Teaching Returnee Voices

A classroom toolkit on return, reintegration, legitimacy, discourse and whose knowledge counts

FAiR
Finding Agreement in Return

PURPOSE

This toolkit helps educators bring together FAiR research on return, reintegration, legitimacy, narratives, imaginaries and lived experience. It is designed to move students beyond asking only whether return happens or whether assistance is delivered, toward questions about who defines success, whose knowledge becomes authoritative, how responsibilities are shared, and what makes life after return viable over time.

Educators can use one module as a stand-alone activity, combine modules across a course, use the ready-to-use 120-minute seminar, or adapt the assignments and worksheets for assessment and professional training.

Six Questions That Organise the Toolkit

- Who defines the return problem and the goals of reintegration?
- Whose knowledge counts - and who has authority to define success?
- What makes a return legitimate beyond lawfulness or operational completion?
- How do imaginaries, agency, preparedness and structural conditions shape what happens after return?
- What counts as sustainable reintegration, according to whom and over what period?
- Who bears responsibility for foreseeable consequences, local support and policy adaptation?

Core idea: Return is a contested social and political process whose legitimacy and sustainability are judged differently by returnees, families, communities, practitioners, states and institutions.

1. CORE CONCEPTS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Concept	Working definition for teaching
Return migration	Movement back to a country of nationality, origin or previous residence. The conditions of return vary widely in timing, choice, preparation and support.
Reintegration	The process through which a returnee re-establishes economic, social, psychosocial and institutional connections after return. It is multidimensional and unfolds over time.
Readmission	Inter-state arrangements and procedures through which a state accepts the return of a person under agreed conditions.
Forced / enforced return	Return that takes place under a state removal decision or without the person's free choice to remain.
Voluntary return	Return described as undertaken without physical enforcement. Teaching should distinguish the legal label from actual options, pressure, timing and agency.
Narrative	A story or explanatory frame that makes sense of return, such as "return is difficult," "return is beneficial," or "the government is responsible."
Discourse	A wider system of language, representation and meaning that shapes what appears normal, legitimate, desirable or possible in policy and society.
Counter-discourse	A discourse that qualifies, challenges or reinterprets dominant understandings of migration and return, including perspectives emerging from returnees, civil society, local institutions, community actors, diaspora actors or countries of return.
Imaginary of return	Shared and personal images, expectations and possible futures through which people imagine what return will mean and what life after return could become.

Preparedness	The resources, information, relationships, plans and agency a person can mobilise for return and reintegration. Preparedness is also conditioned by structural and institutional environments.
Transnational belonging	Identity, family ties, obligations, livelihoods or participation that span more than one country and may continue after return.
Policy legitimacy	Whether return governance is regarded as justified and acceptable by relevant audiences. Lawfulness and operational completion are important but do not settle legitimacy.
Responsibility-sharing	How sending and receiving actors anticipate, allocate and coordinate responsibilities before, during and after return instead of transferring them by default.
Legitimacy expectations trap	A situation in which different actors judge reintegration by competing criteria, some actors have more authority to define success, and those judgements are made over different time horizons.

Teaching caution: Country-of-return, Global South and diaspora perspectives are not single or homogeneous viewpoints. FAiR materials show variation within and across countries, institutions, communities, returnees and transnational actors; use them comparatively rather than as fixed national positions.

2. ETHICAL AND REFLEXIVE TEACHING GUIDANCE

Returnee stories should be treated as knowledge, not only as case material. Students may also have personal or family experience of migration, deportation, return, displacement, asylum or separation. A reflexive classroom asks how researchers, institutions and educators frame the people whose experiences they present.

- **Contextualise voices:** Explain the policy, social and historical setting around a quote, video or case.
- **Avoid trauma-centred teaching:** Do not use suffering only to shock or produce sympathy; include agency, critique, aspiration and policy relevance.
- **Do not ask students to judge returnees' choices:** Analyse structures, options, constraints, policies and narratives instead.
- **Avoid country-of-origin stereotypes:** Compare contexts without treating one case as representative of a whole country or "the Global South."
- **Distinguish voice from authority:** A returnee may be quoted or consulted without having influenced the institutional meaning attached to their story.
- **Ask who produced the source, for what audience and with what institutional purpose;** the same narrative can mean something different depending on the messenger.
- **Discuss forced return sensitively** and give students a route to step out of personally difficult discussion activities.
- **Use anonymised or consent-based materials** and follow the conditions attached to each FAiR resource.
- **Do not treat future mobility or remigration** as automatic evidence of failed reintegration.
- **Move from story to system:** Ask what lived experience reveals about institutions, power, services, responsibility and the criteria used to judge success.

Suggested classroom ground rules

- Listen respectfully and **do not make assumptions** about classmates' experiences.
- Critique policies, categories and narratives - **not people.**
- **Avoid sensationalising suffering** or using stigmatising labels casually.
- Distinguish **evidence, interpretation and assumption**.

- Treat returnee voices as expertise, while recognising that **no single returnee speaks for all returnees.**
- Ask who has the power to turn an interpretation into **a policy category, indicator or decision**.

3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the modules, students should be able to:

- **Explain the gap** between return as an administrative process and return as a lived experience.
- Identify **dominant, alternative and counter-discourses** about return and explain why the position of the speaker matters.
- Assess **legitimacy and competing definitions** of successful reintegration from the perspectives of multiple audiences, including returnees and origin-country actors.
- Explain how imaginaries, expectations, agency and structural conditions **shape preparedness and reintegration.**
- Analyse **responsibility-sharing, local systems and post-return consequences** as part of return governance.
- **Recognise stigma, belonging, family expectations and transnational ties** as issues with policy consequences.
- Translate evidence into **a concrete policy or practice recommendation**.

4. USING FAIR CONTEXTS AS COURSE MATERIAL

These are prompts for comparison, not national stereotypes. Use them to explore variation within each context across returnees, families, local institutions, civil society, service providers and national authorities, and then compare across contexts. Diaspora material can be introduced where it helps illuminate transnational ties or migration feedback, but it need not be the default comparative lens. Ask students to refer back to these prompts during the modules: what evidence supports each pattern, what varies within a country, how the same issue changes across actors, and how conditions shift over time.

Context	Themes to explore	Case-study teaching lens
Georgia	Relatively formalised migration-management and reintegration structures; social expectations of visible success; work and service barriers; age and digital access; returnees' desire to contribute alongside frustration with local systems.	Compare returnee experiences with the perspectives of municipalities, service providers, civil society and national actors. Ask how formal reintegration structures translate into practice, and where work, service access, age or digital barriers create gaps. Diaspora material can be added where useful for migration feedback or expectations of return.
Iraq / Kurdistan Region	Dignity and shame; security and economic stability; transnational imaginaries and ties; contribution to development; family unity; changing historical and economic conditions.	Compare how returnees, families, local institutions, civil society and authorities understand dignity, security, contribution and belonging. Use transnational or diaspora connections as one part of the case where they help explain family ties, political history or future mobility.

Nigeria	Stigma and gendered judgement; debt and economic performance; assistance and trafficking-prevention narratives; returnee associations; tension between humanising stories and dehumanising numbers.	Compare returnee, community, civil-society, programme and government perspectives on stigma, gendered judgement, debt, assistance and returnee associations. Where useful, add diaspora material to examine migration feedback or expectations, rather than making it the primary comparison.
Türkiye	Return of Turkish citizens is comparatively less visible in public debate; legal and intergovernmental framing is prominent; some returns are constrained or provisional; family/community networks may compensate for limited formal reintegration support.	Compare legal and intergovernmental framings with returnee, family/community, civil-society and service-provider perspectives. Ask why Turkish returnees are comparatively less visible and how informal networks shape reintegration. Transnational or diaspora perspectives can be used selectively where relevant.
Across contexts	Countries of return are multi-audience arenas: national and local authorities, civil society, families, communities, returnees and, where relevant, diaspora actors may judge the same trajectory differently.	Ask students not only “What does this country think?” but “Which actor is speaking, from what position, to which audience, and with what authority?” Compare actors within each context before moving to cross-country comparison.

4. TEACHING MODULES

Suggested format: Modules 1-4 and 6 are designed for 120-minute classes. Module 5 is designed for a 180-minute class because it brings together the toolkit's most conceptually demanding material on sustainable reintegration, temporality, stigma, belonging and transnational lives. Educators can compress a 120-minute module to 90 minutes by shortening the reading discussion or group activity, or extend selected sessions through additional country comparison, source analysis or student presentations. Mandatory readings are deliberately selective; full FAiR working papers can be assigned as advanced or optional reading.

Module Overview

No.	Theme	Suggested length
1	What makes return legitimate?	120 min
2	Discourses, counter-discourses and positionality	120 min
3	Lived experiences, voice and silencing	120 min
4	Imaginaries, preparedness and reality	120 min
5	Sustainable reintegration: stigma, belonging and transnational lives	180 min
6	From evidence to policy and practice redesign	120 min

Module 1. What Makes Return Legitimate?

Suggested length: 120 minutes

Key concepts: Return; forced/enforced return; voluntary return; legitimacy; dignity; proportionality; responsibility-sharing; ownership; post-return consequences

Core FAiR insight: Return is not only an administrative or legal event. Lawfulness and operational completion do not settle legitimacy. Return is judged by multiple audiences according to how it happens, how responsibilities are distributed, what foreseeable consequences it creates and who has meaningful influence over the process.

Mandatory Reading

What Makes a Return Legitimate? *Perspectives from Actors Negotiating, Organising and Receiving Returns* - substantive policy brief in full, excluding administrative cover material. **Focus on the four tests**

of legitimacy: justification/proportionality, responsibility-sharing, post-return consequences and ownership of cooperation.

Suggested Class Structure

- **10 min - Opening question:** What do we mean by “return”? Students generate legal, administrative and lived answers.
- **40 min - Lecture:**
    - Return categories, lawfulness and multiple audiences of legitimacy.
    - Guided reading discussion: unpack the four FAiR legitimacy tests and identify where they overlap or diverge.
- **40 min -** Legitimacy audit of a fictional return operation.
- **20 min -** Compare judgements from sending state, receiving state, returnee, family and municipality; identify points of agreement and tension.
- **10 min -** Synthesis and reflection: revisit the opening question and identify what administrative completion leaves unresolved.

Main activity: Legitimacy audit. Give students a fictional return operation and ask: Was the decision and implementation proportionate? Were responsibilities agreed? What foreseeable post-return consequences exist? Who had meaningful influence over the arrangement?

Learning outcome: Students can explain why lawfulness and operational completion do not settle questions of legitimacy, and how return can be understood differently by the actors who organise, receive and experience it.

Reflection question: Can a lawful and operationally successful return still be regarded as illegitimate - and by whom?

Module 2. Discourses, Counter-Discourses and Positionality

Suggested length: 120 minutes

Key concepts: Narrative; discourse; counter-discourse; positionality; Global South; diaspora; power

Core FAiR insight: FAiR identifies humanitarian, development, post-colonial, securitisation, civic and other discourses across countries of return and diaspora communities. They do not form one unified "Global South" position; they reflect different histories, interests, social locations and audiences.

Mandatory Reading

- **Migration Discourses and Enforced Return Policies:** Perspectives from the Global South and Diaspora Communities - Executive Summary and Introduction.
- **One short selected extract from the Key Findings** relevant to the country context, actor comparison or theme used in class. The full analytical framework can be reserved for advanced discourse-analysis courses.

Suggested Class Structure

- **10 min - Opening exercise:** Distinguish a narrative from a discourse using a short example.
- **40 min - Lecture**
    - On positionality, power, counter-discourse and why messenger and audience matter.
    - Guided reading discussion and actor-position map.
- **40 min** - Paired source comparison using texts from different actors or locations.
- **20 min** - Group presentations and comparative debrief: problem definition, subject, responsibility and implied policy response.
- **10 min - Reflection:** What changes when the same issue is voiced from a different position?

Main activity: Source comparison. Give groups two short texts from different actors - for example an official statement and a civil-society, local-institution or returnee account. Identify the problem each text constructs, the actor it centres, the responsibility it assigns and the policy response it makes thinkable.

Learning outcome: Students can explain how the identity and position of the speaker affect what return is understood to mean and what responses appear legitimate or possible.

Reflection question: How does the same issue change meaning when voiced by a state, local institution, NGO, returnee, media source or, where relevant, a diaspora actor?

Module 3. Lived Experiences, Voice And Silencing

Suggested length: 120 minutes

Key concepts: Lived experience; silencing; dehumanisation; representation; voice; selective mobilisation; participation; definitional authority

Core FAiR insight: Institutional categories make return governable, but can obscure how return is actually lived. Returnees may be absent from policy materials, reduced to numbers or beneficiaries, or

visibly quoted while institutions retain authority over what their experiences mean and how success is defined.

Mandatory Reading

- **Discourse and Policies:** Silencing Returnees and the Need for More Inclusive Return Policies, pp. 23-28: the section on silencing returnees, including dehumanisation, assistance and the quasi-absence of returnee voices from policy materials.
- **Who Gets to Define Sustainable Reintegration?** Competing Expectations and Legitimacy in Return Governance, Section 2.3, *"Unequal authority: whose definition counts?"*

Suggested Class Structure

- **10 min - Opening exercise:** What is visible / what disappears? Compare an institutional account of return with a lived account.
- **40 min - Lecture:**
    - Silencing, dehumanisation, selective mobilisation and definitional authority.
    - Close reading of examples from the mandatory sources.
- **40 min - Voice-to-influence continuum:** Silenced -> represented -> consulted -> co-producing -> shaping definitions.
- **20 min - Structured debate and debrief:** When does consultation become meaningful influence?
- **10 min - Exit reflection:** Identify one change that would redistribute authority over how a problem or success is defined.

Main activity: Voice-to-influence continuum. Students place examples from the readings on a continuum from silencing to representation, consultation, co-production and shared definitional authority, and justify each placement with evidence.

Learning outcome: Students can distinguish lived experience from institutional representation, and representation from meaningful influence over how problems and success are defined.

Reflection question: When does making a returnee visible become meaningful influence?

Module 4. Imaginaries, Preparedness and Reality

Suggested length: 120 minutes

Key concepts: Imaginaries; expectations; agency; preparedness; structural conditions

Core FAiR insight: People prepare for return through images of home, work, family, services, stability and belonging. Preparedness is shaped by time, information, resources and agency, but even careful preparation can be undermined by structural conditions after return.

Mandatory Reading

- **From Imaginaries to Realities:** Returnees' Preparedness for Reintegration, Introduction and conceptual framework (pp. 7-9).
- **From Imaginaries to Realities***, "When Imaginaries Meet Reality: Expectations and Preparedness"* (pp. 23-27).
- **Optional extension:** *"Return as a new life or as a new chapter?"* (pp. 14-16).

Suggested Class Structure

- **10 min** - Opening exercise: students write three things someone might imagine before return.
- **40 min - Lecture:**
    - Imaginary -> expectation -> preparedness, with attention to agency and structural conditions.
    - Guided reading discussion linking the conceptual framework to empirical examples.
- **40 min** - Expectation-to-reality mapping exercise.
- **20 min** - Responsibility discussion: separate what can be prepared individually from what depends on institutions, services or wider conditions.
- **10 min** - Reflection: what should policy and practice do when personal planning meets structural barriers?

Main activity: **Expectation-to-reality map**. Give groups a fictional profile and ask them to map expectations about housing, work, services, family reception and mobility against possible realities. Then identify what could be prepared individually and what requires institutional or structural action.

Learning outcome: Students can explain how expectations affect preparedness without individualising responsibility for reintegration outcomes.

Reflection question: What happens when the future someone imagined meets the social, economic and institutional conditions they actually encounter?

Module 5. Sustainable Reintegration: Stigma, Belonging And Transnational Lives

Suggested length: 180 minutes

Key concepts: Sustainable reintegration; measured sustainability; lived sustainability; temporality; stigma; belonging; social reception; family expectations; transnationalism; mobility

Core FAiR insight: Reintegration may be evaluated through employment, assistance completion or immobility, but lived sustainability also involves dignity, social recognition, family relationships, belonging, psychosocial wellbeing and the ability to imagine a viable future. These dimensions change over time, and continued mobility does not necessarily mean reintegration has failed.

Mandatory Reading

- **Who Gets to Define Sustainable Reintegration?** Competing Expectations and Legitimacy in Return Governance - Introduction and Sections 2.1-2.5, especially expectations as legitimacy criteria, unequal definitional authority, temporality and measured versus lived sustainability.
- **From Imaginaries to Realities**, *"Social Reception, Stigma and Emotional Reintegration"* (pp. 26-27) and conclusion/policy priorities (pp. 28-29).
- **Optional extension:** *"Return as a new life or as a new chapter?"* (pp. 14-16), for deeper discussion of transnational and continued-mobility futures.

Suggested Class Structure

- **10 min - Opening exercise:** Students define "sustainable reintegration" individually, then compare definitions.
- **50 min - Lecture:**
    - Competing expectations, definitional authority, temporality and measured versus lived sustainability.
    - Guided reading discussion: stigma, belonging, social reception, family expectations and transnational lives.
- **30 min – Sustainability redesign:** Critique and rebuild a definition of successful reintegration.
- **10 min** - Break.
- **30 min - Systems and transnational application:** Test the redesigned framework against one or two FAiR country/context cases.
- **40 min - Plenary:** What can be measured, what remains interpretive, and what risks disappearing when sustainability becomes an indicator?
- **10 min - Synthesis and exit reflection:** Who should decide whether reintegration is sustainable, according to which dimensions and at what point in time?

Main activity: Sustainability redesign. Give students a conventional definition or dashboard of successful reintegration - for example return completed, grant delivered, job obtained, no remigration. Ask them to redesign it using economic, social and psychosocial dimensions, stigma and belonging, local systems, transnational ties and different time horizons. Then discuss what still cannot be reduced to an indicator.

Learning outcome: Students can critically assess competing definitions of sustainable reintegration and explain how stigma, belonging, local conditions, transnational ties and temporality shape judgements of success.

Reflection question: Who should decide whether reintegration is sustainable, according to which dimensions and at what point in time?

Module 6. From Evidence to Policy and Practice Redesign

Suggested length: 120 minutes

Key concepts: Evidence; structural issue; responsibility; co-production; policy ask; accountability

Core FAiR insight: Lived experience becomes policy evidence when it is connected to a repeated pattern, the system behind it, the actor with authority to act and a clear way to determine whether the proposed change addresses the problem.

Mandatory reading

- **Beyond Listening:** Aligning Return Policy with Reintegration Realities, Policy Recommendations (pp. 7-9), especially co-production, preparedness, local systems and accountability.
- **What Makes a Return Legitimate?** Perspectives from Actors Negotiating, Organising and Receiving Returns*, "What should EU policymakers do?"* section, focusing on legitimacy, responsibility-sharing, post-return outcomes and ownership.
- Students should also bring **one earlier FAiR reading or case from Modules 1-5** to use in the redesign exercise.

Suggested class structure

- **20 min - Revisit:** What turns a voice or lived experience into policy evidence? What policies should be targeted through this session?
- **40 min – Lecture:**
    - Case reading: extract one repeated pattern and distinguish evidence from interpretation.
    - Identify the structural issue, responsible actor and any competing understandings of the problem.

- **40 min - Policy redesign activity:**
    - Peer challenge and revision: who might contest the proposed solution, what is missing, and how should the recommendation change?
- **20 min - Final reflection:** State one concrete policy/practice recommendation and the actor responsible for acting on it.

Main activity: Use the pathway: Evidence -> Pattern -> Structural issue -> Whose responsibility? -> Concrete change -> Who defines success? -> Accountability mechanism.

Learning outcome: Students can translate lived evidence into a specific and responsible policy or practice recommendation without stripping the evidence of its context.

Reflection question: How can institutions learn from returnees and receiving actors without simply absorbing their voices into objectives defined elsewhere?

7. ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT IDEAS

Assignment	Prompt
Short reflection	"Whose definition of successful reintegration counts?" Use one FAiR example to distinguish being represented, being consulted and having influence over definitions.
Legitimacy audit	Assess a return policy or fictional return operation across dignity/proportionality, responsibility-sharing, post-return consequences and ownership. Identify which audiences may judge it differently.
Discourse analysis	Analyse a policy, programme, media or advocacy text. Identify dominant narratives, silences, the speaker's position, implied responsibilities and the policy response made thinkable.
Cross-context / actor comparison	Compare two FAiR sources produced from different locations, institutions or social positions. How do interests, histories and positions shape what return means and what is considered legitimate?
Imaginaries analysis	Compare anticipated return with the structural and social conditions encountered after return. Discuss what this reveals about preparedness and responsibility.
Policy memo	Propose two changes that make return governance more responsive to multiple audiences and longer time horizons.
Ethical storytelling critique	Assess whether a campaign, video or article uses returnee voices with meaningful consent, dignity and context, and whether the voice is being used to advance objectives the speaker helped define.
Comparative country brief	Compare two FAiR contexts without assuming national uniformity. Identify which actors define the problem, what criteria of success appear, and how local conditions shape reintegration.
Role-play reflection	What did the role play reveal about unequal authority, resources, responsibility and the difference between compliance, participation and legitimacy?

8. TEACHING WITH THE FAIR SOURCE SET

Working papers are best for methods and conceptual depth; policy briefs for applied recommendations and debate; the academic paper for advanced analysis of legitimacy and sustainability.

Source	What it contributes	Best classroom use
Policy brief: What makes a return legitimate?	Legitimacy beyond lawfulness; dignity and proportionality; responsibility-sharing; post-return consequences; ownership of cooperation.	Legitimacy audits, role play, policy evaluation.
Policy brief: Beyond Listening	Co-production; preparedness; local reintegration systems; long-term outcomes and adaptation.	Policy-design exercises and practitioner/policymaker comparisons.
Working paper: From Imaginaries to Realities	Imaginaries, expectations, preparedness, social reception, stigma, belonging and viable futures.	Expectation-reality mapping, case analysis, social reception discussion.
Working paper: Discourse and Policies	Silencing, dehumanisation, narrative typology, assistance, alternative discourses and inclusive policymaking.	Discourse coding and “who is absent?” exercises.
Policy brief: Returnee voices matter	Accessible synthesis of returnee voice, needs-based pathways, local systems and accountability.	Introductory classes, policy memo exercises.
WP4 discourses working paper	Global South and diaspora discourses, power, migration-development, post-colonial, humanitarian, security and civic framings.	Cross-source, actor and context comparisons; media/discourse analysis.

Published/web policy-stances version	Public-facing version of the policy-stances evidence.	Shorter reading option and source-version comparison.
Academic paper: Who Gets to Define Sustainable Reintegration?	Definitional authority; measured and lived sustainability; temporality; competing expectations and legitimacy.	Advanced seminar, theory application, measurement critique.

- Erasmus University, Samuel hall, and Università degli Studi di Milano (2024), Migration Discourses and Enforced Return Policies: Perspectives from the Global South and Diaspora Communities, FAiR working paper.
- Samuel Hall, Koç University, and Erasmus University Rotterdam (2024), Discourse and Policies: Silencing Returnees and the Need for More Inclusive Return Policies, FAiR working paper.
- Samuel Hall and ICMPD (2024), Returnee voices matters: Towards more including return policies, FAiR policy brief.
- Samuel Hall (2026, unpublished) Beyond Listening: Aligning Return Policy with Reintegration Realities, FAiR policy brief.
- Samuel Hall and Koç University (2026, unpublished), From Imaginaries to Realities: Returnees' Preparedness for Reintegration, FAiR working paper.
- Samuel Hall (2026, unpublished), What Makes a Return Legitimate? Perspectives from Actors Negotiating, Organising and Receiving Returns, FAiR policy brief.
- Majidi, N, Samman, J and Pfister, L (2026, unpublished) Who Gets to Define Sustainable Reintegration? Competing Expectations and Legitimacy in Return Governance.
- FAiR synthesis policy brief on return and reintegration realities.