PACES

Making migration and migration policy decisions amidst societal transformations

Migration decision-making after return: returnee perspectives in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal

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Introduction

Over the past decade, return and reintegration have become central priorities of European migration policy. At EU level, the 2021 Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration[1] positions voluntary return and sustainable reintegration as key pillars of the EU's approach to managing migration flows, alongside further measures introduced in the Pact on Migration and Asylum. In parallel, legislative negotiations are ongoing on a new regulation establishing a common system for returns, which would replace the 2008 Return Directive and further harmonise procedures, responsibilities and safeguards across Member States.[2] These policy developments have gone hand in hand with substantial financial and operational investments, including the expansion of Frontex's mandate in the field of returns and the creation of its EU Reintegration Programme, which Member States increasingly call on to organise assisted returns and reintegration.[3]

Within this evolving framework, there has been a strong push to increase the uptake of assisted return. Departures supported through so-called Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)[4] schemes are considered more cost-effective and less politically and diplomatically contentious than forced removals. Member States and the European Commission have therefore invested in strengthening voluntary return and improving the assistance provided to its returnees, for example through the Return and Reintegration Facility and other funding instruments that allow for experimentation and tailoring of different reintegration approaches.

The objective underpinning these efforts is 'sustainable reintegration'.[5] Yet, there is no agreement among countries of origin and destination over what exactly makes reintegration 'sustainable' and whether that excludes future migration of returnees. While permanence in the country of origin can be seen as a key indicator of successful reintegration, access to legal migration pathways may allow for better economic, social, and psychosocial outcomes for some returning migrants. There is, however, some agreement that reintegration support should reduce the likelihood of irregular migration after return by mitigating the immediate hardship that returnees might face without assistance. These different perspectives create a degree of ambiguity and, at times, tension around programme goals: whether reintegration assistance is primarily about enhancing returnees' self-sufficiency and well-being, or also about migration control and containment.

While evidence on reintegration outcomes remains limited (whether in terms of economic self-sufficiency, social embedding, or renewed migration aspirations) it is clear is that reintegration presents persistent challenges in many settings. Programmes typically have limited scope to tailor support to the diverse profiles and experiences of returnees. In

addition, most assistance focuses on the individual level, such as access to skills training, funding for small businesses or psychosocial support. However, the broader structural constraints that shape life chances in many countries of origin, such as limited economic opportunities and weak social protection systems, are more rarely addressed. As a result, the available evidence suggests that reintegration outcomes for many returnees remain fragile.[6]

Senegal occupies a prominent place as an important partner for European countries in matters related to migration management and return. Since the so-called Cayucos crisis of 2006, when high numbers of boats departed from West African coasts towards the Canary Islands, Senegal has been a priority partner for the European Union and several Member States in efforts to reduce irregular movements along the Atlantic route. In parallel, Senegal has been a major recipient of external support to bolster return and reintegration efforts, notably via the EU–IOM Joint Initiative and its successor programme the Migrant Protection, Return, and Reintegration Programme (MPRR), as well as additional EU and bilateral projects.[7] As of late 2025, following renewed increases in departures from Senegalese shores, Senegal and the European Union are engaged in discussions on a new comprehensive partnership agreement.

This memo presents the results from fieldwork conducted in Senegal in September 2025 and contributes to two questions: how the governance framework for reintegration in Senegal is evolving, and to what extent returnees supported under assisted return schemes wish to leave again. By combining a review of the emerging evidence on migration intentions after return with qualitative research conducted in Senegal, the analysis feeds into ongoing policy debates on how to design reintegration support that is both meaningful for returnees and realistic about the migration intentions of returnees.

Migration after return – what do we know?

Monitoring what happens to migrants once they have returned to their origin countries is difficult and evidence on post-return migration trajectories remains limited. This section reviews the available evidence on intentions to migrate again among people who have returned to their country of origin with some form of assistance, mainly through AVRR programmes. While most AVRR programmes aim to monitor their beneficiaries for up to 12 months - the duration during which they are eligible to receive reintegration support - implementing organisations often lose contact as returnees change phone numbers, move, or disengage from projects. This is particularly likely when people plan to leave again, since many are reluctant to share updated information or to disclose onward migration plans to reintegration providers, whom they may perceive as being linked to authorities and efforts to control migration.

Migration intentions and aspirations among returnees

Despite these constraints, a small body of research shows that intentions to migrate again are common among returnees, even if not all translate into actual action. In fact, several studies highlight the distinction between *aspirations* and *concrete intentions* to migrate. For

instance, in one study focusing mainly on people who had returned through AVRR programmes, only about 10 per cent of returnees reported clear, concrete plans to leave again, whereas more than half expressed a desire or aspiration to leave again at some point in the future.[8] Similarly, one comparative analysis of return surveys in Algeria, Armenia, Mali, Morocco and Tunisia finds that roughly 10–25 per cent of returning migrants expressed a clear intentions to emigrate again, while sizeable shares are either unsure (around one fifth on average) or say they do not wish to migrate again (around one quarter).[9] These findings suggest that for many returnees, the post-return period is characterised by uncertainty and ambivalence rather than clear, fixed plans. It also shows that returnees may keep migration "on the horizon" even when they lack the resources, information, or opportunities to act on that aspiration in the short term.

Recent experimental work with assisted returnees from Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia reinforces this picture of widespread but conditional interest in migration after. In that study, which explicitly focuses on people who returned with support from an AVRR programme, 24 per cent of returnees in Sudan, 12 per cent in Somalia and 3 per cent in Ethiopia preferred to migrate again when asked to choose between staying and leaving in hypothetical scenarios. An additional group (28 per cent in Sudan, 24 per cent in Somalia, and 13 per cent in Ethiopia) were "conditional movers", meaning they would consider leaving again depending on the balance between expected income at home and abroad, perceived risks on the journey, and the costs of migration.[10] In other words, a majority either wanted to stay or only contemplated leaving under specific, relatively favourable conditions.

Qualitative research also shows migration aspirations among returnees from Europe. In a study of migrants who returned from Sweden to Afghanistan or Iraq after rejected asylum applications and who departed either via AVRR programmes or via forced deportations, a large majority of respondents expressed a wish to leave again.[11] For many in this study, return was seen as a temporary, imposed interruption in a longer-term migration project rather than a definitive end to their migration project.

Finally, some research indicates that many returnees who want to leave again express a preference for returning to their previous host country. For example, OECD analysis finds that around sixty per cent of such returnees have their original destination in mind.[12] Among those returning from Sweden to Afghanistan or Iraq, most indicated that they would like to go back to Sweden or, if that were not possible, move on to another EU country, preferably through regular, legal migration pathways rather than risking irregular routes. In the experimental study of assisted returnees in Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia, the main desired destinations vary somewhat by country but are concentrated in Europe and the United States, with South Africa and, in the Ethiopian case, Saudi Arabia also featuring prominently.

Factors influencing the decision-making process among returnees

Decisions about leaving again after a return are, like initial migration intentions, deeply personal and shaped by a mix of personal, structural and community factors. However, there is an important difference between first-time migrants and those who have already

spent time abroad. Returnees have direct experience of the realities, risks and opportunities associated with migration, and they are familiar with at least one destination country. This prior knowledge is likely to reduce uncertainty and can make assessments of routes, risks, and potential gains more concrete, so that the decision-making process after return is different from that of people contemplating international migration for the first time.

As such, economic conditions and livelihood prospects still play a major role in returnees' decision-making. Across different studies, limited access to decent work and low or unstable income are central reasons why some people continue to consider leaving again. However, compared to first-time migrants, the need to repay debts incurred during the initial journey can further strain returnees' finances and create additional pressure to look for opportunities elsewhere.[13]

In addition, returnees also navigate social norms and community expectations. In places with strong widespread aspirations for migration, returning without visible success may be experienced as a failure, giving rise to shame and stigma in everyday interactions. Research with people who returned from Sweden to Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, illustrates how pressures to meet family expectations, fear of being seen as having failed, and a lack of social acceptance of return can sustain aspirations to move again.[14]

Given their previous experiences of migration, there is some evidence that returnees attach particular weight to how dangerous a new journey might be, whether they could obtain a visa or residence permit, and what would happen if the move failed. For instance, the experimental research in East Africa suggests that, among those who are open to moving again, perceived risks on the route and at destination are as important as income differentials in shaping preferences. Furthermore, many returnees explicitly state a preference for regular, legal pathways if they move again, and the absence of such options could either deter further movement or leave decisions in a state of prolonged uncertainty.[15]

Finally, the overall reintegration experience acts as a crosscutting factor that can amplify or moderate these dynamics. Where reintegration remains fragile – economically, socially, or psychologically – the idea of leaving again may become more attractive, although a lack of resources can at the same time trap people in involuntary immobility. Conversely, more successful reintegration can strengthen the sense of belonging and reduce the appeal of another move, but it can also provide the financial and social capital needed to consider migration again if opportunities at home remain limited.

Methodology

This memo draws on two main sources of information: a review of existing literature of migration after return and qualitative interviews carried out in Senegal with institutional actors and returned migrants. The fieldwork took place in Dakar between 8 and 15 September 2025. Most interviews were conducted in person, with some conversations held by phone where an in-person meeting was not possible.

Two groups of interviewees were targeted. First, key-informant interviews were conducted with representatives of Senegalese authorities such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Interior Ministry, international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), development actors including GIZ and AECID, reintegration service providers such as Caritas Senegal, and diplomatic missions such as the EU Delegation. A semi-structured interview guide was shared with participants in advance to frame the discussion. All of these interviews were conducted in French. In total, sixteen key-informant interviews were completed.

Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with returned migrants. Returnees were identified through several channels. The majority were referred by reintegration service providers previously interviewed, including four individuals identified by Caritas and two identified with the support of the NGO Sama Chance, which has in the past collaborated with GIZ on reintegration support. In addition, a snowball sampling approach was used. At the end of each interview, participants were asked whether they could suggest other potential interviewees, which led to a further three interviews. These conversations were conducted in French and Wolof, with interpretation support from a local translator. In total, nine interviews with returnees were conducted.

Before each interview, participants were provided with an information and consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and their right to decline any question or end the interview at any time. This information was also explained orally. Interviewees signed the consent form and received a copy, which included contact details for MPI Europe, should they wish to follow up on how their data would be used.

With the consent of participants, interviews were audio-recorded. Excerpts and points most relevant to the research questions were transcribed and complemented by detailed interview notes. The analysis involved inductive coding of this material to identify recurring themes across interviews, followed by a structuring of the findings around common patterns and contrasts in institutional perspectives and returnees' own accounts.

Fieldwork findings from Senegal

This section presents the main findings from the fieldwork in Senegal, focusing first on the EU's programming and support for reintegration (A), as well as the institutional landscape in Senegal (B), and then on migration intentions after return drawing on interviews with returnees (C).

EU programming in Senegal on return and reintegration

Interviews with European officials, development actors and representatives of international organisations show that EU engagement on return and reintegration has evolved significantly over nearly two decades. Since the early 2000s, when an increase of departures from West Africa towards the Canary Islands called for new approaches to cooperation, there have been ongoing EU investments in return and reintegration support in Senegal. As one official noted, this crisis demonstrated the urgency of addressing both irregular migration departures and the need for adequate support structures for those returning.[16]

Since then, EU cooperation has expanded in scope and complexity, moving through several phases that reflect broader shifts in development financing and migration governance frameworks.

The groundwork for many ongoing activities was laid during the period of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).[17] In particular, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration[18], implemented between 2017 and 2023, was mentioned as the flagship instrument, providing assistance to thousands of Senegalese migrants returning from transit countries, especially Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia. In parallel, development-oriented projects such as Governance, Migration and Development (GMD)[19], also financed by the EUTF and implemented by AECID together with the Senegalese ministry of foreign affairs, were cited as one of the main tools for building institutional capacity around return and reintegration. However, several interviewees also underlined the limits of this project-based support: once EU funding ended, as with GMD in 2023, it was difficult for Senegal to sustain the capacities and services that had been created, and, as one implementing partner put it, when the funding stopped, many of the activities that had been built up came to a halt.[20]

Since the end of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), interviewees described a transition phase and some re-thinking within parts of the European Union. Overall, there appears to be growing recognition that project-based approaches have delivered limited results, especially when it comes to building national capacities and ownership.[21] The Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) is now gradually phasing out the follow-up programme to the EU–IOM Joint Initiative, the Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa (MPRR-SSA). The new emphasis is more clearly on strengthening institutional capacities and governance structures, partly echoing the approach taken under the previous GMD project. This shift and new support measures are financed under the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), with the EU announcing in late 2024 a €30 million action to reinforce Senegal's capacity to manage migration, with a stated emphasis on return and reintegration support alongside efforts to prevent irregular departures.[22] However, interviews with development practitioners in Dakar also pointed to some unease with this framing, reflecting wider debates about the securitisation of development aid. For instance, one practitioner highlighted concerns about the sustainability of this approach in the absence of local economic development, and its potential impact on relationships with local partners.[23]

In addition to these EU initiatives, several EU Member States also maintain bilateral programmes in Senegal. France maintains longstanding cooperation through the Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII), which implements the voluntary return programme for Senegalese migrants and hosts a referral desk for returnees under the EU-funded Return and Reintegration Facility. Germany, through the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), played a major role until 2024, creating the Centre Sénégalais pour l'Appui à l'Emploi, la Migration et la Réintégration (CSAEM) with the National Agency for the Promotion of Youth Employment (ANPEJ) to offer employment counselling and

job-matching services to returnees. However, Germany's support was terminated in 2024 following a broader geopolitical refocusing of Germany's development cooperation. Finally, Belgium, via its Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) and in partnership with Caritas Senegal, offers reintegration assistance for returnees from Belgium, providing start-up support, training, and psychosocial assistance.

Overall, these initiatives point to a sustained EU interest in working with Senegal on return and reintegration, not only to manage departures but also to shape what happens after return. While funding instruments and programming approaches have shifted over time, the trajectory is clear: EU institutions and Member States are seeking ways to make returns more orderly and to support reintegration in ways that, at least in principle, reduce the incentives for irregular migration after return.

Senegal's institutional and governance framework for reintegration

Interviews with government officials and partners in Dakar show a governance framework in flux. Since the 2024 elections and the launch of Vision Sénégal 2050, the new government has placed a strong rhetorical emphasis on strategic sovereignty.[24] In terms of migration policy, however, interviewees described more continuity than rupture.[25] At the same time, they pointed to a governance set-up that has been in suspension for several years. In particular, the National Migration Policy, drafted with funding from the EUTF and support from IOM, was technically validated but has not been politically adopted. Civil society representatives criticise the policy for focusing too heavily on migration control, paying too little attention to legal pathways and protection needs, and reflecting European priorities more than domestic ones.[26] As a result, the policy appears to have lost traction, leaving mandates and responsibilities around return and reintegration only partially clarified.

Against this backdrop, two ministries share the main responsibilities. The Ministry of Interior and Public Security anchors return and reintegration within the National Strategy to Combat Irregular Migration, which provides the operational framework for preventing departures, intercepting boats and, to a lesser extent, organising follow-up after return. The Ministry of African Integration and Foreign Affairs (MIAAE) is the principal interlocutor for assisted voluntary return and for cooperation with IOM and European partners. It also oversees the Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Orientation et de Suivi (BAOS), which act as regional offices tasked with receiving returnees and connecting them to support. Fieldwork nevertheless points to considerable ambiguity and overlapping interests. While the MIAAE presents the BAOS to European partners as key structures for overseeing reintegration, the same network is also mobilised for other priorities, including the circular migration scheme for agricultural workers with Spain and broader ambitions to strengthen links with the Senegalese diaspora. In practice however, the BAOS have almost no dedicated budget and very limited staffing, reducing their capability to deliver on these priorities.

Overall, the institutional and governance framework reflects competing priorities and external constraints. In recent years, EU funding has enabled important advances in terms of capacity and policy frameworks around return and reintegration, and officials in both

MIAAE and the Ministry of Interior express interest to continue working on these issues. At the same time, return and reintegration sit alongside other political priorities, notably diaspora engagement and regular mobility opportunities. In addition, the government also adopted strong rhetoric against smugglers following tragic shipwrecks.[27] In this context, and among a severe economic crisis affecting Senegal, support for returnees remains limited and fragmented and project-driven, which in turn helps explain why, for some returnees, renewed migration attempts after return remain on the horizon.

Senegalese returnees and their migration intentions after return

The previous sections have shown how the European Union has invested heavily in return and reintegration support in Senegal, through successive funding instruments and various partnerships that explicitly focus on the objective of sustainable reintegration and the reduction of irregular departures. At the same time, Senegal's own governance framework has also evolved. While authorities emphasize the need for reintegration of returning migrants and the prevention of irregular travel, these objectives sit alongside other domestic priorities such as diaspora engagement and the expansion of legal pathways, which respond more directly to internal pressures and priorities, notably driven by the limited economic opportunities in the country and the search for investments and remittances.

Against this backdrop, this section looks more closely at how returnees themselves perceive their future, and how they talk about the possibility of leaving again. To this end, MPI conducted in-depth interviews with nine men who had left Senegal and subsequently returned. Their profiles varied: four had returned from Belgium with support from Caritas under an assisted voluntary return programme; three had been deported from Germany, but received post-return assistance funded by GIZ; and two had attempted to reach the Canary Islands by boat but were intercepted and brought back. The men were in their mid-twenties to early fifties; eight were living in Dakar at the time of interview and one near Saint-Louis, and they had varying living and family circumstances. This is therefore a small, non-representative group of returnees, and there is a possibility that it reflects some degree of bias, notably in the selection of returnees who benefitted from support from Caritas since Caritas selected and invited interview participants. However, their experiences illustrate the diversity of return pathways and reintegration support, and offer a useful starting point for analysing their intentions and aspirations to migrate again.

Across the nine interviews, one returnee reported concrete plans to leave again and was actively preparing a new journey; two expressed a wish to migrate but without a clear idea of how to do so; one had previously considered leaving again but no longer had current plans; and the remaining five said they did not intend or aspire to migrate. The interviewee with the most concrete plans had identified the leader of the local smuggling network and managed to recover the money he had paid for a previous, failed boat crossing. He explained that he is now working to earn enough to finance another attempt by sea. The other man, from near St Louis, with a strong wish to leave again was unemployed and in poor mental health during the interview, and described feeling unable to organise any

departure in practice, despite his strong desire to leave again. Among him and those who said they did not plan to migrate again, all stressed that irregular routes were too risky and that they would only consider moving in the future through regular, legal pathways, having found the experience of being in an irregular situation abroad too difficult.

As the existing literature highlights, intentions to migrate again are closely linked to how returnees are embedded in their communities (see Section 2). Several interviewees described strong feelings of exclusion and stigma, including suspicions that they must have committed a crime or 'done something wrong' to be deported. One returnee who benefitted from Caritas' support said: "*You will get a lot of criticism [upon return], directly into your face and behind your back*".[28] The returnee near Saint-Louis explained that "*people in the village think I made a mistake or committed a crime, that it is my fault they sent me back to Senegal… the authorities also rejected me*."[29] Even more than a year after his deportation, he said he sometimes wakes up thinking "*I am really here now.*"[30] This sense of failure is reinforced by misunderstanding from neighbours. The neighbours are asking: "*When are you going back to Germany?*" To which he thinks: "*But going back where? I can't return to Germany.*"[31] Another returnee without plans to leave again said he had never told his full story before because of shame that he had not succeeded.

Others, by contrast, described efforts to move beyond this stigma, especially by recasting themselves as community resources. One man who had twice tried and failed to reach Spain is now active in an association of returning migrants in a fishing suburb of Dakar, and several of those who returned with support from Caritas participate in regular peer exchanges and were informally discussing the idea of founding a returnee association. In addition, several others described growing family responsibilities which would not allow for a renewed migration attempt. One returnee who was deported from Germany explained: "*I'm in charge of a big family. My father has four wives and my mother has seven children. I am responsible for them.*"[32]

In addition, economic conditions and debt after return came out as central challenges during the interviews. Almost all returnees described the immediate post-return period as extremely difficult financially, and eight of the nine interviewees described some degree of ongoing struggle regarding their livelihoods. One interviewee noted, "*Next year [when my travel ban expires], I would try again, if my situation here doesn't improve. But not by boat, it's too dangerous.*"[33] Another echoed the daily struggle to get by, saying, "*It's impossible to live like this with so few resources in Senegal.*"[34] Even among those who benefited from more generous support, notably from Caritas' reintegration grants, some reported ongoing uncertainty about their livelihoods. As one explained, "*I had received 50,000 XOF to raise chickens, but it didn't work. The space to rent in Dakar is too expensive… I reinvested my money into a small shop; it didn't work. Now we opened a restaurant with my wife.*"[35] By contrast, one returnee had moved outside of Dakar to take over his grandfather's farm and said he was economically stable, employing two people and seeking to expand.

Finally, when discussing their future plans, only a few interviewees referred spontaneously to the assistance they had received through reintegration programmes or state structures,

and these references were often ambivalent. One man, who had been enrolled in support delivered by the German development agency in cooperation with the National Agency for the Promotion of Youth Employment (ANPEJ), explained that he had been promised 200,000 XOF but ultimately received only a fraction and suspected that part of the money had been diverted. Another recalled that, when he was returned from Spain in 2005, state support consisted mainly of a flight ticket, new clothes and 10,000 XOF, and he felt that the highly publicised arrival was driven more by public-relations considerations than by concern for his situation. By contrast, the men who had returned with support from Caritas spoke positively about the help they received, describing close, ongoing personal relationships with staff who had guided them through the first months after return and, in some cases, additional funding or in-kind support that allowed them to start or expand their businesses. It should be noted, however, that compared with the other interviewees, Caritas beneficiaries received by far the most comprehensive and individually tailored support.

Conclusions

Across profiles and reintegration pathways, future migration remains on the horizon for some, whether as a concrete plan or, more commonly, a backup if prospects at home do not improve. While a few, especially those with stronger community support or business success, describe new roots in Senegal, many others describe feeling trapped between limited opportunities, ongoing social pressures, and a desire for mobility that has not been fully resolved by their return experience. At the same time, they are acutely aware of the risks of irregular journeys and of living without regular status in Europe, and several spoke of having "lost years" of their life that they could have devoted to gaining qualifications or founding a family. Among those still contemplating migration, most emphasised that any future move would be through legal channels only, as the risks were too important, but also showed awareness that these channels remain mostly inaccessible to them.

In this context, assistance received through AVRR programmes or national institutions such as the BAOS or ANPEJ was generally seen as helpful, especially when it softened the harsh impacts immediately after return. However, what appears to matter more for longer-term intentions is sustained, personalised support, such as the follow-up offered by Caritas or the solidarity and purpose found in returnee associations. While reintegration assistance can thus play some role in reducing vulnerabilities and supporting returnee businesses, the main factors shaping return intentions appear to go beyond the scope of support offered in reintegration programmes, namely to feel accepted, regain social status, and earn a livelihood that allows them to provide for themselves and their families. This dimension of social embedding emerged clearly across the interviews.

For EU policymakers, these findings invite a re-examination of how sustainable return is defined and measured, and how reintegration support is designed and evaluated. If sustainability is equated mainly with physical presence in the country of origin, important aspects of returnees' realities remain invisible, such as their economic precarity, social stigma, unresolved aspirations for mobility. A more robust understanding of sustainable reintegration would need to take this broader context into account and assess whether

development and reintegration programmes could help create the conditions under which staying becomes a choice rather than the absence of alternatives. In addition, European policymakers, return and reintegration practitioners may want to take a more proactive stance on addressing the migration intentions of returnees, e.g. by offering support to accessing legal migration pathways within the region of return.

Migration decision-making after return: returnee perspectives in Côte d'Ivoire

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire has become one of the EU's most important partners in West Africa in terms of migration management. Driven by a sharp rise in Ivorian nationals arriving at Italy's maritime borders, up 305 percent in 2023 compared to the previous year, [36] the country has moved firmly onto the EU's agenda, most recently through new cooperation actions involving a readmission agreement and counter-smuggling initiatives.[37]

EU engagement on return and reintegration has grown accordingly. The main multilateral instrument, the Migrant Protection, Return, and Reintegration Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa (MPRR-SSA), [38] has supported over 3,107 Ivorian returnees, while bilateral programmes, e.g. those operated by France or Belgium, provide individualised support to smaller numbers returning from Europe. At the structural level, the EU-funded development activities such as the MIGRET project, jointly implemented by IOM, Enabel, and Expertise France, reinvesting in national institutional capacities, including the development of a national return and reintegration strategy and a referral mechanism.[39]

At the same time, Côte d'Ivoire's own governance framework for return and reintegration remains in flux, with a national migration policy stalled at the technical level. The national return and reintegration strategy has been approved technically.[40] While the Direction générale des Ivoiriens de l'extérieur (DGIE) provides a relatively strong institutional anchor, several cross-cutting governance challenges constrain effective reintegration. The absence of dedicated national budget lines creates strong dependence on international donor funding, which is neither predictable nor always aligned with domestic priorities.[41] At the same time, reintegration programmes cover only assisted returnees, leaving people removed through forced return and those who return spontaneously without formal support.

This memo presents the results from fieldwork conducted in Abidjan in February 2026 and explores to what extent returnees supported under assisted return schemes wish to leave

again, and what implications that may suggest for policymakers and reintegration practitioners.

Methodology

This memo draws on two main sources of information.

In August 2025, and as part of MPI Europe's ongoing work on return and reintegration, researchers conducted key informant interviews with institutional actors in Abidjan. In total, 19 actors were consulted, including government ministries and agencies (DGIE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, ONECI, PNSM, CNLTP, DAIP, AGEFOP, the Agence Emploi Jeune, and OSCN), international organisations and development actors (IOM, OFII, AVSI, Enabel, and Expertise France), and civil society organisations (CIP, GRVID, ARMCI, and LEISAD). While these interviews were conducted under a separate research project and do not constitute PACES fieldwork, they have informed the contextual understanding that underpins parts of the analysis in this memo, in particular the sections on EU programming and the institutional landscape.

As part of PACES fieldwork, 11 qualitative interviews were also carried out in Côte d'Ivoire with returned migrants. The fieldwork took place in Abidjan between February 8 and February 13, 2026. Most interviews were conducted in person and two on the phone. Returnees were identified through several channels. The majority were referred by migrants associations, namely the Groupement des Retours Volontaires des Ivoiriens de la Diaspora (GRVID), the Association pour la Réintégration des Migrants en Côte d'Ivoire (ARMCI) and the ONG LEISAD. A snowball sampling approach was also used: at the end of each interview, participants were asked whether they could suggest other potential interviewees.

Before each interview, participants were provided with an information and consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to decline any question or end the interview at any time. This information was also explained orally. Interviewees signed the consent form and received a copy, which included contact details for MPI Europe, should they wish to follow up on how their data would be used. With the consent of participants, interviews were audio-recorded. Excerpts and points most relevant to the research questions were transcribed and complemented by detailed interview notes. The analysis involved inductive coding of this material to identify recurring themes across interviews, followed by a structuring of the findings around common patterns and contrasts in returnees' accounts. In total, 11 interviews with returnees were conducted. All names used in this memo are pseudonyms. Quotes are translated from French.

EU programming in Côte d'Ivoire on return and reintegration

EU engagement on matters related to return and reintegration in Côte d'Ivoire has been shaped by a rise in Ivorian nationals arriving at Italy's maritime borders (up 305 per cent in 2023 compared to the previous year) and by new cooperation actions involving a

readmission agreement and counter-smuggling initiatives.[42] The main multilateral instrument, the Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa (MPRR-SSA), has supported over 3,107 Ivorian returnees between August 2022 and August 2025, with the majority having returned from North Africa.[43] At the structural level, the MIGRET project, jointly implemented by IOM, Enabel, and Expertise France, is investing in national institutional capacities, including the development of a national return and reintegration strategy and a national referral mechanism, both of which have been technically validated.[44]

Within Côte d'Ivoire, the *Direction générale des Ivoiriens de l'extérieur* (DGIE), created in 2013 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provides a dedicated institutional anchor on matters relating to return and reintegration. Yet, at a strategic political level these questions remain sensitive, and the draft of a national migration policy has stalled. The national return and reintegration strategy, though technically approved, has not yet been operationalised.[45] The absence of dedicated national budget lines for return and reintegration creates dependence on international donor funding, which raises questions about the longer-term sustainability of services funded through them.[46] Finally, bilateral support from some European countries, such as France (via OFII) or Italy (via AVSI) provides highly personalized but small-scale assistance to returning migrants. This stands in contrast to the majority of returnees (including those returning through forced removal or spontaneously) and who typically receive no assistance.[47]

Ivorian returnees and their migration intentions after return

Participants' profiles varied: eight had returned through an assisted voluntary return programme (three from France via OFII, two from Italy, one from Germany, one from Belgium and one that was intercepted along the migration route), and three had been forcibly removed (two from France, one from Italy). Eight were men and three were women. They ranged in age from 22 to 41, and their backgrounds spanned several regions, including Bouaké, Daloa, Man, Korhogo, Gagnoa, Odiénné, and Bondoukou. All were living in Abidjan or its immediate surroundings at the time of interview. This is a small, non-representative group and the sample likely reflects some degree of selection bias, particularly as several returnees were referred through former migrant associations. Their experiences do, however, illustrate the diversity of return pathways and reintegration trajectories and offer a useful lens for analysing post-return migration intentions and aspirations.

Migration intentions and the irregular pathway dilemma

Across the 11 interviews, three returnees reported some form of concrete or near-concrete plan to leave again, four expressed migration as a conditional aspiration or "backup" if their situation did not improve, three said they did not intend to migrate again in the near future, and one described himself as economically stable and anchored by family responsibilities.

A critical tension emerged in the interviews between stated preferences for regular pathways and the reality that irregular migration represents the only accessible option for most returnees. Several interviewees initially emphasized that they would only leave again through legal channels. One woman returned from Belgium stated: *"I sometimes imagine leaving again, but I would never risk the irregular route. If I go, it has to be official, a visa, a contract"*[48]. Further probing revealed a more complex picture. Many returnees acknowledged that given their profiles, education levels, limited professional networks, and lack of financial capital, securing a work visa or other legal entry pathway to Europe was highly unlikely. As one returnee put it bluntly: *"Of course I would prefer to go with papers. But who gives papers to people like us? So you have to choose: stay here with nothing, or try again the hard way."*[49]

This recognition that irregular migration remains the only realistic pathway shaped how returnees thought about future mobility. Several described a calculus in which they weighed the known dangers of irregular routes against the certainty of economic hardship at home. One man who had returned from France after detention explained: *"I know the route is dangerous. I saw people die. But what is the alternative? Stay here and watch your family suffer? At least if you go, there is a chance."*[50] Another, who had attempted the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands before being intercepted and returned, described how reintegration assistance had provided temporary relief but not long-term stability: *"The money they gave me, it helped for a few months. But now it's finished and I'm back where I started. So I'm saving again. Not to start a business here, to try the route one more time."*[51]

This dynamic, in which reintegration assistance is consumed or even strategically diverted to fund another migration attempt, was mentioned by several interviewees. One returnee from Italy who had received support for a small trading activity explained: *"I used some of the money for the business, yes. But I also kept some aside. Because if this doesn't work, I need to have something to fall back on. And for me, that means trying to go back."*[52] Another described the psychological function of maintaining this financial reserve: *"Just knowing I have money saved, even a small amount, it gives me hope. It means I'm not completely stuck. If things get really bad, I have an option."*[53]

Awareness of risks and the "it won't happen to me" mentality

Despite widespread awareness of the increased dangers facing migrants attempting to reach Europe most returnees contemplating remigration expressed a persistent belief that they personally might succeed where others had failed. This "it won't happen to me" mentality was particularly strong among younger returnees and those who had not personally experienced the most severe forms of violence or near-death situations during their initial journeys.

One returnee who had been detained in Libya during his first attempt but had not experienced torture or life-threatening violence explained: *"Yes, I heard about the massacres, the boats sinking, all of that. But you hear good stories too. People who made it, who are working now in Italy or France. You think: why not me? Maybe I'll be one of the lucky*

ones."[54] Another, who had closely followed news about EU efforts to strengthen border controls and cooperation with North African countries to prevent departures, acknowledged these developments but remained undeterred: *"They can make it harder, they can push boats back, they can arrest smugglers. But people will always find a way. The smugglers adapt. The routes change. You just have to be smart and pick the right moment."*[55]

At the same time, a subset of returnees (particularly those who had experienced severe trauma during their initial journeys, including detention) expressed genuine fear about attempting irregular routes again. One man who had been forcibly returned from France after spending time in detention described recurring nightmares: *"I still see the center in my sleep. I hear the guards. I think about what could have happened if I had tried to cross the sea instead of going through documents. I don't want to live that again."*[56] Yet even this individual, when pressed, admitted that if his economic situation deteriorated further, he might reconsider: *"For now, I say never again. But if my children are starving, if I have no other choice, I don't know what I would do."*[57]

Social stigma and community reintegration

Several interviewees described strong feelings of exclusion and stigma upon return. One man, forcibly removed from France, explained: *"When you come back like this, people think you did something wrong. They don't say it to your face, but you feel it. The neighbours, even the family, they're watching."*[58] A young man who had returned voluntarily from France described the psychological cost of return as compounding economic pressure: *"You come back and everyone expects you to immediately be a man and provide. But mentally, you swing between relief to be home and regret about lost years."*[59] Another, forcibly removed from Italy, said: *"I have not told many people the full story. There is shame in coming back empty-handed. You keep it inside."*[60]

The stigma was particularly acute for those who had been away for several years and returned without visible material success. In neighbourhoods where migration to Europe is seen as a pathway to prosperity, coming back without having "made it" was experienced as a form of social failure. One returnee described how his standing in the community had diminished: *"Before I left, people respected me. They thought I was going to succeed, send money, maybe even sponsor others to come. Now they see me struggling in the same neighbourhood, doing the same small jobs. Some people mock me, others just avoid me."*[61] This loss of social status created additional psychological pressure that, for some, reinforced the desire to attempt migration again as a way to redeem themselves in the eyes of their families and communities.

Others described efforts to move beyond stigma, particularly by recasting themselves as community resources or by drawing on peer solidarity. One man who had returned voluntarily from Italy and was rebuilding a phone-repair activity in Abobo reflected: *"The only way to get past the shame is to show results. If your business works, people forget. But it takes time, and in the meantime, you live with it."*[62]

Economic precarity and the inadequacy of reintegration support

Economic conditions and debt came out as central challenges across almost all interviews. The amounts provided through reintegration programmes, while helpful in the immediate aftermath of return, were consistently described as insufficient to establish financially viable businesses or achieve economic stability. Several interviewees were frank about the structural constraints that made small business success extremely difficult in Côte d'Ivoire's current economic context. High rent, intense competition, limited access to credit, unreliable electricity, and low purchasing power among potential customers all combined to create an environment where the survival rate for micro-enterprises was very low. One returnee gone through the reintegration IOM programme explained: *"€1,400 sounds like a lot when you first hear it. But when you start a business, it disappears fast. You need space, you need stock, you need equipment. Then you have rent every month, you have to eat, you have family obligations. Within six months, the money is gone and you're back to zero."*[63]

This economic precarity directly fuelled remigration intentions for several returnees. As one put it: *"If the support was enough to really build something solid, maybe I would stay. But it's not. It's just enough to survive for a while, then you're back to struggling. So people think: why struggle here when I could struggle in Europe and at least have a chance at something better?"*[64] Another returnee, who was actively saving money from informal work to fund another migration attempt, explained his calculation: *"I can use €2,000 to try to start a business here, and it will probably fail. Or I can use that same €2,000 to pay a smuggler and try to reach Europe. The second option is risky, yes, but at least if I make it, the payoff is much bigger."*[65]

Several interviewees described the conditionality of disbursements as a source of both structure and frustration. As one returnee put it: *"The meetings help because they push you to stay engaged. But sometimes you lose a whole day going to a meeting on the other side of the city, and you come home and you have not earned anything. So you ask yourself, is it worth it?"*[66] One man who had been forcibly removed from France described a gap between what had been promised and what he received in post-return employment support, fuelling distrust and rumours among peers: *"They told me I would receive help for a project. What I actually got was much less. People talk. You hear things. I don't want to accuse anyone, but it leaves a bad taste."*[67]

Among those who received the most comprehensive support, particularly those assisted by OFII and AVSI, assessments were more positive, with several describing sustained relationships with case managers who had followed them beyond the initial post-return period and provided practical help in navigating public services and business planning. One woman who had returned with OFII support from France said: *"My adviser didn't just give me money and disappear. She called, she followed up. When there was a problem with the paperwork for my catering activity, she helped me solve it. That made a real difference."*[68]

The role of detention in return decisions

Another finding from the interviews concerns the role that immigration detention played in returnees' narratives and decisions to accept assisted voluntary return rather than continue attempting to regularize their status or remain irregularly in Europe. Among the eight returnees who had returned through assisted voluntary return programmes, five had spent time in immigration detention before agreeing to return, with detention periods ranging from a few days to several months. All five described detention as a critical turning point that altered their prospects on staying versus returning.

The uncertainty about detention duration emerged as particularly troubling to returnees. One man who had been detained in France for three weeks before accepting return explained: *"Every day I asked: when will I get out? And they said: we don't know, it depends. One week became two weeks, then three. I saw other guys who had been there two months, three months. I started to think: how long will they keep me? What if it's six months? A year? That's when I said okay, I'll sign the papers, I'll go back."*[69]Another returnee who had been detained in Belgium described the psychological impact: *"When you're locked up and you don't know when you'll be released, your mind starts to break. You can't work, you can't earn money, you can't do anything. At least if you return voluntarily, you're free. You can try to rebuild something."*[70]

Several returnees explicitly stated that without detention, they would have continued trying to remain in Europe, either by appealing their asylum rejections, attempting to work informally, or moving to another European country. One woman who had been detained in France for ten days before agreeing to OFII-assisted return said: *"If they hadn't put me in the centre, I would have kept trying. I had friends who could help me find work without papers. But once you're locked up, everything changes. You feel helpless. They tell you: sign here and we'll help you start over at home, or stay here in detention indefinitely. That's not really a choice."*[71]

Among the returnees interviewed for this study, detention thus incentivized cooperation on their returns via assisted return programmes. However, it did not necessarily function as a deterrent to future irregular migration intentions. At the same time, several returnees who had been detained described lasting trauma from the experience, with some reporting nightmares, anxiety, and deep distrust of authorities. One man said: *"I still feel the walls closing in when I think about that place. It was worse than anything on the migration route. At least on the route, you're moving, you have some control. In detention, you're just waiting, powerless."*[72]

Preferences for legal migration and the recognition of limited options

When discussing future plans, nearly all interviewees initially emphasized that any future move would be through legal channels only. One man forcibly removed from France said: *"I think about leaving. But not like before, not without papers. I know what that life is. You are invisible. If there is a legal way, a contract, something official, yes. Otherwise I focus on*

here."[73] Another, returned voluntarily from Belgium, drew a sharp contrast between her experience of irregular status and what she would want for any future move: *"Living without papers is not living. You are hiding all the time. I would not do that again."*[74]

However, as noted earlier, this stated preference for regular pathways existed in tension with returnees' recognition that such pathways were largely inaccessible to them. The absence of accessible legal migration channels left several interviewees in a state of prolonged ambivalence, neither firmly anchored at home nor able to act on their aspirations, but gradually accepting that if they were to move again, it would have to be through irregular means.

Conclusions

For a significant share of returnees in Côte d'Ivoire, migration remains on the horizon, whether as a concrete plan or a conditional fallback if prospects at home do not improve. Many describe feeling caught between limited economic opportunities, persistent social stigma, and a desire for mobility which their return experience has not resolved.

A central tension runs through the interviews: most returnees express a preference for legal channels, yet recognise these are largely inaccessible given their profiles and resources. For those contemplating leaving again, irregular routes remain the only realistic option, and several described a gradual shift from "never again by irregular means" to reluctant acceptance. Some acknowledged reserving part of their reintegration assistance to fund a future attempt.

The interviews also give some insights into the effects of detention on migration intention. While it appears to help secure short-term compliance with return orders, it does not necessarily deter future irregular migration. Returnees described long periods in detention and loss of autonomy as a decisive factor in accepting to return, but it did not always change their longer-term migration aspirations. This preliminary finding raises questions about the sustainability of such enforcement measures and sits uneasily with the stated objective of voluntary, dignified return.

Finally, reintegration assistance, while valued immediately after return, was consistently described as insufficient to build financially viable livelihoods. Amounts between €1,400 and €6,300 disappear quickly in Abidjan's competitive environment and therefore seem to have limited impact on longer-term reintegration outcomes. In contrast, what mattered more for returnees were ongoing personal relationships and support, as well as access to economic opportunities that allow returnees to meet family obligations and regain social standing.

These findings point to an important limitation within current EU approaches to return and reintegration: Individual assistance cannot substitute for the lack of opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire that could make staying a meaningful choice for returnees. Instead, a considerable share of the returnees interviewed considers leaving again. Without broader improvements

in employment, social protection, and economic opportunity, reintegration assistance therefore functions mostly as temporary relief.

[1] European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (COM [2021] 120 final, 27 April 2021).
[2] European Commission, 'New Common European System for Returns', accessed 24 March 2026.
[3] Frontex, 'Reintegration Assistance', Frontex, accessed 24 March 2026.
[4] The term "voluntary return" is used in this document as it reflects the terminology commonly used in policy discussions. It does not necessarily imply that all returnees act fully voluntarily, as many are required to leave the country and in practice have no possibility of remaining in their host country with a lawful residence status.
[5] European Commission, 'EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary: Sustainable Return', accessed 24 March 2026.
[6] See for instance, Jennifer Vallentine, Roberto Forin, and Bram Frouws, *Mixed Returns: Return Migration and Reintegration Dynamics. Insights and Key Messages from MMC's Research and 4Mi Data Collection* (Geneva: Mixed Migration Centre, 2024), 1–8; or Samuel Hall / University of Sussex, *Mentoring Returnees: Study on Reintegration Outcomes Through a Comparative Lens – Executive Summary* (International Organization for Migration, 2020).
[7] See for instance, Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF), 'Reintegration Insights: RRF and OFII in Senegal' accessed 24 March 2026.
[8] Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2015), 1–344.
[9] These findings are based primarily on surveys with voluntary returnees, most of whom went back spontaneously without formal assistance, with only a small minority having experienced assisted or forced return. OECD, *Return, Reintegration and Re-migration: Understanding Return Dynamics and the Role of Family and Community* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 1–86.
[10] Jasper Tjaden, Ulf Liebe, and Davide Bruscoli, "Explaining Re-migration Preferences among Assisted Returnees: Evidence from Discrete Choice Experiments in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 51, no. 17 (2025): 4362–4386.
[11] Constanza Vera Larrucea, Henrik Malm Lindberg, and André Asplund, *Those Who Were Sent Back: Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq* (Stockholm: Delmi, 2021).
[12] OECD, *Return, Reintegration and Re-migration: Understanding Return Dynamics and the Role of Family and Community* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 1–86.
[13] See for instance, OECD, *Return, Reintegration and Re-migration: Understanding Return Dynamics and the Role of Family and Community* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 1–86; or Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi, "Deportation Stigma and Re-migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 4 (2015): 635–652.
[14] Constanza Vera Larrucea, Henrik Malm Lindberg, and André Asplund, *Those Who Were Sent Back: Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq* (Stockholm: Delmi, 2021).
[15] Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2015), 1–344.
[16] Interview conducted with an EU official in Brussels, February 2025.
[17] European Union, 'Emergency Trust Fund for Africa', accessed 24 March 2026.
[18] EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, 'Migration Joint Initiative', accessed 24 March 2026.
[19] Republic of Senegal, 'Présentation du projet Gouvernance Migration et Développement', accessed 24 March 2026.
[20] Interview with a development official in Dakar, September 2025.
[21] Interview with a development official in Brussels, September 2025.
[22] Statewatch, 'Exporting carceral migration 'management': €30 million from the EU to Senegal for migration control', updated 20 November 2025.
[23] Interview with a development official in Dakar, September 2025.
[24] RFI, 'Senegal Unveils 25-Year Development Plan Aiming for Economic Sovereignty and Sustainability', updated 15 October 2024.
[25] Interview with a civil society representative in Dakar, September 2025.
[26] Marie-Dominique Aguillon, "La fabrique de la politique migratoire sénégalaise," *Anthropologie & développement*, no. 51 (2020) : 51-67.

[27] Richard Kagoe & Natasha Booty, 'Anguish as dozens die in Senegal shipwreck', *BBC News*, updated 10 September 2024.
[28] Interview with a returnee, September 2025: "*Tu vas recevoir une tonne de critique, directement et derrière ton dos.*"
[29] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: "*Les gens du village pensent que j'ai commis une erreur ou un crime, que c'est ma faute qu'ils m'ont renvoyé au Sénégal… Les autorités m'ont rejeté aussi.*"
[30] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: "*Parfois, je me réveille et je me dis 'je suis ici maintenant'.*"
[31] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: "*Les gens me demanded: "Quand est-ce que tu vas rentrer en Allemagne?" Mais rentrer où? Je ne peux pas revenir en Allemagne.*"
[32] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: «*J'ai la charge d'une grande famille. Mon père a quatre femmes et ma mère à sept enfants. Je suis responsable.* »
[33] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: *"L'année prochaine [quand mon interdiction de voyager prendra fin] j'essaierai de repartir si ma situation ici ne s'améliore pas. Mais pas en bateau, c'est trop dangereux."*
[34] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: *"C'est impossible de vivre comme ça avec si peu de ressources au Sénégal"*
[35] Interview with a returnee in Dakar, September 2025: "*J'avais reçu 50 000 XOF pour élever des poulets, mais ça n'a pas marché. Le loyer de l'espace à Dakar est trop cher… J'ai réinvesti mon argent dans une petite boutique; ça n'a pas marché non plus. Maintenant, nous avons ouvert un restaurant avec ma femme."*
[36] ICMPD. (2024). Mediterranean Migration Outlook 2024, p. 10.
[37] Statewatch, 'EU Expands Migration Control Partnership with Ivory Coast', updated 9 October 2025.
[38] European Commission, 'Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme in Sub-Saharan Africa (MPRR SSA)', updated 5 March 2025.
[39] Enabel, 'Réintégration durable des personnes migrantes de retour en Côte d'Ivoire et lutte contre la traite', accessed 24 March 2026.
[40] Adrienne Ehouman, 'La Côte d'Ivoire peaufine sa stratégie nationale de retour et de réintégration des migrants', *Agence Ivoirienne de Presse*, updated 22 May 2025.
[41] CRPM2
[42] ICMPD (2024), Mediterranean Migration Outlook 2024, p. 10; Statewatch (2025), 'EU expands migration control partnership with Ivory Coast', 9 October 2025.
[43] European Commission, Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa (MPRR-SSA).
[44] Enabel, 'Réintégration durable des personnes migrantes de retour en Côte d'Ivoire et lutte contre la traite'.
[45] Ehouman, A. (2025), 'La Côte d'Ivoire peaufine sa stratégie nationale de retour et de réintégration des migrants', Agence Ivoirienne de Presse, 22 May 2025.
[46] Ravenna Sohst, CRPM2 rapport Côte d'Ivoire, August 2025.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Interview with returnee, Cocody, February 2026: *"Parfois j'imagine repartir, mais jamais par voie irrégulière. Si je pars, ça doit être officiel, un visa, un contrat."*
[49] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: "Bien sûr, je préférerais partir avec des papiers. Mais qui donne des papiers aux gens comme nous? Alors tu dois choisir: rester ici sans rien, ou réessayer par la voie difficile."
[50] Interview with returnee, Port-Bouët, February 2026: "Je connais la route, c'est dangereux. J'ai vu des gens mourir. Mais quelle est l'alternative? Rester ici et regarder ta famille souffrir? Au moins si tu pars, il y a une chance."
[51] Interview with returnee, Yopougon, February 2026: "L'argent qu'ils m'ont donné, ça a aidé pendant quelques mois. Mais maintenant c'est fini et je suis de retour au point de départ. Alors j'économise à nouveau. Pas pour lancer une entreprise ici, pour essayer la route encore une fois."
[52] Interview with returnee, Koumassi, February 2026: "J'ai utilisé une partie de l'argent pour l'activité, oui. Mais j'en ai aussi gardé de côté. Parce que si ça ne marche pas, j'ai besoin d'avoir quelque chose sur quoi compter. Et pour moi, ça veut dire essayer de repartir."
[53] Interview with returnee, Adjamé, February 2026: "Juste savoir que j'ai de l'argent de côté, même un petit montant, ça me donne de l'espoir. Ça veut dire que je ne suis pas complètement coincé. Si les choses empirent vraiment, j'ai une option."

[54] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: *"Oui, j'ai entendu parler des massacres, des bateaux qui coulent, tout ça. Mais on entend aussi de bonnes histoires. Des gens qui ont réussi, qui travaillent maintenant en Italie ou en Espagne. Tu te dis: pourquoi pas moi? Peut-être que je serai l'un des chanceux."*
[55] Interview with returnee, Treichville, February 2026: "Ils peuvent rendre ça plus difficile, ils peuvent repousser les bateaux, ils peuvent arrêter les passeurs. Mais les gens trouveront toujours un moyen. Les passeurs s'adaptent. Les routes changent. Il faut juste être malin et choisir le bon moment."
[56] Interview with returnee, Port-Bouët, February 2026: "Je vois encore le centre dans mes cauchemars. J'entends les gardiens. Je pense à ce qui aurait pu arriver si j'avais essayé de traverser la mer au lieu de passer par les documents. Je ne veux pas revivre ça."
[57] Interview with returnee, Port-Bouët, February 2026: "Pour l'instant, je dis plus jamais. Mais si mes enfants ont faim, si je n'ai pas d'autre choix, je ne sais pas ce que je ferais."
[58] Interview with returnee, Port-Bouët, February 2026: *"Quand tu reviens comme ça, les gens pensent que tu as fait quelque chose de mal. Ils ne le disent pas en face, mais tu le sens. Les voisins, même la famille, ils observent."*
[59] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: *"Tu rentres et tout le monde attend que tu sois immédiatement un homme et que tu subviennes aux besoins. Mais mentalement, tu oscilles entre le soulagement d'être à la maison et le regret des années perdues."*
[60] Interview with returnee, Adjamé, February 2026: *"Je n'ai pas raconté toute l'histoire à beaucoup de personnes. Il y a une honte à rentrer les mains vides. Tu gardes ça pour toi."*
[61] Interview with returnee, Yopougon, February 2026: "Avant mon départ, les gens me respectaient. Ils pensaient que j'allais réussir, envoyer de l'argent, peut-être même parrainer d'autres pour venir. Maintenant ils me voient galérer dans le même quartier, faire les mêmes petits boulots. Certains se moquent de moi, d'autres m'évitent."
[62] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: "La seule façon de dépasser la honte, c'est de montrer des résultats. Si ton activité marche, les gens oublient. Mais ça prend du temps, et en attendant, tu vis avec."
[63] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: *"1 400 euros, ça semble beaucoup quand tu l'entends la première fois. Mais quand tu lances une activité, ça disparaît vite. Tu as besoin d'un espace, tu as besoin de stock, tu as besoin d'équipement. Ensuite tu as le loyer chaque mois, tu dois manger, tu as des obligations familiales. En six mois, l'argent a disparu et tu es de retour à zéro."*
[64] Interview with returnee, Koumassi, February 2026: "Si l'aide était suffisante pour vraiment construire quelque chose de solide, peut-être que je resterais. Mais ce n'est pas le cas. C'est juste assez pour survivre un moment, puis tu recommences à galérer. Alors les gens se disent: pourquoi galérer ici quand je pourrais galérer en Europe et au moins avoir une chance d'obtenir quelque chose de mieux?"
[65] Interview with returnee, Adjamé, February 2026: "Je peux utiliser 2 000 euros pour essayer de lancer une entreprise ici, et ça va probablement échouer. Ou je peux utiliser ces mêmes 2 000 euros pour payer un passeur et essayer d'atteindre l'Europe. La deuxième option est risquée, oui, mais au moins si je réussis, le gain est beaucoup plus grand."
[66] Interview with returnee, Abobo, February 2026: "Les réunions aident parce qu'elles t'obligent à rester engagé. Mais parfois tu perds une journée entière pour aller à une réunion de l'autre côté de la ville, et tu rentres sans avoir rien gagné. Donc tu te demandes si ça vaut le coup."
[67] Interview with returnee, Yopougon, February 2026: "On m'avait dit que j'allais recevoir une aide pour un projet. Ce que j'ai vraiment reçu, c'était bien moins. Les gens parlent. On entend des choses. Je ne veux accuser personne, mais ça laisse un mauvais goût."
[68] Interview with returnee, Treichville, February 2026: "Ma conseillère n'a pas juste donné de l'argent et disparu. Elle appelait, elle suivait. Quand il y a eu un problème avec les papiers pour mon activité de restauration, elle m'a aidée à le régler. Ça a vraiment fait une différence."
[69] Interview with returnee, Treichville, February 2026: "Chaque jour je demandais: quand est-ce que je vais sortir? Et ils disaient: on ne sait pas, ça dépend. Une semaine est devenue deux semaines, puis trois. J'ai vu d'autres gars qui étaient là depuis deux mois, trois mois. J'ai commencé à penser: combien de temps vont-ils me garder? Et si c'est six mois? Un an? C'est là que j'ai dit d'accord, je vais signer les papiers, je vais rentrer."
[70] Interview with returnee, Cocody, February 2026: "Quand tu es enfermé et que tu ne sais pas quand tu seras libéré, ton esprit commence à se briser. Tu ne peux pas travailler, tu ne peux pas gagner d'argent, tu ne peux rien faire. Au moins si tu rentres volontairement, tu es libre. Tu peux essayer de reconstruire quelque chose."
[71] Interview with returnee, Treichville, February 2026: "S'ils ne m'avaient pas mise au centre, j'aurais continué à essayer. J'avais des amis qui pouvaient m'aider à trouver du travail sans papiers. Mais une fois que tu es enfermée, tout change. Tu te sens impuissante. Ils te disent: signe ici et on t'aidera à recommencer chez toi, ou reste ici en détention indéfiniment. Ce n'est pas vraiment un choix."

[72] Interview with returnee, Port-Bouët, February 2026: "Je sens encore les murs se refermer quand je pense à cet endroit. C'était pire que tout ce qui s'est passé sur la route migratoire. Au moins sur la route, tu bouges, tu as un certain contrôle. En détention, tu attends juste, impuissant."
[73] Interview with returnee, Yopougon, February 2026: "Je pense à partir. Mais pas comme avant, pas sans papiers. Je sais ce que c'est cette vie. On est invisible. S'il y a une voie légale, un contrat, quelque chose d'officiel, oui. Sinon je me concentre sur ici."
[74] Interview with returnee, Cocody, February 2026: "Vivre sans papiers, c'est pas vivre. Tu te caches tout le temps. Je ne referais pas ça."