also possess their own association entitled the Sierra Leone Association of Commercial Banks (SLACB).

² According to the Financial Inclusion Database (FINDEX 2021), only 28.9% of the adult population has an account with a formal institution or mobile money provider, compared to 55.1% for the Sub-Saharan average. In terms of usage, only 5.6% of adults borrowed from a financial institution or used a mobile money account, while they were 14.4% in sub-Saharan Africa. Sierra Leoneans prefer relying on their family or friends since 39% borrowed from them.

³ Some ESOs have greater resources than others (human resources, networks of experts and equipment available).

⁴ LBD-Useful Hands Vocational Institute providing formal and non-formal training in Industrial Tailoring and Dress Making, Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy, Tourism and Hospitality Management

⁵ Besides the GIZ, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and ILO, UNDP has been NAYCOM's traditional partners.

the Districts Youth Council, to strengthen operational capacities. Finally, NAYCOM's territorial coverage is still too limited compared with the support needed throughout the country¹.

- **SMEDA** proposes a wide range of services, including SME diagnosis, coaching, and mentoring, business development support as well as financial inclusion. It also operates an SME database, currently counting around 15 000 entities². SMEDA has developed partnerships with key international donors such as ILO ('Opportunity Salone' project), GIZ (EPP), UNIDO and the World Bank (Sierra Leone diversification and agro-processing competitiveness projects). Its expertise could be mobilized to support returnees willing to develop their own businesses, especially those already well engaged.

Local NGOs with a proven track record of assistance in entrepreneurship support could also be mobilized.

- The **Africa Institute for Development and Equity** (AIDE – formerly Cordaid Sierra Leone) offers a flexible and tailored approach to youth entrepreneurship support based on the profiles of beneficiaries and local opportunities. It also has strong project management and quick study/research capacities. For several years, the current AIDE team has built a solid reputation among international partners on private sector/entrepreneurship development and financial inclusion.
- Other NGOs like **Global Youth Network** and **MADAM** could also be mobilized.

Table 4: Structures with which referral mechanisms can be implemented for the reintegration of returnees

Organization	IPs/funders	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
NAYCOM (PF#17)	Government, UNDP, World Bank, African development bank (AfDB), ILO, GIZ, UNFPA, OSIWA	Support to entrepreneurs through grants, start-up kits and/or training Linking entrepreneurs with financial institutions	Freetown
AIDE (PF#18)	Government, World Bank, UNPBF, UNDP, UNFPA, USAID, Government of Netherlands	Incubation, acceleration, training & business skills development Follow up support, mentoring, linking entrepreneurs with financial institutions	Freetown
SMEDA (PF#19)	ILO, GIZ, World Bank, UNIDO, UN Women, AfDB	Registration SMEs Diagnosis & business development services Mentoring and coaching Loans, grants & financial services	Freetown

¹ The Commission has its headquarters in Freetown and only three other regional offices in Bo for the South, Kenema for the East, and Makeni for the North-East. It has plans to establish another office for the Northwest.

² Although SMEDA already conducted activities with other audiences, an enterprise needs to be formalized and registered in the SMEDA database in order to benefit from its support.

Sensi Tech Hub (PF#20)	World Bank, GIZ, OSIWA, Comic relief, Freetown city council	Entrepreneurship support Incubator/accelerator Short ICT trainings Impact Fund management Coworking space	Freetown (and Makéni and Pujehun)
Innovation SL (PF#21)	IOM, UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank, US Embassy, FCDO, crowdfunding	Entrepreneurship support Incubator/accelerator Access to finance Coworking space Youth support events organization	Freetown (and Makéni)
Life By Design – IDT Labs (PF#22)	Private companies, World Bank, UNDP, Save the Children	Life By Design: one-stop shop for entrepreneurs and SMEs development. IDT Labs: ICT company (trainings, SMEs services)	Freetown

4.2.3. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES

Microfinance institutions (MFIs), Financial Services Associations (FSAs) and Community Banks (CBs) are the most appropriate structures to work with returnees. In the future, to enable returnees to actually benefit from the services they offer, MFIs, FSAs and CBs could be associated early in the reintegration process, during the development of business plans.

- **MFIs have the largest audience.** Many have developed from NGO programs and are now either ‘credit and deposit’, or ‘credit only’ MFIs. In total, MFIs have more than 200 000 clients in Sierra Leone and their loans, on average, are comprised between USD 110-266 (with, in 2021, an average annual interest rate of 30%)^{xvi}. The following five credit and deposit taking MFIs – **Ecobank Microfinance, Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO), Bank for Innovation and Partnership Microfinance, A Call to Business, Salone Microfinance** – represented around a quarter of MFIs’ clients and were deemed sustainable in 2021^{xvii}. Other interesting MFIs are **BRAC Microfinance** – the largest in the country – and **Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement (GGEM)**.
- **The 59 FSAs and 17 CBs are overseen by an APEX bank** and have reached close to 285 000 households since 2013. As of March 2022, FSAs and CBs comprised more than 170 000 shareholders, almost 120 000 active depositors and 82 000 active borrowers. CBs and FSAs have approximatively the same number of clients.

Focus Box 4: Munafa, a new model of social MFI

Munafa microfinance, developed with *Entrepreneurs du Monde*, presents an interesting model of social microfinance that could be replicated for reintegration assistance. Based on its ‘group model’, It is the only MFI granting loans without any collateral or guarantor. This model consists in grouping entrepreneurs for training sessions (in management/sales and/or other fields such as education, health, human rights). In addition to these sessions, follow-up visits are conducted twice a month in beneficiaries’ neighborhoods. A social monitoring is also conducted, and a tailored individual support is made available as part of Munafa’s comprehensive approach.

Digital financial services (DFS) and mobile money also represent an option to support financial inclusion for the general population, including returnees. They are rapidly growing in Sierra Leone and will most likely continue to do so¹. A 2021 United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) survey indicated that 12 out of 13 providers experienced an increase in registered accounts between 2019 and 2020, with a 63% increase in 90-day active accounts (from 1.4 million in December 2019 to 2.2 million in December 2020)^{xviii}. The ease on administrative requirements have made them an increasingly popular solution. These services are mainly used for person-to-person transfers, cash-in, cash-out and airtime top-up. Demand for other products, such as savings and credit, remains limited but could be developed and improved to provide opportunities to financially excluded groups, such as returnees. The key players in this sector are the two main mobile money operators, Afrimoney and Orange Money². Both have experienced very significant growth since 2018. Other DFS providers are commercial banks and one MFI (LAPO).

Several government instruments designed to improve the financial inclusion of the youth could also be leveraged in favor of returnees. For example, the National microfinance program (Munafa Fund³) offers subsidized sources of credit to SMEs through selected banks and MFIs. Officially launched in 2021, it is managed by SMEDA, the MoTI and the Ministry of Finance. More recently and in line with the MTNDP, the MoY announced the creation of the National Youth Empowerment Fund which will include two main components: access to financial services, and business development services for the youth. UNDP has been associated to the conception phase and, according to the MoY, the fund will be supplied with contributions from the National Treasury, development partners, as well as international organizations.

4.2.4. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES THROUGH DIRECT PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYMENT

Besides the largely informal structure of the economy, the inaccessibility of jobs in the formal sector is also due to the ineffective matching between labor demand and supply, and the inadequacy of skills with the needs of private companies. Much of the labor force in Sierra Leone has little education or training, particularly in rural areas. Illiteracy remains a persistent challenge as only 43 % of women and 59 % of men aged 15-49 are literate^{xix}. The youth also generally lack skills: two in five people aged under 35 never attended school^{xx}. In addition, in the TVET sector, *curricula* often do not match the needs of local companies. As explained earlier (section 4.1) only 40% of TVET institutions offer training programs that are relevant to market demand. As a result, employers have difficulties hiring technicians in the fields of mining, construction, and manufacturing, where most jobs are available^{xxi}.⁴ This is exacerbated by the few job opportunities in these sectors being insufficiently advertised, due to structural weaknesses of public intermediation mechanisms (section 3.3).

There are, however, potential opportunities for returnees in the private sector, which private job placement agencies could help identifying and accessing. The services offered by these structures can include identifying job openings, pre-selecting candidates, putting them in touch with companies, and even delivering short training sessions on the skills required for the positions available. All recommended structures (Table 5) are equally active in the formal and informal sectors. Their comparative advantage is their extensive network of partners, combined with a precise knowledge of the needs of companies and of the overall job market. For instance, Job search is vice-chair of the TVET Coalition and has organized several large youth support events, while Craft Human Resources

¹ Sierra Leone is a good environment for the development of mobile money. Based on GSMA's mobile money prevalence index, Sierra Leone has 'high' mobile money prevalence. It also scores well in terms of the GSMA regulatory index (83.4 out of 100), which covers criteria such as consumer protection, KYC requirements, agent networks and transaction limits

² The third is the Gambian owned QMoney, a more recent market entrant.

³ This is a different initiative from Munafa microfinance, developed by Entrepreneurs du Monde (Focus Box 4)

⁴ According to a skill needs assessment study completed in 2018.

closely works with the Freetown business school. Finally, Afriqia offers a specific psychometric test approach, providing precise information on candidates' aptitudes. It also has experience in providing a form of reintegration assistance since it already supports individuals made redundant from their jobs.

Table 5: Structures with which referral mechanisms can be implemented for the reintegration of returnees

Organization	IPs/funders	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
Afriqia (PF#23)	Private clients, GIZ, IOM, FAO, IFAD	Recruitment Short trainings Research	Freetown
Job Search (PF#24)	Private clients, Freetown City Council	Recruitment Short trainings Youth events organization	Freetown
Afreruit (PF#25)	Private clients, UNDP, Cordaid, World Bank	Recruitment Short trainings	Freetown
Craft Human Resources (PF#26)	Private clients, World Bank, GIZ	Outsourced human resources services Trainings	Freetown

4.2.5. OTHER KEY ACTORS SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP, FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

The donor programs listed below (Table 6) tackle youth unemployment through entrepreneurship promotion, support to financial inclusion and private sector development. They support job seekers starting small businesses and/or existing businesses in selected sectors. Coordinating actions and sharing lessons would be mutually beneficial and, where relevant, would enable to establish referral systems in favor of returnees.

- **The most significant projects in favor of entrepreneurship development in Sierra Leone are implemented by UNDP¹, the World Bank² and the AfDB³.** The combined geographical coverage of these programs is countrywide. They mainly aim to support skills training and development, access to finance, as well as the governance the private sector, the business environment, and the development of infrastructures.
- **Many projects aim to support entrepreneurship and value chain development, especially in the agricultural sector.** These are mostly supported by ILO (Opportunity Salone, BI-BEST), FAO (Green Jobs), IFAD (Agricultural value chain development) and the GIZ (MOVE). The World Bank⁴ and the AfDB⁵ are also active in this field. Each project targets different segments of the value chains (production, processing, marketing). Collectively, they represent a wide array of job opportunities for returnees in rural areas. The World Bank and GIZ have also

¹ Local Economic Revitalization for Local Communities; Youth Empowerment and Employment program; MSME Growth Accelerator Program.

² Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment; Economic Diversification project.

³ Post-Ebola Recovery Social Investment Fund Project.

⁴ Smallholder Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Project and Agro-Processing Competitiveness Project.

⁵ Rice agro-industrial Cluster project and the Agribusiness and Rice Value Chain Support Project (SLARIS).

supported entrepreneurship in the tourism and energy sectors through the Economic diversification project and ENDEV.

- **Another category of projects supporting entrepreneurship are implemented by donors aiming to strengthen social cohesion and/or support peacebuilding.** Among those, UNDP ('Human Security'), FAO (Empowering youth at risk as resources for sustaining peace and community resilience), and ILO (BI-BEST, Blue Peace Initiative) are particularly active. These programs could enroll returnees residing in their intervention areas.
- **Others support the development of financial inclusion in Sierra Leone:** UNCDF implements multiple projects in favor of digital financial services and inclusive digital economies. It has been active in Sierra Leone since 2014 and has significantly helped to improve the governance of the sector, particularly through the development of the national strategy for financial inclusion. It also supports the diversification of financial services as well as the empowerment of customers (through capacity building and digital financial literacy). The World Bank and IFAD are also implementing key projects, notably the Financial Inclusion Project and the Rural Finance and Community Improvement Program - Phase II. The first aims to develop digital economy and improve access and usage of financial payments, while the second allowed for the creation of CBs and FSAs throughout the country.
- **Finally, innovative pilot projects in mining areas could offer opportunities for returnees.** In mining areas, currently attracting large numbers of youth, international projects have been developed to support the formalization of artisanal gold mining in order to create legal and socially responsible opportunities for the youth. Key players in this area are the GIZ, the AfDB and the World Bank. ILO is also involved in the promotion of local content and the development of business linkages between multinational enterprises (MNEs) and the local economy. It participated in building the capacities of key public structures such as the Sierra Leone Local Content Agency (SLLCA) and the MLSS, as part of which a dedicated Unit of Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MESP) was created.

Table 6: Other key actors involved in the entrepreneurship sector with whom increased coordination could be envisaged

Structure	Project	Geographical locations	Projects' status
UNDP (AF#3)	Local Economic Revitalization for Local Communities	Countrywide	Running 2020-2023
	Youth Empowerment and Employment	Countrywide	Running 2021-2023
	MSME Growth Accelerator Program	Countrywide	Running since 2022
	Strengthening Human Security	Kono District	Ending 2021-2022
ILO (AF#4)	Opportunity Salone	Bo, Bombali, Kenema and Port Loko districts	Running 2021-2025
	Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises and promotion of business linkages between MNEs and local enterprises	Countrywide	Running since 2017
	BI-BEST Initiative - Selecting and Analyzing Value Chains in the Mano River Border Areas	Countrywide	Running 2022-2023

World Bank (AF#1)	Smallholder Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Project	Countrywide	Running 2016-2024
	Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project	Countrywide	Running 2021-2025
	Sierra Leone Agro-Processing Competitiveness Project	Countrywide	Running 2019-2023
	Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment	Countrywide	Running 2022-2027
AfDB (AF#5)	Post-Ebola Recovery Social Investment Fund Project:	Countrywide	Ending 2015-2022
	Rice agro-industrial Cluster project	Pujehun and Bonthe Districts	Running 2021-2027
	Agribusiness and Rice Value Chain Support Project (SLARIS)	Kambia, Kenema and Moyamba districts	Running 2019-2024
	Enhancing Efficiency and Sustainability of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) through Climate Smart Actions	Countrywide	Ending 2020-2022
GIZ (AF#2)	Market-Oriented Value Chains for Jobs & Growth in the ECOWAS Region (MOVE)	Countrywide	Running 2022-2024
	Energizing Development (ENDEV)	Countrywide	Running 2015-2025
	Regional Resource Governance in West Africa	Countrywide	Ending 2019-2022
FAO (AF#6)	Green Jobs for rural youth employment	Countrywide	Running 2019-2024
	Empowering youth at risk as resources for sustaining peace and community resilience	Tonkolili and Kenema districts	Running 2020-2023
IFAD (AF#7)	Agricultural Value Chain Development Project	Countrywide	Running 2019-2026
UNCDF (AF#8)	Digital Financial Services in Sierra Leone	Countrywide	2019-2022
	Freetown / Blue Peace Initiative	Countrywide	2020-2022
	Inclusive Digital Economies	Countrywide	Running 2020-
	Strengthening Domestic Resources Mobilization for SDGs Financing	Countrywide	2020-2022

Focus Box 5: Opportunities for action in the entrepreneurship, financial services and private sector

Opportunities for action in support of returnees' reintegration

- The EU could consider providing additional financial and technical support to the leading structures in the entrepreneurship ecosystem such as NAYCOM, SMEDA, as well as the

ESOs listed above¹. In particular, the EU could support the expansion of their activities in rural areas and the establishment of referral mechanisms in favor of returnees.

- In order to strengthen relations between the education and entrepreneurship sectors, the inclusion of an entrepreneurship curriculum entrenched in the education system, particularly within TVET curricula, could be encouraged.
- Micro-credit agencies offering financial services to entrepreneurs could be involved upstream of the definition of reintegration paths to offer support combining project set-up and funding research. This strategy would improve the sustainability of microenterprises and the reintegration of returnees.
- Partnerships with recruitment agencies could be developed in order to increase the linkage of returnees with enterprises in the formal and informal sectors. These structures could also play a more important role in the counselling and orientation phases of reintegration given their extensive knowledge of the employers' expectations.
- Coordination with other donors actively supporting business incubators/accelerators (World Bank, UNDP, etc.) should be consolidated and referrals mechanisms developed, particularly in the agricultural field, where many programs could enroll returnees among their beneficiaries.

Opportunities for action in support of the entrepreneurship, financial services and private sector:

- The EU could consider supporting State structures in charge of coordinating and monitoring entrepreneurship initiatives, such as the MoY, the MLSS or NAYCOM; encourage them to harmonize the methods and tools used (e.g., *curricula* in business skills trainings) and support the development of common M&E frameworks and indicators.
- In terms of access to finance – a key component of successful entrepreneurship-based job creation strategies – the EU could consider, in partnership with UNCDF, supporting more actively the development of the microfinance ecosystem in Sierra Leone to make the existing financial offer more accessible to vulnerable populations, particularly returnees.
- Coordination mechanisms between international and government actors in relation to entrepreneurship, access to microfinance, and support to the private sector should be strengthened, through the identification of lead partners, the regular exchange of information and the implementation of joint operational strategies.

4.3. CIVIL SOCIETY AND ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE RETURNEES

4.3.1. STATUS OF ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE RETURNEES

Returnees in Sierra Leone often present vulnerability profiles that require an economic reintegration process combined with specific psycho-social support (PSS), which remains scarcely available. Many returnees have severe medical conditions, including physical and/or psychological trauma, which require a holistic approach to reintegration assistance on the medium to long-term, that can only be provided through partnerships with relevant national structures or specialized NGOs. In addition, the low level of literacy, the difficulties in accessing civil status documents and the need to access economic resources shortly after their arrival can constitute significant obstacles to returnees' sustainable reintegration.

¹ The same recommendation was included in the 2022 study on 'Non-Financial Business Development Services to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises' (see bibliography).

Unlike in other countries covered under the JI, IOM Sierra Leone did not mobilize any specialists in psycho-social support and lacks the financial and human resources to identify the most vulnerable profiles and provide them with the necessary assistance, both in terms of quality and duration. In addition, return and reintegration appear to be mainly considered and addressed by government officials from a security (as opposed to protection) standpoint, as illustrated by the lead taken by the NSC in the elaboration of the SOPs (section 3.1), which could question the breadth and sustainability of (psycho-)social support provided by national actors in this perspective (see below).

4.3.2. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE RETURNEES

To address the wide range of needs of vulnerable migrants, IOM Sierra Leone developed several partnerships with national and international actors, which should be pursued. Additional partnerships could be developed to strengthen individual support, PSS services and shelter availability.

- **The MSW** plays a key role in screening vulnerable returnees through PSS group sessions (section 3.3.3) though only two full-time agents are dedicated to this task. The most vulnerable returnees are referred to specialized stakeholders (e.g., UNICEF for minors and medical facilities for those in need of treatment). The MSW also chairs the national task force on human trafficking, specifically dedicated to the protection of vulnerable migrants. It could play a more significant role in the case management process through its district task forces that could be mobilized in the support and follow-up of vulnerable returnees.
- **World Hope International (WHI)** is the most active partner in the field of social assistance in Sierra Leone, keeping track of vulnerable returnees (it conducts on-site visits, supports social insertion, provides shelter and emergency assistance such as food and medical treatment). WHI and MSW teams work closely together, with WHI staff embedded in the ministry's offices throughout the country (one office per region). The WHI protection team includes four social workers in charge of reintegration and three counsellors in charge of PSS. The team's capacity should be further strengthened: if it manages to screen large numbers of returnees (close to 2 000 per year), it is not in a position to provide individual support on a large scale (only about 50 individuals per year) which is insufficient compared to the number of returnees in need of this type of assistance.
- **To expand protection's capacities, partnerships should be further strengthened with structures such as UNICEF and CSOs.** Whilst UNICEF is already involved in the protection of minors upon arrival, it could be further involved in the social reintegration and individual support, on the long run, of this category of returnees (UNICEF is already playing this role in neighboring Guinea). In addition, specialized CSOs such as Defence for Children International or Don Bosco Fambul have proven track records in child social support and could be further involved. Given the significant number of female returnees, partnerships with CSOs specialized in supporting women and victims of trafficking and/or gender-based violence such as the Aberdeen Women Centre would be relevant.

Table 7: Structures vulnerable returnees could be referred to in Sierra Leone

Organization	IPs/funders	Areas of intervention	Geographical location
World Hope International (PF#27)	USAID, EU	Protection, WASH, Health, Environment & climate resilience, Education	Offices in Freetown and Makéni; national coverage
UNICEF	UN, AfDB, FCDO, etc.	Child protection	Office in Freetown; national coverage

Focus Box 6: Opportunities for action to better reintegrate vulnerable returnees

- Partnerships and further capacity building / funding of structures involved in the social support of returnees could be considered (MSW, WHI), including data collection capacities.
- As part of the next phases of reintegration programming, the EU should encourage its future implementation partners to develop a wider network of partnerships with international and national partners able to deploy a holistic approach to reintegration.

ⁱ IOM, 2022, Assistance to voluntary and humanitarian return 2017- June 2022.

ⁱⁱ IOM, 2022, data communicated to Altai Consulting.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Frontex, 2022, Detections of illegal border crossings.

^v Republic of Sierra Leone, 2019, Medium Term National Development Plan 2019–2023.

^{vi} World Bank Group, 2017, Job Diagnostic – Sierra Leone.

^{vii} Republic of Sierra Leone, 2022, National Migration Policy for Sierra Leone.

^{viii} IOM, 2022, Assistance to voluntary and humanitarian return 2017- June 2022.

^{ix} NCTVA, 2022, “2021 Survey report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions for Sierra Leone”.

^x Ibid., Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, interviews conducted by Altai Consulting.

^{xi} 2021 Survey report on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions for Sierra Leone, NCTVA, 2022.

^{xii} Skills Needs Assessment, Initiative of the TVET Coalition of Sierra Leone, Maryam Darwich, 2018.

^{xiii} NCTVA, 2022, “2021 Survey report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions for Sierra Leone”.

^{xiv} Altai Consulting, 2022, *Réintégration des migrants de retour : Cartographie des acteurs, programmes et partenaires potentiels – Sénégal*.

^{xv} World Bank, 2021, Narrative for the Mapping output of Youth Programs in Sierra Leone.

^{xvi} Center for Affordable Housing in Africa, 2020, Sierra Leone Overview; Bank of Sierra Leone, 2022, Financial Stability report 2021.

^{xvii} Bank of Sierra Leone, 2022, Financial Stability report 2021.

^{xviii} UNCDF, 2021, State of the Digital Financial Services Market in Sierra Leone, 2021 – Results from the UNCDF Annual Provider Survey.

^{xix} Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022-2026

^{xx} Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2020, Labour Market Profile Sierra Leone 2020,

^{xxi} Maryam Darwich, 2018, Skills Needs Assessment, Initiative of the TVET Coalition of Sierra Leone.