



RETURNING HOME?

THE REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES FACING CHILD AND YOUTH RETURNEES FROM LIBYA TO NIGERIA.

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This report was authored by Vasileia Digidiki and Jacqueline Bhabha

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AU:	African Union
AVR:	Assisted Voluntary Return
AVRR:	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CMR:	Central Mediterranean Route
CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EMR:	Eastern Mediterranean Route
EU:	European Union
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
MENA:	Middle East North Africa
MoU:	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF:	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGN:	Nigerian Naira
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
SC:	Separated children
UMC:	Unaccompanied migrant children
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF:	United Nations Children’s Fund
VHR:	Voluntary Humanitarian Return
VHRR:	Voluntary Humanitarian Return and Reintegration

KEY TERMS

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration: “Administrative, logistical, financial and reintegration support to rejected asylum seekers, victims of trafficking in human beings, stranded migrants, qualified nationals and other migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country who volunteer to return to their countries of origin.”¹

Children and Youth: “The United Nations defines adolescence as the period between ages 10 and 19 and youth as the period between 15 and 24. A ‘child’ is anyone under the age of 18, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).”² This report refers to two age groups: Children (age 17) and youth (age 18-24). The two age groups together are referred as “young migrants”.³

Irregular migration: “Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of a destination country it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of a sending country, the irregularity is for example seen in cases in which a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfill the administrative requirements for leaving the country. There is, however, a tendency to restrict the use of the term “illegal migration” to cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.”⁴

Migrant: “IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.”⁵

Separated children: “Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.”⁶

Smuggling: “The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” Smuggling, contrary to trafficking, does not require an element of exploitation, coercion, or violation of human rights.⁷

Sustainable Reintegration: “Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity.”⁸

¹ IOM. (2011). Glossary on migration. International Migration Law, 25. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf

² UNICEF & IOM. (2017, September). Harrowing journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf

³ The UN define youth as “those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years [...]”. Migration Data Portal. Child and Young migrants. Available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/child-and-young-migrants>

⁴ IOM. UN Migration: Key migration terms. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

⁵ IOM. UN Migration: Key migration terms.

⁶ Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children. (2004). Available at: https://www.unicef.org/protection/IAG_UASCs.pdf

⁷ Art. 3(a), UN Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

⁸ IOM (2017). Towards an integrated approach to reintegration in the context of return migration https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/Towards-an-Integrated-Approach-to-Reintegration.pdf

Trafficking in persons: “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”⁹

Unaccompanied children: “Children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.”¹⁰

Voluntary Humanitarian Return Program: This program aims to provide a safe journey home for migrants who find themselves in a precarious situation and wish to return to their home countries but have little means to do so. Upon return, the program, run by IOM, offers reintegration assistance to further aid returnees.

Vulnerable migrants: “Vulnerability within a migration context is defined as the diminished capacity of an individual or group to resist, cope with, or recover from violence, exploitation, abuse, and violation(s) of their rights.”¹¹

⁹ Art. 3(a), UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

¹⁰ Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children. (2004). Available at: https://www.unicef.org/protection/IAG_UASCs.pdf

¹¹ IOM. (2017). Global Compact Thematic Paper: Protection of Human Rights. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Protection-of-Human-Rights-and-Vulnerable-Migrants.pdf



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2017, 19,371 migrants of all ages opted for return from Libya to their countries of origin.¹² Taking stock of the lack of accessible legal migration opportunities and the grave hardships associated with the stay in Libya, these migrants elected to receive assistance and safely return home. Between 2017 and late October 2018, 10,674 children returned safely from Libya to their home African countries under the Voluntary Humanitarian Return Program (VHR), operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with governments in the countries of origin. To date, little is known about the many challenges returnees face post-return, a considerable concern given the vulnerability of migrant returnees, and of child migrant returnees in particular.

To address this concern, IOM commissioned a pilot study in Nigeria, one of the main countries of origin for many young migrants, and the site of a substantial number of recent voluntary returns of male and female children and young people from Libya.¹³ A central goal of the pilot study, was to collect empirical data on the challenges, needs, aspirations and long-term prospects of returnees, as well as the architecture of assistance available during the process of reintegration. The objective of this data collection was to learn from the young migrants' experiences in order to generate an evidence base for a series of rights-respecting recommendations to promote sustainable reintegration and capacity building of government agencies involved in supporting returnees.¹⁴

The pilot study was conducted in July 2018 in the four States of Nigeria with the highest number of VHR children and youth: Delta, Edo, Lagos and Ondo. Primary data were collected through a quantitative survey administered to 119 VHR beneficiaries aged 17 to 24. Secondary data were gathered through an extensive desk review of literature on issues of return, sustainable reintegration, child and youth aspirations and conditions in Nigeria.

¹² Source IOM.

¹³ UNICEF & IOM. (2017, September). Harrowing journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

¹⁴ For more information on the levels and dimensions of sustainable reintegration see also Hall, S. / IOM. (2017). Setting standards for an integrated approach to reintegration Geneva: IOM.

The first part of this report provides a broad overview of the situation in Libya, a major destination for migrants hoping to transit on, via the Central Mediterranean Route, to Europe. It also discusses the context and operations of the VHR program, including the situation facing young migrants on their return to Nigeria.

The second part of the report describes the methodology used during the pilot study, focusing on the steps taken to obtain reliable data, the acknowledged limitations of the study, and lessons learned for future studies.

The third part presents the migratory experience of young Nigerians participating in this study, focusing on the reasons why they decided to embark on a migration journey, their individual trajectory, including the risks they faced, the conditions in the transit zones, and the reasons driving their decision to opt for return

The fourth part of the report presents returnees' own perspectives on their reintegration realities. It discusses some of the difficulties they face, describes the current reintegration efforts in place and analyzes how personal and societal factors influence the young migrants' experience of reintegration as a positive or negative outcome of their return.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations to assist governments and international aid organizations in crafting rights based and context-appropriate reintegration efforts that incorporate the future aspirations of the young people themselves.

INTRODUCTION

"We need to work toward structural and long-term solutions because we don't know what the future holds"
-European Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos (2018)

The current scale of international child and youth migration is staggering. In 2017, there were 258 million people worldwide living outside their country of birth, 30 million of whom were children.¹⁵ Though increasingly recognized as a significant constituency within current global migration flows, children and youth on the move have received fragmented and inconsistent attention and inadequate support despite a number of high profile agreements crafted to better protect their rights.¹⁶ National responses, particularly in some popular migration destination regions, have resembled "crisis" discourse that casts refugees and other forced migrants first and foremost as threats to national security and domestic resources. Consequently, measures to effectively exclude migrants have taken priority over the development of strategies geared to migrant protection. A notable spill-over of these exclusionary measures has been the "externalization" or "extra-territorialization" of migration control, as relatively well-resourced states have negotiated deals with their neighbors in an attempt to stem migrant arrivals on their shores.¹⁷ Examples of these processes include the measures evident at the southern border of the US, and in the region surrounding Australia. In the case of Europe, bilateral agreements have significantly reduced migration flows to Europe,¹⁸ measures that have a direct impact on the lives, wellbeing and migration plans of large numbers of vulnerable children and youth on the move.

The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) of migrants to their countries of origin has long been a component of migration management. The program is available to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries, who wish to return to their home countries.¹⁹ In the case of Libya, where migrants are subject to severe human rights violations, the International Organization for Migration operates its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) program, a version of AVRR, offering a safe and viable mechanism for migrants to return home with the support of the returnees' national government. The program aims to improve the mechanics of humanitarian return by providing conditions that enable migrants to reach informed decisions, assessing migrants before departure to identify vulnerabilities, ensuring that assistance is provided to them upon return home, and supporting them through their reintegration process within the home community.²⁰ Since the June 2016 partnership agreement spearheaded by the European Commission and key partner countries, the rates of IOM mediated voluntary humanitarian returns of migrants from Libya have increased to

¹⁵ UNICEF. (December 2018). Child Migration. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>

¹⁶ See for example: Bhabha, J. (2018). Can we solve the migration crisis.; Price, A. (2016). Enduring solutions in the midst of "Crisis": Refugee children in Europe. In M.O. Ensor, E.M. Gozdziaik. (Eds). Children and forced migration: durable solutions during transient years. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁷ Baldwin-Edwards, M. Blitz, B. & Crawley, H. (2018). The politics of evidence-based policy in Europe's 'migration crisis'. Journal of Ethnic and migration studies. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1468307?needAccess=true>

¹⁸ UNHCR. (July, 2018). Refugee situation. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean.>; The New York Times. (June, 2018). Migration to Europe is down sharply. So is it still a "crisis?". Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/27/world/europe/europe-migrant-crisis-change.html> ;

¹⁹ IOM. (2011). Glossary on migration. International Migration Law, 25. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf

²⁰ IOM. (2016). Towards an integrated approach to reintegration in the context of return. Geneva: IOM.

about 16,120 in 2018²¹ and 7,759 between January and September in 2019. In 2018, 64% of the young VHR beneficiaries returned to Nigeria, Niger, Guinea Conakry and Mali.²² In 2019, migrants returned to 26 countries across Africa and Asia. 23% of these migrants returned from Libyan detention centers.²³

While data on the process of return is available, information about the challenges returnees face and their assessment of the experience of return is limited. The information that is available mostly addresses access to school and employment, as well as food insecurity. What emerges from the information available is that the multidimensional challenges faced by returnees may impede effective reintegration and prevent returnees from achieving a sustainable livelihood.²⁴ These challenges are often a reflection of the factors that propelled migration in the first place, on occasion exacerbated by new debts arising out of the unsuccessful recent migration attempt. The problems that returnees and their families face are difficult to overcome without targeted and consistent assistance, particularly as the home countries to which young migrants return have limited supportive infrastructure and capacity. One consequence of the lack of adequate support post return is the attraction of renewed irregular and risky migration. The lure of future irregular migration affects both young migrants who have recently returned (repeat migration) and peers with whom these plans are discussed and developed (related migration). To date, information about the reintegration challenges facing returnees and their families is limited, as is a detailed understanding of the extent to which family and community members are able to effectively engage with the reintegration process.

Robust and appropriate reintegration support to returnees is a critical step in the process of reducing returnees' vulnerability to hardship and mitigating factors that can lead to risky and irregular re-migration.²⁵ Given the large numbers of returnees from Libya that Central and Western African countries of origin have received since 2017, more information about these countries' capacities and/or needs to achieve sustainable reintegration of child and youth returnees is urgently needed.

The study presented here is a first attempt to address these knowledge gaps and provide a basis for improved reintegration efforts. IOM Regional office for Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in partnership with the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, conducted a pilot study in July 2018 in four states in Nigeria, the West African country with the largest current number of VHR child and youth from Libya. The study's goal was to document the reintegration support available to children and youth post return and to investigate the challenges they faced. The study also set out to explore the readiness of family, community and state structures in Nigeria to contribute to children's and youth constructive reintegration into the society they had left.

Data gathered from this study are intended to inform a larger study to be carried out in three African countries with high levels of young migrant returnees.²⁶

²¹ IOM UN Migration. (December 2018). IOM Libya Voluntary Humanitarian Return. Available at: <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---voluntary-humanitarian-return-update-1-15-december-2018>

²² CNBC Africa. (2018). Voluntary Humanitarian Return flights resume January 1 as UN Migration Agency continues efforts to assist migrants in Libya. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/africa/apo/2018/01/03/voluntary-humanitarian-return-flights-resume-january-1-as-un-migration-agency-continues-efforts-to-assist-migrants-in-libya/>

²³ IOM UN Migration. (September 30, 2019). IOM Libya Update. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iomlibyaupdate-16-30september2019.pdf>

²⁴ Schuster, L. & Majidi, N. (2015). Deportation stigma and re-migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(4), 635-652

²⁵ IOM. (2016). Towards an integrated approach to reintegration in the context of return.

²⁶ Ibid.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 The unfolding crisis in the Mediterranean basin: pushing migrants into dangerous migration routes

Human mobility is not a new phenomenon in the Mediterranean basin. Indeed, the movement of ideas, goods and people across the shores of the three continents that make up the basin define the very essence of the region.²⁷ In recent years, the Mediterranean basin has become one of the largest migration corridors for African migrants, with the North African sub region a key hub of transit activity.²⁸ As uprisings throughout the Arab World, initially known as the “Arab Spring”, unfolded, many of the Northern African countries in this region, including Libya, have become increasingly dangerous for refugees and migrants.

The changing landscape in the Arab world and the rapid emergence of migration as a key survival strategy for hundreds of thousands, including children and youth fleeing death, violent conflict and persecution, as well as those seeking employment and better education opportunities, prompted restrictive responses by Europe. In 2011, only a few months after the outbreak of unrest and military intervention in North Africa following the fall of Gaddafi, Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on security with Libya to prevent the unauthorized departure of migrants from Libya.

In post-revolutionary Libya, a group of militias quickly established a transnationally networked human smuggling operation.²⁹ Without a legally recognized mechanism to oversee border control and migration on site, these well-armed groups progressively established their control over the flows of refugees and migrants across and beyond the Libyan territory. In 2014, as Libya’s efforts to transition to democracy led to a new civil war, 170,100 migrants fled Libya toward Italian shores. As the Libyan government was further destabilized, the strength of the criminal networks functioning within Libya grew, increasing the volume of migrant flows to Europe. Between 2015 and 2018, 478,017 migrants arrived in Italy from Libya, and 65,383 in Spain.³⁰

These unprecedented migratory flows from Libya prompted EU migration control measures, just as the very sizable Turkey/Greece migration across the Balkan route had done earlier. Under pressure because of the scale of migrant arrivals as well as the death toll in the Mediterranean sea, in early 2017 the European Council established the Malta Declaration and Italy signed another Memorandum of Understanding with Libya to actualize a more effective system of migration control.³¹ Opting to strengthen migration control, the EU outsourced the task, offering financial and technical support to establish a return process, and promoting readmission agreements and cooperation with countries of origin.

²⁷ Hadj- Abdou, L. (2016). Europe’s “Rio Grande:” (Im)mobility in the Mediterranean. In . Toperich & A. Mullins, (Eds.). *A New Paradigm: Perspectives on the Changing Mediterranean*. Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations.

²⁸ IOM. (2018). *World Migration report*. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en.pdf

²⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (December, 2016). “Detained and dehumanized”. *Report on human rights abuses against migrants in Libya*. Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/DetainedAndDehumanised_en.pdf

³⁰ UNHCR. (December, 2016). *Operational portal, Mediterranean Situation: Italy, sea arrivals*. Available at: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>; IOM. (2019). *Flow monitoring Europe*. Available at: <http://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>

³¹ *Memorandum of understanding between Libya and Italy*. (February, 2017). Available at : <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/feb/it-libya-memo-immigration-border-security-2-2-17.pdf>

Table1: Arrivals from Libya after the uprisings in the Arab World³²

YEAR	2011 ³³	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ITALY	61,000	13,200	42,925	170,100	153,842	181,436	119,369	23,370
SPAIN				12,037	16,936	14,605	28,349	65,383

As flows toward Europe continue, the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) has become the site of a massive human smuggling and trafficking operation, while the conditions of migrants in Libya, daily exposed to egregious human rights violations, deteriorate.³⁴ As a result, migration flows have begun moving westward, with Spain witnessing record migrant sea arrivals from Morocco in 2017 and 2018.³⁵

1.2 Libya: when a beacon of hope becomes a dead end

Since 2011, violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have steadily increased in Libya, with the general state of lawlessness and the weakness of judicial institutions leaving few avenues for victim redress.³⁶ Not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and without a functional process in place for assessing refugee claims and granting protection, Libya is the setting for frequent occurrences of refoulement or chain-refoulement for stranded migrants.³⁷

Until late 2018, 663,445 migrants had been identified in Libya, 65% of whom (434,391) originated from Sub-Saharan countries.³⁸ 9% of these were children, with approximately 20,000 of them unaccompanied (33% of the total child migrant population stranded in the country).³⁹ The number of those eligible for refugee status is unknown. By the end of April 2018, UNHCR had registered 52,031 refugees and asylum seekers through coordinated efforts with other humanitarian partners,⁴⁰ efforts that were severely constrained by the strict Libyan mandate that only migrants arriving from a subset of seven African countries could be considered refugees or asylum seekers.⁴¹

³² UNHCR. (December, 2016). Operational portal, Mediterranean Situation: Italy, sea arrivals; IOM. (2019). Flow monitoring Europe.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Duetsche Welle. (November 11, 2017). UN: EU cooperation with Libya has led to “unimaginable horrors” for migrants. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/un-eu-cooperation-with-libya-has-led-to-unimaginable-horrors-for-migrants/a-41380660>

³⁵ European Council. (2019). Infographic – Migration flows: Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean routes. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eastern-and-central-mediterranean-routes-09-2017/>

³⁶ Home Office. (January, 2018). Country policy and information Note Libya: Security and humanitarian situation. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673747/Libya_-_Security_Situation_-_CPIN_-_v3.0.pdf

³⁷ Palm, A. (October 2017). The Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding: The baseline of a policy approach aimed at closing all doors to Europe? Eu Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy. Available at: <http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/the-italy-libya-memorandum-of-understanding-the-baseline-of-a-policy-approach-aimed-at-closing-all-doors-to-europe/>

³⁸ IOM. (December, 2018). DTM. Libya- migrant report 23. Available at: <http://www.globaldtm.info/libya-migrant-report-23-nov-dec-2018/>

³⁹ IOM. Displacement Tracking Matrix: Libya’s migrant report round 23 November – December 2018. Available at: <http://www.globaldtm.info/Libya/>

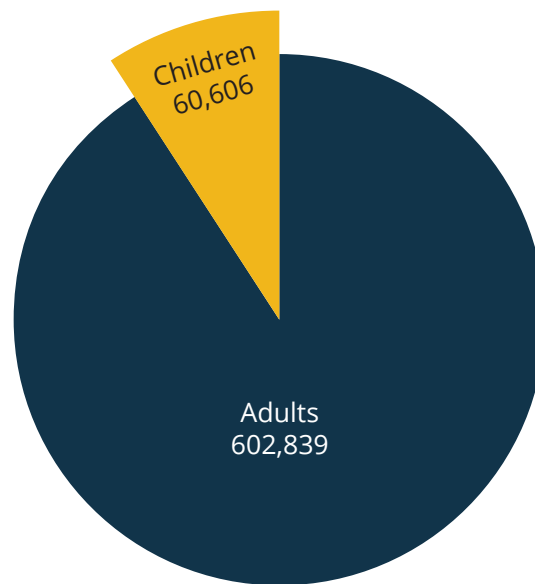
⁴⁰ UNHCR. (April, 2018). Alternatives to detention in Libya. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/One%20pager%20-%20Alternatives%20to%20detention%20-%20April%202018.pdf>

⁴¹ UNHCR.(2017). Central Mediterranean Route: Working on alternatives to dangerous journeys: UNHCR Central Mediterranean Risk Mitigation Strategy. Available at: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Risk%20Mitigation%20Strategy%20for%20Central%20Med%20Route%20-%20October%202017.pdf>

In 2010, the Libyan government decreed that all undocumented people found in the country would be held in detention centers.⁴² This has resulted in the detention of large numbers of migrants in facilities where they lack access to basic care and protection. The mandatory detention policy includes children, asylum seekers or other populations who may be eligible for international or humanitarian protection.⁴³

Twenty-six official detention centers were operating in the country⁴⁴ in January 2019, holding roughly 3,856 migrants.⁴⁵ Reported figures have oscillated between 1,000 and 7,000, between the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2019, based on how many centers are operational or on access granted to IOM teams. Data on unofficial detention centers, and the numbers of migrants detained in them, are lacking. Anecdotal reports about these facilities, to which recognized aid organizations have no access, detail rampant human rights violation, including migrant abuse, exploitation, torture, and death.⁴⁶

In response to this situation, the European Union, the African Union and the United Nations have increased their collaborative efforts to return and reintegrate migrants to their home countries.⁴⁷ This policy is facilitated by IOM and supporting governments through the VHR program.



Breakdown of Migrants in Libya

⁴² Article 11 of law No. 19.

⁴³ UN News. (June, 2018). UNHCR raises alarm over deadly detention centre escape in Libya. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/06/1011141>

⁴⁴ IOM. (February, 2019). Libya – Detention Center Profile Generator. Available at: <http://www.globaldtm.info/Libya/>

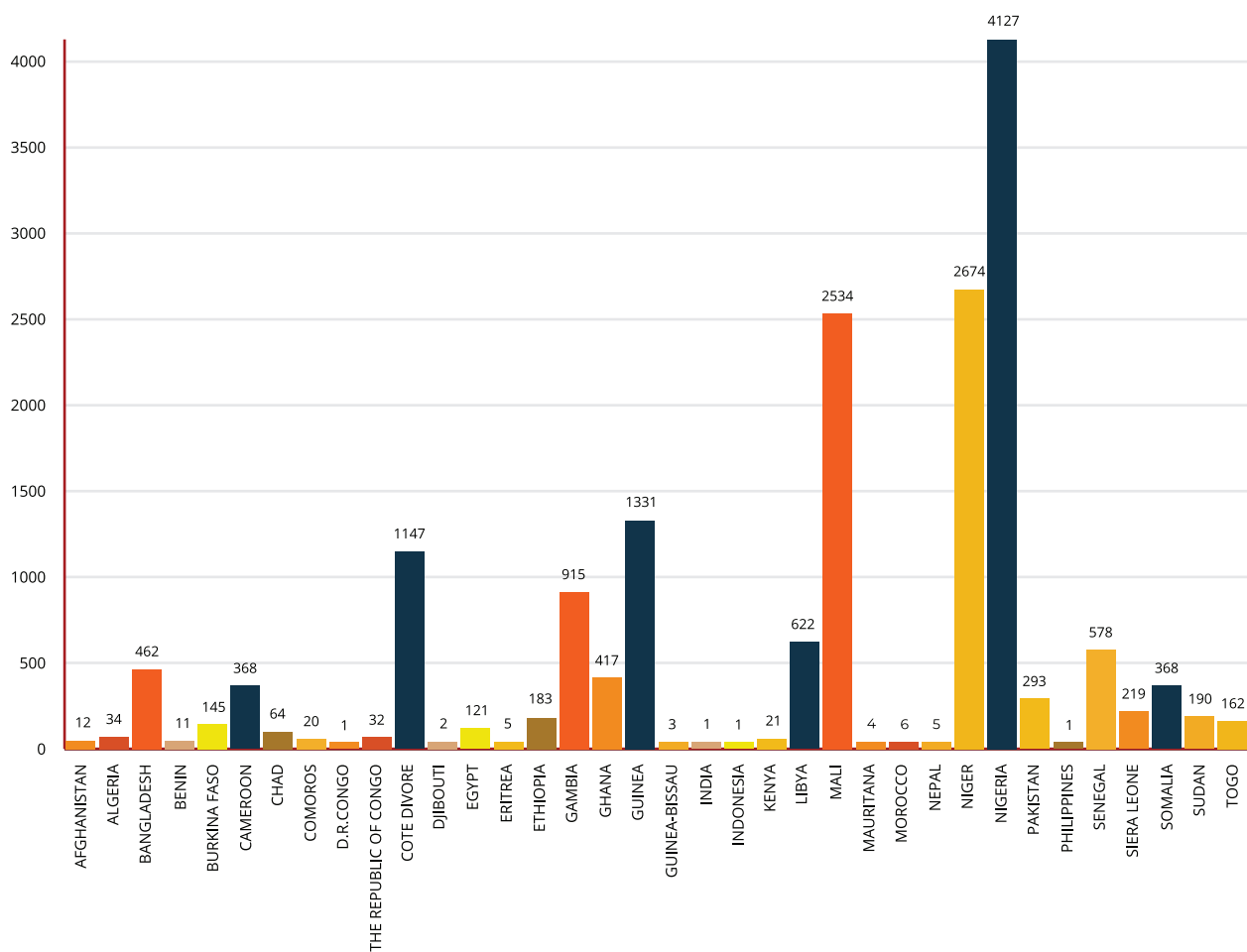
⁴⁵ <https://www.globaldtm.info/libya-detention-centre-profile-generator-january-2019/>

⁴⁶ UN News. (June, 2018). UNHCR raises alarm over deadly detention centre escape in Libya.

⁴⁷ European Commission. (February, 2018). Delivering on commitments: new programmes to protect migrants and support return and reintegration in Africa worth €150 million adopted. Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-1143_en.htm

1.3 Voluntary Humanitarian Return: prospects and challenges

Through the VHR program, migrants unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wishing to return to their home countries are given administrative, logistical and financial assistance to enable them to return to their home.⁴⁸ In the case of Libya, this program also provides a way to end detention and human rights violations. The conditions that breed human rights violations in Libya also generate significant challenges for implementing the VHR program. Voluntary Humanitarian Returns are an option only for migrants hosted within the community or detained in official, government run detention centers. Those held in clandestine prisons or unofficial detention centers not under DCIM (Department for Combating Illegal Migration) where the government and aid organizations have no control and access, may face increased constraints in accessing the program.⁴⁹



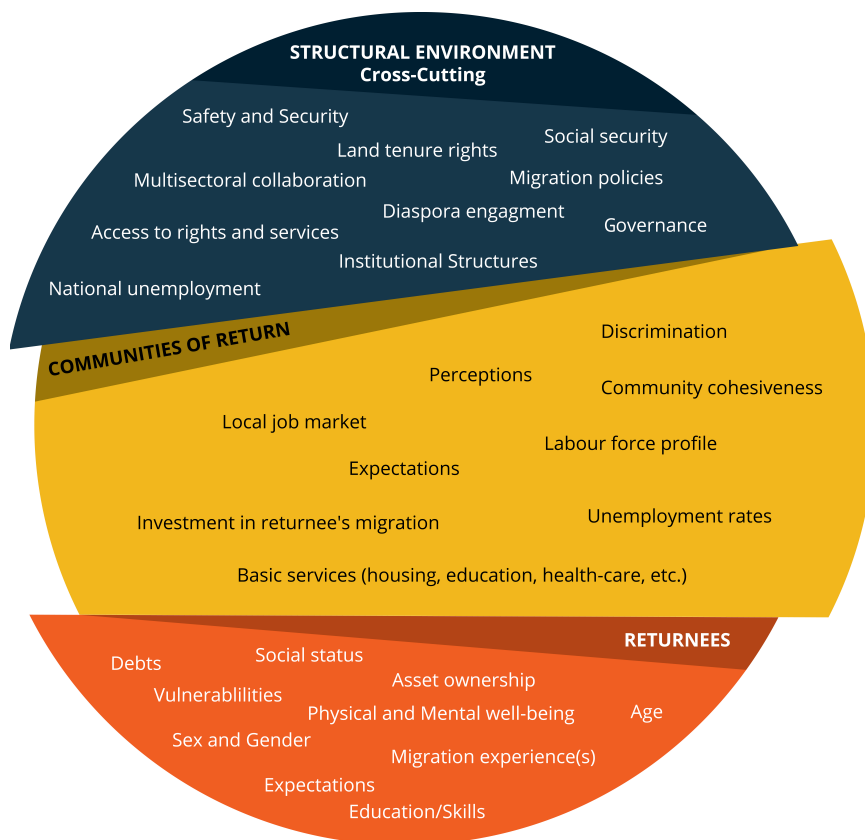
VHR by country of return in 2018

⁴⁸ IOM. (2011). Glossary on migration. International migration law, 25. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf

⁴⁹ IOM UN Migration. (April, 2019). IOM Statement: Protecting Migrants in Libya Must be Our Primary Focus. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-statement-protecting-migrants-libya-must-be-our-primary-focus>

In 2018, IOM facilitated 17,080 returns from Libya under the VHR scheme. Of those, nearly 900 were young people under the age of 24 returned to Nigeria. The successful reintegration of these children and youth remains challenging as resources necessary to support the complex needs that arise are limited.⁵⁰ The success of a returned migrant's reintegration is influenced by individual, familial, societal, and structural factors that span both practical and affective domains. At an individual level, debts incurred to support the journey abroad combine with feelings of disappointment, shame or a sense of failure, as well as exposure to hostility or criticism, whether actual or perceived, from family and acquaintances. A key factor in facilitating or impeding the reintegration process is the strength of social networks and financial resources. Other relevant considerations relate to the nature of family dynamics (harmonious or conflictual), the exposure to violence upon return, and the overall reaction of the migrant to his or her recent migration experience. At a societal level, access to basic services, employment opportunities, as well as legal mechanisms to ensure basic human rights can greatly facilitate or hinder reintegration efforts.⁵¹

Reintegration efforts that combine individualized assistance with community-based initiatives, while mitigating factors that drive migratory pressures, are critical first-steps toward effective reintegration, particularly in home countries with already under-resourced social welfare systems. In the absence of holistic reintegration efforts, many returnees eventually resort to re-migration as their only survival strategy.



Factors affecting sustainable reintegration

⁵⁰ IOM. (2017) Towards an integrated approach to reintegration in the context of return migration.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1.4 Why focus on Nigeria?

Nigerians have long felt powerful pressures to leave their rich but extremely stratified country, both because of violent political conflicts in some regions and because of extreme economic pressures. From 2015 onwards, Nigeria has been one of the leading African country of origin for refugees and other forced African migrants traveling to Europe by sea. In 2016, Nigerian children and young people (predominantly women) aged between 15 and 24 made up more than 20% of asylum applicants in Italy.⁵²

The backdrop to this exodus is noteworthy. Economic inequality and related poverty, a lack of opportunities for youth as well as unrealistic expectations concerning economic opportunities abroad are among the factors driving current migration flows. Despite being one of the world's largest oil producers, half of the country's population lives on less than \$1.90 per day, resulting in an estimated 87 million Nigerians living in poverty.⁵³ Corruption and misappropriation of public resources exacerbate the differences between rich and poor, increasing the struggle of average Nigerians.⁵⁴ Under-spending on public services has led to poor health services, limited sanitation and safe drinking water, and more than 10 million children out of school.⁵⁵ 43.3% of young Nigerians aged 15 to 24 are either unemployed or underemployed.⁵⁶

These circumstances are compounded by the impact of extremism in the country. Since 2009, the belligerent activities of Boko Haram have claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people and displaced more than 2 million people across Northern Nigeria. Women, children, and youth are often targets, both recruits for suicide bombing and victims of predatory capture, as the infamous 2014 kidnapping of over 100 school girls highlighted.⁵⁷ Clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders have compounded the instability. In the first half of 2018, over 1,000 people were killed and 300,000 displaced due to these conflicts, an attack rate against civilians 48% higher than that perpetrated by Boko Haram.⁵⁸



Map of routes from Nigeria to Libya

⁵² Open Migration. (March, 2016). 5 things you should know about (second-class) Nigerian migrants. Available at: <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/5-things-you-should-know-about-second-class-nigerian-migrants/>

⁵³ Kharas, H., Hamel, K. & Hofer, M. (June, 2018). The start of a new poverty narrative. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/19/the-start-of-a-new-poverty-narrative/>

⁵⁴ Oxfam International. Extreme inequality in numbers. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/even-it-nigeria/nigeria-extreme-inequality-numbers>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ National Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Labor force statistics Vol. 1: Unemployment and underemployment report. Available at: africacheck.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/q1-q3_2017_unemployment_report_VOLUME_1-1.pdf

⁵⁷ Institute for security studies. (April, 2018). Refugees are Boko Haram's latest soft target. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/refugees-are-boko-haram-s-latest-soft-target>

⁵⁸ European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (July, 2018). Nigeria - Violence, displacement in the Middle Belt. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>; IOM. DTM Nigeria. Available at: <http://www.globaldtm.info/nigeria/>

Struggling with this reality and the elusive quest for a fulfilling life, and in the face of restricted legal mobility options, a significant number of Nigerian children and youth have for years embarked on high-risk journeys. Many have taken deadly migration routes, hoping to eventually reach Europe.

According to recent data, there are an estimated 62,447 Nigerians in Libya.⁵⁹ Since 2017, 9,984 Nigerians have returned from Libya to Nigeria through the VHR program, making Nigeria the country with the largest rate of current returns.

⁵⁹ IOM. (2018). Displacement Tracking Matrix: Libya's migrant report round 22.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

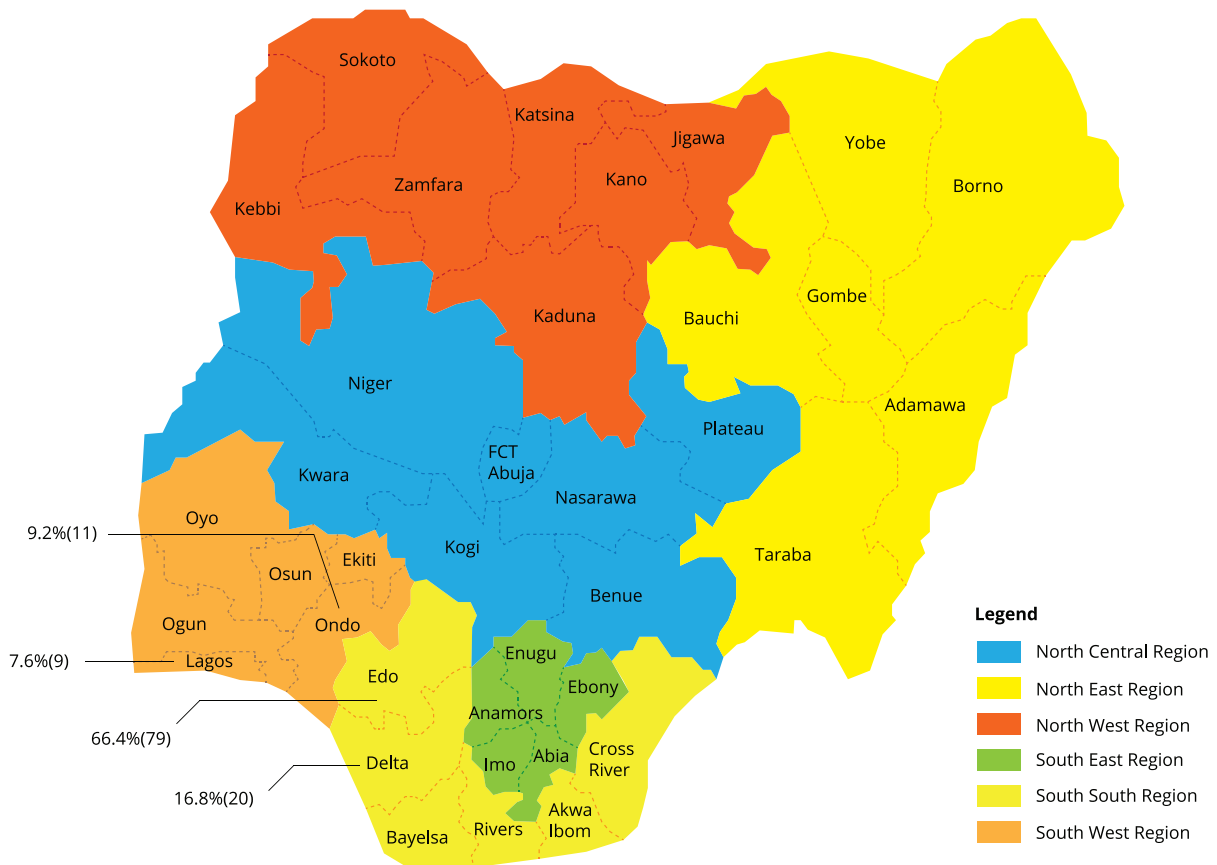
2.1 Aims

By shedding light on the challenges young returnees face and the capacity of the receiving society to support them, we hope to 1) assist the Nigerian government and supporting organizations in their efforts to build a holistic, integrated, human-rights based and context-appropriate approach to sustainable reintegration of children and youth, 2) contribute to the development and realization of safe, just and legal migration options for migrating children and young people, 3) develop a feasibility grid to inform and guide reintegration efforts and 4) inform and contribute to a policy agenda centered on the priorities, rights and needs of children and youth who have been part of the VHR program.

This mapping will generate evidence necessary for IOM’s Handbook for Return and Reintegration Module and advance protection principles to continue ensuring that the rights of children and young people are prioritized along every step of the return and reintegration process.

2.2 Procedure

The Harvard FXB Center conducted a comprehensive literature review on issues of voluntary return, sustainable reintegration, migration management policies and displacement of children in Africa between January and May of 2018. The aim of this review was to inform the development of a survey instrument for data collection on the migration, return and post-return experiences of migrant children and youth returning Nigeria.



Percentage of participants from each State

This tool was pilot-tested by the IOM Regional Office in Nigeria in July of 2018. Data collection was conducted in the four Nigerian States with the highest number of VHR children and youth beneficiaries: Delta, Edo, Lagos and Ondo. Of the 828 young returnees from Libya, 674 returned to these four States.

Primary data were collected through a quantitative survey administered to 119 male and female returnees aged 17 to 24. 14 local enumerators with extensive experience working with vulnerable populations were selected and trained in July 2018.

Participation in the survey was anonymous and participants were identified only by a non-personally identifiable referral code in IOM's records. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants and in the case of children, from their legal guardian. As soon as consent was obtained, the interviews were carried out in person, in the respondents' home. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English. Each interview lasted an average of 60 minutes. The respondents' answers were saved on electronic tablets, automatically uploaded to a server and then erased from the tablet for privacy and confidentiality reasons. The MENA IOM office provided ongoing assistance to the enumerators in an effort to proactively solve any issues that might emerge.

Upon completion of the pilot, the enumerators provided valuable feedback on the research tools and the overall methodology used for the study to inform the next phase of the research.

2.3 The survey tool

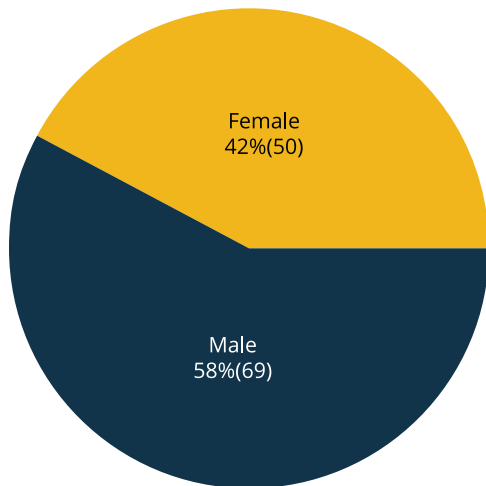
Most of the survey consisted of close-ended questions. A few open-ended questions were added to allow participants who wanted to elaborate on specific topics. The tool included questions on: the migration decision, the migration journey, the young migrant's experience in Libya, the decision to return to Nigeria, the status of the migrant's reintegration, and the governmental and non-governmental efforts to promote successful reintegration. Socio-demographic characteristics were also gathered. Very few questions explored human rights violations that returnees may have experienced in an attempt to avoid participant distress during the interview process.

2.4 Participants: process and challenges

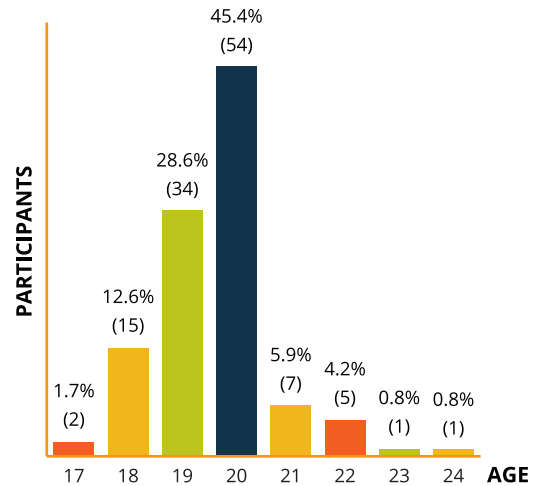
To obtain a representative probabilistic sample of this population, the field team used the list of all child and youth returnees to Nigeria drawn up by IOM. A sample of 485 participants was then drawn from this list, employing a stratified disproportionate random sampling methodology based on sex, age and geographical area. As covering States with a very small number of returnees would have been costly and time consuming, only those States where returnees live in sufficiently high concentration were included in the final sampling.

Even though the survey set out to achieve a net sample size of 482 interviews, field challenges forced the field team to make adjustments to the sample size. Moreover, in 79 cases the team could not obtain parental consent to interview child returnees. As a result, the final sample size was 119.

The sample includes children and young people between the ages of 17 and 24 in an effort to capture a wide range of experience. 20 participants began their migration journey in 2015, 38 participants in 2016, 53 participants in 2017, and 3 participants in early 2018. Only one participant migrated before 2015. The vast majority of them migrated when they were under 18. Interviews with returnees under the age of 16 were not conducted due to the data collection team's lack of capacity in accommodating the unique needs of very young returnees at the time of the study.

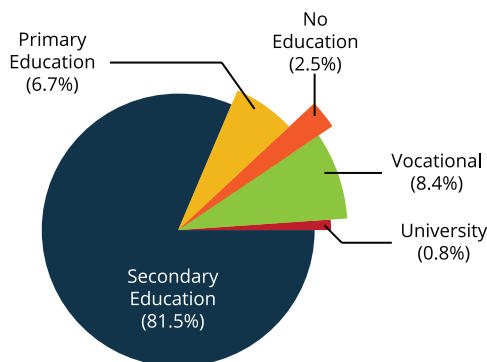


Breakdown of participants by gender

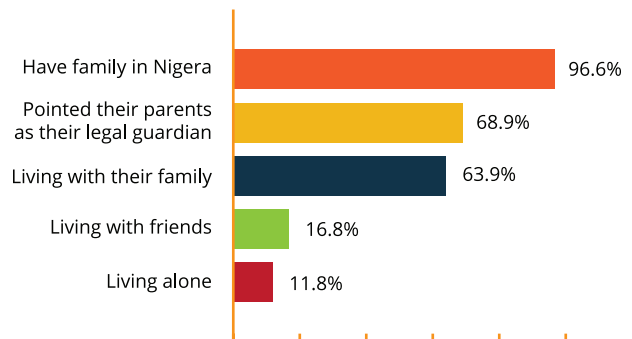


Breakdown of participants by age

Given the sample size, the data gathered cannot be considered representative of all young returnees to Nigeria, though they do provide significant insight into the reintegration circumstances of the relevant population and into the issues of concern to governments, regional bodies and aid organizations operating in the region.



Breakdown of participants by level of education



Breakdown of participants by family condition

2.5 Limitations

Time constraints and sample size generated some limitations in the study. The sample size leaves out a potentially sizable portion of returnees from different States across Nigeria. Furthermore, a significant number of returnees could not be reached for a range of reasons, including re-migration. As data was gathered only from VHR beneficiaries who could be reached by the research team, findings cannot be considered representative of the entire returning population. Additionally, children under 16, a highly vulnerable group of returnees with potentially different migration and return/post-return needs, were not interviewed.

Lastly, during this pilot, the data collection team did not interview members of the resident population in order to document whether the reintegration challenges returnees face are a result of their return or a general inability and lack of capacity of the country to care for its citizens as a whole. A follow-on study aims to fill in this gap by interviewing a large number of members of the resident population to achieve a better understanding of the current situation in the country.

3. FROM NIGERIA TO LIBYA: UNDERSTANDING THE MIGRATORY EXPERIENCE OF NIGERIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

3.1 The decision to leave

It is often argued that children's reasons for migrating are tied to the migration patterns and priorities of their parents, suggesting generational or cyclical trends.⁶⁰ However, children's own agency also fuels the decision to migrate. Understanding the multiple factors influencing children's decision to leave their country of origin is critical as a precondition for assessing the sustainability of any reintegration efforts.

Data point to a desire for better living conditions as the primary migration driver for 84.9% of participants. The inability to secure a job and earn a living was a significant driver for 54.6% of respondents. 37% of respondents also identified the lack of educational opportunities as a key motivation for their decision to migrate⁶¹ and 37% pointed to a desperation-oriented driver that influenced their decision to migrate, noting that in Nigeria they felt they had no future. In short, young people's decision to migrate does not stem from one isolated reason or factor but from varied drivers.

The majority of respondents exhibited surprising independence in coming to the decision to change their lives, despite the fact that it could result in a dangerous migration journey and in life altering transformation.⁶² In fact, only 1.7% of the participants traveled with members of their extended families. 73.1% of respondents made the decision to migrate independently, without seeking the advice of their families or caregivers. More specifically, 68% of the female and 76.8% of the male young people indicated that their decision to migrate was solely theirs. However, more than half of participants (50.4%) indicated that their families expected remittances from them once they reached their final destination. These expectations can put tremendous pressure on young people,⁶³ adversely influencing decision-making, including the decision to consider returning home should the opportunity arise.⁶⁴

The issue of familial expectations of young people is complicated.⁶⁵ In some cases, children from families that have experienced some kind of crisis, such as severe health issues or other precipitators of financial difficulty, may independently assume the responsibility of providing for the family themselves, a decision that can impact their life in unanticipated ways. One respondent explained:

"My mother had been the sole breadwinner. Then she had an accident that affected her waist and legs. I had to step up and take responsibility. I had no idea where I was going...all I knew was that I wanted a better life for myself and my family. So a friend advised that we migrate to Europe by land. I had no prior knowledge of this option before then."

⁶⁰ Donato, K. M., & Sisk, B. (2015). Children's Migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America: Evidence from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects. *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3(1), 58-79.

⁶¹ See also UNICEF. (July, 2017). In search of Opportunities. Voices of children on the move in West and Central Africa. Available on line: <https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/nigeriaregionalcrisis/Migration.WCAR.July2017.pdf>

⁶² See also UNICEF & REACH. (2017). Children on the Move. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/children-move-italy-and-greece>

⁶³ Searcey, D. & Barry, J.Y. (June, 2017). Why migrants keep risking all on the 'deadliest route'. *New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/22/world/africa/migrants-mediterranean-italy-libya-deaths.html>

⁶⁴ IOM. (2018). World migration report 2018. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en.pdf
Timera, M. (2018). Child mobility from and within West African countries, (pp 66-81), In J. Bhabha, J. Kanics, D. Senovilla Hernandez. (Eds). *Research handbook on child migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁶⁵ Vacchiano, F. (2018). Desiring Mobility: Child Migration, Parental Distress and Constraints on the Future in North Africa, (pp 82-97). In J. Bhabha, J. Kanics, and D. Senovilla Hernandez, (Eds), *Research Handbook on Child Migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Another respondent noted:

“I never expected the journey to be as difficult as it was.”

Another one elaborated:

“The suffering was too much. The journey was not what I expected.”

For a small percentage of the sample (16%), peer influence was also an important factor. When peers who have successfully migrated are portrayed in the community as the “successful ones”, the benefits of migrating can easily be idealized, the risks minimized and the influence on decision-making rendered disproportionate.⁶⁶

One respondent noted:

“A friend came back from Italy looking rich and flamboyant.”

Another commented:

“The way they [my friends] dress on Facebook, they look very rich and I want to be rich like them.”



TAKEAWAY ONE

Multiple and multi-layered factors drive the decision of young people to migrate. Our findings shed light on the significant role of personal drivers, family livelihood, peer influence and social perceptions about migration. Successful interventions should target a) individual drivers for migration that can impact reintegration, b) any “intra-familial implicit contract”⁶⁸ affecting families’ livelihood and c) idealized societal perceptions about “successful” migration.

⁶⁶ Ibid

3.2 The journey

"[During my journey to Libya] I was beaten repeatedly and they demanded family contacts to extort a ransom out of them. But I didn't have any family they could contact. Eventually I managed to get my sister to sell property and send 500,000 naira just to stop the beatings."

-Research participant

To realize their dream of reaching Europe, children and youth are forced to travel through countries that are accessible, despite the risks and hazards this may bring. With limited or no legal options to migrate, the majority have no choice but to resort to high-risk journeys along dangerous routes. 97.5% of respondents indicated that they traveled through Niger, a country whose dangers they knew about but chose to enter nevertheless, because it was accessible. More than half of the respondents explained that they used several different modes of transport during their journeys, including cars (52.1%), buses (59.7%), and trucks (52.9%). 43.7% of respondents decided to travel with groups of strangers organized by agents, despite being aware of the dangers they could face. A smaller percentage of respondents embarked on the journey with friends (25.2%), while a significant minority (22.7%) decided to travel alone despite their youth and lack of experience.

Children's approaches to migration journeys tend to differ from adults, as their overarching drive to reach a desired destination leads them to underestimate risks and be less prepared to face them overall.⁶⁷ More than half of the respondents (59.7%) explained that they decided to follow a specific migration path because of information they had received from smugglers. The desire of children to reach their destination can lead to resignation about the likelihood of exploitation by smugglers.

These migration journeys, usually orchestrated by smugglers and their networks, come with high fees that children and youth often struggle to pay. The respondents explained that they secured the necessary funds to travel by either spending their savings (43.7%), selling their properties (36.1%) or borrowing money from relatives in Nigeria (21%). A smaller, though still significant, percentage (11.8%), particularly given the age and inherent vulnerability of those concerned, reported getting money directly from smugglers, entering into agreements that would ultimately lead to heightened levels of exploitation and abuse.

Despite the striking resourcefulness and agency that children and young people exhibited, most found themselves lacking the resources needed.⁶⁸ More than 40% of respondents indicated that they had to interrupt their onward journey when they ran out of money or were forced by smugglers to stay in Niger until they found funds to continue. Many had to look for a job to financially support their onward journey, while those dependent on smugglers found themselves easy victims to exploitative practices.

⁶⁷ Khashu, A. (2010). Children in Transit: Results of Interviews with Central American Unaccompanied Minors Encountered in Mexico. Center for Interamerican Studies and Programs, Working Paper 21. Mexico City.

⁶⁸ UNICEF & IOM. (2017, September). Harrowing journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf



TAKEAWAY TWO

Young people tend to use life-time savings, sell income-generating assets or enter high levels of debt to pay for the migration journey. Young people may experience serious difficulties re-establishing incomes reliant on the assets they sold and face hardships overcoming debts. Interventions and efforts should target returnees' access to income generating opportunities including employment schemes, apprenticeships, development of public-private partnerships to stimulate job opportunities, and expanded grant opportunities. In a minority of cases, low risk loans and the opportunity to develop self-employment ventures may be appropriate.⁶⁹

3.3 Detention and abuse

Almost half the respondents (47.1%) indicated that they experienced detention while en route to Libya. The vast majority of participants experiencing detention were over the age of 19. Extortion was cited as the main reason for their detention: despite the amount of money the respondents had paid upfront to reach Libya, it had not been enough to pay off additional smugglers' fees along the way, or ransoms imposed by gangs that prey on migrants throughout their journey. During their captivity, young people faced inhumane living conditions: for example, according to most of the respondents, food was scarce, provided not more than once a day.

In response to open-ended questions from the researchers, respondents reported experiencing exploitation and abuse, the latter ranging from physical abuse, humiliation and harassment, to rape. As one respondent explained:

"It was a horrible experience. They kept beating us every morning demanding us to call our parents in Nigeria to send money. There were kidnappers everywhere. They were killing my Nigerian brothers and sisters."

Another respondent added:

"We were practically slaves and they did with us anything they wanted. We were murdered, beaten and raped."

Among the highly vulnerable population of migrating children, some are at heightened risk of abuse and exploitation. Previous research indicates that age, sex, level of education and the nature of

travel arrangements can affect the probabilities of being exploited.⁶⁹ However, findings from this study did not point to specific risk factors. Rather they assume that if older age and male groups report exploitation and abuse during this high-risk journey, younger age and female groups would likely experience similar or elevated risk levels due to their inherent vulnerability, regardless of their individual characteristics or the trajectory of their journey.

Overwhelmed by the hazards of the journey, more than half of respondents (51.3%) explained that they had thought about returning to Nigeria and given up on the migration plan altogether. Having experienced physical and psychological abuse, many said they preferred to return back home despite their strong desire for a better life. As one respondent noted:

"[I wanted to go back to Nigeria] because the stress and suffering had become too much".

Notwithstanding media reporting and information campaigns, many participants reported being unaware of the dangers and risks of the journey. As one participant pointed out:

"I never expected the journey to be as difficult as the way it was." Another one elaborated: "The suffering was too much. The journey was not what I expected."

The survey responses indicated that many participants would not have risked their lives or contemplated this sort of journey if they had fully understood the extent of the hazards involved and the lack of protection services along the way. As one participant explained:

"[I wanted to return] because of the stress but I couldn't, because there was no one to help me".

3.4 Conditions in Libya

"I was treated badly even though I was pregnant. There was no food or water for me."

-Research participant

When children and young people arrive in Libya, they face a reality they did not anticipate. 84.9% of respondents indicated that they were not aware in advance of the hazards and perils they would face in Libya.

Almost all the respondents (88.2%) described having a negative experience while in Libya, with 73.9% reporting abuse and 85.7% detention in Libya's network of formal and informal detention facilities. Respondents also pointed to the perpetration of a number of severe human rights violations, including killings, sexual violence, forced labor, beatings, confiscation of property, and insufficient food provision. As one respondent explained:

"The suffering was so much. I had little access to water and food. I wasn't free to go out of the detention facility. My employers never gave me any money despite working day and night for them."

Another respondent noted:

"No peace of mind, the Arab men used to come kill us for fun. They used us to work in their farm and end up giving us cigarettes. If you refuse, they will beat or kill you. It was a horrible experience."

⁶⁹ UNICEF & IOM. (2017, September). Harrowing journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

Another respondent explained:

"I was sold to several men that used me for sex and made me do heavy labor".

Almost half of the respondents (47.9%) said they were detained by the Libyan authorities because of their irregular immigration status and lack of legal documentation. A smaller but still significant number (31.9%) reported having been captured and detained by traffickers seeking to exploit them further.

Racial and religious discrimination in Libya was highlighted by some respondents as another reason for ill-treatment and abuse.⁷⁰ Respondents said that systematic racism, xenophobia and religious bigotry were rampant along the migration journey, leading to detention, physical violence and exploitation. As one respondent noted:

"When they see a black man on the street they will arrest you because they know they can get money from you."



TAKEAWAY THREE

Returnees that have experienced or witnessed torture, exploitation and abuse are in need of specialized assistance. These experiences can trigger or intensify trauma and severely undermine mental health, consequently impacting reintegration.⁷¹ Previous research has shown that those returnees who have been exploited during their journey may experience shame and be stigmatized and discriminated against by their families and communities.⁷² Reintegration efforts should aim to restore emotional stability and well-being, ensuring complementary direct assistance and psycho-social support. Additionally, awareness campaigns targeting receiving families and communities can further facilitate their effective reintegration by preventing and addressing discrimination and discussing returnees' needs and expectations.

⁷⁰ See also: Refugee International. (April, 2018). "Death would have been better": Europe continues to fail refugees and migrants in Libya. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/506c8ea1e4b01d9450dd53f5/t/5ad3ceae03ce641bc8ac6eb5/1523830448784/2018+Libya+Report+PDF.pdf>

⁷¹ Koser, K. (2013). Migrants and refugees, (pp.556-71). In P. Crang, M. Crang, M. Goodwin. (Eds). *Introducing Human Geographies*, 3rd Edition. London: Routledge.

⁷² Koser, K. & Kuschminder, K. (2015). Key findings of comparative research on assisted voluntary return and reintegration of migrants. *Migration and Policy Practice*, 5(1), 28-31.

3.5 The decision to return

While there is well-established literature on the determinants of migration, there is considerably less literature on the factors that drive migrants' decisions to return home.⁷¹ Previous research indicates that such decisions are influenced by a range of determinants including individual, family-level and community-level factors, as well as by the prevailing policy framework and the economic and political situation at home and abroad.⁷² 67.2 % of the participants pointed to the high risk conditions in Libya as the main structural factor influencing the decision to return home. Almost half of the respondents (42.9 %) decided to return home when they realized that their options for onward migration were limited to such a degree that they would be stranded and destitute in Libya. A small but significant number of participants (17.6%) explained that they chose to return home because they saw that as the only viable and humanitarian alternative to the detention and destitution they were being subjected to. In the absence of legal paths for regular migration, participants falling into this category may re-migrate irregularly, as they will possibly encounter the same reasons that led them to attempt irregular migration in the first place and will still have unfulfilled migration aspirations and goals.⁷³

Drivers of return

High risk conditions in Libya

Limited options for onward migration

Return as the only alternative to detention and destitution

The conditions under which returns happen can have powerful implications for successful reintegration of returnees. When returnees feel that they have not achieved their migration goals prior to their decision to return home, they may experience difficulties in reintegrating and opt for repeat irregular migration if proper reintegration assistance is not offered to them. 79% of the respondents reported feeling disappointed about not having reached their final destination. 67.3% spoke of concerns with the difficulties that awaited them in Nigeria. And 42% noted that, even though they freely chose to return home, they would have liked to have an additional alternative to detention, such as a legal, safe and affordable option for onward migration.

⁷³ UN General Assembly. (May, 2018). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1812517.pdf>



TAKEAWAY FOUR

Returnees who feel they have not reached their migration goals may find it difficult to reintegrate and may opt for repeat migration. Return and reintegration efforts should take into account the complex background of a returnee. Accurate but neutral information should be provided during the return process, to allow migrants to reach an informed decision about their return. Furthermore, an individualized reintegration plan should be made to cater to both the immediate and long-term needs of the returnees, contributing to their self-sufficiency.

4. THE VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAM: CURRENT EFFORTS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES

4.1 The process of return

When asked how they learned about the option to leave Libya and return home, the respondents credited IOM, the Libyan authorities and fellow migrants as the main sources of information. The Nigerian embassy was referenced by only a small number of respondents. This finding indicates the importance of migrant communities and word of mouth in the development of outreach strategies. The current role of the country embassy points to a greater need for its involvement in outreach and initial counseling activities.

Research participants were asked to evaluate pre-departure counseling and the return process. 74% of the participants indicated that they were happy with the return process and the way it was conducted. Moreover, 57.9% reported being satisfied with the information they received during the pre-departure counseling carried out by IOM staff.⁷⁴ The analysis did not indicate any gender differences in the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the process of return. The remaining 42.1% reported feeling they had received less information than they expected or desired to have. This perception, regardless of whether it reflects the reality or not, could foreshadow dissatisfaction with post-return reintegration efforts, particularly if returnees do not fully understand the situation back in their home country. The survey tool, however, did not probe this topic so follow up research is needed on this point. One explanation for these pilot results, and for the perception of dissatisfaction with the information received may be that the returnees were not psychologically prepared to assimilate the information received, having perhaps not fully realized the challenges following their decision to return home.

⁷⁴ During the pre-departure counseling, potential returnees receive information about their status in Libya, possibility of being detained back in Nigeria and the socio-economic and political situation in Nigeria.

Perceptions were divided on whether the pre-departure counseling fully captured safety concerns associated with the return back home. 39.5% of the respondents did not feel that adequate information on why they left Nigeria had been gathered during their interview, while 35.3% felt that they did not discuss in depth their safety concerns during the counseling. As Best Interests Determinations (BIDs) are conducted for unaccompanied children and vulnerable people as part of the return process, it is of utmost importance to further understand why returnees retain these perceptions and what suggestions they have for the inclusion of additional measures to ensure their best interests are met.



TAKEAWAY FIVE

Returnees who feel they have not received clear and concise information about the return process and the situation in their home country may mistrust the whole process of return.⁷⁵ This mistrust, intertwined with the traumatic experience of the migration journey, can further increase anxiety, hindering effective reintegration.

4.2 Post-arrival reception and challenges

“My family members were not happy because even though I came back alive, I returned with empty hands.”
-Research participant

Post-arrival reception and assistance is very important to help returnees resettle and establish themselves in their home communities. If upon return, and under familial and societal pressure, returnees perceive their decision to return home as a failure, following one of their most radical attempts to improve their lives, they may face severe challenges in effectively reintegrating.⁷⁵

When asked to describe the reception received on returning home to their families, 81.5% of respondents reported that their families were happy with their return. This is an important finding as familial acceptance is crucial in strengthening children’s and young people’s psychosocial well-being, particularly in cases where they may feel they have failed their families. However, anecdotal evidence from the field indicates that returnees do not remain with their families after their arrival, but instead prefer to remain with fellow returnees or friends, indicating that this acceptance and initial support does not directly benefit the returnees. A longitudinal study could further clarify whether this support helps returnees long term.

⁷⁵ Cassarino, J.P. (2004). Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migrants revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6(2), 253–279.

Some participants further noted that their return brought disappointment and embarrassment to their families precisely because they had failed to reach their final destination. The absence of a supportive family response can precipitate potentially harmful future decision making.

Sending a family member on a migration journey constitutes a major financial investment. Many families sold valuables to support the journey, believing that they were making an investment that would pay off in the future. When the journey failed, the emotional toll on children and youth was on occasion devastating, even if their families remained supportive. One respondent explained how his unsuccessful attempt to migrate embarrassed him in the eyes of his father and local community:

"I sold my father's land to raise money to travel, now I am back with nothing to show for it."

Feelings of shame and embarrassment can also stem from comparisons with peers who may have found success without leaving Nigeria. Some participants expressed shame about coming back empty-handed and provoking contempt from peers who had managed to succeed without migrating. A respondent elaborated:

"All my mates I left behind now have one or two things that they are doing and they laugh at me."

A family's preparedness to receive a returning child or young person plays a very important role in their successful reintegration. Family support strengthens family ties and combats feelings of shame, failure and anxiety, helping returnees feel a deep sense of belonging and a desire to stay in their origin countries. Despite the importance of family preparedness, however, only 12.6% of respondents reported that their families had received any kind of support or mentorship from the government or other organizations to prepare for their return.



TAKEAWAY SIX

Reintegration interventions and efforts should focus on effective counseling, preparing and assisting families in welcoming and supporting young returnees in an effort to establish strong social networks and strengthen their psychological well-being.

Familial support is a critical component of the successful reintegration of a returnee regardless of the conditions under and the reasons for their migration in the first place. Whether migration was a family investment or an individual decision, supporting a returnee's family can help support the returnee to effectively navigate through the different challenges of reintegration.

4.3 The complex nature of returning home: The end of a migration cycle or a stop along the way?

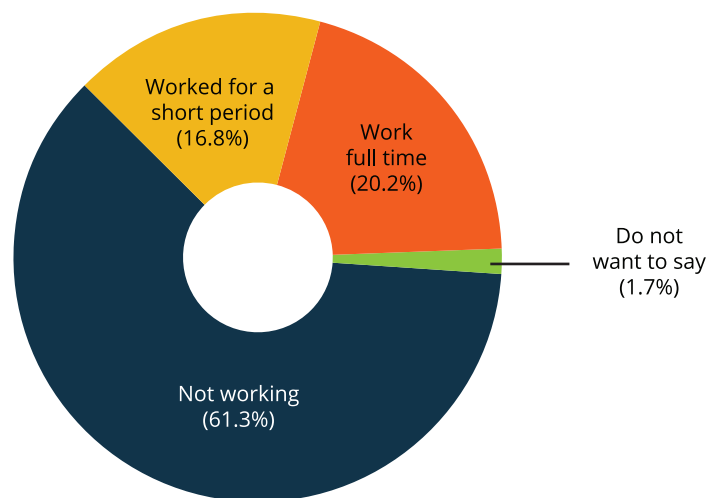
"I am not ready to go through the challenges of the migratory journey again but I would like to provide for my mom and siblings as I have no father. So I need to get a stable source of income if I am to stay in Nigeria."
-Research participant

Returning to a country where economic conditions, political structures and social relations are dire can cause severe challenges for returnees, burdened by the additional trauma of their migratory experience abroad. Effective reintegration efforts that target sustainable livelihood are of utmost importance to promote rights-respecting opportunities and prevent a repeat migration attempt borne out of a desire to survive.

Bearing this in mind, the current study investigated factors that foster or hinder the sustainability of young returnees' integration in Nigeria. These factors were assessed on different levels (individual and community) and dimensions (economic, social and psychosocial), with the young people's own views later incorporated into the analysis.

■ Economic Dimension

Economic reintegration of returnees is widely considered essential for sustaining reintegration and preventing repeated migration attempts. It contributes to an individual's financial independence and self-reliance and offers a pathway for returnees to rebuild their lives. In order to assess returnees' economic realities, the survey included a number of questions exploring current employment conditions and opportunities and respondents' perceptions of the economic environment.



Breakdown of returnees by employment status

Generating stable and adequate income is one of the most crucial challenges returnees face, particularly in countries with high unemployment rates and low salaries. In the study sample, 61.3% of participants were not working, and an additional 16.8% only worked for a short period of time, not enough to generate a stable source of income. The majority of respondents (87.4%) pointed to the lack of employment opportunities and ensuing severe financial issues (81%) as the most crucial challenge they faced upon their return. As one respondent explained:

"I don't have a job, I don't have any source of income. I don't have anyone to depend on. My situation is worse than before I decided to leave."

Another respondent noted food insecurity as a challenge that increased his economic vulnerability:

"I'm hungry, unemployed and face severe financial challenges upon my return."

Yet another respondent spoke of his need to pay back loans taken out for the journey, a factor compounding his preexisting, severe economic instability:

"I cannot pay back the money I received for the journey [as I don't have any income], therefore I receive threats."

When asked where their main source of support came from, the majority of respondents pointed to their families, indicating high dependency on others and limited self-reliance, a situation that evidently hinders young people's ability to define their own future. Such conditions of dependency, insecurity and a lack of options to reverse these circumstances are at once fundamental challenges to successful reintegration and triggers for repeated irregular migration.

■ Social dimension

Education is a fundamental and empowering human right and a potentially powerful anti-poverty tool for marginalized populations. Though this right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),⁷⁶ it remains unrealized for thousands of young migrants, compounding their vulnerability to abuse, neglect, deprivation and violence. Together with limited access to timely, adequate, and affordable health care (another core obligation enshrined in the CRC),⁷⁷ the obstacles to sustainable reintegration of returnees from Libya and potential for repeated migration attempts are daunting. A rights-based approach to education, health care, shelter and an adequate standard of living⁷⁸ is critical to a young person's protection and well-being.

The study assessed the extent of returnees' social reintegration by examining three indicators: access to education, access to public services, and access to health care.⁷⁹ Education was high on the list of reasons respondents provided for deciding to embark on migration, so understanding how respondents assessed their educational opportunities in the home countries upon return was important for evaluating potential reintegration success. In fact, 37% of the participants pointed to their desire to receive a better education as a main driver of their migration journey. Upon return, the vast majority of returnees, 98.3%, were not in any form of regular educational setting: none of the participants reported attending university. This finding indicates that returnees are faced again with one of the most important challenges that compelled them to leave in the first place.

When asked to provide a reason for this, 68.1% noted that they could not afford to pursue University-level education, while another 20.2% said that they did not have time for education as they had to spend the majority of their time working to support themselves. Additionally, as generating a stable income was a necessary precondition for being able to access educational opportunities, a significant number of respondents, despite their strong desire to receive a high level of education, perceived the cost of doing this to be unmanageable given their current conditions.

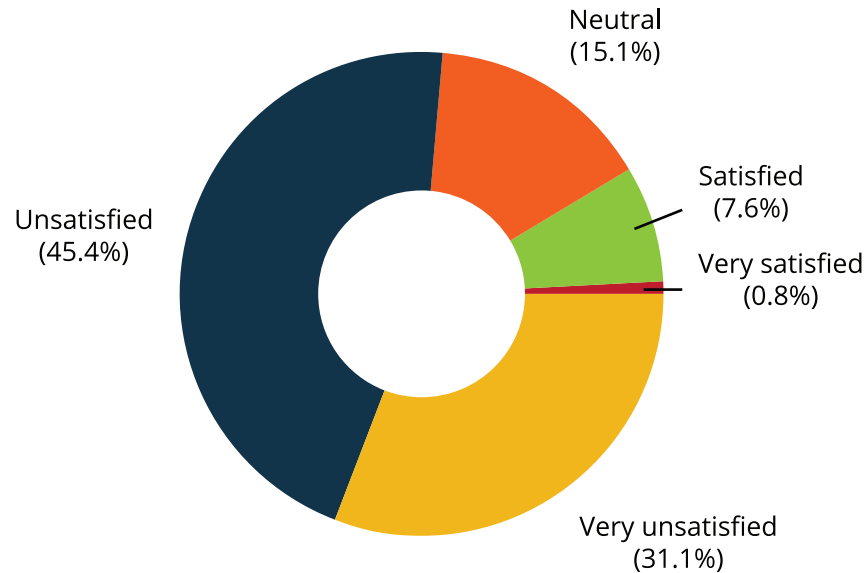
⁷⁶ CRC. General Comment No. 6, Article. 28, 29(1)(c), 30 & 32. Available at : <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC6.pdf>

⁷⁷ CRC. General Comment No. 6, Article. 23, 24 & 39. Available at : <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC6.pdf>

⁷⁸ CRC. General Comment No. 6, Article.20, 22, & 27. Available at : <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC6.pdf>

⁷⁹ See also: IOM. (2017). Pilot project to foster the sustainability of reintegration support in the framework of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) in the Mediterranean. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/IOM_SAMUEL_HALL_MEASURE_REPORT%202017.pdf

Regarding health care provision, 71.4% of respondents reported that they did not have adequate access to health care, a significant detriment to their quality of life. Respondents' lack of resources and the home country's inadequate health system are likely joint contributory factors to compromised reintegration outcomes, a point that future research should investigate further.



Level of satisfaction of returnees with access to health care services

Finally, 76.5% of respondents reported having limited access to social welfare services, a serious obstacle given the extensive challenges returnees face upon return. Any disruption of access in this domain increases a returnee's vulnerability, rendering reintegration difficult and paving the way for another irregular migration attempt.

■ Psychosocial dimension

The psychosocial reintegration of returnees was measured through 5 indicators: community involvement, experience of discrimination and abuse, psychological well-being, physical safety and plans for repeated migration.⁸⁰

Qualitative data indicated that the unsuccessful migration attempt had severely impacted many of the returnees' psychological wellbeing. Some respondents reported feeling sad, others commented on their social isolation and the inability to connect with others in their communities or in their own family, and yet others expressed feelings of stagnation and lethargy. As one respondent explained:

"I am having problems with my finances. Where we stay is really monotonous. All I do is eat and sleep and I am tired of that. I prefer to lose weight than gain it because I am idle."

Due to time constraints the survey did not provide respondents the opportunity to elaborate further on their current psychological states, so no other psychological symptoms were assessed. Further research on this topic is required to fully understand the psychosocial conditions of returnees as countries begin to assess their preparedness to receive, support and reintegrate them and as VHR

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

programs include psychosocial interventions as part of their post-return provision.

The behavior and attitudes of the community toward returnees can play a crucial role in sustainable reintegration. Participating in organized community activities can have a significant positive impact on young people as they find a way to reconnect with or establish social networks and express their creativity. 66.4% of respondents indicated that they did not take part in any community activities. When asked to state the reasons for this non participation, each participant presented multiple responses. 39.2% pointed to work-related time pressures, while 26.6% mentioned a lack of interest in the activities on offer. Moreover, 20.3% noted that they felt too embarrassed to participate in the activities offered while 7.7% said that they did not feel welcomed by the community.⁸¹

For those who did participate, sports or initiatives organized by religious organizations were their main activities of interest, noting that these activities enabled them to make friends, connect with like-minded people, and feel a part of the community again. Specifically, when asked to present their reasons for opting to participate in community activities, 60% saw these activities as a productive way to spend their free time, 60% believed them to be a viable pathway to feeling a part of the community again, 37.5% considered them as a way to connect with people with similar lived experiences, and 30% thought of them as a good way to make new friends. Only 2.5% mentioned parental pressure, and another 2.5% mentioned peer pressure as a reason to participate in these activities.⁸²

With respect to the interactions between community and returnees, survey data shed light on returnees' experience of psychological and physical violence perpetrated by the community and/or family members. 42.9% reported experiencing verbal abuse, 14.3 % experienced bullying, and a few participants reported physical attacks against them. Female returnees reported more cases of verbal insults (34%) than physical attacks (4%) or bullying (16%). 35.3% reported that community members had been the attackers while 16% reported being victims of domestic abuse. For both the male and the female returnees, community members are the most usual attackers. Such violence inflicts additional harm on an already traumatized child or youth returnee, hindering the healing and reintegration. However, the current study could not document whether the violence experienced by participants was a result of their return status or a common phenomenon in Nigeria affecting the whole population. Rejection by the family or the local community, and the resulting shame, can inflict further and profound psychological damage that can promote strong negative emotions and gravitation toward dangerous alternative paths for the future.

⁸¹ Participants were able to select multiple answers. Percentages shown reflect frequencies of selected answers.

⁸² Participants were able to select multiple answers. Percentages shown reflect frequencies of selected answers.



TAKEAWAY SEVEN

Tip for sustainable reintegration: Data on instances of domestic violence reveal an opportunity for further improvement of the VHRR programs and efforts.

If violence had occurred prior to migration: Evidence of preexisting domestic violence should be carefully and extensively assessed and discussed during the pre-departure counseling. Quantitative data from this study indicated that 33.9% of respondents had not discussed difficulties at home during the pre-departure counseling. This can be attributed to multiple factors that should be understood and effectively addressed.

If domestic violence commenced after the young person's return: Reintegration efforts should focus on family's preparation for and support during the reintegration process.

If both situations are not considered and addressed during VHRR programming, returnees may end up in potentially dangerous conditions, leading to potentially harmful future decision making.

When asked to discuss their desire to re-migrate, 48.7% noted that they were thinking about leaving the country again. This strong desire can be attributed, among other reasons, to the impact of these hardships on respondents and the inability to have a fulfilling life in Nigeria. Age and gender seem to influence this desire for re-migration with male and older returnees indicating a stronger desire for re-migration. Interestingly, many participants explained that they would like to follow legal migration options and avoid embarking on high risk journeys again. As one participant explained:

"I have had a horrible experience. I don't want to ever leave Nigeria again by road. If I travel, it has to be legal".

On the other hand, 18.5 % of the participants had not yet decided their future steps and 32.8 % noted they did not wish to migrate again, mainly because of the negative impact of the recent migration experience. Though a significant number of returnees did not intend to try to migrate again, all of them reported being disappointed and discouraged with the prospect of not having opportunities for a sustainable livelihood, while a significant number highlighted their wish to have a chance for future legal, safe and regular migration.

4.4 Access to effective reintegration assistance

Data revealed very important findings regarding the success and effectiveness of current reintegration efforts that can help bridge existing gaps and inform VHR programming and future reintegration efforts in Nigeria.

90.8% of respondents reported not receiving any support or assistance from the government. For the few who said they did, the support received ranged from financial support to life skills training, awareness raising, and counseling. By contrast, respondents noted that they had received no support to cover their primary and material needs, such as housing, food security and access to health care. However, it should be noted that returnees are not the only ones facing such challenges. The majority of Nigeria's population does encounter the aforementioned challenges as well, revealing the country's difficulty and struggle to secure citizen's basic needs and adequately address the persistent and high levels of poverty.⁸³

On the other hand, assistance provided by international and local, nongovernmental organizations appears to be more comprehensive. 40.3% of respondents reported receiving support that covered a wide range of primary and psychological needs such as food provision, housing, life skills training and education, access to health care, and employment opportunities. When given the opportunity to



Returnees' level of satisfaction with the assistance received

⁸³ Aregbeshola, B. (2018). Health care in Nigeria Challenges and recommendations. Available at: <http://socialprotection.org/discover/blog/health-care-nigeria-challenges-and-recommendations>

elaborate, some participants explained the importance of IOM's financial support to them upon return. However, as was the case for the support offered by governmental agencies, respondents did not seem fully satisfied with the services provided: 41.6% reported they were unsatisfied and 18.8% remained neutral.

4.5 Additional areas to focus on

Data from this pilot study demonstrate that more reintegration support is needed in Nigeria, and that the resources that are mobilized do not adequately cater to young returnees' needs, such as education, employment opportunities, financial aid and psychological support.⁸⁴ This assessment suggests a series of measures to streamline the provision of rights-respecting support and services to returnees and minimize the risk of hostility and conflict between the local population and the returnee community.

When respondents were asked about the kind of support they would like to receive, the majority mentioned financial support, including to set up a business, and assistance in finding stable employment. As one respondent noted:

"It's depressing having to just live like this without any source of income. I need money to be able to take care of basic needs as a woman."

Another commented:

"What is needed is a change of government policies so employment can be high in such a way that Nigerians will not want to leave Nigeria again."

Some respondents also stressed the urgency of better disseminating public information about the risks of migration, and of promoting life skills training that might provide them with entrepreneurship skills.

⁸⁴ Hammond, L. (1999). Examining the Discourse of Repatriation: Towards a More Proactive Theory of Return Migration. In R. Black & K. Koser, (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*. (pp 227-244). Oxford: Berghahn.

5. NEXT STEPS FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

The aim of this study was to achieve an initial understanding and map the complex array of factors that complicate and challenge the sustainable reintegration of young returnees from Libya once they arrive in Nigeria.

Successful reintegration is highly dependent on a series of interdependent personal and societal factors that can sustain achievement of developmental, educational and socio-economic milestones and eventually promote rich and fulfilling lives. This pilot study has achieved an understanding of the way in which interlinked factors including the drivers of migration, the actual migration experience, the circumstances surrounding the decision to return, and challenges in the home country influence the reintegration process, in some cases paving the way for irregular re-migration attempts.

Focusing specifically on children and youth, the initial data collected revealed that family, peers and the community are some of the most important reintegration-related actors within their social ecosystem.⁸⁵ In general, family and peers (the microsystem) provided both financial and psychological support to young returnees. In some cases though, returnees experienced feelings of shame and anxiety and a sense of failure caused by high but unrealized family expectations, feelings that hindered the healing process needed to reintegrate effectively.

By contrast returnees' mesosystem (community, neighbors) offered limited support, frequently adopting a more judgmental approach to young people's decision to return, and pushing them into situations of social isolation. Future efforts might usefully attempt to address this gap. Despite the efforts made on the ground, the current exosystem (governments and organizations), does not seem to provide effective assistance to young returnees. Initial findings indicate limited provision of social services, job placements, psychosocial support, educational opportunities and life-skill trainings. However, more data is required to better understand the efforts of the government to support returnees and the challenges it faces to cover the needs of the whole Nigerian population. When asked, returnees pointed to their need for economic opportunities and job placements as the most significant wished-for assistance.

Based on these findings, we offer a series of rights-based recommendations. They are anchored in the same CRC standards that have shaped child protection protocols worldwide and are provided here in an effort to bolster VHRR programming and assist reintegration efforts.

Prior to return

In Libya

- The Nigerian embassy can play a significant role in outreach and initial pre-departure counseling activities. The embassy should increase its attempts to ensure that Nigerian migrants in Libya are fully aware of the opportunity, procedures and conditions involved in returning home.
- Since the majority of the beneficiaries heard about the VHR programming from migrant communities and Libyan authorities, it is important to ensure that these sources fully understand the operations and eligibility criteria of VHR programs. Outreach activities should target these populations to avoid the spread of false information and the creation of false expectations among returnees.

⁸⁵ See also: Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

- During the pre-departure counseling period, clear and accessible information about the situation in the home country and the nature of reintegration assistance should be provided to avoid creating false expectations among returnees and to help potential returnees reach an informed decision about return.
- During pre-departure counseling, post return plans should be outlined and discussed concretely so returnees are fully prepared for what they will face upon return.

In Nigeria

The objective of this pilot study was to document the perceptions of returnees relating to the support and assistance they received during and after their return from Libya to Nigeria.

In future, in-depth interviews with governmental and non-governmental actors in the country will provide information on the strategies being adopted to assist returnees.

The following recommendations are based on the research conducted for this pilot, which focused on the returnees' assessments rather than on a comprehensive mapping of all the services actually offered by government and other actors.

- Family preparation is an important factor in creating a safe and nurturing environment for returning children and young people. Helping families understand the hardships their children and young people may have endured will help them create the supportive network children need to rebuild their lives.
- Community pre-return preparation is also important, particularly in cases of large-scale returns. Through awareness-raising and education, communities, locals, and religious leaders can become important sources of support for young people, helping them to heal and integrate.
- Government programs need to be designed to cater for the specific needs of returnees, which may not be commensurate with or exactly mirror the needs of non-migrant peers.
- Collaboration with the government is critical to incorporating the return and reintegration process within existing national system to avoid creating redundant and consequently ineffective systems.

Upon arrival- immediate actions:

- Access to adequate and safe housing is critical to protect children from substandard living conditions that will increase their vulnerability and hamper their integration. Strengthening the existing shelters and increasing the numbers of shelters available to child and youth returnees should be a first step towards their protection.
- Access to healthcare, regardless of financial conditions, is necessary to help returnees as they navigate their new realities and manage their diverse needs.

Post – arrival and Reintegration assistance:

Child and youth migrant reintegration should be a participatory process where the young person's needs and aspirations are engaged with to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome.

➤ **Psychosocial support**

- Psychosocial support should be made accessible to all returnees, supplementing, as needed, children and youth's natural resilience and existing family and community support networks.

➤ **Access to education and group activities**

- The Ministry of Education should further assist current efforts to provide access to educational opportunities. An effective measure is to develop special bridge programs to help children who have been out of school for a significant period of time re-enter schooling in a manner conducive to their academic success. Experience of bridge schooling in comparable situations might be usefully drawn upon to generate structures that are supportive, encouraging and pedagogically useful at the same time. Transition to "regular" school as soon as viable is useful for generating a sense of social inclusion, of predictable structure to the day, and to enhance educational and skill capacities.
- Short-term, accelerated learning classes as well as vocational training activities suited to local labor market conditions can enhance the ability of youth to build useful skills and better position themselves for job opportunities that arise.
- Youth group activities should be offered to all returnees to enhance community supportive networks.

➤ **Economic recovery and support**

- Socio-economic support programs should be available to children of legal working age to provide a transitional safety net while they find their feet economically and socially, ideally with the possibility of concurrent adult educational opportunities to enhance skill acquisition.
- Families of returnees would also benefit from socio-economic support, so that the extra responsibilities of supporting the returnee are absorbed by adults rather than thrust onto the young person preventing him or her from pursuing educational alternatives to work.
- Access to public services and public resources should be ensured. Further efforts should focus on preventing feelings of hostility or discrimination, particularly in cases where large scale returns may strain already limited resources.

➤ **Building trust among youth returnees**

- Coordination and collaboration between government, UN, and local NGOs and, where they exist, returnees' own youth groups or spokespeople, is critical in defining roles and responsibilities, minimizing redundancies and maximizing constructive collaboration. Dialogue should be promoted at all levels to allow for the timely exchange of knowledge. Joint recreational sporting activities have been shown to be an excellent way to build trust and cement relationships in the early stages, before tackling the demanding task of addressing past trauma and future plans.

➤ Awareness rising

- Awareness raising campaigns, mobilizing media and technology, and community level advocacy are important to effectively inform potential young migrants about the risks of an irregular migration journey, the strategies that might be pursued to enhance future opportunities in order to help them understand the consequences of a decision to embark on an irregular journey, the safe migration options available to them, as well as livelihood opportunities available at home.

➤ Funding efforts and legal advocacy

- Funding should be secured and local level financial resources should be provided to directly support reintegration efforts and their long-term success. Young migrants who just returned might be encouraged to participate as actors in community building activities and research on their communities' needs, and in the formulation of realistic strategies for moving forward safely.
- Primary drivers of migration, documented through careful empirical research, should be brought to the attention of national decision makers, development funders and other regional and international stakeholders so that coordinated measures can be introduced to help neutralize their role in driving migration.
- National and regional stakeholders across different disciplinary contexts should be encouraged to participate in the development of effective legal pathways to migration for young people, so that legitimate aspirations can be safely realized and harmful and potentially traumatic migration strategies avoided. Youth themselves should be supported in creating representative organizations that present their views to regional and international fora, so that they participate directly (like DACA children in the US and some children on the move in Europe) in conferences, and other processes including the evolving discussions relating to the Global Compacts on refugees and on migration.

In-depth interviews with locals who have not migrated, community leaders as well as governmental key informants during future study will also provide an insight into the challenges and difficulties countries face in supporting their citizens, as well as the architecture in place for the provision of services designed to assist locals and returnees. A better understanding of the capacity and challenges countries face when fulfilling the unique needs of their citizens can further shape informed and actionable recommendations tailored to the needs of returnees and the ability of the country to realize them.

In depth interviews with IOM local offices will also allow for a better understanding of current partnerships with NGOs, private sector stakeholders, and the community in order to provide alternative opportunities to returnees and reduce potential tension between locals and returnees. The ultimate aim will be to further understand the efforts in place to leverage resources and expertise in order to jointly create a community based approach to reintegration.



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