Faces of reintegration in the Sahel and Lake Chad

PROTECT, ASSIST, EMPOWER.
The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Sahel and Lake Chad (hereinafter referred to as the ‘EU-IOM Joint Initiative’) has shown that coordinated action with established governance structures facilitates sustainable reintegration for returnees.

Launched in December 2016 with funding from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration is the first comprehensive programme to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa. Targeting a total of 26 countries in Africa, in the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative covers Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

The EU-IOM Joint Initiative enables migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way, in full respect of international human rights standards.

Once back in their countries, reintegration assistance helps returnees restart their lives through an integrated approach that seeks to address their economic, social and psychosocial needs. At the same time, the communities of the returnees are included in the reintegration process.

A multi-actor coordination has proven key to ensure effective and comprehensive reintegration: governments, civil societies, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other international organizations have joined forces to harmonize and maximize the reintegration assistance provided in target countries.

At the heart of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative are the thousands of resilient individuals who decided to return and re-establish their lives in their countries of origin, with the support of their communities.

In this booklet, IOM would like to present their faces, their stories and how the assistance received through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative made a difference in their lives.
Since the launch in 2016, the programme provided tailor-based economic reintegration support to more than 54,100 migrants, while providing more than 16,500 with social support, and more than 19,800 received psychosocial assistance.

It also supported migrant communities through more than 380 community-based reintegration projects that benefited over 2,300 migrants along with more than 3,100 community members.

Through over 145 dedicated activities, the programme built the capacity of more than 3,590 partners for the delivery of reintegration services, including governments, civil society organizations, and NGOs.

61,000

Migrants started their reintegration assistance process in the Sahel and Lake Chad region.
After leaving Cameroon in 2015, Abdou Raman, 30, travelled between Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya.

In Libya, Abdu Raman was imprisoned in different locations, and was only able to access medicine and care through UN agencies. Abdou Raman then attempted the crossing into Europe twice. The first time, he reached Malta but was turned back to Libya via Turkey. The second time, the boat and its 137 passengers were lost at sea for two days before being rescued by fishermen.

After returning to Cameroon, through the support of IOM, Abdou Raman resumed the craft he practised before leaving, and set up a jewelry shop. Abdou Raman wishes to expand his activity and open a workshop on the side of the road to present his creations.

Fotso left his native Cameroon for economic reasons, and spent six years on the move. His wife joined him a year after his departure, and she gave birth to two children as they were traveling towards Europe. As the journey became too difficult, they changed their plan and stayed in Algeria.

In 2019, they left Algeria for Niger. Once they reached the border, they walked across the desert with their children for a week before reaching an IOM office. They sought voluntary return assistance from IOM who helped with pre-departure arrangements, such as obtaining necessary travel documents.

One month later, they were back in Cameroon. IOM supported their economic reintegration by helping the family set up a poultry farm. The business proved to be such a success that they have been able to start breeding pedigree dogs, and plan to expand even further by farming pigs in the near future.

Dimitri, 26, used to be a docker at the port of Douala. However, life was hard as he would only get work when ships were docked. He tried different other activities but could not make ends meet. He thus decided to leave in the hope of reaching Spain.

On his journey, Dimitri travelled to Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Niger and Nigeria, but remained mainly in Algeria to work. One day, having broken a bone, and with no one to support him financially, Dimitri started to reflect on his situation. He felt his life was passing by without moving forward, so he decided to return. Back home, and with the support of IOM, Dimitri started raising pigs.

Today, Dimitri is happy to be back and to have a source of income. He hopes to develop his activity in the years to come and finally go to Europe through regular means.

In the western area of Côte d’Ivoire, returnees and community members work together on a community-based market gardening project.

In Songon, 30 returnees and 20 community members work together on a plantation processing cassava into Attiéké “Made in Côte d’Ivoire” with the support of the National Rural Development Agency (ANADER), one of IOM’s reintegration partners.

Souleymane Sylla returned to Bouaké, Côte d’Ivoire from Algeria in 2018. Along with 80 other young people, he received training followed by technical and financial support for the creation of his business in the field of building and civil engineering. Today, he is an entrepreneur in the field of building and a source of inspiration for the youth of his community.

IOM, in partnership with the NGO Action-Entreprises, trained 80 young people, including 50 returnees and 30 community members, in construction skills. This training enabled the participants to rehabilitate a primary school in Bouaké-Gonfreville, Côte d’Ivoire, benefitting the whole community by creating social ties and introducing a new trade.

Ousmane, 35, returned from Libya to Côte d’Ivoire in November 2019. Specialized in shoe manufacturing, he is now in charge of a shoe repair workshop in the city of Daloa. He was supported by one of IOM’s reintegration partners, Care International.

Arouna Konaté returned from Niger in January 2019. Upon his return, he attended several trainings related to his field of activity, provided by partner CARE International, and he received material and financial support to start a welding business. Today, he manages a workshop in Abobo. 
Photo: IOM 2020 / Mohamed Diabaté
In September 2020 in Ghana, eight returnees supported to set up tailoring workshops produced 4,000 nose masks.

While this helped them to address the economic challenges the COVID-19 pandemic was posing on their livelihoods, they, at the same time, supported the Government of Ghana in its national COVID-19 response and helped people protect themselves and others from the virus.

The masks were distributed in collaboration with IOM partners, such as the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the European Union Delegation to Ghana, as well as Civil Society Organisations working in migration-prone communities in six regions (Western, Bono, Bono East, Ashanti, Ahafo, Northern regions).

Through a community-based reintegration project implemented in Takoradi, Ghana, 25 members of the community and returnees completed technical training, tailored to their education background and the needs of the local market. They were trained on skills such as operating heavy machinery but also financial literacy.

Jamilatu used to sell second-hand clothes in Accra. When the business faced challenges and a friend told her about an opportunity to travel to Libya for work, she decided to go.

One day, while in Libya, she was stopped by the police and was arrested because her passport had expired. Jamilatu came back to Ghana in 2018 together with her daughter. In March 2020, through the reintegration support she received under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, Jamilatu re-launched her business in Walewale, retailing secondhand clothing. But the spread of COVID-19 in the country affected her new business venture, and she needed to adapt.

She decided to diversify her business and invest into grains and cereals, and started to sell maize, rice, groundnuts and soy beans at the Ganga market in Walewale.

Today, her daughter is going to school, and with the profits of her business, Jamilatu is able to take care of her family, including her brother’s children.

*Photo: IOM Ghana / Geoffrey Buta, 2020.*

"I spent three months in prison with my infant daughter until I decided to return to Ghana with the help of IOM. It was the biggest relief for me and my daughter."
Arzouma returned from Algeria four years ago. His return was difficult: when he came back with no money in his pocket, family and friends alike turned their backs on him because of his failed attempt to migrate irregularly. He suffered a lot of discrimination and was laughed at by those around him.

The situation began to change when Arzouma set up his own spare parts business with IOM’s support. His father, a garage owner, is now a loyal customer. Today, Arzouma owns three stores in Ouagadougou. He has regained the trust of his relatives and is now regularly consulted on family decisions.

Being able to support himself and his granddaughter and to help the two apprentices he trains, is now his greatest pride. More than ever convinced that opportunities can be found in Burkina Faso, he no longer wishes to try the irregular migration adventure again. Now, if he travels, it will be for professional reasons: to pay for spare parts in Nigeria and come and sell them in Burkina Faso, so that his company grows further.

Before returning to Burkina Faso in December 2017, Kara, 36, spent a year and a half abroad. After his return, Kara Seydou completed a business training course and a training in soap making, an activity he was familiar with, as he used to sell soap in Côte d’Ivoire.

Today, established in Ouagadougou, Kara produces approximately 130 boxes of soap every four days. He has expanded his business, and hired five women. Each is paid 1,500 FCFA ($2.50) per day – more than the national average income of $2. In addition to gaining decent income, his employees are trained in soap-making skills. His dream is to elevate his business from an informal to a small-scale enterprise.

Temitope, 25, spent three years in Libya. She left Nigeria with the intention of going to Europe to find a better job and a better life. In Libya, she worked for two and a half years as a housekeeper, a situation that allowed her to save money to attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

One night, she embarked with 300 other passengers on a small makeshift boat bound for Europe. The boat sailed for three hours before being intercepted by Libyan coast guards who brought them back to land.

Back in Libya, Temitope worked for another six months before contacting IOM to return to Nigeria. Once home and with IOM’s support, she enrolled in business management training and opened a hardware store on the outskirts of Lagos. Today, her store helps her support herself and her baby.

Within five years, Temitope hopes to expand her business and sell other materials and tools.

Habi thought that she could easily earn money working as a maid in Libya and come back to take care of her children with some savings. In 2019, she sold all her belongings to pay for the trip. At three months pregnant, she crossed Benin and then Niger, but suffered a miscarriage on the road.

When she finally arrived in Libya, she and the group she was traveling with were immediately intercepted by soldiers, who took them to a camp before sending them back to Arlit in the north of Niger, where IOM offered her assistance. She spent two months in IOM transit centre in Arlit before she was transferred to the transit centre in Agadez.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, she remained there for seven months before being able to board a plane to Lagos. Upon her return, IOM invited her to attend a business management training before she opened a grocery store. Today, Habi uses the money she earns to support her family and to send her children to school.

Tounde, 27, dreamt of going to Europe, and when a friend promised her a good job there, Tounde agreed to travel with her. Tounde was only 21 at the time. After spending three years in Libya, she realized that her dream of going to Europe will not come true, Tounde decided to return to Nigeria. She managed to reach the Nigerian Embassy and was referred to IOM who supported her through the voluntary humanitarian return programme.

Upon her return, she began training in business management before embarking on a hair salon project. Today, she is grateful for IOM’s support, without which she says she does not know where she would be. Tounde’s new dream is to open a large hair salon, hire apprentices and have people come from all over town to get their hair done.

Itchik, 32, returned from Libya in 2018 after spending two years on the road in the hope of reaching Italy. After returning home, he began the reintegration process by joining a business management training before pursuing his project to make and sell clothes.

As part of a community-based reintegration project implemented in the Gambia, Ebrima runs the first bakery in his community. It is enhancing the food supply in the area, benefiting both his community and neighbouring border communities in Senegal.

In the Upper River Region of the Gambia, Musa teamed up with community members to set up and operate a mill. This project resulted in the reduction of manual labour for women within his community, since milling grain was previously a traditional and labour-intensive role done by women only. On top of this, parts of the project profits are being invested back into the community, to support local development work, such as improving access to clean water.

Rosamond returned from Libya in 2018 and opened a grocery shop. Little by little, she has been expanding it to meet the needs of her family.

In May 2017, influenced by his friends, Abdou Karim, 37, decided to migrate to Europe. But this migration journey was strewn with pitfalls and he did not make it. In October 2018, he returned to Senegal from Libya with IOM’s support, and settled in his village in the south of Senegal. Today, Karim farms a hectare and a half of land where he practises arboriculture, market gardening and keeping livestock.

Moussa returned from Algeria in 2018. Determined to overcome the difficulties he faced during his migratory journey and eager to do business in his community of origin in Kankan, Guinea, he set up the collective group called "Fasso Kany" with three other returnees. The three partners started farming and vegetable gardening, which offered a way for them to gain a sustainable income and to contribute to food self-sufficiency in their community. Photo: IOM Guinea, 2020.
Returning to Guinea in November 2017, Ibrahima decided to join a technical training course on glazing. After successfully completing it, he joined ten other returnees to launch a glazing workshop producing windows for the construction industry. Thanks to this activity, Ibrahima and the other members of the group are able to make ends meet.

Having been without news from her husband for months, Chettou concluded that he passed away and decided to return to Niger. After 12 years in Libya, she returned home with her four children, and is raising them alone with the help of her brother, who lives close by. Through the support she received from IOM, Chettou bought a plot of land and built a house for herself and her children, which she equipped with a small solar panel. She also purchased school supplies, food and clothing for her children. She also started raising goats and runs a shop that helps her provide for herself and her family.

Photo: IOM Niger / Monica Chiriac, 2019.
Upon their return from Libya in 2016, Bachir and Mohamadou met on the bus taking them from the capital of Niger to their home region of Tahoua. They attended a reintegration counseling session together, and decided to join forces to open a welding workshop. To this aim, they underwent technical training supported by IOM at the local vocational training centre, and secured a traineeship at a local workshop. This placement allowed them to gain experience and meet potential clients. With their training certificate in hand, they now want to open their own workshop with the equipment they received from IOM.

Photo: Bachir and Mohamadou with their trainer (centre), IOM Niger / Monica Chiriac, 2016.
With his first 750 chicks and all the materials received from IOM to set up a poultry farm, Oumar, a young Malian migrant returning from Spain, is able to start anew. IOM also supported his participation to a training course on poultry farming, to ensure he has all the skills needed for his venture.

Photo: IOM Mali / Moussa Tall, 2020.
Returning from Libya in 2019, Sory, passionate about welding, opted for metal carpentry as his economic reintegration project. He enrolled at a training centre to gain the skills needed to succeed in his project. At the end of this training, he received all the equipment he needed to set up shop. Thanks to his work, Sory earns enough to support himself. In turn, he gives other young people the chance to learn the trade in his workshop.

Photo: IOM Mali / Moussa Tall, 2020.
Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the European Union.

© 2021- EU-IOM Joint Initiative. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions.