

# POLICYBRIEF

## NIGERIA: RETURNING MIGRANTS AT RISK OF NEW DISPLACEMENT OR SECONDARY MIGRATION

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Returning migrants in Nigeria are at risk of new displacement or secondary migration, regardless of whether the return was voluntary or forced. This policy brief provides recommendations to enhance the sustainability of return and reintegration of all returning migrants in Nigeria.

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### Introduction

Violent attacks from non-state armed groups, like Boko Haram, and competition between pastoralists and farmers in the country's central and north-western regions, had forced about 2.6 million Nigerians into internal displacement by the end of 2019.<sup>2</sup> While conflict and violence have prompted over 294,000 Nigerians to seek refuge abroad, their secondary impacts have prompted far higher numbers to migrate in search of better opportunities elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016, over half a million Nigerians are thought to have set out across the Sahara in a bid to reach greener pastures.<sup>4</sup> Although Nigerians represent a small portion of overall arrivals in Europe, more than 46,000 Nigerians applied for asylum in the countries of the European Union (EU) in 2016, and more than 39,000 in 2017, making

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<sup>2</sup> IDMC, [Nigeria](#)

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, [Nigeria Emergency](#)

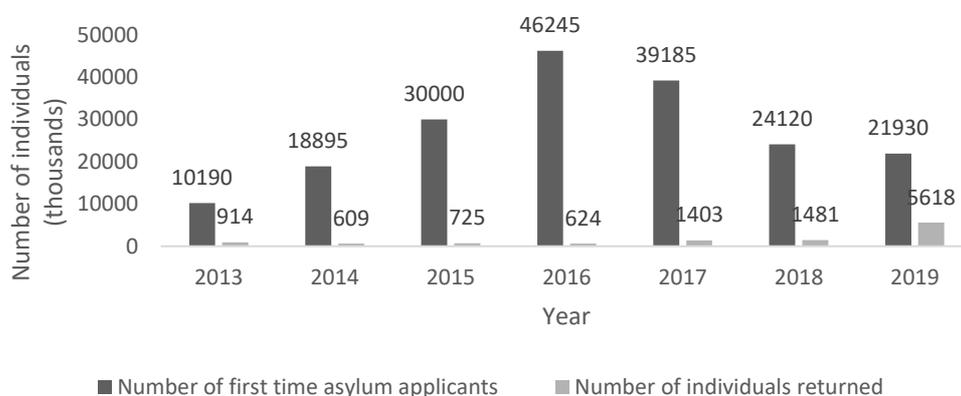
<sup>4</sup> Eurostat, [Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data \(rounded\)](#); Global Initiative, [The intersection of irregular migration and trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel](#), 2020

Nigeria the first country of origin in the Sahel and Lake Chad region.<sup>5</sup> To reduce the scale of irregular migration and prevent loss of life during perilous journeys, the EU has focused its policies and resources on improving Nigerian border control, addressing root causes of migration, and funding voluntary return and reintegration programmes in the region.<sup>6</sup>

The EU Trust Fund for Africa established at the Valletta Summit in 2015 allocated resources to promote the voluntary return of migrants through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, established in 2016.<sup>7</sup> In the same year, the Partnership Framework under the European Agenda on Migration called for a measurable increase in the number and rate of returns and readmissions. This emphasis on returns was reinforced by the Malta Declaration in 2017, which called for increased support for assisted voluntary return programmes.<sup>8</sup>

European policies appear to have borne fruit. By 2019, the number of Nigerian first-time asylum applicants dropped to 21,930, a 53% decrease from the peak in 2016.<sup>9</sup> The same year, over 3,700 Nigerians were repatriated from Libya through voluntary humanitarian return (VHR) programmes, and a further 1,900 returned through assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes from other countries such as Niger, Mali and Germany.<sup>10</sup> Close to three thousand more were returned from Europe following an order to leave.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1. Number of first-time asylum applicants from Nigeria in the EU and the number of individuals assisted with voluntary return and reintegration support from 2013 to 2019 <sup>12</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Global Initiative, [The intersection of irregular migration and trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel](#), 2020; European Commission, [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Correspondent, [A breakdown of Europe's €1.5bn migration spending in Nigeria](#), December 2019

<sup>7</sup> EU, [Migration Partnership Framework](#); European Commission, [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#) ; <https://migrationjointinitiative.org/about-eu-iom-joint-initiative> ; European Commission, [Communication on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration](#), 2016

<sup>8</sup> European Council, [Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route](#), 2017

<sup>9</sup> Eurostat, [Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data \(rounded\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> IOM, [2019 Return and Reintegration Highlights](#), 2020; IOM, [2019 Return and Reintegration Highlights: Annexes](#), 2020

<sup>11</sup> Eurostat, [Third country nationals returned following an order to leave - annual data \(rounded\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat, [Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data \(rounded\)](#); IOM, [2019 Return and Reintegration Highlights: Annexes](#), 2020

Based on primary research with 105 Nigerian returnees however, we find that, **despite efforts to promote reintegration, returning migrants in Nigeria are exposed to a risk of internal displacement or secondary migration.** Drawing upon the results of this larger study, this policy paper identifies opportunities to enhance the sustainability of return.<sup>13</sup>

## Evidence and Analysis

Despite reintegration assistance, returning migrants struggle to make ends meet

Over a quarter of all Nigerian returnees surveyed by IOM were out of work.<sup>14</sup> As a result of limited opportunities for income generation, around a quarter reported often having to reduce the quantity or quality of food they ate, and a similar percentage were occasionally forced to borrow money.<sup>15</sup>

In 2019, IOM provided over 8,630 post-arrival reintegration assistance services to returnees in Nigeria, including for example economic assistance and reintegration counselling.<sup>16</sup> GIZ and Edo state also provide reintegration assistance. Among returnees interviewed for this study, reintegration assistance generally involved an initial cash handout of approximately 100 USD from IOM to meet the migrants' immediate needs, followed by vocational training and in-kind start-up assistance amounting to approximately 1,000 USD per person in order to set up a new business, often in partnership with other returnees - although in many cases, groups formed during training are reported to subsequently fall apart, leaving each returnee to fend for themselves.

Having accumulated high levels of debt to finance their migratory projects, many returning migrants struggle to make ends meet in the interval between the initial cash grant and the provision of start-up assistance. Bureaucratic procedures required to receive start-up assistance require time and money, which is an obstacle for returning migrants who often find themselves effectively destitute upon arrival in Nigeria. New businesses, meanwhile, do not immediately generate sufficient profits to meet returnees' basic needs. Unable to afford accommodation, many are dependent on family and friends for shelter.

*“All the money I spent was 1.7 million Naira (around 4,500 USD). I had to borrow some of the money. I returned with nothing. [...] I had to stay with my friend for 6 months.” – Bankole*

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<sup>13</sup> IDMC, Nigeria: returning migrants at risk of new or secondary displacement, MAGYC, 2021

The findings of this policy paper are based on 105 qualitative interviews conducted with Nigerian returnees who were purposively sampled in Lagos, Edo and Borno states between August and September 2020. The paper also draws upon aggregated Reintegration Sustainability Survey (RSS) data for Nigeria provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). See the full report for more details.

<sup>14</sup> IOM Nigeria RSS data

<sup>15</sup> IOM Nigeria RSS data

<sup>16</sup> IOM, [2019 Return and Reintegration Highlights](#), 2020

## Trauma and stigmatisation undermine opportunities for reintegration

Violent detention, bonded labour, sexual exploitation and other forms of human trafficking are unfortunately common experiences for Nigerian migrants in North Africa.<sup>17</sup> Returnees who have suffered such abuses can be stigmatised upon return to Nigeria, undermining their prospects for reintegration and preventing them from seeking support from their relatives.

*"Many persons in my street already knew I travelled to Libya and there's this perspective they have about returned migrants. Especially if it has to do with Libya. There's the bad omen. So, I couldn't go back. [...] I was ashamed of myself so I couldn't face the shame and the gossip."* – Otiku

In other cases, families may also blame returnees for their failed migration projects, for which they are often perceived to carry individual responsibility.<sup>18</sup>

*"Since I came back, I'm like a ghost. Your family is happy to see you. But what do you have to offer? Because you cannot offer anything, you become like "trash" in the presence of your own family. [...] Whenever I step out, my head is always down. Because of the shame."* – Aisosa

Among returnees surveyed by IOM, although 85% agree or somewhat agree that they feel part of the community where they currently live, over half report experiencing at least occasional discrimination.<sup>19</sup> This contributes to feelings of shame among returnees, undermining their psychosocial wellbeing and their prospects for successful reintegration.

## Insecurity in areas of origin represents a further obstacle to reintegration

More than half of Nigerian migrants in Europe are thought to originate from Benin City, in Edo State.<sup>20</sup> Located in the south of the country, the city is relatively unaffected by insecurity. But other migrants come from areas which are far less secure.

*"Before leaving the country I was really suffering. [...] There was tension and unrest in the country and that was why I had to leave: Boko Haram destroyed our means of livelihood so I had to go in search of a better life"* – Abdullah, from Borno State.

Conflict and violence led to 248,000 new displacements across 19 states of Nigeria in 2019.<sup>21</sup> The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast is one of the biggest drivers of displacement, but intercommunal clashes fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions also flare regularly throughout the country. In 2020, there was an increase in new

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<sup>17</sup> IOM, [Assessing the risks of migration along the central and eastern Mediterranean routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), 2016

<sup>18</sup> Digidiki, V., Bhabha, J. [Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria](#), 2019

<sup>19</sup> IOM Nigeria RSS data

<sup>20</sup> The Correspondent, [Want to make sense of migration? Ask the people who've stayed behind](#), 2019

<sup>21</sup> IDMC, [Nigeria](#)

displacement in the north-central and north-western regions as a result of violence between farmers and pastoralists.<sup>22</sup>

Returning migrants originating from these regions face the difficult choice of either going back to their communities of origin where insecurity is likely to hinder prospects for reintegration, or settling elsewhere in the country without the safety net of existing social networks.

## Policy Implications and Recommendations

Returning migrants are exposed to a risk of internal displacement or secondary migration

Poverty and lack of opportunities for income generation contribute to a risk of internal displacement for returning migrants. Unable to afford the cost of rent, some returning migrants are evicted and find themselves homeless. Family and friends are not always able to provide accommodation indefinitely, especially when they are themselves financially vulnerable.

*“I was like a newborn baby because I was broke. I stayed with a friend when I got back but his landlord sent him packing and I had nowhere to go, so I slept in metal containers at night and went to work at building sites in the morning.” – Dele*

The cost of rent may also push returning migrants to seek accommodation in more affordable areas, including informal settlements exposed to insecurity or natural hazards. Floods, common in lowlands and river basins where people live in densely-populated informal settlements, are expected to trigger on average over 208,000 new displacements per year in Nigeria.<sup>23</sup>

*“I got into an apartment but I didn’t know that when it rains, it enters the compound. You can’t go out, you can’t come in. I didn’t take note of that. I’ve relocated from that area because of flood and thieves.” – Otiku*

Finally, returning migrants may find themselves at risk of internal displacement if they originate from parts of the country which are affected by conflict and violence. Internal displacement may occur as a result of a direct exposure to a conflict event, such as an armed attack. Returning migrants may also find themselves living in internal displacement if ongoing insecurity prevents them from returning to their area of origin.

*“We haven’t gone back to our village because it is dangerous, so we live in the IDP camp.” – Ali*

Insecurity also contributes to the risk of secondary migration. Disillusioned and disenfranchised by the challenges they face upon return, or simply disappointed by the failure of their migration project, many returning migrants aspire to leave the

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<sup>22</sup> IDMC, [Mid-Year Update](#), 2020

<sup>23</sup> IDMC, [Nigeria](#)

country once again.<sup>24</sup> Although 91.5% of returnees surveyed by IOM said that they felt able to stay and live in Nigeria, previous research had found that around 62% wanted to leave the country again.<sup>25</sup>

## Ways forward

Take into account protection concerns in regions of origin

An essential first step in reducing the risk of internal displacement for returning migrants is to take into account protection concerns in regions of origin, rather than to consider the security situation of the country as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

The principle of non-refoulement prohibits the forcible removal of persons to countries where their safety is likely to be at risk.<sup>27</sup> For asylum-seekers, the UN Refugee Agency emphasised in 1979 that “fear of being persecuted need not always extend to the whole territory of the refugee’s country of nationality”.<sup>28</sup> Although the concept of internal flight alternatives is sometimes used during refugee status determination procedures as a basis to deny international protection, internal displacement should not be considered an acceptable outcome.<sup>29</sup> For similar reasons, host countries should refrain from deporting migrants who are expected to return to insecure regions, as proposed by the European Commission in 2016 under the Qualification Regulation.<sup>30</sup>

In some cases, conditions abroad may be such that return is desirable irrespective of the situation in regions of origin, prompting migrants to enrol in assisted voluntary return programmes, including voluntary humanitarian return from Libya. In such instances, returning migrants who originate from parts of Nigeria which are affected by conflict and violence should receive specialised reintegration counselling and assistance to reduce the risk of subsequent displacement.

Promote longer-term, development-oriented reintegration assistance

Despite its limitations, the provision of reintegration assistance appears to reduce the risk of new displacement. In IOM’s survey of returnees, around two thirds of respondents reported that they never or only rarely borrow money.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> IOM, [Assessing the risks of migration along the central and eastern Mediterranean routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), 2016

<sup>25</sup> IOM Nigeria RSS data; EU-IOM, [Mapping and Socio-economic Profiling of Communities of Return in Nigeria](#), 2018

<sup>26</sup> Alpes, J. [Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger: a protection response or a source of protection concerns?](#), 2020; Newland, K., Salant, B. [Balancing Acts: Policy Frameworks for Migrant Return and Reintegration](#). Migration Policy Institute, 2018

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR, *Voluntary Repatriation, International Protection* (1996); Goodwin, G. and McAdam, J. ‘Non-Refoulement in the 1951 Convention’, *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.201-284.

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR, [Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 1979

<sup>29</sup> IDMC, [Internal displacement is not an acceptable alternative to international protection](#), 2020

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, [Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council](#), Article 8: internal protection, 2016

<sup>31</sup> IOM Nigeria RSS data

However, not all returning migrants benefit from this support. Those who return spontaneously or are deported are less likely to benefit from reintegration assistance than those who take part in assisted return programmes. Yet even the latter sometimes fall through the cracks. One study found that around 58% of those who returned to Nigeria through assisted return programmes between May 2017 and February 2019 received some form of reintegration support, and just 36% had received individual or collective reintegration assistance in the form of in-kind support for business.<sup>32</sup>

Reducing the risk of internal displacement and secondary migration among returning migrants requires committing to broader, longer-term, development-oriented reintegration assistance for all returning migrants, irrespective of the modalities of their return.<sup>33</sup> Given the negative impact of stigma and shame on reintegration, the social and psychological dimensions of reintegration should also be accorded increased attention.<sup>34</sup>

### Improve the effectiveness of reintegration assistance

Returning migrants who participated in this study outlined three opportunities to improve the effectiveness of reintegration assistance:

1. Provide housing assistance pending income generation. In the interval between the initial cash handout and the reception of start-up assistance, this would protect returning migrants from eviction and homelessness, and enable them to focus their meagre resources on meeting other basic needs.

*“I think most of the time, it’s difficult to settle down immediately so accommodation and shelter is very vital.” – Bankole*

2. Minimise costs and delays in obtaining start-up funding. The paperwork currently required to secure in-kind support for new businesses is both costly and cumbersome, representing a barrier to assistance. The lengthy procedures can also be disheartening for vulnerable returnees, further undermining their psychosocial wellbeing.

*“There were some people who didn’t get support immediately who committed suicide because they were doing well before they left and after they came back they had to start from square one.” – Bola*

3. Offer individual rather than group-based business support. Many returnees having benefited from reintegration assistance noted that they would have preferred to start their own business, rather than to partner with other returnees. This would also improve the sustainability of the businesses.

*“Every returnee comes from different backgrounds. We have different knowledge, dreams and goals for life.” – Nosa*

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<sup>32</sup> Alpes, J. [Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger: a protection response or a source of protection concerns?](#), 2020

<sup>33</sup> Alpes, J. [Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger: a protection response or a source of protection concerns?](#), 2020; Newland, K., Salant, B. [Balancing Acts: Policy Frameworks for Migrant Return and Reintegration](#). Migration Policy Institute, 2018

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Hall, [Community profiling of return areas in Nigeria \(Executive Summary\)](#), for the regional West Africa bureau and the IOM, 2018; IOM, [Reintegration handbook](#), 2019

The Global Compact on Migration, endorsed by nineteen EU states, commits to creating “conducive conditions for personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities, in order to ensure that reintegration of migrants upon return to their countries of origin is sustainable.”<sup>35</sup> By heeding returnees’ recommendations, reintegration assistance could play an even greater role in reducing returning migrants’ risk of new displacement, and optimising the sustainability of return.

## Research Parameters

The findings of this report are based on 105 qualitative interviews conducted with Nigerian returnees in Lagos (40 interviews), Edo (41 interviews) and Borno states (24 interviews) between August and September 2020. The average age of the sample was 30 years old, and it consisted of 56 men and 49 women.

Data was collected by Datadrill Research. Research participants were identified through purposive sampling, drawing upon the consulting firm’s existing network. A Covid-19 mitigation strategy was developed by the consulting firm to uphold the safety of researchers and participants. Efforts were made to include returnees who had been forcibly returned (21 interviews), returnees who participated in assisted voluntary return programmes (54 interviews), and spontaneous returnees (17 interviews).<sup>36</sup> No personally identifiable information was collected during data collection; all names in this policy brief have been changed.

Research tools were designed to provide insight into respondents’ prior experiences of displacement, their migratory trajectories, the modalities of their return, and their post-return mobility. A major limitation of this study is that respondents’ narratives focus more heavily on their experiences of migration than their subsequent return. In order to remedy this issue and obtain additional information on return and reintegration challenges, the study also draws upon aggregated Reintegration Sustainability Survey (RSS) data for Nigeria provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The RSS was designed to assess fifteen indicators covering the economic, social and psychological aspects of reintegration, to provide a reintegration score that measures progress towards sustainability of reintegration.<sup>37</sup> This comprehensive dataset is based on 1,223 interviews conducted with returnees in Nigeria between 2018 and 2020. It disaggregates data based on age, sex, and type of returnee; AVRR, VHR, or ‘non-IOM’, which indicates that the individual received reintegration support, but did not travel to the country of origin through IOM.

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<sup>35</sup> Global Compact on Migration, Objective 21.

<sup>36</sup> The modality of return of thirteen respondents was unclear.

<sup>37</sup> IOM, [Sustainable reintegration: Knowledge Bite 1](#), 2020

## Project Identity

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	MAGYC - Migration Governance and AsYlum Crises
<b>COORDINATOR</b>	The Hugo Observatory (Université de Liège), Liège, Belgium. hugo.observatory@uliege.be
<b>CONSORTIUM</b>	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique - Institut français du Proche-Orient (Beirut, Lebanon) GIGA Institute of Global and Area Studies (Hamburg, Germany) IDMC (Geneva, Switzerland) Lebanese American University (Beirut, Lebanon) Lund University (Lund, Sweden) Sabanci University (Istanbul, Turkey) Sciences Po (Paris, France) SOAS University of London (London, UK) University of Economics in Bratislava (Bratislava, Slovakia) University of Macedonia (Thessaloniki, Greece) University of Milan (Milan, Italy)
<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	This project has received funding from the European Commission's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call MIGRATION-02-2018 — Towards forward-looking migration governance: addressing the challenges, assessing capacities and designing future strategies.
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<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: 3,175,263.70€.
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="https://www.magyc.uliege.be/">https://www.magyc.uliege.be/</a>
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<b>FURTHER READING</b>	<a href="#">IDMC, 'Even if they reopened the airport': Barriers to cross-border movement expose Yemenis to repeated internal displacement, April 2020</a>  <a href="#">IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021, May 2021</a>

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