



EU-IOM

Joint Initiative for
Migrant Protection
and Reintegration



STORIES OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

THIRD EDITION



In partnership with
the Government of The Gambia



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The stories featured in this publication are true and have been relayed by Gambians who have received return and reintegration assistance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The opinions expressed in the book are those of the protagonists and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the book do not imply the 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; to advance understanding of migration issues, to encourage social and economic development through migration, and to uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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EU-IOM

Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration

The **EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration: The Gambia** is part of a regional initiative covering and closely cooperating with 26 countries in North Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad region. It aims to facilitate the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants and to contribute to strengthening migration governance.

The Joint Initiative's inclusive approach involves key stakeholders, such as migrants' associations, community-based organizations and local communities to ensure that, in the future, Gambians will choose to migrate using regular means as a matter of choice, rather than necessity.

IOM works closely with the Government of The Gambia, particularly the Ministry of Interior, which has the mandate to lead on migration governance in the country.



Key Components of the Joint Initiative:

Reintegration

- Provision of reintegration assistance to returning Gambians
- Capacity building of national and local stakeholders to ensure sustainable reintegration activities

Awareness Raising

- Information and sensitization activities targeting the general public on the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration

Data Collection

- Collection and analysis of data on migration flows

RETURN

AND REINTEGRATION

The Gambia is an emerging democracy that has pledged to ensure the safety and security of citizens. However, a historically difficult social, political and economic environment under the former political regime created high levels of insecurity that led many young Gambians to leave the country on irregular migration routes in search of better lives.

Along the irregular migratory routes, migrants may face significant protection issues, including violence, exploitation and abuse at the hands of smugglers and traffickers.

Voluntary return can be an important protection measure. It is one of the options for stranded migrants facing dire conditions along the routes and who wish to return to their countries of origin, but do not have the necessary means to do so. Voluntary return is conducted with no prejudice to the principle of *non-refoulement*.

TAILORED APPROACH

The support follows a tailored approach, putting the rights and the needs of the migrant first.

For migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated migrant children and migrants with health needs, IOM follows specific procedures with proper safeguards in place. For unaccompanied minors, IOM engages in family tracing and family reunification.

A further **vulnerability assessment** is carried out after return and **reintegration assistance** is tailored to specific needs and opportunities. Many migrants return tired and traumatized and may not always be ready to start professional or skills development training straight away.

Thus, the value and duration of reintegration assistance is not fixed. The Joint Initiative does not foresee specific, one-size-fits-all packages.

SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

Once in their country of origin, returning migrants may encounter a number of challenges which can impact their ability to readjust to life and reestablish themselves, equally impacting other members of their community. The Joint Initiative aims at enabling returnees to reintegrate through a holistic approach that supports both migrants' and their communities' economic, social and psychosocial needs.

The involvement of communities highlights that reintegration is a two-way process between the returnee and the community, as reintegration has the potential to complement local development and mitigates drivers of irregular migration.

This is not a simple or short-term process, as the factors impacting the sustainability of reintegration are similar to those that led to the decision to migrate in the first place. Furthermore, additional factors resulting from the migration experience itself (e.g. debt, separation, trauma) must be taken into account.

An effective and comprehensive referral and partnership system is one of the key components of reintegration assistance. Whenever possible, referral to local partners and services constitutes a viable first option for returning migrants.

Reintegration Assistance may consist of:

- Referrals to programmes or services available in the country
- Medical care, psychosocial support or assistance for basic needs for the most vulnerable
- Support to pursue education or to enroll in vocational training
- Support for job insertion
- Support to set up or strengthen a small business as an individual, with other returnees (collective project) or with members of your community (community-based reintegration)

Return and Reintegration Statistics

(January 2017 – April 2019)

- Total Number of Returned Migrants: 4,194
- Total Number of Returnees Provided with Reintegration Assistance: 2,563
- Top 3 Reintegration Sectors:
 - Retail (39 per cent)
 - Construction (31 per cent)
 - Transport (14 per cent)



DEMBA

“Once you’re back, you hear all sorts of things said about you. You just need to be strong.”

Before I left for Libya in 2014, I was working both as a tailor and driver, but times were difficult. I wasn't satisfied with the money I was receiving. A friend of mine had left and arrived in Italy within two weeks and I thought I could do the same. None of my family knew that I was going to leave.

My difficulties along the journey started in Mali. I got captured the day I arrived, and they asked me to pay money before being released. Once free, I found work as a tailor in order to continue my journey because, at this point, I had no money left. After six months, I proceeded to Burkina Faso where I was asked to pay money at numerous checkpoints. Heading to Niger, we were attacked and all my money was stolen. It seemed that the further I went, the more difficulties I faced. After doing some more work, I was able to make the journey to Libya.

On the day I finally arrived, I was shot on my leg, which ended up broken. After this, I was very discouraged and decided my journey was over. I heard about IOM helping people who wished to return home, and I sought assistance.

When I came back, my family was so happy to see me again because they didn't hear from me for so long. After a week, I started driving again and, eventually, IOM supported me to open a tailoring shop. I currently employ three people. In the future, I hope to teach tailoring to more people. I also joined a group of returnees, the Youths Against Irregular Migration (YAIM). We use our stories to raise awareness on the *backway*.

People say that Gambian youths are lazy, but I believe we work really hard. We just need help and motivation.



JALIKA

“I hope to expand the shop with more goods and get my son to work in the shop.”

In January 2017, I left The Gambia to join my husband who was working in Libya. He asked me to join him and find domestic work, such as cleaning, laundry or cooking. I was aware of the risks but left with my 10-year-old daughter anyway, with the hope of earning money and supporting my family.

My daughter and I left through Senegal, to Mali and then Niger before making the journey to Libya through the desert. I spent one year in Libya working as a domestic worker for a Libyan family.

Still not earning enough income, I made the decision to cross to Italy but was unable to—there was no way to cross as weather conditions worsened. I finally thought coming back home was the best choice for me and my daughter. On our way back to The Gambia by land, we encountered IOM's voluntary return programme in Niamey.

IOM facilitated my return through a flight from Niger. I am happy to be back home safe and sound. After my arrival, I received reintegration assistance partially in the form of a grocery shop in my neighbourhood.

The business was doing well until thieves broke into the shop and stole goods and valuables. Through a monitoring assessment, IOM was able to provide the rest of my allocated assistance through adjustment support, which stabilized my income. I was deeply saddened by the theft, but the additional support has renewed my confidence to making a better life at home

Today, I use my income to support my children's education. I already have what I want at home and I'm making a living from it. I am happy.

RECORDING STUDIO

KEVIN



**WE ALSO RENT
MUSICAL SET**

“It still feels strange to be back, but I'm learning how to adapt.
I don't ever want to take the journey again.”

My mother is a Gambian; my father, Sierra Leonean. I was born in The Gambia, but my father decided for us to go back to Sierra Leone when my mother passed away. I was a little boy at that time. My father, who was a medical doctor, gave me a good life. He passed away in 2014 and I had no one there with me.

My dad's younger brother, who was still living in The Gambia, brought me back to live with him and his family. When I returned, life was very foreign to me. A friend in Algeria told me there were a lot of job opportunities available in North Africa, and he convinced me to the journey.

At the age of 15, I decided to leave without informing my uncle. At that time, I didn't know what I was thinking. My uncle was planning to take me to school, but I just wanted to leave.

The journey was so hard—150 people sharing a small room; no food and water. I spent one year and eight months in Algeria as an electrician, then I decided to head to Morocco to find my way to Spain. I made numerous attempts but was always sent back to Algeria. I had very little money left but thought I've come too far to return home.

Realizing I was wasting my time, I started planning my return home but didn't know how to. Suddenly the Algerian authorities sent us to the Nigerien border. There I encountered IOM, who contacted my uncle.

Shortly after my return to The Gambia, I received counselling from IOM on reintegration support. I decided to assist my uncle by upgrading his business. We rent musical sets, sell flash drives and repair computers. Things are going easy now. My focus is on going back to school soon. I just feel lucky to come back alive after seeing people die on the journey.

A portrait of a smiling Black man with short dreadlocks and a goatee, wearing a red polo shirt. He is standing outdoors in front of a light-colored wall with a blue wooden shutter and a dark panel. A green rectangular box with the name 'PAUL' in white capital letters is overlaid on the right side of the image. The red shirt has a white logo on the left chest that reads 'House of Joy' in a script font, with 'THE GAMBIA' in a smaller sans-serif font below it.

PAUL

House of Joy
THE GAMBIA

“At the end of my training program, I landed a job at one of the biggest ICT companies in The Gambia, Right Click Company.”

Before I travelled to Libya through the *backway* in June 2014, I was working as a computer technician and pool cleaner at hotels and residential apartments. Due to peer pressure, I decided to embark on the journey. Many of my friends made it to Italy, so I decided to give it a go despite being somewhat aware of the risks.

I went through Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Along the journey, I ran into all kinds of trouble, such as extortion and abuse from authorities at various checkpoints. I would describe the journey on a tight truck as being full of turbulent weather and high temperatures, with little breathing space. Many developed illnesses and mental health issues. It took several weeks before reaching Tripoli. Over one year in Libya, I made two unsuccessful attempts to cross the Mediterranean.

On my third attempt, a fight broke out off the shore. As the captain began shooting people, I jumped off the boat. Thanks to my background as a pool cleaner, I saved someone who was unable to swim. After that, I didn't feel safe anymore.

In April 2017, I was assisted to return to The Gambia. Upon my return, IOM provided me support to re-establish my information and communications technology (ICT) business—selling and repairing electronic devices. In December 2018, IOM further referred me to a training program to assist in organizing the largest music festival in the country: Open Mic. Through my training in music and entertainment management, I was able to land a job with an established ICT company.

My business is growing and I really enjoy my new job. There's an expanding ICT market here, which only we, young Gambians, can take advantage of.



ROSAMOND

“I would never encourage anyone to travel through irregular means, as it is risky.”

I studied Accountancy and Finance and was employed at a plastic production company, but lost my job when it shut down. Having lost my father, I was the breadwinner of my family—I had to pay for my brother’s college tuition fees, take care of my mom and raise my daughter as a single mother.

I saved some money, but it was not enough to settle the family expenses, so I decided to use it to leave the country. In December 2017, I left for Libya through Senegal, Mali and Niger but got stranded in Algeria. There, I inquired about job opportunities but was told females risked being exploited. I eventually earned some money by working for a women’s charity and cooking dinner for other migrants.

One day, thieves broke into my room and threatened to rape me if I did not hand over all my money. Fortunately I managed to escape, but I no longer felt safe. Back home, my mom suffered from a stroke; my daughter, from asthma.

I heard about IOM’s voluntary return programme and went to Niger, where I got on a charter flight in June 2018. After one night at a temporary accommodation, I rushed to the hospital to pay my daughter’s medical bills. She was discharged in three days. My mom had mixed feelings—sad at how much was spent on the journey; happy that I returned safely. At first, I was depressed to be back home without anything to do.

Eventually, I had my counselling appointment with IOM to begin my reintegration process. I decided to open a grocery shop with IOM’s support to purchase goods. My business is going well. It is located on a highway and easily accessible by commuters. My income supports me to pay for my meals, rent and daughter’s tuition fees. In the future, I would like to travel through regular means to pursue further education, earn a good degree and land a good job.



SAMBA

“To come back and see your family is a great feeling.”

A friend and I used to work together as tourist taxi drivers. He left for Algeria and asked me to join him there. I left in March 2015 but, when I got to Niger, I changed my mind about going to Algeria. People informed me that the road from Niger to Algeria was risky, so I decided to go to Libya instead and hopefully cross to Italy.

Life in Libya is something else. You can't even explain it. Many times, I was hired to work and, in the end, was denied my pay. I attempted to cross to Italy three times. On the first two attempts, I ended up in prison.

The third and final attempt was the eye opener for me. Our boat capsized at sea and so many people lost their lives. We kept waving for someone to save us for hours, to no avail. After two days, some fisherman found us and saved us.

That was the moment I decided to come back home. IOM came to our camp in Libya and offered voluntary return assistance.

Once back in The Gambia, IOM helped me to set up a bar and restaurant. Wanting to continue diversifying my skills, I heard about the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) on the radio. I applied for their five-month livestock training and was fortunately selected. Now I invest in livestock. I bought groundnut, cassava and maize seeds for my farm; four goats, two sheep and chicks for my poultry.

My experience in Libya was the worst I've had. I was desperate to come home, so I thank god that I am back home alive. I can say that my life is better now. It can be challenging to get back the money you invested, but I am hoping to expand my business soon.



SANKUNG

“Life is better now, free of all the stress that I used to face in Libya.”

Before I left for Libya in 2013, I was a vehicle electrician. I embarked on the *backway* due to peer pressure and pressure to alleviate my family's hardships—to provide them a better standard of living.

I faced a lot of difficulties on the journey, especially in Niger where I worked as a laborer. We were attacked out of nowhere, and they took all our money and possessions. I had to continue working, raising money to make it to Libya.

After finally making to Libya, I found work as a vehicle electrician again. I saved some money that I was able to send back home to my family, as well as to help some Gambian friends struggling in Libya. Nonetheless, the situation in Libya was very bad and we were all hoping to try crossing the Mediterranean.

Believing I was so close to Europe, my father helped pay for my first two, amounting to GMD 35,000 (USD 700) each. On the first attempt, our boat began to capsize. We were lucky to be rescued. On the second attempt, we were captured by the Libyan Coast Guard and taken to prison, where I spent almost two years.

The conditions were horrible. They used to beat us like animals, there was never enough food and many Gambians had untreated medical conditions. Eventually we were visited by IOM, who facilitated my voluntary return to The Gambia in 2017.

Back home, through IOM's reintegration support, I invested in becoming a taxi driver. It is my life now. I will never think of going to Europe through the *backway* ever again.



Meat pie

SULAYMAN

“My advice to youths who want to migrate is to do it safely.

I decided to embark on the backway because I wasn't making enough profit from my business. The journey was a difficult one. We faced a lot of troubles, including hunger and thirst, seeing people being sold and people falling off trucks due to physical ailments. When I got to Libya, I worked different jobs in order to survive, including painting, washing clothes and masonry.

One day, we were attacked and all my money was stolen. I decided to come back home. When I came back home, I didn't feel that I failed. I always tell people that it wasn't meant to be. I didn't do anything for seven months after I came back, and then I decided to start a business. I started with only GMD 1500 (USD 30), selling fish and meat pies.

Through IOM's support, I was able to expand my business into a restaurant. We now sell breakfast, lunch and dinner along Kairaba Avenue, a major highway.

Recently, I was invited by IOM to operate a stall at the 13th Trade Fair Gambia International. This was the first time I participated the trade fair, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity. It helped me make a lot contacts, which to me is most important. I got to meet so many people from different walks of life, and I believe this will go a long way for my business. I also had the honour to receive a certificate upon completion from The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCl). I would like to participate in next year's fair.



Credits

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