

SUCCESS STORY

From Libya back home: stories of new beginnings



EU Trust Fund for Africa - North of Africa

T05.800 EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in North Africa



EUTF PARTNER:

International Organisation for Migrations (IOM)



COUNTRY:

Regional,
including Libya



BUDGET:

EUR 58 M



From **08/2018**
to **12/2022**

Objective of the project

To improve protection and enable the voluntary return of stranded migrants and migrants in transit in North Africa.

Key successes

- > 31252 stranded and vulnerable migrants in Libya assisted to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.
- > 8330 migrants assisted to return voluntarily from other North African countries to their countries of origin.
- > 4496 returning migrants from North Africa have received reintegration assistance in their countries of origin.

The story of transforming lives

For many migrants in Libya, returning home safely was the first step towards rebuilding their lives. Through the EU–IOM joint initiative, thousands of men and women who faced exploitation, insecurity, or loss of livelihood were able to make the journey back with dignity. Their testimonies show the hardships they endured, the decisions they had to take, and the new beginnings they are now creating for themselves and their families.

John and Temnaia, both from Nigeria, never imagined they would marry and start a family in Libya. John had worked with his father as a barber before learning how to paint cars. However, in Nigeria, financial instability was constant: *“In Nigeria, you often don’t get paid after the work is done. It was frustrating”*. His sister encouraged him to attempt the desert crossing. *“It was a dangerous journey, and some people didn’t make it. It felt like a 50/50 chance”*.

Temnaia, who worked as a domestic worker in Libya, had different aspirations. *“I found work as a domestic worker and was able to send money back to my family. But deep down, I still dreamt of designing dresses”*. Temnaia and John eventually met. *“From that point, we built our life together. We got married, and soon after, we had a daughter”*, she remembers. But the limitations



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of life in Libya soon became clear. *“We didn’t see a future for her here without an education, and that’s something every parent wants to give their child”*.

With support from IOM, the family decided to return to Nigeria. John now plans to open a car painting business, while Temnaia hopes to establish her own shop. *“I plan to open my own shop selling the dresses I design. I want to bring what I’ve learned here back to Nigeria”*.



and create a better future for our family". For her, the message is simple: "Don't give up on your dreams. Even when life doesn't go as planned, hold on to your vision. Your strength is in your resilience".

Mohammed from Borama, Somaliland, left home without telling his parents, hoping to reach Sweden. He had no money to pay smugglers: *"I knew the people who brought me to Libya would ask me for money, but I still decided to go. I did not have any option at that time".*

He spent over a year between detention centres, facing hunger, disease, and torture. During a visit by IOM staff, he learned about assisted voluntary return. After going back, he used his reintegration grant to open a grocery shop. *"I can manage my life and it helps me".* He is now studying ICT part-time at university. *"I don't plan on trying to go back to Europe. I had that experience, and I don't want to try again".*

Together, these stories reflect not only hardship but also the possibility of change. Thanks to the EU–IOM initiative, returnees like John, Temnaia and Mohammed have been able to turn a difficult chapter into the start of a new one back home.

How did the EUTF help?

Safe and dignified return. Through the EU–IOM Joint Initiative, the EUTF made it possible for nearly 40,000 migrants to return voluntarily from North Africa, including over 31,000 from Libya. Pre-departure counselling, medical checks, and organised travel ensured that people went home safely and with dignity. Returnees described the process as clear and respectful, giving them confidence to start again.

Support for reintegration. Back in their home countries, returnees received assistance that combined economic, social, and psychosocial support. Some used small grants to open businesses — like grocery shops, tailoring workshops, or car repair services — while others received help with housing, schooling for children, or medical needs. Follow-up surveys confirmed the difference this made: 98% of returnees reached a sustainable reintegration score on IOM's Reintegration Sustainability Index.

Ongoing guidance. Reintegration was not a one-off event. Through phone counselling, field visits, and regular check-ins, IOM followed up to ensure returnees could make the most of the support provided and avoid slipping back into precarious situations.

Keys to Success

Individualised support. Assistance was tailored to the specific needs of each person, whether they were children travelling alone, victims of trafficking, or people with urgent medical conditions. Short-term emergency aid was linked to longer-term support through individual plans.

Adapting to context. Operating in Libya meant facing constant security challenges. By working with local staff and offering online consular services, IOM was able to register migrants and process documents even when direct access was not possible. This flexibility kept protection and return activities moving.

Community outreach. Teams regularly visited detention centres and urban areas to inform migrants about voluntary return options. Community mobilisers and representatives played a key role in spreading the word and connecting people to IOM services.

Building on Success

Partnerships and protection networks. The project helped reinforce collaboration with government institutions and civil society organisations, creating more effective protection networks and smoother voluntary return procedures.

Support at home. IOM's presence in countries of origin ensured that people returning from Libya were not left alone. Returnees could count on pre-departure counselling, host family arrangements when needed, and follow-up services that helped them reintegrate.

A new perspective. For many returnees, going through the hardship of migration reshaped how they see the future. Instead of attempting dangerous journeys again, they are now focusing on building stability at home, opening businesses, continuing education, and contributing to their communities. This change of outlook shows how dignity and security can be restored when viable opportunities are provided.



EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

Disclaimer

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