

Stories

of Return

and Reintegration

Second Edition

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EU-IOM

Joint Initiative for
Migrant Protection
and Reintegration

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In partnership with the
Ministry of Interior
Government of The Gambia



Project funded by the European Union
Project implemented by IOM



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

The stories featured in this publication are true and have been relayed by Gambian returning migrants to the staff of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The opinions expressed in the book are those of the protagonists and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the book do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

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

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EU-IOM

Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration

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

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

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



Key Components of the Joint Initiative:

Reintegration

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

Awareness Raising

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

Data Collection

- Collection and analysis of data on migration flows

Return

and Reintegration

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

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

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

Tailored Approach

The support follows a tailored approach, putting the rights and the needs of the migrant at the forefront. Prior to voluntary return, migrants are individually screened to assess potential vulnerabilities and, if applicable, referred to partners.

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

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

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

Sustainable Reintegration

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

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

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

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

Reintegration Assistance may consist of:

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

Return and Reintegration Data (January 2017 – November 2018)

- Total Number of Returns: **3,865**
- Total Number of Returnees Provided with Reintegration Assistance: **1,572**
- Top 3 Sectors:
 - Retail (37 per cent)
 - Construction (26 per cent)
 - Transport (11 per cent)

BAKARY



SYCHETU

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“I am grateful to IOM for the support. This has changed my life forever.”

I left The Gambia in April 2016. Before my departure, I was a trainee teacher at the college. As I was personally funding my travel, I had to stay in Mauritania to work and earn some money before proceeding further. I spent a week in Niger and five months in Sabha, Libya, where I also stayed to work and pay for my crossing. I attempted to cross twice, but was unable to make it each time I tried and got imprisoned.

As the son of a single parent, I felt compelled to leave. We were poor and providing for the family’s basic needs was getting increasingly difficult. I was pressured, thus leading to my departure from the country to look for better opportunities in Europe.

I do not regret my decision to come back home, as my life was saved. I was in prison when IOM came to our assistance and facilitated our voluntary return to The Gambia. I am happy to be back home and alive.

After my arrival in The Gambia, I attended an information session and signed up for an educational grant because I wanted to go back to school to continue my studies.

After all the necessary procedures, I received a grant which supported my tuition to pursue a diploma program in Diplomacy and International Relations at the Management Development Institute. The educational grant also covered school materials, such as a laptop, text and exercise books, a USB memory stick, a bicycle, a school bag and stationery. The support has enabled me to go back to school and pursue my dreams.

I wanted to study Diplomacy and International Relations for two reasons: one, because I aspire to work for an international organization; and two, because I had been affected by the crisis in Libya, which involves elements of diplomacy and international relations. The course is going well, and I am learning a lot about the international system, including peace and conflict management and development issues.



I was a disk jockey (DJ) before I travelled to Libya. I stopped the business, sold the musical equipment and took the journey.

Before I left, I was doing well and had no intentions to travel, but peer influence played a huge part in my case and I decided to take the journey.

My attempts to cross to Italy failed and I was held in detention for six months. The conditions were bad.

IOM helped me to return home, as I needed assistance to go back to my country.

After I returned, I was supported with a grocery shop and the business is going well. When I started I was short on other supplies, but now I have them in the shop.

“I changed my location to a more strategic one, as my former location was not good enough. The business is going so well and I’m getting a good living from it.”

DANIEL



EBRIMA



“I am never going back. I am here to stay and grow this business together with my family.”



I came back to The Gambia from Libya in August 2017 through the assistance of IOM. My journey was a very rough one, so I decided to come home. I am happy to be back home alive and to see my family again.

After my return, I received a call from IOM regarding my reintegration assistance and my father advised me to expand his business, which is a shop that sells modest outfits and textiles. The business is going very well and customers keep coming in every time.

We are situated in the Serrekunda Market, which is a strategic location and is close to my house. I am managing the business together with my father. I have no regrets coming back home and everything is going so well for me.

I regret taking the “backway”, but I am glad to be back home and making a positive change in my life. My favourite part about coming home is seeing my mother’s beautiful smile again, because she was so worried and devastated when I left.

Before leaving in early 2017, I was an Arabic scholar. Life had been difficult for my family, so I thought I should travel to Italy to turn things around for us.

I travelled to Libya via Senegal, Mali and then Niger, but there were many challenges along the journey, such as lack of food and water for weeks on a vehicle packed with dozens of migrants from other countries. I paid a 'middleman' to get on a boat to Italy twice, but he took away my money without 'pushing' me. In my last attempt, he 'pushed' me but we were caught by the Libyan navy police and taken into detention for two months.

In the prison, I decided I had to go home because I had gone through an unspeakable experience. It was the best choice for me. With IOM's assistance, I returned to The Gambia in December 2017.

After initiating my reintegration assistance, I chose to do poultry farming because it is a profitable and great economic venture that would get me self-employed and independent. I underwent a three-month intensive poultry training program at EMPAS Poultry Processing Centre.

“My goal is to bridge the gap on the importation of chicken and encourage more people to embrace locally grown chickens for a healthier life. This is a good boost for the country’s economy too.”

The training widened my knowledge on poultry farming techniques and sustainability. After the training, I was supported with a full poultry house, including 500 chicks with feeders, drinkers, detergents, medicine and other poultry materials.

The poultry business will benefit me in many ways, as it has the potential to produce enough of the chicken consumed in my area. The chicks I have are broilers and, in the future, I would like to have layers as well to be able to sell not only chicken, but also eggs.



FODAY

KANYIBA



“In the future, I would like my business to grow bigger to create wealth and employment opportunities for young people in my community and the country at large.”

Before I left for Libya, I was working here as a welder. Although the business was going well, it was not enough to support all the expenses of my family. So, the idea of going to Europe via Libya came to my mind.

I went through a lot of challenges, as my family couldn't support me financially. I had to stay at each destination I arrived at to work and earn some money to go further. It took two years before I reached Tripoli. I worked for two months to cross to Italy but was captured at sea and jailed repeatedly on all four attempts.

I thought about returning home after my life was threatened several times. At one point, our apartment was attacked. With these circumstances, I knew going back home was the best choice for me. IOM came to our rescue and I decided to come back home with the hope of rebuilding my life.

I received my reintegration support in the form of in-kind assistance through procurement of welding equipment to continue and expand my business from where I left it before taking the journey to Libya. My reintegration process took three months and it went smoothly.

I am happy to be back home and am so grateful to IOM for facilitating my return and reintegration. Since I returned and started work, I have never begged for money. With my business I am able to sustain myself and my family.

My community has been supportive too, as I get patronage from them to do their welding and metalwork needs. I have young people working under me, including my brother.

I was a police officer before my departure for Libya in March 2016. Before I left, I also worked in the timber trade for a Chinese company. My income was stable and I had some savings. All these changed after I started communicating with my friends who had taken the journey to Libya and crossed to Italy. They thought I should join them because life was good there. I decided I would take the journey to make life easier for my family. Although my father disagreed with my choice, I was determined to travel.

Without enough information about the journey, I bought a bus ticket, leaving my wife who was pregnant at the time. The journey to Libya was difficult. When I got to Tripoli, I tried cross to Italy over three times without success. On each occasion, I was caught and taken into detention.

On my last attempt, our boat ran out of fuel and we got lost for two days. The Tunisian navy rescued us, took us to safety in Tunis and then contacted IOM, who came to our aid with food, water, clothing, and sanitary and hygiene materials. Initially, I did not want to go home; but after three months in the camp, I realized my time to being wasted and that I should return to my country and start all over.

“My plan is to ensure that the poultry farm grows bigger, so I can generate a lot of revenue from it and create employment opportunities for young Gambians.”

IOM facilitated my voluntary return. My parents were happy to see me back alive and I was happy to be back home with my wife and children.

My reintegration assistance commenced a few months after my return. I decided I would go into poultry, as my father maintained a small poultry home before his retirement. After undergoing a poultry farming training program at EMPAS Poultry Processing Centre, I received a full poultry house with chicks, drinkers, feeders, and medicine and poultry materials. The support has improved my life and I’m so grateful for it. It has made me self-employed and independent.



LAMIN

MAM



I was a welder man but had eye problems, so I stopped the business to start a local grocery shop before I made the journey to Europe via Libya.

Without sufficient income from the grocery shop, I left in 2017. The journey was hard for me, but I made it through to Libya. I tried to cross to Italy, but I was caught and detained for several months until IOM came to our rescue. I decided to return home because the situation in Libya was getting increasingly difficult at the time.

I am happy to be back home alive, as many of my friends have lost their lives or got seriously ill.

I received my reintegration support in the form of a grocery shop in my hometown, Basse Santa Su, where I sell different kinds of food items. I also have a popcorn machine that supplements my business, as most children and even adults love popcorn.

The business is going well, and my family has been supportive throughout the process.

“The support I received from IOM has opened many doors for me to become self-employed and independent. In the future, I want to get married, start a family and settle down here, as I do not intend to travel abroad using irregular routes.”

***“My business is going well,
and I am grateful for the
support. My desire is to
expand more.”***



I left in September 2017 to travel to Europe via Libya to support my family and relatives because of our economic situation. The journey was extremely challenging and traumatizing.

I went through Sabi in Basse, then Mali for three weeks and headed for Niamey in Niger. I spent some time in Agadez before crossing the desert to Libya.

When we were crossing the Mediterranean Sea, we were caught and detained in prison. Our luck came when IOM assisted us to voluntarily return to The Gambia, because the situation in the prison was terrible.

Since I returned to The Gambia, there has been a big difference in my life. IOM supported me to start my own fashion and cosmetics shop. I am also one of the founding members of the Youths Against Irregular Migration (YAIM)—a group of migrant returnees raising awareness on the risks of irregular migration in The Gambia.

MAM JARRA



OMAR



“My customer base has increased during the course of the few months I started the business. Hopefully this will continue, so I can expand the business with more machines and hire people to work for me.”

I was running a tailoring business before leaving for Libya. The business was going well, but the money was not flowing as I expected. So, I sold everything I owned to finance my journey to Europe and look for better opportunities.

I left in 2017 via Senegal, Mali then Burkina Faso. I headed for Algeria but got caught and returned to the Niger border, and then eventually made it to the capital, Niamey, where I worked as a tailor for up to five months. While in Niger, the situation was getting difficult. The route to Italy was blocked, as rescue ships withdrew operations in the central Mediterranean. Barely anyone would take the journey from Niger to Libya, because you would be stranded in Libya and not able to cross to Italy.

So, my journey ended and I could not proceed further. I decided to return home to reunite with my family because the situation was not helping. The best thing was to go back home and start all over again. IOM facilitated my voluntary return via land from Niger.

I am happy to be back home. I received my reintegration support in the form of a tailoring shop. I was supported with four different kinds of sewing machines, including a designer machine. The business is going well and I'm happy about the progress, as I'm getting what I want from it. I have around five apprentices from the community working under me and learning to become tailors. I also have plans to do business in Guinea-Bissau. I can sew clothes here and export them, because they have a good market for sewed clothes and I would like to take advantage of it.



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