

27.

Towards the successful reintegration of returned migrants: IOM Niger's trainings for migrants in transit¹Lorelle Yuen²RETURN AND
REINTEGRATION

Abstract: This chapter explores the initial impacts of the microbusiness management training offered by IOM to migrants in transit back to their countries through the Niger. Due to the increased number of migrants expelled from Algeria to the Niger since 2018, there has been a significant increase in the number of migrants assisted with voluntary return to their countries of origin from the Niger. Upon return to their home countries, IOM assists these migrants with reintegration activities. Two case studies of returned migrants are showcased to demonstrate the impact of the training and to highlight the challenges they are facing.

27.1. Introduction

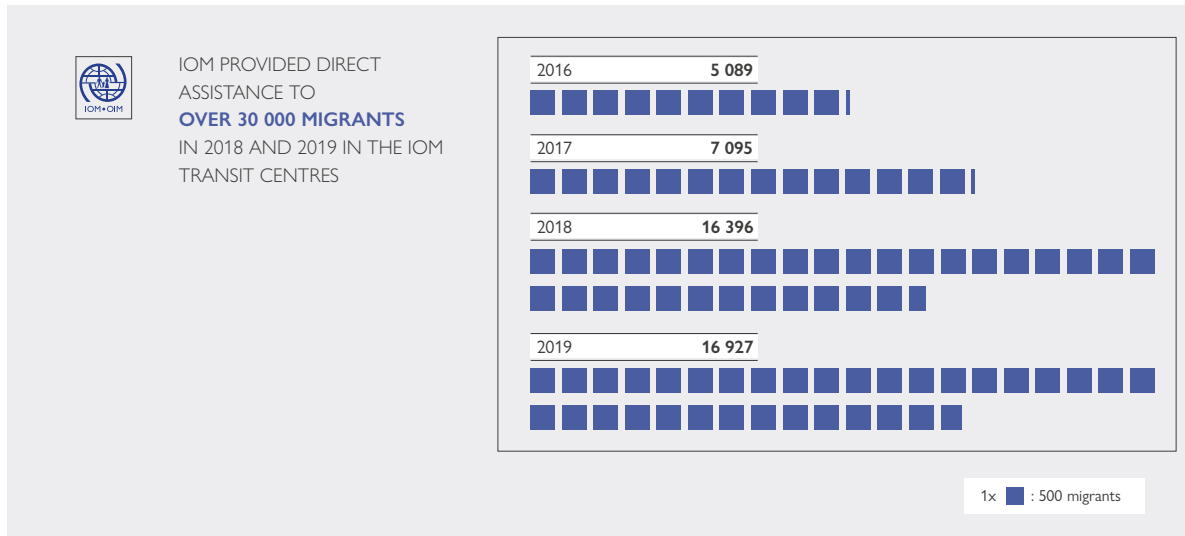
Situated between West, Central, East and North Africa, the Republic of the Niger is a major country of transit for migrants.³ In 2018–2019, the number of migrants arriving to the Niger from Algeria increased dramatically due to the systematic expulsions of migrants, starting at the end of 2017. As a result, IOM provided direct assistance to over 30,000 migrants in 2018 and 2019 in the IOM transit centres (see Box 27.1), many of whom were also assisted with voluntary return to their countries of origin (Figure 27.1). In 2019, 95 per cent of returnee migrants were male and 78 per cent were young men and women between the ages of 15 and 29 years. Almost all were from countries within the West and Central Africa region; 52 per cent came from Guinea and Mali alone (Figure 27.2).

¹ This chapter was written with support from Claire Gaulin and Corantine Groccia, IOM Niger.

² IOM Niger.

³ According to IOM (2020), the main host countries of destination (countries that assisted migrants in their return) in 2017–2019 were Libya (41,400), followed by the Niger (36,900). In total, 18,534 migrants were assisted in the six transit centres of IOM Niger throughout 2019. IOM Niger also provided assistance for the voluntary return of 16,927 migrants in 2019, including 16,378 migrants in transit and 549 people from the Niger.

Figure 27.1. Number of migrants assisted by IOM with Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration to their countries of origin in 2016–2019

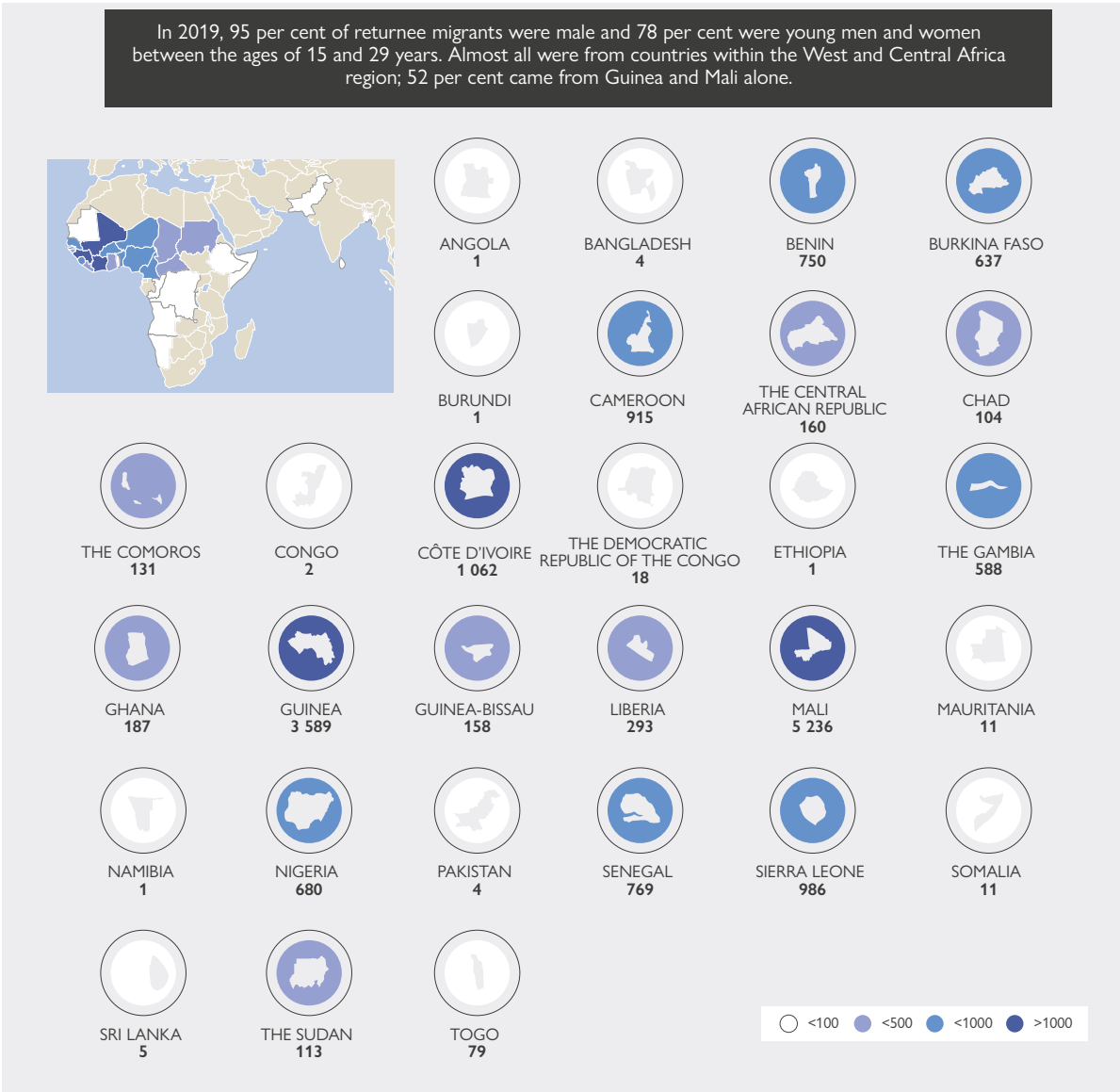


Box 27.1. IOM Niger transit centres

Migrants transiting through the Niger intending to return to their countries of origin or communities of origin (for migrants from the Niger)* with the assistance of IOM, temporarily stay in transit centres until their scheduled departures to their home countries or communities. IOM manages six transit centres across the Niger – in Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou and Niamey (three centres). All migrants arriving at the transit centres are registered and informed about their rights, and the services provided by IOM. Assistance in the centres includes accommodation, water, food, access to health care, preparation and facilitation of travel documents, psychosocial support, protection screening and support to the most vulnerable migrants, recreational activities and vocational trainings. In 2016 and 2017, most migrants arrived at the transit centres at their own initiative or by referral by one of IOM’s community mobilizers. In 2018, this shifted to the greatest number of migrants (46%) arriving at transit centres with the assistance of IOM after being expelled from Algeria, a significant increase from 2017, when only 4 per cent of migrants arrived with the assistance of IOM after being stranded in the desert. The average transit time varies depending on the migrant’s vulnerability status and/or presence of consular services in the Niger to process travel documents.

Note: The majority of migrants assisted in the transit centres are foreigners; however, there are also some assisted migrants from the Niger, who typically come to the transit centre on their own initiative. These do not include those repatriated from the official convoys, but may include some expelled from Algeria or rescued through IOM’s search and rescue operations conducted in the areas around Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou and Bilma.

Figure 27.2. Number of migrants assisted by IOM with voluntary return from the Niger by country of origin, 2019



Note: These maps are for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

IOM assists stranded migrants in the Niger with return to their home countries where, upon their return, they receive assistance from IOM to set up and implement their reintegration activities. Depending on the needs, skills and aspirations of each migrant, the reintegration assistance can include medical assistance, psychosocial support, education, vocational training, development of economic activities (such as microbusinesses or income-generating activities) and/or cover the housing/basic needs of the returnees. Most returnees choose to set up microbusinesses, but many lack the skills to enable them to set up viable businesses or livelihoods when they return.⁴ This is partly attributed to the lack of specialized training and education on business development, which could greatly increase the successful outcome of their businesses. Additionally, the education level of migrants varies, with 33 per cent lacking any formal education, 27 per cent having completed secondary school, 19 per cent having primary school,

⁴ Over 85 per cent of returnees assisted with Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) from the Niger to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Benin, Togo, Chad, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo chose to set up businesses. Statistics do not include returns to other countries of return (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal).

12 per cent having Koranic school and 10 per cent having higher education.⁵ In response to this gap, IOM Niger began offering business management⁶ and market gardening techniques⁷ trainings to migrants in the Agadez transit centre, the largest transit centre in the Niger, where the majority of migrants stay for a short period of time, in order to make better use of their time in transit and to prepare for successful and sustainable reintegration.⁸ The business management trainings also include visits to local microbusinesses in Agadez, where the migrants meet business owners to inspire them and allow them to ask them questions.

Since November 2019, vocational trainings are also offered to unaccompanied migrant children during their stays in the IOM transit centre in Niamey.^{9,10} The trainings enable these young migrants to go back to their countries of origin with certificates, thus supporting their entry into the labour market and facilitating their reintegration.

In the West and Central Africa region, business management trainings may be available to returnees upon their return home, depending on their countries of origin. In some countries, such as Sierra Leone and Nigeria, these types of trainings have been defined as mandatory prerequisites for IOM to support migrant returnees with the establishment of economic activities through reintegration assistance upon their return. However, there remains a large gap for many returnees transiting through countries other than the Niger and those returning to countries other than Sierra Leone and Nigeria, where these programmes are not available.¹¹

The successful and sustainable reintegration of returning migrants, the majority of whom are youths, remains challenging and complex. Most migrants originally left their home countries due to a lack of appropriate job opportunities. In West and Central Africa, the share of people who are unemployed or have unstable jobs is estimated at 50 to 90 per cent of the total labour force (African Development Bank Group, 2018). On top of that, youth unemployment is generally much higher than – often double – adult unemployment (African Development Bank Group, 2019).¹² Considering the dramatic increase in the number of returning migrants, particularly youths, to countries within West and Central Africa over the past two years – a trend which is likely to continue – the question of the impact of interventions towards sustainable reintegration becomes increasingly important.

This paper aims to assess the initial impacts of the trainings offered at the Agadez transit centre based on post-training evaluation surveys conducted with migrants who have completed the training and have since returned. Only the initial impacts of the trainings can be measured, since trainings started in July 2018. The impact will be assessed among the migrants who have returned home for at least three to six months and have chosen to start microbusinesses as their reintegration activities.¹³ Longer-term impacts of the training for migrants who have returned for at least one year or longer will be subject to future assessments. Further analysis will be conducted in order to compare over time the businesses of migrants who completed a business management training compared with those who did not receive any training. Understanding factors that may positively contribute to the success and ease of migrants' reintegration process is key, as effective economic reintegration can significantly influence migrants' decisions to remigrate, either irregularly or regularly.

⁵ Based on the 2018 profile data of migrants staying in the transit centres in the Niger.

⁶ The International Labour Organization (ILO)'s "Improve your business – IYB" training (in French, "*Gérez mieux votre entreprise – GERME*").

⁷ Market gardening techniques trainings are offered in partnership with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Regional Directorate for Agriculture (*Direction Régionale de l'Agriculture*). The training is aimed at migrants from rural areas interested in agricultural activities.

⁸ On average, the duration of stay in the transit centre is two weeks. However, the duration varies between migrants, as it depends on several factors: for example, on the nationality of the migrant, as some countries do not have any embassy/consulate in the Niger, which explains that it requires more time to obtain a travel document to organize the return to the country of origin. Also, migrants with specific vulnerabilities, unaccompanied children or people who are not fit to travel due to medical complications usually stay longer.

⁹ The training includes six modules, such as mechanics, carpentry and sewing.

¹⁰ Literacy, English and information technology classes are also offered to unaccompanied migrant children during their time in transit.

¹¹ Business management trainings (not mandatory for all) are also offered by IOM country offices in the following countries upon the return of migrants: Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea-Bissau. Similar to IOM Niger's business management and agricultural techniques trainings offered to migrants in transit in the transit centres, IOM Morocco also offers trainings to migrants in transit before their return to their countries of origin.

¹² The United Nations definition of youth is all people between 15 and 24 years of age. In 2019, 50 per cent of returnees assisted with AVRRO from the Niger to their country of origin were youth between 15 and 24 years.

¹³ The scope of this paper is only for returned migrants who chose to start microbusinesses, not other reintegration activities.

27.2. Methodology

The results of the post-training evaluation surveys are based on data collected from January 2019 to December 2019 for migrants who completed either the ILO IYB training (69 people) or the market gardening techniques training (7 people) or both (4 people). The trainings started in July 2018, and as migrants do not necessarily depart for their home countries immediately upon completion of the training, the first cycle of surveys was conducted in January 2019 for the first group of trained migrants that returned home for at least three months, followed by a second cycle in May and June 2019 for successive groups of returned migrants. A total of 80 responses were received from 2 females and 78 males of the following nationalities: Liberia (24), Cameroon (21), Côte d'Ivoire (15), Nigeria (14) and Benin (6).¹⁴ Stratified sampling of migrant returnees was used based on sex and country of origin to ensure representativeness across all groups given the predominance of male migrants and certain nationalities. The majority (79%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 33 years, with most having completed secondary school (25%), followed by other higher-level education (14%).¹⁵

All returning migrants were surveyed by IOM staff after returning to their home countries for three to six months, in order to understand the initial impacts of the trainings.¹⁶ A perception survey was used to assess how returning migrants perceived their situations, as well as to solicit their direct feedback about the training and their challenges, since this was the first time IOM Niger had conducted business management trainings for migrants in transit. Perceptions help reveal how a person views their environment or makes sense of their situation, which becomes the basis for their behaviours and their decisions (such as whether they feel the need to migrate or not based on their economic situation). It is important to note that perceptions can differ vastly due to differences in life experiences, education, attitudes, motives and interests. Given the diverse backgrounds of migrants surveyed, a perception survey was useful in gauging each migrant's sense of their own success or situation and how the trainings may have contributed to this success or not.

The case studies are based on follow-up interviews conducted in January 2020 with two migrant returnees who had returned for at least one year.

27.3. Status of businesses

Returnee migrants, upon arrival to their home countries, begin the process of designing their reintegration plans¹⁷ with the support of IOM Reintegration Assistants in their countries of origin. All migrants surveyed wanted to establish microbusinesses. Of those who were interviewed, half (40 people) had already started their microbusinesses, of which 75 per cent self-rated the status of their businesses as doing well (19 people, 47.5%) or very well (11 people, 27.5%).¹⁸ Migrants stated that the training helped improve their lives and boosted their confidence. Others, who are now running profitable businesses, plan to further expand their businesses. For instance, a 51-year-old male from Benin said: "Thanks to the training, I have learned the importance of diversifying my sources of income. This led me to launch other income-generating activities that are yielding enough money. I also learned how to manage a business so that it is promising. This allowed me to manage well my first activity and be able to launch a second one. I intend to continue this way and make my investment grow."

¹⁴ It is important to note that survey responses were not received from Guinea or Mali, the two top countries of origin for returning migrants transiting from the Niger.

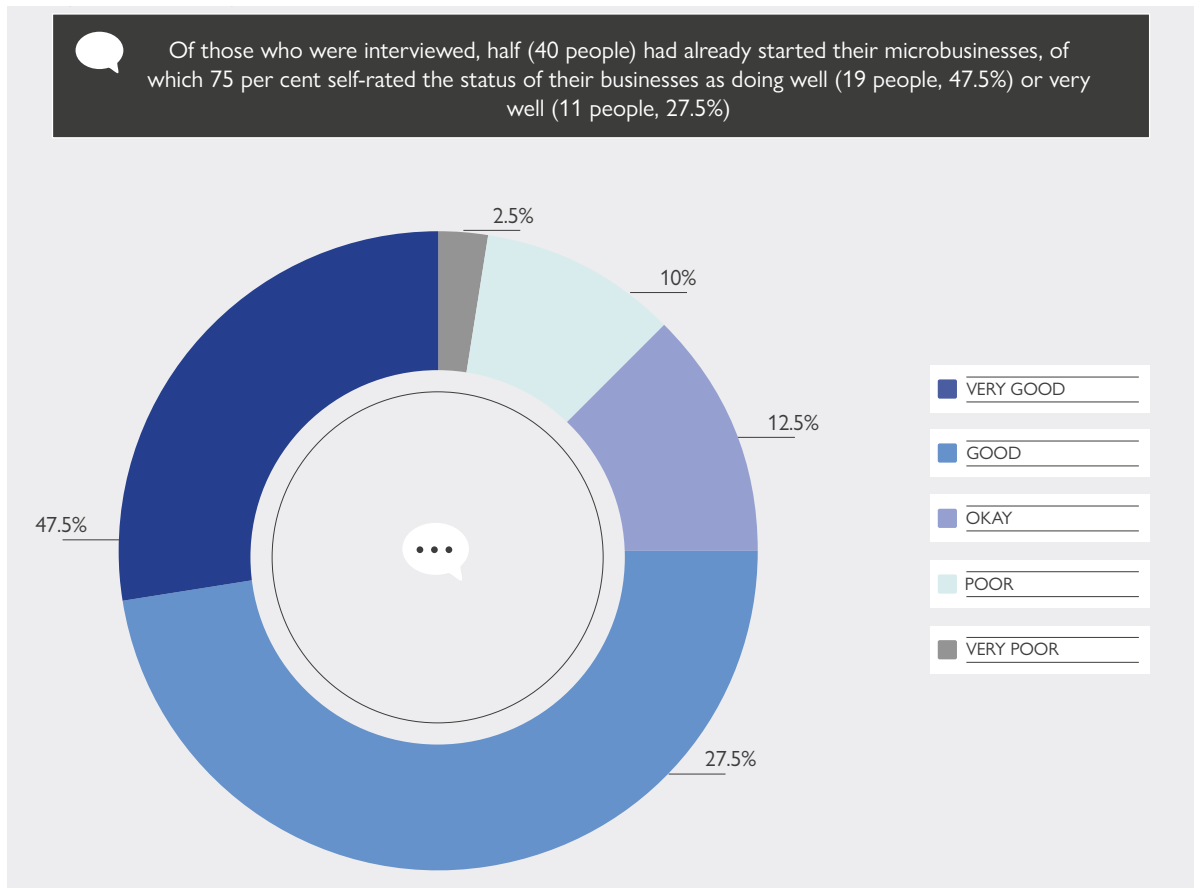
¹⁵ IOM Niger transit centre registration data.

¹⁶ Response bias may have influenced the response of respondents, which may have caused survey results to be more positive, as surveys were carried out by IOM staff.

¹⁷ A reintegration plan is a tool for returnees to identify their objectives for their reintegration process and to plan, with the support of the case manager, what support is needed and how it will be provided. The plan is developed by bringing together an understanding of the returnee's skills, needs and motivations, and the context of the return environment, including its challenges, opportunities and available services.

¹⁸ Survey questions asked respondents to rate the status of their microbusinesses based on the Likert scale, ranging from "Very Poor" to "Very Good".

Figure 27.3. Self-rated status of microbusiness among migrant returnees in country of origin at time of survey, three to six months after return



Those who had not yet started their businesses indicated that this was due to delays in receiving the materials for their businesses or other administrative procedures required for validating their business plans. Despite the delays, returnees stated that the training was “very valuable” and explained that they were able to utilize the knowledge gained from the training to develop a viable business plan. One migrant from Cameroon waiting to start his business said: “I [did a] feasibility and market study before choosing my reintegration project.” Another migrant from Côte d’Ivoire explained: “The skills acquired during the training allowed me to learn how to undertake, settle down, do a market study, exchange with partners who [trade in] silk, know these competitors and take into account the needs and tastes of the customer base.”

27.4. Usefulness of training for reintegration process

Interviewees were asked to rate four statements assessing the impact of the training in contributing to identifying their business ideas, developing their reintegration plans, as well as how useful the training was in contributing towards the planning or management of their reintegration activities.¹⁹ The majority of returnees, including those who had not yet started their businesses, stated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that the training was useful, with slightly more returnees (73.8%) who found the training to be more useful in developing their project ideas and

¹⁹ Respondents were asked to rate the following four different statements based on the Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, to assess how the training contributed towards the development of their reintegration project ideas and/or implementation of their microbusinesses (reintegration activities). Two statements assessed the impact of the training on developing their project ideas and reintegration plans: (a) The training contributed towards identifying my project idea; (b) The training contributed towards developing my reintegration plan. Two other statements assessed the impact of the training on implementing their reintegration plans: (a) The training contributed towards planning/organizing my reintegration activities (microbusiness); and (b) The training contributed towards the better management of my reintegration activities (microbusiness).

reintegration plans, rather than the actual implementation and management of their reintegration plans (58.8%), which may be attributed to the more theory-based methodology of the training, as well as the fact that their businesses only recently started.

Common themes were observed across interviewees who answered positively (68 people answered “agree” or “strongly agree”) to questions regarding the impact of the training on developing or implementing their reintegration plans. Returnees stated that the training enabled them to identify viable business ideas based on the localized needs and market demands, by first conducting market surveys. Others described how they learned the principles of business management, including the importance of diversifying income sources and saving a portion of profits and techniques to expand their businesses (see Case Study 1). Developing a foundation and sound knowledge of business management is vital for the success of a business, and for contributing towards the success and sustainable reintegration of returnees. A common finding across monitoring reports evaluating the reintegration activity and progress of returned migrants indicates that migrants lack knowledge on the importance of saving and how to reserve a portion of profits to sustain their business in the long term.

“I thank God for the microbusiness training. It has helped me a lot in managing my business. I had businesses before but they usually collapsed due to poor management or lack of business management skills. For example, I never used to observe my profit from the principle. Now I know how to sell my products to make and save the profit. Presently, I’ve increased the business and moved from the market into a shop. I also have good savings.” – Liberian man, 23 years of age.

“Through the training I gained more ideas to run and manage my business well. With the knowledge gained, I’m able to save my profit to develop the business and sustain myself. For example, before the training I didn’t know how to price my goods to get profit or even sell faster. I thank God for the training. Now I know all about business, its principles and profit, and my business is growing rapidly.” – Liberian man, 27 years of age.

Interviewees who answered negatively were few (nine people answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree”) – only three people who had started businesses rated them as performing poorly; the others had not started their businesses yet. They mentioned that they did not have the opportunity to utilize the knowledge and skills gained from the training back home, either due to sickness or personal problems (two people) or lack of market opportunities in their areas of origin (two people). Others mentioned challenges in following the training due to illiteracy (one person) or due to going back to school instead of focusing on the business (one person). One person stated that the training was not useful practically and another that their reintegration plan was irrelevant to the training.

“I didn’t know if the training help[ed] me to develop or implement any of my reintegration plans... because I needed to go back to school. [Because I went back] to school, I [didn’t] get the opportunity to [run my] business [and] unfortunately I [gave] the business to one of my family member[s], [and] due to mismanagement, the business broke down.” – Liberian man, 29 years of age.

27.5. Difficulties encountered

For migrants who risked everything in the hope of establishing their lives outside their countries, sometimes at the wish of their families or communities, returning home is difficult. Returnee migrants face stigmatization and lack of acceptance by their families and communities. Several returnee migrants surveyed stated that they were homeless when they returned or had to find their own accommodation as their family members did not welcome them back. Some migrants are also in debt to family members or friends due to money borrowed or even stolen to finance their migration journeys.

On top of these difficulties, migrants are faced with pressure to establish new means of livelihood in the same poor economic conditions that drove them to migrate in the first place (see Case Study 2). Lack of opportunities in the job market, especially in rural areas far from the capital, represents a big challenge, where migrant returnees risk being in competition against each other. To tackle this issue, IOM Reintegration Assistants try to diversify the portfolio of activities proposed and to work with local non-governmental organizations, which are well aware of the local context and opportunities.

Despite having the choice among several – and combinable – options for designing their reintegration plans, returnees usually focus on activities that enable them to meet their basic needs and those of their family members, which leads them to sometimes ignore their urgent medical or psychosocial needs. To overcome this challenge, IOM Niger offers medical support outside of the “reintegration package”, so that migrants in need do not feel that this assistance will undermine the budget available to develop their microbusinesses or income-generating activities.

27.6. Moving forward

Overall, this initial assessment showed that the trainings had a positive impact for returning migrants in their ability to design a viable business plan. The majority of migrants surveyed also self-rated their businesses to be doing well thus far, and said that the trainings provided them with a renewed sense of hope to be able to apply their new skills back home, especially as many migrants arrived to the transit centres hopeless and defeated from their perceived failed migratory experience.

“With the ideas and skills I own now, I think I can become a successful business owner back home.” – Congolese woman, 35 years of age.

“The training allowed me to have confidence in myself.” – Ivorian man, 21 years of age.

“I just want to say many thanks to IOM worldwide for assisting migrants to return to their homes and for the reintegration assistance given. This has helped us restart our lives once more at home.” – Liberian man, 27 years of age.

The trainings offered to migrants in transit represent one small piece of a large puzzle that attempts to creatively support migrants in their sustainable reintegration by making use of their time in transit. Other options – such as partnering with the private sector to offer internships and facilitate job placements, and involving diasporas to contribute to support returnees both financially and through transfer of expertise or know-how – are already being explored by IOM and other partners, and have been compiled in the IOM Reintegration Handbook (IOM, 2019 and Chapter 29 of this volume. Continued monitoring and evaluation of the status of the businesses and welfare of migrant returnees are needed to further assess the long-term impact of the business management trainings, and to shape and explore existing and new interventions that work towards maximizing the success of migrant returnees in their reintegration processes and achieving economic security.

Case Study 1

Boubacar is a 27-year-old man from Liberia. (For reasons of confidentiality, names in the case studies reported in this chapter are not real names.) He decided to migrate to Europe to have a better life and to be able to support his family back home. He ended up staying in Algeria for about two years, but life proved to be difficult due to limited job opportunities, so he decided to return back to Liberia. After leaving Algeria, he entered IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme at the transit centre in the Niger, where he participated in the week-long business management training course offered at the centre. He eventually returned home with the assistance of IOM in August 2018.

Upon his return, Boubacar decided to restart his old cement business, where he sold cement wholesale to customers. He said that the training helped him to reassess the business environment to see whether restarting his old business was a good idea or not. After he conducted a market assessment, he was able to put together a business strategy on how to regain his old customers and attract new customers, using knowledge he gained from the training. The training also helped him to competitively price his materials.

Boubacar was able to restart his business and he was even able to regain his old customers and win new customers, despite other competitors in the market. He said that the training helped him to run and manage his business well the second time around. For example, he now knows how to save profits to reinvest into the business and also how to competitively price his goods to earn a profit, something he struggled with in the past. Now, his business is growing and he is currently conducting assessments to determine whether he should expand his business to other parts of the country.

Boubacar's business is not without challenges, however. Due to the economic state of his country, the rate of buying has decreased, which has negatively impacted his business. Furthermore, he has experienced a decrease in the number of customers, which may also be attributed to the current economic situation. Finally, he mentioned that high transportation fees from his home to his shop are preventing him from further developing his business, as he needs to spend a lot of his money on transport costs. Despite these challenges, Boubacar says that he is satisfied with his current economic situation and that he believes he made the best decision to return home. He is optimistic that he will be able to take advantage of other opportunities to continue to improve his life and economic situation.

Case Study 2

Ibrahim is a 28-year-old man from Côte d'Ivoire. Back home, he was a technician for MTN, a telecommunications company. However, he aspired to improve his economic situation and his skills in order to set up a money transfer business. He decided to migrate to Algeria, where he worked and received training from a Chinese company in the industry of industrial refrigeration and cabinet cooling. He was living in Tamanrasset, in southern Algeria, near the border with the Niger, for just about a month, when Algerian authorities expelled him, along with a group of other migrants, to the Niger.

Ibrahim entered IOM Niger's transit centre in Agadez, where he decided to partake in the week-long business management training course offered there. He agreed that the training was very useful for him, saying "This training allowed me to know a lot of things. [It is] very beneficial for me." Ibrahim has been home since the end of October 2018, and since January 2019, he became involved in a new community poultry project, along with 12 others, in his hometown of San Pedro, where they aim to raise and sell chickens. As deputy group leader, he said that the training helped him to better structure his group and better organize the activities for the group, and that it taught him sales techniques, which proved useful for the business. He explained that the first phase of the project was successful, as they were able to obtain a farm and 1,000 chicks. However, with the second and third phases, they have been experiencing difficulties, which he attributes to the large number of people involved in the project. He himself, as well as others in the group, are finding it difficult to make ends meet.

In order to improve his economic situation, Ibrahim is also engaged in other side businesses, including the selling of telephones and clothing. He started these side businesses as soon as he returned home; he said the training gave him a good entrepreneurial spirit as well as skills to develop a marketing strategy, which has helped him with both these businesses, as well as the community poultry project. Overall, Ibrahim is happy to be back home and to be close to his family again, but he said he does not feel like he is able to stay at home due to low earnings and family pressures. Despite these pressures, Ibrahim remains optimistic, saying "The means are lacking for the moment, but I am very motivated."

African Development Bank Group

- 2018 *West Africa Economic Outlook 2018*. Abidjan. Available from www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2018AEO/African_Economic_Outlook_2018_West-Africa.pdf.
- 2019 *West Africa Economic Outlook 2019*. Available from www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/regional-economic-outlook-2019-west-africa-108624.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2019 *Reintegration Handbook: Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance*. Geneva. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/reintegration-handbook-practical-guidance-design-implementation-and-monitoring-reintegration>.
- 2020 *Assistance to Voluntary and Humanitarian Return 2017/2019: Profiles of migrants assisted to return to their country of origin, West and Central Africa*. IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa, Dakar. Available at <https://migrationjointinitiative.org/sites/default/files/files/articles/assistance-voluntary-and-humanitarian-return2017-2019iom-en.pdf>.