



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)



MINISTRY FOR HOME AFFAIRS
AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Stories of Return

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)
in the Country of Origin



**General Programme Solidarity & Management of Migration Flows
(2007 - 2013)**

European Return Fund (RF)

Co-financing rate: 75% EU Funds: 25% Beneficiary Funds

Sustainable Management of Migration Flows



Acknowledgments

IOM Malta would like to thank all IOM colleagues and partners who have contributed to the success of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme.

The AVRR programme in Malta is funded by the European Return Fund (RF) and co-funded by the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security.

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Disclaimer

The opinions contained in this publication are those of migrants, as expressed during the monitoring and evaluation of their reintegration processes. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), project partners and/or donors.

All migrants featured in this booklet have given their consent for the publication. Fictitious names have been used to protect their privacy.

IOM in Brief

Established in 1951, and currently counting 157 member states, over 2,600 active programmes and more than 8,400 staff members serving in some 480 field offices in more than 150 countries, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration. By providing services and advice to governments and migrants, IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration. IOM works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. IOM's independence and neutrality makes it a preferable point of contact among migrants. IOM has almost four decades of experience in the field of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR).

The IOM Mission in Malta was established in 2007 and since then has been actively supporting the Government of Malta in migration management and assisting migrants in Malta who often find themselves in difficult situations.

About AVRR

AVRR is one of many migration management services IOM offers to migrants and governments. It aims at orderly, humane and cost-effective return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin. Since 1979, more than 1 million persons worldwide have been assisted under IOM's AVRR programmes.

In Malta, the AVRR programme is funded by the European Return Fund (RF) and implemented by IOM, in cooperation with the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, since 2009. To date, over 200 persons have been assisted to return from Malta, mostly to sub-Saharan African countries.

Stories of Return

Deciding to return to one's country of origin is not easy. Factors influencing this decision vary from case to case and the backgrounds of returnees are also different. IOM Malta endeavours to provide each returnee with all the information available, in order for her/him to fully benefit from the return and reintegration assistance offered under the AVRR programme. The stories presented in this booklet are only a small percentage of the numerous individual stories of returnees. All stories have been collected during the process of reintegration monitoring carried out by IOM Missions in countries of origin.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Which are the main preconditions for all IOM's AVRR activities?

- Voluntariness - return decision has to be based on free will and made in the absence of any physical, psychological or material pressure.
- Informed decision - return decision has to be based on sufficient and accurate information. Meetings with IOM are private and confidential.

Who can benefit from AVRR in Malta?

- Individuals (non-EU nationals) who have not yet received a final negative decision in relation to their request for international protection in Malta;
- Individuals (non-EU nationals) enjoying a form of international protection in Malta;
- Individuals (non-EU nationals) who do not or no longer fulfil the conditions for entry and/or stay in Malta.

What assistance can be received?

In Malta:

- Information and individualized counselling on AVRR, including country-of-origin information
- Specialized assistance and referral services to vulnerable individuals (e.g. persons with health problems)
- Facilitating travel documentation
- Travel arrangements (including escorts, if required)
- Pre-departure assistance and cash allowance

In transit:

- Assistance with travel in transit (including assistance with escort in transit, if required)

In countries of origin:

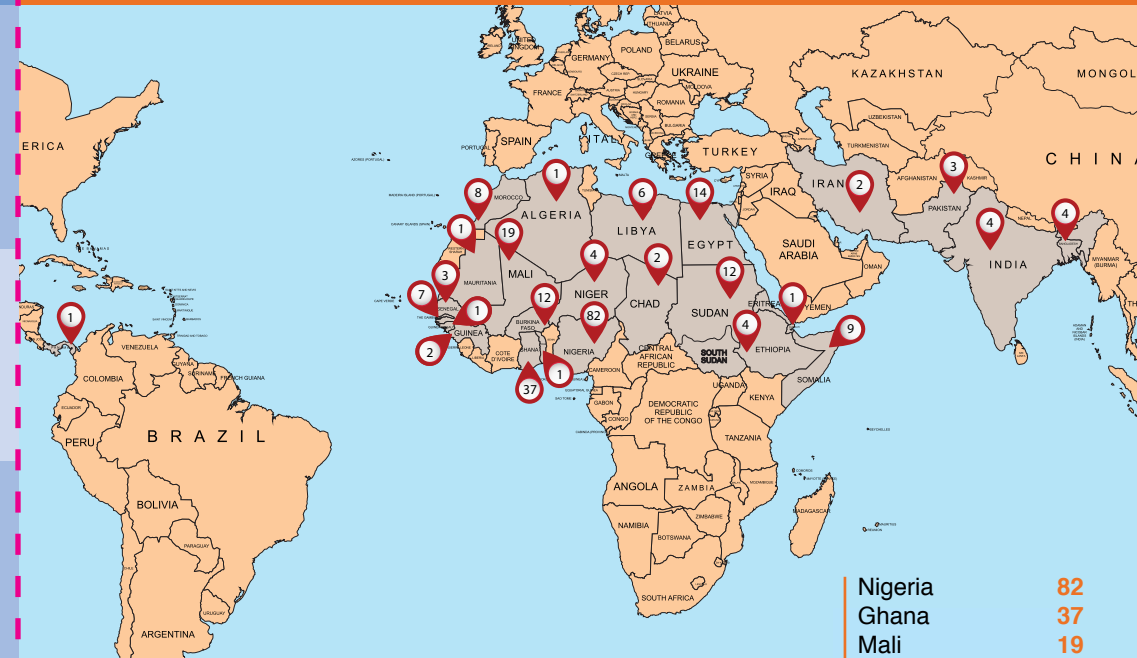
- Assistance through immigration and customs on arrival at the airport
- Post-arrival reception arrangements, including information and referral to local partners, if necessary
- Onward travel to the final destination
- Post-return counselling and provision of reintegration assistance

What does reintegration assistance cover?

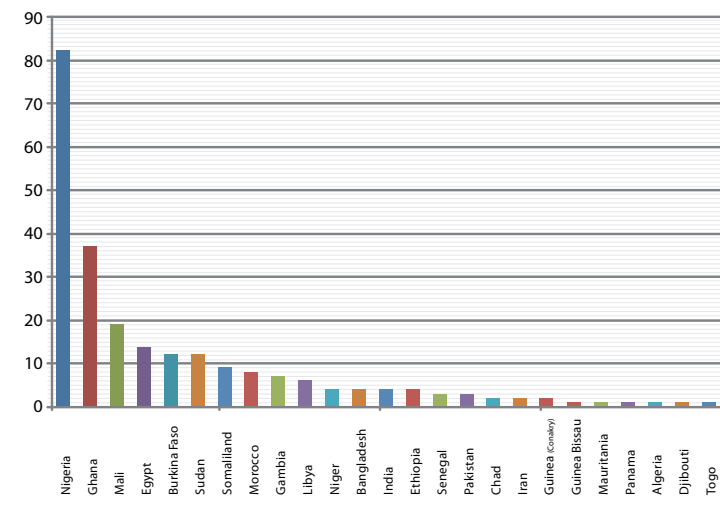
In-kind reintegration assistance is provided in order to help returnees in creating sustainable living conditions in their country of origin. It consists of support towards one or more of the following:

- Small business start-up or development;
- Vocational training or education;
- Job placement/on-the-job training;
- Medical assistance and other tailor-made assistance to persons with special needs.

Map of Return



Since 2010, a total of 240 AVRR returnees have been assisted to return from Malta to the following countries of origin:



Nigeria	82
Ghana	37
Mali	19
Egypt	14
Burkina Faso	12
Sudan	12
Somaliland	9
Morocco	8
Gambia	7
Libya	6
Niger	4
Bangladesh	4
India	4
Ethiopia	4
Senegal	3
Pakistan	3
Chad	2
Iran	2
Guinea (Conakry)	2
Guinea Bissau	1
Mauritania	1
Panama	1
Algeria	1
Djibouti	1
Togo	1



// I would advise you all to consider going back to your country and benefiting from the assistance provided by IOM. I would like to give special thanks to IOM Malta and IOM Panama for their help: I am the result of your solidarity and professionalism. Life is so wonderful now! //

Javier, January 2015

PANAMA

Cabin Crew



My name is Javier and I am from Panama. I decided to travel to Malta in order to create a better future for me as well as to learn English. However, things did not go as I had expected and I eventually found myself in an irregular situation, therefore being stigmatized and sometimes even seen as a thief. At a certain point, I was informed about the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme implemented by IOM.

Meeting IOM staff and deciding to return to my country under this programme was life-saving for me. The assistance I received for my return and reintegration changed my life, as it contributed greatly towards my personal and professional development. IOM offered to cover one year's rent in Panama for me, in addition to paying my hotel, where I was temporarily staying while I was looking for housing.

Having a place of residence enabled me to immediately focus on looking for means to sustain myself; whereas the moral and practical support provided by my ex-employer in Panama and my family allowed me to be optimistic about my future. IOM contributed with counselling both in Malta and in Panama, thus helping me to find a job. Thanks to their efforts, advice and support, I managed to be selected by Copa Airlines as cabin crew. I could not even dream of any better position than the one I currently have. It is a well-established international company which offers constant training and many opportunities to succeed within the company.

Now I have a job and a house, I am self-sustainable and I am able to support my family. IOM's AVRR programme led me to this point. It has been an extra push for me to return home, since without the housing assistance I would not have been able to find a job. The reintegration grant helped me find the job and set my new goals, support my family in every way I can, learning and improving as much as possible, saving some money to rent an apartment in Panama City and applying, on time, for a Copa scholarship for my 12 year-old sister.

I would advise you all to consider going back to your country and benefiting from the assistance provided by IOM. I would like to give special thanks to IOM Malta and IOM Panama for their help: I am the result of your solidarity and professionalism. Life is so wonderful now!



// I feel happy to have received the return and reintegration assistance from IOM, especially because I am aware that other individuals were deported from European countries, without getting such assistance. Thanks! //

Kingsford, January 2015

GHANA

Grocery & Carpentry Shop



My name is Kingsford and I am from Ghana. After almost three years travelling in order to find a better future, I moved back to Ghana. During my journey, I paid a large amount of money in order to go first to Libya, where I stayed for 2 years, and then to Malta, where I spent 9 months in a detention centre. Thanks to IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, I eventually returned to Ghana.

With IOM's support and reintegration grant, I started with the sale of cement and construction materials. Later, I diverted the grant into the sale of groceries, which is doing very well. I invested part of the grant into starting a carpentry workshop alongside some subsistence farming. I used IOM's assistance to buy carpentry tools, wood, roofing sheets, a metal container and a stock of groceries. With income from these businesses, I am able to meet my daily needs, as well as those of my dependents. In other words, the reintegration assistance has contributed to the sustainability of my return.

My current situation is better than before migrating: at least now I have two businesses running. The moral support that my family provided me with, despite the fact that I came back to Ghana without money in my hand, has also been particularly important. Now I hope not to travel again, at least not in the way that I travelled to Libya and to Malta. I hope to expand my grocery business and to acquire advanced tools for my carpentry business.

My advice is as follows: it is good to travel, it is an eye opener. It is, however, best to travel through safe and regular means. Travelling through the desert and across the sea - the means I used - was not safe at all. In many instances, I saw the remains of people who had died on the desert; I could have ended up like one of them.

Finally, I feel happy to have received the return and reintegration assistance from IOM, especially because I am aware that other individuals were deported from European countries, without getting such assistance. Thanks!

GHANA

Beer Bar



// If I had to give an advice to those considering the option of migrating, I would emphasize that if travelling through the desert is risky, travelling across the sea aboard an inflatable boat is often deadly. I could have easily lost my life. Do not try it. Finally, I urge IOM to continue providing voluntary return and reintegration assistance to a lot more people who are in need of it. //

Prince, January 2015

My name is Prince and I am from Ghana. After having stayed in Libya for 8 months and in a detention centre in Malta for another 8 months, I decided to return back home. Taking this decision was difficult: I had my concerns regarding the socio-economic situation in Ghana and, to make matters worse, I had serious fears since I had nothing or nobody to return to. How was I going to meet my daily needs?

Nevertheless, having heard about IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, I decided to go back to Ghana. The IOM offer was attractive and I thought that with their assistance I would manage to build a life back home. Moreover, it is important that I had the moral support of my friends and family, who also provided me with food and a bed, when needed.

When I returned to Ghana, with support from IOM, I started retailing electrical gadgets. However, after a while, I changed my business plan and now I have my own beer bar. IOM provided me with a freezer, stock of assorted drinks, tables, chairs, wood, roofing sheets for extension and paid the initial rent. IOM's assistance has given me the hope that hitherto I did not have. I now have a life and a job from which I am able to meet my daily needs. I am very grateful for this.

Currently, I am self-dependent and with the proceeds from my business I can sustain myself and my future dependents and, most importantly, I can support my nephew in school. I believe this is a sign of more positive changes coming my way. My next goal is to expand my business to include a wholesale department. In the long term, I hope to acquire my own house.

If I had to give an advice to those considering the option of migrating, I would emphasize that if travelling through the desert is risky, travelling across the sea aboard an inflatable boat is often deadly. I could have easily lost my life. Do not try it. Finally, I urge IOM to continue providing voluntary return and reintegration assistance to a lot more people who are in need of it.



“ There is always a ready market for farm products because of food insecurity. Therefore, I encourage more returnees and prospective returnees to take up vegetable farming. With hard work and determination, they are likely to succeed. From my own experience, I have also learned that travelling to seek better opportunities abroad can often be not only a waste of precious time but also a deadly undertaking. ”

Yao, January 2015

GHANA

Vegetable Farming



My name is Yao and I am from Ghana. My life in Ghana was difficult and I decided to seek greener pastures abroad. After a long and dangerous journey I reached Libya, where I spent 3 years, before travelling onwards to Malta. I stayed in Malta for almost 14 years: at first in a detention centre, afterwards, living in the community, studying and working on the island. After 17 years, I finally decided to return to Ghana.

IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme strongly influenced my decision to return to my home country and enabled me to start my dream business - vegetable farming. Moreover, my family facilitated my decision by warmly welcoming me back and offering moral support. IOM assisted me with my return and supported my project in its initial stages by helping with the acquisition of farmland and with the drilling of a borehole for irrigation purposes.

Currently, my new business is fully operational and my children have also been helping me in the farm. I would like to emphasize that IOM's support was very important since it has given me hope. I am grateful to IOM for all the assistance that I received. In the future, I am planning to expand my business by taking full advantage of the land I possess and cultivating other crops. I also intend to employ staff and to start cultivating vegetables in large quantities for sale.

There is always a ready market for farm products because of food insecurity. Therefore, I encourage more returnees and prospective returnees to take up vegetable farming. With hard work and determination, they are likely to succeed. From my own experience, I have also learned that travelling to seek better opportunities abroad can often be not only a waste of precious time but also a deadly undertaking.



// It was difficult to travel through the Sahara desert and across the Mediterranean sea; indeed, it was an experience I would have never dreamt of. However, I feel that I have made remarkable progress in life since my return to Ghana: to begin with, I have a job and enjoy my freedom. //

Johnny, January 2015

GHANA

Grocery Store



My name is Johnny and I am from Ghana. I spent five-and-a-half years in Libya and then another seven months in detention in Malta. Nothing would motivate me to recount my migratory experience. It brings back bad memories that I would rather not talk about.

Even if I had not been able to achieve my goal, namely, to seek greener pastures, I decided to move back to Ghana because I lacked freedom. Thanks to the opportunity given by IOM through its Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, I finally managed to return home.

Upon my return, already having been supported by IOM Malta, I got in touch with the IOM Mission in Ghana. IOM Ghana helped me with all the procedures required to access my in-kind reintegration assistance. I decided to start a grocery store because I thought it would be profitable. I was proactive as I was gathering the necessary documents in order to start my business as soon as possible. The strong support that I received from my family along the way was also very important. They accepted me even though I returned with nothing. They also rendered moral support and helped me with obtaining the required documents.

I used IOM's assistance to buy a deep freezer, a metal container and a stock of groceries. I am most grateful for IOM's help, as a result of which I now have my own business – a fully operational grocery store. I am able to support myself and my family. I am also hoping to expand my business by opening branches elsewhere. The assistance that I received will contribute towards reaching my goals, on condition that I manage my venture well and continue reinvesting into it.

It was difficult to travel through the Sahara desert and across the Mediterranean sea; indeed, it was an experience I would have never dreamt of. However, I feel that I have made remarkable progress in life since my return to Ghana: to begin with, I have a job and enjoy my freedom.

NIGERIA:

Transportation Business



“ It is better to stay in one’s own country and struggle than to stay in a foreign land suffering unnecessarily and living in perpetual fear and lack of freedom. Recalling my journey, I would discourage anyone from travelling abroad and would advise those who can to make use of IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme in order to re-establish themselves at home. ”

John, February 2015

My name is John and I grew up in Benin City in Nigeria. I owned a small aluminium roofing business, but was not earning enough to make ends meet. Therefore, I decided to leave Nigeria in order to look for better opportunities in Europe. I reached Malta after spending 7 days on the Mediterranean Sea and stayed for six months in an accommodation centre. In Europe, the situation was really difficult for me, so I decided to move back to Nigeria.

Prior to returning home, I was considering how I was going to secure my food and accommodation in Nigeria. I also did not know how to handle my family expectations, since I was about to return back from Europe without much money. However, the lack of freedom and clear prospects facilitated my return decision. My case worker referred me to IOM Malta, with whom we discussed my options and I then eventually asked for assistance to return home.

As soon as I arrived in Nigeria, I decided to start a transportation business. I applied for the reintegration grant at IOM Nigeria and used it to purchase a Volkswagen wagon car. Apart from IOM’s assistance, I did not receive any other support.

Some months after having received the grant, my business is not doing well; it is not as profitable as I wished it to be. Unfortunately, the vehicle frequently breaks down and it costs me a lot to put it into a good shape so as to attract passengers. Therefore, I still have no proper accommodation, and I am not self-sustainable. Moreover, as a result of my time spent away from home, I have lost most of the contact details of my friends and family. However, in the future, I hope to set up an aluminium business and I am definitely not considering re-emigration. If I could describe my migratory experience, I would say that it was a nightmare.

It is better to stay in one’s own country and struggle than to stay in a foreign land suffering unnecessarily and living in perpetual fear and lack of freedom. Recalling my journey, I would discourage anyone from travelling abroad and would advise those who can to make use of IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, in order to re-establish themselves at home.



// I have come to a conclusion that life is too precious to risk it for travelling to Europe in search of a better life via a “backway”. If you work hard, you can make it anywhere in the world. //

Duta, February 2015

GAMBIA

Taxi Business



My name is Duta and I live in The Gambia. I embarked on a journey to Europe through a “backway”, starting off from The Gambia and, through Senegal, Mali, Niger, Libya, reaching Malta after seven months.

I decided to return to my country because I had lost hope. I also heard of IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme that would enable me to have my own business at home, which would, in turn, allow me to support myself and my family. I had no actual fears related to moving back to The Gambia.

After returning to The Gambia, I set up a taxi business with the support of the reintegration grant. I opted for a taxi business because this is what I had been doing before travelling to Europe. However, at that time, I was working for my uncle, whereas now I am self- dependent. The business is operational and it generates sufficient income.

Under the AVRR programme, IOM facilitated the payment for my taxi, whereas my family offered me invaluable moral support. Both, IOMs’ assistance and my family’s moral support have been very important to me because they enabled me to reintegrate fast and without any difficulties.

Today, my situation makes me optimistic: I have my own taxi business and I am earning enough money to support myself and my family. In the future, I am planning to expand my business by buying more taxis from my savings.

I have come to a conclusion that life is too precious to risk it for travelling to Europe in search of a better life via a “backway”. If you work hard, you can make it anywhere in the world.



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