



EASO Nigeria Trafficking in Human Beings

*Country of Origin
Information Report*

April 2021





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PDF: ISBN: 978-92-9465-045-0 doi: 10.2847/777951 BZ-08-21-054-EN-N

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Acknowledgements

EASO acknowledges as the drafter of this report:

The Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin (COI) unit

The following departments and organisations have reviewed the report:

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It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019).¹ The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The first draft of this report was finalised on 1 March 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [methodology](#) section of the Introduction.

¹ The 2019 EASO COI Report Methodology can be downloaded from the EASO COI Portal [url](#)

Glossary and abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| ERRIN | European Return and Reintegration Network |
| FGM | Female genital mutilation |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NACTAL | Network of CSOs Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labour |
| NAPTIP | National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons |
| NCFRMI | National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| OCG | Organised Crime Group |
| OHCHR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| PCI | Patriotic Citizen Initiatives |
| SEYP | Society for the Empowerment of Young Persons |
| THB | Trafficking in human beings |
| TIPPEAA | Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act |
| TIPLEAA | Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| USDOS | United States Department of State |

Introduction

The purpose of this COI report on Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection. In particular the report is intended to inform the update of EASO [Country Guidance development on Nigeria \(2019\)](#).

The report is an update of the 2015 EASO COI report on Sex Trafficking of women in Nigeria² and of Chapter 3.16 Victims in THB in EASO's 2018 Targeting of Individuals report³. While the report's main focus remains on sex trafficking – in which to a large extent women are involved as victims, other types of trafficking in human beings are also briefly discussed, such as trafficking of men and children and for purposes of labour, drugs, organ or 'baby factory' trafficking in Nigeria.

Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)⁴ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).⁵

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference of this report were defined by EASO based on discussions held and input received from policy experts from EU+⁶ countries within the framework of a country guidance development on Nigeria. Terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of reference](#).

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 1 March 2021. In addition, several oral sources were interviewed by the drafter in the period from October 2020 to 1 March 2021. Some of these sources wished to remain anonymous for safety reasons. All oral and anonymous non-public sources are described in the [Bibliography](#).

Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 13 April 2021.

Quality control

In order to ensure that the drafter respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. In addition, a review of the report was carried out by Dr Corentin Cohen, and by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD). All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report. EASO performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

² EASO, EASO COI report Nigeria, Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#)

³ EASO, EASO (COI) Report Nigeria Targeting of individuals, November 2018, [url](#)

⁴ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

⁵ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

⁶ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland

Structure and use of the report

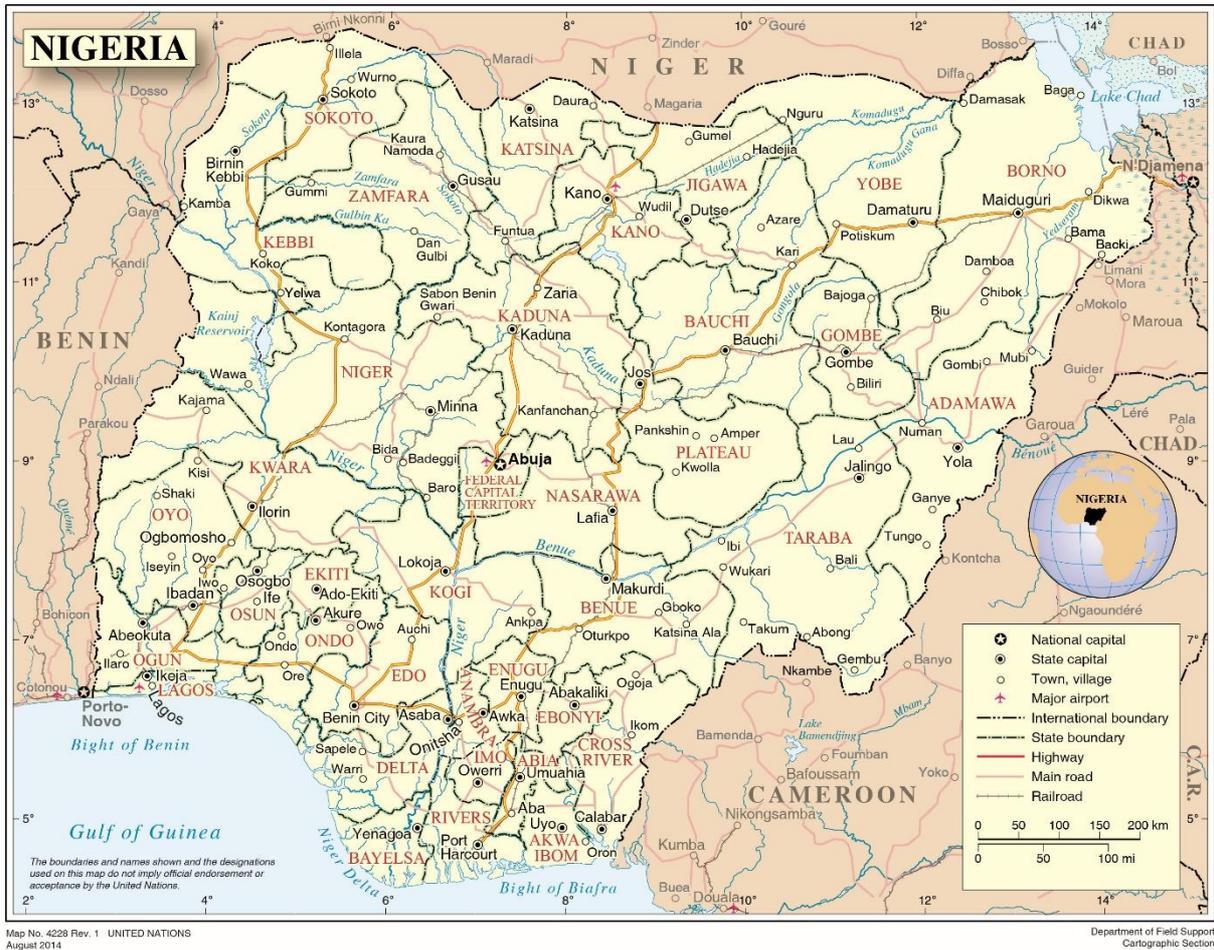
The report is structured according to the ToR and is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is a general overview of trafficking in human beings within Nigeria, and includes the most occurring types of trafficking. It discusses the profiles of women, men and children as the most probable victims of trafficking.

The second chapter dives into the modus operandi of trafficking, including networks and roles of traffickers, the debt system and taking of oaths, and the organisation of travel to Europe.

The third chapter deals with the situation of returning victims of trafficking to Nigeria, the support possibilities and shelters, the attitude of relatives and organisations towards returnees. The risks of re-trafficking and the factors influencing possible re-trafficking are also discussed.

The final chapter treats the role of the state and state organisations in protecting victims of trafficking and prosecuting traffickers.

Map



Map No. 4228 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS
August 2014

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Map 1 © UN, August 2014⁷

⁷ UN, UN Map No 4228, August 2014, [url](#)

1. Human trafficking within and from Nigeria

Nigeria is a country of origin, transit and destination for victims of trafficking in human beings.⁸ In 2003, Nigeria adopted the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPLEAA), which constitutes the legal basis for the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria⁹, and which has been significantly amended in 2015.¹⁰ The Nigerian government considers a person to be trafficked if: (i) the individual was sold in exchange for money; (ii) the individual was put in debt bondage; (iii) his/her travel documents were seized by agents, employers or traffickers; (iv) his/her freedom of movement was restricted; (v) the individual was subjected to or suffered violence or threat against his/her family; (vi) the individual's traffickers gained any form of benefits at their expense through the use of force, deceit, and other forms of exploitation; (vii) the individual has suffered physical, mental and/or sexual abuse; and/or (viii) the individual had no prior knowledge of the exploitative nature of the job they were promised.¹¹ The law establishes a National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to enforce and administer the TIPLEAA.¹²

International organisations and other experts largely agree that the Nigerian government at the federal and state level – particularly in Edo State¹³ – has made various efforts to address trafficking in human beings.¹⁴ Sources, however, also posited that this acknowledgment has not been followed up with the allocation of adequate resources to the fight against human trafficking¹⁵, and that this acknowledgement predominantly concerns human trafficking aimed at the sexual exploitation of women.¹⁶ Positive developments during the last couple of years were efforts aimed at the creation of a new National Action Plan against Human Trafficking¹⁷ and the creation of multiple state task forces on human trafficking.¹⁸ While the core focus of this report concerns cross-border trafficking to Europe, this introductory chapter will also touch upon various types of trafficking in human beings within Nigeria and from Nigeria to countries outside the European Union.

1.1 Trafficking in human beings at domestic level

In 2018 the Walk Free Foundation estimated there were almost 1.4 million individuals living in modern slavery in Nigeria.¹⁹ According to their definition of modern slavery, this phenomenon covers a range

⁸ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹ Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003, [url](#)

¹⁰ Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015. [url](#). Some states, such as Edo have adopted their own anti-trafficking laws. See: Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Edo state human trafficking bill signed into law by governor Obaseki, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹ Nigeria, NAPTIP, National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria, 2008, p. 8.

¹² Nigeria, NAPTIP, About NAPTIP, n.d., [url](#)

¹³ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 378; OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵ Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020; OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷ UNODC, NAPTIP kick-off process to develop a new national action plan against human trafficking, 23 November 2020, [url](#); UNODC, Strengthening the policy framework and response to human trafficking in Nigeria (2020 – 2021), 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ UNODC, Nigeria heeds global call, sets up State Task Force against human trafficking, n.d. [url](#). See also: NAPTIP, Month: October 2020, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹ Walk Free Foundation, The Global Slavery Index 2018, 2018, [url](#), p. 69. The report indicated that: 'These regional figures, while important, should be interpreted cautiously given the gaps and limitations of data in certain countries. For example, it

of ‘specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and human trafficking’.²⁰ The report does not indicate what percentage of the estimated number of Nigerian victims of modern slavery were victims of human trafficking.

Nigerian victims of human trafficking are exploited within and outside Nigeria. Stakeholders, who were consulted for a report on human trafficking in Nigeria by an international organisation, estimated that two-thirds of Nigerian victims of trafficking are victims of domestic human trafficking.²¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children also indicated that this type of trafficking was ‘rampant’.²² NAPTIP data show that in 2019 41.8 % of the victims they rescued were victims of exploitation outside Nigeria. 417 out of 1 152 individuals were victims of ‘Procurement for Foreign Travel which promotes Prostitution’ or ‘Procurement of Persons for Sexual Exploitation or prostitution externally’.²³ However, the total number of victims rescued by NAPTIP in 2019 – 1 152 individuals – constitutes only a fraction of the estimated total number of Nigerian individuals who are trafficked on an annual basis; in view of the above mentioned Global Slavery Index 2018 which mentioned 1.4 million Nigerians as victims of modern slavery.²⁴ Therefore, the NAPTIP figure of rescued victims is not necessarily a reliable picture about the ratio of victims of internal and cross-border trafficking in Nigeria.

Human trafficking in Nigeria affects individuals across various age groups, genders and geographical locations within Nigeria. However, children and women dominated the category of victims that were rescued (inside and outside Nigeria) by NAPTIP in 2019: half of the rescued individuals were children, 44 % women and 6 % men. Girls constituted almost 75 % of the rescued children. These data also include children rescued from other situations than exploitation, as NAPTIP also intervenes in family disputes and custody battles, for instance.²⁵ The following paragraphs discuss in some more detail common forms of domestic trafficking, including exploitation of children in various realms, the sexual exploitation of women and girls, and the phenomenon of ‘baby factories’.

1.1.1 Exploitation and trafficking of children

Data indicate that child labour is a widespread problem in Nigeria. According to the Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, 13 % of Nigerian boys and 10 % of Nigerian girls (5-14 years old) indicated to spend their time working only.²⁶ According to UNICEF’s 2016-2017 Multi Indicator Cluster Survey, 50.8 % of the surveyed children (5-17 years old) had engaged in economic activities or household chores in the previous week. 39.1 % of the surveyed children had engaged in such activities ‘under hazardous conditions’.²⁷ Relatively more boys than girls between five and seventeen years old had partaken in child labour under hazardous conditions in the week before the survey took place, 42.8 % against 35.1 %. In terms of geography, child labour and child labour under hazardous circumstances occurred across the whole of Nigeria. However, it was almost twice more common in rural than in urban zones, and occurred most in north-central and north-west Nigeria.²⁸ Children were

is not possible to survey in countries that are experiencing profound and current conflict, such as Libya, South Sudan, and parts of Nigeria. The lack of data from countries experiencing conflict means that modern slavery estimates in these countries are likely to understate the problem’.

²⁰ Walk Free Foundation, The Global Slavery Index 2018, 2018, [url](#), p. 140

²¹ International organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 16

²² OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²³ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁴ Walk Free Foundation, The Global Slavery Index 2018, 2018, [url](#), p. 69

²⁵ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶ Nigeria, National Bureau for Statistics, Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, 2021, [url](#), p. 58

²⁷ UNICEF, 2016-2017 Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey, February 2018, [url](#), pp. 223-224

²⁸ UNICEF, 2016-2017 Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey, 2017, [url](#), pp. 223-224

subjected to various types of exploitation, including: domestic servitude, forced labour (in agriculture, mining, quarrying), and street hawking.²⁹

Forced begging is a major problem in Nigeria as well. While reliable estimates of the number of children who engage in (forced) begging do not exist, in northern Nigeria millions of children who cannot be taken care of by their parents attend a specific type of religious boarding schools, known as almajiri schools, which rely on child begging/labour for their financing.³⁰ In 2014, UNICEF estimated that out of the 13.2 million children outside of Nigeria's formal school system, 9.5 million were in the almajiri system.³¹ In the south – particularly in big urban centres – street children and child beggars also are a common sight.³² In some cases, parents also forced their children to beg, or recruiters lured children away from their families.³³ According to the 2020 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TiP) report 'in southern Nigeria, especially Lagos, some women drug and "rent" their infants out to street beggars to increase the beggars' profits.'³⁴

In conflict zones such as the Middle Belt, north-west and north-east Nigeria children are vulnerable to (sexual) exploitation.³⁵ There have been reports of recruitment of girls from internally displaced people (IDP) camps across northern Nigeria for the purpose of sexual exploitation.³⁶ In the north-east in particular there were cases of recruitment of children as child soldiers.³⁷ According to UN data the total number of Nigerian child soldiers and the number of new recruitments have, however, significantly decreased since 2017.³⁸

1.1.2 Sexual exploitation of women and girls in Nigeria

As the previous paragraph already indicated, sexual exploitation akin to human trafficking also occurs within Nigeria. This phenomenon is not limited to conflict zones and IDP camps. In 2019, 68 out of the 1 152 victims rescued by NAPTIP were victims of sexual exploitation within Nigeria. 66 of these victims were women.³⁹ Often these women/girls are trafficked from the countryside to big cities such as Lagos⁴⁰, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar, and Port Harcourt.⁴¹ Some sources indicated that victims of trafficking who had returned from abroad/Europe ended in (forced) prostitution in Nigeria.⁴² Euronews found that 'it is difficult to keep returning women and girls away from the networks that trafficked them in the first place', citing a non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker

²⁹ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 17; US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 381

³⁰ BBC, Coronavirus in Nigeria: The child beggars at the heart of the outbreak, 16 May 2020, [url](#); Anti-Slavery International, Shackled to the past: An exploration of the best prospects for combatting forced child begging in Nigeria, November 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³¹ UNICEF, cited by Anti-Slavery International, Shackled to the past: An exploration of the best prospects for combatting forced child begging in Nigeria, November 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³² Africa.com, Social Enterprise Shines Light On Nigeria's Street Kids In Dark Days Of Pandemic, May 2020, [url](#)

³³ Aluko Y. and T. Olanipekun, Menace of Street Begging among Children in Urban centers: Activities, Survival and Coping Strategies, 2019, [url](#), p. 10

³⁴ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 381

³⁵ International organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 17

³⁶ UNHCR, Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria, April 2020, [url](#), p. 12. See also: Al Jazeera, Survivors of Nigeria's 'baby factories' share their stories, 3 May 2020, [url](#); Premium Times, INVESTIGATION: Grim tales of rape, child trafficking in Nigeria's displaced persons camps, 31 January 2015, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), First Person: Want to thwart human traffickers? Just add water, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁷ UNSG, Children and Armed Conflict in Nigeria, 6 July 2020, [url](#), p. 6

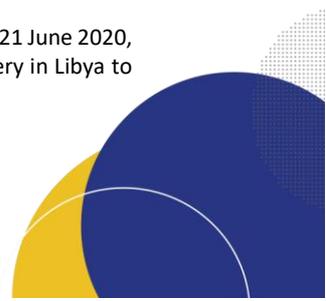
³⁸ UNSG, Children and Armed Conflict in Nigeria, 6 July 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁹ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰ Vanguard, Girls trafficked from Akwa Ibom for prostitution in Lagos open up, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 381. See also: DW, The New Ways of Nigeria's Human Traffickers, 3 October 2017, [url](#)

⁴² Euronews, Abused in Libya and forced into prostitution back home: the nightmare of trying to reach Europe, 21 June 2020, [url](#); Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)



from Benin City who stated that ‘our girls tried their best to return to their families, yet many return to prostitution, others are still in contact with their traffickers.’⁴³ The Washington Post indicated that ‘survivors and experts say the rush to return Nigerians is doing little to break the cycle of sex slavery and may be perpetuating it: Returnees are dropped back into the epicenter of Nigeria’s sex-trafficking industry, often deeper in debt and with fewer options than before they left’ (see also Section 4.2 Retrafficking).⁴⁴ Women from neighbouring countries are also trafficked to Nigeria for the purpose of sexual exploitation.⁴⁵

1.1.3 ‘Baby factories’

Also during this reporting period, a range of actors including Nigerian and international media outlets reported on the trafficking of Nigerian women for selling their babies.⁴⁶ The centres, which house the victims and their children, are called ‘baby factories’.⁴⁷ Reports and articles in the media distinguished two modi operandi of baby factories. Articles by the Guardian and CNN indicated that traffickers recruited already pregnant, unmarried women from poor backgrounds either (falsely) promising them a high amount of money in return for their babies⁴⁸, or luring them into the ‘baby factories’ by pretending to provide them with some form of support.⁴⁹ Another report indicated that baby factories recruited young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly IDPs⁵⁰, with the false promise of jobs.⁵¹

1.2 Cross-border trafficking in human beings towards third countries

Nigeria acts as a source country for human trafficking towards neighbouring countries, destinations in North Africa and the Middle East, the EU, and Eastern European countries such as Russia. In 2020, the US Department of State identified Nigerian victims of human trafficking in at least 36 other countries.⁵² In 2019, NAPTIP rescued and returned Nigerian victims from eighteen different countries. The majority of victims rescued from situations of exploitation in third countries by NAPTIP were based in neighbouring countries (Mali, Niger and Cote d’Ivoire), Libya, Russia and various countries in the Middle East.⁵³ It goes beyond the scope of this report to discuss victim profiles per country/region (outside Europe). Nigerian women and girls often ended up working in prostitution or domestic servitude.⁵⁴ Nigerian boys ended up in domestic servitude as well, or in forced labour (in for instance mining/construction/agriculture), as do adult men.⁵⁵ Experts indicated that southern Nigerians were

⁴³ Euronews, Abused in Libya and forced into prostitution back home: the nightmare of trying to reach Europe, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁵ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 382

⁴⁶ For information about this phenomenon during the previous reporting period, see: EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report Nigeria Targeting of individuals, November 2018, [url](#), p. 140

⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, Survivors of Nigeria’s ‘baby factories’ share their stories, 3 May 2020, [url](#); CNN, 19 pregnant teens and women rescued from suspected baby traffickers in Nigeria, police say, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Guardian (The), ‘I had no choice’: the desperate Nigerian women who sell their babies, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Guardian (The), ‘I had no choice’: the desperate Nigerian women who sell their babies, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, Survivors of Nigeria’s ‘baby factories’ share their stories, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹ CNN, 19 pregnant teens and women rescued from suspected baby traffickers in Nigeria, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵² US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 382.

⁵³ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁴ CNN, 20,000 Nigerian girls sold to prostitution ring, trafficking agency says, 22 January 2019, [url](#); BBC, Trafficked Nigerian women rescued from Lebanon, 26 May 2020, [url](#); IPS, The Exploitative System that Traps Nigerian Women as Slaves in Lebanon, 14 September 2020, [url](#); Premium Times, Another 71 Nigerian women trafficked to Lebanon arrive home, 17 August 2020, [url](#); UNHCR, Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria, April 2020, [url](#), p. 11; Representative international humanitarian organisation, interview 26 October 2020

⁵⁵ UNHCR, Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9; Representative international humanitarian organisation, interview 26 October 2020

mostly trafficked to west and central Africa, whereas inhabitants from the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria were mostly trafficked to Niger, Chad, Sudan and the Middle East.⁵⁶ Some IDP camps in northern Nigeria functioned as gateways for trafficking to neighbouring countries.⁵⁷

Specifically with regard to sex trafficking, sources indicated that as it has become more difficult to traffic Nigerian women to Europe, trafficking networks have adjusted their modus operandi and focused more on neighbouring countries and the Middle East as destinations for sex trafficking.⁵⁸ The anthropologist Sine Plambech, who is specialised in the field of sex trafficking from Nigeria, indicated that women from Edo State in southern Nigeria are now also being trafficked towards Dubai in increasing numbers, due to the increased difficulty in crossing the central Mediterranean route since 2017.⁵⁹ Due to less stringent visa requirements for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, traffickers fraudulently recruited Nigerian women for jobs in Russia to exploit them in the sex industry.⁶⁰ While some of these countries thus increasingly acted as the main trafficking destination for Nigerian women, a large share of the victims got stuck in Libya while they were on their way to Europe⁶¹, where they can spend months or years.⁶²

1.2.1 Organ harvesting

Some reports about cross-border organ trafficking have been published. In 2019, NAPTIP reported the arrest of one individual suspected of the recruitment of persons for ‘organ harvesting’.⁶³ A quantitative survey based on more than 1 600 interviews with West African migrants in Mali and Niger found that while relatively few participants indicated to have become victim to organ trafficking (3 %), traffickers were approaching Nigerian migrants to participate in such schemes:

‘Organ trafficking is the least commonly experienced form of trafficking for migrants in our sample, being cited by only 3 % of respondents (50 individuals). However, in addition to the 3 % who reported being forced to sell their blood or organs, a further 4 % reported that they had been approached with offers of money for their blood and organs.’⁶⁴

Specifically with regard to the Nigerian context, the report indicated that the market for these organs has partly shifted from Europe and North Africa to Malaysia and Singapore. There are indications that as sex trafficking has become more difficult traffickers are looking to organ trafficking as an alternative source of income.⁶⁵

1.3 Cross-border trafficking in human beings towards Europe

The EU harbours a significant number of Nigerian trafficking victims. However, after a peak of arrivals of Nigerian migrants in Italy between 2015 and 2017⁶⁶, data from 2019 show the influx has sharply declined as a result of the worsening security situation in Libya⁶⁷, and in the wake of new measures to

⁵⁶ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

⁵⁷ UNHCR, Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria, April 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁵⁸ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

⁵⁹ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

⁶⁰ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 382

⁶¹ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 26 February 2021

⁶² Pascoal, R., Stranded: The New Trendsetters of the Nigerian Human Trafficking Criminal Networks for Sexual Purposes, 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁶³ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁴ Malakooti, A., The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel, 2020, [url](#), p. 45

⁶⁵ Malakooti, A., The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel, 2020, [url](#), p. 74

⁶⁶ UNHCR, Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard - December 2017, 11 January 2018. [url](#); UNHCR, Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard - December 2018, 11 January 2019, [url](#); UNHCR, Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard – December 2019, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Foreign Policy, The U.N. Is Leaving Migrants to Die in Libya, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

stem migration to Italy, including support for Libyan coast guards.⁶⁸ Between 2017 and 2019, the number of detected illegal crossings via the central Mediterranean route dropped significantly (for more details, see Section 2.5).⁶⁹ According to figures of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) a total of 465 250 irregular migrants arrived in Europe (both by land and by sea) between 2017 and mid-2020. 20 348 individuals originated from Nigeria.⁷⁰ During the reporting period, Nigerians still topped the list of countries of origin of (identified) non-EU victims of human trafficking in the EU.⁷¹ During this period, Nigeria also topped the list of non-EU citizenships with the highest proportion of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the EU, accounting for 68 % of such victims.⁷² The majority (92 %) of identified Nigerian victims of trafficking in EU countries were women.⁷³ The following paragraphs will discuss the profiles of sex trafficking victims and others in more depth.

1.3.1 Nigerian victims of sex trafficking in Europe

As was the case during the previous reporting period⁷⁴, women still constituted the largest share of trafficking victims detected in the EU (92 %) between 2017 and 2018, and the majority of all detected Nigerian trafficking victims in the EU was exploited in the European prostitution industry.⁷⁵ These women originated predominantly from the south of Nigeria, particularly the state of Edo, of which the capital, Benin City, has been the central hub for sex trafficking from Nigeria to Europe for the last decades.⁷⁶ The previous EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women (2015) indicated that most women who were trafficked from Edo belonged to the Bini, the dominant ethnic group in Edo.⁷⁷ They were predominantly between 17 and 28 years of age with a large share of the victims belonging to the 18-20 years age bracket.⁷⁸ The 2015 EASO report furthermore indicated that most women and girls were illiterate or had only completed secondary education, originated from unstable family situations and experienced economic hardship, but did not belong to the poorest ranks of Edo society, but rather to the lower middle class.⁷⁹ There are no indications that this profile of women trafficked from Edo to Europe has changed significantly since 2015.

Geographical background: shift in recruiting grounds?

A remarkable development during this reporting period was a partial shift in the recruiting grounds for traffickers. Some media reports provided the impression that this is a result of the 2018 decision by the *Oba* (local royal ruler) of Benin to curse sex trafficking and renounce the oaths that obliged existing victims of sex trafficking to pay off the debts they incurred with their traffickers (more in

⁶⁸ BBC, Migrant crisis: Illegal entries to EU at lowest level in five years, 4 January 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Returned to a war zone: One boat. Dozens of dreams. All blocked by Europe's anti-migrant policies, 28 December 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹ In 2020, the number of arrivals in Europe via the Central Mediterranean Route increased again even though the overall number of illegal arrivals in Europe dropped due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Frontex does not specify how many of these arrivals were Nigerians. Frontex, FLASH REPORT – Irregular migration into EU at lowest level since 2013, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ IOM, Irregular Migration Routes to Europe: West and Central Africa, January-June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁷¹ European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁷² European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 28

⁷³ European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 169. See also: Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 30. This was also observed in older research, e.g.: IOM, Human Trafficking Along the Central Mediterranean Route, 2017, [url](#), p. 30

⁷⁴ UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014, [url](#), pp. 56-57

⁷⁵ European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), pp. 166-169

⁷⁶ Alberto Mossiono, Director PIAM ONLUS, email exchange 22 February 2021; CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁷ Also referred to as binis.

⁷⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 15. Source: Pascoal, R, The situation of the Nigerian human trafficking victims and their children in Italy, 19 December 2012, p. 23; Kastner, K, 'Moving relationships: family ties of Nigerian migrants on their way to Europe', January 2010, p. 20.

⁷⁹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 16. Source: Kastner, Kristin, 'Moving relationships', January 2010, p. 20.

[Section 2.3](#)).⁸⁰ As the influence of the Oba only stretches over the Bini people who acknowledge his authority⁸¹, NGO representatives based in Benin City suggested that traffickers have partly relocated their recruiting grounds to other states or recruit women from other backgrounds.⁸² A research carried out in 2020 with (returned) trafficking victims in Benin City indicated that Edo State is still an important departure point for victims of overseas sex trafficking, but that many of the women and girls who pass through Benin City are not from Edo themselves.⁸³ Sources identified an increase of female victims destined for sex trafficking towards Europe from the southern states Delta⁸⁴, Ekiti, and Ondo⁸⁵, but also the northern state of Kano.⁸⁶ One report identified the state of Anambra as an important departure point for irregular Nigerian migrants, and indicated that the city of Onitsha in the state of Akwa Ibom had the potential to become a hub for irregular migration.⁸⁷ It is, however, still too early to estimate the exact effects of the decision by the Oba.

Moreover, since the arrival of Nigerians to the EU has dropped since 2018, sources deemed unlikely that the actions by the Oba have significantly altered the demographic profile of female Nigerian victims of trafficking in the EU. Various organisations working with Nigerian female victims of trafficking in Europe confirmed that they still mostly encountered victims from Edo and other parts of southern Nigeria.⁸⁸ Recent research with Nigerian victims in France confirmed that most (identified) Nigerian victims of sex trafficking in France still originated from Edo and particularly from two relatively poor neighbourhoods in Benin City named Upper Sakponba and Saint Saviour.⁸⁹ Other research also identified Upper Sakponba as a prime area for the recruitment of trafficking victims, together with the village of Uromi outside Benin City.⁹⁰

Age

Eleven percent of all (male and female) Nigerian trafficking victims who were detected in the EU between 2017 and 2018 were recorded as minors.⁹¹ Other sources also indicate that there were minors amongst female Nigerian sex trafficking victims in Europe.⁹² Out of 450 Nigerian sex trafficking

⁸⁰ See, for instance: Reuters, Black magic ban dents sex trafficking in Nigeria, 19 September 2018, [url](#); De Correspondent, Vijfhonderd voodoo-priesters en een vloek laten zien: met magie kun je mensenhandel bestrijden [Five hundred voodoo priests and a curse show: magic can combat human trafficking], 26 September 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹ Mostly based in the former territory of the Kingdom of Benin, nowadays localized in Edo State.

⁸² Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020

⁸³ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁸⁴ International organisation, confidential report December 2020, p. 20

⁸⁵ Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020

⁸⁶ International organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 20

⁸⁷ European organisation, confidential report, December 2020, p. 4

⁸⁸ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, interview 19 November 2020. See also: VRT, PODCAST: De meisjes van de nacht [Girls of the night], 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 56

⁹⁰ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 37

⁹¹ The document does not specify on the basis of what evidence victims' age was recorded. In 7% of the cases the victim's age was unknown. European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 175. The 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking indicates that '[t]he age declared by girls or women may not be accurate however', citing a source which states that: 'Generally speaking, there is a tendency to rise the potential victim's age during the journey to Italy thus stressing the consensual and voluntary aspect of the journey. Contrary to this, there is a tendency to lower the age when the woman is working as a prostitute since this may attract a broader clientele. Once the women detach themselves from the exploitation rings and start their relationship with the social services, the possibility to lower or rise their age depends on basic needs (when the age is uncertain): on the one hand, be under 18 years old may be an important factor for receiving better protection but, on the other hand, it may be an obstacle in job hunting.' EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 15. Source: UNICRI, Trafficking of Nigerian girls in Italy, April 2010, pp. 41-42

⁹² Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 54; New Yorker (The), The Desperate Journey of a Trafficked Girl, 3 April 2017, [url](#)

victims who arrived between 2015 and 2018 and got support from the French NGO Le bus des femmes, about one hundred were minors aged between 12 and 17 years.⁹³ Sine Plambech indicated that especially at the height of Nigerian migration to Europe (2015-2017) on average victims were younger than in the past, because traffickers had expanded the age range from which they were recruiting.⁹⁴

Poverty as a root cause of sex trafficking

Poverty and associated issues still act as the root cause for human trafficking – and migration in general – from southern Nigeria to Europe. A workshop with Nigerian stakeholders in 2018 found :

‘The causes or drivers of human trafficking appeared to be multiple, intertwining and overlapping. Stakeholders highlighted multiple vulnerabilities to trafficking across the different levels of the Determinants of Vulnerability model. These included poverty, unemployment, lower levels of education and literacy, corruption, conflict, the lack of social safety nets, abuse of traditional fostering practices, cultural or religious norms that support exploitation, the erosion of values and limited options for safe and legal migration. Increasing demand for sex and cheap labour were considered an integral part of this.’⁹⁵

More than half of the 76 survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch for a study on the experiences of victims who returned to Nigeria had dropped out of primary or secondary school for economic reasons.⁹⁶ Looking at the economic situation in the whole of Nigeria, the poverty experienced by people in Edo, however, concerns relative poverty as Edo is not one of the poorest states in the country.⁹⁷ The National Living Standards Survey 2018/2019 showed that Edo is amongst the top three states in which the highest percentage of households is receiving remittances.⁹⁸

According to a study by the CLEEN Foundation and Pathfinders Justice Initiative, recruiters were most likely to approach ‘the poorest and most vulnerable’ and the ‘illiterate and psychologically weak/naïve’:

‘Recruiters maintain working knowledge of their prospective victims and mainly target those that are financially insecure and desperate. Families that cannot afford to educate their children or provide three square meals a day are often targeted. [...] Significantly, enablers appear to take advantage of those who are illiterate and who lack the requisite strength in will to resist their advances. One key informant avowed that “at most times, when you see [Enablers], a lot of them appear rather intelligent and they know how to work on your intelligence. If you are not strong willed, they will entice and convince you.”’⁹⁹

Sources also indicated that many victims originated from dysfunctional and sometimes abusive family situations. Daughters from one-parent¹⁰⁰, and polygamous households¹⁰¹ are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking. Various sources indicated that the tradition of subjecting girls/women to female genital mutilation (FGM) was a factor that increased girls’ vulnerability to trafficking.¹⁰² Amongst certain ethnic groups in the south of Nigeria a larger percentage of

⁹³ Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 54 ; European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, p. 175. [url](#); Save the Children, Young Invisible Enslaved: Children Victims of Trafficking and Labour Exploitation in Italy, July 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁴ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

⁹⁵ University of Bedfordshire, Vulnerability to Human Trafficking: A Study of Vietnam, Albania, Nigeria and the UK - Report of Shared Learning Event held in Lagos, Nigeria: 17-18 January 2018, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁷ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 53-54

⁹⁸ National Bureau for Statistics, Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, 2021, [url](#), pp. 61-63

⁹⁹ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, p. 33. [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2020-3-page-51.htm> [Paywell]; Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, p. 28. [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, p. 29. [url](#)

¹⁰² Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, p. 65. [url](#) ; Report International Organisation, 2020, p. 22.

girls/women are submitted to FGM at a relatively late age.¹⁰³ Sources indicated that traffickers prey on girls/women who try to escape FGM and end up by themselves in large urban centres.¹⁰⁴ Gender inequality¹⁰⁵, and the notion that daughters should make sacrifices for the economic well-being of their families also contribute to high rates of sex trafficking from Edo State.¹⁰⁶

Awareness: Trafficking perceived as an opportunity for social mobility

As was mentioned in the 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking, research indicated that many victims from Edo State were aware that they will work in the sex industry in Europe.¹⁰⁷ An overview of projects to curb sex trafficking in Nigeria identified 39 awareness-raising campaigns that had been launched between 2010 and 2019, most of which targeted Edo State, with a focus on urban areas.¹⁰⁸ According to recent research by PathFinders Justice Initiative, citizens of Edo State were very well aware of the issues and know what sex trafficking entails.¹⁰⁹ Other research found that women from Edo State, who were trafficked to Europe, were themselves also often aware of the type of activities they would be engaged in.¹¹⁰

Sex trafficking is not necessarily considered something bad in Edo State. According to Aparad and others, many poor and lower/middle-class inhabitants of Benin City indeed consider having a family member abroad to be the sole mechanism to achieve social mobility:¹¹¹

‘Examples of social success linked to migration in general, whether real or fantasized, have permeated the collective consciousness with such force, that families with no family members abroad perceive themselves (and are perceived) as deprived of all opportunities for enrichment and social advancement.’¹¹²

¹⁰³ The majority of Nigerian women are submitted to FGM before the age of five. This percentage was higher in the north than in the south of the country. The 2018 NDHS indicated that 85% of the circumcised women between 15 and 49 years old had experienced this procedure before the age of five. The probability that women had experienced FGM before the age of five was higher amongst women below the age of 25. 91% of circumcised women between 15 and 25 indicated to have been submitted to FGM before the age of five. This percentage was 79% for women above 45 years old. In nine out of ten cases, circumcised muslim women had experienced FGM before the age of five. This percentage was 77% for Christian women. The percentage of circumcised women who had experienced this procedure before the age of five was highest in the north west geographic zone (97%) and lowest in the south south zone (59%). In the south south zone almost a quarter (24%) of circumcised women between 15 and 49 years old experienced the procedure after the age of fifteen. This practice of practicing FGM at a later age is most common amongst the Ijaw/Izon ethnic groups. Amongst some ethnic groups circumcision is practiced just before marriage (for instance amongst the Efik and Ibibio) or during pregnancy (for instance amongst the Odi and Urhobo ethnic groups, who are mostly based in the Niger Delta). See: National Population Commission, National Demographic and Health Survey, 2018, [url](#), pp. 468-476; World Pulse, Bride Confinement, Fattening and Circumcision: A Cultural Practice in Nigeria, 2016; Bamgbose, Legal & Cultural Approaches to Sexual Matters in Africa, 2001-2002. [url](#); Kolawole and Van de Kwaak, A Review of Determinants of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria, December 2010. [url](#); Atibinye Dotimi, Lived Experiences of Women from the Odi community in Nigeria of Female Genital Mutilation, 2016. [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; See also: Infomigrants, Germany 'the brothel of Europe' for trafficked Nigerian women, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰⁶ Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), pp. 60-62

¹⁰⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁸ Semprebon, M., Fighting Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Recent and ongoing projects (2010-2019), 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁹ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 13-14

¹¹⁰ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7; Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria's Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#), p. 195 ; Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 60 . See also: Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹² Translated from the original in French by the author : 'Les exemples de réussite sociale liée à la migration de manière générale, qu'ils soient réels ou fantasmés, ont imprégné l'inconscient collectif de manière si profonde que les familles n'ayant aucun de leur membre à l'étranger se perçoivent (et sont perçues) comme privées de toutes opportunités d'enrichissement et de progression sociale.' Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 60

This attitude specifically applies to (first-born) daughters, who are expected to sacrifice themselves for the economic well-being of the family.¹¹³ In this regard Sophia Samyn found that ‘in Edo there is a form of collective complicity when talking about forced prostitution migration. People in Benin City are generally aware of prostitution and consider it as something worthwhile, because many benefit from it.’¹¹⁴

The fact that trafficking victims still managed to send remittances home from an early stage of their stay in Europe and that many of them used social media to depict a more positive image of their living circumstances contributed to preserving the notion that trafficking can be a path to a better future.¹¹⁵ Key informants interviewed by CLEEN Foundation and Pathfinders Justice Initiative also pointed at the overt display of wealth gains due to sex trafficking in Benin City/Edo State as important factors encouraging families of and women/girls themselves to seek out traffickers.¹¹⁶

It is important to emphasise that in many cases those who are considered to be victims of sex trafficking— by international actors and the Nigerian authorities - do not necessarily consider themselves as such.¹¹⁷

‘Since its founding, NAPTIP has worked with foreign donors and local NGOs on wide-ranging public enlightenment campaigns marking all forms of women’s migration as sex trafficking. As trafficking discourses entered the local lexicon, many poor and ambitious young women appropriated it to describe their own goals, acknowledging the risks involved and yet still insisting that they would “want to be trafficked,” meaning they were willing to travel to enter foreign sex industries.’¹¹⁸

These women, however, do not always seem to fully grasp the duration of the exploitation and the actual amount of the debt they will have to repay. In this regard Sophie Samyn found that: ‘The proposed loan of 30,000 to 60,000 euros is an abstract amount that they think they can earn back in the shortest possible time.’¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, she also found that even when these women had arrived in Europe and experienced exploitation, some of them still believed their traffickers ‘helped’ them or provided them with an opportunity:

‘The girls often have a complex relationship with their sponsor. “I do what she says, because she is my boss. Ultimately she made it possible for me to come to Europe. I’m grateful to her,” says Rose, who left when she was barely sixteen. And Vivian says, “My sister and a friend were my madams. They paid for my crossing. When I found out what I had to do, I got very angry. We did not speak for two years, but I paid my debt. My sister had gone through the same thing, allowing me to go to school. In the end she also helped me to get papers, she really

¹¹³ Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 61

¹¹⁴ Translated by drafter from the Dutch original: ‘In Edo is er een vorm van collectieve medeplichtigheid wanneer het over gedwongen prostitutiemigratie gaat. Mensen in Benin City hebben over het algemeen weet van de prostitutie en beschouwen het als iets wat de moeite loont, omdat velen er van mee profiteren.’ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7. See also: Thomsom Reuters Foundation, Nigeria: Tolerance of Trafficking Protects Nigeria’s Trade in Humans, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), pp. 7, 9

¹¹⁶ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 19-20

¹¹⁷ Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria’s Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#), p 195

¹¹⁸ Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria’s Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#), p 195

¹¹⁹ Translated by drafter from the Dutch original: ‘De voorgestelde lening van 30.000 tot 60.000 euro is een abstract bedrag dat ze binnen de kortste keren denken te kunnen terugverdienen’. Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7

helped me.” Although she ended up in prostitution against her will, Vivian understood it now was her turn.¹²⁰

The existence of this complex attitude amongst trafficking victims towards the phenomenon itself and the women who brought them to Europe was also observed by the migration sociologist Maria Shaidrova.¹²¹

Lastly, research indicated that the large influx of returnees from Libya (see [Chapter 3](#)) has contributed to increased awareness about the dangers of sex trafficking.¹²² Experts who were interviewed for this (EASO) report indicated that the fact that crossing to Europe has become very difficult in the recent years, has dissuaded Edo women – and other Nigerian migrants - to disembark on a journey to Europe, but that it has not dissuaded them from leaving Benin City, which is reflected in the fact that Edo women are increasingly travelling to other destinations.¹²³

1.3.2 Pregnant trafficking victims

During the reporting period, concerns emerged about the exploitation of pregnant Nigerian women. In 2020, Dutch law enforcement authorities also expressed concern about the disappearance of tens of heavily pregnant Nigerian asylum seekers from reception centres, giving rise to the suspicion that Nigerian trafficking rings were engaged in baby trafficking.¹²⁴ Maria Shaidrova indicated that there were many rumours amongst Nigerian migrants in Italy about the increased chances of getting asylum and social security in some EU Member States in case one is pregnant. This has resulted in high rates of pregnant Nigerian trafficking victims who move to other EU countries, only to disappear again once they discover that pregnancy/child birth does not result in better protection.¹²⁵ Sine Plambech confirmed the existence of this phenomenon and indicated that many of these women also disappear from asylum centres because they need to work to earn money.¹²⁶ Reports from Italy indicated that drug traffickers use pregnant Nigerian women as ‘drug mules’, because they raise less suspicion.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Translated by drafter from the Dutch original: ‘De meisjes hebben vaak een complexe relatie met hun sponsor. “Ik doe wat ze zegt, want ze is mijn baas. Uiteindelijk heeft ze het mogelijk gemaakt dat ik naar Europa kon komen. Ik ben haar dankbaar,” zegt Rose, die vertrok toen ze amper zestien was. En Vivian vertelt: “Mijn zus en een vriendin waren mijn madams. Zij betaalden mijn overtocht. Toen ik erachter kwam wat ik moest doen, ben ik heel kwaad geworden. We spraken twee jaar lang niet met elkaar, maar ik betaalde mijn schuld. Mijn zus had hetzelfde doorstaan en daardoor heb ik naar school kunnen gaan. Uiteindelijk hielp zij me ook om papieren te krijgen, ze heeft me echt geholpen.” Hoewel ze tegen haar wil in de prostitutie terecht kwam, begreep Vivian dat het nu haar beurt was.’ Samyn, S., *Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria* [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹²¹ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

¹²² CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, *Pathway to Prevention*, 2020, [url](#), pp. 15-16

¹²³ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

¹²⁴ VPRO, *Zwangere Afrikaanse asielzoeksters verdwijnen uit opvang* [Pregnant African asylumseekers disappear from reception centres], 19 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021. See also: Olabisi Oluwatoyin T. and A. Akinyoade, *Coercion or Volition: Making Sense of the Experiences of Female Victims of Trafficking from Nigeria in the Netherlands*, 2015, [url](#), p. 185

¹²⁶ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

¹²⁷ ABC News, *In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob*, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

1.3.3 Male Nigerian victims of human trafficking in Europe

Some sources suspected a rise in the number of male Nigerian victims of human trafficking in Europe.¹²⁸ Recent studies, however, identified a scarcity of knowledge about the profiles and experiences of this group.¹²⁹

Smuggling vs trafficking

It is expected that most Nigerian men are smuggled, rather than trafficked towards Europe, meaning that they – and/or their families¹³⁰ – generally pay smugglers in advance to facilitate the journey towards Libya and crossing of the Mediterranean.¹³¹ According to research and articles in international media, some male Nigerian migrants made the decision to travel to Europe themselves, while others were forced by family members to go. Some were well prepared and saved up for the journey in advance, whereas others decided to leave spontaneously.¹³² One source indicated that many male Nigerians from southern Nigeria who decided to travel to Europe were members of cultist groups and benefited from support of other members of their cults who were already in Europe when navigating the journey.¹³³ This model is different from the model used by many Nigerian female victims of human trafficking for whom the journey is paid in advance by sponsors who then expect them to reimburse – highly inflated – debts through prostitution in Europe (more in [Section 2.3](#)). However, male Nigerians have become victims of trafficking/modern slavery during their journey towards Europe - especially in Libya¹³⁴ - and also upon arrival in Europe.¹³⁵

Exploitation in various spheres

8 % of Nigerian victims of human trafficking detected in Europe in 2017 and 2018 were men.¹³⁶ Data provided by the European Commission on the types of exploitation experienced by Nigerian victims of human trafficking in Europe in 2017 and 2018 do not distinguish between men and women. The majority of victims (68 %) – presumably mostly women - were subjected to sex exploitation. However, Nigerian victims of trafficking in the EU were also subjected to other types of exploitation, including domestic servitude (5 %), forced labour (3 %), forced criminality (1 %), forced begging (1 %), and other

¹²⁸ Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019, 2020 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], [url](#), p. 19; Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, interview 19 November 2020

¹²⁹ University of Bedfordshire, Vulnerability to Human Trafficking: A Study of Vietnam, Albania, Nigeria and the UK - Report of Shared Learning Event held in Lagos, Nigeria: 17-18 January 2018, October 2018, [url](#), p.8; Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 19; OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Olusegun Ikuteyijo, L., Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria, West African Youth Challenges and Opportunity Pathways, [url](#), pp. 69-70, 73; BBC, I sold all I had to go to Europe - now I'm home, and broke, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7; UNHCR, Mixed Migration Routes and Dynamics in Libya in 2018, June 2019, [url](#), p. 23. According to this source most Nigerians, with the exception of Nigerian women, engage in 'step-by-step' journeys with different smugglers who are paid in advance. This also applies to (male) children, see: Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 20

¹³² Kuschminder, K., Before disembarkation: Eritrean and Nigerian migrants journeys within Africa, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2020, [url](#)

¹³³ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

¹³⁴ TIME, 'It Was As if We Weren't Human.' Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵ TIME, 'It Was As if We Weren't Human.' Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶ European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 169

types of exploitation (16 %).¹³⁷ Between 2017 and 2018 there were no registered reports of Nigerians who were victim of organ harvesting in Europe. In 2019, there was at least one report of such a case.¹³⁸

Sources indicated that some illegal male Nigerian migrants in Europe join Nigerian gangs – which engage mostly in drug related crimes - upon arrival in Europe.¹³⁹ The Guardian found that an Italian reception centre for asylum seekers in Sicily had become a recruitment ground for criminal groups:

‘The centre has become a lawless place where people are easy prey for criminal gangs. The state funds these centres by giving them a sum of money for each asylum seeker, but many of them cut corners on food and other amenities, and pocket the profits. Low-level members of Italy’s various mafia organisations and Nigerian gangs come to the centre to recruit drug mules and petty criminals among the bored, idle men who have given up on the life they dreamed of when they crossed the sea.’¹⁴⁰

Other research and reporting confirmed that Nigerians are used as ‘drug mules’. This occurs on flights between Brazil and West-Africa within the framework of the drug trade between Latin America and Europe, in which West African countries act as a transit hub.¹⁴¹ Eurojust indicated that Nigerian organised crime groups also use drug mules to transport drugs within Europe – while not specifying the nationality of the drug mules.¹⁴² Reporting by ABC News confirmed the use of young African men and Nigerian women as drug mules in Europe:

‘The Pineta Grande also sees more drug mules than any other hospital in Italy. Doctors told Foreign Correspondent young African men are arriving with stomachs full of narcotics, some smuggling up to 1.2kg of cocaine in individually wrapped capsules the doctors describe as "eggs". In other parts of Italy, authorities have noticed a rise in the number of young pregnant Nigerian women dying from drug overdoses when capsules burst inside them. Pregnant women are less likely to face suspicion in transit. No one would imagine they could be drug mules.’¹⁴³

While migrants who join Nigerian gangs are generally not in debt bondage, sources emphasised that it is very hard to leave such groups or refuse orders once one has become implied¹⁴⁴, and that the individuals who act as drug mules do not always appreciate the big (health) risks involved.¹⁴⁵

EASO indicated in 2017 that ‘there is no public source material available reporting that the Nigerian networks of “sponsors” and “madams” which facilitate migration for women also offer such possibilities for men, or that these networks in Europe organise men working in prostitution.’¹⁴⁶ Based

¹³⁷ European Commission, Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2020, [url](#), p. 166

¹³⁸ Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 28

¹³⁹ Euractiv, Money from Europe a lifeline for Nigerian families, 15 June 2017, [url](#); Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, interview 19 November 2020

¹⁴⁰ Guardian (The0, ‘Migrants are more profitable than drugs’: how the mafia infiltrated Italy’s asylum system, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Cohen, C., Development of the Brazilian Drug Market Toward Africa: Myths, Evidence and Theoretical Questions, Journal of Illicit Economies and Development, 2019, [url](#)

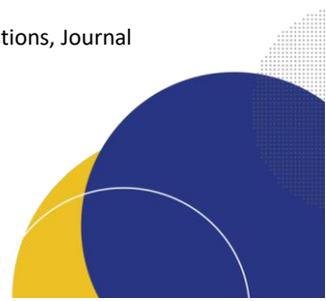
¹⁴² Eurojust, More than 200 arrests after drug trafficking network is dismantled with Eurojust support, 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ ABC News, In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021; Harper Magazine, The Black Axe, September 2019, [url](#); ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), p. 152

¹⁴⁵ Cohen, C., Development of the Brazilian Drug Market Toward Africa: Myths, Evidence and Theoretical Questions, Journal of Illicit Economies and Development, 2019, [url](#), p. 139.

¹⁴⁶ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Nigeria Country Focus, June 2017, [url](#), p. 45



on the available information, this still seems to be the case. However, sources did identify individual cases of Nigerian men exploited in the European sex industry.¹⁴⁷

Anecdotal evidence indicated that adult male Nigerian victims of trafficking were exploited in the agricultural sector in southern Europe.¹⁴⁸

Boys

Research indicates that most Nigerian minors are smuggled to Europe, but often end up in situations of exploitation because they do not have the means to finance the whole travel.¹⁴⁹ There were some indications that Nigerian boys are being trafficked – i.e. not smuggled - to Europe from Nigeria.¹⁵⁰ Different sources detected cases of football trafficking of Nigerian boys. These boys were lured to Europe on the pretext of a career with a professional football club to eventually become victims of exploitation outside the football industry.¹⁵¹

Anecdotal evidence shows that during the last couple of years Nigerian boys have been trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation or ended up in sexual exploitation after arrival in Europe.¹⁵² In 2016 social workers in the UK indicated they often encountered trafficked Nigerian boys across African boys ending up in a combination of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.¹⁵³ A Nigeria-based European journalist indicated to know two cases of Nigerian boys who had been trafficked together with their sisters to Europe for sexual exploitation.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, interview 19 November 2020; Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 28; The Children's Society, Boys Don't Cry: Improving identification and disclosure of sexual exploitation of boys and young men trafficked to the UK, 2016, [url](#), p. 53.

¹⁴⁸ TIME, 'It Was As if We Weren't Human.' Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 20.

¹⁵⁰ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 21; Al Jazeera, African footballers stranded around the world with crushed dreams, 26 August 2019, [url](#); Premium Times, Football agents in Nigeria tasked on trafficking, other vices, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Al Jazeera, African footballers stranded around the world with crushed dreams, 26 August 2019, [url](#); Premium Times, Football agents in Nigeria tasked on trafficking, other vices, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵² Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 19; The Children's Society, Boys Don't Cry: Improving identification and disclosure of sexual exploitation of boys and young men trafficked to the UK, 2016, [url](#), p. 53.

¹⁵³ The Children's Society, Boys Don't Cry: Improving identification and disclosure of sexual exploitation of boys and young men trafficked to the UK, 2016, [url](#), p. 53

¹⁵⁴ Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020

2. Modus operandi of THB in Nigeria for sexual exploitation in Europe

The modi operandi of trafficking in human beings in Nigeria differentiate between the type of trafficking (sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour, etc.), the type of victim and the destination.¹⁵⁵ This chapter describes the organisation of trafficking in human beings from Nigeria to Europe with a focus on the trafficking of female victims for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking of women from Nigeria consists of three phases: recruitment, the journey towards Europe and exploitation in Europe. As the following paragraphs will show, since the previous EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women (2015), the journey towards Europe has become significantly more difficult due to the deteriorating civil war in Libya, and the measures to stem the influx of migrants to Italy.¹⁵⁶ This section attempts to provide insight in the impact of these developments on the modus operandi of Nigerian sex trafficking networks.

2.1 Structure and size of Nigerian trafficking networks

The 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women indicated that these operations consisted of networks with cellular structures, of which cells operated independently while drawing on an extensive network of personal contacts to run these operations.¹⁵⁷ It found madams and members of confraternities (also often referred to as cults), which started out as student organisations but evolved into criminal groups, to be central to the process.¹⁵⁸ However, it also identified conflicting visions with regard to the modus operandi of traffickers and roles of/hierarchy between the different actors involved.¹⁵⁹ Recent criminal investigations into and prosecutions of Nigerian sex traffickers in various EU Member States have increased the level of insight into the mechanisms of this phenomenon¹⁶⁰, as have studies with Nigerian trafficking victims in Europe and Nigeria.¹⁶¹

These sources mostly confirm the involvement of both actors in sex trafficking of Nigerian women, but continue to put forward differing views on the relations between these actors and do not provide clear insight in the way in which the situation in Libya has changed the modus operandi of trafficking networks. The existence of these different viewpoints partly attests to the opaque nature of Nigerian sex trafficking and the lack of high quality data on this phenomenon, but could also reflect – as the 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking suggested - that modus operandi differentiate between different trafficking cells.¹⁶² Various experts emphasised the need for more research on the functioning of Nigerian trafficking networks in order to make authoritative claims about their functioning.¹⁶³ The

¹⁵⁵ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 24

¹⁵⁶ Washington Post (The), Returned to a war zone: One boat. Dozens of dreams. All blocked by Europe's anti-migrant policies., 28 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁵⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), pp. 20-21

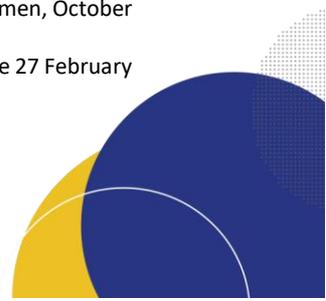
¹⁵⁹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), pp. 20-21

¹⁶⁰ rfi, Nigerian sex trafficking syndicate on trial in France, 6 November 2019, [url](#); Infomigrants, Germany 'the brothel of Europe' for trafficked Nigerian women, 9 December 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#); BBC, Spanish police break up Nigerian sex trafficking gang, 23 March 2018, [url](#); ABC News, In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Belgium, MYRIA, Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human trafficking 2019], 2020, [url](#); Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶² EASO analysis by drafter. EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 20.

¹⁶³ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Peano, I., University of Lisbon, email exchange 27 February 2021; Representative of international organisation A, interview 26 February 2020



following paragraphs explore the most recent insights about Nigerian trafficking networks and potential explanations for changes in modus operandi.

2.1.1 Madams

According to the EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women (2015), most sources indicated that so-called ‘madams’, Nigerian women who mostly worked as prostitutes in the past and/or were victims of sexual exploitation in Europe themselves, were at the centre of these networks.¹⁶⁴ They initiated recruitment of victims, financed the journey and monitored the exploitation in Italy.¹⁶⁵ The report specified that madams often operated in couples, with one madam being located in Europe and the other in Nigeria.¹⁶⁶ Madams mostly relied on the support of organised crime groups with representatives in destinations along the trafficking route and in Europe to facilitate the journey of female trafficking victims from Nigeria to the EU.¹⁶⁷ Various criminal investigations into Nigerian trafficking rings in Europe confirmed the continuing prominence of the model centred on these female traffickers in the organisation of sex trafficking from Nigeria to Europe. These women were core suspects in criminal investigations into trafficking in for instance Spain¹⁶⁸, France¹⁶⁹, Italy¹⁷⁰, Belgium¹⁷¹, and Germany.¹⁷² However, as will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs, some recent court cases in Europe put into question the enduring prominence of this model.

Ladies clubs

In some European countries (e.g. France, Belgium and The Netherlands)¹⁷³, madams have established ladies clubs, which sometimes have ties to similar groups in Nigeria. While there is strong evidence that these Europe-based ladies’ clubs – which consist entirely of madams – are involved in trafficking, there is no conclusive evidence that Nigerian ladies’ clubs are necessarily involved in this practice.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it has been suggested that ladies’ clubs ‘form an international network which allows madams to strengthen the links between their own trafficking networks’.¹⁷⁵

Impact of the situation in Libya on activities of madams

Madams are also based in Libya, where Nigerian sex trafficking victims are exploited on their way to Europe, or where Libya sometimes acts as the final destination. Madams in Italy and Libya cooperate and/or engage in a two way process of selling and buying Nigerian women and girls.¹⁷⁶ Some research indicated that madams have lost influence over trafficking operations because of the developments

¹⁶⁴ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁶⁵ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 21.

¹⁶⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Rodríguez López, S., Getting to Know Women Convicted of Human Trafficking in Spain: Personal Profiles and Involvement in Crime, Women & Criminal Justice, 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁶⁹ rfi, Nigerian prostitution network dismantled in France, 6 October 2018, [url](#); France Inter, Kate, survivante de la traite nigériane : "Je suis fière d’être debout aujourd’hui pour raconter tout ça", 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 Augustus 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Belgium, MYRIA, Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human Trafficking 2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 54

¹⁷² Infomigrants, Germany 'the brothel of Europe' for trafficked Nigerian women, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³ IFRA, United We (Net)work: An Online and Offline Analysis of Nigerian Women’s Clubs, 2 March 2019, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁴ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 133-136

¹⁷⁵ Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 58

¹⁷⁶ IOM, Human Trafficking Through the Central Mediterranean Route: Data, Stories and Information Collected by the International Organization for Migration, 2017, [url](#), p. 30

in Libya¹⁷⁷, where Libyan criminals and armed groups are in charge of Nigerian women/girls as soon as they cross the border.¹⁷⁸ In this regard, IOM remarked in 2017 that:

‘The control of victims by traffickers during their stay in transit countries is made difficult by the social and political instability reigning in these countries. Particular reference is made to Libya, the last stop before sea crossing, where victims of trafficking wait to embark, along with other migrants, for variable periods of time. If in the past traffickers were able to monitor their victims, while in the last year, because of instability and the rise of rebel groups, they have not been able to have a full control over the situation.’¹⁷⁹

These Libyan actors have been accused of both sexually exploiting Nigerian women as well as forcing their family members back home or madams in Italy to pay ransom in exchange for their liberation.¹⁸⁰ Others indicated that Nigerian trafficking networks have representatives in Libya¹⁸¹, have managed to make agreements with Libyan criminals, and are increasingly in charge of the trafficking/smuggling of individuals of other (West African) nationalities.¹⁸²

2.1.2 Organised crime networks and cults

Madams rely on the services of others – mostly men – during various stages of the trafficking trajectory.¹⁸³ Insights about the relationships and power dynamics between madams and organised crime groups differentiate. Some sources suggested that madams mostly rely on these men for various services (for more details, see below).¹⁸⁴ Other (European law enforcement) sources indicated that - in Italy notably - certain powerful Nigerian criminal gangs are actually in charge of trafficking operations.¹⁸⁵ Others argued these groups control some of the territories where the madams run their prostitution businesses and require them to pay tax for the right to be active in these territories¹⁸⁶, but are not actually engaged in trafficking themselves.¹⁸⁷

Synergies between madams and organised crime groups

The NGO ECPAT France, which conducted research on networks of human trafficking in Nigeria, indicated that a symbiosis exists between madams and criminals, who often belong to so-called cults. Cults originated as confraternities in Nigerian universities, but developed into violent gangs, which terrorise campuses and have become increasingly involved in violence and crime outside universities as well.¹⁸⁸ Madams mostly rely on the criminals for a range of services¹⁸⁹, and often have romantic

¹⁷⁷ Pascoal, R., *Stranded: The New Trendsetters of the Nigerian Human Trafficking Criminal Networks for Sexual Purposes*, 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷⁸ IOM, *Human Trafficking Through the Central Mediterranean Route*, 2017, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁷⁹ IOM, *Human Trafficking Through the Central Mediterranean Route*, 2017, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁰ Pascoal, R., *Stranded: The New Trendsetters of the Nigerian Human Trafficking Criminal Networks for Sexual Purposes*, 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁸¹ Belgium, Myria, *Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human Trafficking 2019]*, 2020, [url](#), p. 58; Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, email exchange 23 February 2021

¹⁸² Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, email exchange 23 February 2021

¹⁸³ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 26

¹⁸⁴ ECPAT, *Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women*, March 2019, [url](#), p. 145

¹⁸⁵ European Migrant Smuggling Centre, *4th Annual Report*, 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁸⁶ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; ABC News, *In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob*, 16 March 2020, [url](#). The academic researcher Irene Peano also indicated that there are indications that Nigerian organised crime groups are benefiting from joint rental (i.e. they control the territory and exact taxes on all illicit economic activities) and that some of the money made through trafficking of women/girls gets reinvested in the drug business. However, she also indicated this phenomenon has not been sufficiently researched to make definite claims. Peano, I., University of Lisbon, email exchange 27 February 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

¹⁸⁸ SBM Intel, *Rivers of blood: Gang violence in Nigeria’s garden state*, 22 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-6

¹⁸⁹ ECPAT, *Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women*, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 167-169

relationships with them.¹⁹⁰ Victims in France indicated, for instance, that before their departure men accompanied them to shrines to take oaths¹⁹¹, and that they also acted as ‘trolleys’¹⁹², transporting victims from Nigeria to destination countries.¹⁹³ These men also exerted pressure on victims’ family members when victims failed to pay their debts.¹⁹⁴ The research showed that male accomplices – often in their capacity of boyfriends of Europe-based madams – also provided services in the destination country. These included the provision of apartments, conflict management between madams who are operating in the same territory, and debt collection amongst trafficking victims, sometimes through violent means.¹⁹⁵

Nigerian organised crime groups in charge of trafficking operations?

Conflicting accounts exist about the extent to which Nigerian organised crime groups are in charge of trafficking operations themselves, what is the role of madams in these groups, and how closely they are linked to confraternities/cults, which suggests that from one case of trafficking to another, the degree of involvement of these various actors might not be the same.¹⁹⁶

Some stakeholders identified the emergence of sophisticated and powerful Nigerian organised crime networks in charge of trafficking operations via the central Mediterranean route. Europol, for instance, emphasised in a 2020 report that powerful Nigerian cults are at the heart of sex trafficking operations:¹⁹⁷

‘Nigerian networks achieved significant influence in EU organised crime by regular cooperation with local criminal groups. Besides THB, Nigerian networks are known to be active in other criminal businesses linked to THB, such as fraud, corruption, migrant smuggling, counterfeiting of documents and money laundering. They are also involved in trafficking and distribution of various types of drugs and currency counterfeiting.

Most of the groups are so-called confraternities; often cult groups that developed in Nigerian universities. They are based on gang culture with a strict hierarchy and using specific colours, gestures and language. They are well organised both geographically and logistically, and are able to mobilise a large number of human resources. One of their main strengths is their distribution in hubs along the trafficking routes from Nigeria to transit and destination countries, and the support of personal contacts carrying out various activities linked to the trafficking business.’¹⁹⁸

Citing Italy's national anti-mafia and anti-terrorism prosecutor Federico Cafiero de Raho, Infomigrants suggested that these networks have a well-established presence throughout Europe: ‘The Nigerian crime world has "sections in almost all Italian regions and all European countries", de Raho said. In Italy, there are various brotherhoods - such as the Axe, Eiye and - more recently - Viking that seem "for the time being not connected to each other".¹⁹⁹ Some journalists indicated that ‘the Nigerian mafia’ (with specific reference to the Black Axe) is in charge of human trafficking of both Nigerian women and men in southern Italy, sharing some of the profit with the local mafia.²⁰⁰ Similarly, reporting by another media outlet indicated that also in Sicily sex trafficking of Nigerian women and

¹⁹⁰ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019 [url](#), p. 166; Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

¹⁹¹ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), p. 167

¹⁹² Trolleys are illegal smugglers for humans across borders.

¹⁹³ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), p. 168

¹⁹⁴ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 168-169

¹⁹⁵ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, March 2019, [url](#), p. 152

¹⁹⁶ EASO analysis by drafter.

¹⁹⁷ European Migrant Smuggling Centre, 4th Annual Report, 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁹⁸ European Migrant Smuggling Centre, 4th Annual Report, 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

¹⁹⁹ Infomigrants, 'African mafias work together in Italy,' national prosecutor says, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ ABC News, In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

girls has become increasingly organised (and violent) due to the involvement 'of numerous secret societies and criminal gangs, such as the so-called Black Axe, Vikings or Supreme Eiyé Fraternity'.²⁰¹

Other sources have found that while men and male-dominated crime groups are playing an increasingly important role in sex trafficking, these actors are not necessarily linked to cults. A French research study into the functioning of trafficking networks quoted a law enforcement official, who stated that: 'There is definitely a development here, where the "madams" are now one of the elements of a much more complex organisation in which men play an increasingly important role.'²⁰² A criminal investigation into a French trafficking network, for instance, indicated that a Nigerian 'priest' was the kingpin in a Lyon-based trafficking network consisting of ten women and approximately a dozen male accomplices.²⁰³

No high levels of engagement of Nigerian organised crime groups in sex trafficking

Nigerian stakeholders and international researchers who extensively studied Nigerian sex trafficking, however, challenged the entire notion that highly organised Nigerian crime groups are in charge of sex trafficking.²⁰⁴ A study by an international organisation indicated that:

'Some stakeholders felt that the major involvement of cults or confraternities in trafficking was more of a myth than the reality, as trafficking was much more fluid and opportunistic, thriving on the insecurity and lack of opportunity in the country. It was also considered unhelpful to 'attach labels' when a range of criminal types were involved. European stakeholders consulted tended to focus on reports about the involvement of cult groups, with much of the information stemming from European police reports rather than from law enforcement agencies in Nigeria.'²⁰⁵

Various experts consulted for this EASO report also questioned the existence of a high level of organisation within Nigerian trafficking operations. Based on fieldwork amongst migrant communities in Palermo, Maria Shaidrova questioned the actual power of and level of organisation amongst cults in Italy. She indicated that while Italy-based cult members did assist madams, they were neither in charge of sex trafficking, nor highly organised in their activities.²⁰⁶ Sine Plambech also indicated that she had found no evidence through ethnographic research, that the Europe-based Nigerian organised crime groups which are involved in trafficking of drugs and weapons are now organising human trafficking from Nigeria to Europe as well.²⁰⁷

In 2021, the Swedish police had no clear evidence that Nigerian cults, which are engaged in drug trafficking in Sweden, are in charge of sex trafficking operations as well, according to reporting in the media and information provided by an anonymous source.²⁰⁸

Madams paying tax to organised crime groups

Sources indicated that in certain locations in Europe, where Nigerian organised crime groups which engaged in drug trafficking had a strong presence – e.g. Marseille, Castel Volturno and Sicily – might indeed try to benefit from human trafficking organised by madams, by forcing madams to pay tax. The

²⁰¹ DW, How the 'Nigerian mafia' exploits African women in Europe, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰² ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, p. 170, March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³ Infomigrants, Nigerian sex trafficking syndicate on trial in France, 6 November 2019, [url](#); Le Monde, Jusqu'à sept ans de prison pour 24 membres d'un réseau de prostitution de femmes nigérianes, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

²⁰⁵ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 25

²⁰⁶ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

²⁰⁷ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

²⁰⁸ European diplomat, email exchange 11 February 2021; Sputnik International, 'Black Axe': Reports of African Drug Mafia Taking Over Sweden, 23 July 2019, [url](#)



director of a Nigerian anti-trafficking NGO noticed this dynamic during a field visit to Castel Volturno. Female trafficking victims informed her, that their madams had to pay organised crime groups to let their women/girls use parts of the street in Castel Volturno for street prostitution.²⁰⁹ However, research showed that prostitution in places such as Marseille has historically relied on territorial protection and informal taxation, in which African pimps have played a role since the beginning of the 20th century.²¹⁰ Sources, therefore, indicated that in order to make robust claims about this phenomenon and the degree to which Nigerian organised crime groups are involved in this practice today, more research is required.²¹¹

2.2 Means of recruitment for trafficking

The 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women identified different models for the recruitment of women from Benin City/Edo State in particular. It cited sources that indicated that: 1) women themselves would approach traffickers²¹², 2) family members or acquaintances would put them in contact with traffickers²¹³, or 3) women would be approached by strangers on the street.²¹⁴

Recent research and articles in media confirmed the continuing existence of each of these models. Some sources indicated the existence of a fourth more fragmented ‘smuggling’ model whereby the journey from Nigeria to Europe would not necessarily be controlled and organised by one madam/trafficker from beginning to end. Some researchers argue that this model has become more important, because madams have lost control over the trafficking trajectory due to the insecurity in Libya, and it has become more difficult to traffic women into Europe due to measure to stop the influx of migrants via the Mediterranean (see Sections [2.1](#) and [2.5](#)). This section first discusses the developments surrounding the traditional model and then delves deeper into the more fragmented smuggling model.

2.2.1 Recruitment in Nigeria

A study of recruitment practices in a specific area of Benin City, by a Nigerian anti-trafficking NGO indicated that various types of individuals are involved in the creation of links between traffickers and potential victims. On the side of the traffickers, some madams are based in Nigeria and are themselves recruiting women and girls. Some Europe-based madams regularly travel themselves to Nigeria to recruit victims²¹⁵, or use middlemen. These include their boyfriends, who they send to Nigeria to

²⁰⁹ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

²¹⁰ See for instance: Sylvain, P., Souteneurs noirs à Marseille, 1918-1921 Contribution à l'histoire de la minorité noire en France [*], Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales, 2009, [url](#), pp. 1361-1386

²¹¹ Guardian (The), ‘Migrants are more profitable than drugs’: how the mafia infiltrated Italy’s asylum system, 1 February 2018, [url](#); Plambeck, S., Senior Research DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Peano, I., University of Lisbon, email exchange 27 February 2021

²¹² EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 22-23. Source: Plambeck, S., Points of Departure, 2014, p.39; Skilbrei, M.-L. & M. Tveit, Facing return, 2007, p. 27; Pascoal, R., The situation of the Nigerian human trafficking victims’ and their children in Italy, 19 December 2012, p. 6

²¹³ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 22-23. Source: Skilbrei, M.-L. & M. Tveit, Facing return, 2007, p. 27; DIS, Protection of victims of trafficking in Nigeria, April 2008, p. 30; Carling, J., Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe, 2006, p. 27; Landinfo, Trafficking in Women, May 2006, p. 14; Cherti, M. et al., Beyond Borders, January 2013, pp. 38-39

²¹⁴ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 22-23. Source: Skilbrei, M.-L. & M. Tveit, Facing return, 2007, p. 27; Cherti, M. et al., Beyond Borders, January 2013, p. 39. Cherti, M. et al., Beyond Borders, January 2013, pp 5, 39. See for anecdotal evidence: BBC, Human trafficking - The lives bought and sold, 28 July 2015.

²¹⁵ L’Express, Qui est Jessica Edosomwan, la fugitive la plus recherchée de France ?, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

recruit for them.²¹⁶ They also rely on family members back home²¹⁷, former trafficking victims²¹⁸, or various types of professional recruiters including so-called burgers (also known as trolleys or connection men: men who accompany victims during – a part of - the journey), scouters, juju priests²¹⁹, and Christian pastors.²²⁰ These ‘professional’ recruiters are predominantly women and operate both in the streets as well as online via social media and WhatsApp.²²¹

With regard to the victims’ side, recent studies and articles in media indicated that the second model, in which family members or other acquaintances encourage a girl to be trafficked to Europe is most common.²²² According to Human Rights Watch, the majority of the 76 trafficking survivors they interviewed, said ‘they were trafficked by people they know, who prey on their desperation, making false promises of paid employment, professional training, and education.’²²³ However, according to Pathfinders Justice Initiative, many of what they described as ‘helpers’ ‘are generally not connected to organised criminal networks and generally unaware of the inherent dangers that lay in wait for their recruits’ and are ‘to a large extent [...] genuinely motivated to help a young woman who they see suffering from abject poverty find a better life abroad’.²²⁴ According to Aparad and others, parents – and particularly mothers – in Edo State usually instigate the trafficking of their (oldest) daughters by getting in touch with the Nigeria-based families of madams.²²⁵ This phenomenon also received coverage in international media.²²⁶

Sources confirmed that in Benin City/Edo State some girls/women themselves actively looked for opportunities to travel to Europe via traffickers.²²⁷ In this regard Sophie Samyn remarked that: ‘Most women are approached themselves in Edo, but there are also those who contact their friends in Europe and ask around for sponsors who are very accessible anyway.’²²⁸

2.2.2 Smuggling model

Sources distinguished two types of journeys from Nigeria to Libya. The first type consists of the ‘organised journeys’ described above, where, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) ‘highly-structured smuggling networks offer to take clients from their country of origin to the Libyan coast or even to their destination of choice in Europe’. The other type is the step-by-step journeys, where ‘each smuggler, driver or intermediary is paid individually and is only in charge of a

²¹⁶ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

²¹⁷ Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 61 ; Belgium, MYRIA, Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human Trafficking 2019], 2020, [url](#), p. 55; International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 26

²¹⁸ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 25

²¹⁹ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 23-24

²²⁰ CNN, The sex trafficking trail from Nigeria to Europe, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

²²¹ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 25; Interpol, Online African Organized Crime from Surface to Dark Web, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-24

²²² Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, p. 4. [url](#); Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), pp. 60-61 ; CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 24-25; See also: Conversation (The), How strong family ties play a role in sex trafficking in Nigeria, 12 February 2017, [url](#)

²²³ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 4. See also: ABC News, In a ruined city on the Italian coast, the Nigerian mafia is muscling in on the old mob, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 26-27

²²⁵ Aparad, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 61 . See also : Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²²⁶ Trouw, Benin City loopt leeg: waarom de vrouwenhandel van Afrika naar Europa niet te stoppen is [Benin City is emptying: Why the trafficking of women from Africa to Europe cannot be stopped], 25 May 2018, [url](#); Infomigrants, Italian police uncover trafficking of Nigerian women, minors, 19 December 2019 [url](#)

²²⁷ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²²⁸ Translated by drafter from the Dutch original: ‘De meeste vrouwen worden zelf benaderd in Edo, maar er zijn er ook die hun vrienden in Europa contacteren en rondvragen naar sponsors die sowieso heel toegankelijk zijn.’ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 7

segment of travel from one location to another.²²⁹ According to UNODC, most migrants from Western Africa to Italy use the second option, except for Nigerian women being trafficked²³⁰, for whom the whole trajectory is organised. This ‘organised journey’ model, typical of sex trafficking from Benin City, has received most attention in international research and reporting about sex trafficking from Nigeria. Experts, however, indicated that some Nigerian women who ended up as victims of sexual exploitation actually organised their journeys themselves and relied on smugglers to go to Libya and subsequently Europe²³¹, and were not in debt bondage to a madam at the outset of their journey.²³²

The Director of a Nigerian NGO estimated that one out of ten Nigerian women who leave from Edo State did so – initially – without the support of a sponsor.²³³ These women either saved up money in advance or worked during the journey. Some diplomats and NGOs believed that it is difficult to distinguish between smuggling and trafficking cases in view of the abuse and exploitation experienced by Nigerian migrants during the journey, and suggested that trafficking often occurred as a result of smuggling ‘gone wrong’.²³⁴ Various sources indicated that many of the women who left by themselves ended up in some sort of debt bondage to smugglers because they ran out of money during the journey²³⁵, and/or were tricked by their smugglers and sold to traffickers, often resulting in sexual exploitation in so-called ‘connection houses’ in Libya.²³⁶ The director of a Nigerian anti-trafficking NGO confirmed the existence of this practice. She indicated that women who left Nigeria without the support of a sponsor, usually had to rely on a sponsor to pay the crossing of the Mediterranean. When making the crossing these women got the name of an unknown person they would have to contact upon arrival in Italy, who then turned out to be the person who would exploit them in Europe.²³⁷ A similar method was described in an article in the Guardian.²³⁸

2.2.3 Recruitment along the way

The journey has become less organised than in the past, also for most of the women whose travel is funded by traffickers. According to Rafaela Pascoal ‘nowadays the phase of recruitment has become more complex to comprehend, in which the girl has no awareness regarding its beginning and duration.’²³⁹ Pathfinders Justice Initiative confirmed this:

‘It should be noted that although traffickers contend that victims are indebted to them for the overland journey from Nigeria, many victims are regularly abandoned en route to Europe. In

²²⁹ UNHCR, Mixed Migration Routes and Dynamics in Libya in 2018, June 2019, [url](#), p. 23. A similar distinction has been identified by Pathfinders Justice Initiative: CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 21

²³⁰ UNHCR, Mixed Migration Routes and Dynamics in Libya in 2018, June 2019, [url](#), p. 23

²³¹ Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#); Grotti, V. et al., Shifting vulnerabilities: gender and reproductive care on the migrant trail to Europe, 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²³² Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; Olabisi Oluwatoyin T. and A. Akinyoade, Coercion or Volition: Making Sense of the Experiences of Female Victims of Trafficking from Nigeria in the Netherlands, 2015, [url](#), p. 186

²³³ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

²³⁴ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 22

²³⁵ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; 4Mi, Hidden Figures Women on the Move in Libya, September 2017, [url](#), pp. 5-6; 4Mi, Invisible Labour Women’s labour migration to Libya., December 2017, [url](#), p. 8

²³⁶ Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

²³⁷ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

²³⁸ Guardian (The), ‘Migrants are more profitable than drugs’: how the mafia infiltrated Italy’s asylum system, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

²³⁹ Pascoal, R., Motherhood in the Context of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, 2020, [url](#), p. 47

an effort to advance the journey, victims are forced to start prostitution as soon as they leave Nigeria and will continue to do so until their arrival in Europe.²⁴⁰

Rafaela Pascoal observed that increasingly madams only get in touch with trafficking victims towards the end of the journey, when victims are already in Libya.²⁴¹ Pascoal identified cases in which girls who thought they had been recruited by an Italy-based madam when they were still in Nigeria, lost touch with this madam once in Libya and in the end got recruited from Libya by another Italy-based madam.²⁴²

The academic researchers Sine Plambech and Irene Peano both indicated that traffickers were selling trafficking victims and their debts along the way.²⁴³ IOM also found that madams are selling trafficking victims to each other and that this was particularly the case with regard to victims who fell pregnant in Libya:

‘From the evidence that has been collected, it was possible to ascertain that pregnant victims who arrived in Italy by sea may be re-trafficked. In fact, the madame, having learned of the victim's pregnancy, may decide to “leave her” in Libya, considering her pregnancy as a great obstacle to work, and, therefore, the payment of debt. In some cases, girls are sold by their madame in Europe to another madame in Libya, who will force girls to interrupt their pregnancy and work in brothels. In many other cases, however, the girls who were interviewed were forced to rely on a different trafficker willing to support them in Libya and, eventually, from Libya to Italy. The victim is then subjected by the new madame to a second voodoo ritual and sometimes, forced to prostitute herself even during a pregnancy.’²⁴⁴

2.3 The debt system and the use of juju

The incurring and repaying of a debt are a central feature of sex trafficking from Benin City/Edo State to Europe. Madams or criminal gangs finance the journey of trafficking victims to Europe, but require victims to repay a highly inflated debt through sex work upon arrival in Europe. These debts are estimated to be between EUR 30 000 and EUR 70 000.²⁴⁵ The 2015 EASO report indicated that most trafficking victims from Edo/Benin City were aware of the fact they would have to repay a debt, but that they were not aware of or did not understand the actual (highly inflated) amount of the debt.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, research indicated that many trafficking victims in Europe tried to fully repay their debts²⁴⁷, even though very few succeeded.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁰ CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), p. 8. Source: New Yorker (The), The Desperate Journey of a Trafficked Girl, 3 April 2017, [url](#)

²⁴¹ Pascoal, R., Motherhood in the Context of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, 2020, [url](#), p. 46

²⁴² Pascoal, R., Motherhood in the Context of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, 2020, [url](#), p. 46

²⁴³ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Peano, I., University of Lisbon, email exchange 27 February 2021

²⁴⁴ IOM, Human Trafficking Through the Central Mediterranean Route: Data, Stories and Information Collected by the International Organization for Migration, 2017, [url](#), p. 30

²⁴⁵ TIME, An Ancient Curse Kept Nigerian Women Bound to Sex Slavery. Now, It's Been Reversed, 17 April 2018, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 42; Malakooti, A., The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel, 2020, [url](#), p. 75

²⁴⁶ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 25

²⁴⁷ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 9

²⁴⁸ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Malakooti, A., The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel, 2020, [url](#), p. 75; Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 10

2.3.1 Juju and oath-taking

Until at least 2018, traffickers from Edo used the native justice system which relies on oaths and lucky charms/fetishes (juju) to seal the debt agreement with trafficking victims before departure. Through these oaths traffickers promised victims to arrange their travel to Europe and victims committed themselves to paying back the debt and not making any problems, including revealing the identity of the trafficker(s) to law enforcement authorities.²⁴⁹ Recent research indicated that the information about the use of oaths in the 2015 EASO report about sex trafficking of Nigerian women is still mostly accurate.²⁵⁰

The 2015 EASO report described juju as ‘a popular term for various forms of “traditional” medicine and black magic’.²⁵¹ and a colloquial term for voodoo, ‘a traditional religion in West Africa’ according to which ‘spirits or gods are believed to govern the earth and every aspect of human existence.’ The report also stipulated that ‘juju is deeply ingrained in society in Edo State, and many Nigerians, regardless of social class or education level, believe in it.’²⁵²

Recent research emphasised that juju has multiple meanings in the Edo context. It refers both to the practice of using ‘supernatural forces to act on natural forces’, as well as to the actual lucky charms/fetishes which are used to achieve this goal. ECPAT France indicated that:

‘The people interviewed as part of our surveys use the word "juju" to refer not only to their beliefs and the rituals they have undergone during their journey, but also to the object that materializes the promise and that is composed of the items used during the oath of allegiance [...] or to the representations of the deities used during the rituals.’²⁵³

As such, juju is an essential part of Edo’s customary justice system, in which oaths²⁵⁴, and fetishes are used to seal ‘oaths of allegiance’:²⁵⁵

‘According to Precious Diagboya, the oath of allegiance, which can also be described as a loyalty oath, is used in the Benin City area in the context of marital fidelity, good faith in commercial dealings or commitment to a group (a cultist group, for example) or to a deity. As we have seen, it can be taken by the devotees to a deity at the time of initiation or by the "priests" to the Oba. The existence of an oath of allegiance adds a sacred dimension to the commitment of allegiance, a dimension that distinguishes it from a simple promise. This sacred aspect is "most often handled by involving a third party witness: the third actor in this sociodrama that is the oath, a sacred or sanctified actor, a witness and guarantor of the enunciation".’²⁵⁶

The 2015 EASO report about sex trafficking of Nigerian women cited insights from academic research that warned against a sensationalist understanding of the role of juju charms and oath taking in sex trafficking in Nigeria, which considers juju as the driving force behind this phenomenon and depicts juju rituals themselves as inherently traumatic. Researchers emphasised that while juju is used to ensure a victim’s allegiance to the trafficker, juju is not used as a way to force women and girls into

²⁴⁹ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), p. 66

²⁵⁰ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), pp. 25-28. See for instance: ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), p. 66

²⁵¹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 25. Source: Plambech, S., Points of departure 2014, p. 161

²⁵² EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 27. It cites: Ana Dols Garcia, Voodoo, Witchcraft and Human Trafficking in Europe, October 2013, DIS, Protection of victims of trafficking in Nigeria, April 2008, p. 23

²⁵³ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 64-76

²⁵⁴ IFRA, Oath Taking in Edo: Usages and Misappropriations of the Native Justice System, 2 March 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵⁵ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 99-100

²⁵⁶ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), p. 65

sex trafficking, and is only applied once she has decided that she wants to go to Europe.²⁵⁷ The EASO report also indicated that the act of making an oath that involves juju charms is not necessarily experienced as intimidating and coercive²⁵⁸, as juju and juju oaths are integral to daily life in Edo.²⁵⁹ Researchers also emphasised that juju is just one of the means traffickers have at their disposal to guarantee a victim's obedience, and that not all victims of sex trafficking in Nigeria have sworn oaths²⁶⁰, or if they did swear an oath, believe in its 'magic power'.²⁶¹

The EASO report also indicated that juju could become a tool of psychological coercion once victims refuse or fail to live up to the demands of their traffickers.²⁶² According to multiple sources cited in the report, victims who believed in juju and wanted to escape their traffickers reported high levels of fear for the consequences of breaking their oaths.²⁶³ Recent research showed that the fetishes (juju) that are taken when a trafficking victim swears her oath of allegiance play a central role in this. Priests threatened victims to set on fire their fetishes when victims do not pay back their debts, which victims believe could result in death of madness.²⁶⁴

However, during this reporting period, the role of juju and oaths in sex trafficking from Nigeria to Europe has been impacted by the decision by the Oba of Benin to curse the use of juju to seal allegiances between traffickers and their victims, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.3.2 Oba of Benin and the cursing of sex traffickers

As mentioned in Section 1.2, one of the most remarkable developments during this reporting period was the decision by the Oba of Benin, the traditional religious ruler who has moral authority over all juju priests in Edo State, to curse human trafficking, curse all priests who perform oaths between sex traffickers and their victims, and nullify all previous juju oaths sworn by trafficking victims. Initial reports from Nigeria and Europe showed that this decision had various impacts. Juju priests in Edo were said to have stopped performing oaths²⁶⁵, and have requested victims and/or their families to pick up the bundles with the victims' intimate items.²⁶⁶ Trafficking victims in Europe have demonstrated more willingness to leave their madams²⁶⁷, and some victims seemed more willing to cooperate with both European and Nigerian law enforcement authorities to convict their traffickers.²⁶⁸ Reuters interviewed a paid Nigeria-based recruiter of potential victims, who indicated that she had stopped recruiting women and girls out of fear for the consequences of the curse.²⁶⁹

²⁵⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 26. It cites: Cherti, M., et al., Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK, January 2013, p. 43

²⁵⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), pp. 26-27. It cites: Cherti, M., et al., Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK, January 2013, p. 43; Dijk, van, R., 'Voodoo' on the doorstep. Young Nigerian prostitutes and magic', 2001, p. 571

²⁵⁹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 27. It cites: DIS, Protection of victims of trafficking in Nigeria, April 2008, p. 23

²⁶⁰ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 28. It cites: Cherti, M., et al., Beyond Borders, January 2013, p. 43

²⁶¹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 28. It cites: Skilbrei, M.-L. & M. Tveit, Facing return, 2007 p. 33

²⁶² EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 27. It cites: Carling, J., Trafficking in Women from Nigeria to Europe, 1 July 2005

²⁶³ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 67-68

²⁶⁴ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 63, 86-87

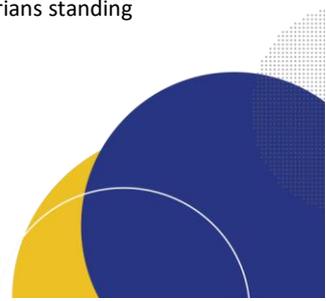
²⁶⁵ Reuters, Black magic ban dents sex trafficking in Nigeria, 19 September 2018, [url](#); TIME, An Ancient Curse Kept Nigerian Women Bound to Sex Slavery. Now, It's Been Reversed, 17 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ TIME, An Ancient Curse Kept Nigerian Women Bound to Sex Slavery. Now, It's Been Reversed, 17 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Al Jazeera, A traditional Nigerian leader took on traffickers. Has it helped?, 4 July 2018, [url](#); BBC, The Nigerians standing up to sex-work traffickers in Sicily, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Reuters, Black magic ban dents sex trafficking in Nigeria, 19 September 2018, [url](#)



No end to sex trafficking from Edo State

However, these observations are mostly based on anecdotal evidence and concern the situation just after the Oba made the curse. Experts indicated that sex trafficking from Benin City has not stopped²⁷⁰, as predicted by experts/stakeholders from Edo State in 2018 already.²⁷¹ Experts indicated that ‘the current question is likely to be more about what strategies criminal groups will deploy, adapting what they do to comply with the Oba’s declaration, rather than whether the declaration will put an end to trafficking.’²⁷² Stakeholders identified various potential (unintended) consequences of the oath, including:

- A shift in recruiting areas for sex trafficking victims, as the Oba’s authority is only recognised by the Bini people from Edo State (see Section [1.3.1](#));²⁷³
- A shift towards other coercive tactics to guarantee the allegiance of victims to their traffickers including the threat and/or use of violence (see Section [4.1](#) on reprisals);²⁷⁴
- The use of ‘clandestine oaths’²⁷⁵, or the use of shrines outside Edo State.²⁷⁶

The director of a Nigerian NGO indicated that the curse by the Oba did nothing to remove the push factors that encourage inhabitants of Edo State to leave, meaning that they will still look for opportunities to go abroad, including via the sex trafficking model.²⁷⁷ In this regard, it has been emphasised that the oath was never the driving force behind a trafficking victim’s choice to travel with the support of a madam. The oath was used to seal the ‘agreement’ between traffickers and trafficking victims, once the victim had decided to make the journey to Europe. Sources indicated that there has been a decrease in departures to Europe from Edo State, but ascribe this to the fact that the journey has become more difficult and the huge number of returnees from Libya signifies to would-be migrants in Edo State²⁷⁸ that this is not the right moment to attempt the journey.²⁷⁹ Experts, however, believed that this has resulted in sex trafficking of women to other destinations, such as the Middle East.²⁸⁰

Impact on victims in Italy (and the rest of Europe)

Sources confirmed that the decision by the Oba provided trafficking victims from Edo in Italy with an opportunity to escape situations of exploitation/debt bondage. NGOs providing services to Nigerian victims in Europe, however, indicated that while victims might initially have felt emboldened to leave their madams, the lack of sufficient support services for these women and girls has resulted in many of them returning to their madams.²⁸¹ A migration sociologist also observed this development during fieldwork with Nigerian trafficking victims in Italy in 2020.²⁸² In addition, sources indicated that traffickers in Europe have other tools at their disposal to coerce women into obedience. These include

²⁷⁰ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

²⁷¹ TIME, An Ancient Curse Kept Nigerian Women Bound to Sex Slavery. Now, It’s Been Reversed, 17 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁷² ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 99-100

²⁷³ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

²⁷⁴ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 99-100; Al Jazeera, A traditional Nigerian leader took on traffickers. Has it helped?, 4 July 2018, [url](#); DW, How the ‘Nigerian mafia’ exploits African women in Europe, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), pp. 99-100

²⁷⁶ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

²⁷⁷ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

²⁷⁸ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

²⁷⁹ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

²⁸⁰ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

²⁸¹ Al Jazeera, A traditional Nigerian leader took on traffickers. Has it helped?, 4 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁸² Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

(threats of) violence against victims and their families²⁸³, and threats to report trafficking victims without documents to the authorities.²⁸⁴

2.4 Travel to and within Europe

This section deals with the routes taken by Nigerian migrants trafficking victims on the way to Europe, activities of traffickers and intermediaries alongside these routes, and the abuse inflicted along the way. Sources noted that the actors who are in charge of human trafficking have been shifting between various EU countries²⁸⁵, resulting in significant changes in the number of Nigerian victims of human trafficking that have been detected in individual EU Member States.²⁸⁶

2.4.1 Routes to Europe

The 2015 EASO report indicated that most Nigerian trafficking victims used the central Mediterranean route through Niger and Libya to travel to Italy. In 2020, this was still the case. Nigerians using this route continued to predominantly favour Italy as primary destination country, followed by Greece.²⁸⁷ Data from interviews with Nigerian migrants in Italy by the Mixed Migration Centre indicated that most Nigerian migrants (including victims of trafficking) followed a similar journey. Migrants from other places in Nigeria travelled to Kano in northern Nigeria first, to subsequently cross the border with Niger. Most migrants then directly travelled to the Nigerian city Agadez, but some indicated they made a stop before in the Nigerian town Zinder. From Agadez they continued to the southern Libyan desert town Sabha to subsequently travel to Tripoli or in some cases Sabratha, both on the north coast of Libya²⁸⁸, where they hoped to embark on a boat journey to Italy across the Mediterranean Sea. The 2015 report mentioned the use of the western Mediterranean route to Spain.²⁸⁹ IOM data showed that Nigerians do not figure amongst the most common nationalities of arrivals in Spain.²⁹⁰

First-time asylum applications in Spain between 2015 and 2020 reflect this observation (see table below).²⁹¹ While first-time asylum applications by Nigerians dropped significantly in Italy since 2018, there was no stark increase in first-time applications in Spain.²⁹²

²⁸³ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 8; Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; Guardian (The), 'Migrants are more profitable than drugs': how the mafia infiltrated Italy's asylum system, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#); VPRO, Zwangere Afrikaanse asielzoeksters verdwijnen uit opvang [Pregnant African asylum seekers disappeared from asylum centres], 19 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ Infomigrants, Germany 'the brothel of Europe' for trafficked Nigerian women, 9 December 2019, [url](#); Interview Heeringa, A., Team Leader Perspectives on Rights, Salvation Army, 19 November 2020; Argos, Honderden Nigerianen verdwenen uit asielopvang [Hundreds of Nigerians disappeared from asylum centres], 5 June 2020, [url](#); Frontex confirms the prevalence of secondary movements within Europe by West-African migrants: Frontex, Risk analysis 2018, [url](#), p. 28

²⁸⁷ IOM, Irregular migration routes to Europe: West and Central Africa, January-June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ Mixed Migration Centre, Protection risks along migration routes through North Africa to Italy, September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁸⁹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 33

²⁹⁰ IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information, November 2019, [url](#), p. 4. In 2019, the main nationalities among arrivals by sea in Spain between January and November 2019 were Morocco (30%), Algeria (15%), Mali (9%) and others (46%) In 2019 and 2020, Nigerians also did not feature amongst the main nationalities of arrivals in Italy. IOM, Flow Monitoring Surveys – Italy, February 2021, [url](#); IOM, Top 5 Nationalities Interviewed in Italy in 2019, July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹¹ Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded), last updated 18 March 2021, last accessed 28 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹² Dutch research indicated that the most common West African nationalities that entered Spain between 2014 and 2018 showed a significant overlap with the nationalities that were previously detected in the Central Mediterranean, with the exception of Nigerians. Netherlands, ACVZ, Research report: Secondary Movements of Asylum Seekers in the EU, 12 November 2019, [url](#), p. 41

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|------|------|
| Italy | 17 755 | 26 550 | 24 950 | 5510 | 1255 | 855 |
| Spain | 200 | 275 | 250 | 375 | 280 | 200 |
| Malta | 5 | 15 | 35 | 35 | 220 | 215 |
| Greece | 190 | 190 | 130 | 130 | 170 | 100 |

Table 1: First-time Nigerian applications in selected Mediterranean EU countries between 2015 and 2020²⁹³

Nevertheless, various sources indicated that Nigerian trafficking victims have used the western Mediterranean route to enter Europe.²⁹⁴

A European NGO indicated that a small fraction of Nigerian sex trafficking victims still arrived via plane in Europe.²⁹⁵ The main airports of embarkation indicated by Frontex (2018) - in its database of irregular entries at EU air borders - also included Lagos (in the top six).²⁹⁶

2.4.2 Abuse on the way to Europe

In theory the organised journey model shields trafficking victims from violence and exploitation along the way, as they do not have to search and pay for their own transit to the next destination, reducing the time spent in transit.²⁹⁷ However, as the 2015 EASO report already mentioned, trafficked Nigerian women experienced significant levels of sexual abuse and exploitation in so-called connection houses or ghettos in Niger and Libya where they resided before embarking on the next part of the journey.²⁹⁸ Along the central Mediterranean route, Nigerian migrants had to pay bribes to corrupt border officials to guarantee passing into the next country:

‘Widespread/endemic corruption was noted in law enforcement, particularly as returnees left Edo State and on the border between Nigeria and Niger. Returnees noted that law enforcement officers are aware of the smuggling happening on the borders and either turn a blind eye or demand bribes for returnees to continue.’²⁹⁹

The lawlessness and volatile security situation in Libya since 2011 ‘provides fertile ground for thriving illicit activities, such as trafficking in human beings and criminal smuggling, and leaves migrant and refugee men, women and children at the mercy of countless predators who view them as commodities to be exploited and extorted for maximum financial gain’, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).³⁰⁰ During this reporting period, Nigerian migrants identified Libya, and particularly Sabha and Tripoli, as the most dangerous places during the journey.³⁰¹ The fact that since 2018 it has become more difficult to leave Libya, has increased the risk of being submitted to exploitation and abuse for migrants. The types of abuse reported by both male and female migrants were manifold and included physical violence, torture, rape/sexual violence³⁰²,

²⁹³ Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded) [choose first-time applicant], 18 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ Jorge, E., I. Antolínez and A. Alonso, The Construction of Silence: Narratives of Nigerian Women Crossing into Europe, UNESCO Chair on Gender, Wellbeing and a Culture of Peace Working Paper Series, March 2020, [url](#); Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021; CLEEN & Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Pathway to Prevention, 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

²⁹⁵ The arrival dates of these victims, however, were not specified. See: Herzwerk, Best practices in tackling trafficking Nigerian Route (BINs): National Report Austria, 2018, [url](#), p. 11

²⁹⁶ Semprebon, M. Fighting Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Recent and ongoing projects (2010-2019), 2020, [url](#), p. 26

²⁹⁷ UNHCR, Mixed Migration Routes and Dynamics in Libya in 2018, 2019, [url](#), p. 23

²⁹⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 33

²⁹⁹ INSigHT, Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#), p. ix

³⁰⁰ OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 20. See also: Malakooti, A., The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel, 2020, [url](#), p. 77

³⁰¹ Mixed Migration Center, Protection risks along migration routes through North Africa to Italy, September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁰² OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 46-47

forced detention³⁰³, kidnapping for ransom³⁰⁴, killings³⁰⁵, and various forms of exploitation.³⁰⁶ In Libya, traffickers regularly kidnap migrants to force families back home to pay ransom.³⁰⁷ The OHCHR found that migrants in Libya:

‘are systematically held captive in abusive conditions, including starvation, severe beatings, burning with hot metals, electrocution, and sexual abuses of women and girls, with the aim of extorting money from their families through a complex system of money transfers, extending to a number of countries. They are frequently sold from one criminal gang to another and required to pay ransoms multiple times before being set free or taken to coastal areas to await the Mediterranean Sea crossing.’³⁰⁸

There have also been reports of cases where smugglers captured (male) Nigerian migrants in Libya and forced family members of those migrants to pay for their release after the smugglers had decided that the initial amount that was paid for the journey to Libya was too low.³⁰⁹ Migrants have been auctioned at ‘slave markets’.³¹⁰ Women and girls often fell prey to sexual exploitation³¹¹, whereas men mostly ended up in forced labour.³¹² Women were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Libya by smugglers, including Nigerians.³¹³ There have been reports of pregnancies as a result of rape and abortions in unsanitary conditions.³¹⁴

Research with Nigerian migrants who used the western Mediterranean route indicated that traffickers also use violence along the way to intimidate women into obedience. According to Spanish research, ‘Maghnia (Algerian border with Morocco) stands out notoriously as a place where women often recount the assaults that they experience, in this case, from their fellow countrymen.’³¹⁵

Besides the fact that West African migrants are vulnerable to abuse by others during their journey, both routes in themselves are very dangerous as well. Significant numbers of African migrants died of dehydration or asphyxiation during the journey through the Sahara Desert or drowned during the crossing of the Mediterranean.³¹⁶

2.4.3 Secondary movements in Europe

As mentioned, most Nigerian irregular migrants have travelled via the central Mediterranean route to Europe during the last couple of years, with Italy being the favoured primary destination country.

³⁰³ Mixed Migration Centre, Protection concerns of people on the move across West Africa and Libya, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 12, 15; OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), p. 38

³⁰⁴ OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), p. 48

³⁰⁵ OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 29-30

³⁰⁶ TIME, ‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Mixed Migration Centre, Protection concerns of people on the move across West Africa and Libya, May 2018, [url](#) OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, December 2018, [url](#), p. 47

³⁰⁷ TIME, The Families of Migrants Held Hostage Are Using Facebook to Raise Money for Smugglers’ Ransoms, 5 February 2019, [url](#); BBC, ‘I thought I was going to die’: Jailed and ransomed in Libya, 21 June 2017, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ OHCHR, Desperate and Dangerous, 20 December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

³⁰⁹ Ansa (via Infomigrants), ‘African mafias work together in Italy,’ national prosecutor says, 29 November 2019, [url](#); Inkyfada, Investigation: At the Heart of Human Trafficking Networks in Libya, 1 December 2020, [url](#) (This publication concerns the situation of migrants in Libya in general and not specifically Nigerian migrants)

³¹⁰ TIME, ‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

³¹¹ 4Mi, cited in: Clingendael, Caught in the middle A human rights and peace-building approach to migration governance in the Sahel, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 29-30; TIME, ‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

³¹² TIME, ‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

³¹³ France 24, Nigerian women struggle to raise children born of Libya rape, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, ‘You Pray for Death’ Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 5

³¹⁵ Jorge, E., I. Antolínez and A. Alonso, The Construction of Silence: Narratives of Nigerian Women Crossing into Europe, UNESCO Chair on Gender, Wellbeing and a Culture of Peace Working Paper Series, March 2020, [url](#), p. 17

³¹⁶ IOM, Irregular Migration Routes West and Central Africa, January-June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

However, data about (first-time) asylum applications by Nigerians in EU+ countries indicated that Nigerians have (temporarily) dispersed over various EU Member States, particularly in the wake of 2018. Indeed, as fewer Nigerian migrants have arrived to Europe since 2018, movements of victims who arrived prior to that year from Italy to other EU countries have become more important. Since 2018, Germany has topped the list of EU countries receiving most Nigerian asylum applications, surpassing Italy. Many Nigerians have also withdrawn their asylum applications, mainly in Italy.³¹⁷ The 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking indeed identified the ‘continuous shifting of exploited victims within the EU’ based on data from Europol, specifying that ‘destination countries can become transit countries.’³¹⁸

As the number of new Nigerian trafficking victims arriving to Europe has decreased, movement of Nigerian trafficking victims within Europe has continued. There are no data available about secondary movements of Nigerians who have entered Europe through the Central Mediterranean route. However, data about the annual number of Nigerian asylum applicants in individual European countries provide some insight in the extent to and where Nigerians are moving after arrival in Italy. Data about Nigerian asylum applications in Europe indicate that – besides Italy, Greece and Spain – the most important asylum destinations for Nigerian migrants in Europe between 2015 and 2019 were Germany, France, Austria, the UK, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, and Ireland.³¹⁹

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Italy | 18,145 | 27,105 | 25,495 | 6,975 | 3,520 | 3,150 |
| Germany | 5,300 | 12,910 | 8,260 | 11,010 | 10,510 | 4,215 |
| France | 1,710 | 1,955 | 2,350 | 5,050 | 6,390 | 3,785 |
| United Kingdom | 1,615 | 1,905 | 1,680 | 1,440 | 1,485 | : |
| Austria | 1,375 | 1,855 | 1,405 | 680 | 335 | 185 |
| Switzerland | 970 | 1,105 | 700 | 510 | 355 | 170 |
| Sweden | 460 | 365 | 395 | 400 | 395 | 255 |
| Spain | 215 | 285 | 260 | 400 | 380 | 275 |
| Netherlands | 265 | 280 | 270 | 320 | 650 | 2,200 |
| Greece | 370 | 275 | 200 | 185 | 210 | 135 |
| Ireland | 185 | 175 | 185 | 250 | 385 | 210 |
| Finland | 165 | 165 | 105 | 105 | 120 | 75 |
| Belgium | 145 | 115 | 145 | 120 | 195 | 140 |
| Denmark | 115 | 115 | 65 | 30 | 20 | 15 |
| Hungary | 1,005 | 85 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 |

Table 2: Top 15 first asylum applications of Nigerians between 2015 and 2020³²⁰

Shifting secondary destinations

While in some countries such as the UK, Ireland, and Sweden the number of Nigerian asylum applications remained quite constant between 2016 and 2019, the table above shows that the Netherlands and France reported a significant increase in the number of Nigerian applicants since 2018/2019. Recent research in both countries showed high levels of Nigerian trafficking victims³²¹, and research in the Netherlands showed that the increased number of Nigerian asylum applications

³¹⁷ EASO, EASO Asylum Report 2020: Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union, 2020, [url](#), p. 78

³¹⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 34. Source: Europol, Joint actions to tackle West African Human Trafficking Networks, 12 June 2014

³¹⁹ Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded), 18 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁰ Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded), last updated 18 March 2021, [url](#)

³²¹ Sourd A., and A. Vacher, La traite des êtres humains en France Profil des victimes suivies par les associations en 2019, 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), pp. 42-43

corresponded with an increased number of identified Nigerian trafficking victims.³²² On the other hand, countries such as Austria and Switzerland and also Norway and Denmark witnessed significant decreases in Nigerian asylum applicants.³²³ Dutch research (2019) indicated that secondary movements mostly took place between Italy and Germany between 2014 and 2018. According to this research, France received many asylum seekers who had previously applied for asylum in Germany, Italy and Hungary, but it was not specified how many Nigerians were amongst them.³²⁴

Nigerian trafficking networks escaping European law enforcement

Little recent (academic) research exists on what motivates secondary movements by Nigerian trafficking victims and/or why the presence of Nigerian victims of trafficking/asylum seekers has significantly increased in some European countries and decreased in others. However, trafficking networks determine where trafficking victims reside and recent insights from Europol (2018) suggested that these networks know how to use local asylum procedures to their advantage and how to adapt to increased scrutiny by law enforcement officials in certain countries:

‘The long-established presence of Nigerian OCGs [organised crime groups] in the EU has given them an insight into law enforcement methods and a good understanding of how to misuse legal immigration channels (in particular the asylum mechanism, which they abuse both to traffic their victims and to legalise their status). This is shown by the many THB suspects who either hold legal residence permits, are currently asylum applicants, or former asylum seekers [...] The large number of human resources and the structure in cells makes the organised crime network rather fluid. Once one cell is dismantled by law enforcement, the rest can continue to operate and can easily re-establish any losses.’³²⁵

An representative of a shelter for Nigerian trafficking victims in Italy confirmed this vision, adding that the Italian prostitution market has been saturated, making it more beneficial for traffickers to explore other European markets.³²⁶ Save the Children indicated that the high territorial turnover of Nigerian trafficking victims was ‘implemented mainly to avoid police inspections or the creation of close relationships with clients or social workers’.³²⁷

Better earnings and conditions

Plambech indicated that Nigerian sex trafficking victims travel to other destinations within Italy and Europe to accelerate the repayment of their debts.³²⁸ In northern Europe, Nigerian trafficking victims earn more than in Italy. In addition, also within Italy, Nigerian sex trafficking victims organise short trips to different parts of the country – with a less saturated prostitution market - to enhance their earnings.³²⁹ Sine Plambech indicated that madams usually do not force Nigerian trafficking victims to go to different destinations and that women/girls often want to go themselves.³³⁰ The search of both traffickers and trafficking victims for better social security/protection via the asylum procedure also

³²² Netherlands, Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel, Slachtoffermonitor Mensenhandel 2015-2019 [[Victim Monitor Human Trafficking 2015-2019], 2020, [url](#), pp. 42-43

³²³ Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded), Last updated 18 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁴ Netherlands, ACVZ, Research report: Secondary Movements of Asylum Seekers in the EU, 12 November 2019, [url](#), p. 41

³²⁵ Europol, Situation Report: Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the European Union, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 12-13

³²⁶ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

³²⁷ Save the Children, Young Invisible Enslaved: Children Victims of Trafficking and Labour Exploitation in Italy, July 2017, [url](#), p. 27

³²⁸ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021

³²⁹ Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

³³⁰ Plambech, S., Senior Researcher DIIS, interview 1 March 2021



inspires secondary movements.³³¹ In some cases trafficking victims move to different countries, because once they are in the asylum procedure they will receive a higher allowance than in the primary destination countries. This is beneficial for traffickers as well, who force them to give all or a part of the allowance to them.³³²

³³¹ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021, Maria Shaidrova, PhD Candidate Tilburg University, interview 24 February 2021

³³² Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

3. Reintegration of returnees

This chapter discusses the situation of Nigerian trafficking victims and migrants (women and men) upon return in Nigeria. It looks into (the effectiveness of) available reintegration support and community attitudes towards returnees.

3.1 Repatriation (voluntary and forced return)

On an annual basis, many migrants return to Nigeria. European governments have established a range of programmes to support Nigerian returnees with their returns and reintegration in Nigeria. The departure country and the question whether the migrant does or does not cooperate with his/her return determine for what type of support programme he/she can apply. Prospective Nigerian returnees based in Europe can use programmes by EU Member State immigration agencies, IOM programmes or support provided through the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) in the framework of their joint reintegration programmes.³³³ Support by national immigration agencies and IOM support is predominantly reserved for voluntary returnees, whereas ERRIN support is provided to both voluntary and forced returnees according to policies in place in the respective sending countries.³³⁴

3.1.1 Number of Nigerian returnees

No information was found in regard to the percentage of returnees from Europe who are recognised to be victims of human trafficking. According to data provided by European countries to Eurostat, the authorities of these countries organised the return of 1 965 Nigerians in 2017, 1 300 in 2018 and 1 650 in 2019.³³⁵ These numbers, however, are not based on insights about return from all EU Member States. Frontex indicated that in 2019 2 287 Nigerians effectively returned.³³⁶

Most of the Nigerian returnees from Europe reported by Eurostat between 2017 and 2019 were forced returnees, as displayed in the table below:³³⁷

| | Total number of returnees ³³⁸ | Number of forced returnees ³³⁹ | Percentage forced returnees |
|-------------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| 2017 | 1965 | 1130 | 57.5 % |
| 2018 | 1300 | 755 ³⁴⁰ | 58.1 % |

³³³ For more details, see: ERRIN, What we do: Joint reintegration programmes, n.d., [url](#)

³³⁴ ERRIN, What we do: Joint reintegration programmes, n.d., [url](#). Returnees do have to live up to certain requirements in order to be eligible for support.

³³⁵ Eurostat, Third-country nationals who have left the territory to a third country by destination country and citizenship, last updated 8 February 2021, [url](#). This table covers returns from: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

³³⁶ Frontex, Risk Analysis for 2020, 2020, [url](#), p. 33. Effective returns, however, do not necessarily mean returns to the country of origin and, for example in the case of Syrians, they include returns of persons to third countries considered to be safe (for example from Hungary to Serbia).

³³⁷ Eurostat, Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³³⁸ Eurostat, Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹ Eurostat, Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ Norway, Belgium and Iceland did not report the number of forced returnees this year, which means that the total was likely higher than 755.

| | | | |
|-------------|------|---------------------|--------|
| 2019 | 1650 | 1105 ³⁴¹ | 67.0 % |
|-------------|------|---------------------|--------|

Table 3: Number of Nigerian returnees from Europe³⁴²

The largest group of organised returnees to Nigeria between 2017 and 2020, however, did not leave from the EU, but from Libya – and to a lesser extent Niger - in the framework of IOM’s humanitarian evacuation programme. Between May 2017 and December 2020, more than 17 000 Nigerians returned in the context of this programme.³⁴³ All aforementioned figures include both victims of trafficking and other categories of migrants.

Since most information about the situation of migrants after return to Nigeria concerns the experiences of returnees from Libya/Niger, they will be discussed in this chapter as well. Where possible and necessary the following sections distinguish between the experiences of voluntary and forced returnees and indicate whether it concerns experiences of returnees from Europe or Libya/Niger.

3.1.2 Overview of return programmes

Support in case of voluntary return from Europe

European countries use various programmes to support the repatriation and reintegration of voluntary returnees to Nigeria, notably programmes by local IOM offices, the ERRIN programme³⁴⁴, and programmes via national immigration agencies.³⁴⁵ Voluntary returnees can apply for these support programmes in the European country of departure. These programmes generally cover the actual repatriation including the acquisition of the required travel documents. Together with a counsellor/advisor, returnees will develop a reintegration strategy for the moment they are back in Nigeria.³⁴⁶ These strategies cover economic reintegration/schooling, but also psychosocial support, legal support (long-term) housing and medical support if necessary. Additional support is available for vulnerable groups such as victims of trafficking and (unaccompanied) minors. IOM and ERRIN provide returnees predominantly with in kind support including training/schooling, equipment/materials to start a business and housing through local IOM offices or government/NGO partners within the boundaries of the available grant amount.³⁴⁷ In some cases, voluntary returnees receive limited amounts of cash financial support for basic needs. Besides the provision of (long-term) reintegration

³⁴¹ Various countries including Norway and Sweden did not report the number of forced returnees this year, which means that the total was likely higher than 1105.

³⁴² Eurostat, Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship, last updated 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁴³ See: EU-IOM Joint Initiative, Geographic Coverage (Nigeria), n.d., [url](#). For more information about the implementation of the programme, see: EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #3, July 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ In February 2021 the ERRIN website indicated that Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and UK used the ERRIN contracts in Nigeria. See: ERRIN, Where we work (open Nigeria), n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁵ France, for instance, organises voluntary return via the Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII France), See: OFII, Retour Volontaire, n.d., [url](#). The German Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) cooperates with IOM to provide this type of support via the REAG/GARP programme. See: BAMF & IOM REAG/GARP, n.d., [url](#). In Norway the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration (UDI) also coordinates with IOM: IOM, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁶ ERRIN, About ERRIN, n.d., [url](#); For details about for instance the return support provided by IOM in various Member States, see: [url](#) (the Netherlands), [url](#) (Finland), [url](#) (Sweden), [url](#) (Iceland), [url](#) (Austria), [url](#) (Italy), and [url](#) (Poland)

³⁴⁷ For information about the nature of IOM support in Nigeria, see: EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 26-28. The IOM office in Nigeria has trained various NGOs and government entities to provide reintegration services, in the framework of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, including: National Directorate of Employment, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, Industrial Training Fund, Edo State Task Force, Committee for Support of Dignity of Women and Lift Above Poverty Organization (p. 39). For information about the nature of ERRIN support in Nigeria, see: ERRIN, ERRIN Reintegration Programme for Returning Migrants: Nigeria, n.d., [url](#), p. 2. ERRIN cooperates with the Nigerian NGO Idia Renaissance to provide reintegration support.

support ERRIN and IOM arrange the airport pick up and accommodation in Nigeria during the first days after arrival (see [section 3.1.3](#)).³⁴⁸

Support in case of forced return from Europe

The extent to which forced returnees can apply for reintegration support after arrival in Nigeria depends on the country from which they have returned. Forced returnees from EU countries who use ERRIN contracts in Nigeria, can take part in the ERRIN programme according to policies in place in the respective Member States.³⁴⁹

Support in case of humanitarian evacuation from Libya/Niger

The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for humanitarian evacuation from various African countries including Libya and Niger consists of five phases, of which the first phases consist of support in the departure country, the actual repatriation, and reception of returnees at the airport. The final phase consists of reintegration support once back home.³⁵⁰ The exact nature of reintegration support depends on the profile of the returnee. All returnees are eligible for information and counselling by an advisor who creates a reintegration plan together with the returnee.³⁵¹ Based on this advice IOM redirects returnees to existing trainings and services provided by government entities or NGOs.³⁵² These initiatives have the aim to prepare returnees for participation in the labour market or the creation of their own micro business.³⁵³ A (large) share of the returnees are eligible for additional reintegration support, notably seed money to create a business, or integration in a community development project in communities that absorb many returnees.³⁵⁴ Vulnerable returnees are priority recipients of this type of support³⁵⁵, as are returnees from communities with a high level of returnees. Other returnees can, however, also apply for additional support, if they propose an eligible reintegration project.³⁵⁶ A committee will select returnees who will get additional support based on criteria such as sustainability and the likely results of the project.³⁵⁷

Procedure for returnee trafficking victims

All above-mentioned programmes foresee in specific support for vulnerable returnees including victims of trafficking. In Nigeria, NAPTIP coordinates the provision of shelter for and reintegration of trafficking victims. The 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking indicated that victims of human trafficking who were deported from Europe often did not receive adequate support at the airport due to a lack of coordination between European authorities and NAPTIP.³⁵⁸ During the last couple of years, most

³⁴⁸ ERRIN, ERRIN Reintegration Programme for Returning Migrants: Nigeria, n.d., last accessed 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁴⁹ ERRIN, What we do: Joint reintegration programmes, n.d., [url](#). Returnees do have to live up to certain requirements in order to be eligible for support.

³⁵⁰ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 15

³⁵¹ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 26

³⁵² EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 26-27

³⁵³ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 27. The document specifies that training: ‘consists of assistance targeting a large number of returnees with common activities that can contribute to address their needs or improve their reintegration’s perspectives, such as (i) business management or technical skills training sessions, (ii) psychosocial counselling for both migrants and their families or relatives, and (iii) exposure to job fair and other similar events where return migrants could network with potential employers, get information on micro-finance institutions, etc.’ For an illustration of this type of initiative, see: IOM, Nigerian Returnees Learn the Ropes of Business Development at Home, 31 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 28. For an example of a community initiative, see: IOM, Farmers, Private Sector and Returnees Join Forces to Launch Pineapple Factory, Foster Reintegration in Nigeria, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 28

³⁵⁶ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 28

³⁵⁷ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #1, March 2019, [url](#), p. 28

³⁵⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 37

victims of trafficking who returned to Nigeria came from Libya in the framework of the EU-IOM programme. In case of return from Europe, it is most likely that victims of trafficking were amongst forced returnees. Research by an international organisation in Nigeria indicated that both under the EU ERRIN programme and the EU-IOM programme screening committees involving multiple government agencies have received returnees at airports and identified their status and assistance needs.³⁵⁹ Those who got identified as trafficking victims, were transferred to NAPTIP.³⁶⁰ This research indicated that cooperation between Europe-based and Nigerian NGOs working on sexual exploitation also sometimes resulted in the identification of trafficking victims after return from Europe. [Section 3.4](#) describes the specific support provided to trafficking victims by NAPTIP in cooperation with other actors.

3.1.3 Reception and short-term assistance to returnees

Most voluntary return programmes provide support to returnees upon arrival in Nigeria consisting of the reception of returnees and accommodation during the first day(s) after arrival. Most information about the experiences of migrants upon arrival at Nigerian airports concerns return flights from Libya. These returnees arrive in big groups of hundreds of migrants. Various sources who witnessed the arrival of this type of return flights, did not register abuse of voluntary returnees from Libya by the authorities.³⁶¹ One source captured ‘patronizing remarks’ by customs agents against women perceived to have worked in prostitution.³⁶²

IOM cooperates with various Nigerian government agencies to conduct vulnerability scans with returnees in the countries in which they are stranded, as well as at their point of entry into Nigeria. This helps to identify vulnerable returnees such as survivors of trafficking, torture, and slavery. The Nigerian Port Health collaborates with IOM medics to attend to the emergency needs of survivors via the screening of returnees, the provision of immediate medical assistance and psychosocial aid, and the delivery of a brief orientation session on available assistance options. The IOM’s protection team also cooperates with NAPTIP’s rehabilitation and counselling team in the management of identified trafficking survivors.³⁶³ Human Rights Watch expressed concerns about the efficacy of vulnerability scans/victim identification efforts at the airport.³⁶⁴ A witness of a return flight from Libya observed a generally well-organised process, but also indicated that some (traumatised) migrants refused to participate in registration procedures, and that groups of returnees started protesting in the registration area, demanding empowerment and jobs.³⁶⁵

Whether there is support for forced returnees from Europe upon arrival at the airport depends on the arrangements made by Frontex or the countries organising repatriation. Sources only described the

³⁵⁹ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 66

³⁶⁰ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 66

³⁶¹ Representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020; Foreign journalist, email exchange 4 November 2020; New Humanitarian (The), Nigerians returned from Europe face stigma and growing hardship, 28 July 2020, [url](#); DW, Nigerian returnees face poverty and destitution back home, 2 February 2018; De Correspondent, Dit is grensbewaking anno 2018: creëer onderweg een hel, zodat migranten massaal terug naar huis willen [This is border control in 2018: create hell on the way, so that migrants want to return home en masse], 21 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁶² Alpes, J., Senior researcher Human Rights Centre at Ghent University, interview 7 December 2020

³⁶³ Nigeria based representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020; Foreign journalist, email exchange 4 November 2020; New Humanitarian (The), Nigerians returned from Europe face stigma and growing hardship, 28 July 2020, [url](#); DW, Nigerian returnees face poverty and destitution back home, 2 February 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death” Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 67-68

³⁶⁵ De Correspondent, Dit is grensbewaking anno 2018: creëer onderweg een hel, zodat migranten massaal terug naar huis willen [This is border control in 2018: create hell on the way, so that migrants want to return home en masse], 21 August 2018, [url](#)

arrival of forced returnees for whom there was no support by third parties.³⁶⁶ Most of these sources did not report abuse by airport officials of returnees³⁶⁷, contrary to the 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking, which cited various sources describing the arrest of deported trafficking victims and cases in which trafficking victims were forced to pay bribes to airport officials to get released.³⁶⁸ A more recent publication did allude to such experiences, but was based on fieldwork with Nigerian victims before 2015.³⁶⁹ One source reported to be aware of (more recent) cases where Nigerian airport officials had confiscated ID documents of forced returnees.³⁷⁰ Another source reported to be aware of a case where airport officials had threatened to put a forced returnee in prison if he would not pay them a bribe.³⁷¹

Sources indicated that the key issue forced returnees faced was the lack of accommodation upon arrival in Nigeria.³⁷² This is problematic, as the airports where returnees arrive can be hundreds of kilometres away from their regions of origin. This is particularly problematic when planes arrive late at night, as is often the case.³⁷³ A source indicated that forced returnees who had no place to go upon arrival were sometimes supported by churches.³⁷⁴ The return of forced returnees was sometimes perceived by witnesses as hectic.³⁷⁵

3.2 Community attitudes towards returnees, including sex trafficking victims

As discussed in the 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking, victims of trafficking feared stigmatisation by their families and communities upon return because ‘there are both negative attitudes and high expectations towards victims of trafficking who have returned or been forced to return from Europe.’ In particular, the report emphasised that attitudes towards trafficking victims who have engaged in prostitution depend on the extent to which they have managed to make and send remittances back home. In case women succeed in making money, ‘people are not interested in the origin of the earnings.’³⁷⁶

³⁶⁶ New Humanitarian (The), Nigerians returned from Europe face stigma and growing hardship, 28 July 2020, [url](#); Alpes M.J. and I. Majcher, Who Can Be Sustainably Reintegrated After Return? Using post-return monitoring for rights-based return policies, 2020, p. 8. [url](#)

³⁶⁷ Trouw, Verlost uit de Libische horror, terug in Nigeria. En dan? [Released from Libyan horror, back in Nigeria. And then?], 31 May 2018, [url](#); De Correspondent, Dit is grensbewaking anno 2018: creëer onderweg een hel, zodat migranten massaal terug naar huis willen [This is border control in 2018: create hell on the way, so that migrants want to return home en masse], 21 August 2018, [url](#); EuroNews, Abused in Libya and forced into prostitution back home: the nightmare of trying to reach Europe, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 37. Source: Women’s Link Worldwide, Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls, 2015, p. 60-61; Skilbrei, M.-L. & M. Tveit, Facing return, 2007, pp. 53-54; Women’s Link Worldwide, Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls, 2015, p. 60; Cherti, M. et al., Beyond Borders, January 2013, pp. 9, 73

³⁶⁹ Esposito, F. and others, Voices from the Inside: Lived Experiences of Women Confined in a Detention Center, Signs, 2019, [url](#), p. 424

³⁷⁰ Representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020

³⁷¹ Alpes, J., Senior Researcher Human Rights Centre at Ghent University, interview 7 December 2020

³⁷² Alpes, J., Senior Researcher Human Rights Centre at Ghent University, interview 7 December 2020; New Humanitarian (The), Nigerians returned from Europe face stigma and growing hardship, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁷³ Alpes, J., Senior Researcher Human Rights Centre at Ghent University, interview 7 December 2020

³⁷⁴ Alpes, M.J. and I. Majcher, Who Can Be Sustainably Reintegrated After Return? Using post-return monitoring for rights-based return policies, 2020, [url](#), p. 8

³⁷⁵ Representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020

³⁷⁶ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 38. Source: Science Nordic, Victims of sex trafficking return home to great expectations, 13 September 2012; Pascoal, R., The situation of the Nigerian human trafficking victims and their children in Italy, 19 December 2012, p. 35. (319) Osezua, C., ‘Changing Status of Women and the Phenomenon Trafficking of Women for Transactional Sex in Nigeria’, 2013, pp. 14-30

Disappointment about a ‘failed economic project’

Recent research confirmed the continuing existence of these attitudes. Research by Medico International & Brot für die Welt indicated that: ‘Families in countries of origin often understand returns as failed migration projects for which migrants carry an individual responsibility.’³⁷⁷ Female returnees indeed often reported to feel as if they let their families down, by not managing to send remittances home.³⁷⁸ Male returnees, whose families often had to sell land or other belongings to fund their sons’ travel, reported similar feelings of failure.³⁷⁹ Based on interviews with seven returnees Lanre Olusegun Ikuteyijo found that ‘many of the returnees were stigmatized by friends and relatives and thus failed to improve their social as well as economic status.’³⁸⁰

This applies to minor returnees as well. A survey with this target group revealed that while more than 80 % of the minor returnees reported that their families were happy to have them back, others still indicated to have the sense they disappointed their families. Moreover, a significant share of the underage returnees experienced abuse by community members and – to a lesser extent – their own families upon return.³⁸¹ Physical violence against minor returnees was a very rare occurrence though:

‘With respect to the interactions between community and returnees, survey data shed light on returnees’ experience of psychological and physical violence perpetrated by the community and/ or family members. 42.9 % reported experiencing verbal abuse, 14.3 % experienced bullying, and a few participants reported physical attacks against them. Female returnees reported more cases of verbal insults (34 %) than physical attacks (4 %) or bullying (16 %). 35.3 % reported that community members had been the attackers while 16 % reported being victims of domestic abuse. For both the male and the female returnees, community members are the most usual attackers.’³⁸²

As the study did not include a control group, it is not clear whether these experiences were unique to underage returnee migrants or were also common amongst other young Nigerians.

Family attitudes towards returnee victims of sex trafficking

In case of ‘unsuccessful’ returns of victims of sex trafficking, the actual response of families and communities upon return seems to be mixed. Human Rights Watch indicated that the majority of women and girls who participated in their research were welcomed or at least accepted by their families upon return.³⁸³ Another source indicated that the extent to which a victim will be stigmatised (or welcomed) also depends on prior relations between the victim and her family members.³⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch reported cases in which returned trafficking victims were mocked, insulted and bullied

³⁷⁷ Medico International & Brot für die Welt, Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger, July 2020, [url](#), p. 17. See also: ECPAT, Religious, Social and Criminal Groups in Trafficking of Nigerian Girls and Women, 2019, [url](#), p. 80

³⁷⁸ Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 10; Apard, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; Olabisi Oluwatoyin, T. and A. Akinyoade, Coercion or Volition: Making Sense of the Experiences of Female Victims of Trafficking from Nigeria in the Netherlands, 2015, [url](#), pp. 184-185

³⁷⁹ BBC, I sold all I had to go to Europe - now I'm home, and broke, 7 May 2018, [url](#); De Correspondent, Dit is grensbewaking anno 2018: creëer onderweg een hel, zodat migranten massaal terug naar huis willen [This is border control in 2018: create hell on the way, so that migrants want to return home en masse], 21 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ Olusegun Ikuteyijo, L., Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria, West African Youth Challenges and Opportunity Pathways, [url](#), p. 72

³⁸¹ Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 31

³⁸² Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 31

³⁸³ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death”: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 45. See also: DW, Nigerian returnees face poverty and destitution back home, 2 February 2018, [url](#); Samyn, S., Seksmigratie als deel van de overlevingseconomie in Nigeria [Sex migration as part of the survival economy in Nigeria], 2018, [url](#), p. 10

³⁸⁴ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

by family members.³⁸⁵ Sources also reported cases in which family members tried to retraffic returnee victims.³⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interviewed several minor returnee trafficking victims who stayed in orphanages because they could not return to abusive families. This abuse, however, predated the trafficking experience.³⁸⁷

Shame about prostitution in case of unsuccessful returns?

With regard to victims of sex trafficking in particular, research and articles in international media confirmed that migration towards Europe to work in prostitution continued to be encouraged and accepted by families and communities in Edo State, if it results in remittances.³⁸⁸ The observation that prostitution is accepted, provided that it pays off, therefore still applies.³⁸⁹

In case returnees return empty handed they are sometimes stigmatised and bullied for the fact they engaged in prostitution at the community level.³⁹⁰ Sometimes Nigerian trafficking victims return with children, especially women who got stuck in Libya and were raped by guards and sexually exploited as prostitutes. The added burden of a child can result in more hostile attitudes by family members.³⁹¹ France24, for instance, finds that:

'Whatever their origins, in Nigeria these children born in Libya are nicknamed "Arabo children" -- stigmatised for the circumstances of their birth. "Some will say 'those Arabo children, we don't want them in our house'," Jennifer Ero, national coordinator for Nigeria's Child Protection Network, said. When the women leave on the journey to Europe, families expect them to end up sending back money to help relatives at home. But the reality can be very different. "Now they come back, they didn't reach Europe, they come with debts, and with baggage -- with a child with no name," Ero said.'³⁹²

3.3 Relocation in Nigeria

As a result of the fear – real or imagined - of disappointing their families and getting stigmatised upon return to Nigeria, and – for those who did not have a sponsor - the desire to repay the debts they incurred when embarking on the journey to Europe, many returnees/victims of trafficking want to build up their lives in another region of the country before facing their family members and communities.³⁹³ The 2015 EASO report indicated that the concept of 'indigeneity' – which treats individuals whose families originate from a region preferentially– posed an obstacle to those wanting to relocate to a different part of the country. It concluded that 'although relocation in another part of Nigeria might be feasible and possible for victims who feel threatened by traffickers, they would need economic support and a social network or members of their ethnic group to sustain a safe livelihood in their new place of residence.'³⁹⁴ Since the last report, the situation has not significantly changed in

³⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 46, 52-53

³⁸⁶ Trouw, Benin City loopt leeg: waarom de vrouwenhandel van Afrika naar Europa niet te stoppen is [Benin City is emptying: Why the trafficking of women from Africa to Europe cannot be stopped], 25 May 2018, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 45

³⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 37, 66

³⁸⁸ Aparid, E., et al., «La prostitution, ça ne tue pas !», 2020, [url](#), p.69

³⁸⁹ EASO analysis by drafter.

³⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 46

³⁹¹ France24, Nigerian women struggle to raise children born of Libya rape, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁹² France24, Nigerian women struggle to raise children born of Libya rape, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁹³ BBC, I sold all I had to go to Europe - now I'm home, and broke, 7 May 2018, [url](#); Representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020; Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death" Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 47

³⁹⁴ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 47. It cites: DIS, Protection of victims of trafficking in Nigeria, April 2008, p. 51

this regard. The system of indigeneity is still reported.³⁹⁵ It mostly erects obstacles to access to political office, jobs in civil service, and – in some places – land.³⁹⁶ The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) indicated that the system is not applied in big cities such as Abuja and Lagos³⁹⁷, but other research contests this claim with regard to Lagos.³⁹⁸ Sources agreed that having a social network is still a core prerequisite for moving to another region in Nigeria, as without a social network it is nearly impossible to find a job and housing.³⁹⁹ International return programmes and certain Nigerian NGOs pay housing for returnees, including trafficking victims, in different regions of the country.⁴⁰⁰

3.4 Shelter, rehabilitation and reintegration support

As described in the 2015 report on sex trafficking, Nigeria’s anti-trafficking act – the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPLEAA), which entered into force in 2003, established a national anti-trafficking body, NAPTIP.⁴⁰¹ This agency is according to Section 12 of the 2015 revision of the TIPLEAA - since then referred to as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA)⁴⁰² - in charge of the counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficking victims. NAPTIP has zonal command offices in nine Nigerian states and provides these services in cooperation ‘with ministries and agencies like Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development, National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), a host of non-governmental organisations, and international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Salvation Army’.⁴⁰³ This section describes the scope of these activities and, where possible, what have been the effects of the various of support programmes for Nigerian returnees.

3.4.1 Shelter for victims of trafficking

The Nigerian government is in charge of the residential rehabilitation model for the assistance and protection of survivors of trafficking.⁴⁰⁴ The provision of shelter for identified survivors rests on NAPTIP and NGOs with shelter facilities.

Capacity of NAPTIP shelters

NAPTIP has ten transit shelters across the country, located at each zonal command⁴⁰⁵ and at the headquarters in Abuja⁴⁰⁶, with the capacity to accommodate 334 victims, if operating at full capacity.⁴⁰⁷ NAPTIP shelters provide shelter for up to six weeks, unless victims are exceptionally vulnerable and/or they decide to collaborate with the criminal investigation into and prosecution of their traffickers.⁴⁰⁸ Based on interviews with NAPTIP officials Human Right Watch, however, found

³⁹⁵ European University Institute, Report on Citizenship Law: Nigeria, July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

³⁹⁶ Fourchard, L., Bureaucrats and Indigenes: Producing and Bypassing Certificates of Origin in Nigeria, Africa, 2015, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report Nigeria, December 2020, [url](#), p. 57

³⁹⁸ Akinyele, R.T., Lagos is our land: indigeneship associations and the protection of the rights of Lagosians since 1950, Lagos Historical Review, 2016, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020; Alpes, M.J. and I. Majcher, Who Can Be Sustainably Reintegrated After Return? Using post-return monitoring for rights-based return policies, 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰⁰ Representative of international organisation C, interview 12 November 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴⁰¹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁰² Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ Okoli, N. and U. Idemudia, Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁰⁴ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 26

⁴⁰⁵ In the cities Lagos, Benin, Uyo, Enugu, Kano, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Osun and Makurdi.

⁴⁰⁶ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 67

⁴⁰⁷ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 67

⁴⁰⁸ Okoli, N. and U. Idemudia, Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

that ‘the time limit is up to NAPTIP’s discretion, taking into account things like family problems.’⁴⁰⁹ According to the academics Okoli and Idemudia, the actual time that victims stay in NAPTIP shelters varies:

‘The length of stay in the shelters is determined by the peculiarities of each case. For example, survivors who were coerced into trafficking and suffered severe trauma may stay for up to six weeks in the shelters to recuperate while some survivors who were aware of the probable dangers before being trafficked or who were intercepted by law enforcement before arriving at the final destination may want to stay for just one or two weeks or decline shelter stay because they do not necessarily consider themselves “victims”.’⁴¹⁰

In September 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur has expressed concern about the short duration of the provision of shelter by NAPTIP and the fact that NAPTIP centres have been used to accommodate victims of other types of gender-based violence as well, resulting in a reduction of available spaces for victims of human trafficking.⁴¹¹ Other sources, however, indicated not to be aware of a lack of shelter opportunities for trafficking victims. NAPTIP coordinates with NGOs that provide shelter and other services to victims of human trafficking for a longer period.⁴¹² An NGO representative in Edo indicated that taken together, sufficient capacity was available for the accommodation of trafficking victims in Edo.⁴¹³

Quality of care in NAPTIP shelters

NAPTIP shelters do not live up to international standards for the shelter of human trafficking victims, according to OHCHR.⁴¹⁴ As was the case in 2015, a lack of sufficient resources negatively affected the overall quality of the services provided by NAPTIP. Sources indicated that due to the poor living conditions in NAPTIP shelters many human trafficking victims – and particularly those who returned from Europe⁴¹⁵ – refused to reside there.⁴¹⁶ The closed nature of NAPTIP shelters has been the subject of criticism by various stakeholders⁴¹⁷, including the UN Special rapporteur.⁴¹⁸ During their six-week stay in a NAPTIP shelter victims are not allowed to be in touch with the outside world, including their families.⁴¹⁹ The rationale behind this approach is to protect victims against re-trafficking and/or reprisals while they cooperate with law enforcement. It is not clear to what extent this approach is effective. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children

⁴⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death”: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 57

⁴¹⁰ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴¹¹ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴¹² Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, ‘Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?’, 2020, [url](#), p. 6 ; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴¹³ Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴¹⁴ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020

⁴¹⁶ Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020; International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 64: ‘This situation also contributed to the under-utilisation of shelters as they were not seen as viable spaces for recovery, which required a much longer-term approach to assistance. One victim’s view, after assistance provision in Edo state, was that she preferred to return to Libya, from where she had been evacuated, because at least there ‘she had been fed chicken by her trafficker and could earn some money, whereas here she had nothing’.’

⁴¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death”: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁴¹⁸ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria’s Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#), pp. 195-196

stipulated that closed shelters breach human trafficking victims' fundamental rights.⁴²⁰ Victims also indicated not to be aware of when they would be allowed to leave the facilities.⁴²¹

NGO shelters

Shelters managed by NGOs can have an open or a closed policy. Some NGOs provide victims with the opportunity to reside for up to one or two years in a different region of the country, allowing them to escape their traffickers and/or family members who stigmatise them or force them to return to situations of exploitation.⁴²² The Network of CSOs Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labour (NACTAL), which represents various Nigerian anti-trafficking NGOs, runs fourteen open shelters in Nigeria.⁴²³

In 2020, Lagos counted at least twelve NGO shelters catering to underage and female trafficking victims⁴²⁴, managed by:

1. Real Women Foundation (Peace Villa)
2. Sought After Women and Children Foundation (House of Sharon)
3. Web of Heart Foundation
4. Project Alert
5. Cece Yara
6. PBO (Genesis Home and Grace Home)
7. Mirabel Center, Project ALERT
8. Echoes of Mercy and Hope Foundation
9. Women helping Ends Initiative Shelter
10. Freedom Foundation (Genesis House)
11. Bakhita Foundation

Edo State counted at least four such shelters, managed by the NGOs:⁴²⁵

1. Committed Support for the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW)
2. Society for empowerment of young People (SEYP)
3. Pathfinders Justice initiative

Edo also has a shelter run by its state task force (instead of NAPTIP).⁴²⁶

The quality of NGO shelters greatly differs depending on the available resources/donor funding.⁴²⁷ This is reflected in research with trafficking victims in various NGO shelters. Some victims indicated their basic needs are met and they have access to education and training⁴²⁸, while others indicated

⁴²⁰ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020

⁴²¹ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁴²² Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴²³ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 68

⁴²⁴ Azu, E., A Report of Gender Audit of Protection Services and shelters in Lagos State for Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls' in Nigeria, September 2020, p. 3 [Unpublished]; Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²⁵ Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 14 [Unpublished]

⁴²⁶ Leadership, Obaseki Names World Class Returnees' Shelter After Daisy Danjuma, September 2020, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020

⁴²⁸ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 12

they did not get sufficient food and experienced abuse by the staff running the shelter.⁴²⁹ Research by an international organisation in Nigeria concluded that overall ‘shelters are generally in poor condition, ill-equipped and with minimal service provision’, and that this was the case particularly regarding civil society shelters.⁴³⁰ Other research indicated that due to lack of resources most NGO shelters in Edo do not have the required skills and expertise in managing unstable behaviours of survivors of trafficking and unsafe migration, which is reflected in the slow response to counselling requests from victims who are dealing with a range of mental health issues.⁴³¹

Shelter for (female) trafficking victims with specific needs

Research indicated that shelters’ limited access to funding contributes to ‘inaccessibility of rehabilitation services for persons who are HIV and Hepatitis C positive, pregnant and with children’. According to research by Okoli, two out of the three Lagos-based NGO shelters she studied, did not admit these categories of survivors, because they did not have the necessary capacity to cater to their needs.⁴³²

Shelter for underage trafficking victims

NAPTIP shelters provide shelter to minor (boys and girls) and female adult victims of trafficking. Experts consider this problematic, as generally children should be cared for separately to adults.⁴³³ While some minor victims find shelter in NGO shelters for trafficking victims, Human Rights Watch also identified a case of an underage trafficking victim referred to an orphanage for long-term support.⁴³⁴ US Department of State (USDOS) confirmed that ‘authorities sometimes assigned child trafficking victims to foster homes or orphanages for care.’⁴³⁵ A representative of an international organisation in Nigeria indicated that the quality of orphanages in Nigeria generally is ‘abysmal’⁴³⁶, but also here applies that big differences exist between facilities dependent on the available (international) donor funding. According to a recent evaluation of orphanages in four different Nigerian states, both privately as well as state-run orphanages did not have sufficient resources and depended largely on charity.⁴³⁷ Some orphanages were reported to lack basic services including beds for all children, sufficient food and clean sanitary facilities. Not all orphans provided access to medical care and education.⁴³⁸ According to the research, orphanages ran by private entities scored slightly better than state-run orphanages. Examples of orphanages that according to this study did manage to cater to the basic needs of vulnerable children in Cross River State are: Blessed Hope and Faith Foster Family, Gapolunya Children’s Residential Home, Mother Elizabeth Redeemed Home, Society for Youth Development and Rescue Initiative. Examples of such orphanages in Lagos State are: Don Bosco Boys Street Children Home, Motherless Babies Home Lekki, Bales of Mercy Children’s Home Kosofe.⁴³⁹

⁴²⁹ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, ‘Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?’, 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 14 ; Human Rights Watch, ‘You Pray for Death’: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁴³⁰ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 67

⁴³¹ Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 17 [Unpublished]

⁴³² Okoli, N.H., Empowerment and Reintegration: Survivors’ Perceptions of Human Trafficking, 2020, [url](#), p. 110

⁴³³ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 68

⁴³⁴ Human Rights Watch, ‘You Pray for Death’: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 37

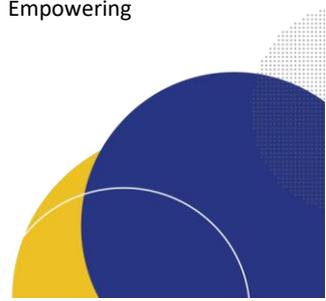
⁴³⁵ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 380

⁴³⁶ Representative of international organisation B, written responses 1 December 2020

⁴³⁷ Unpublished UNICEF assessment, 30 June 2020; Nigeria Health Watch, A Different Kind of Charity; Empowering Orphanages to Fight Malnutrition in the FCT, 16 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Unpublished UNICEF assessment, 30 June 2020

⁴³⁹ Unpublished UNICEF assessment, 30 June 2020



Shelter for adult male returnees

The UN Special Rapporteur identified a lack of shelter for adult male trafficking victims.⁴⁴⁰ In 2020, local NGOs created two shelters for male returnees in Lagos and Edo State.⁴⁴¹ The Patriotic Citizen Initiatives (PCI) manages the location in Lagos and the Society for the Empowerment of Young Persons (SEYP) manages the Edo shelter.⁴⁴² No data were available on the quality of services provided by these shelters. Edo State also runs a hostel for male returnees.⁴⁴³

3.4.2 Economic reintegration support for trafficking victims

Besides providing shelter, NAPTIP is in charge of programmes aimed at the (economic) reintegration of trafficking victims. According to its website, NAPTIP has a rehabilitation department with 107 staff members who contribute both to the provision of counselling and training aimed at economic reintegration.⁴⁴⁴ This training focuses on skills such as ‘knitting, weaving, fashion design, hair dressing, catering, hat making, beads making and photography’.⁴⁴⁵ However, research by Okoli and Idemudia indicated that for instance in Lagos the NAPTIP shelter did not provide vocational training, because of a lack of equipment⁴⁴⁶, and that therefore (in Lagos) NAPTIP referred victims to NGO partners who do have the capacity to provide economic reintegration support. In addition, sources indicate that trafficking victims did not always end up under NAPTIP’s umbrella and ended up participating in the regular EU/IOM economic reintegration programme.⁴⁴⁷

NGOs leading on reintegration

In general, throughout the country, NAPTIP coordinates with a range of other government agencies and NGOs to provide economic reintegration support. In Edo the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues runs a skills acquisition centre, as do the NGOs Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Idia Renaissance, Genius Hub Global Initiative, Fullness of Life Counselling and Development Initiative (FULIFE).⁴⁴⁸ In Lagos the Real Women Foundation, Bakitha, Rehoboth Homes and Skill Acquisition Center, and the Web of Heart Foundation provide economic reintegration support.⁴⁴⁹ According to various sources, NAPTIP and this type of service providers had a ‘cordial’⁴⁵⁰ working relationship.⁴⁵¹ However, actual coordination between different service providers was considered to be lacking resulting in a poor offer of reintegration services with too much overlaps.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁰ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Azu, E., A Report of Gender Audit of Protection Services and shelters in Lagos State for Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls’ in Nigeria, September 2020, p. 7 [Unpublished]; Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 14 [Unpublished]

⁴⁴² Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴⁴³ Leadership, Obaseki Names World Class Returnees’ Shelter After Daisy Danjuma, September 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ See: Nigeria, NAPTIP, Counselling And Rehabilitation, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ See: Nigeria, NAPTIP, Counselling And Rehabilitation, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Okoli, N. and U. Idemudia, Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, “You Pray for Death”: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 70

⁴⁴⁸ Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, pp. 43-44 [Unpublished]

⁴⁴⁹ Azu, E., A Report of Gender Audit of Protection Services and shelters in Lagos State for Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls’ in Nigeria, September 2020, p. 3 [Unpublished]

⁴⁵⁰ Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 32 [Unpublished]

⁴⁵¹ Okoli, N. and U. Idemudia, Survivor’s Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵² Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020 [Unpublished]; International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 69

Reintegration offers

With regard to quality of the (vocational) training programmes, sources remarked there is a 'saturation in certain areas (hairdressing, catering, fashion design), which ultimately limits the earning potential of survivors'⁴⁵³, and that most 'training was not based on an assessment of labour market needs.'⁴⁵⁴ Experts concluded that there is need for diversification of the training offer with a focus on entrepreneurial⁴⁵⁵ and digital skills.⁴⁵⁶ Stakeholders also identified the short duration of some training programmes and absence of the provision of transportation to and from trainings as obstacles hampering their efficacy.⁴⁵⁷ Experts also criticised the lack of economic reintegration programmes tailored to male victims of trafficking.⁴⁵⁸ In Edo returnees are encouraged to take part in The Edo Jobs Programme.⁴⁵⁹

Despite the predominantly negative assessment of the current state of economic reintegration support in Nigeria, reports also identified positive exceptions. Some programmes provide trafficking victims up to 24 months of training⁴⁶⁰, and/or tailored training to the specific needs and preferences of trafficking victims, including with regard to placement opportunities.⁴⁶¹ In general, it should be noted that returnees and returnee trafficking victims have access to more training opportunities for economic empowerment than most of their peers who did not leave Nigeria.⁴⁶²

Reintegration packages/kits upon completion of training

In case of voluntary return from European countries trafficking victims and other returnees receive an (in kind) grant to accelerate their economic reintegration in Nigeria.⁴⁶³ The available amount seems to differ according to the country from which the person returns⁴⁶⁴, and is almost entirely provided through in kind support.⁴⁶⁵ Trafficking victims who participate in EU-IOM programmes, facilitating return from other African countries, can also try to access funding packages for economic reintegration (see Section 3.1). Many returnees indicate that this funding is not sufficient to provide for basic needs, particularly when victims have children and family members to take care of.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁵³ INSigHT, Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ International Organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 69. See also: Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 74

⁴⁵⁵ INSigHT, Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#), p. viii

⁴⁵⁶ Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 13 [Unpublished]

⁴⁵⁷ Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021; De Correspondent, What happens to migrants who are sent back? I spent a year following 12 people to find out, 9 January 2020, [url](#); Medico International & Brot fur die Welt, Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger, July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁵⁸ INSigHT, Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#), p. viii

⁴⁵⁹ Switzerland, SEM, Focus Nigeria, Etat d'Edo, émigration et retour, 22 March 2019, p. 14

⁴⁶⁰ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁶¹ INSigHT, Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#), p. viii; Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁶² De Correspondent, Dit is grensbewaking anno 2018: creëer onderweg een hel, zodat migranten massaal terug naar huis willen [This is border control in 2018: create hell on the way, so that migrants want to return home en masse], 21 August 2018, [url](#); De Correspondent, Europese hulp voor terugkerende migranten werkt (maar is ook een prikkel om de oversteek te wagen) [European support for returnees is effective (but also encourages migrants to cross)], 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ Plambech, S., Back from "the Other Side": The Postdeportee Life of Nigerian Migrant Sex Workers, 2018, [url](#), pp. 91-92

⁴⁶⁴ Sine Plambech reported based on fieldwork in 2016 that the maximum amount of the available grant was 1200 euro. Sine Plambech, Back from "the Other Side": The Postdeportee Life of Nigerian Migrant Sex Workers, 2018, [url](#), pp. 91-92. In 2020 the Netherlands provided adult voluntary returnees to Nigeria with 1800 euro, and minors with 2800 euro. See: IOM in the Netherlands, What is Reintegration Assistance?, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ See: IOM in the Netherlands, What is Reintegration Assistance?, n.d., [url](#).

⁴⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 7, 47

Several sources alluded to the fact that NAPTIP itself is also supposed to provide trafficking victims with a reintegration/empowerment package upon completion of skills training programmes by NGOs⁴⁶⁷, in case no international funding is available. NAPTIP's policy guidance indeed indicates that NAPTIP aims to provide trafficking victims with 'training kits and resettlement tools', and will liaise with financial institutions to provide micro-credits.⁴⁶⁸ The empowerment packages usually consist of grants, rented store spaces, equipment for skills they learned in rehabilitation, and rented apartments.⁴⁶⁹

One of the resources for these empowerment packages is the Victims of Trafficking Trust Fund, which was established under the 2015 TIPPEA.⁴⁷⁰ Funding for the trust fund is obtained through a direct grant from the Nigerian government, voluntary contributions by NAPTIP partners and confiscated assets of traffickers. However, one source indicated that a large share of trafficking victims who completed reintegration training did not receive the promised economic package⁴⁷¹, and various NGOs that supported the reintegration of trafficking victims indicated not to be aware of the existence of the Victims Trust Fund.⁴⁷² Those that were aware of the existence of the fund indicated that they did not know how to access its resources.⁴⁷³ Human Rights Watch confirms that the fund's implementation is unclear.⁴⁷⁴ Research indicates that the empowerment packages are selectively bestowed on well performing returnees⁴⁷⁵, and that NGOs sometimes depend on the philanthropy of rich individuals to award this type of packages.⁴⁷⁶

Results of reintegration projects

Specifically with regard to the (economic) reintegration of female victims of human trafficking, various sources imply that a minority of them manages to become economically independent after return. Human Rights Watch indicated that out of the 76 victims of human trafficking it had interviewed for a report about return⁴⁷⁷, only four said they had been assisted by NGOs to set up successful businesses.⁴⁷⁸ The report indicated that the economic situation of almost all returnee trafficking victims was worse than upon departure. Various women cited in this study indicated not to have sufficient money to buy food for themselves and their children.⁴⁷⁹ Other research with thirteen victims of sex trafficking who had returned to Nigeria, indicated that two managed to create a business, two had found a stable job and three were enrolled in higher education. The other six had no jobs or irregular jobs.⁴⁸⁰ Articles in the media also include testimonies of returned victims of sex trafficking

⁴⁶⁷ Okoli, N.H., Empowerment and Reintegration: Survivors' Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), p. 107; Basil Ofili, I., Gender Audit Report: Assessment of Protection Services & Shelters for Trafficked Victims and Returnees in Edo State, September 2020, p. 31 [Unpublished]

⁴⁶⁸ Nigeria, NAPTIP, National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria, 2008, p. 18

⁴⁶⁹ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁷⁰ Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003, Article 67, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ Okoli, N.H., Empowerment and Reintegration: Survivors' Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, , 2020, [url](#), p. 116

⁴⁷² Azu, E., A Report of Gender Audit of Protection Services and shelters in Lagos State for Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls' in Nigeria, September 2020, p. 4 [Unpublished]

⁴⁷³ Azu, E., A Report of Gender Audit of Protection Services and shelters in Lagos State for Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls' in Nigeria, September 2020, p. 4 [Unpublished]

⁴⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁷⁵ Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria's Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Okoli, N.H. Empowerment and Reintegration: Survivors' Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria, 2020, [url](#), pp. 109-110

⁴⁷⁷ More than forty of these respondents were trafficked into sexual exploitation. See: Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 73

⁴⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 7, 47

⁴⁸⁰ Okoli, N. and U Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 15

who have not managed to find a stable income.⁴⁸¹ Sources find that, as is the case for all West African returnees, it was easier for victims of sex trafficking to stay afloat economically in case they had managed to send money home before their return and family had used this money to invest in real estate of land.⁴⁸² In general, it should be noted that unemployment amongst men and women in Edo State is high, and that returnee trafficking victims have access to more support by NAPTIP, international organisations and local NGOs than average citizens.⁴⁸³

Impact of IOM reintegration support

Not only reintegration programmes specifically focused at female trafficking victims did not deliver desired outcomes. The EU-IOM economic reintegration programmes are characterised by a relatively high level of dropouts and conflicting accounts exist with regard to their efficacy. Between 1 April 2017 and the end of January 2020 IOM initiated reintegration support with 11 991 returnees. Of this group, 4 367 returnees had completed the trajectory by January 2020.⁴⁸⁴ Articles in international media and (academic) research indicated that returnees dropped out of reintegration programmes because of bureaucratic obstacles and/or the costs associated with participation in the IOM trajectory. Returnees were for instance not able to pay for transportation to training locations or IOM offices.⁴⁸⁵

While the IOM's own evaluations indicate that those who finalise the (economic) reintegration programmes are satisfied with the support and mostly managed to 'sustainably reintegrate', external research suggest that also those who do finalise reintegration programmes struggle to keep afloat independently. In a recent IOM evaluation of reintegration support with 610 Nigerian returnees, 85 % indicated to be satisfied or very satisfied with IOM support.⁴⁸⁶ 77 % indicated that the support answered to all or a large share of their needs.⁴⁸⁷ According to IOM research most of the respondents also managed to reintegrated 'sustainably' at the economic, psychosocial and social level.⁴⁸⁸ Various other sources question these findings and indicate that also the majority of returnees who finalised the IOM programme did not manage to become economically independent.⁴⁸⁹ A source indicated that the IOM's focus on the creation of businesses by groups of returnees negatively affected the efficacy of reintegration support, as motivated returnees were negatively impacted by unmotivated members in their groups.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸¹ De Correspondent, Maak kennis met de mensen achter de 'migratiestroom'. Deze vrouw overleefde 12 jaar als illegale seks slaaf [Meet the people behind the 'migration influx'. This woman survived twelve years as an illegal sex slave], 13 April 2019, [url](#); EuroNews, Abused in Libya and forced into prostitution back home: the nightmare of trying to reach Europe, 21 June 2020, [url](#); Trouw, Benin City loopt leeg: waarom de vrouwenhandel van Afrika naar Europa niet te stoppen is [Benin City is emptying: Why the trafficking of women from Africa to Europe cannot be stopped] 25 May 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Medico International & Brot fur die Welt, Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger, July 2020, [url](#), p. 18; De Correspondent, Maak kennis met de mensen achter de 'migratiestroom'. Deze vrouw overleefde 12 jaar als illegale seks slaaf [Meet the people behind the 'migration influx'. This woman survived twelve years as an illegal sex slave], 13 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ Vanderhurst, S., Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria's Counter-Trafficking Programs, 2017, [url](#). See also: De Correspondent, Europese hulp voor terugkerende migranten werkt (maar is ook een prikkel om de oversteek te wagen) [European support for returnees is effective (but also encourages migrants to cross)], 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #3, July 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁴⁸⁵ Correspondent (The), What happens to migrants who are sent back? I spent a year following 12 people to find out, 9 January 2020, [url](#); Medico International & Brot fur die Welt, Emergency returns by IOM from Libya and Niger, 16, July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

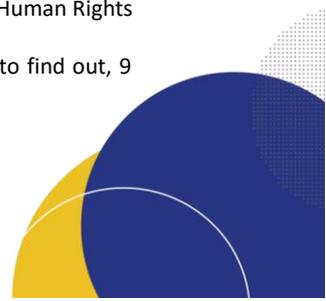
⁴⁸⁶ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #3, July 2020, [url](#), p. 42

⁴⁸⁷ EU-IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #3, July 2020, [url](#), p. 43

⁴⁸⁸ EU IOM, Biannual Reintegration Report #3, July 2020, [url](#), p. 44

⁴⁸⁹ De Correspondent, Zo ziet het leven van 12 teruggekeerde migranten in Nigeria eruit (gefotografeerd door hen zelf) [This is what the life of twelve returnees in Nigeria looks like (photographed by themselves)], 29 August 2019, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 47, 73-74

⁴⁹⁰ Correspondent (The), What happens to migrants who are sent back? I spent a year following 12 people to find out, 9 January 2020, [url](#)



Specifically with regard to minor returnees, research indicated that 41.6 % of the respondents who had received IOM support were dissatisfied with the nature of this support, compared to 39.6 % who indicated to be satisfied or very satisfied.⁴⁹¹ Furthermore, this research indicated that 61.3 % of the respondents had not managed to find a stable income after return and that 16.8 % had only managed to find temporary jobs. 98.3 % of the respondents indicated they were not attending school/university.⁴⁹² In comparison, the Nigeria Living Standards Survey from 2018/2019 indicated that 29.3 % of the surveyed men and 35.6 % of the surveyed women from Edo had not partaken in labour activities in the seven days prior to being interviewed.⁴⁹³

3.4.3 Family reunification

In view of the challenges associated with sustainable economic reintegration, NAPTIP and NGOs aim to reunite trafficking victims with their families and integrate them in the socio-economic life of their communities.⁴⁹⁴ The process consists of family tracing, a risk assessment of returning victims to their families/communities, family counselling, provision of psychosocial/medical/legal services to victims and their families, and the provision of security for victims' families where necessary. Various NGOs provide similar services.⁴⁹⁵ The director of one such organisations indicated counselling for sex trafficking victims and their families was a priority for their organisation in view of facilitating victims' return to their home communities.⁴⁹⁶ NAPTIP reports do not provide insight in the number of victims it has reunited with their families. As the previous EASO report indicated, an insistence on family reunification comes with risks such as rejection or re-trafficking of the victim.⁴⁹⁷ The research for this report did not identify robust evaluations of family reunification efforts in the Nigerian context. In a recent study with minor Nigerian returnees from Libya (not necessarily victims of trafficking), 'only 12.6% of respondents reported that their families had received any kind of support or mentorship from the government or other organizations to prepare for their return'.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹¹ Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, *Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 33-34

⁴⁹² Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, *Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 28-29

⁴⁹³ Nigeria, National Bureau for Statistics, *Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019*, 2021, [url](#), p. 51

⁴⁹⁴ Nigeria, NAPTIP, *National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria*, 2008

⁴⁹⁵ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Okoli, N. and U. Idemudia, 'Survivor's Perceptions of Human Trafficking Rehabilitation Programs in Nigeria: Empowerment or Disempowerment?', 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁹⁶ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁴⁹⁷ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women*, October 2015, [url](#), p. 44

⁴⁹⁸ Digidiki, V. and J. Bhabha/IOM, *Returning Home: The reintegration challenges facing child and youth returnees from Libya to Nigeria*, 2019, [url](#), p. 27

4. Protection of returnees and prosecution of perpetrators

This chapter discusses the situation of trafficking victims upon return in Nigeria from a security perspective. It looks into the likelihood they themselves or their family members will be subjected to retaliation, the risk of re-trafficking, attempts to prosecute traffickers by Nigerian law enforcement agencies, and the protection of victims who collaborate with these efforts.

4.1 Retaliation

Female Nigerian victims of sex trafficking in Europe often express a strong fear to leave their madams, cooperate with law authorities and/or to return to Nigeria before they have repaid their debts. This sentiment is partly inspired by fear for the consequences of breaking the oath which binds them to their traffickers (see Section 2.3)⁴⁹⁹, and the violent behaviour traffickers display on the way to and in Europe.⁵⁰⁰ As discussed before, traffickers use intimidation primarily to ensure that victims will repay their debts and will not cooperate with law enforcement authorities. This section discusses to what extent victims and their family members are subjected to reprisals when they leave their madams and/or return to Nigeria without repaying their full debts.

4.1.1 Prevalence of reprisals against victims themselves

While the fear of reprisals is significant, insight into the actual prevalence and nature of reprisals remains spotty, as was the case in 2015.⁵⁰¹ Various sources identified a tendency on behalf of traffickers to use more violence to guarantee the obedience of victims during this reporting period because of the actions by the Oba of Benin, and the fact that it has become more difficult to transfer women to Europe. Nevertheless, the various (anonymous) sources who were interviewed for this report provided conflicting accounts in relation to the actual occurrence of (violent) reprisals. Overall, experts distinguished three categories of reprisals: threats and (mortal) violence against returnee trafficking victims, threat and (mortal) violence against family members of victims who returned or who remained in Europe, and the re-trafficking of returnee victims.⁵⁰² Sources' views mostly diverged with regard to the question to what extent victims themselves are at risk of being subjected to violence upon return. Most did recognise that family members have become victims of threats and violence⁵⁰³, and that women/girls have been re-trafficked.⁵⁰⁴ Some sources, however, indicated that trafficking

⁴⁹⁹ De Correspondent, Vijfhonderd voodoo-priesters en een vloek laten zien: met magie kun je mensenhandel bestrijden Five hundred voodoo priests and a curse show: magic can combat human trafficking], 26 September 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 45

⁵⁰² EASO analysis by drafter

⁵⁰³ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020; Belgium, MYRIA, Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human Trafficking 2019], 2020, [url](#), pp. 55, 57

⁵⁰⁴ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵⁰⁴ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

victims choose themselves to return to Europe⁵⁰⁵, in order to flee stigmatisation, pay off debts, earn money themselves⁵⁰⁶, and escape a general lack of economic opportunities in Nigeria.⁵⁰⁷

Traffickers' attitude towards 'disobedient' victims

Various sources identified a toughening in the attitude of traffickers towards victims who failed to repay their debts.⁵⁰⁸ An article in the Dutch newspaper *De Correspondent* ascribed this development to the fact that Italian measures to stem migration from Libya have put under pressure Nigerian traffickers' 'business model', which was dependent on a continuous influx of new Nigerian sex trafficking victims.⁵⁰⁹ Sources prior to 2015 stated that reprisals against trafficking victims, who decided to escape, were rare, as it was easy for traffickers to replace them with a new victim.⁵¹⁰ However, as this influx has been partly blocked, it has become more important for traffickers to ascertain that the women who are already in Europe continue working to repay their debts according to an article in international media. A nun who supports returnee trafficking victims in Benin City mentioned that since 2018 she was witnessing, for the first time, traffickers using violence against trafficking victims and their families in order to ensure that they would repay their debts.⁵¹¹ Another NGO representative from Edo State indicated the need to be aware of specific cases in which returnee victims had been subjected to dead threats.⁵¹² The director of NAPTIP's zonal command in Lagos stated that:

'The traffickers are increasingly brutal. According to Atokolo, efforts to dispel juju superstition among West Africans mean the madams in Europe now mainly resort to violence, instead of the psychological pressure of spells, to control the young women forced into prostitution. [...] That the secret societies active in Europe today, commonly referred to as the Nigerian mafia, "are no longer out to psychologically condition their victims with magic spells. They now use sheer terror. There is a clear relationship between the decrease in juju spells and the stronger presence of these gangs, who demand total obedience from their victims."' ⁵¹³

Other sources stated that Nigerian traffickers have always been violent and that violent reprisals against trafficking victims have always existed.⁵¹⁴ One of these sources indicated that contacts within the Nigerian police force indicated that trafficking victims have been killed after their return to Nigeria.⁵¹⁵ However, these observations could not be supported by reports in the media or by linking them to a specific time and date. At the same time, various sources indicated to almost never receive reports about violent reprisals against returnee trafficking victims.⁵¹⁶ A source indicated that

⁵⁰⁵ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Infomigrants, Nigerian returnees face poverty and destitution back home, 2 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵⁰⁷ Infomigrants, Nigerian returnees face poverty and destitution back home, 2 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; *De Correspondent*, Wie migratie écht wil begrijpen, moet naar de achterblijvers in Afrika kijken [Those who really want to understand migration, should look at those who are left behind in Africa], 8 August 2018, [url](#); DW, How the 'Nigerian mafia' exploits African women in Europe, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ *De Correspondent*, Wie migratie écht wil begrijpen, moet naar de achterblijvers in Afrika kijken [Those who really want to understand migration, should look at those who are left behind in Africa], 8 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 46. Source: Plambech, S., 'Between 'Victims' and 'Criminals'', September 2014, p. 395

⁵¹¹ *De Correspondent*, Wie migratie écht wil begrijpen, moet naar de achterblijvers in Afrika kijken [Those who really want to understand migration, should look at those who are left behind in Africa], 8 augustus 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹² Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵¹³ DW, How the 'Nigerian mafia' exploits African women in Europe, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020; Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

⁵¹⁵ EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020

⁵¹⁶ Interview Nigerian magistrate, 9 October 2020; Nwoha, R., Representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020; Idahosa, R. Evon, Founder/Executive Director Pathfinders Justice Initiative, interview 24 February 2021

traffickers prefer not to attract the attention of Nigerian law enforcement and instead to send a new victim to Europe⁵¹⁷, as did some sources cited in the 2015 EASO report.⁵¹⁸

Asked about the lack of reporting on specific cases of reprisals against trafficking victims (in Nigerian media), sources indicated that local media do not report about these cases, because the experiences of sex trafficking victims are not a newsworthy subject in the south of Nigeria,⁵¹⁹ since it is such a common phenomenon. One source indicated that there might be a reluctance to draw attention to this topic, because many individuals in the south of Nigeria are involved in this business.⁵²⁰ A source, who assists returnee victims of trafficking, indicated that many victims who have been threatened or experienced violence are afraid to share their stories with third parties, including the media, out of fear of experiencing more violence.⁵²¹

4.1.2 Reprisals against family members

Most sources indicated that particularly victims' family members were at risk of being subjected to threats and reprisals by traffickers, especially when victims would still be in Europe but outside of the sphere of influence of their madams.⁵²² Articles in international media cited specific cases. A lawyer who represents trafficking victims in Italy told the Guardian that traffickers had attacked family members of various people⁵²³, including an instance in which the mother of a victim had been killed.⁵²⁴ The director of an Italian shelter for trafficking victims indicated to be aware of two recent cases of violence against family members. In the first case traffickers killed a victim's father. In the second case traffickers burned down the parental house of the victim.⁵²⁵ A representative of a Nigerian anti-trafficking NGO indicated that traffickers had killed the brother of a sex trafficking victim who was based in Denmark.⁵²⁶ Another source was aware of a planned attack against a trafficking victim's family members which had been thwarted by Nigerian law enforcement.⁵²⁷ None of these incidents were backed up by reporting in the media. Some sources indicated that cases of reprisals against family members were relatively rare as well, because in many cases family members would be involved in the trafficking scheme and/or would encourage their daughters to return to their traffickers.⁵²⁸

Threats via trafficking victims' children

There have been indications that traffickers have started using victims' children to put pressure on them to repay debts. An article published by InfoMigrants identified the impregnation of Nigerian trafficking victims in Libya by their Libyan and Nigerian guards with the aim to use threats of violence to the children to control victims after their arrival in Italy.⁵²⁹ The researcher Rafaela Pascoal has also

⁵¹⁷ Nigerian magistrate, interview 9 October 2020

⁵¹⁸ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 45. Source: DIS, Protection of victims of trafficking in Nigeria, April 2008, pp. 23-28

⁵¹⁹ Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020

⁵²⁰ EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020

⁵²¹ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵²² Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020; Belgium, MYRIA, Jaarlijks Evaluatieverslag Mensenhandel 2019 [Annual Evaluation Report Human Trafficking 2019], 2020, [url](#), pp. 55, 57

⁵²³ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

⁵²⁶ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020 and email exchange 19 November 2020

⁵²⁷ Nigerian magistrate, interview 9 October 2020

⁵²⁸ Nigerian magistrate, interview 9 October 2020; EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020. The Dutch newspaper Trouw discussed such a case: Trouw, Benin City loopt leeg: waarom de vrouwenhandel van Afrika naar Europa niet te stoppen is [Benin City is emptying: Why the trafficking of women from Africa to Europe cannot be stopped], 25 May 2018, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ InfoMigrants, Tricked, trafficked and sold: How criminal gangs are bringing Nigerian women to Italy, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

identified the traffickers' use of victims' motherhood to force them to obey orders.⁵³⁰ Nigerian trafficking victims in Spain also reported fear of reprisals against their children.⁵³¹ An anonymous source indicated to be aware of a case where a trafficking victim's child had been abducted in Nigeria after she had escaped her madam.⁵³²

4.1.3 Reprisals against male returnees

Most male Nigerians are smuggled instead of trafficked to Europe, which means that they pay for the travel in advance and are not in debt bondage to their smugglers. An expert posited that the risk of reprisals against male Nigerian returnees therefore is negligible.⁵³³ Another source indicated to be aware of cases in which smugglers forced male migrants who got stuck in Libya to pay for the journey from Libya to Europe even though they had not made the crossing.⁵³⁴

4.2 Retrafficking

Threats and violence against victims and their families usually serve the goal of forcing them to repay the outstanding debt. As returnee victims or their families usually do not have the means to repay these debts, traffickers sometimes try to retraffic victims to gain profits.⁵³⁵ Sources indicated that as it has become more difficult to traffic victims to Europe, women have also been re trafficked to neighbouring countries or Libya.⁵³⁶ However, as was mentioned in the 2015 EASO report on sex trafficking of Nigerian women, re trafficking does not always result from intimidation and force.⁵³⁷ Various sources indicated that financial hardship and shame incited trafficking victims to try to travel to Europe again.⁵³⁸ Some trafficking victims who have repaid a significant share of their debt hope to return to Europe to start earning money on their own account as sex workers or madams.⁵³⁹

4.3 Prosecution of traffickers

NAPTIP coordinates, supervises and controls the criminal investigation of trafficking cases and the prosecution of traffickers.⁵⁴⁰ However, the conviction rate of traffickers has remained low since 2015 compared to the prevalence of the phenomenon in Nigeria.⁵⁴¹ Moreover, convictions of high-ranking individuals within Nigerian trafficking networks were virtually non-existent.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁰ Pascoal, R., How Nigerian human trafficking networks use motherhood to maintain and introduce their victims into sexual exploitation, *Journal of Trafficking, Organized Crime and Security*, 2017, [url](#), p. 25

⁵³¹ Jorge, E., I. Antolínez and A. Alonso, The Construction of Silence: Narratives of Nigerian Women Crossing into Europe, UNESCO Chair on Gender, Wellbeing and a Culture of Peace Working Paper Series, March 2020, [url](#), p. 21

⁵³² Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

⁵³³ Nigerian magistrate, interview 9 October 2020

⁵³⁴ Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020

⁵³⁵ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020; De Correspondent, Wie migratie écht wil begrijpen, moet naar de achterblijvers in Afrika kijken [Those who really want to understand migration, should look at those who are left behind in Africa], 8 August 2018, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), p. 47

⁵³⁶ Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020; EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020; New Humanitarian (The), Nigerians returned from Europe face stigma and growing hardship, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women, October 2015, [url](#), p. 47

⁵³⁸ Nwoha, R., representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020; Nigerian magistrate, interview 9 October 2020

⁵³⁹ Nwoha, R., representative Idia Renaissance, interview 19 November 2020; Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018. [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ Nigeria, Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003, Article 5(m), [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 378-379; Premium Times, ANALYSIS: Despite successes, NAPTIP investigates, prosecutes only few reported trafficking cases, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴² Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020

4.3.1 Convictions of traffickers

The table below summarises NAPTIP's record in the realm of the prosecution of traffickers between 2017 and 2019:⁵⁴³

| | Victims rescued | Cases fully investigated | Cases brought to court | Cases won/lost | Number of individuals convicted |
|------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 2017 | 1890 | 148 | 70 | 21/? | 26 |
| 2018 | 1173 | 206 | 75 | 31/1 | 50 |
| 2019 | 1152 | 203 | ? | 18/? | 25 |

Table 4: NAPTIP prosecution of traffickers⁵⁴⁴

In 2019, 20 % of the 701 individuals arrested by NAPTIP were suspected of being involved with human trafficking abroad.⁵⁴⁵ For example, USDOS found that 'in an improvement from prior reporting periods, the government prosecuted and convicted three mid-level and senior-level officials for trafficking offenses.'⁵⁴⁶ In November 2020, a Nigerian court convicted three female traffickers for the sexual exploitation of a Nigerian woman in Russia, imposing prison sentences of ten to fourteen years. According to NAPTIP's director this was one of the rare examples of Nigerian traffickers receiving long-term prison sentences.⁵⁴⁷

4.3.2 Reasons behind the rarity of convictions

Several sources identified victims' unwillingness to cooperate with law enforcement authorities and testify against their traffickers as the core reason for the low level of prosecutions of human traffickers.⁵⁴⁸ Fear for the consequences of breaking a juju oath and fear for other types of reprisals were considered to be at the root of this lack of willingness on victims' behalf.⁵⁴⁹ With regard to the recent developments around the use of juju by human traffickers (see Section 2.3.2), research from 2020 indicated that also in the wake of the Oba's curse victims remain reluctant to cooperate with prosecutors, which suggests that other factors than the oath, determine victims' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement authorities (more in Section 2.3).⁵⁵⁰ Nigeria does not have a well-functioning witness protection programme, meaning that if victims decide to cooperate with prosecutors, they do not have a strong guarantee that the authorities will protect them and their families against reprisals (for more details, see next paragraph).⁵⁵¹ Victims also fear further stigmatisation by their families/communities in case they open up about their experiences in Europe.⁵⁵² Furthermore, the involvement of family members in the trafficking impedes victims from testifying.⁵⁵³ In this regard, a representative of the Judiciary of Edo State was cited remarking during

⁵⁴³ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2017 Data Analysis, 2018. [url](#); Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2018 4th Quarter Report, 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-6; Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-8

⁵⁴⁴ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2017 Data Analysis, 2018. [url](#); Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2018 4th Quarter Report, 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-6; Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-8

⁵⁴⁵ Nigeria, NAPTIP, 2019 Data Analysis, 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁴⁶ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 379

⁵⁴⁷ Reuters, Nigeria convicts family of sex traffickers with rare jail sentence, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁸ Representative of international organisation A, 21 October 2020; Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵⁴⁹ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵⁵⁰ International organisation A, confidential report December 2020, p. 59

⁵⁵¹ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020; Representative of international organisation A, 21 October 2020; Mossino, A., Director PIAM ONLUS, interview 5 October 2020

⁵⁵² Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020

⁵⁵³ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Representative of international organisation

a stakeholder event on trafficking ‘that the lack of safehouses has led to lower convictions (particularly for cases prosecuted by the Edo State Task Force), as victims must return to their homes, often the place that pressured them into trafficking’.⁵⁵⁴

One source indicated that victims also are reluctant to testify because they consider themselves (failed) migrants instead of trafficking victims.⁵⁵⁵

Corruption also figures as an important reason for the lack of convictions of traffickers.⁵⁵⁶ The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children indicated that: ‘In the narratives of victims and survivors, the role of corrupted law enforcement officers has often been highlighted. A special attention should be paid by investigative authorities on possible involvement or collusion of public officials with trafficking rings.’

The source added:

‘The main challenges identified by civil society organisations relate to corruption, lack of confidence in the judicial system, lack of training and specialised knowledge on trafficking in persons among law enforcement officials, police departments, judges and prosecutors, poor capacity in targeting high-level perpetrators and length of judicial proceedings leading to delayed, and hence, denied, justice.’⁵⁵⁷

Similarly, USDOS found that while the Nigerian government collaborated with foreign governments on anti-trafficking cases, ‘international partners reported corruption and capacity issues at times hindered cooperation.’⁵⁵⁸

Other/related causes for NAPTIP’s issues at the level of prosecution are the lack of coordination between prosecutors and the police, a lack of capacity within NAPTIP and the slow pace of cases in Nigerian courts.⁵⁵⁹ In this regard, it should be noted that Nigerian law enforcement generally fails to respond adequately to cases of gender-based violence.⁵⁶⁰ The justice system does not adequately respond to the legal needs of Nigerians, particularly poor women:

‘Women, poor people and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face particularly serious challenges on their paths to justice. People at the cross-sections of vulnerability, such as poor and rural women, are particularly disadvantaged. On average, poor women in Nigeria are the least likely to achieve resolution of their legal problems. Their problems are close to home. They relate to neighbours and family members. Women have little confidence that they can receive justice when they need it. They are afraid to aggravate relationships characterized by dependency.’⁵⁶¹

A, interview 21 October 2020; Washington Post (The), Nigerians return from slavery in Libya to thriving sex-trafficking industry back home, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ Insight - Building Capacity to Deal with Human Trafficking and Transit Routes in Nigeria, Italy, June 10-11, 2019, [url](#), p. ix

⁵⁵⁵ For an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon, see: Plambech, S., ‘God brought you home – deportation as moral governance in the lives of Nigerian sex worker migrants’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2017

⁵⁵⁶ Premium Times, ANALYSIS: Despite successes, NAPTIP investigates, prosecutes only few reported trafficking cases, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ US, USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report 2020: Nigeria, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 379

⁵⁵⁹ OHCHR, End of visit statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Representative of international organisation A, interview 21 October 2020

⁵⁶⁰ Canada, IRBC, Nigeria: Domestic violence, including legislation; protection and support services offered to victims (2016-November 2019), 14 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Hiil, Justice Needs and Satisfaction in Nigeria 2018, 2018, [url](#), p. 20

Moreover, in general Nigeria experiences high levels of corruption also in comparison to other Sub-Saharan African states.⁵⁶²

4.4 Witness protection

As mentioned, Nigeria lacks an effective witness protection programme for those who are willing to testify against their traffickers. NAPTIP provides (closed) shelter for a prolonged period to those victims who want to cooperate with law enforcement. However, a report by an international organisation indicated that this approach is not sufficient as this does not protect victims' family members against potential acts of violence, and neither provides protection to victims once they leave the shelter.⁵⁶³ Sources considered that victims in NGO shelters are not well protected against traffickers. Reports emerged of traffickers who tried to look for returnee victims in NGO shelters or left letters/messages to intimidate victims.⁵⁶⁴ A source indicated that NGO shelters can be easily identified by traffickers.⁵⁶⁵ Some NGOs propose trafficking victims to relocate themselves to a different region of the country. This allows victims to escape the negative influence of family members and traffickers alike.⁵⁶⁶ When women leave shelters, NAPTIP does not have sufficient capacity to provide protection. Cooperation with local police is a possibility in theory, but occurs very rarely in practice according to a report by an international organisation in Nigeria.⁵⁶⁷

Nigeria-based family members of Nigerian trafficking victims who are still in Europe neither have access to sufficient protection, according to an Italian lawyer interviewed by the Guardian:

'Under an agreement between Italy and Nigeria, Italian police forces may alert Nigerian authorities so that they can protect survivors' relatives once a complaint has been filed, but this measure has proven ineffective. De Masi says that whenever she has made a request to protect a woman's family, the Nigerian authority responsible for fighting human trafficking has failed to respond.'⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶² UNODC, Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns And Trends - Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population, December 2019; EU Member State Diplomat, interview 13 November 2020; Transparency International and Afrobarometer, Global Corruption Barometer Africa 2019 Citizens' Views and Experiences of Corruption, 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁵⁶³ International organisation A, confidential report 2020, p. 68

⁵⁶⁴ Trouw, Benin City loopt leeg: waarom de vrouwenhandel van Afrika naar Europa niet te stoppen is [Benin City is emptying: Why the trafficking of women from Africa to Europe cannot be stopped], 25 May 2018, [url](#); Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020

⁵⁶⁵ Foreign journalist, interview 28 October 2020

⁵⁶⁶ Director Nigerian NGO, interview 10 November 2020

⁵⁶⁷ International organisation A, confidential report 2020, p. 65

⁵⁶⁸ Guardian (The), Escape: the woman who brought her trafficker to justice, 27 August 2020, [url](#)



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- Plambech, Sine, online interview 1 March 2021. Dr Plambech is a Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies. Dr Plambech's research focuses on international migration, human trafficking, smuggling, border politics, refugees, women's migration, sexual violence, deportations, sex work, marriage migration, documentary film, and visual anthropology. Sine Plambech conducts fieldwork in migrant and border communities in Nigeria, Thailand, Italy and Denmark.
- Shaidrova, Maria, online interview 24 February 2021. Ms Shaidrova is a PhD Candidate at Tilburg University. Ms Shaidrova is a migration sociologist whose research focuses on issues of labour and sexual exploitation amongst Nigerian migrants in Europe. She has conducted fieldwork in Nigeria and Italy.

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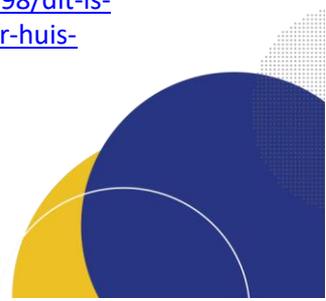
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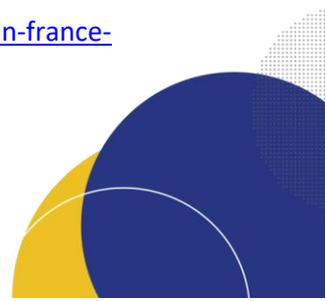
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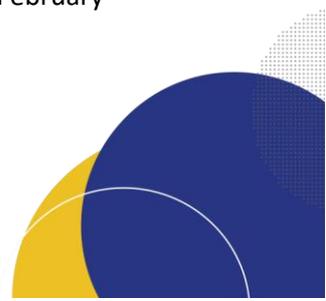
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Annex 2: Terms of reference

Aim: the report provides an update of EASO's [2015 Sex Trafficking of women](#) report and of Chapter 3.16 Victims in THB in EASO's [2018 Targeting of Individuals](#) report. Reference period: 2019-2020

- 1 Human trafficking in Nigeria introduction**
 - 1.1 Different types of human trafficking (sex, labour, organ, baby factory..... etc) and since when this has been going on
 - 1.2 Prevalence and victims
 - 1.3 Regions of recruitment (Benin city, Edo State and/or other major hub)
 - 1.4 Profiles of trafficked victims (men, women, children) and most probable victims of trafficking, including risk-impacting circumstances

- 2 Modus operandi of THB in Nigeria**
 - 2.1 Structure and size of Nigerian trafficking networks
 - 2.2 Means of recruitment for trafficking
 - 2.3 The debts system and the use of juju (also impact of Oba's comments)
 - 2.4 Sex trafficking: Role of 'madams' and victim's relatives
 - 2.5 Travel to Europe

- 3 Situation of returnees to Nigeria**
 - 3.1 Repatriation (voluntary and forced return)
 - 3.2 Attitude of relatives and communities towards 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' returning victims of THB
 - 3.3 Attitude of relatives and communities towards children who have been trafficked
 - 3.4 Support organisations (NGOs) and shelters in Nigeria
 - 3.5 Treatment of traffickers against returnees/ violence
 - 3.6 Relocation in Nigeria
 - 3.7 Factors influencing possible re-trafficking (risk of re-trafficking)

- 4 Role of the state**
 - 4.1 Role of the state in awareness raising of THB
 - 4.2 Effectiveness of NAPTIP
 - 4.3 State response to returnees, role of NAPTIP
 - 4.4 State action (police and judiciary) against traffickers
 - 4.5 Possibility of state protection for returnees



Publications Office
of the European Union

doi: 10.2847/777951