



RETURNEES FROM LIBYA: THE BITTERSWEET EXPERIENCE OF COMING HOME POLICY BRIEF¹

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy brief looks at the situation of migrants who have returned home to several West African countries as a result of the conflict in Libya. It aims to provide an understanding of the factors that led to migration to Libya, in the first place; the migrants' journey to Libya and their efforts to make a new life; the hasty return home; and the current needs of returnees and context to which they are returning. It draws on several assessments carried out by IOM at the height of the crisis and provides a unique perspective on the thoughts and minds of returnees, their families and their communities. What emerges is a very human story – gratitude for

the many lives that were saved through a rapid and sophisticated international response, but also a sense of despair about the future. Returnees have the ideas, skills and desire to make new lives for themselves in their home communities, but they are in desperate need of technical and financial support to help make this reintegration a reality. Wider destabilization to the countries of the region is a potent threat if these issues are not addressed.

2. CONTEXT

In February 2011, civil unrest in Libya erupted into armed conflict between pro-Gaddafi forces and the rebels of the National Transitional Council (NTC), with air support from NATO. The emergency continued until the end of September 2011, when most of the country was under the control of the NTC and there were only sporadic battles in Gaddafi strongholds. The fighting led to one of the largest migration crises in modern history, with 706,000

migrants fleeing across Libyan borders between 28 February and 27 September 2011. This outflow into neighbouring countries comprised not only migrants from those countries but also nationals from further afield – and from more than 120 countries – who needed to be transported back to their countries of origin. Most were from Africa but there were also thousands from Asia – particularly Bangladesh but also more distant countries such as the Philippines and Viet Nam. IOM's role in the crisis was to support Member States in evacuating nationals stranded in and outside Libya. IOM emergency operations were carried out in two major phases in 2011:²

¹ Prepared by Asmita Naik, IOM consultant.

² For further information on the IOM response, please see: *Migrants Caught in Crisis: The IOM Experience in Libya*, IOM, Geneva; and *Humanitarian Emergency Response to the Libyan Crisis*. Seven-month report on IOM's response: 28 February – 27 September 2011, IOM, Geneva. Available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/media/docs/reports/MENA-Seven-Month-Report.pdf>

February – June: During the first few months of the crisis, massive evacuation operations were conducted in the four main countries where migrants found refuge (Chad, Egypt, Niger and Tunisia), to cope with the massive flows out of Libya. Overall, IOM and its partners provided transportation assistance to more than 210,000 stranded third-country nationals (TCNs) (93% were assisted between February and June), departing from Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Niger and Tunisia. One of the main objectives was to decongest the borders to prevent a spread of the crisis to neighbouring countries. To this end, at the beginning of March, IOM and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) joined forces to coordinate evacuation efforts and set up the Humanitarian Evacuation Cell (HEC) at the central level. The HEC is currently hosted by IOM.

June – September: As cross-border movements out of Libya decreased substantially in June, IOM strove to remain active in Libya (security permitting), to reach out to stranded migrants, while maintaining its evacuation operations in neighbouring countries. As of May 2012, IOM had undertaken the evacuation of 38,000 migrants stranded in Misrata, Sebha, Gatrour, Tripoli and Benghazi, through a combination of means of transportation (boat, bus and plane). Despite the many logistical challenges, IOM was able to provide assistance to stranded migrants inside Libya because of its extensive expertise in movement management and thanks to its experienced operational staff on the ground.

Before the crisis, the Libyan economy had been highly reliant on foreign workers – both highly skilled/specialized workers and large numbers of unskilled irregular migrants, with the latter, particularly, accounting for hundreds

of thousands of the foreign nationals forced to leave Libya. Libya's oil wealth and infrastructure development, coupled with a pro-sub-Saharan African foreign policy pursued by Gaddafi, made it a magnet for poor people from nearby countries. Many found work in the low-skilled labour market in construction, agriculture, etc. Some were absorbed into the Libyan army as regular officers, and others were reportedly taken on as mercenaries and, allegedly, given Libyan citizenship for their services. These mercenaries were reportedly used by the Gaddafi regime to brutally suppress the uprising, leading to reprisal attacks on migrants, which were denounced by IOM, the United Nations and human rights groups.

Libya's neighbouring countries bore the brunt of the situation and had to contend with the influx of vast numbers of traumatized and impoverished migrants, among whom were persons with special needs such as those with medical conditions, unaccompanied minors, and foreigners registered in Libya as refugees, asylum-seekers and trafficked persons. This influx was coupled with broader threats to peace and security, such as the proliferation of weapons around the region, and links to terrorism and organized crime, as noted in a recent United Nations Security Council report on the aftermath of the crisis.³ These issues added to the problems already blighting the region, such as poverty, food insecurity and nutritional crises. The scarcity of rainfall across the Sahel indicates that the 2012 harvest is likely to be worse than previous years, further compounding the situation.

³ UN Secretary-General report to the Security Council of the assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region, 7 to 23 December 2011 (reference S/2012/42).

While timely intervention and transportation of returnees prevented an immediate humanitarian crisis from occurring on Libya's borders, the return of vast numbers of migrants to their home countries is not without consequences. The risk of destabilization to countries in the region remains a key concern; for example, the recent military coup in Mali may be partly due to the proliferation of arms from Libya and the possible involvement of Tuareg returnees who fought as mercenaries alongside Libyan troops.⁴ (Some Tuaregs were reported to have gone to Libya only when the crisis began, to join pro-Gaddafi forces.⁵) There are also concerns that such factors will compound the insecurity caused by the food crisis in the region, especially in Niger, which is now hosting additional refugees from Mali, following the outbreak of conflict in that country.

There are also economic repercussions. Aside from the direct impact of the loss of remittances, there is increased competition for resources and jobs, which puts pressure on local economies. The afore-mentioned United Nations Security Council report comments on the budgetary and financial implications at national level. For a number of years, the Libyan strategy had been to invest heavily in sub-Saharan Africa, and the suspension of these investments in countries such as Mali has added to unemployment figures and led to an increase in the price of basic

⁴ See, for example: Tuareg rebels make troubled return from Libya to Mali, BBC, 29 February 2012 (available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17192212>); also: Livelihood, security: climate change, migration and conflict in the Sahel, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 5 December 2012 (available at: <http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/Introduction/EnvironmentalCooperationforPeacebuilding/EnvironmentalDiplomacy/SahelReport/tabid/55812/Default.aspx>).

⁵ Tuaregs 'join Gaddafi's mercenaries', BBC, 4 March 2011 (available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12647115>).

commodities and high transportation costs. In Niger, defence spending reportedly went up by 65 per cent, while the budget for social services went down.

This policy brief looks specifically at the plight of returnees to six West African countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Niger, Mali and Senegal). It draws on assessment reports and/or profiling exercises carried out by IOM to map out the needs in areas of return, as well as documents related to IOM reintegration and community stabilization programmes set up to assist returnees in Chad and Niger – the two most affected countries. The policy brief is also based on IOM reports on five of the countries, as well as an assessment report on Ghana produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the support of IOM. As the assessments were carried out between June and October 2011, they may not give an accurate picture of the latest situation on the ground. Although the overall context is well known, these assessments provide insights into the micro view – the perspectives of returnees, their families and their communities, and the reality of coping with an unplanned and premature return.⁶

3. MIGRATION PATTERNS

The studies yielded detailed information on the migration patterns

in all six countries. Most experience internal migration from rural to urban areas and from poorer to richer parts. Ghana and Senegal, which represent two of the larger economies in the region, are migrant-receiving countries, hosting a significant number of nationals from neighbouring countries. All are significant migration-producing countries and Libya has been a popular destination for migrants, in addition to being a staging post for irregular migration to Europe – particularly France, Italy and Spain. Other destinations include Algeria, to the north, and south and central Africa (including new destinations such as Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville and Gabon). There are strong traditions of migration to Côte d'Ivoire from both Burkina Faso and Senegal. Patterns of repeat migration, expulsion and return to countries such as Libya are also evident, as is seasonal migration, which ties into the annual farming cycles.

Migration is largely prompted by the search for employment. Most migrant-producing areas are poor and lack viable employment options. This is particularly true for young people, who are often not drawn to traditional occupations such as farming, for example, and may be excluded from certain industries due to the local economy being dominated by older people. The Casamance region of Senegal suffers from armed conflict, which is an added push factor. Although it is an area of considerable potential, with abundant arable land and a favourable climate, it remains one of the poorest parts of the country. Recurrent drought and severe food insecurity are major problems in the subregion, especially for Chad and Niger. Migration is also seen as a rite of passage, in some communities – a journey into adulthood and a way of showing oneself capable of assuming adult burdens. In one site in Mali, clanship rivalry was found to be a unique driver of migration,

as competition between families was pushing sons to go abroad to make a success of themselves.

4. THE MOVE TO LIBYA

LIFE BEFORE GOING TO LIBYA

The assessments shed some light on the life of migrants before they went to Libya (see box 1). In Ghana, migrants were engaged in diverse occupations such as trading, masonry, plumbing, carpentry and farming. Most had worked, on average, for 4.6 years before departing for Libya and had accumulated an asset base of approximately GHS 4,000 (USD 2,300). Several had served apprenticeships in a range of vocational trades and a smaller number had undertaken short courses. There was less diversity among migrants from other countries such as Burkina Faso and Senegal, who had been mainly engaged in low-paid jobs in agriculture and livestock and were actively seeking different types of work in Libya.

Box 1: Mini-case study – life in Libya

Focus groups of returnees in Chad provided insights into the typical lifestyles led by migrants, once in Libya. In one location – Moun – the majority of returnees had only been there for six months and did not have work or, at best, had irregular employment. They had wanted to go to Libya to become more independent and to earn money to send home, and they had taken out loans for the journey. One couple said they had been in Libya for nearly 3 years and had not been paid for 10 months as they were on probation and had to wait several months before they could open a bank account to receive a salary. In Matafo, the returnees had worked in Libya for 1–3 years, and one had been there for 9 years. They had been attracted by the idea of easier jobs and luxurious lifestyles but, in

⁶ A note on methodology: The assessments were carried out using a variety of methods, including interviews and focus groups, quantitative questionnaires, observation and literature reviews, with the approach being adapted to suit the particular country context. This allowed for the observation of general trends and patterns in the returnee experience, although the methodological and definitional differences meant that a comparison of quantitative data across countries was not possible. All assessments targeted several different sites within each country, known to be places of return, and covered rural and urban areas. In some places (such as Chad and Niger), the needs assessments were accompanied by a profiling exercise, which yielded additional data on returnee populations.

reality, life was difficult and hard work. Most were engaged in low-skilled jobs as cleaners, guards, etc. Most women went to join their husbands. Returnees said they sent back XAF 1 million (USD 1,992) every 4 months through Chadian traders for families back home to buy food.

ROUTES TO LIBYA

The route to Libya from sub-Saharan Africa is a treacherous journey across the Sahara desert, involving days of travel. Some do not make it alive. Migrants travel by road transport to various transit points and then continue on foot through the Sahara desert to Libya.

JOBS HELD BY MIGRANTS IN LIBYA

The assessments suggested that there was some variation in the type of work available to migrants, depending on their country of origin. A very high percentage of Ghanaian returnees (94%) had found work in masonry and construction – especially plastering. Returnees from elsewhere had tended to be engaged in a wider range of lower-skilled work, such as labouring, farming, housekeeping and odd jobs. Data on returnees from Niger show that 41 per cent were in construction, 23 per cent were in agriculture and the remainder were engaged in a variety of occupations, ranging from shopkeeping and small businesses, to working on the docks, gardening and guard duty. The majority of female returnees said they had remained without formal employment in Libya. Earnings varied considerably: returnees to Niger reported earning between XOF 50 and 100,000 per month (USD 0.20–199). Returnees to Mali said they acquired real skills and learned about new technologies during their time in Libya. Irrespective of country of origin, work for migrants seemed intermittent, with returnees often

reporting that they survived in Libya without work for months at a time. According to the data from assessments carried out in Ghana, most returnees were satisfied with the levels of remuneration they received; they were able to make savings and accumulated an asset base over three years, valued at around GHS 4,000 (USD 2,300), comprised of land, houses and vehicles. They had stayed in Libya for an average of three years, and several had been back numerous times, following successive deportations.

5. THE RETURN HOME NUMBERS OF RETURNEES

According to the latest IOM figures (dated 14 March 2012), the crisis has resulted in some 318,000 third-country nationals in Libya's neighbouring countries (Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Niger and Tunisia) requiring evacuation to their home destinations – mainly across Africa

but also to some countries in Asia. Most returnees were transported by air and a small number by bus. Since mid-December 2011, returns have slowed considerably but there is still some residual movement to Egypt, Niger and Tunisia. The latest figures indicate that 216,618 West African nationals have returned to their home countries – 136,786 by direct border crossing from Libya into Chad and Niger, and 79,832 with IOM assistance from neighbouring countries. In addition, several governments evacuated their citizens from Libya. Table 1 shows the number of returnees, by country of return and by the mode of transport used to return them home (air/road). (These numbers do not include those who returned without IOM assistance.) The largest numbers returned to Libya's immediate neighbours, Chad and Niger. In terms of onward movement, Ghana and Mali were the next biggest destinations.

Table 1: Return of West African country nationals, by type of transport, March 2012

Country	CBM	Return by Air	Return by Bus	Total
Benin	-	107	2	109
Burkina Faso	-	880	781	1,661
Cameroon	-	160	-	160
Central African Rep	-	44	-	44
Chad	55,630	31,747	-	87,377
Congo	-	8	-	8
Côte d'Ivoire	-	90	15	105
Gambia	-	351	-	351
Ghana	-	11,096	339	11,435
Guinea	-	680	-	680
Guinea-Bissau	-	177	-	177
Liberia	-	10	-	10
Mali	-	11,164	231	11,395
Mauritania	-	783	-	783
Niger	81,156	16,664	-	97,820
Nigeria	-	3,158	525	3,683
Senegal	-	406	-	406
Sierra Leone	-	45	-	45
Togo	-	342	27	369
Total	136,786	77,912	1,920	216,618

Source: IOM Daily Statistical Report, 14 March 2012.

THE RETURN JOURNEY

When the conflict broke out, sub-Saharan African migrants found themselves in a precarious situation. Some were accused of being mercenaries recruited to fight under Colonel Gaddafi and became the subject of harassment and threats. Rebel soldiers told one Chadian migrant at gunpoint: “You came here with nothing and you will leave with nothing.” With the conflict rapidly intensifying, many migrants were unable to recuperate their belongings or salaries. Some destroyed their own identity documents, fearing that rumours about migrants being given visas to fight for Gaddafi might expose them to danger.

Inevitably, as in any humanitarian crisis, migrants returned in haste, fearing for their lives because of the conflict itself and also because they risked becoming targets for the rebel forces. Possessions, savings, valuables and documents were abandoned in the rush to leave. The Senegal assessment report revealed that some even lost their lives en route through the Sahara. The journey home was uncomfortable, often on heavily overloaded trucks – some carrying as many as 200 people although designed for only 80 – and baggage was lost en route or abandoned at airports due to lack of space in the hold. Reports of bribery and extortion by police, border and embassy officials, both in Libya and in transit and home countries, were commonplace.

IOM worked with government and partner agencies to ensure that reception facilities were in place. This involved the setting up of transit centres to provide food, water and sanitation while transportation to final destinations was arranged. In Mali, for instance, migrants benefited from the combined efforts of several partners, including

the government, IOM and others. The majority were returned by air on chartered planes. They were greeted in Bamako with assistance, food, shelter and psychological support. From there, bus transport was arranged to home destinations. Returnees to Mali by land reported being harassed as they passed through Algeria and Niger.

In some countries, returnees were met in their home towns with food and accommodation provided by the local authorities and NGOs. Similar plans were in place in other countries, although the services varied, depending on the locality. One issue that comes up in different reports is the cost of ground transport upon arriving home. These costs were supposed to be covered by the authorities under reception plans, but returnees in both Mali and Senegal, for example, said they had to find the money themselves to get on the buses provided. Statistics sometimes show a discrepancy between the number of migrants registered at airports and those who subsequently arrive back in their home localities. This may have been due to a variety of push and pull factors: for instance, some may have been reluctant to go home without the means to support themselves and may have moved on elsewhere; others may have been attracted by the prospect of greater opportunities in urban centres or capital cities.

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURNÉES

GENDER

The vast majority of returnees (98–99%, in some places) were males. Profiling data for Niger show that female returnees made up only 1.47 per cent of the total returnee group. Explanations given for the lack of women tended to focus on assumptions that available jobs (such as those in construction) were

unsuitable or because travel across the Sahara was too hazardous. But it also seems that female returnees were less willing to come forward due to the stigma associated with working in Libya and the perception that they were sex workers. In Ghana, the small number of female interviewees discounted this perception, claiming that other jobs such as housekeeping and hairdressing were available and that only females from other countries were engaged in sex work. The Senegal assessment found that women mainly migrated to join their husbands. In Chad, it was observed that the numbers of female returnees increased as the crisis went on, and it was assumed that the women had been living in Libya with their families and were initially more hesitant to return.

AGE

The returnees were mostly 20–40 years of age, in all six countries. The assessments from Burkina Faso, Ghana and Senegal further indicated that, of this number, the majority were in their 20s. The Niger profiling surveys cited 80 per cent as being between the ages of 20 and 40. A very small percentage were over 50 (only 1%, according to the Ghana assessment), and Senegal reported a small number of children under 15. This should not come as a surprise; the young are the most likely to migrate, for a host of reasons, including the lack of employment opportunities, the challenges likely to be encountered along the migratory routes, the quest for adventure, and the desire for independence. It is worth noting that the ages of the migrants interviewed could not be verified, due to the lack of identity documents – in Chad and probably also elsewhere.

MARITAL STATUS

The marital status of returnees showed a mixed pattern. In Burkina

Faso, Niger and Senegal, the pattern was very similar: nearly two thirds were married, which suggested that it was mainly newly weds who were migrating. The pattern was more evenly balanced in Ghana and, in Chad, most returnees were married. In Mali, there were significant differences between the sites assessed, but the incidence of divorce and separation appeared to be minimal. Data from Niger show that the vast majority (93%) travelled alone, usually leaving behind five dependents, on average, which suggests a pattern of temporary labour migration rather than permanent family migration. The situation regarding the number of dependents in other countries is less clear. Assessments carried out in Burkina Faso indicated that nearly half of the returnees had no children and that the remainder had only one child. In Chad, it was found that the majority of returnees had several dependents but it was not clear whether these were children or extended family members.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The education levels of migrants were found to be low. Of the six nationalities assessed, Ghanaian migrants appeared to have the highest level of schooling: nearly two thirds of them educated into their teens and only a small minority had no schooling at all. Interviews with the wider community revealed that education was highly valued and that migration was considered to be a threat to academic achievement, highlighting the need for pupils to be provided with vocational training opportunities and information on the risks of irregular migration. The education levels of returnees to other countries were very low. In Niger, 82.2 per cent had no education at all; 11 per cent had been educated to primary level; 6.7 per cent had gone to secondary school; and

only 0.1 per cent had a university-level education. The same pattern was evidenced in Burkina Faso and Senegal: many of the migrants had not attended school at all and those that had tended to stop at primary level. Assessments in Chad revealed that there was little or no formal education – much the same as in Mali, although the option of Koranic schooling was available to some, in that country.

The assessments in Ghana also looked at further education and training, and found that the majority of returnees had undertaken an apprenticeship of more than a year, on average, prior to their journey to Libya. These apprenticeships were most commonly in building and construction, which was the sector in which most Ghanaian returnees were found to have worked, during their time in Libya. A few had also been on short courses. Senegal was the only other country where the assessments included vocational training, revealing that nearly half of the returnees had had some form of training before their departure to Libya – mostly in building and construction. Very few had computing skills.

7. REMITTANCES

AMOUNT AND MODE OF TRANSFER

It is not possible to generalize across countries on the amounts remitted by migrants, given the variability in reporting and currency exchange rates. Also, even within countries, the remittance data were conflicting; for instance, in Ghana, returnees reported sending home GHS 602 (USD 340) per month, but bank officials claimed that the amounts were considerably lower – on average, USD 86 per month and with an upper limit of Ghana GHS 500 (USD 288). Given that Ghanaian migrants seemed to have access to better-paid jobs than other West African migrants, it seems likely that returnees from

other countries were remitting less, on average. In Burkina Faso, for example, the assessments revealed average annual remittances of XOF 250,000 (USD 498), whereas returnees to Mali said they remitted XOF 100,000 (USD 195) on an annual basis.

In terms of transfer methods used to remit income, Malian and especially Ghanaian returnees said they mainly used money-transfer agencies such as Western Union. Others sent money through banks, agents and friends. Interviewees from Niger mainly favoured non-formal channels and used middlemen traders. Some Malian returnees also used an informal buddy system known as ‘fax’, which had the advantage of offering lower commission rates but involved a higher risk of the migrant being deported if caught using informal means of money transfer.

VALUE AND USE OF REMITTANCES

Across all six countries, remittances from returnees were a significant form of support to families, playing a major role in household survival. The remittances were used to meet basic daily needs – paying for food, housing, health and education – and little was left over for investment. The assessments suggested that, in fact, most remittances were spent on food and, in some countries, nearly 90 per cent of remittance income went towards this basic essential. If money was spent on acquiring assets, it tended to be on agricultural purchases such as livestock, plots of land or farming equipment. In Ghana, some of the migrants’ families used the funds to send the migrants’ children to private schools. In all six countries, however, savings rates were low.

Assessments in Ghana indicated that returnees were satisfied with the way remittances were spent. It seems that households with

family members abroad enjoyed a relatively high standard of living and were considered by other community members to be doing well. However, the remittances appeared to benefit only the respective households, and there was no evidence of the local economy having enjoyed positive impacts in any of the countries. The Chad assessment reported no communal benefits. Information obtained from the assessment in Niger was somewhat contradictory, however; on the one hand, interviewees said that remittances provided significant support to families and the local economy, but enquiries in towns visited by the assessment team indicated that remittances were not being used for social investment projects in communities. The Mali assessment report hints at the potential benefits of families setting up small businesses and sharing the skills and know-how imparted by migrant workers. Two of the assessments also refer to the potentially negative side effects of migration, in terms of weakening family ties, as well as the creation of dependency on remittances, which can undermine local productivity.

8. CIRCUMSTANCES OF RETURNEES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING HOME

MIGRANTS' RECEPTION AT HOME

For many returnees, going home was a bittersweet experience. Reunions were emotional; families were relieved to see family members come home safely, but joy quickly turned to worries about making ends meet and returnees were embarrassed at coming home empty-handed. One Senegalese returnee described his mother's reaction: "My mother cried when she saw me and said she lost her Soutoura [a word that implies loss of dignity and respect – in this case, due to loss of income]."

Most returnees were from poor families anyway, and the return home heightened the vulnerability of already desperate households, particularly in countries such as Niger, which had already been affected by recurrent drought and food insecurity.

LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS

Returnees in all countries found themselves in very difficult circumstances and commonly expressed sentiments of desperation, anxiety and frustration. What came across most forcefully, in all the assessment reports, was the human tragedy of young men and women being suddenly uprooted from their livelihoods, and transplanted back into a situation of dependency, with a bleak and uncertain outlook. Returnees frequently talked of feeling belittled, humiliated and ridiculed; they experienced scorn and abuse from community members and felt emotionally fragile and unstable. One returnee from Mali expressed what many were feeling, in all six countries, when he said: "People should not come to mock us while we are in this dejected situation."

The most common and obvious concerns were employment, financial support, daily expenses and housing. The Burkina Faso assessment focused particularly on living circumstances and revealed that most returnees were living with relatives or friends in homes constructed with basic, temporary materials. Some appeared to have problems finding the next meal and often had to manage on just one meal a day. However, interviewees appeared to experience shame about the difficulty of meeting their basic food requirements as they would admit this in individual interviews but would emphasize other types of problems, such as psychological difficulties, when

talking in focus groups. Other challenges included covering the costs of schooling and health care. Returnees expressed frustration with government and political authorities for failing to follow up. A returnee in Niger said: "It's four months since I returned and no support has reached us. It seems as if something [implied money] is scheduled for us but it remains blocked, for some reason, in Niamey." To the assessment team, returnees said: "You are the nth mission, then we do not see anything concrete." Family tensions are also heightened. Some returnees are resentful that remittances have not been used wisely. One returnee to Mali said: "I was able to send nearly XOF 2 million (USD 3,984) per year to my parents but they have squandered it all and now I find myself today without even XOF 1,000 (USD 1.99), which is frustrating. If I had known it was going to be like this, I would have stayed abroad for good. Now, I want to leave permanently." In other cases, families expressed concerns about their survival. One father in Senegal said his son had been the sole provider for the family and, since his son's return, the family had been experiencing enormous difficulties.

Returnees resorted to a variety of measures to make ends meet. Local bank managers in Ghana reported an increase in the withdrawal of deposits and early redemption of fixed deposits, as well as an increase in the demand for loans. In Burkina Faso, animals were being sold to meet immediate needs. In both cases, returnees were effectively liquidating important investments in order to survive.

Some returnees went back to the work they used to do before going to Libya – such as farming – but cited difficulties in accessing cash to buy inputs (e.g. seeds, fertilizers and chemicals). In

Burkina Faso, very high numbers of returnees took up agriculture – largely, it seems, because they could get access to land to grow crops. In Ghana, some returnees purchased taxis even though they did not know how to drive or have insurance, which posed a risk to themselves and others. The Niger assessment report revealed that some returnees started income-generating activities such as small restaurants or enrolled in ‘food for work’ programmes. In Mali, few migrants came back with sufficient savings to start projects that would facilitate their socio-economic integration.

Returnees in all six countries lacked the financial means to help kick-start new income-generating activities, even though they had ideas and an interest in helping themselves. Most had aspirations, for instance, to go into farming, set up businesses, carry out construction projects or acquire driving skills but needed money and materials to launch these initiatives. The small number of female returnees tended to be more interested in setting up businesses or working in the food industry than working the land. They faced particular constraints in terms of securing employment, accessing food or making a living from agricultural activities.

Aside from financial resources, other key barriers to reintegration included psychological trauma, loss of property or investment, and debts. The ‘culture shock’ of returning home seems to have been an issue for some; having got used to different lifestyles in Libya, they were described by community members as dressing differently, standing out and engaging in what was seen as inappropriate behaviour, such as heavy drinking and promiscuity. In some cases, they appeared to be unwilling to do the work they had done before and were only interested in doing more skilled work.

Not surprisingly, some returnees wanted to migrate again and were just waiting for the opportunity to return to Libya. Interviewees in Senegal said: “If it was not for the war, we would not come back here ... because our situation was better in Libya than it is here in Senegal. There, we earned a good living but now we have problems trying to get hold of XOF 25 (USD 0.5). It is faith in God that enables us to live and not to fall into madness..” What is interesting, however, is that most of the returnees were keen to stay at home and to adapt to local conditions, if only they could get some assistance in finding jobs or setting up some kind of business for themselves.

9. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

There was also an impact on host communities in the six countries. The majority of returnees were from impoverished and underdeveloped communities that experience agricultural failure, food insecurity, malnutrition, an absence of economic opportunities, and inadequate health infrastructure and education services. Some regions also suffer from conflict. In the face of all these challenges, labour migration was a key coping strategy.

The assessment reports indicate that the economic impact of the loss of remittances was felt at individual family and community levels, although this somewhat contradicts the aforementioned indications that remittances had little effect on the wider community. Family consumption was undoubtedly affected, money for housekeeping and daily food was a problem, and some families had to withdraw their children from private schools. The impact seemed to be particularly serious in places that had suffered severe food insecurity for years, such

as Niger, or where there was a particularly heavy dependence on remittances, such as in Mali.

In terms of wider communities, the abrupt termination of remittances had a negative effect on local markets and traders in Niger. In Senegal, villages with a large expatriate community in Libya suffered acutely – for example, in the village of Mandingo, where 75 per cent of the village income was derived from remittances from Libya or elsewhere. Local banks were said to have felt the effects through the loss of deposits and commissions coming from transfers from Libya. In Chad, there were no visible impacts on communities or families at the time of the assessment in that country, but there was much talk among interviewees of potential instability due to lack of jobs and of returnees being unable to reintegrate into local society. Interviewees in both Ghana and Niger cited community concerns about security and the association of returnees with heavy drinking and petty theft, but it is not clear to what extent these were proven allegations or merely stereotypes. In Ghana, community members were generally sensitive and concerned about the social instability that might arise if these hardworking young men were unable to find jobs. A bank manager interviewed for the Ghana assessment gave his perspective on the crisis: “It has brought problems ... people came unprepared. But those who had sent money home were better able to withstand it. Some had arrived in Libya not too long before. Others were enjoying life there [in Libya] and had not saved up. So how to make ends meet is a problem...” By contrast, in Burkina Faso, there was found to be little community support – seemingly due to a lack of investment by migrants in their countries of origin while they were away.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In the course of the Libyan conflict, the transport and return of hundreds and thousands of migrants to their homes was a huge logistical challenge, and one that all parties – international organizations, governments and civil society – worked constructively together to address. The emphasis has been largely on providing safe and dignified evacuation and transport assistance, as well as temporary shelter, food and health care. Governments in the region cooperated with IOM and partners in taking adequate measures to facilitate the safe return of citizens and third-country nationals through the territory. In all six countries, the return and reception of migrants appear to have been systematically organized, but measures faltered – perhaps inevitably, given the circumstances – when it came to reintegration support. At the time of writing this report, some governments (together with IOM and other international organizations) had secured some

funds and started the process of planning reintegration support for its returning migrants. However, more comprehensive planning is needed.

In terms of reception, the approach in Senegal seems typical of other countries in the region. With the help of IOM and other agencies, the government mobilized a national committee to plan a response. This involved meeting returnees at international airports or at land border crossings, providing them with basic assistance, and then organizing transport back to the returnees' home localities.

Most migrants have returned safe and sound but the majority of them still require reintegration support. In Niger, the government issued an order for support to be provided to returnees in the form of food distribution, seed supply, distribution of livestock, and the transfer of money. However, the degree of implementation varied at the local level. Some local authorities did barely anything and

did not even have a clear registration process. Others, while slow to start, had plans in place for cash transfer, cash for work, and strengthening grain banks. The situation in Chad was found to be similarly variable. Some local/regional authorities had set up welcome committees and were carrying out registration as a prelude to other activities, while others were doing nothing. In Senegal, part of the problem was that return was managed at central level, without the involvement of local authorities, which made for a weak response at the local level.

POTENTIAL FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The potential for socio-economic reintegration was assessed in several areas, often yielding some very specific suggestions. While there is evidently potential in most places, investment and development are required. In Mali, for instance, there is potential in terms of agricultural development, which fits well with the skills acquired by returnees

© IOM 2011.



in modernized agriculture, during their time in Libya. However, financial support is needed in order for returnees to use these newly acquired skills in productive and lucrative ways. Likewise, in Ghana, returnees need support in realizing the potential for new businesses to be established in their districts in agriculture and food processing, especially on a cooperative basis. As a follow-up to the assessments carried out in the country, IOM Ghana has started projects aimed at income generation and awareness-raising on the hazards of migration. In Chad, the assessments indicated that some programmes initiated by international agencies to address food security and nutrition had ended, highlighting the need for: a renewed emphasis on micro-credit and income-generation support (in the form of materials and agricultural inputs, to get businesses started); skill-building (such as in small business development, carpentry and sewing); and wider job creation and community development initiatives. Interviewees in Niger cited the need for emergency assistance (in the form of food, cash transfers and food for work), as well as support for agricultural interventions.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment data provide a clear and consistent picture of the returnee situation in all six countries. The efficiency of the repatriation operation carried out by the international community, governments and NGOs, in response to the most immediate danger, saved the lives of thousands of migrant workers and prevented the Libyan crisis from spilling over into other countries and turning into a much larger humanitarian catastrophe.

Several months on, with the most immediate security threats at bay, other needs have come to the fore. Now, what is most visible is the hardship and disappointment faced by tens of thousands of young men (who represented the majority of returnees), suddenly robbed of the livelihoods they had journeyed so hard to find, and facing a hopeless future and no means of helping themselves. Programmes for socio-economic integration are badly needed to help individual returnees and families, but also to safeguard the peace and stability of wider communities, countries and the region as a whole. There is still a need for

ongoing humanitarian assistance in the form of free distribution of food and psychological assistance (among other things), until reintegration programmes are up and running. Initiatives aimed at providing these services should draw on best practices and learn from the success of programmes/projects for youth employment and/or rehabilitation, or from IOM programmes elsewhere. As part of this process, the data that have been collected on returnees will provide an essential resource for future planning.

The assessments carried out in the six countries resulted in a variety of recommendations, which have been consolidated in the following list.

REINTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY STABILIZATION

1. Community stabilization.

In areas affected by high returns, support should be provided in a holistic way, to the entire community, rather than targeting returnees or their families, which could create tension in the communities.

2. Socio-economic reintegration.

Reintegration programmes should be based on priorities defined by



At the Choucha refugee camp near the Ras Djir, Tunisia-Libya border crossing. © IOM 2011 - MTN0089 (Photo: Emiliano Capozoli).

policy and planning documents at the regional, departmental and communal levels, and should involve community-based organizations such as youth associations, socio-professional groups and women's groups.

3. Mainstreaming protection.

Given the potential long-term social impacts of large numbers of migrants returning home to their communities, as well as the security issues involved, it is important to ensure that protection is mainstreamed – in the development of strategies as well as in the actual activities that may be included in the reintegration programmes.

4. Addressing gender bias.

Activities for women should be included in any strategy, to ensure that families' needs are addressed and met. This will also ensure that families continue to receive the support they need, should returnees decide to go back to Libya or move elsewhere. In addition, given the potential prejudice against single women who have migrated to Libya, there is a need for initiatives to raise awareness of the women's rights and to support the women's needs. Both returnee women and women left behind face specific familial, social and economic challenges, and it is important that these gender-specific concerns be addressed.

5. Activities by groups/ associations.

Given that most communities prefer to develop associations in order to implement activities, this approach should be used in any medium- to-long-term activities. This would also be in line with ensuring a holistic approach to any interventions. Training could also be provided to groups of returnees in group formation, cooperative ventures, enterprise management and counselling, to help them

establish successful enterprises. In addition, the establishment of cooperatives or associations of returnees should be encouraged.

6. Reintegration support should be targeted and relevant.

Assistance should be provided to returnees to facilitate their reintegration, based on their interests and capabilities – for example, through the provision of small loans administered by local banks, the distribution of inputs (fertilizer, chemicals and seeds) and the organization of tractor and marketing services for those interested in farming or trading. Training in specific sectors (such as masonry and brick/tile-laying) should be provided to interested returnees through local apprenticeships schemes with master craftsmen and artisans, to enhance the returnees' skills and increase their employability. Returnees who wish to return to school could be assisted with tuition and board, and the skills developed by migrants in Libya should be further developed through apprenticeship programmes, using specific lines of credit from micro-finance institutions or other local funding bodies. Finally, the United Nations and its partners should work on multisectoral reintegration initiatives that focus on conflict prevention, social cohesion and protection, as well as livelihood support.

7. Participation.

Returnees and/or their associations should be actively involved in the implementation of the various reintegration projects, with a view to enhancing the returnees' exposure to, and knowledge of, the workings of the different institutions and organizations in the districts. This will also help to defuse their concerns about possible politicization and/or the misallocation of funds for their reintegration.

8. Children.

The children of returnees must be reintegrated into the school system. This may be an issue in some countries where children have got used to learning in Arabic or English but are now, back home, being taught in French.

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

1. Government capacity-building.

Besides short-term support to governments in building their capacity to deal with the immediate situation, there also needs to be more long-term capacity-building at the central government level, in terms of managing migration, responding to local and international labour demands, and harnessing the benefits of remittances (the human, financial and social capital associated with remittances, as well as returns). The relevant government institutions and civil society organizations should be trained in the management of labour migration to promote better use of remittances for the social, economic and environmental development of their localities. In the same vein, the capacity-building of community institutions must be enhanced to provide guidance to youth on income-generating activities, and technical support should be given to community health facilities to enable them to provide better psychosocial support to returnees and their families.

2. Job creation.

Viable employment opportunities should be created in migrant-sending districts so that young people can make a living at home and are not compelled to migrate or embark on risky journeys in search of work.

3. Information campaigns.

Information must be provided on safe migration and the dangers

of irregular migration, starting in schools and reaching out to the communities in areas with high rates of irregular migration. Broader awareness-raising campaigns should also be carried out in communities of origin, through the media and public debates, on the hazards of migration and the difficulties faced by returnees. In addition, migrants should, while still in the host country, be provided with help in preparing for their return through investment in business development in economically productive sectors.

4. Regional initiatives.

A broader approach should be taken to tackle the root causes of recurrent food insecurity and mal-

nutrition. This will involve strengthening the various countries' institutional and governance landscape and focusing on programmes that promote social cohesion, peace, security and development.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Technical education and vocational training.

Education ministries should be encouraged to provide literacy classes to returnees and to build the capacity of technical schools within the region. In the medium-to-long term, local authorities and opinion leaders (including traditional authorities, youth groups and the local media) should work with education departments to enhance the appeal of education

and the acquisition of viable employment skills. This could be achieved by setting up scholarship schemes for students in need, enforcing the quotas established by regional educational institutions, and offering continuous public education (including outreach programmes, durbars, and the sponsorship of inter-district competitions among schools) to provide attractive rewards to winning schools and pupils.

2. Risk-management strategies.

Risk-management strategies for coping with future crises of this sort should be established at the local level. Such strategies should be integrated into any existing local disaster-management strategies.

REFERENCES

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2011a *Humanitarian Emergency Response to the Libyan Crisis. Seven-month report on IOM's response: 28 February – 27 September 2011.* IOM, Geneva. Available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/media/docs/reports/MENA-Seven-Month-Report.pdf>.
- 2011b *IOM Needs Assessments Reports: Ghana, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Senegal.* Unpublished. Available from IOM, Geneva, upon request.
- 2012 *Migrants Caught In Crisis: The IOM Experience in Libya.* IOM, Geneva.



© All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Organization for Migration
17 Route des Morillons
C.P. 71, CH-1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland
Tel.: +41.22.717 91 11 • Fax: +41.22.798 61 50
E-mail: hq@iom.int • Internet: www.iom.int