



EU-IOM

Joint Initiative for
Migrant Protection
and Reintegration



REGIONAL FINAL EVALUATION REPORT THE SAHEL AND LAKE CHAD REGION



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVRR	ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION
AWR	AWARENESS RAISING
CBI	CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS
CFM	COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS
CFW	CASH FOR WORK
CS	COMMUNITY STABILIZATION
CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION
DAC	OECD'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE
DSA	DATA SHARING AGREEMENT
ECOWAS	ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
EUTF	EUROPEAN UNION EMERGENCY TRUST FUND FOR AFRICA
GIZ	DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT
IMAP	IOM MIGRANT ASSISTANCE PORTAL
INGO	INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
IOM	INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION
IP	IMPLEMENTING PARTNER
JI	JOINT INITIATIVE
KAP	KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES
KII	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW
M&E	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
MHPSS	MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT
MIMOSA	MIGRANT MANAGEMENT OPERATING SYSTEM APPLICATION (PROGRAMME DATABASE)
NFI	NON-FOOD ITEM
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
OECD	ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
SAR	SEARCH AND RESCUE
SLC	SAHEL AND LAKE CHAD
SOP	STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After more than four years of programme implementation in the region, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative has largely achieved its overall objective: “To contribute to strengthening the governance of migration in Sahel and Lake Chad, and provide protection and sustainable reintegration for migrants along the Central Mediterranean route.” By September 2021, almost 57,000 migrants, including children, have been assisted to return to their country of origin and reunited with their families and communities. The returnees have been supported to recover their physical and emotional wellbeing with medical and psychosocial reintegration assistance, in addition to economic support to re-establish their livelihoods. Governments and civil society partners demonstrate increased motivation and capacity to provide services for returning migrants, and have access to improved migration data to make evidence-based policy. The risks of irregular migration have been conveyed to local youth and their families, often using the testimonies of returning migrants themselves. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Initiative successfully adapted its activities, finding innovative solutions to continue assistance to migrants.

The Joint Initiative final evaluation is based on freshly collected quantitative and qualitative data including more than 7,000 surveys collected by IOM M&E staff in the post-COVID 19 period and almost 500 qualitative interviews with key informants and beneficiaries conducted by international evaluators between January and August 2021. A total of 11 field missions were conducted by a mixed team of internal and external evaluators. This evaluation used the six OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) and examined seven themes: Migration Governance, Referrals and Implementing Partnerships, Awareness Raising, Protection and Return, Reintegration, Community Stabilization (CS) and Search and Rescue (SAR).

Key findings and main recommendations include:

Migration Governance

The Joint Initiative broke new ground in migration governance by engaging with countries on the sensitive topic of return and reintegration of returnees, setting the stage for effective voluntary return processes – even amid COVID-19 border restrictions. The multi-faceted approach of capacity building, material support and engagement of national and local authorities in coordination and implementation ensured buy-in for voluntary return and reintegration. The programme’s migration governance objectives were challenging given the amount of time and investment needed for consultation and capacity building on one hand, and the pressure to rapidly implement return and reintegration assistance on the other amid surging migrant caseloads. Trust and cooperation with national governments were established over time and despite challenging circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Continue to combine migration governance and capacity building activities with national stakeholder involvement in direct assistance and technical support to ensure that migration governance activities remain relevant to operational needs and field realities.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Engage with multiple levels of government – state/local, national and cross-regional bodies to ensure that return and reintegration activities are relevant to SLC development priorities and that migration governance initiatives filter down to the local level.

Referrals and Implementing Partnerships

Learn by doing' was a central tenet of the JI's engagement with national government and civil society partners, but it was not without challenges. For referral partnerships, conducting outreach to a wide range of partners to try to find synergies with programmes that were not necessarily set up to serve returnees was no easy feat. Additionally, the referral partners were not incentivised to receive returnees (or penalised for not including them) which often led to a longer process of negotiation. For implementing partnerships, vocational training initiatives run by organizations with established expertise were generally more successful than attempts to outsource the overall microbusiness process.

Challenges with collective projects and managing beneficiary expectations, already observed with direct assistance during the [2020 Regional Reintegration Evaluation](#), tended to be heightened in cases of beneficiaries assisted by partners.

RECOMMENDATION #3

If the donor intends to draw on multiple development actors for the reintegration of returns for future programmes, ensure that coordination is undertaken during the project inception stage and that clear case management and quota criteria are in place, in coordination with all actors involved in migration (IOM, Government) and drawing on existing platforms.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Systematize the collection of data on migrants' educational level, literacy status and languages spoken to allow partners to tailor vocational training to the appropriate level.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Streamline the referrals process by increasing direct information-sharing (by inviting partner organizations to come to reception centres and inform new returnees about relevant services for example).

RECOMMENDATION #6

Strike a balance between matching the size/value of implementing partner contracts to (proven) organizational capacity and keeping the number of IPs to a manageable number.

RECOMMENDATION #7

Ensure that the economic reintegration counselling function is separated from the procurement of microbusiness items, for example by building partners' capacity to ensure services and procedures are up to standard and delivered transparently.

Awareness Raising

A range of awareness raising activities and approaches were piloted under the Joint Initiative, involving and building the capacity of a wide range of stakeholders in a largely new domain in the Sahel and Lake Chad region. Beneficiary and partner feedback was largely positive, suggesting that the majority of the messaging hit its mark and encouraged community members to think twice about migrating irregularly or sending a family member. However, the large number of communities targeted and limited budget constrained effectiveness. Lessons learned include the effectiveness of peer-to-peer messaging and the need to engage more with religious leaders.

Protection and Return

After effectively managing a higher-than-expected volume of return during the project's first three years, IOM was again put under high levels of pressure as borders slammed shut in the early months of the pandemic, leaving migrants trapped in transit. The project responded by introducing COVID-19 prevention measures on voluntary return flights and in transit centres, in addition to stepping up psychosocial support and recreational activities to help migrants cope with prolonged limbo. Solutions were effectively negotiated, such as humanitarian corridors, to allow migrants to return despite the restrictions.

RECOMMENDATION #8

Continue to extend technical support to governments and civil society in transit countries and countries of origin to support national management of humanitarian response to migrants in distress, including through consular assistance, as well as access to social and health services.

RECOMMENDATION #9

Provide migrants in transit with regular updates on the progress of their case. Where delays in the return process are due to external factors (for example, waiting for country of origin embassies to issue travel documents), communicate clearly what IOM is doing to address the issue.

RECOMMENDATION #10

Increase the frequency of monitoring visits to migrant transit centres and build partners' capacity to ensure that conditions are in line with minimum standards. For hard-to-reach locations, explore remote monitoring alternatives such as virtual video tours of centres and hiring of third-party contractors to act as independent field monitors.

Reintegration

In terms of promising practices in response to the COVID-19 crisis, Mali stood out with its efficient provision of cash-based assistance combined with a streamlined menu of reintegration microbusiness kits, delivered securely within three days of arrival. As well as responding to challenges posed by the pandemic and worsening security situation in Mali, the innovative approach also served to enhance transparency and reduce returnee stigma as beneficiaries no longer had to return to their communities empty-handed.

RECOMMENDATION #11

Continue with cash-based assistance (CBI) beyond a COVID-19 adaptation measure due to its high level of efficiency, flexibility and beneficiary satisfaction. Harmonise the various CBI approaches under the Joint Initiative project according to IOM Mali and Senegal's hybrid reintegration model (up to one-third of the total value of reintegration assistance given in cash and the rest in-kind). To maximise efficiency and transparency, consider fast-tracking the economic reintegration assistance by providing CBI cheques and standard reintegration kits during the reception period and/or during business skills training as done in Mali, while still giving returnees the option to wait for more individually tailored economic assistance options in addition to receiving social and psychosocial support..

RECOMMENDATION #11

To avoid returnees becoming stressed and/or discouraged while waiting for reintegration assistance and losing contact with IOM, conduct continuous outreach to beneficiaries via phone and/or SMS to reassure them that their case is in progress.

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2020 REINTEGRATION EVALUATION

1. Handle collective microbusiness assistance with caution, reserving for cases where collective members have a successful track record of business cooperation or other relationship of trust (such as family members).
2. Continue to build on the psychosocial assistance component of the programme and ensure equal access for returnees to counselling services across missions.
3. Mobilize additional funding for social reintegration and allow provision of assistance addressing longer-term/more serious vulnerabilities.

Community Stabilization

Local leaders indicated that just prior to the project beginning, tensions had been running high between migrants and host communities as they competed over scarce jobs and access to public services. The Joint Initiative's community stabilization programming in Niger sent a strong signal to the host community that their needs were not being ignored in favor of migrants', thus promoting stability. Areas of improvement highlighted included reducing procurement-related delays in the delivery of the community-driven activities and enhancing strategic communication in order to maximise public confidence in local authorities' ability to respond to local needs.

Search and Rescue:

Overall, IOM Niger's SAR activities have been lifesaving and highly appreciated by rescued migrants. The involvement of Niger's Civil Protection Forces in SAR activities in vast desert zones where they previously had a limited presence is a landmark achievement. However, as the missions are resource-intensive in terms of vehicles, fuel, medical and protection staff and military escorts, the sustainability of SAR efforts without dedicated donor funding is in doubt.

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the 2015-2016 migration crisis where thousands of Africans died en-route to Europe and North Africa, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration was launched with funding from the EU Emergency Trust fund for Africa (EUTF). It is the first comprehensive programme to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa.

The EU-IOM Joint Initiative enables migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way, in full respect of international human rights standards and in particular the principle of non-refoulement. In close cooperation with partnering state and non-state actors, it provides assistance to returning migrants to help them restart their lives in their countries of origin through an integrated approach to reintegration that supports both migrants and their communities. This approach has the potential to complement local development, and mitigates some of the drivers of irregular migration. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative covers and closely cooperates with 26 African countries in the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa.

In the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the JI is being implemented from December 2016 until May 2022 in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and the Gambia. Interventions include:

Migration Governance:

Building the capacities of government and local stakeholders on migration governance, sustainable reintegration of returning migrants and ownership of reintegration activities at the national level. More than 4,000 employees of partner organizations have been trained under the Joint Initiative.

Protection and Assisted Voluntary Return:

Protecting vulnerable migrants in transit through provision of individualized support to address their needs and providing voluntary return assistance to the country of origin. By September 2021, almost 57,000 migrants stranded in Sahel and Lake Chad host/transit countries had been assisted to return home.

Reintegration:

Providing economic, social and psychosocial reintegration assistance. The most common types of economic assistance provided are microbusiness support and vocational training, while for social assistance it is medical and housing assistance and payment of children's school fees. The most common types of psychosocial assistance provided are individual counselling and psychoeducation group sessions. Overall, by August 2021, almost 60,000 returnees had received economic reintegration support, with approximately one-quarter of the caseload also receiving social reintegration support and more than one-third benefitting from psychosocial assistance (see Annex for further details).

Awareness raising:

Conducting awareness raising and sensitization activities targeting the general public on the risks of and the alternatives to irregular migration. This includes both community events (e.g., film screenings and community discussions) and mass media campaigns (e.g., radio debates, street art murals). Over the life of the programme, more than 2.5 million people had been reached with awareness raising messages across the region.

Migration data:

Collecting and analysing data on migration to support evidence-based programming. As of mid-2021, at least 20 Joint Initiative-funded flow monitoring points were operating across the region.

Community Stabilization and Search and Rescue (Niger and Burkina Faso only):

In the key transit countries of Niger and Burkina Faso, community stabilization activities were also implemented to reduce the pressure on host communities along migrant routes, and thereby address the drivers of social tension and instability. As of September 2021, more than 130,000 individuals have benefitted from improved access and provision of basic social services, awareness raising and socio-cultural activities.

Search and rescue operations were also mounted to save migrants stranded in the desert, where they are frequently abandoned by smugglers. By September 2021, more than 35,000 migrants had been rescued across the two countries¹. This is the second of two IOM-led regional evaluations required under the JI. An evaluation focusing on reintegration activities was completed in July 2020, while this final programme evaluation in 2021 covers all thematic areas. The evaluation covers only 12 out of the 13 countries, as the Joint Initiative in Mauritania is being evaluated in a separate report due to the unique country context (unlike the other JI countries, it is not a major country of origin for irregular migration) and different activities implemented, such as diaspora engagement and border management. This evaluation measures the programme's level of achievement in relation to its overall objective: *"To contribute to strengthening the governance of migration in the Sahel and Lake Chad, and provide protection and sustainable solutions for migrants along the Central Mediterranean route."* The evaluation is designed both for internal learning purposes and to offer the donor an overall analysis of the outcomes of the project after more than four years of programme implementation.

2. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the previous section, the evaluation covers all thematic areas of the JI in 12 countries. The evaluation questions are based on the six OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability):

Migration Governance	Relevance	Were IOM's migration governance activities appropriately tailored to the country context (i.e., did they address the main gaps with migration management of voluntary return and sustainable reintegration?)
	Effectiveness	To what extent (if at all) has IOM's direct support and/or advocacy contributed to the country drafting and/or ratifying laws and/or policies for strengthened migration governance of voluntary return and sustainable reintegration?
	Impact	If policies/laws have been drafted/ratified in the country with IOM support, what difference has this made on the ground to migration management and wellbeing of returnees (or what difference is it expected to make) in the country?
	Sustainability	Following programme capacity building activities (including trainings, coordination/consultation bodies and joint implementation), are national government and civil society partners more engaged in the field of protection, voluntary return, sustainable reintegration, awareness raising and/or migration data?
Referrals/IPs	Coherence	Was the programme's approach of encouraging referrals compatible with the capacity and types of interventions offered by local partners in the various country contexts?
	Effectiveness	How effective were referrals to partner organizations in improving returnees' economic, social and psychosocial wellbeing?
	Sustainability	Are referral partners willing to continue serving returnees after the end of the Joint Initiative programme, and will they have the capacity (both skills and financial) to do so?
	Efficiency	Did the Joint Initiative project manage to refer beneficiaries to partners in a timely manner without compromising data protection principles?

¹ This figure also includes IOM's Humanitarian Rescue Operations at Niger's border with Algeria.

Awareness raising	Relevance	To what extent did the JI programme involve local stakeholders (local civil society, national and local authorities, community leaders and/or returnees themselves) to design AWR messages, campaigns and events appropriately for the target audience?
	Effectiveness	How effective were the programme's awareness raising activities in increasing knowledge on migration and risks related to irregular migration?
	Sustainability	Did the experience with the Joint Initiative awareness raising inform subsequent AWR efforts in the West and Central Africa region? Are lessons learned and best practices taken forward?
Protection and Return	Relevance	How appropriately did IOM adapt voluntary return interventions and transit Centre management to respond to the needs for protection and return assistance amid the COVID-19 pandemic?
	Coherence	How have IOM interventions in transit centres complemented those by other partners? What are the gaps and lessons learned?
	Effectiveness	Under the Joint Initiative, were migrants able to make an informed decision to make a dignified and safe return to their country of origin? Was the programme able to learn and adapt? What could be improved in the transit, return and reception stages?
	Efficiency	Did assisted voluntary return journeys take place in a timely manner? What were the challenges in the return process and how were they overcome?
	Efficiency	Were direct assistance and protection services to vulnerable migrants in transit implemented in an efficient way?
Reintegration ²	Relevance	Were the programme's PSS activities appropriately tailored to the reintegration needs of returnees (including social/cultural/community context, vulnerabilities, gender, age and geographical scope)?
	Effectiveness	How effectively did IOM adapt reintegration activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the new cash-based assistance modality(ies)? Did any new promising practices emerge for future reintegration programming?
	Impact	Has PSS and social assistance enhanced migrants' wellbeing in their communities of return?
CS	Effectiveness	Did assisted voluntary return journeys take place in a timely manner? What were the challenges in the return process and how were they overcome?
	Sustainability	Are community structures created within the scope of the project seen as long-term resources for conflict resolution and reduction? Do members of these structures view their role as exclusive to project implementation, or as longer-term resources for conflict prevention in their communities?
SAR	Effectiveness	To what extent have stranded migrants been effectively assisted with IOM search and rescue activities? What could have been improved?

² In 2020, IOM conducted a regional thematic evaluation of the Joint Initiative's reintegration activities (available here) which focused on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of individual, collective and community economic reintegration assistance. In order to focus on areas of reintegration assistance which were not already covered in depth in the previous report, this final evaluation focuses on COVID-19 adaptation, partner-implemented reintegration assistance and social and psychosocial reintegration.

Data sources and collection:

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods methodology. External consultants were used to collect qualitative data in six countries, while qualitative data collection was carried out in the field in the remaining six countries by IOM staff based in the Dakar Regional Office, with additional support from staff based in the Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire country offices. Field missions took place between April and August 2021, with a total of 162 key informant and 264 beneficiary interviews conducted. For the Migration Governance component, an additional 49 key informant interviews were collected remotely (via Skype/Teams) by two external consultants between January and March 2021.

With the exception of awareness raising and capacity building surveys, all quantitative data used for this final evaluation is a fresh data collected by IOM M&E staff after the 2020 IOM reintegration evaluation and the onset of COVID-19. Following a regional needs assessment on the effects of COVID-19 on reintegration beneficiaries, harmonized regional surveys were adapted to capture data on COVID-19 prevention measures during transit and voluntary return and assess programme progress amid the pandemic. As the project piloted cash-based interventions (CBI) for the first time, a post-distribution monitoring survey was also introduced to promote accountability and assess outcomes. As only vulnerable beneficiaries usually receive social and psychosocial assistance, streamlined surveys were developed with regional experts to target this specific caseload. As part of IOM's flagship [migrant centre management toolkit](#), M&E tools on transit centres were also developed to monitor quality standards and migrant satisfaction.

SURVEY	RESPONSES
COVID-adapted AVR survey	1,746
COVID-adapted Economic Reintegration Satisfaction Survey	2,222
COVID-adapted Social Reintegration Satisfaction Survey	466
COVID-adapted Psychosocial Reintegration Satisfaction Survey	499
Migrant Transit Centre Satisfaction Survey	530
CBI Monitoring Survey	982
AWR Event Beneficiary Outcome Monitoring Survey	222
Capacity Building Outcome Monitoring Survey	367
TOTAL	7,034

Challenges and Limitations

- **COVID-19:**

Movement and travel restrictions and health concerns meant that IOM M&E staff carried out a greater proportion of surveys by phone, particularly in the early months of the pandemic. However, by the end of the data collection period, field data collection had resumed, and international evaluators were able to conduct field missions.

- **Security and access:**

The worsening security situation in a number of countries limited the areas that it was advisable to travel to for evaluation missions. For example, in both Mali and Burkina Faso, most regions have been placed on the highest security alert level by the UN Department of Safety and Security.

- **Potential bias in beneficiary interviews:**

As many beneficiaries were more comfortable being interviewed in local African languages such as Wolof or Bambara rather than in English or French, some details might have been lost during the translation process by local M&E staff for the international evaluator. Demand bias is also possible, as although it was explained at the beginning of each interview that feedback would be anonymised and not linked to the provision of future assistance, such hopes may still have shaped beneficiaries' responses. A similar issue may exist with partner organizations being reluctant to voice negative feedback in the hope of attracting future IOM funding.

3. FINDINGS

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods methodology. External consultants were used to collect qualitative data in six countries, while qualitative data collection was carried out in the field in the remaining six countries by IOM staff based in the Dakar Regional Office, with additional support from staff based in the Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire country offices. Field missions took place between April and August 2021, with a total of 162 key informant and 264 beneficiary interviews conducted. For the Migration Governance component, an additional 49 key informant interviews were collected remotely (via Skype/Teams) by two external consultants between January and March 2021.

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3.1 MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The JI's Migration Governance component aimed to build the capacities of government and local stakeholders on migration management, including protection, reintegration and data management with a view to increase ownership and sustainability.

3.1.1 *Relevance: Were IOM's migration governance activities appropriately tailored to the country context (i.e., did they address the main gaps with migration management of voluntary return and sustainable reintegration?)*

Overall, the Joint Initiative broke new ground in migration governance by engaging with countries on the sensitive topic of return and reintegration of returnees, setting the stage for effective voluntary return processes – even amid COVID-19 border restrictions. The multi-faceted approach of capacity building, material support and engagement of national and local authorities in coordination and implementation was highly relevant to the country context. The migration governance initiatives ensured buy-in for voluntary return and for the first time placed reintegration of returnees firmly on the national agenda. IOM key informants described that prior to the Joint Initiative, returnees were generally assisted on an individual basis by the transit country mission, with minimal involvement from governments in the country of origin. The project's strategy of engaging with migration governance and designing reintegration interventions in the country of origin thus represented a major shift in approach, which aimed to ensure that reintegration assistance was aligned with broader national development priorities. The programme's ambitious migration governance objectives were challenging given the amount of time and investment needed for consultation and capacity building on one hand, and the pressure to rapidly implement return and reintegration assistance on the other amid surging migrant caseloads. One lesson learned from the project start-up is to have a back-up plan (such as temporary Standard Operating Procedures) to ensure operational continuity in the event of delays in reaching agreement with national governments. As an IOM key informant highlighted, *“Working on governance is very important but at the same time operationally you need to have things in parallel that move ahead to ensure minimum humanitarian assistance to people, otherwise things will fall through the cracks.”* Trust and cooperation with national governments was established over time and despite challenging circumstances.

Key activities directly involving the government in implementation of return and reintegration included:

- **Establishing Migration Steering Committees:**

Under the Joint Initiative project, all 12 Sahel and Lake Chad countries covered in this evaluation have established steering committees which regularly bring together government actors to discuss key issues. This marks an important step for coordination, engagement and ownership in country contexts where laws on migration are in place but responsibility for implementation is scattered across a range of government bodies. As a government official in the Gambia described, *“There were many stakeholders, many players in the area of advocacy, but the coordination was an issue. There was a real need for a centralized platform between government and other NGOs to improve the coordination”*. Likewise, a member of the government in Chad stated, *“The Steering Committee has allowed us to sit together and take decisions in a coordinated manner. Before we were scattered, now we are in sync to respond in a coordinated manner. Each person has understood their responsibilities.”*

- **Involvement of Thematic Working Groups in programming:**

Several countries also set up thematic working groups to encourage direct involvement of the government in joint implementation. A notable example of this is Cameroon, which has working groups to advise on migrant's reintegration business plans, migration data collection and awareness raising messages and activities. Likewise in Côte d'Ivoire, a government working group participates in the implementation of collective and community reintegration projects. In Nigeria, the TWG leads case management teams deployed to assist returnees with reintegration plan preparation.

- **Supporting Sahel and Lake Chad governments' diplomatic missions to produce ID documents in Niger, Libya and Mali:**

In the region's main host/transit countries for irregular migration, IOM has worked closely with several countries' embassies and consulates in order to support the prompt delivery of travel documents for migrants stuck in transit in Niger. IOM also engaged in high-level advocacy with migrants' origin country governments to strengthen their consular presence in Niger, leading to Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea opening consulates there.

The migration governance structures set up by the project were often relevant to migrant protection and reintegration beyond the Joint Initiative. Some platforms set up by the project, such as the Return, Reintegration and Readmission Working Group for Nigeria, are also used to discuss return and reintegration for other EU-funded programmes, not just IOM's.

Other significant migration governance activities include the drafting and validation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on return and reintegration (covered in the following section) and capacity building activities (covered in the final question in this section).

3.1.2 Effectiveness: To what extent (if at all) has IOM's direct support and/or advocacy contributed to the country drafting and/or ratifying laws and/or policies for strengthened migration governance of voluntary return and sustainable reintegration?

While other IOM projects have engaged with governments in the region on migration legislation, the main achievement of the Joint Initiative has been to support countries to put in place Standard Operating Procedures to outline a common approach to the return and reintegration process, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved. These SOPs were individually tailored to each country context after extensive consultation with the government, and are thus more likely to influence national policy in the longer term than if they had been designed by IOM without any government involvement. The SOPs have been validated in all countries covered by the evaluation, with the exception of Guinea-Bissau where the process was delayed due to chronic political instability. IOM played a key role in their initiation, drafting and validation by the various stakeholders. This often involved a complex process of negotiation between different levels and organs of the government over an extended period, such as in Senegal where the SOPs were validated by partners in November 2018 after two years of programme implementation. A Senegalese government official describes the collaborative and exhaustive process undertaken involving numerous government bodies: *“We have co-written, finalized and validated the SOPs with IOM based on the experiences of the General Directorate for Support to Senegalese Abroad (DGASE), on a document called CARRE which is the Contract Accompanying the Return and Reintegration of Emigrants and on IOM's experience on the subject of return and reintegration. We have integrated our CARRE in the SOP.”*

It was a collegial work between IOM and the DGASE. The design and validation of the SOPs was carried out by the National Committee Charged with the Management of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced People (CNRRPD) a body that is part of the President of the Republic's office, directed by the Chief of Staff of the Head of State who gathers the key ministries as well as the national and international partners who bring their expertise and support to the committee."

These SOPs succeeded in securing national buy-in and laying the foundation for the close cooperation between IOM and Sahel and Lake Chad governments in implementing a programme that saw the return of tens of thousands of migrants to countries of origin in the region, with assistance continuing even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The SOP process also broke the ice on the sensitive topic of return and reintegration of returnees and started a wider conversation about the longer-term migration management issues linked to return and reintegration. This central role and the time invested in detailed consultations contributed to placing IOM as a trusted partner when discussing further migration policies and strategies. IOM's operational role in return and reintegration also meant it was well-placed to advise on practical policy matters, as an IOM staff member described: *"My recommendation is that future programmes really look at governance and direct assistance together. Our credibility as IOM is based on the proximity work, because we do assist migrants, and we do know what their struggles are. In turn we are able to have operational SOPs and are able to influence policy."*

While various stakeholders have engaged with general migration governance and capacity building efforts in the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the SOP process was unique as it directly engaged governments in large-scale return and reintegration efforts on an operational level. As another IOM staff member described:

"Now we have governments involved in the process of how to do reception on arrival and how to integrate assistance provided by IOM with social services. Government agencies meet quite frequently to discuss migration management in general. Before the Joint Initiative this cooperation was not there, and now it's there. Discussion about the COVID crisis was done through this forum and not through anything else. It allowed migration to become a topic of real discussion, you have authorities and actors using the Joint Initiative to decide how to manage migration. And this is massive. In order to create a dialogue, you must have an impact on reality, learn by doing, and it needs to imply resources. Otherwise, it's just another workshop where we take a nice picture at the end."

A Guinean government official reflects, *"Thanks to going down this road together, we have been able to improve our knowledge of migration governance. If today we are speaking about this issue, it's because we have been engaged and involved."*

Impact: If policies/laws have been drafted/ratified in the country with IOM support, what difference has this made on the ground to migration management and wellbeing of returnees (or what difference is it expected to make) in the country?

The Joint Initiative has accompanied Sahel and Lake Chad governments to make large strides in migration management and supported facilities with the potential to provide long-term services to migrants. One of the most tangible results of the programme's migration governance work has been to ensure dignified and safe voluntary return for migrants. For example, in one scene witnessed during final evaluation data collection in Mali, migrants exhausted from being trapped in detention in Libya or stranded in the Nigerien desert are greeted by government officials on arrival and whisked directly from the tarmac onto waiting government buses to a government-run reception centre. As with several other centres in the region, the Bamako reception centre managed by the government was built, refurbished and equipped with IOM support. Likewise in the Gambia to ensure a smooth return process with government involvement, a dedicated area has been set aside at Banjul Airport for Mobile Reception facilities for return charter flights, following consultations with government and Gambian Civil Aviation Authority. In Côte d'Ivoire, staff from six different government ministries (including the health ministry and ministry in charge of civil documentation) are involved in meeting charter flights. In Ghana there is also extensive coordination as a Ghanaian embassy official in Libya described: *"When we have data about our nationals who are about to go back to Ghana, we share the data with the government there and with IOM Ghana. We specify in the document those who need assistance and what kind of assistance they need. We send the data to Ghana ahead of time. So that allows proper coordination with our health authorities there, but also with other relevant stakeholders."* Coordination with government authorities was also observed in Cameroon, where the Ministry of Health dispatches a team to the airport to provide free emergency medical assistance to returning migrants.

In Nigeria, an increased commitment of the federal authorities and other stakeholders was noticed by IOM staff members, who stated that *“comparing to when this project started and now, you completely see the difference between the governments agencies’ reactions and prioritization of migration issues ...we saw for example the Federal Government allocating resources when IOM was bringing returnees back from Libya; the government has also allocated resources and charter flights to bring back Nigerian migrants. This was actually direct resources allocated at the presidency level which shows directly to what extent IOM sensitization has reached on the overall understanding and recognition of migration issues.”* Resources for return and reintegration were also allocated on a local government level in Nigeria, with Edo State (a high-return region) providing buses to transport migrants from the airport to their area of origin.

In Burkina Faso and Senegal, the programme’s migration governance efforts have led to migrants being increasingly included in local initiatives to promote youth employment. An IOM staff member in Burkina Faso reported: *“The government is more and more involved in putting in place different employment programmes to allow youth and migrants to be able to find their place in their communities. These are very strong actions which show that the Joint Initiative had had a very strong impact.”* Likewise in Senegal according to an IOM staff member: *“There’s been a shift in thinking about [irregular] migration. For a long time, it was considered a normal phenomenon...Now that the local officials call us to share their information about the migrants and that they refer migrants to us shows a very good level of involvement and approval.”*

In Ghana and the Gambia, a network of Migration Information Centres (MICs) has been set up, in the former case staffed by government officials and in the latter case by the National Youth Council, an organization linked to the government. Following staff capacity building and material support to the centres by IOM, they are designed to be a long-term resource for potential migrants and others interested in accessing reliable information about migration.

Overall, the improvements to the reception process to ensure a safe and dignified return, the establishment of government-run migrant reception and information centres and returnees’ increasing access to public services are evidence of the programme’s role in improving migration management across the region.

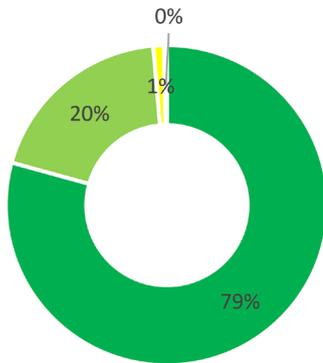
3.1.3 Sustainability: Following programme capacity building activities (including trainings, coordination/consultation bodies and joint implementation), are national government and civil society partners more engaged in the field of protection, voluntary return, sustainable reintegration, awareness raising and/or migration data?

Partner capacity building was a key plank of the Joint Initiative, with more than four thousand government and civil society representatives trained over the life of the programme in areas ranging from psychosocial reintegration assistance to migrant protection, awareness raising and migration data.

M&E data collected across the region illustrates that 99% of participants report that their skills and knowledge improved as a result of the training and 95% of participants now report feeling more engaged in migration management. A total of 367 training participants were surveyed across the region between November 2019 and September 2021 with a harmonized Capacity Building Outcome Monitoring Survey approximately six months after taking part in the capacity building activity.

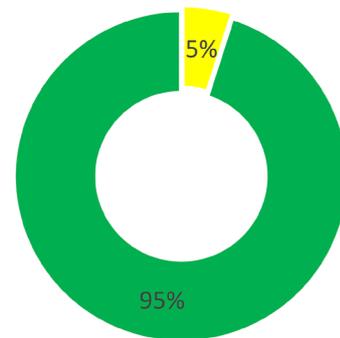
Have your knowledge and skills improved as a result of the training? (n=367)

■ Yes, a lot ■ Yes, somewhat ■ A bit ■ Not at all



After the training, what is your level of motivation to work on these activities? (n=367)

■ No change ■ More motivated



In total, 95% of government and civil society trainees reported that the capacity building activity had made them more motivated in their migration management work. For example, an employee of a civil society organization in Burkina Faso stated, *“I am more motivated, because in my organization we don’t focus on returnees, but more on migrants in transit. Now I am able to identify the vulnerabilities of returnees who have as much need of our assistance as the migrants in transit, especially concerning the psychosocial aspect.”* A civil society organization worker in Nigeria stated, *“The skills I’ve learned make data management less tedious.”*

Those who reported their skills had improved felt that they were now better equipped to carry out their work with migrants. *“The training helped me to learn how to lead awareness raising sessions”* said one NGO participant in Guinea, while an NGO participant in Guinea-Bissau felt better-equipped to deal with psychosocial issues: *“After the training, I’ve improved my approach with migrants and am being more sensitive.”* For the 1% that reported that their skills had not improved at all or only ‘a bit’, the reason was pre-existing familiarity with the content of the training.

The suggestions in the box below are gathered directly from partner representatives on how IOM can improve capacity building activities. Much of the feedback points to the demand for more training – whether it is increasing the length of training, extending training to include field visits, offering regular refresher workshops or launching training on new subjects. Other suggestions reveal popular touches in the Sahel and Lake Chad regional context, such as USB key handouts, certificates of participation and coffee breaks with an array of snacks. For greater impact, partner representatives also advise including more field-level government staff and local actors in capacity building activities and using local African languages.

PARTNERS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO IOM TO IMPROVE TRAININGS:

- **Increase training length/frequency:** The vast majority of respondents requested regular refresher trainings or longer trainings to help them fully absorb the material.
- **Gather more feedback from partners** to identify gaps and needs and better tailor training, as well as consulting more with partners on challenges and lessons learned in programme implementation.
- **Improve training follow-up:** Provide additional resources/further reading for participants and follow up with them more in the field to assess their progress.

- **Provide training on more subjects:** Partners wished to participate in more capacity building activities on different topics, such as project management, gender-based violence and child protection.
- **Reach a broader range of local/rural actors:** Respondents suggested expanding the trainings to more local stakeholders such as local councils and community leaders, in addition to focusing on field-level government staff rather than senior managers. It was also suggested to hold more trainings in rural areas.
- **Employ more interactive methods:** Suggestions from participants included using more videos, testimonials from migrants, case studies and practical examples, even incorporating field trips to visit migrants.
- **Use local languages:** Several participants suggested that training would be more effective if done in local African languages, for example Bambara rather than French in Mali.
- **Shorten training hours and structure sessions around prayer breaks.**
- **Offer more refreshments.**
- **Increase per diems.**
- **Provide handouts such as booklets summarizing course material and USB keys.**
- **Provide certificates of participation.**

Based on partner feedback, one key takeaway for IOM to bear in mind when designing future capacity building activities is partners' clear preference for face-to-face over online training (as a high value is placed on interactive methods, in-person consultation, field visits, per diems, refreshments and handouts). Other important points include increasing the frequency and reach of trainings and where feasible conducting more sessions in local African languages to increase participants' level of focus and engagement. As prior to the Joint Initiative, there was limited programming serving returnees in the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the capacity building activities were essential for laying the groundwork to get national partners involved in return and reintegration activities.

As an IOM staff member in Cameroon explained, *“Capacity building allowed the development of a better understanding of the issues....For many organizations, it was the first time — thanks to the Joint Initiative — that they could concretely participate in the protection and reintegration of returning migrants.”* An IOM staff member in Niger reflected: *“All the government institutions we’ve worked with have greatly progressed during the years of programme implementation, especially on migration.”*

Aside from the staff turnover issue, building up sustainable knowledge in a relatively new field is challenging to complete over only a three-year period. A Guinean government official described the progress made so far over the years of the project, but expressed the need for further capacity building support:

“The Joint Initiative has allowed us to better understand the migration management mechanisms and to collect migration data in a secure and orderly way. Before we did not have this. Now we are capable of giving clear, reliable and precise figures on the phenomenon. What IOM has built with the government, we need to make it sustainable. We have to reflect on this, otherwise it’s as if we built a castle and then left it untended. We still need the support of IOM and the Joint Initiative.”

LESSONS LEARNED ON TARGETING CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES MORE EFFECTIVELY

- It is important to train the frontline staff who are involved in providing daily services to migrants, rather than focusing only on senior NGO and government representatives. A Malian government official explains, *“Sometimes, the turnover of officials is a real problem in the government. The capacity building activities need to be done at a much more technical level, where the people will be less affected by staffing changes – not at the more political level as those posts change frequently.”* The more junior frontline staff are also likely to directly apply the skills learned. However, this may be challenging to reach the more junior participants as protocol dictates that while IOM can request a certain staff profile, heads of institutions are ultimately the ones to select the participants.
- Regular refresher training is needed, as one-off or ‘train-the-trainer’ approaches are insufficient amid high staff turnover. An IOM Mali staff member explains: *“It’s not enough to just do one training and take it for granted that things will last. Especially in the current political context in Mali, where once the transition period is over, most of the main state actors will change. It’s only through continuous training that the skills acquired will be made sustainable and that we will see a real change in migration governance in the country.”* The issue applies equally to other countries in the region facing political instability, such as Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. Where staff turnover is due to factors other than political stability, future migration governance capacity building activities could assess whether support could be provided in the area of human resources policy and management to increase staff retention.

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3.2 PARTNERSHIPS (REFERRALS AND IPS)

Partnerships are an important part of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative and aim at supporting partner countries in responding to migration governance challenges and opportunities. This section assesses IOM’s work with (inter)national partners under both referral (services existing outside the framework of the JI) and implementing partnership arrangements where there have often been common challenges and lessons learned. The feedback in this evaluation chapter thus relates to reintegration assistance that was implemented by partner staff rather than directly by IOM staff.

3.2.1 Coherence: Was the programme’s approach of encouraging referrals compatible with the capacity and types of interventions offered by local partners in the various country contexts?

As found in the [2020 IOM Regional Reintegration Evaluation](#), prior to the Joint Initiative, returnees were previously an under-considered and under-served group in the Sahel and Lake Chad region. The programme played a pivotal role in putting the needs of returning migrants on the map for government and civil society partners.

As economic reintegration is in many ways similar to livelihoods programming serving the general population, many national partners offered transferable skills in vocational training and other services relevant to returnees. The Joint Initiative harnessed and amplified the capacity of these partners to serve returnees as a specific beneficiary population, including raising awareness of their social and psychosocial vulnerabilities. Most importantly, for the first time in the region many partners gained hands-on experience in addressing returnees' needs. While in most project countries many national partners had an established track record of providing types of interventions that were relevant for returnees (for example business skills training and medical assistance), a number of gaps were noted in terms of capacity, coverage and understanding of the specific needs of migrants.

- **Gender:**

The vast majority of returning migrants are male, with a regional average of 85% rising to above 95% for some project countries such as Mali and the Gambia. However, the projects of many local and international NGOs are either designed only for female beneficiaries, or have a gender quota which limits the places available for (usually male) returnees. Even if male beneficiaries are accepted under project selection criteria, the activities may not be culturally appropriate. For example, in Burkina Faso, a local partner's artisanal weaving course attracted very little returnee interest as it was not perceived as a suitably masculine activity.

- **Psychosocial assistance:**

There is a scarcity of mental health services across the Sahel and Lake Chad region. The availability of services is often limited to specialized institutions in capital cities, and most mental health professionals are based in psychiatric hospitals. According to IOM psychosocial support specialists, most returnees are not in need of psychiatric services but rather psychosocial support on level 2 and 3 of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee intervention pyramid (level 2: community and family support; level 3: focused support provided by trained and supervised MHPSS staff). Additionally, returnees' inclusion in existing mental health systems is likely to be ineffective whenever those systems are not adequately serving the local population. The Joint Initiative project trained partners on basic psychosocial skills including identification of vulnerabilities and integrated it into the business skills training, but there is still a significant gap between the needs and the available resources. This gap impacted not only the programme's ability to refer beneficiaries to partners for psychosocial support, but also the provision of economic reintegration assistance by partners who were inexperienced in dealing with beneficiaries with psychosocial vulnerabilities. A partner in Côte d'Ivoire describes, *"Migrants are a very particular type of beneficiary population. You need to prepare them and to motivate them to do the training. The centre has taken time to understand the migrants' mentality, their concerns and priorities."*

- **Geographical coverage:**

Partners' activities were not necessarily concentrated in the regions of high return. Even where they did have a presence in the relevant region, returnees are often scattered throughout a range of small communities linked by poor roads—and small partner organizations may not have vehicles available to carry out field missions to beneficiaries' homes and businesses. In Ghana, returnees complained of frequently having to spend money on hour-long trips to an implementing partner's office to complete paperwork.

- **Financial/reporting capacity:**

Despite initial capacity assessments carried out, challenges in the region meant that implementing partners often required capacity building on documentation and reporting requirements and other aspects of project management. IOM supported with training on these aspects as well as the procurement of essential items. Some smaller local partners also lacked the capacity to implement activities without full pre-financing, leading to their taking loans or struggling to fulfill their contract. IOM typically limits upfront payments for implementing partnership agreements due to risk mitigation reasons, with risks likely to be higher where the partner has limited capacity.

- **Implementation capacity:**

Many partners did not have the capacity to implement assistance to returnees on a large scale. An IOM staff member in Ghana gives one example of an IP that was unable to handle significant numbers of beneficiaries: *"We started out referring small groups (beginning 15-20) for training, then maybe we got comfortable and then we gave a bigger chunk [approx. 200 for microbusiness assistance] ... They were used to dealing with refugees rather than returning migrants, they thought 'how hard can it be to deal with them and give them a plan' and I think they underestimated the work they would need to put in as well... So we got bitten, but we're not completely shy and we still want to engage with IPs."* An IOM staff member in Niger also warns against relying on local partners to serve large numbers of returnees: *"My suggestion is to mitigate the selection risks by trying to diversify. We need to choose partners that we are used to working with, as well as adding other partners"*

that have good technical expertise. We have to try to divide the contracts between different organizations to avoid having a beneficiary target that's too big for a single organization.”

- **Educational level:**

Many vocational training activities offered by partners assumed a certain educational level and that beneficiaries were literate in French or English. In Guinea, some returnees were rejected from partner trainings as they did not meet the educational criteria. In other cases, such as in Cameroon, beneficiaries still participated but were not able to fully understand the skills being taught. For example, in 2019 a total of 50 returnees were referred to an embassy-run training in innovative agricultural techniques. An IOM staff member in Cameroon reflected, *“The topics were interesting. I think that the problem was largely the migrants’ level of education, which is generally only between primary and the first years of secondary school... the level of the training was a bit above the level of the migrants.”*

- **Variety of activities:**

There was of ten a gap between the preferences of returnee and the activities on offer from partners. At times this issue was related to the lack of variety in partner trainings, as an IOM staff member in Guinea Bissau explains, *“You can’t direct a beneficiary towards an agricultural project just because he lives in a rural area, if the beneficiary doesn’t really want to be a farmer. They will accept it if they have no other choice, but they will migrate again at the first opportunity.”*

- **Financial support for participation:**

Migrants’ needs upon return to their countries of origin are primarily economic: the need to earn a decent living wage. While the need to learn a technical skill – which would allow them to support themselves over the long-term – was of interest, the short-term need to earn an income was of a higher priority. For example, in Guinea, some beneficiaries reported that they had dropped out of a training being run by an EUTF partner as the training stipend was not enough to make ends meet.

- **Sustainability:**

IOM staff in Niger highlighted that as well as limited budget to support migrants, the sustainability of partnerships was another concern as many organizations were only able to offer support within short programme timelines.

- **Speed:**

In the case of referrals to organizations that are not IPs, schedules for training and other activities are not designed to match the arrival of returnees. For example, in the Gambia, the initial strategy was to encourage referrals as a major source of reintegration assistance. However, mission staff quickly realized that in the Gambian context IOM still needed to provide substantial direct assistance to returnees due to referral organizations’ pace and ways of working: *“these partners don’t work with the urgency of arrivals, and you cannot tell a returnee to wait for 6 or 12 months for a training that might suit their needs”*.

3.2.2 Effectiveness: How effective were referrals to partner organizations in improving returnees’ economic, social and psychosocial wellbeing?

The regional satisfaction rate for beneficiaries assisted by partners is 72% - significantly below the overall regional reintegration satisfaction rate, which stands at 84%. This section focuses primarily on the effectiveness of partnerships for economic reintegration assistance, as evaluation data did not reveal significant differences regarding psychosocial and social assistance delivered by partners compared to by IOM staff.

Nevertheless, qualitative data indicates that referrals and implementing partnerships were often successful in improving returnees’ economic wellbeing, especially in the area of vocational training, reflecting the substantial pool of expertise in this area in many Sahel and Lake Chad countries.

For example, the programme in Ghana effectively engaged with four implementing partners with a solid track record in vocational training, and feedback from beneficiaries regarding these courses was positive. The IPs’ strengths included their knowledge of the local market and microbusiness set-up, ability to coach and motivate returnees, and - in the case of a government training institute - to provide recognized trade certificates.

The provision of transport stipends and food was also well-appreciated by returnees and helped to ensure their attendance. Beneficiaries expressed that the trainings were useful to them in starting their microbusinesses and easing their transition to working back home again.

One said, *“I was happy about the training, and I learned a lot. They showed us how if the customer comes to you, if you take good care of them, they will come back again.”* Another Ghanaian returnee reflected, *“Usually when you come back you are not really the same as the people here, but the training calms you down and gives you a sense of the business environment. Otherwise, you would mess your business up as you don’t have the necessary skills and on top of that you’ve been out of the country for a long time.”*

Likewise in Niger, beneficiaries stated that business skills training from a local partner had improved their livelihoods. One said, *“It’s thanks to this training that I am able to manage this big tailoring workshop that you see. I’ve received a training and was supported with two sewing machines. I was also able to rent several more machines for my workshop and I also employ six people.”* Another Nigerien returnee stated, *“If it was not for this training and the assistance, I would have left again. Now, I even discourage those who want to migrate. The training allowed me to know how to invest money and how to run a business. I am very satisfied.”*

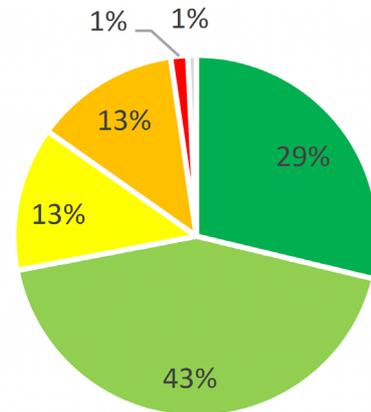
In the Gambia, beneficiary feedback also indicates that partner-run vocational training and cash for work activities were successful in improving returnees’ wellbeing: *“I will be certified after the training which will enrich my CV. I am learning new skills and knowledge on solar installation”* said one. *“Now I am not thinking about going back the backway [migrating irregularly]. I am so happy with the way my life is going now,”* said another.

Migrants credited the provision of training stipends and food for improving their immediate economic wellbeing during the training, while awarding formal certificates was seen as an asset for their future. Said one vocational training beneficiary in Cameroon: *“I am very satisfied. Every day we have breakfast in the morning and a lunch at midday. The training certificate that they gave me has helped to convince my uncles to support me in my business... Thanks to the training my wife has opened a beauty salon that she manages quite well.”* As well as helping to attract investors, having formal training is even seen as an asset in attracting customers, as a Burkinabe beneficiary of a partner training describes: *“I am very happy with the training to be a cook, because even if I can make food, people ask me if I’ve had any training. I am surrounded by other food sellers’ stalls, but all the customers come to me. We take care to be clean and to respect the customers. The training was very good.”*

Negative feedback for vocational trainings implemented by partners was limited and tended to be linked to specific local factors. For example, one particular partner organization in Burkina Faso received negative feedback due to providing kits that returnees perceived as inadequate to practice their new trade. In Guinea-Bissau, vocational training courses were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When they resumed, participant stipends were cancelled due to budget constraints, causing many trainees to drop out. Returnees in Guinea-Bissau also felt cheated by a climate-conscious project with a local partner that involved their making items to sell out of recycled materials. Returnees were upset that there was no immediate financial benefit to them: *“At the end, we stopped working with that organization because we were not paid. We came from far away without eating to work all day long. We didn’t receive anything, and we left empty-handed. We have families and we live far away,”* said one. Another stated, *“I wouldn’t recommend [the local partner] to anyone, because all they do is make you work and they don’t pay you. It is better to stay home and manage yourself, rather than move around, spend and receive nothing.”* This example underscores a lesson learned to ensure that climate-conscious projects are fully integrated with returnees’ immediate livelihood needs, for example, by conducting a market assessment in advance to confirm the local demand for the recycled goods or prioritising cash-for-work environmental projects where returnees are guaranteed a set stipend. While vocational training by local partners was largely successful in improving returnees’ wellbeing (aside from the isolated instances mentioned above), outsourcing the entire microbusiness process to local partners did not emerge as a best practice.

What is your level of satisfaction with the assistance from the partner organization? (n=264)

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- OK
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Prefer not to say



In Ghana, numerous issues were encountered that led to contracts with two implementing partners being cancelled. These included inability to meet beneficiary reintegration targets as well as many cases of giving returnees assistance worth less than half of what they would have received had they been directly assisted by IOM.

In Nigeria, IOM's complaints mechanism detected allegations of conflict of interest involving some local partners deliberately referring returnees to sub-standard vendors in exchange for kickbacks.

In Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, partners also had a tendency to over-emphasize collective reintegration assistance, either by grouping large numbers of migrants together (Côte d'Ivoire) or by grouping returnees into collective projects that did not match their interests or geographic location (Ghana and Nigeria.) A beneficiary in Ghana complained: *"Because other colleagues were Muslim, we couldn't rear pigs. My first choice was to have an individual piggery business, if I had done my piggery the pigs would still be alive. They [the IP] put me with two Muslims, they were not my friends and I didn't know them. The goats all died and the collective was left with nothing."* In another collective, members were grouped together who lived in different cities about four hours' drive apart. A beneficiary of a collective livestock-farming project in Côte d'Ivoire complained, *"I am a father, my family depends on me. The income was not enough, and on top of that there were many of us working on the farm. We had to share the profits which were practically nothing."*

LESSONS LEARNED

While many partnerships have been vital to managing the programme's large caseload, there are several lessons learned from local partners managing microbusiness assistance:

- The importance of regular monitoring of partner activities by IOM M&E staff and of implementing robust beneficiary accountability mechanisms, such as complaints hotlines
- Handling collective projects with caution, favoring eligible individual projects unless migrants themselves have a relationship of trust and common interests that would match a collective project approach.
- Separating the microbusiness counselling process from the procurement of microbusiness goods – for example a local partner could provide the business counselling and/or vocational training service while IOM carries out the procurement or gives the returnee cash-based assistance.
- If microbusiness assistance is fully managed by an implementing partner, clearly specifying in the contract the minimum amount that is to be spent on each returnee.

3.2.3 Sustainability: Are referral partners willing to continue serving returnees after the end of the Joint Initiative programme, and will they have the capacity (both skills and financial) to do so?

Key informant interviews with government and NGO partners across the 12 project countries covered by this evaluation indicate that partners are willing to continue serving returnees after the end of the programme. One NGO partner in Ghana stated, *"We hadn't undertaken anything like this [working with returnees]... IOM opened the door for us to explore more opportunities within this space."*

However, it is unclear to which extent partners will have the financial capacities to do so. For Sahel and Lake Chad governments, the issue of reintegration of migrants is competing for funds with other national priorities, such as high youth unemployment and coping with the economic downturn from COVID-19. Returnees would have the same access to scarce public services as the general population, as a government vocational training partner in Mali described, *"Demand [for training places] is quite high and we have limited means. We can't take everyone immediately... They [returnees] will have to go on a waitlist that can last for one to two years... If we want to be effective, it's necessary to fund us and we will organize tailored trainings [for returnees]. It's better."* Similarly in Ghana, a government vocational partner stated, *"Where we know there are needs, we can provide training, but the person would need to pay a fee to cover it. We need assistance, there are no resources for free places, and we need money for the transport stipends and kits."*

For civil society organizations, programming for migrants will be contingent on project-based funding. A Nigerian civil society partner expressed fears that progress made in capacity building under the Joint Initiative will be lost: *“The problem with staff is, when there is project and salary, they stay and when there is no project and salary, they leave. When there is a gap in funding, you could lose your staff and the capacity they have gained will also be lost without transferring that to new staff.”* For private sector partners, willingness to engage with migrants is usually on a for-profit basis. In Burkina Faso, a private sector vocational partner said, *“We are not a charity. If a migrant turns up and they wish to participate in a training and have the means to pay, we will train them.”*

Overall, national partners across all sectors confirm increased capacity and motivation to serve returnees. However, due to funding constraints after the end of the Joint Initiative they may be unable to continue doing so.

3.2.4 Efficiency: Did the Joint Initiative project manage to refer beneficiaries to partners in a timely manner without compromising data protection principles?

Referral processes were completed in accordance with IOM’s Data Protection Principles in order to preserve the confidentiality of personal data and to ensure that the rights and interests of IOM beneficiaries are adequately protected. Before beneficiaries’ personal data could be shared, informed consent needed to be collected and a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) signed with the relevant partner after endorsement by IOM’s legal department. IOM Nigeria, which has a large and sensitive beneficiary caseload including victims of trafficking, went one step further by also investing in data protection training to partners and ensuring that they had the equipment (lockable filing cabinets, secure databases) to ensure confidentiality.

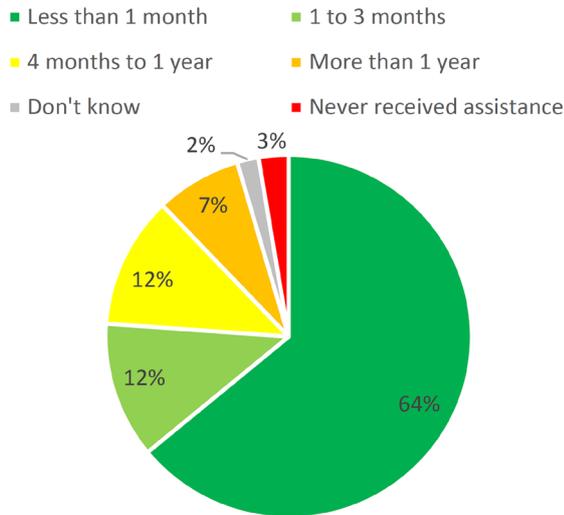
The amount of time and resources – on IOM’s, the partner’s and the donor’s side – needed to engage the relevant organizations, establish the referrals process and include the relevant safeguards was underestimated at the beginning of the programme. Building a referral network is a long process, and establishing DSAs is an important but time-consuming step. An IOM staff member in Senegal reported, *“If the organization approaches IOM and asks that we send a list of migrants, we don’t have the right to do it if we don’t have that agreement in place. That has made us lose many opportunities. It takes a huge amount of time before the agreement is validated by the legal department in headquarters.”*

In Niger, one international partner organization objected to a clause in the Data Sharing Agreement which required damages to be paid to IOM in the event of data loss. An IOM staff member in Niger recalls, *“The discussions dragged on for more than two years.”* The complexity of establishing a DSA means that sufficient time needs to be factored into the referral process as early as possible by both parties, IOM and the partner. The Joint Initiative project has taken steps to improve the turnaround time for Data Sharing Agreements by funding a dedicated position in the legal department and reaching an agreement to use a standard template for implementing partner agreements. The establishment of framework data protection agreements with main partner organizations could also be explored.

Once Data Sharing Agreements were in place, beneficiaries were generally able to be referred in a timely manner. Once the referral process began and the beneficiary data were sent to a referral organization, both migrants and referral organizations reported that the activities could begin within a month. For example, in Chad, partner organizations reported smooth coordination with IOM: *“We cooperate very well, the communication is very clear. If there are difficulties, we can find a solution immediately.”* Those which were unable to provide support within a month attributed this to a lack of financial means and insufficient clarity on their roles and responsibilities in coordinating with IOM and other partners. COVID-19 contributed to the length of time it took to begin activities in 2020 as training was set up as a group activity where social distancing was difficult to ensure.

Across the region, 264 beneficiaries of assistance provided by local partners were interviewed in the context of this final evaluation (minimum of 20 in each of the 12 countries covered.) Once they were put in contact with the partner organization, 64% reported that they were assisted within one month and a further 12% within 3 months. Regionally, only 8% reported waiting more than one year, but the proportion of those in this category was much higher in Ghana (33%) and Guinea (32%). Of the seven migrants (3%) who reported never receiving any assistance, five were in Guinea and had missed out on assistance due to not meeting the EUTF partner’s selection criteria.

Since you were put in touch with the partner organization, how long did you wait for assistance? (n=264)



Once beneficiary details are referred to partners, it has proven challenging to verify in a systematic manner how many are actually assisted, given that outside of implementing partner agreements there is no obligation to report progress to IOM. In the Gambia, IOM staff members admitted that “[they] don’t know much about the referred returnees” and that “when we refer returnees, we do not know what happens to them after.” To improve coordination with partners in offering reintegration assistance, IOM developed IMAP (IOM Migrant Assistance Portal), a referral system on the Salesforce platform. The system allows both outward referrals (biodata and service referral is exported from MiMOSA to IMAP by IOM, and referral partner is expected to update the status) and inward referrals (partners enter biodata, service request, vulnerability screening and consent onto IMAP). However, there seems to be room for improvement in how the IMAP referral platform is used by partners. An IOM staff member shared that “IMAP provides partners with an easy way to update us on the status (...) But so far partners have not been very good in updating the status in the system. One of the challenges is that they rely on implementing partners, so they probably have a hard time tracking down their beneficiaries”, while another said that, from all the referred returnees, “not all of them were accepted”.

To ensure the returnees do not fall through the cracks, in the Gambia, the country office strategy is to provide direct assistance first and foremost; migrants may be referred at a later time, if necessary. IOM staff noticed that it was frustrating for returnees to have to wait for an opportunity to be provided by a referral partner. Therefore, an IOM staff member believed that best solution was that “IOM provides direct assistance and then the referral opportunity is potentially a complementary assistance.”

The experience with referrals in Guinea indicates that the Gambia’s approach is a best practice. Several cases were found during the Guinea final evaluation mission of migrants who reported never receiving anything after being referred to an international partner. IOM country staff confirmed that their names and contact information were sent to the referral organization. However, migrants interviewed reported either never being contacted by the referral organization at all, or being contacted once determine their eligibility and then not being contacted again afterwards (likely due to their ineligibility). Given that the referral process was completed from IOM’s standpoint, with migrants deemed ineligible from the referral organization’s view, a number of migrants appear to have missed out on their reintegration assistance. The approach taken in the Gambia reduces the risk of migrants falling through the cracks.

Partners indicated a number of areas for improvement for IOM in terms of communicating lists of beneficiaries. While once Data Sharing Agreements were signed, no bottlenecks related to data protection requirements were noted during evaluation data collection, the following issues of quality and completeness of beneficiary data were highlighted:

1. Outdated location data:

One issue noted with the process of sharing beneficiaries’ data in Ghana was outdated information about their location. Returnees - by definition - are a highly mobile population, and in Ghana, anecdotal evidence suggests a significant trend of rural to urban migration. This led to some missteps in the organization of business training, as IOM provided one partner with a list of returnees recorded as based in the town of Tamale, in a poorer rural region. The head of the partner organization described:

“Our original experience wasn’t too pleasant... we used our office in Tamale, on the understanding that the returnees lived nearby but only 6 out of 25 showed up... they made last-minute excuses. We had to get other names from IOM, so it was very difficult. It clicked that these guys are no longer in their original locations, and they don’t want to tell us due to the perception that their support is tied to their region of origin... When we did an Accra workshop it was over-subscribed. People don’t want to move back to areas because of stigma, also there are more job opportunities in cities.”

The same issue has been noted in Senegal, although related to direct IOM assistance. Returnee caseloads were assigned to sub-offices in Kolda or Tambacounda in southern Senegal, on the presumption that migrants would return and stay in their community of origin. By the time the assistance is provided, in several cases the returnees had moved to the capital Dakar in search of better job opportunities. This suggests that returnees often find sustainable reintegration in their country of origin rather than their community of origin. The community of return may differ to the community of origin, and may change over time as the returnee seeks alternatives to irregular migration by looking for opportunities in their home country.

2. Lack of information on beneficiaries' educational level and (il)literacy:

Partner feedback in Ghana, Guinea and Cameroon also highlighted lack of information about educational background as a gap in referral data provided by IOM. One partner in Ghana mentioned: *"People in the class had different educational levels, so if they had been grouped according to education levels it would have made things easier. Having to translate course material in local languages take time, and illiterate migrants are ashamed to admit they don't speak English."*

3. Over-subscribing beneficiaries for partner activities:

This issue was reported only in Cameroon, where a partner reported IOM sending almost double the required number of participants for a training. This was particularly problematic as many returnees had travelled to a different city to participate and were expecting to receive accommodation and stipends.

Overall, feedback shows that beneficiaries were able to be referred to partners in a timely manner once Data Sharing Agreements were in place. However, there is room for improvement in tailoring the type and accuracy of information shared.

3.3 AWARENESS RAISING

3.3.1 Relevance: To what extent did the JI programme involve local stakeholders (local civil society, national and local authorities, community leaders and/or returnees themselves) to design AWR messages, campaigns and events appropriately for the target audience?

In an effort to ensure the messages were relevant and tailored to the local context, IOM engaged civil society organizations as implementing partners for awareness raising (AWR) activities in many countries, such as Nigeria, Cameroon, the Gambia, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Ghana. In Chad, a range of local stakeholders participated in campaign brainstorming sessions: *"We discussed with Mably [partner organization], tribal chiefs, beneficiaries, the Chadian Red Cross which has volunteers more or less everywhere and meets migrants in transit, and a women's group which works in awareness raising and advocacy. That's how we created the message."* They all decided on the slogan 'Know where you're going before leaving'.

In Guinea-Bissau however, engagement with a local IP, Manitese, was less successful as the partner did not necessarily have the grassroots connections in the targeted communities. An IOM staff member explained, *"At the beginning of the project, AWR activities were centralized with Manitese which had a special team already set up. It didn't work very well. It was only very late in the project that we opted for another technique, to choose migrants in each community to lead the awareness raising activities in their own community in order to share their life story – this way the message gets through better."*

Likewise in the Gambia, there was also a shift away from using local IPs towards embracing peer-to-peer messaging. An IOM staff member explained: *"Then [in mid-2019] we started to work less with implementing partners, and more with returnees themselves to tell their stories. It worked. There is no better way to talk about something than to talk with someone who experienced it"*.

Also underlying this shift were downsides to working with some local IPs, which included limited experience with migration issues as well as a lack of capacity to pre-finance activities and challenges with reporting requirements.

Across the region, the government was a key partner for AWR activities. In Ghana, senior officials in government ministries prominently displayed awareness raising banners and brochures warning of the risks of irregular migration. Central AWR messages were developed regionally by IOM staff and were then tailored to the country context, with government and

civil society stakeholders consulted and testimonies from Ghanaian migrants integrated in local languages. A government key informant described how migration data was used to adapt messages according to migration trends in different regions of Ghana: *“We have returnees coming from the airport, and when they arrive we do a regional breakdown... for some people it’s through the desert, that’s the Bono people, for the Ashantis it’s through the use of fraudulent documentation and going to overstay, so if we are going to such a region, we will carve out a message based on data for return... But we never forget central message on dangers of irregular migration.”*

In Senegal, implementation of awareness raising activities began much later than originally foreseen as it was critical to ensure government buy-in before launching campaigns. After extensive consultation, the Senegalese government validated the awareness raising strategy in August 2019 and since then has played an integral role in programme implementation. For example, for an ‘awareness raising caravan’ campaign in early 2021, the government advised on selecting the communities most touched by recent irregular migration attempts from northern Senegal to the Canary Islands, and also closely collaborated with IOM on the organization and messaging of the events. Cameroon is another strong example of government participation in awareness raising activities, for which a dedicated working group was set up involving four government ministries and four local civil society organizations. The working group met as required to discuss activity timetables, campaign slogans and awareness raising media materials. In Ghana and the Gambia, government employees staff Migration Information Centres (MICs) which have the role of coordinating awareness raising events in their regions as well as answering questions on migration from visiting community members.

One notable example of a government partnership in the Gambia came in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as an IOM staff member described: *“We shifted our awareness raising programming to Covid-19 risk communication and community engagement, with endorsement from the European Union Delegation. We worked with the Ministry of Health and with the Regional Health Directorates... our niche was anti-discrimination messaging: discrimination towards migrants but also towards COVID-19 positive people, health workers etc.”* Similar efforts were undertaken across the region with events combining messages on the risks of irregular migration with information on COVID-19 prevention.

In terms of the project’s involvement of local stakeholders in awareness raising, key informants highlighted meaningful engagement of local traditional and religious leaders as the main area for improvement. As family and community attitudes interact with individuals’ motivations for irregular migration, these leaders play a critical role. In Burkina Faso, the programme worked with a range of implementing partners on mobile cinema activities, but key informants suggested that consultation with community leaders could have been more profound than simply getting their permission to hold events. A local civil society partner said: *“We should involve them more so that they play a key role in awareness raising, not just simply the formalities. From the beginning stage, they would have things to say, they could guide us with information about the villages. That could help us to better influence the community.”* In Ghana, the potential to engage religious leaders in awareness raising was under-explored, with faith-based IPs instead engaged in implementation of microbusiness support for reintegration beneficiaries, an area where they lacked experience.

On the other hand in Guinea, the programme engaged successfully with both Christian and Muslim figures, with positive results. One religious leader in the region of Lower Guinea explained: *“I’ve participated in many awareness raising activities with IOM...the population is very religious and people easily believe anything that comes out of the mouth of imams, priests or pastors. For example, certain parents of migrants come to see certain religious leaders to pray for their children before and during the migration journey. Following the awareness raising campaign, that stopped.”* In Nigeria, IOM community facilitators reported that community dialogue activities focused on irregular migration were not well-received until they began to involve local religious and traditional leaders. A government partner described the initial community reaction: *“They said ‘go away!’ They think that we don’t want their children to prosper and we don’t want their lives to change.”* However, with active participation from community leaders it was possible begin a dialogue and start to change opinions.

In the case of Ghana, a ‘celebrity ambassador’, the singer Kofi Kinnati, was used to raise awareness on irregular migration. However, more beneficiary feedback on these kinds of campaigns is needed to assess whether such messages resonate with the target audience. It is unclear whether having jetsetting singers and footballers telling often unemployed and illiterate youth not to travel is viewed as hypocritical, or whether their popularity would ensure that they are listened to as role models.

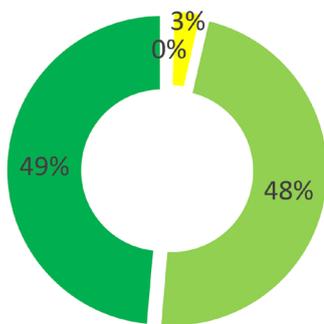
3.3.2 Effectiveness: How effective were the programme’s awareness raising activities in increasing knowledge on migration and risks related to irregular migration?

The programme’s awareness raising activities were implemented in all countries covered by this evaluation, with the exception of Mali where IOM was requested not to implement AWR. Carried out through both direct implementation approaches and with a variety of local stakeholders, the activities reaching a total of more than 2.5 million people included media campaigns via social and traditional media (e.g. community radio debates, Facebook outreach), and community events (e.g. community theatre, community dialogue, film screenings, street art, presentations in schools, traditional tea ceremonies and sports matches.) According to an outcome monitoring survey conducted with 222 awareness raising participants in the region between November 2020 and July 2021, the level of satisfaction with community events is high at 96%, including 49% who report that they are ‘very satisfied.’ Said one participant in Ghana: *“I liked the migrant stories in the video. It teaches us not to go to Libya ... We shouldn’t travel without a visa, or it can lead to injury or death and lost property.”*

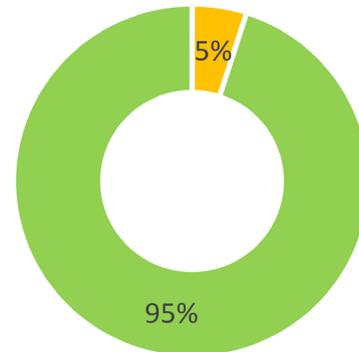
What is your level of satisfaction with the awareness raising event? (n=222)

Did you learn anything from this event that changed your opinion about migration? (n=222)

■ Dissatisfied ■ Neutral ■ Satisfied ■ Very satisfied



■ No ■ Yes



Audiences also appreciated when awareness raising messages were conveyed using artistic means, such as this participant in Chad: *“The comedy is very good. It made us understand the subject well.”* Less than 1% of participants expressed dissatisfaction and 3% were neutral. Reasons for a lack of enthusiasm about the event were mostly related to not understanding the film being screened due to sound quality or language issues.

95% of surveyed participants said they had learned something from the event that changed their level of knowledge and attitudes about irregular migration, and 89% said they would do something differently as a result of what they had learned. For example, one participant in Burkina Faso stated, *“This year I had in mind to see if my children could go outside [of Burkina Faso] to look for work. But thanks to this event I am thinking differently.”* Key informants interviewed also confirm the effectiveness of the community awareness raising events. A youth leader in Senegal stated, *“During the meal after the event, I overheard the conversation of the people having lunch next to us. Everyone was saying that migrating irregularly was equal to committing suicide.”*

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, messaging on how to prevent the virus was also mainstreamed into awareness raising events (which continued with appropriate social distancing measures where feasible amid government restrictions.) In the Gambia, one participant stated: *“I learned that face masks shouldn’t be shared – we were sharing face masks within our household.”*

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the programme has made increasing use of community radio to broadcast debates on migration and migrant testimonies in local languages, particularly in Senegal, Guinea and Nigeria. While a lack of availability of media monitoring services and reliable audience figures makes it challenging to estimate the reach of campaigns, feedback from key informants indicates that radio debates have been an effective approach. The head of one rural radio station in Guinea stated, *“The listeners are very interested in debates, especially as the debates were in local languages...people call us to thank us and thank IOM. Listeners call in to give their own testimonies on irregular migration and its consequences, discouraging youth and parents who support their children in this adventure.... Some listeners approached us to re-broadcast the programmes, which we did.”*

Regardless of whether returnee testimony is communicated via radio, TV or during community events, beneficiary and partner feedback also suggests that peer-to-peer messaging is effective. Returned migrants are regarded as credible sources of information, and personal stories told in the local African language have a stronger impact than facts and figures conveyed in French or English-language documentary screenings or via PowerPoint presentations by local or international NGOs. In Senegal, a returned migrants' association was supported to travel to areas of high migration to share their testimonies. A member of the group stated, *"You have to let the right people speak out. The message will not get through if people don't know what they're talking about. Me, I have tried to travel nine times without success, so I'm well-placed to speak about migration."* In Ghana, it was observed during the evaluation mission that school students watching video testimonies of Ghanaian returnees' experiences in Libya were most moved by the experiences of a migrant who was from a nearby town, showing the importance of local media content to connect with audiences.

Overall, key informants believed that holding events in schools was an effective and efficient approach due to having a ready-made audience of local youth. An IOM staff member in Cameroon states: *"We realized that failing high school final exams made ideas of migration start to form...if they fail their exams several times and don't have training in a specific trade, the idea of hitting the road and trying their luck is very common. We have organized educational discussions in schools. In this way we have brought up the subject of migration in school classrooms and it's also allowed us to reach the students' parents who are generally one of the main influences in the decision to migrate."*

According to partners and IOM staff in Nigeria—one of the biggest source countries for irregular migration—the most effective awareness raising method has been community theatre, due to its ability to entertain as well as inform and reach a diverse audience. After each session, there is an interactive discussion where community members share insights, what they thought of the characters, what they would do in this situation etc. In the words of one local NGO partner, *"Theatre captures attention for a period of time. Just a play of ten minutes can provide information that can fill pages or books."* A government partner agrees, *"I have seen the good and the beauty of it. It has really changed a lot of people's thinking."* Community dialogue, with the active participation of traditional and religious leaders, was rated as the next most effective method of awareness raising. An IOM staff member reports, *"When we work in the community now, they see us as helpers, as people who help them and give correct information. Sometimes when they even hear about somebody who is trafficking, they call and inform their local government. There was a woman who wanted to traffick some children, she was reported and arrested."* A government partner testifies, *"Village recruitment is not as rampant as it used to be. Thanks to IOM and partners who have helped, we are raising the bar of awareness and ensuring any decision is so informed."*

One best practice that emerged during the Joint Initiative was to balance warnings of the dangers of irregular migration with positive messaging on opportunities in the home country and within ECOWAS. This focus on both the risks and opportunities was reported by IOM staff members to be relevant to the Gambian context, where there is a long tradition of migration and where an approach focusing on risks only was reported to be unlikely to successfully change behaviours. However, the limitations of this positive messaging strategy amid tough socioeconomic conditions was evident in Guinea-Bissau. An implementing partner stated, *"The communities were very receptive to awareness raising activities. People know that migration is difficult, that it can be extreme, that depending on the host country in Europe, the living conditions can be difficult and that finding a job does not happen automatically. They know all that. They tell you that they understand. But here in Guinea-Bissau, there is nothing. What can they do? They have to work and look after their family."* To avoid a disconnect between positive messages about opportunities in the country of origin and the reality, job creation programmes can accompany awareness raising activities, as was done in Guinea where a cash-for-work programme to clean beaches was combined with a 'Guinea, my future' campaign.

An initiative currently being undertaken on a regional level (partly funded by the bridging programme after the Joint Initiative) is the Waka Well platform which combines advice on migration with information on job and internship opportunities available in five West and Central African countries.

One major challenge identified in awareness raising programming under the Joint Initiative was its wide geographical and strategic scope and limited resources, stretched over a dozen countries and aiming to target all high-migration zones using a variety of activities while involving many stakeholders. Both IOM staff and NGO key informants in Ghana believed that a sustained campaign in certain high-migration communities would lead to greater change over time than reaching many communities with AWR events once. An IOM staff member in Ghana described, *"We tried to reach each community twice so that we would be able to sustain the campaigns in these areas. But then it was always difficult in terms of resources, so that was when we complemented it with multimedia awareness raising for very rural areas...We were trying to also diversify the activities we do in the communities, so I would do one activity with face-to-face interaction, while the next one would be radio via the community information centre."*

A partner organization in the same country advocated expanding the length of campaigns: *“From my organization’s point of view, you need to sustain the campaign for a long period. If you start a campaign for 3 months and then stop, sometimes communities hear of it and come here and ask for support, but the project is already over...”*

Overall, a range of awareness raising activities and approaches were piloted under the Joint Initiative, involving and building the capacity of a wide range of stakeholders in a new domain. Beneficiary and partner feedback was largely positive, suggesting that most of the messaging hit its mark and encouraged community members to think twice about migrating irregularly or sending a family member. However, the large number of communities targeted and limited budget constrained effectiveness.

3.3.3 Sustainability: Did the experience with the Joint Initiative awareness raising inform subsequent AWR efforts in The West and Central Africa region? Are lessons learned and best practices taken forward?

The Joint Initiative’s awareness raising activities on the risks of irregular migration were among the first to be implemented in the region on the heels of the 2015-2016 migration crisis. IOM’s Awareness raising Unit in the West and Central Africa Regional Office grew from one staff member at the beginning of the project to more than 20 staff covering a multi-donor portfolio of projects by 2021.

AWR LESSONS LEARNED

The following are lessons learned from the Joint Initiative that have informed subsequent AWR programming in the region

- **Collecting baseline data on community Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP):** Due to the urgency to begin implementing activities and limited awareness raising budgets, the Joint Initiative did not have the luxury of an inception period. A baseline evaluation would have allowed activities to be better-tailored to the local audiences and provide a point of reference to measure shifts in KAP over time.
- **Factoring M&E into the activity design stage:** The Joint Initiative’s limited awareness raising resources were spread over many communities, and in some countries activities were implemented by numerous IPs. As the imperative was to reach as many potential migrants and communities as possible, involve local partners and diversify activities according to the local context, the lack of concentrated, structured and sustained campaigns made it challenging to collect in-depth data comparing the impact of specific approaches. Other regional awareness raising programmes such as CineArena and Migrants as Messengers which have a more defined geographical scope and focused strategy, and which factored impact evaluation into the project design and funding stage have been able to bring more scientific evidence of their campaigns’ effects. Due to the open public nature of awareness raising activities where collecting beneficiary details could be a disincentive to participation, for longitudinal KAP studies participants need to be pre-identified and offered small incentives (such as phone credit) to retain them for endline studies.
- **Linking awareness raising on the risks of irregular migration with positive messages and concrete initiatives to promote opportunities in the country of origin:** The programme’s experience has shown it is vital to also present viable alternatives to irregular migration, as people may still take the risk if they feel they have no other choice.

- **Ensuring sound information management:** Engaging IPs and other grassroots actors is key to the success of activities but makes tracking community events and participant numbers challenging. Online and traditional media engagement and audience reach is even more difficult to track in a region where media monitoring figures for audience reach are not regularly available. Continuous follow-up with local partners and media monitoring (including the filing of media clippings and profiles of media outlets) is needed. In the case of IPs, they should be required to share a monthly or weekly timetable of events with GPS points to allow for monitoring visits.
- **Basing AWR events on local traditions and popular activities:** Experience showed that community events which built on local customs – such as the ‘attaya’ (tea) ceremony and sports matches were more successful in reaching the target audience than staged events such as formal presentations. Likewise, staging an event in a central and busy location, such as the main market, a sports ground or a community centre, is effective at maximizing audience numbers by attracting the attention of passers-by.
- **Using peer-to-peer messaging:** Peer-to-peer messaging was first piloted successfully in the region under the JI, and then scaled up with programmes such as Migrants as Messengers. Data suggests that community members generally find testimonies from migrants in their local languages more convincing than campaigns by local civil society organizations.
- **Re-thinking donor/IOM branding:** Donor visibility for awareness raising activities may undermine the message. An IOM staff member in the Gambia says, *“There was an issue with the branding of our campaigns. If you see an EU flag and a message that says, “don’t migrate”, it is not convincing, (...) it defeats the purpose”*. This because it is perceived that EU countries may have an agenda on migration management that is not in line with individual interests to seek increased wealth. This experience seems to have allowed for a more efficient strategy for subsequent campaigns, both under the JI and under other projects, with a shift away from donor visibility.

The Joint Initiative has also shared its experience of awareness raising efforts in the region and promoted sustainability beyond other IOM programmes. An online learning platform for awareness raising practitioners in the region (yenna.org) was established with JI funding and is now supported by another donor. Capacity building efforts for local awareness raising partners have also led to some activities continuing beyond the project. For example, in Nigeria, two government agencies (the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and the National Orientation Agency) are continuing the community dialogue and community theatre activities that they began under the Joint Initiative. All awareness raising partners interviewed for this evaluation across the region express willingness to continue with their activities, but say that lack of resources is their main challenge.

3.4 PROTECTION AND RETURN (SAHEL AND LAKE CHAD HOST/TRANSIT COUNTRIES)

The objective of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative was here to improve protection, provide assistance to migrants and communities and enable the assisted voluntary return of vulnerable and stranded migrants in target countries.

Activities include:

- Establishment or enhancement of transit centres to provide protection and direct assistance services to migrants
- Immediate assistance to migrants
- Assistance to voluntary return

These activities were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. This section therefore assesses IOM's interventions with a specific focus on IOM's response in this context.

3.4.1 Relevance: How appropriately did IOM adapt voluntary return interventions and transit Centre management to respond to the needs for protection and return assistance amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

In Sahel and Lake Chad, the main host/transit countries for migrants where protection and voluntary return initiatives are implemented under the programme are Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad (in addition to Mauritania, which is being covered by a separate evaluation.)

Overall, protection and return operation in the four countries were adapted in a relevant and responsive manner to the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic. The creation of a flexible funding mechanism, the 'COVID fund', made it possible to respond quickly and effectively. Adjustments that the IOM missions made include:

- **Implementing COVID-19 quarantine requirements:**

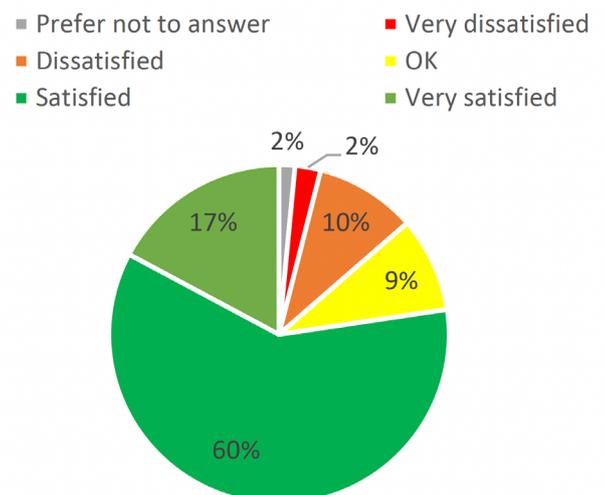
The pandemic added an additional layer to voluntary return journey logistics, with IOM needing to ensure that returning migrants underwent a period of quarantine period if required by national governments. In Niger, IOM rented a building in the border town of Assamaka to allow migrants to complete the 14-day quarantine period required for those returning from Algeria. The migrants would then be transferred to the main transit centres in Arlit and Agadez. In the large Agadez transit centre, migrants who tested positive to COVID-19 were isolated from the main centre population. At the beginning of the pandemic, the COVID-19 cases were placed in the local hospital, but tensions soon erupted as an IOM staff member described:

“There were several incidences of migrants trashing the health facility, as they were frustrated, they were in a hurry to return home and they believed that the hospital was not taking care of them, and several had many positive tests in a row. The authorities decided then that they would no longer accept migrant cases.” IOM Niger then had to find a way to isolate COVID-positive migrants within the busy centre. Keeping asymptomatic cases at the centre was particularly challenging as many migrants were not convinced of the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Managing COVID-19 testing for migrants:**

Before the voluntary return journeys could take place amid the pandemic, IOM also had to organize PCR tests for migrants. Instead of bussing migrants to busy local COVID-19 testing centres, one best practice that emerged in Mali was reaching an agreement with clinics to accept samples taken by an IOM nurse directly in transit centres. This saves transportation costs, migrant and IOM staff movements (in a volatile security situation in Bamako), reduces the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission and removes the risk of 'losing' migrants in crowded testing centres. Likewise in Niger, IOM medical staff were able to collect samples directly from migrants in the transit centres and have them tested by a laboratory. IOM Niger also donated a PCR testing machine to the local hospital in Agadez to facilitate testing in the region.

Migrant satisfaction with COVID-19 prevention measures in the transit centre (n=530)



- **Improving hygiene in transit centres:**

In transit centres across the four countries, extra handwashing stations were installed, temperature checks were introduced and regular awareness sessions about COVID-19 prevention were held. Hygiene kits given on arrival were adapted to include masks and hand sanitizer. According to the regional Migrant Transit Centre Satisfaction Survey (n=530), more than three-quarters (77%) of migrants were satisfied with the COVID-19 prevention measures implemented in transit centres. Said one migrant in Mali, *“They gave me masks and as well as that, there is a handwashing place near the door that I use frequently to wash my hands.”* Most migrants also reported receiving hand sanitizer and regular hygiene awareness sessions. Of the remaining respondents, 2% did not answer the question, 9% found the COVID-19 prevention measures to be ‘OK’ and 12% were dissatisfied. The majority of those who were dissatisfied reported poor hygiene and lack of functioning handwashing facilities in partner-run centres in Burkina Faso and Mali. IOM Burkina Faso has since engaged in advocacy to partners on the issue and supplies hygiene kits to partner-run centres.

- **Reducing capacity in transit and reception centres to enable social distancing:**

Due to the need for social distancing during the pandemic, IOM re-assessed the capacity of all migrant centres, leading to substantial changes. For example, the main reception centre for Malian returnees in Bamako, the Reception and Information Centre for Malians from Abroad (Centre MMEIA) was reduced by more than half, with no more than 110 returnees now staying there at a time (normal capacity is 254 migrants). The design of the centre is favorable to social distancing, with many smaller bedrooms rather than large dormitories and open-air shaded spaces where migrants can receive briefings from centre and IOM staff. In Burkina Faso, the capacity of the IOM-run centre in the capital was reduced from 55 to 50, with remaining migrants housed in smaller partner-run centres. At the time of evaluation data collection, a new, larger transit centre in the capital was being built with programme funds to improve the quality of services and COVID prevention measures for returnees and migrants in Burkina Faso.

- **Increasing use of air travel rather than land transport for voluntary return:**

In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, due to both land border closures amid COVID-19, and the country’s volatile security situation, IOM has increasingly needed to rely on flights rather than land transport. IOM support in either providing charter flights or negotiating with airlines to allow migrants to fly with provisional travel documents was a lifeline to many vulnerable individuals who otherwise would have remained stranded. However, the shift to relying more heavily on air travel for voluntary return resulted in much higher operational costs.

- **Negotiating humanitarian corridors:**

In the early months of the pandemic where land and air borders were largely closed in the region, IOM responded by negotiating ‘humanitarian corridors’ to allow the return of migrants by air and land. For example, in June 2020, 338 Malians returned from Niger on two special charter flights following IOM negotiations with both governments. Similarly in October 2020, 105 migrants returned from Chad to Niger on a charter flight. Other charter flights were organised between June and August 2020 from Niger to Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. The Joint Initiative project also collaborated with a UK-funded IOM project on a return flight from Mali to Nigeria in July 2020 for 110 victims of trafficking. The other IOM project provided pre-departure housing, medical and psychosocial assistance while the voluntary return journey itself was funded by the Joint Initiative. These humanitarian corridors allowed migrants who had been stuck in transit since the beginning of the pandemic to return home, as well as easing pressure on transit centres.

- **Stepping up psychosocial activities to reduce tension in centres:**

The pandemic travel restrictions dramatically increased the amount of time migrants needed to spend in IOM transit centres. For example, in Mali, air and land borders were closed from March-July 2020, leaving IOM protection and operations staff under pressure with more than 200 migrants stuck in transit for long periods. An IOM staff member in Mali explained: *“Imagine if you are staying for two months with people you don’t know... the tensions mounted, and we had problems with violence. We responded with weekly visits to all the centres and increased psychosocial sessions. As there was limited space in centres due to the need for social distancing, we had to limit our intake in centres to only vulnerable cases.”* In Chad, key informants reported that before the pandemic migrants stayed on average for 21 days in transit centres, but between March and September 2020 the average duration blew out to six months. For some migrants, the uncertainty and prolonged waiting period for voluntary return had a negative effect on their psychosocial wellbeing. In response, in Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali, the programme offered more psychosocial support and recreational activities in centres.

3.4.2 Coherence: How have IOM interventions in transit centres complemented those by other partners? What are the gaps and lessons learned?

In Niger and Chad, the main transit centres are directly managed by IOM, with partners involved in providing medical services. In Chad, medical cases are referred to the al-Shifa Clinic for the transit centre in the capital and to the local hospital in Faya for the transit centre near the Libyan border. IOM staff interviewed reported some challenges with the capacity of the hospital in Faya due to its remote location: *“IOM has just renovated and equipped a health centre. Medicines are not always available at the hospital, and this has affected our performance...the teams at the hospital change often and they don’t really do a handover [on patient cases]. So, we have to start from scratch.”* In Niger, IOM struck agreements with hospitals and pharmacies in Niamey and Agadez to treat migrants without the usual practice of requiring upfront cash payments. An IOM staff member explained how these agreements overcame the delays in providing urgent medical care: *“Before we had the contracts with the hospitals and pharmacies, we worked on the basis of cash payments. To bring a sick person to the hospital, you need to pay cash; if you have a prescription you need to pay cash as well. We had difficulties getting cash from the finance unit, because the procedures are a bit long at IOM. It could take a week, while we had sick people... Since we’ve had the contracts with the hospitals and pharmacies, things are going better.”* In remote areas of Niger such as Madama, Seguedine and Assamaka, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has also been a key partner for providing medical assistance. Psychosocial assistance inside transit centres was provided by specialised IOM staff, while to treat migrants with severe mental health conditions, the main partners were the Italian NGO COOPI and the Nigerien Ministry of Health.

In Burkina Faso there was a mixed approach to transit centre management, with IOM running the main transit centre in the capital Ouagadougou while other centres were managed by partners. The Red Cross was a major partner involved in reception assistance for returnees as well as medical and psychosocial support in transit centres. The Red Cross also runs two centres (in Dori and Bobo-Dioulasso) where IOM refers migrants in transit, but which also host non-migrants. The transit centre in the capital Ouagadougou is run directly by IOM. While having transit centres run by national partners is preferable from a sustainability standpoint, an IOM staff member states: *“We have a better quality of assistance in the centres managed by IOM. We have in our suggestion box quite a number of complaints from beneficiaries [in the partner-run centres] who haven’t received hygiene kits on arrival.”* The results of the Migrant Transit Centre Satisfaction Survey in Burkina Faso support this observation, with all the dissatisfied respondents coming from the Dori and Bobo Dioulasso centres. In the case of these partner-run centres where very limited IOM support is provided, IOM does not have direct control over centre standards and can only intervene through advocating for improved conditions for migrants.

The multiplicity of partners involved in transit centres has also led to gaps and raised some issues of coordination and accountability. In Burkina Faso, an M&E field visit in November 2020 found that more than 20 non-migrant children staying in a partner-run centre alongside migrants had not received any soap or handwashing awareness sessions. While these non-IOM beneficiaries are outside the mandate of the Joint Initiative, if a part of the centre’s population does not wash their hands it affects the overall hygiene and COVID-19 prevention situation for migrants in transit. In Mali, IOM provides hygiene kits to migrant children who are staying in a partner-run centre alongside non-migrant children. The non-migrants receive hygiene kits from other partners that may have different contents to IOM’s, risking sparking jealousy among children if one kit is perceived as better than the other. To address this concern, the kits were provided directly to the centre’s management to allow them to allocate the items to beneficiaries as needed.

Mali’s government-run returnee reception centre offers one promising model for balancing national ownership and ensuring appropriate standards. The Reception and Information Centre for Malians from Abroad (MMEIA) in Bamako is managed by the General Delegation of Malians Abroad (DGME) with some IOM staff also embedded at the facility to directly provide protection and reintegration services. This arrangement is effective at encouraging government ownership and sustainability, while also ensuring additional checks on quality of service. The centre has been extensively renovated and equipped by IOM. IOM has also provided training on transit centre management to government staff, who expressed satisfaction with the partnership: *“I’ve appreciated working with IOM. We [the Malian government] are at the centre of this activity. Perhaps we have limits, but we manage. I would say we have perfect collaboration.”* Some gaps were noted in government ownership in terms of ensuring timely building maintenance and appointing a doctor to staff the newly built and equipped health centre. At the time of the evaluation visit, IOM and the centre’s government staff were advocating to the ministry to address these issues.

Overall, there is a delicate balance to be struck with transit centres in terms of ensuring sustainability and encouraging government ownership, while ensuring that the migrant’s right to a dignified and safe return is respected. To spell out in detail the expected conditions, in September 2021 IOM launched the Migrant Centres Toolkit which was developed with Joint Initiative funding to provide technical guidance on transit centre management. It includes a monitoring checklist based on the minimum standards.

LESSONS LEARNED IN TRANSIT CENTRE MANAGEMENT

- Conduct regular monitoring visits to both IOM-run and partner-run centres to ensure services and procedures comply with the minimum standards in the Toolkit and ensure that beneficiary feedback mechanisms are in place.
- Ensure capacity building of partner staff in transit centre management and human rights of migrants.
- For implementing partner agreements, ensure that minimum standards and services expected to be provided are clearly spelled out in the contract, even if these seem obvious (including for example that three meals per day are to be provided to migrants, or that the centre should be cleaned).
- In centres supported by several organizations/donors, coordinate with partners to harmonise assistance e.g., NFI packages to reduce disparities.

3.4.3 Effectiveness: Under the Joint Initiative, were migrants able to make an informed decision to make a dignified and safe return to their country of origin? Was the programme able to learn and adapt? What could be improved in the transit, return and reception stages?

In total, 804 migrants who returned from Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad have been surveyed with the regional COVID-adapted Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) survey between September 2020 and September 2021. Overall, 96% confirmed that they received sufficient information to make an informed decision to return. For those who reported they had not received enough information, the majority were returnees who returned from Niger to the Gambia complaining about the language barrier (despite provisions to supply return counselling in English, the main language used at the transit centre is French). The surveys were completed after the migrant had arrived back to their country of origin, and no migrant reported that IOM had pressured them into returning. An IOM staff member in Chad described the process of voluntary return counselling: *“For each migrant we do an assessment and at the end we talk to them about the services available. They choose what they wish to do and sign to give their consent. Most of the migrants we assist are migrants who have contacted us themselves via the hotline, via a community leader or another way.”* If an individual does not wish to return to their country of origin, they will be referred to other services as relevant, for example to UNHCR if they wish to claim asylum.

Overall, 93% of migrants reported that they were satisfied with the travel arrangements made for them, 4% reported that they were OK and 1% did not answer. Of the remaining 2% who were dissatisfied, the reasons were mixed (for example one migrant was disappointed to return by bus instead of by air, another for not receiving a new set of travel clothes, and another due to delays at the airport). Asked how IOM can improve, the main suggestion from migrants is to speed up the voluntary return process to reduce waiting time. This feedback illustrates that timeliness is the area of most concern to voluntary return beneficiaries, however it should be noted that one of the main sources of delays—obtaining travel documents for country of origin embassies and consulates—is not under IOM’s control.

To gather feedback on the quality of post-arrival assistance to migrants voluntarily returning to the 12 countries in the Sahel and Lake Chad region covered by this final evaluation (includes migrants returning from North Africa and Europe as well as those returning from SLC host/transit countries), 1,746 beneficiaries were surveyed between September 2020 and September 2021. Overall, 95% expressed satisfaction with the post-arrival (reception) assistance received in their country of origin. Reasons for satisfaction were being well-treated at the airport by IOM staff and smooth organization of arrival formalities. *“Everything was perfectly organized,”* said one migrant returning to Burkina Faso. Another returning to Niger said, *“We are very happy to come home. IOM staff welcomed us with open arms. Thank you.”* Dissatisfaction rates were low at 1%, with migrants mentioning receiving insufficient pocket money to meet their expenses and not being met by IOM staff upon arrival as the main reasons.

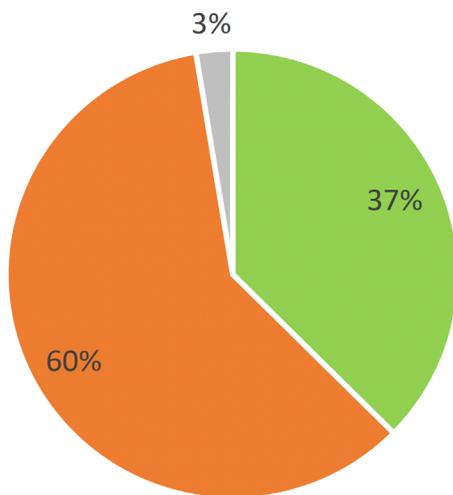
During the evaluation field mission to Mali, the reception process for a voluntary return charter of 110 migrants was observed to be smooth, with returnees given a brief but dignified welcome by government officials after landing on the Bamako airport runway and then whisked into waiting buses without the need to queue at immigration. The migrants are taken directly to the reception centre in Bamako to rest from the journey before receiving their pocket money and CBI the following day, as well as reintegration counselling, medical and PSS screening. At the time of evaluation data collection, those who opted for a standard economic reintegration kit from a menu of options (including hairdressing, construction, mini-market, tailoring, tiling, plumbing, welding, hardware etc.) also received it within 48 hours while they were still at the centre, minimizing the gap between the provision of reception and reintegration assistance.

3.4.4 Efficiency (Return): Did assisted voluntary return journeys take place in a timely manner? What were the challenges in the return process and how were they overcome?

According to the COVID-adapted AVR survey (total sample of 804 migrants surveyed from the four SLC host/transit countries covered by this evaluation), 37% of beneficiaries considered that their return had taken place in a timely manner, while 60% believed too much time had passed between their application to IOM and their voluntary return journey. Migrants reported that they had waited an average of 13 weeks between the two stages, while prior to the pandemic the average wait time reported by migrants for voluntary return was five weeks.

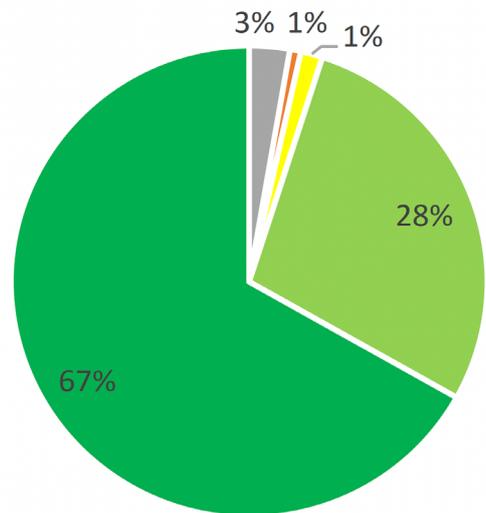
Did you feel that your return was timely?
(n=804)

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know/No answer



How satisfied were you with the assistance on arrival? (n=1,746)

■ No answer ■ Dissatisfied ■ Neutral
■ Satisfied ■ Very satisfied



According to evaluation data collected, there are three main challenges to the timeliness of the return process:

1. Lack of travel documents:

Many migrants do not possess the necessary ID documents needed to travel and applications need to be made to their country’s consulate or embassy. If the migrant’s country of origin has no diplomatic representation in the host/transit country, this further complicates procedures and delays the process. As well as obtaining the travel documentation from the country of origin, in the case of Chad some nationalities also require an exit visa which takes at least two weeks to process. Measures to respond to these voluntary return challenges include engaging with the country of origin’s diplomatic missions and in some cases supplying material support such as computers and printers to facilitate the issuance of ID documents.

However, as some migrants may wait longer than others, uncertainty over the return date feeds frustration. *“It was a long process in Niger, for Malians it takes longer than for other nationalities. For Guineans it moves fast,”* complained one Malian returnee. Regular communication with beneficiaries to update them on efforts to advance their case is essential to managing frustrations during this period.

2. Vulnerabilities:

Some voluntary return cases are unaccompanied children, victims of trafficking and/or have serious medical and psychological issues. Managing the protection elements of these cases takes more time to secure guarantees that the migrant can safely and securely return to their country of origin. For unaccompanied children, the process takes longer due to the need to secure parental consent and a formal decision by the relevant government’s child services department that the return is in the child’s best interests. Family tracing may take months if the child either does not remember, or is too distressed to supply current contact details for family members. Protection staff also need to assess whether the family is willing to take the child back and if he/she feels safe to return.

3. COVID-19:

Air/land border closures and quarantine periods increased the amount of time needed for voluntary return. Although air borders reopened within months, continued land border closures meant that more time and funds were needed to organize charter flights for return journeys that previously would have been organized by bus. At the beginning of the pandemic, services from government offices, embassies and consulates were also frequently disrupted, increasing the amount of time needed to obtain migrant documents. The increased waiting times for voluntary return during the pandemic increased security challenges in transit centres, as a staff member in IOM Niger described, *“Every migrant wants to return home as quickly as possible, so all the delays, COVID, even if some understand, the majority don’t. That really put the centre staff at risk – imagine yourself in a place where hundreds of people are starting to get restless – it doesn’t make you feel very safe. We had dozens of protests, things smashed, all types of violence with police intervention sometimes. Most of the protests are always linked to departures and the travel document which takes time.”* To better communicate with the migrants on the reasons for the delays in their voluntary return journeys, IOM staff in Niger asked migrants of each nationality to select a delegate to represent them. The delegates were invited to participate in a weekly meeting where they were updated on IOM efforts to secure their travel documents and could express any questions or concerns. Migrants could also approach IOM staff on an individual basis to enquire about their case. These measures largely succeeded in calming tensions, and migrants in transit in Niger gave positive feedback: *“I am satisfied, from time to time I get updated on my file. We are just waiting for the confirmation from our government for the departure.”* Another said, *“Every time I approach the team, they provide all the information we need. They also take the time to explain things well to make sure we understand. They are very available.”*

During the final pre-departure stage, a positive result on the pre-travel COVID-19 test can create an additional delay and source of frustration for migrants. An IOM staff member in Niger describes, *“They can’t understand when we tell them they are asymptomatic cases. They feel well, they have a departure list with their name on it and when they do the test, the test comes back positive at the last minute before the trip. After having left their family years ago, after having gone through many things, at the last minute someone tells you that you are not travelling and on top of that that you are sick. It’s very difficult to accept.”*

LESSONS LEARNED: COMMUNICATING WITH MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT

- When facing delays to voluntary return due to waiting for travel documentation or similar issues, regular communication with migrants is essential to reassure them that IOM is doing the maximum possible to ensure their timely return home. One best practice from IOM Niger is electing migrants as leaders for their national group and holding regular meetings to update them and listen to their concerns. Weekly visits to transit centres by protection staff to speak to migrants, as well as telephone and SMS outreach are other good practices.
- To address the source of the travel document delays, engagement of and support to National Authorities in charge of identity verification is key, as well as engagement of and technical support to national protection actors in charge of support to vulnerable migrants.

3.4.5 Efficiency (Transit): Were direct assistance and protection services to vulnerable migrants in transit implemented in an efficient way?

In the framework of the Joint Initiative project, IOM directly runs some transit and reception centres as well as supporting government and NGO partner centres with certain services. These centres form a vital part of IOM’s protection and return assistance with some migrants staying for longer periods while travel documents are secured from national authorities.

The regional Migrant Transit Centre Satisfaction Survey gathers feedback from migrants who have stayed in the centres to monitor key standards and levels of satisfaction on food, medical and psychosocial assistance, hygiene/COVID-19 prevention, security and recreational facilities. To date, a regional total of 530 migrants have been surveyed from May 2020 until September 2021 in the four key transit countries covered by this evaluation (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad) in addition to Senegal and Guinea where the programme funds reception centres to assist migrants on the final stage of their voluntary return journey. Female migrants made up 20% of those surveyed. The feedback captures the COVID response in the transit and reception centres and the migrants’ experiences.

Main findings:

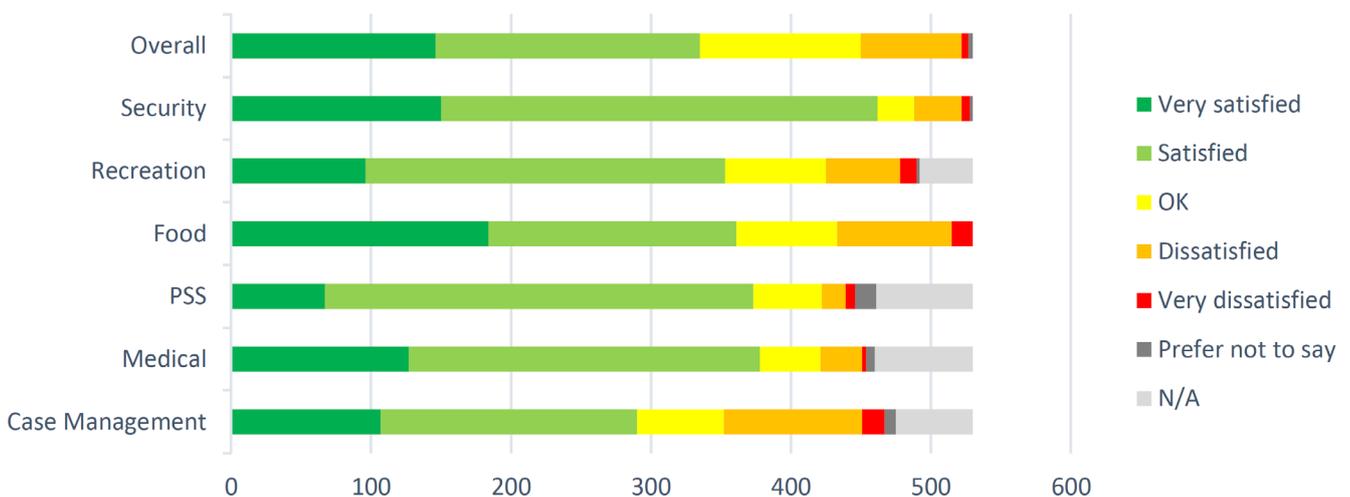
- Overall Satisfaction:**

63% of migrants are satisfied overall and another 22% regard the centres as OK. 15% are dissatisfied. Most of the reasons given for dissatisfaction relate to long waiting periods for voluntary return, such as this migrant in Mali: *“I’m here without money or work, I’m very bored and I’m in a hurry to return home.”* Some migrants also complained about the quality of food, medical care and hygiene. The migrants who were satisfied appreciated being able to stay somewhere safe with food provided.

- Case Management:**

Only half of respondents (exactly 50%) reported that the next steps to organize their voluntary return had been explained to them and 22% are dissatisfied with case management. Those migrants with their voluntary return already scheduled tended to give more positive feedback: *“I’m going back to my country tomorrow, it’s good,”* said one migrant in transit in Mali. But many others said they had no news of their cases: *“I don’t know if our case files are really followed up. Because nothing has happened until now,”* said another migrant in a Malian transit centre.

Regional Migrant Transit Centre Satisfaction Rates by Category (n=530)



- **Medical assistance:**

71% are satisfied with the quality of medical assistance, reporting easy access to the centre's clinic or a local hospital. One migrant in Niger said, *"I wasn't really sick, but I was very weak. The doctor treated me well. I've seen other migrants also received very good treatment, so everything is going well now."* The 6% of migrants who are dissatisfied complain of delays before receiving treatment, or of being given only paracetamol instead of medicines tailored to their condition. Another migrant in a Niger transit centre said, *"The medical assistance here is insufficient.... I said I had a problem in my chest, and they gave me paracetamol. It's not enough and I won't go back [to the centre clinic]. I'm going to have it checked out in my country."* In Niger, for serious medical issues that require migrants to be medically evacuated from Arlit or Agadez to a hospital in the capital, IOM staff report that administrative and security procedures are often complex due to the need to obtain a military escort as well as organize transport.

- **Psychosocial assistance:**

70% report being satisfied with psychosocial assistance. A migrant in Niger said, *"We've always been listened to, and our problems are always resolved with these people. They do their best to help us, and we appreciate it."* While actual dissatisfaction rates for psychosocial assistance are low at 5%, it appears that some migrants may be unaware of the availability of psychosocial support, as some survey responses to an open question about reasons for (dis)satisfaction were off topic. It is recommended to ensure that a detailed briefing is provided to migrants upon arrival at the centre about the availability of these services, as psychosocial support is not widely available and understood in the Sahel and Lake Chad cultural context.

- **Food:**

More than three-quarters (78%) of migrants were satisfied (including 35% very satisfied) with the food, reporting sufficient hygiene, variety, quantity and quality. Pointing to a promising practice for centre management, three female migrants staying at a partner-run centre in Mali were empowered to manage their own meals: *"We choose ourselves what we would like to eat, and they bring us the ingredients to cook."* Another 24% of those surveyed said the food was 'OK'. However, 18% are dissatisfied, complaining about poor taste, quality and variety. A migrant in transit in Chad complained, *"The sauce is the same every day. I would like to eat different sauces and some fish from time to time."*

- **Recreational activities:**

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) are satisfied with the recreational activities available in the transit centres, with 14% rating them as 'OK.' 12% are dissatisfied and 7% say there are no activities available. Dissatisfaction is linked to the lack of TV at some centres, non-availability of wifi for migrants, lack of games for the children and/or no space to play sports. In Chad, migrants in the Ndjamenia transit centre seemed unaware of the availability of activities: *"I don't know if there are any recreational or educational activities here in the centre, nor any games. There is only the television that I don't watch because it's in French and I understand nothing,"* said one migrant. A mother in the centre was also unaware of childcare activities organized twice per week.

- **Security:**

87% of those surveyed are satisfied with security in the transit centre where they are staying. Said one migrant in Chad: *"The guards are always there. There are no problems with other migrants."*

MIGRANTS' MAIN SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT PROVIDE KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR IOM TO CONSIDER WHEN DESIGNING FUTURE TRANSIT CENTRE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES:

- Provide phone or internet access to communicate with their families in their home country
- Provide TV (or if there is already a TV, a greater range of channels) and wi-fi for entertainment, more games and sports activities, music and dance
- Improve food quality and variety
- Provide more clothes
- Step up security for migrants' personal/hygiene items to avoid theft
- Improve maintenance and cleaning of toilets
- Provide vocational training courses and income-earning opportunities while in transit. A migrant in Burkina Faso stated, *"The centre is too small, otherwise we could have job training workshops, that would be very good. Last time for example, the centre manager taught us to make liquid soap and it was very good."*
- Hire more English-speaking staff in transit centres to assist migrants from anglophone countries
- Install more taps to reduce queuing time for water (for the centre in Agadez)
- Provide more shaded outdoor spaces. Said a migrant in transit in Niger: *"We would like a place where we can be in the shade. The sun is very hot during the day, so we cannot be outside. It would be great to have a place where we can sit outside during the day."* In Niger's main Agadez centre, outdoor shaded areas do exist but are sometimes unavailable for general use due to being utilized as sleeping areas when the centre is full, as was the case during the evaluation mission.

3.5 REINTEGRATION

To improve the reintegration of returning migrants, reintegration assistance provision was adjusted to the individual needs of beneficiaries and adapted to context. For this reason, although assistance was primarily provided in-kind, assistance through cash transfer was also provided in some countries, either as a complementary assistance to the in-kind or as a replacement of the in-kind assistance, including to allow the beneficiary to implement the reintegration plan. For this reason, the amount and duration of the reintegration assistance may vary. The assistance can be provided at the individual collective or community level. Provision of reintegration assistance follows counselling and individual orientation of returnees.

3.5.1 Relevance: Were the programme's PSS activities appropriately tailored to the reintegration needs of returnees (including social/cultural/community context, vulnerabilities, gender, age and geographical scope)?

The 2020 IOM-led [Regional Reintegration Evaluation](#) highlighted the essential role of psychosocial wellbeing in the success of economic reintegration, and vice versa. Improving livelihoods reduces returnees' stress and anxiety, while addressing any psychosocial issues helps beneficiaries to focus on their microbusiness and training opportunities. This final evaluation examines the outcomes of specific types of psychosocial support activities, presenting feedback collected from a dedicated survey for psychosocial reintegration beneficiaries.

Key informants interviewed for this evaluation believed that psychosocial support (PSS) was particularly relevant to ensuring successful reintegration, since psychological wellbeing is often not prioritized in the Sahel and Lake Chad context and government support services are limited.

Returnees also frequently experience stigma and discrimination due to returning to their families and communities empty-handed. *“We had activities with people who would break into tears, saying they lived with a trauma for years, that they felt like a failure. They could then see that they were not alone, and that they can find strength in being together despite their problems”*, said an IOM staff member in the Gambia.

A range of psychosocial assistance (PSS) activities were implemented under the Joint Initiative, including individual and group counselling, psychoeducation sessions (typically as part of business skills trainings), recreational activities (e.g., art therapy, sports) and family mediation. The emphasis on psychosocial reintegration increased over the years of the programme, with many missions expanding their PSS services, staff and reach from 2019-onwards.

To widen the geographical scope, the project offered counselling with IOM psychosocial support staff by phone and also built partnerships with government agencies and National Red Cross societies. However, phone counselling proved to be problematic in countries such as Guinea-Bissau due to poor communications networks and lack of electricity to charge phones, and ability to refer to national partners was constrained by their limited capacity and experience in providing mental health services.

More than 90% of the returnees interviewed for the PSS Satisfaction Survey (n=499) confirmed that the activity offered was in a location that was easy to access and in a language that they felt comfortable expressing themselves in.

The activities were tailored to different vulnerabilities, gender and age with individual PSS screening conducted on arrival to complement pre-departure screening. *“There are not many female migrants, and they can face additional discrimination, including when they come back to their communities. We try to expedite their cases, and we follow up closely with them. We do the same for migrants returning to the Gambia with children,”* reported an IOM staff member in the Gambia. To better support beneficiaries whose psychosocial needs emerged later on during the reintegration process, IOM staff implementing economic reintegration assistance were sensitized on the need to detect signs of distress, refer cases and provide psychosocial first aid in case of need.

Some of the programme’s PSS activities – for example psychoeducation sessions – are designed to be relevant for all migrants, while others receive more targeted support. For example, in Mali, all migrants receive a ‘psychosocial information session’ during the reception phase about the challenges of settling back into their family and working life in Mali, as well as a rapid vulnerability assessment. Typically, about 10% of returnees need more focused support with individual or group-based counselling (including family mediation), while a small percentage is in need of psychiatric care. During the initial reintegration counselling, migrants also receive a simple brochure outlining the availability of all types of reintegration assistance from IOM, including PSS assistance should they need it at a later stage.

Both individual and group counselling sessions were viewed by beneficiaries as relevant to their needs. While individual sessions were perceived as more confidential, *“during the group sessions I was able to understand that I wasn’t alone in this situation and to share my experience with other women,”* a beneficiary in Côte d’Ivoire described.

Some beneficiaries in Cameroon and Côte d’Ivoire reported a lack of awareness of the psychosocial support services offered. A returnee in Côte d’Ivoire stated, *“No one told me about the existence of the psychologist. If I had known that this service was offered by IOM, I would have definitely requested it given that immediately after my return, my situation was not good.”* Since 2019, returnees in Côte d’Ivoire are briefed on arrival about the availability of medical and psychosocial support, and are handed a card with contact details to request the assistance.

3.5.2 Effectiveness: How effectively did IOM adapt reintegration activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the new cash-based assistance modality(ies)? Did any new promising practices emerge for future reintegration programming?

NOTE: This section focuses on promising reintegration practices that emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For broader findings and recommendations on the Joint Initiative’s reintegration activities, please see the [IOM regional reintegration thematic evaluation](#).

Across the region, reintegration activities needed to be adjusted in order to continue assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. For some missions, this amounted to adapting existing activities to ensure that social distancing was respected.

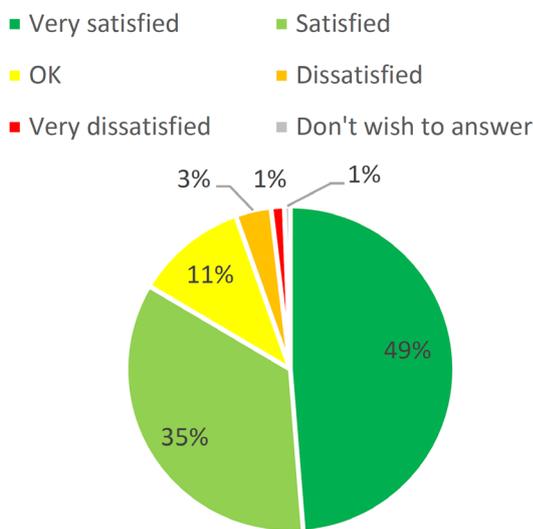
For others such as Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, the programme for the first time piloted cash-based assistance activities as a way to deliver more efficient and flexible assistance to beneficiaries, following an [IOM needs assessment](#) which showed that 85% reported being financially worse off than before the pandemic.

In Burkina Faso and Niger, the programme was able to continue with in-person reintegration activities while reducing the number of participants per group and distributing masks and hand sanitizer. In Guinea-Bissau, the programme was not able to adapt effectively after vocational training courses were interrupted by the pandemic. The activities re-started late, if at all, and many beneficiaries complained of not receiving their allowances or microbusiness kits. As of August 2021, IOM's regional office is supporting Guinea-Bissau to finalise these cases and the country is not included in future programming. In the Gambia and Ghana, reintegration counselling and follow-up continued via phone in the early months of the pandemic, but staff reported that it was more difficult to build trust with beneficiaries. A staff member in the Gambia explained: *"For reintegration, personal contact is very important. Phones can help but nothing can replace a physical one-to-one meeting, for the returnees to have the reassurance that they are attended to"*. In Ghana, staff reported that suppliers for returnees' microbusiness items would be reluctant to provide their business and bank details over the phone due to suspicions about scams.

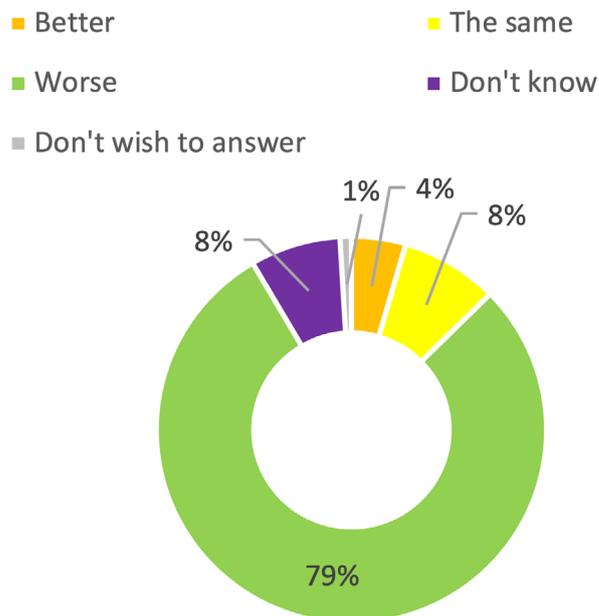
The COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative effect on beneficiaries who had already received microbusiness assistance, as some were not able to operate, had reduced hours due to lockdowns and curfews, or faced challenges with re-stocking inventory due to movement restrictions. One sector, tailoring was particularly badly hit as people were less likely to buy new clothes due to fewer social engagements and lower incomes amid the pandemic. In Ghana, the programme responded by ordering masks from tailors to boost their income while also helping to counter the spread of the virus.

Despite the challenges, IOM has managed to achieve the same beneficiary satisfaction rate for reintegration assistance as during the pre-pandemic period. More than two thousand M&E surveys collected from September 2020-September 2021 show that 84% of beneficiaries across the region are satisfied with the economic reintegration assistance they received. This figure is the same as the beneficiary satisfaction rate for IOM's thematic evaluation of reintegration activities, which analysed beneficiary satisfaction from the beginning of the Joint Initiative project until February 2020. While the overall satisfaction rate ('satisfied' plus 'very satisfied' categories) stays the same at 84%, there is a dramatic increase in the percentage of beneficiaries falling into the 'very satisfied' category, from 17% pre-pandemic to 49% post pandemic. Beneficiaries' higher level of appreciation for IOM assistance likely reflects the increased need for it during the COVID-19 economic downturn. In the COVID-adapted Economic Reintegration Survey, 79% of beneficiaries stated they would be in a worse situation today if not for IOM support.

Beneficiary satisfaction with reintegration assistance post COVID-19 (n=2,222)



If you hadn't received reintegration assistance, what would your situation be like now? (n=2,222)



MALI BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY: COMBINING CBI WITH STREAMLINED IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

Country context:

Mali stands out in terms of promising practices adopted in response to the pandemic, adopting a new strategy that saw returnees receive their complete economic reintegration assistance in record time. Along with Senegal, Guinea, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, Mali introduced cash-based interventions (CBI) under the Joint Initiative for the first time in response to the worsening economic situation and movement restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was particularly relevant in Mali, as it helped to ensure timely delivery of assistance amid increasing security and access challenges. Islamist groups hold significant territory in the country's east and centre, and military coups took place in August 2020 and May 2021. This means that keeping in contact with returnees and delivering reintegration assistance over a prolonged period is also more challenging there, as conflict-torn areas often have no phone coverage. Coupled with these challenges, Mali now has the highest returnee caseload in the region. An unstable economic and security situation, combined with generations-long migration traditions in some regions seems to lie behind this phenomenon: "Migration used to be easier, lots of people were able to send money and their families were able to build big houses, so youth come under pressure from older generations to do the same," says one IOM staff member.

Background on combined CBI and in-kind reintegration strategy:

Background on combined CBI and in-kind reintegration strategy: By the beginning of August 2021, more than 5,000 beneficiaries in Mali had received CBI. This took the form of a payment (via cheque) of 300,000 XOF for each adult returnee, in addition to 100,000 XOF for small children and 200,000 for children aged 13-17. Migrants who had returned since 2019 were contacted by phone and informed that they could collect their cheques from IOM offices, while from late 2020-onwards IOM started providing the cheque to migrants within the three day period they spend at the reception centre in Bamako. By May 2021 not only were migrants receiving their CBI cheques almost immediately, but they were also offered the chance to choose from a menu of microbusiness kits, such as construction, hairdressing, mini-market, hardware etc. The menu features pictures of each kit item, which allows all beneficiaries, regardless of language or literacy status, to be able to make an informed choice and verify that their kits are complete. Vendors are on standby to deliver the kits within 48 hours, so migrants can receive them before leaving the reception centre or business skills training venue. As well as the microbusiness kits, there are also NFI and food kits available for families and pregnant women.

In terms of efficiency and risk management, Mali's new strategy of combining cash and in-kind assistance (using a reintegration kit 'menu') has the following advantages:

- **Increased transparency:**

With both CBI and in-kind assistance distributed at reception centres or business skills training venues, migrants can see that they are receiving exactly the same value of economic reintegration assistance as their peers and all distribution is witnessed by IOM staff.

- **Overcoming returnee stigma:**

The shame of return is linked to returning home empty-handed, but receiving CBI immediately empowers migrants to be seen as a contributing member of the family and restores their dignity. During the evaluation mission, one returnee in Bamako reflected, *"We Malians travel a lot... then when we get to another country we find there is no work, but it is too shameful for us to return home without money. Money is not a small thing here. Now that IOM is giving 300,000 XOF on arrival it will encourage many more migrants to come home as they won't face stigma going back to their families as they are bringing something."* Two migrants interviewed by the evaluator in the reception centre just after receiving their CBI reported they were planning to get married, an indicator that they are more likely to settle down in Mali and that they are accepted by their local community.

- **Efficiency:**

As an overwhelming majority of beneficiaries demonstrate a strong preference for micro-businesses that fall into common categories (small supermarkets, hardware stores for instance), procuring microbusiness kits in bulk can save staff time, reduce beneficiary waiting periods and improve value for money. A streamlined economic reintegration process maximises staff resources and enables teams to keep pace with the high volume of returns (saves long process of outreach using phone numbers, setting meetings, travelling to communities).

- **Builds trust with beneficiaries:**

Long wait times for assistance can create a climate of uncertainty, leading beneficiaries to wonder if they have been misinformed about the reintegration support they will receive after their voluntary return. An IOM staff member explained the change in the dynamic since CBI was introduced: *“In the head of migrants they were convinced that the aid won’t arrive and even if it does, they will be deceived. Some migrants don’t come back to their family because of the shame of returning empty-handed...All that is until the end of 2020. People now see that everyone who arrives receives everything immediately... People have more and more confidence.”* Prompt delivery of aid also reduces security threats to staff and partners, as beneficiaries may not understand the administrative and logistical reasons for delays and attribute them to favoritism.

- **Immediately empowers returnees to take charge of their reintegration:**

Beneficiaries are given the resources they need to re-start their lives straight away, without being in limbo wondering when they will receive reintegration assistance. Having part of the assistance in cash also means that beneficiaries are empowered to purchase the goods that they want.

- **Flexibility in meeting urgent expenses:**

Social reintegration assistance for rent and medical expenses can take time to process, but having part of the assistance in CBI ensures that beneficiaries have cash immediately on hand to meet these basic needs.

- **Mitigates contact/dropout issue:**

Delivering assistance to beneficiaries during the reception phase means that the program avoids being dependent on phone contacts (beneficiaries often change phone numbers and some villages have a lack of network and electricity). Taking advantage of the reception intake process, migrants can receive in-person reintegration counselling on the spot rather than staff trying to follow up with migrants dispersed across the country. In some cases, microbusiness kits can be given to beneficiaries after completing business skills or vocational training.

- **Wider reintegration choices still available with regular timeframe:**

All migrants interviewed expressed that the range of kits offered sufficient choice. Migrants who want to launch a microbusiness that falls outside these categories can still choose their own individually tailored package, which is likely to be delivered faster than previously as the majority of beneficiaries have already been assisted with the ready-made kits. According to reintegration staff, 90% of beneficiaries choose the ready-made kit option.

Key findings from Mali CBI beneficiary satisfaction surveys (n=263):

- **Use of CBI:**

79% of beneficiaries report spending at least some of their CBI on microbusiness items, a high proportion considering that as only one-third of the total economic reintegration assistance is provided in cash, their CBI is also designed to help meet basic needs. 68% spent some or all of their assistance on food and other basic items.

- **Beneficiary satisfaction:**

88% say the CBI fully or partly matched their needs (negative feedback was linked to wanting a higher amount of money), while 85% are satisfied with receiving assistance in cash rather than in-kind.

- **Effect of CBI on household relations:**

77% report that the CBI had a positive effect, promoting more harmonious family relationships. *“My wife is calmer as there is enough to live on for a while,”* said one returnee. Another said, *“When I have money, the family feels the benefits – I paid for new clothes for my wife and children. They are happy.”* 22% said the CBI had no effect on their household relationships, while 1.5% said that it had a negative effect due to family pressure to share the money.

- **Effect of CBI on community relations:**

37% of beneficiaries said receiving CBI had had a positive impact on their relationships with the community, while 57% said it had no effect. Positive effects reported were linked to pride in their financial independence and not being a burden to other community members: *“Since I’ve arrived, I haven’t asked anyone for money – that’s already a big thing,”* said one returnee. *“I attend weddings and baptisms and I give gifts. I have a good relationship with others”,* said another.

- **CBI delivery modality:**

Giving beneficiaries a CBI cheque to cash at the bank proved to be secure and effective, with 99% reporting that they had no problems accessing the assistance (for the remaining 1%, issues were relatively minor such as needing a replacement cheque due to a name being misspelled and having trouble finding the bank).

One possible negative unintended outcome of CBI observed by the evaluator during the field mission was the immense family pressure that returnees face to share their assistance. One female beneficiary had given all her CBI to her family to help with urgent expenses and home renovations, and several other beneficiaries also reported having to use the money to pay for basic expenses and medical bills of family members. Out of the 23 CBI beneficiaries visited by the evaluator, two male returnees stood out as determined to invest everything into their microbusinesses:

“When I first received the cash, my family wanted the money. I said to myself, ‘I’m educated, I need to put my foot down.’ I sent wife and baby to the village with 50,000 XOF, then saved the rest for the business and I am sleeping in a small room in Bamako for 12,000 XOF monthly rent so I can put everything into the business.”

“I had a small difficulty as some of my family thought I had got a lot of money to share. I preferred not to waste money and instead I put it all into my business”.

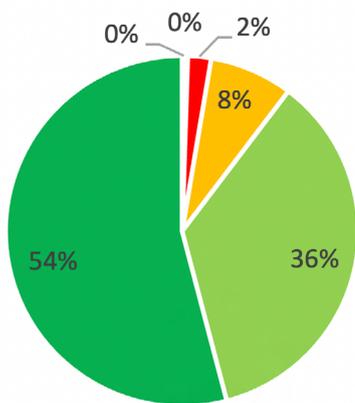
While the extent of family pressure to share money is high in this cultural context, it should be noted that in-kind assistance can equally be sold for cash. **However, a combination of both CBI and in-kind assistance -as currently being done in Mali- is likely the best strategy as it allows a degree of flexibility for urgent expenses while ensuring the bulk of the reintegration assistance is in the form of vocational training or microbusiness items.** One beneficiary stated, *“I was happy to receive part of the assistance in cash, but it was good not to receive everything in cash, or perhaps I would have spent everything. Having part of the money in cash allowed me to meet urgent expenses while the kit was useful... the process went well for me.”*

CBI IN OTHER JOINT INITIATIVE COUNTRIES

Following consultation with the Senegalese government on implementation of reintegration assistance during COVID-19, the programme in Senegal also piloted a combination of cash and in-kind assistance for the first time. There were several differences in approach. Firstly, the assistance was provided in actual cash rather than by cheque. Some staff regarded this approach to be risky from a security perspective, as staff and ‘community facilitators’ would often travel carrying large amounts of cash. Secondly the amount was lower (150,000 XOF), and was designed primarily to help meet urgent expenses—or in the case of beneficiaries who had already received the rest of their reintegration assistance, to help boost microbusinesses struggling amid the pandemic. Lastly, the amount was generally not given on arrival. Beneficiaries would be contacted individually by staff and either asked to come to the IOM office or meet the staff or facilitator during a community visit. M&E data collected suggests that the CBI was much appreciated by beneficiaries in Senegal, such as this woman in Dakar: *“With the assistance in cash, I managed to meet the needs of my three-year-old girl. If I had received in-kind assistance, I wouldn’t have had the possibility to meet my needs.”* In Senegal, the assistance was given to all beneficiaries who had returned from 2019-onwards, but those who received the CBI before the in-kind portion of their reintegration assistance would receive a lesser value of in-kind assistance (500,000 XOF worth of assistance compared to the previous 650,000 XOF.) On the other hand, some CBI beneficiaries had already received the equivalent of 650,000 XOF in in-kind assistance, bringing the total value of their assistance to 800,000 XOF.

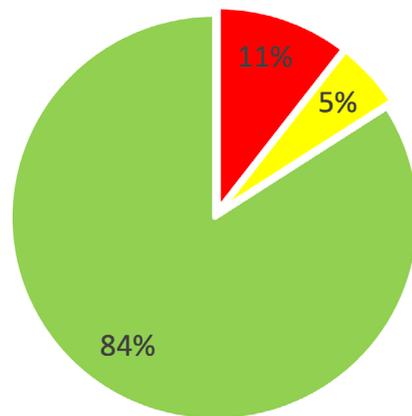
What is your level of satisfaction on receiving cash rather than in-kind assistance? (n=982)

- Don't wish to answer
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- OK
- Very satisfied



Did the cash-based assistance meet your needs? (n=982)

- No
- Partly
- Yes



At the time of evaluation data collection, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Guinea had also begun implementing varying CBI approaches, ranging from ‘COVID cash’ given only to vulnerable beneficiaries to conditional cash grants covering the entire amount of reintegration assistance. On average, region-wide CBI post-distribution monitoring survey results show that 90% (n=982) of those surveyed prefer receiving cash rather than in-kind assistance. Beneficiaries felt empowered to manage their own affairs: *“It’s money that I need, it allows me to organize things myself;”* said one Ivorian returnee. Several beneficiaries in Nigeria appreciated the efficiency of receiving cash rather than the former process of gathering paperwork to process in-kind reintegration assistance: *“I did not go through the stress of getting invoices from vendors.”* Overall, 90% say the CBI fully or partly met their needs and 85% say the assistance had a positive effect on their household relationships. The main reason beneficiaries gave for the assistance not meeting needs was that the amount of money is not enough to meet their expenses.

While the beneficiary feedback demonstrates a clear preference for cash over in-kind and many positive outcomes related to CBI, a possible risk is that the money will not be spent on microbusiness items, training or other aspects linked to sustainable reintegration. It should be noted that in-kind assistance also carries a degree of similar risk (items can always be sold) and that there are ways of mitigating this risk for CBI. For example, CBI can be provided on a conditional basis in installments, with each installment released after the beneficiary provides proof of how the previous amount was spent (the current approach in Cameroon). Alternatively, providing up to one-third of the reintegration assistance in cash, and the rest in-kind, allows many of the benefits of CBI (for example empowerment, flexibility) to be unlocked while reducing the risks.

3.5.3 Impact: Has PSS and social assistance enhanced migrants' wellbeing in their communities of return?

Overall, across the region, data gathered suggests that PSS and social reintegration assistance has contributed to enhancing migrants' wellbeing in their countries of origin. Respondents reported that they felt better after expressing their anxieties during counselling, and having basic necessities such as medical care, schooling and shelter taken care of reduced the immediate financial pressure on returnees and helped them to focus on their economic reintegration.

Social Reintegration Assistance

Social reintegration assistance delivered under the Joint Initiative primarily involved supporting particularly vulnerable returnees with medical expenses, rent, children's school fees and food/basic household items. The IOM 2020 Regional Reintegration Evaluation found that due to limited funding allocations for social assistance, the scale of support was insufficient to match returning migrants' medical, shelter, schooling and food/NFI needs.

Despite the reach of social reintegration assistance being limited to only a quarter of the total regional reintegration caseload, beneficiary feedback indicates that where it was able to be provided, it had a significant impact not only on immediate humanitarian needs but also on migrants' psychosocial wellbeing and ability to focus on their economic reintegration. Launching a microbusiness or starting a vocational training course is difficult, if not almost impossible, without a safe and dignified place to live and treatment for any health problems. Several returnees testified of the impact the programme's social reintegration assistance had on their ability to stay and live in their country of origin:

"The shelter assistance that I received changed a lot for me. I feel like a man again," Burkinabe returnee

"The children are learning now, and I am able to concentrate on my work," Ghanaian returnee

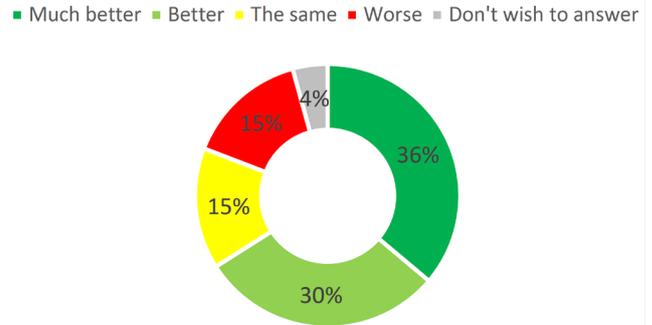
"They hit and beat me. My neck and my foot were a mess, and I couldn't even walk. Thanks to the medical treatment, today I can walk," Burkinabe returnee

"If IOM wasn't there, it would have been very, very difficult for me frankly. I came back sick, and IOM took care of everything. I was pregnant, I had nothing!" Ivorian returnee.

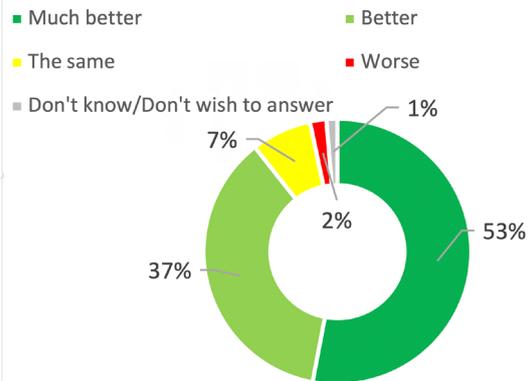
Key findings of the Social Reintegration Survey (n=466) include:

- After receiving social reintegration assistance, 73% believe that their decision to return was a good decision and 6% that it was partly a good decision. Only 3% say they are planning to migrate irregularly again.
- 80% of beneficiaries say that the social reintegration assistance made a positive change in their life. However, many express the need for longer-term rent, school and medical assistance.
- 80% say that they received their social assistance in a timely manner. However, the most common suggestion for improvement from beneficiaries is to speed up the timeline for paying medical and school fees.
- **Shelter:**
Out of those who received this part of assistance, 85% are satisfied with the rent/housing assistance and two-thirds (66%) say that the standard of their current housing is better than before they migrated. However, some returnees say that the duration of the support is insufficient, such as this Cameroonian returnee: “The period covered is too short. I received rent assistance for three months. That’s not enough time to get back on my feet, and on top of that I have a wife with a newborn baby and two other children. It’s not easy to face life with these responsibilities.”
- **Medical:**
86% are satisfied with the assistance and 89% report feeling better after the treatment. For this Gambian returnee from Libya, social assistance was a much more important aspect than economic reintegration assistance: “I came with a disability unable to do anything... Urgent attention should be given to returnees who need medical treatment instead of giving them economic reintegration.”
- **Education:**
91% are satisfied and 75% say their children’s situation with schooling is better than before they migrated. Several beneficiaries request more prompt and longer-term payment of school fees.
- **Food/NFIs:**
92% are satisfied and the same percentage report that they had no problems accessing the assistance.

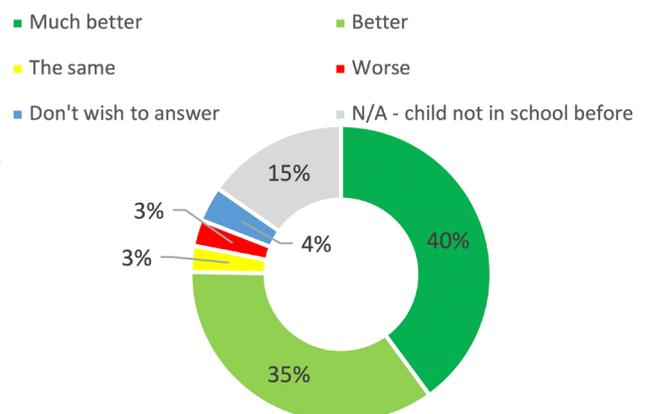
How is the standard of your housing now compared to before you migrated? (n=47)



How do you feel after the medical assistance? (n=151)



How is the situation with your child’s schooling now compared to before you migrated? (n=105)



Psychosocial Reintegration Assistance

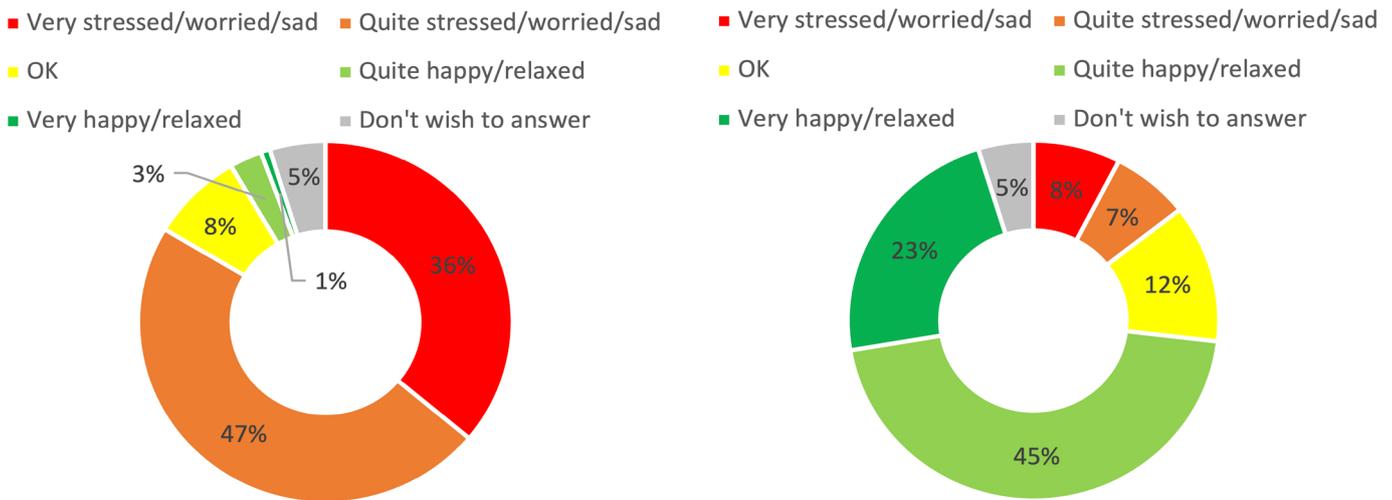
The [2020 Regional Reintegration Evaluation](#) highlighted the vital importance of psychosocial assistance in supporting returnees to settle back into life and work in their country of origin. Many returnees face stigma and feelings of shame about returning home to their families and communities empty-handed, and they may also have suffered negative experiences during migration. Psychosocial support plays a key role in helping returnees to be focused and motivated as they pursue launching a microbusiness, starting vocational training or participating in other economic activities such as cash-for-work or job placement. As an IOM staff member in Ghana described: *“PSS is something that I think makes the whole reintegration possible. You can’t provide economic support when a person is not of a sound mind, you won’t get any results. People need peace of mind to work.”*

Across the region, beneficiary feedback on psychosocial reintegration assistance delivered under the Joint Initiative was collected using a dedicated survey. Almost 500 beneficiaries gave specific feedback on activities ranging from individual counselling to family mediation and recreational activities.

Overall, 83% of respondents reported that they had felt stressed, worried and/or sad before the PSS activity, but only 15% reported still feeling this way afterwards. The migrants appreciated being able to freely discuss the emotional and financial stresses often involved in returning home. A participant in a psychoeducation group session in Mali said, *“The session was well-organized. Participants were given enough time to explain their problems. He [the trainer] listens to people, it’s good.”* Meanwhile in Guinea-Bissau, many migrants benefitted from individual counselling sessions from an on-staff psychologist. *“I feel a lot better because I’ve been able to express myself and I feel relief,”* said one.

How did you feel BEFORE the activity? (n=499)

How do you feel AFTER the activity? (n=499)



More than three-quarters (76%) of returnees surveyed across the region expressed that psychosocial assistance had had a positive impact on their lives. One beneficiary in Cameroon stated, *“The psychosocial support activities have allowed me to regain my confidence in the future and what I’m capable of achieving.”* Another in Guinea-Bissau said, *“I participate more in my community’s activities, and I feel more at ease.”* A returnee in Senegal said, *“The session freed my mind from many things, as before, I kept to myself. I didn’t have much interaction with people in light of the social reality for those who return from travel empty-handed. This activity allowed me to believe in myself and develop a new approach with my family and friends.”*

For some migrants, psychosocial assistance helped them regain their lost self-confidence, while for other returnees it helped them to deal with more severe mental health conditions. An IOM staff member in Guinea-Bissau stated, *“We had two or three migrants that had said they were feeling like committing suicide because quite a few things had happened to them during their journey. With the support of the psychologist, they are going better now.”* A returnee in Senegal said, *“I had really lost my mind, I couldn’t even manage to recognize my parents and loved ones. But after the consultations I feel better.”*

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM M&E SURVEYS ASKING MIGRANTS HOW IOM CAN IMPROVE PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION SUPPORT:

1. Provide more family mediation and family counselling
2. Increase the number of counselling sessions given to each migrant and conduct more follow-up over a longer period
3. Provide PSS assistance as soon as possible after return, as migrants often come back feeling desperate and need support urgently
4. Speed up economic reintegration assistance and provide the assistance according to a fixed timetable to reduce uncertainty and anxiety around when they will receive it
5. Link the timing of psychosocial support with concrete steps to improve livelihoods due to the strong relationship between financial and emotional wellbeing. A returnee in Burkina Faso said, *“Boosting our morale is good, but in our society, if you don’t have any money it’s difficult. So, helping us to have decent businesses would allow us to feel better emotionally and better integrate into society.”* A Malian returnee agreed, *“It’s good that you put this [psychosocial] service in place. But it would be better if it was based on something concrete. For example, if they explained to us the other options for assistance after the training [psychoeducation sessions as part of business skills training], I think that many of the participants would be more at ease.”*
6. Provide snacks during group PSS sessions.

PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION CASE STUDY:

Group psychosocial recreational activities led by returnee mentors in Nigeria

M&E data collected during group psychosocial recreational activities in Nigeria show positive outcomes for returnees. **These outcomes include improved social interaction, increased self-confidence and ability to express their feelings in a supportive environment. Overall, 100% of participants reported that they liked the activity, enjoyed being with other returnees and would be keen to participate in future IOM PSS programming.**

The group psychosocial activities, facilitated by mentors who are themselves returnees, were held over three days in March 2021 in Benin City, Edo State. The mentors previously attended nine days of IOM training on basic psychosocial counselling skills, and were supervised on the job by an IOM psychosocial support specialist. The beneficiaries selected to participate in the mentor-run activities included victims of trafficking, single mothers, gender-based violence survivors and other women with multiple vulnerabilities. The first activity was an interactive session on applying make-up, which aimed to build connections among group members and strengthen resilience. The second activity involved coloring-in activities for children with their parents. The third activity was a support group meeting for caregivers of returnees with mental health needs. To assess these activities, M&E staff observed the sessions and conducted interviews with 24 beneficiaries and the three returnee mentors involved.

Make-up workshop: Ten women who participated in the activity were interviewed. All enjoyed the session: *“It is interactive and gave me an opportunity to express myself about my beauty”* said one participant. *“I now have a new skill in make-up!”* said another. The women also benefitted from social interaction with other returnees: *“Meeting some friends we last met in Libya made it more fun,”* said one participant. Respondents also welcomed being able to express their feelings in a supportive environment: *“I get to discuss issues and I feel free around them.”* Several women also reported improved self-confidence: *“I have a change in my mood. I am going back beautiful and happier.”*

Coloring-in session for children and parents: The M&E staff observing the session noted that only 12 out of the target of 20 children attended (11 boys and one girl), despite efforts to contact beneficiaries to confirm attendance beforehand. The timing of the event during the school exam period was likely a factor in the lower attendance rate, a lesson learned that will be taken into account for future activities. Another area for improvement identified is offering more training to the two male mentors on managing groups of children, or possibly targeting an older age group (all children present were under the age of 10). A longer session may also be needed to encourage increased interaction from parents. Giving children a painting assignment to take home would also extend the benefits of the session.

Nine of the parents were interviewed and gave positive feedback about the session. Many valued the opportunity for their child to learn an artistic activity and play with other children: *“I feel happy because it makes my child happy,”* said one parent. After difficult migration experiences, the activity was also an opportunity for mothers and children to play together: *“I have learned how to dedicate my time to my child and I am happy my child is improving his drawing skills,”* said another mother. Mothers also reported feeling less socially isolated after the activity: *“It made me understand that I am not the only one who has gone through what I felt.”* The beneficiaries asked for the event to be repeated: *“I would like to participate in the future because it’s a kind of relief interacting with your fellow returnees in a cool environment.”* Another said: *“I thank IOM for making my life worthwhile. I am more confident and feel safe living back home.”*

Caregivers’ session: Four participants were interviewed from the caregivers’ meeting. They reported that they learned how to take care of their own wellbeing amid the challenging task of caring for returnees with mental health issues. One said, *“I have attended the training three times and each time I come I go home with something new, and it makes me forget my problems most of the time.”* Another said, *“It helps us to control ourselves, care for our body, reduce (over)thinking and have relationships with people.”* They also drew strength from meeting other caregivers: *“We share experiences and advice with each other because most of us are going through similar problems.”*

Overall Feedback from Mentors: Feedback from the three returnee mentors (two male, one female) leading the group psychosocial recreational activities indicates that IOM training was effective in preparing them to mentor newer returnees. One mentor described how his interpersonal skills had improved: *“Before, I didn’t have the tolerance to listen to people both at work and in my personal life. I am really happy with the training.”* The second mentor requested further capacity building, while the third wanted more material support: *“The location of most of the participants is far apart and we use so much money to transport ourselves.”*

All three mentors found that being involved in supporting returnees was both challenging and rewarding. One expressed pride at being a positive example for other returnees, while another said: *“Mentoring persons with mental issues really opens our mind to managing people’s expectations and needs.”* The three also highlighted the need for clearer communication and more follow-up with returnees to ensure the activities happen on time.

3.6 COMMUNITY STABILIZATION

NOTE: The contract was amended to include 15.5 million EUR for community stabilization activities in Burkina Faso and Niger, set to start in June 2020 and to end in May 2022. Therefore, since many of the community stabilization activities in support of improved governance and enhanced service delivery which began in Burkina Faso and Niger in late 2020 are still underway and therefore not yet at final evaluation stage, this final evaluation focuses on the first round of community stabilization activities implemented in Niger.

3.6.1 Effectiveness: To what extent did programme activities contributed to social cohesion and stability in targeted communities? What could have been improved?

So far, a total of 97 activities in support of local governance and social cohesion, and three in support of improved basic service delivery have been implemented under the Joint Initiative project in Niger, spread across 15 communes. The activities included providing capacity building and material support for local authorities, organizing community mobilization events and radio programmes for awareness raising on social cohesion, enhancing drinking water systems and other public services and offering vocational training. Project Monitoring Committees were also formed to engage communities in identifying priority needs and monitoring the activities. According to seven community leaders interviewed for the evaluation, the committees were confirmed to be both representative and effective in reducing tensions: *“Putting the committees in place has contributed to social cohesion and stability, because all the members of the community (youth, women, religious leaders, civil society, traditional leaders and local authorities) would find themselves meeting to discuss the community’s problems, and also to propose solutions to community problems through the choice of projects.”*

Key informants also confirmed that host community frustrations had been running high before IOM started community stabilization activities. *“IOM took care of the migrants, to make sure they had food, water and transport. Meanwhile we, the host community, received nothing,”* said one local leader. However, after the activities, *“The host community felt like they were being supported as well by IOM in the face of the migration crisis.”* A youth leader in Agadez praised the project’s involvement of local youth: *“IOM is the only institution that has opened the door to us, with a representation of youth at the level of the project committee.”*

In terms of suggestions for improvement, the community leaders expressed a need for individual microbusiness projects targeting local youth (similar to economic reintegration of returnees) and also for increased use of local labor in the community stabilization infrastructure projects. Furthermore, the need to ensure prompt implementation of the community stabilization activities was another area highlighted: *“It’s necessary to reduce the delays in carrying out activities. We announce to communities that this or that activity will take place, but if the implementation drags on and they see nothing concrete, they start to question when the activities will really happen.”*

One lesson learned from the first round of community stabilization activities under the project is the need to pay more attention to the optics and branding of the activities. To restore community members’ confidence in local authorities’ capacity to provide services, it is essential to ensure that they receive the public credit for the interventions, rather than IOM or the donor as has sometimes been the case in the past. Going forward, the project will therefore increase its efforts to promote government ownership of community stabilization activities, for instance by increasing government visibility during public events and highlighting the active participation of government representatives throughout all stages of the project.

3.6.2 Sustainability: Are community structures created within the scope of the project seen as long-term resources for conflict resolution and reduction? Do members of these structures view their role as exclusive to project implementation, or as longer-term resources for conflict prevention in their communities?

The Joint Initiative’s community stabilization programming in Niger took a conflict-sensitive approach, sending a strong signal to the host community that their needs were not being ignored in favor of migrants. According to community leaders in the Agadez region, the activities were chosen through an inclusive process of community consultation and contributed to reducing tensions, including those linked to competition over scarce public resources. The activities focused on improving local governance and restoring social cohesion by addressing the possible drivers of instability, such as limited access to basic social services. Activities included, among others, initiatives to improve local infrastructure and capacity, such as upgrading public water systems, equipping health centres and training youth and local authorities. The benefits to the host community are expected to last long beyond the life of the project, as a local leader underlined: *“The activities carried out are sustainable and long-term. If we take the example of the new health centre building, it is not a structure that is limited to the project, but it will stay in the community well after the project and will continue to serve us. It’s the same for the boreholes. And even for the women’s centre, they are trained, and these trainings will allow them to train other people in turn and create activities. All that goes beyond the project. And that allows the community to feel supported, that their needs are considered by IOM, and this calms all the frustrations that existed before.”* Another community leader added, *“The community knows that IOM has not abandoned them, and they are supported in the same way as the migrants. There are not really any conflicts or tensions with the migrants; just frustration which has now calmed down a lot.”*

Local leaders also reported that community committees created in the framework of the project play an ongoing role in reducing local conflicts and promoting dialogue. The leaders believed that the committees would still be active in one year's time.

3.7 SEARCH AND RESCUE

NOTE: Niger is the only Joint Initiative country with search and rescue activities

3.7.1 Effectiveness: To what extent have stranded migrants been effectively assisted with IOM search and rescue activities? What could have been improved?

Niger's search and rescue (SAR) activities focus on migrants in distress in the Agadez region, mainly in the Kawar desert where smugglers' vehicles often break down. Some missions are routine patrols along known migration routes, while others are launched in response to tip-offs about lost or abandoned migrants.

Almost 30,000 migrants have been rescued under the Joint Initiative programme in Niger (note that this figure also includes humanitarian rescue operations near the border with Algeria). A member of IOM's medical team describes the precarious conditions migrants are often found in amid 50-degree desert temperatures: *"We have many migrants who were dehydrated...we also have severe burn cases due to the sun. Their shoes tear from the heat of the sun in the desert sand, and the skin peels off."* Some migrants are already in a vulnerable condition before they start travelling through the desert due to being pregnant or injured during their journey. An ambulance with a medical team always forms part of the SAR convoy to be able to provide immediate first aid to rescued migrants.

Migrants surveyed in transit centres expressed their appreciation about their desert rescue:

- *"You [IOM] really try to do your best. Perhaps I would have died... When you came to my rescue, I was really happy. I recommend IOM continues with these activities to save other migrants"* Female migrant, Dirkou transit centre
- *"I wanted to go to Libya, and we had an accident in the desert. IOM helped me and it was a bit like a miracle. I stayed a long time on that road..."* Male migrant, Dirkou transit centre

One of the key successes of the programme's SAR efforts has been the strong level of government engagement, with civil protection forces accompanying IOM staff on missions. IOM key informants report that there is regular and productive coordination with government authorities, with designated focal points in SAR bases in Niamey, Agadez and Dirkou. Missions can be launched within three to six hours of receiving information about migrants in distress.

The main challenges faced by SAR teams are:

- **Poor weather and road conditions:**

An IOM staff member describes: *"Our [SAR] mechanisms are operational all year round, regardless of the weather conditions. However, it should be noted that we are dealing with a desert with temperatures reaching up to 54-56 degrees [Celsius] in summer and down to -3 or -5 in winter... There is also the wind and storms that block the roads, sometimes for days. It has often happened to us to be stuck in the middle of nowhere waiting for floodwaters to go down so we can cross."*

- **Distance and changing migration routes:**

Smugglers vary migration routes in the vast desert zone in order to evade a government crackdown on irregular migration. An officer in the Civil Protection describes: *"Before, the migrants had known itineraries. But today they keep changing their routes to try to avoid the checkpoints."* The security situation in Niger is another challenge, as missions need to be organized in advance with UNDSS approval and require a military escort, which may not always be available.

- **Security threats:**

Ensuring the availability of a military escort for SAR missions, a necessity given the upsurge in security incidents in Niger, is another challenge. IOM staff report that some routine SAR patrols have had to be cancelled due to non-availability of a military escort, but that security forces have always made themselves available for emergency missions in response to reports of migrants in distress.

- **Sustainability, resources and ownership:**

While Niger's Civil Protection forces have been closely involved in accompanying IOM staff on missions, discussions to encourage national authorities to take the lead in initiating SAR missions have so far not borne fruit, with the government expressing that it does not have the resources to carry out SAR activities on an independent basis.

Overall, IOM Niger's SAR activities have been lifesaving and highly appreciated by rescued migrants. The involvement of Niger's Civil Protection Forces in SAR activities in vast desert zones where they previously had a limited presence is a landmark achievement. However, as the missions are resource-intensive (requiring vehicles, fuel, the presence of both medical and protection staff plus military escorts) the long-term sustainability of SAR efforts without dedicated donor funding is in doubt.

4. DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Migration Governance and Capacity Building

1. Continue to combine migration governance and capacity building activities with national stakeholder involvement in direct assistance and technical support to ensure that migration governance activities remain relevant to operational needs and field realities.
2. Engage with multiple levels of government – state/local, national and cross-regional bodies to ensure that return and reintegration activities are relevant to SLC development priorities and that migration governance initiatives filter down to the local level.
3. Target government and CSO trainings to frontline staff wherever feasible to maximise the relevance and sustainability of capacity building efforts. Where it is challenging to reach more junior and/or field-level staff, increase the number of training places available per partner organization and/or offer separate 'advanced' trainings for senior/policy-level staff.
4. Conduct regular refresher trainings (rather than one-off) to mitigate the issue of high staff turnover in government and national civil society organizations. Where turnover is not simply a consequence of political instability, look at ways that IOM could provide support to HR policy to mitigate the issue.
5. Develop more specialised trainings beyond the overall concept of reintegration, for example in providing livelihood support for specific sectors or conducting microbusiness market assessments.

Referrals and Implementing Partnerships

6. If the donor intends to draw on multiple development actors for the reintegration of returns for future programmes, ensure that coordination is undertaken during the project inception stage and that clear case management and quota criteria are in place, in coordination with all actors involved in migration (IOM, Government) and drawing on existing platforms.
7. Systematize the collection of data on migrants' educational level, literacy status and languages spoken to allow partners to tailor vocational training to the appropriate level.

8. Streamline the referrals process by increasing direct information-sharing (by inviting partner organizations to come to reception centres and inform new returnees about relevant services for example).
9. Strike a balance between matching the size/value of implementing partner contracts to (proven) organizational capacity and keeping the number of IPs to a manageable number.
10. Ensure that the economic reintegration counselling function is separated from the procurement of microbusiness items, for example by building partners' capacity to ensure services and procedures are up to standard and delivered transparently.
11. Ensure that every returnee receives direct reintegration assistance from IOM or an implementing partner. Referrals to organizations where migrants may not meet eligibility criteria or fit within the organization's quotas or timeline should be encouraged as complementary assistance.
12. Conduct psychosocial first aid training and provide emergency health and psychosocial support contacts to partner organizations conducting economic reintegration activities in order to prepare them to respond appropriately to returnee needs and vulnerabilities.
13. Ensure IOM M&E staff play a robust and direct role in monitoring of assistance provided by implementing partners, while also supporting the IP to carry out its own M&E in order to build capacity and triangulate data. Ensure that robust complaints and feedback mechanisms for beneficiaries are in place.

Protection and Return

14. Continue to extend technical support to governments and civil society in transit countries and countries of origin to support national management of humanitarian response to migrants in distress, including through consular assistance, as well as access to social and health services.
15. Provide migrants in transit with regular updates on the progress of their case. Where delays in the return process are due to external factors (for example, waiting for country of origin embassies to issue travel documents), communicate clearly what IOM is doing to address the issue.
16. Increase the frequency of monitoring visits to migrant transit centres and build partners' capacity to ensure that conditions are in line with minimum standards. For hard-to-reach locations, explore remote monitoring alternatives such as virtual video tours of centres and hiring of third-party contractors to act as independent field monitors.
17. Increase the range of recreational and educational activities available at the centres. These activities aimed at boosting psychosocial wellbeing and equipping migrants with new skills for their economic reintegration are particularly important in view of COVID-19 movement restrictions impacting wait times. Ensure that information on the activities is included in centre orientations for new migrants.
18. Ensure a nurse is continuously available on-site to treat migrants, including supporting pregnant women and victims of trafficking and gender-based violence, as relevant. Maintain a supply of basic non-prescription medicines under the supervision of the nurse.

Awareness raising

19. Factor M&E into the activity design, setting clear expectations and adequate resources for baseline and KAP studies. If an impact evaluation is planned, favor a strategy of sustained engagement with particular communities and defined target audiences in order to better measure changes.
20. Re-think donor/IOM branding which may serve to undermine the credibility of the message and/or stigmatise returnees as aid beneficiaries.

Reintegration

NOTE: This final evaluation focused on promising reintegration practices emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic. For broader recommendations on the JI's reintegration programming, please see the [2020 IOM Regional Reintegration Evaluation](#). Some of the main recommendations are recapped in the box below.

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REGIONAL REINTEGRATION EVALUATION (2020):

1. Handle collective microbusiness assistance with caution, reserving for cases where collective members have a successful track record of business cooperation or other relationship of trust (such as family members).
 2. Continue to build on the psychosocial assistance component of the programme and ensure equal access for returnees to counselling services across missions.
 3. Mobilize additional funding for social reintegration and allow provision of assistance addressing longer-term/more serious vulnerabilities.
-
19. Continue with cash-based assistance (CBI) beyond a COVID-19 adaptation measure due to its high level of efficiency, flexibility and beneficiary satisfaction. Harmonize the various CBI approaches under the Joint Initiative project according to IOM Mali and Senegal's hybrid reintegration model (up to one-third of the total value of reintegration assistance given in cash and the rest in-kind). To maximise efficiency and transparency, consider fast-tracking the economic reintegration assistance by providing CBI cheques and standard reintegration kits during the reception period and/or during business skills training as done in Mali, while still giving returnees the option to wait for more individually tailored economic assistance options in addition to receiving social and psychosocial support.
 20. To avoid returnees becoming stressed and/or discouraged while waiting for reintegration assistance and losing contact with IOM, conduct continuous outreach to beneficiaries via phone and/or SMS to reassure them that their case is in progress.

Community Stabilization

21. Explore possible cash for work projects to provide income to local youth while improving infrastructure.
22. Fast-track procurement for community stabilization projects, where delays to implementation risk cancelling out the activity's positive effects of boosting public confidence in local authorities.
23. Include a communications and visibility component for each activity to ensure that the community gives the credit for the initiative to local authorities.

Search and Rescue

24. To increase national ownership and sustainability, continue to provide operational and capacity building support the Nigerien government to implement a national plan of action and produce training materials for search and rescue activities.
25. Explore the use of third-party hiring modalities (such as engaging field staff via HR providers as has been done by IOM in other high-security contexts) who are able to carry out search and rescue missions using non-UN vehicles (lower security profile) and deploy on emergency missions rapidly without administrative delay.

ANNEX - Overview Of Reintegration Assistance Provided

By the end of August 2021, 61,043 migrants started the reintegration assistance process in the region and remained active, showing a 17 per cent increase as compared to the previous reporting period with 52,190 (1 April 2017 to 31 January 2021). 50,723 of the reported active caseloads completed the reintegration assistance process, indicating a 54 per cent increase compared to the [5th bi-annual reintegration report with 32,921](#). The breakdown per country is presented in the table below.

As of end of August 2021	Active caseload having started the assistance process	Assistance process completed
Burkina Faso	2,357	1,535
Cameroon	3,968	2,895
Côte d'Ivoire	5,372 ⁴	4,165
Gambia	4,042	3,747
Ghana	1,637	901
Guinea	10,313	9,930
Guinea Bissau	657	657
Mali	12,552 ⁵	9,479
Mauritania	38	32
Niger	2,008	1,691
Nigeria	13,272	11,196
Senegal	4,827	4,487
Total	61,043	50,715

Table 1 Number of returnees assisted in their reintegration (EU-IOM Joint Initiative in the Sahel and Lake Chad)

⁴ The decrease compared to the data reported at the end of January 2021 (5,464) through the 5th bi-annual reintegration report is due to the deactivation of cases who became unreachable after the provision of reintegration counseling.

⁵ The decrease compared to the data reported at the end of January 2021 (12,812) through the 5th bi-annual reintegration report is due to the deactivation of cases who became unreachable after the provision of reintegration counseling.

The table below presents the disaggregation of support provided by dimension⁶. Since April 2017, 59,074 received economic support, 15,940 acquired social support and 21,475 benefitted from psychosocial support. These numbers indicate an increase of 26 per cent, 33 per cent and nine per cent respectively on economic, social, and psychosocial support provided as compared to the [5th bi-annual reintegration report](#).

As of end of August 2021	Economic support	Social support	Psychosocial support
Burkina Faso	2,140	695	1,340
Cameroon	3,774	728	913
Côte d'Ivoire	4,781	3,889	2,126
Gambia	4,141	930	845
Ghana	950	135	44
Guinea	9,640	1,107	1,421
Guinea Bissau	339	554	319
Mali	14,583	2,976	1,032
Mauritania	38	9	0
Niger	1,845	221	1
Nigeria	12,129	1,831	10,334
Senegal	4,714	2,865	3,100
Total	59,074	15,940	21,475

Table 2 Number of returnees assisted in the economic, social, and psychosocial dimension of reintegration

⁶A returnee can receive assistance in the three dimensions and therefore be counted several times.

Since April 2017, a total of 8,328 migrants returned from host countries covered by the Joint Initiative in the Sahel and Lake Chad window (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) to countries of origin not covered by the Joint Initiative. See table number 3 below for per country overview.

CoO / Host country	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritanie	Niger	Total
Benin	28	0	35	6	1,169	1,238
Central African Republic	5	0	18	5	187	215
Chad	1	0	3	1	230	235
Liberia	111	6	335	76	1,512	2,040
Sierra Leone	110	2	688	479	2,897	4,176
Togo	8	8	20	8	205	249
Other	6	2 ⁷	27 ⁸	70	98 ⁹	203
Total	269	18	1,126	269	6,298	8,356

Table 3 Returns to non-EUTF countries of origin

On top of the assistance being provided to the migrants stranded along their migratory journey in North and West and Central Africa, the Joint Initiative in the Sahel and Lake Chad window also gives assistance to migrants returning from Switzerland and the European Economic Area. In total 5,444 migrants returned from Europe, Switzerland, and Norway since the rollout of the Joint Initiative in the Sahel and Lake Chad.

⁷ The decrease compared to the data reported at the end of January 2021 through the [5th bi-annual reintegration report](#) is due to data cleaning

⁸ See above

⁹ See above

Countries	IOM AVRR ¹⁰	Non-IOM facilitated returns	Forced return	TOTAL number of returns	Post-arrival assistance provided through the JI
Burkina Faso	128	11	0	139	8 ¹¹
Cameroon	254	7	0	261	7 ¹²
Cote d'Ivoire	123	15	0	138	4
Gambia	458	80	286	824	230
Ghana	747	24	0	771	1 ¹³
Guinea ¹⁴	305	43	0	348	1
Guinea Bissau ¹⁵	36	28	0	64	11
Mali	114	17	0	131	11
Mauritania	24	2	0	26	2
Niger	85	3	0	88	0
Nigeria	2,054	89	2	2,145	20
Senegal	410	18	81	509	96
Total	4,738	337	369	5,444	391

Table 4 Returns from Europe Switzerland and Norway

¹⁰ It is worth noting that only part of AVRs from Europe rely on the Joint Initiative for post-arrival assistance

¹¹ The decrease compared to the data reported at the end of January 2021 through the [5th bi-annual reintegration report](#), is due to data cleaning

¹² The decrease compared to the data reported at the end of January 2021 through the [5th bi-annual reintegration report](#), is due to data cleaning

¹³ See above

¹⁴ The numbers for Guinea and Guinea Bissau were inverted in the [5th bi-annual reintegration report](#)

¹⁵ See above



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