

# RETURNING MIGRANTS

## Sahel, Africa



Picture by IFRC

### SUMMARY TABLE

<b>Type of intervention:</b> A multi-country migration assistance programme for returning migrants in the Sahel with a primary focus on livelihoods
<b>Geographical area:</b> Sahel - Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal
<b>Timeframe of the project:</b> 5 years, June 2024-May 2029 (TBC)
<b>Funding requirement:</b> 55M EUR TOTAL

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Sahel region, migrants<sup>1</sup>, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced persons embark on perilous and challenging journeys in pursuit of safety or improved livelihoods. Whether on land or at sea, individuals encounter numerous threats to their lives, dignity, and human rights. Tragically, many perish or become lost, while others endure harm, abuse, and exploitation along the way.

Migrants may struggle to access food, water, healthcare, information and other essential needs along their journeys. Migrants may face discrimination and stigma and lose connection with family and friends.

In recent years we have seen major migratory movements along the Atlantic route from West Africa to the Canary Islands (Spain), while others cross the Sahara in the hope of reaching and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. With the hope of reaching Europe, many migrants may become stranded in transit countries, susceptible to severe conditions along the route. For a significant proportion of migrants, returning home becomes the only option for their survival. They choose to 'voluntarily'<sup>2</sup> return home due to lack of opportunities and difficulties experienced in the country of transit or destination.

Many migrants succeed in establishing themselves in their new communities, but others – those at the centre of our attention – face difficulties. Outside their traditional support systems, they often are unable to access health and social services that respect their essential needs and dignity.

The IFRC network recognises that these migrants returning to their place of origin or in transit, in many instances arrive with no assets, no means of employment and debts accumulated to fund their migration journey. They may lack immediate basic support, including access to water, shelter, hygiene, and may need psychosocial support and support to contact their family members. Others may face loss of social status, shame and stigmatisation in their communities of return and may need reintegration support. Many returning migrants need their own source of income to break the cycle of dependency. There is a need for more predictable, sustainable and dignified support to the most vulnerable returning migrants.

The following document sets out an initiative for the IFRC network in the Sahel to scale up activities and collective engagement by strengthening livelihood support for returning migrants, and addressing issues of stigma, marginalisation and mental health and psychosocial support.

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the IFRC's 2009 Policy on Migration, 'migrants' are persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. This includes migrant workers, stateless migrants, migrants deemed irregular by public authorities, as well as asylum seekers and refugees.

<sup>2</sup> IOM handbook involuntary or voluntary return: Involuntary or forced return is the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, to a place of transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision. Voluntary return is the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee.

This programme sets out three common pillars of response (essential needs and livelihood support, social inclusion and mental health and psychosocial support). Each National Society in the Sahel will develop its own plan of action aligned with these three response pillars, and at the same time tailor made and suited their own context and needs of returning migrants. The National Societies will implement their respective plans of actions, and by doing this will contribute to these pillars.

This programme has been developed within the Sahel Plus Group<sup>3</sup>. This group brings together eleven National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (NSs) in West Africa that have issues of common interest. These returning migrants programme is complementary to the Global Route Based Migration Programme<sup>4</sup>.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT ON RETURNING MIGRANTS

**The scale of the problem.** Across the region there are large numbers of migrants, refugees, IDPs and other people on the move. As of 2023, this includes more than 4.2 million people who have been displaced across the Sahel region. 3.7 million people are internally displaced in the region, and more than half a million refugees and asylum seekers have sought refuge in neighbouring countries<sup>5</sup>. The risks for displaced people, particularly refugees, when they are on the move are growing. When people flee unexpectedly, for example when displacement is prompted by violent events, their stress is compounded. In addition, those forcibly displaced, migrants and others on the move can be exposed to a range of threats. These include human rights violations, abuses, sexual exploitation as well as the dangers posed by traffickers, unscrupulous smugglers, armed groups and, in some cases, treacherous desert and sea crossings. They may be separated from family or lose friends or loved ones and face deprivations caused by policies that limit access to basic services and care. Some may be deprived of their liberty and detained, as part of the migration process. The risks are heightened for stateless people and those who do not have official proof of their identity.

**An intra-regional phenomenon.** The Sahel region has a long history of population movements. Seasonal, pendular and circular migrations are an essential part of local resilience strategies. Intra-regional migrants with valid travel documents can benefit from the freedom of movement framework established by the Economic Community of West African States. However, access to essential services within the region is particularly challenging for migrants, due to significant administrative, financial, socio-cultural and language-related barriers, as well as risks of discrimination. Migrants within the region include unaccompanied and separated children. The number of women and girls embarking on these dangerous journeys is on the rise.

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<sup>3</sup> The Sahel Plus group comprises the following 10 Red Cross Red Crescent-National Societies of Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, as well as the IFRC and the ICRC as observer members. Cameroon Red Cross is also included as it has shown great interest in this programme.

<sup>4</sup> IFRC multi-year Global Route-Based Migration Programme aims to improve the safety and dignity of people on the move along migration routes in Africa, Europe, Middle East and North Africa and the Americas. The Programme includes the commitment of National Societies to scale up assistance and protection – primarily through Humanitarian Service Points – to the most at-risk people on the move.

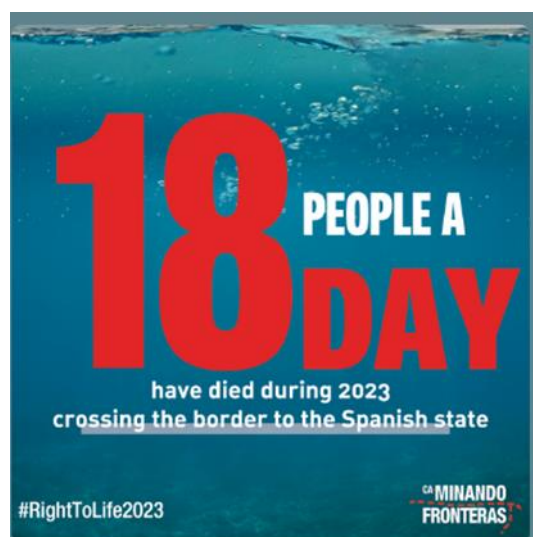
<sup>5</sup> according to UNHCR

**Double impact of conflict and climate change.** Disasters such as floods and droughts, due to climate change and environmental degradation, continue to exacerbate vulnerabilities across the region, and influence migratory movements and internal displacement. Moreover, the region is grappling with conflict and violence, particularly around the Lake Chad Basin, in Northern Mali and in parts of Burkina Faso, triggering internal and cross-border displacement. The areas that are worst affected by violence, and those experiencing the most severe impacts of climate change, largely overlap – with serious consequences on the vulnerabilities of migrants, displaced persons and host communities.

**Dangerous routes through deserts and seas.**

The Sahel is at the crossroads of migration routes to and from North Africa and Europe. These routes extend through the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Migrants moving along these routes face significant protection risks, including, human trafficking, gender-based violence, detention, forced deportations and loss of family contact. Many are unable to continue their journey or return home and may find themselves in need of long-term support.

2023 saw a rise in departures from more distant parts of this transit region, such as Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia to Spain. 2023 was the deadliest year on record: whereas in 2021, the total number of victims was 4,639 and 12 people died each day while crossing borders, in 2023 this shameful figure rose to 6,618 and 18 deaths per day<sup>6</sup>. 91% of the victims died using the Canary Islands route. To a lesser extent, 6,5% occurred on the Algerian route, 2% on the Strait route and 0.5% Alboran route.



**Those who return.** For many, returning home becomes the ultimate option for their survival. They choose to 'voluntarily' return home due to lack of opportunities and difficulties experienced in the country of transit or destination. For those who return, on their own will or by force, many will face significant reintegration, and socio-economic challenges.

Returning migrants will often face challenges, particularly in terms of their reintegration – but they also can contribute to the development of countries of return. When working with and for them, National Societies are only concerned with the returnees' own needs and interests. At all times, they maintain their impartiality, neutrality and independence. National Societies in countries of destination, transit and return cooperate, both in preparation of returns, and in receiving the returnees. Activities by National Societies include pre-departure counselling and support as well as reintegration assistance and monitoring of conditions after return.

Many returning migrants feel anxiety, failure, social isolation and fear of not being able to repay their obligations, these states of anxiety and social isolation lead to full scale mental health issues in the context of poor mental health care in the

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<sup>6</sup> [Maqueta\\_EN\\_VWEB.pdf \(caminandofronteras.org\)](#)

region. Being unable to repay money borrowed to migrate can also lead to physical danger for migrants and their families where they can be threatened, abused or subjected to acts of violence to force them to repay their debts.

The shame or burden of their indebtedness can be a hindrance to their reintegration in their home communities. The lack of livelihood opportunities, and perception of failed migration from their family members upon return, is seen as the main obstacle for returning migrants to overcome and reintegrate into society; and in many cases, it becomes a reason for migrating again. Most of migrants have lost their savings, become indebted and due to their failed migration experience, have very low self-esteem.

Those from rural areas tend to return to larger urban centres to seek job opportunities or do not want to return to the situation they left or because of stigma; they remain isolated from their family network.

"The stigma in society is real, it's a living hell pushing thousands and thousands to go try again."

As a woman when you return back, they see you as a prostitute. As someone that is just useless, you cannot even make friends. Even the old friends will abandon you. The society is always saying you are a failure for coming back without money. The stigma of society, the lack of friends, the family staying away from you... this would make you try the journey again, to just stay away. It's a living hell pushing thousands and thousands to go try again.

*Case Study: Community Engagement and Accountability for People on the Move*

Often, the causes for migration (violence, lack of economic opportunities, and other structural and personal factors) have not changed, and the situation of the returning migrant may be worse than it was before migration. The presence of social networks acts as a constant reminder of their failure. This together with the risk of violence, may

influence returning migrants' decisions about returning to their place of origin.

Some migrants risk persecution if they return to their countries of origin. Migrants also often face cultural and language barriers, discrimination and exclusion, or even violence. Women and children – especially unaccompanied and separated minors –, traumatised persons, people with physical and mental disabilities, and elderly persons are particularly vulnerable.

## GAPS IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO RETURNING MIGRANTS

**Essential needs and livelihoods.** Often, returning migrants arrive with no assets, no means of employment and, in some cases, debts accumulated to fund the migration. They may lack immediate basic support; access to food and water, shelter, hygiene, psychosocial support and being able to contact their family and reintegrate.

The returning migrants need their own source of income to make it easier for them to sustain their own well-being and break the cycle of dependency. Beyond improving their socio-economic situation, having livelihood opportunities/options and assets promotes self-esteem and self-resilience, facilitating meaningful social connection and integration, or reintegration upon return to the place of origin.



**Social inclusion.** Returning migrants may face a multitude of challenges regarding social inclusion. These include loss of social networks, stigma and discrimination, and a perception of “failure” from themselves or from communities which supported their migration in hopes for better economic opportunity. As one report from the Danish Institute of International Study, looking at returnees in Ethiopia, notes, “there is no re-integration, there is only integration anew.”<sup>7</sup> The life-altering effects of migration means that life could never return to what it was before.

"Trust was rebuild on the way back when we started meeting the Red Cross. Many were mentally affected, some were sitting alone, not talking, stressed. But once they started interacting with the Red Cross they started trusting again."

*Case Study: Community Engagement and Accountability for People on the Move*

**Mental health and psychosocial support to migrants.** Returning migrants face the burden of returning to an even more stressful situation where reliance on social support is eroded and they may need to start building networks afresh. The need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is widespread among returning migrants, especially in relation to trauma and loss of social status. Psychosocial support is essential to prevent mental illness which is caused by unaddressed trauma, social isolation and stress. Special attention must be given to survivors of human trafficking and those who have been subjected to sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Psychosocial support, including professional counselling or even psychological first aid, is important to prevent mental illness. Mental illness is a taboo subject in many contexts that attracts much stigma. The low-level mental health services makes the problem worse for returning migrants.

Africa has 1.4 mental health workers per 100 000 people, compared with the global average of 9.0 per 100 000, and performs relatively poorly with regard to the number of psychiatrists, the number of hospital beds for patients with mental illness, and the amount of outpatient facilities.

**Information and coordination.** The ability to fully understand migration trends, as well as efforts to respond to vulnerabilities within the African continent remains not very well-resourced. Monitoring of return and reintegration is not always systematically carried out, creating a gap in the evidence required<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the monitoring of reintegration to date has been conducted over a short timeline which has provided a limited understanding of reintegration outcomes.

There is data available on assisted return programmes where they have been registered by government agencies and others, such as, IOM. But for spontaneous/those returning on their own the data is limited and the true scale of the issue is not well quantified.

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<sup>7</sup> [No Place For Me Here: The Challenges of Ethiopian Male Return Migrants \(DIIS\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [https://knomad.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/knomad\\_paper\\_45\\_return\\_migration\\_methodology\\_a\\_malakooti\\_and\\_h\\_s\\_zwick\\_october\\_2022.pdf](https://knomad.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/knomad_paper_45_return_migration_methodology_a_malakooti_and_h_s_zwick_october_2022.pdf)

In the Sahel region, many refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants depend on humanitarian organizations as their first and last resource for humanitarian assistance and protection. Independent groups that provide food, shelter, health care, legal assistance, and other essential services at borders, in detention centres, and elsewhere can be a lifeline for migrants who are in need and uncertain about their fate at different stages of their journeys. Meeting the humanitarian needs of people who cross borders is not only the responsibility of independent humanitarians, but also of governments. The humanitarian imperative to protect and assist all people in vulnerable situations, irrespective of legal status, is universal.

The RCRC Movement recognizes that return and sustainable reintegration are integral elements of migration governance and are beyond the capacity of one single actor's engagement; the issue therefore depends on the combined efforts of all stakeholders. Partnerships and cooperation between a variety of actors – governmental and non-governmental – at the international, regional, national and subnational levels - are required to enhance the range and quality of return and reintegration assistance available to migrants, avoid duplication of efforts and foster the sustainability of reintegration processes. The RCRC Movement advocates, and is well placed to facilitate, the engagement of a variety of actors – governmental and non-governmental, public and private, local and international – with different mandates and areas of expertise.

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESENT STRENGTHS

**IFRC:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement has a longstanding commitment to work with governments, host populations and people on the move. For decades, our global humanitarian network has provided life-saving services to the most vulnerable, advocated for their needs and rights, and improved their access to longer-term support. This commitment was formally-elaborated in the IFRC Policy on Migration in 2009 and recalled by States in Resolution 3 adopted at the 31<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2011.

The Movement does not encourage or discourage migration. Our approach is strictly humanitarian in keeping with our Fundamental Principles, and action is undertaken on the basis of migrants' needs and vulnerabilities, regardless of their legal status. We also seek to ensure respect for migrants' rights under international and domestic law, including the special protection afforded to certain categories of people, such as refugees and asylum seekers.

Our strength lies in the diversity of our action. The IFRC is a global network of 191 National Societies and their Secretariat providing locally adapted, needs-based responses to people on the move, at different stages of their journeys.

**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** provides support to responding National Societies based on its mandate in conflict and violence-affected areas in countries. The ICRC and IFRC have a longstanding collaboration in the Sahel. The ICRC supports the Movement in the provision of security services

in some of these contexts, while ICRC cooperation teams also work with the IFRC in support of the National Society Development objectives.

**The National Societies in the Sahel** are supported by the different components of the Movement – IFRC, ICRC and Partner National Societies (PNSs). The IFRC Secretariat provides strategic, technical and financial support to the National Societies. There are PNSs in-country that have continued providing bilateral support to the National Societies including Belgium Red Cross, British Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, French Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross.

The unique status of the National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field provides opportunities for dialogue with governments on to advocacy and provision of support to ensure that the needs of migrants are met, their rights are ensured, and their dignity is protected. The extensive network of RCRC National Society local branches and volunteers means that there is a presence in almost every district of every country.

Voluntarism is embedded in the RCRC; this facilitates strengthening integration and social inclusion and provides the ability to tackle discrimination. The presence of well-known and trusted volunteers that are easily identifiable to migrants allows to assist them at all stages of their journeys.

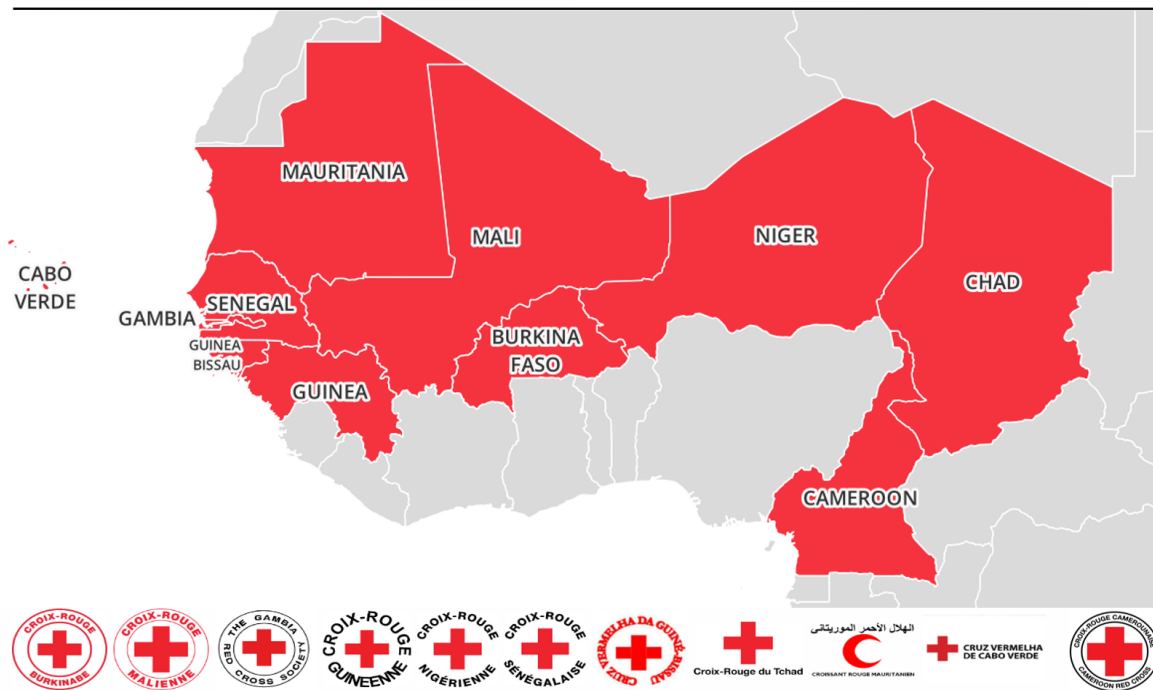
Social and economic distress, as well as the lack of services and prospects for development, are major causes of migration. Humanitarian advocacy may encourage governments to take measures for improved services and economic development. However, the comparative advantage of National Societies lies in their contribution to the resilience of communities through volunteer-based work. This may involve, among other activities, programmes for food security and income generation, programmes for health and education, or humanitarian relief.

"Becoming a Red Cross volunteer has been a transformative experience for me. The Red Cross has a remarkable way of making people feel valuable and truly human. I often encourage my fellow returnees to consider becoming Red Cross volunteers as well, so they too can make a positive impact on others' lives."

*Case Study: Community Engagement and Accountability for People on the Move*



## Returning migrants programme



**National Society capacity and ongoing response.** The National Societies in the Sahel are already present at the main departure, arrival, transit and return points, as well as in the main border areas, through local branches and volunteers in communities, ensuring our proximity to migrants and our ability to respond rapidly and at scale. These National Societies have a long-standing experience on working with people on the move, providing assistance and protection including returning migrants.

The RCRC capacity includes an unparalleled global network also connected with the MENA region National Societies.

A further strength lies in the unique role of National Societies in the Sahel as auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field. The National Societies added value also lies in our local-to-global knowledge and first-hand understanding of humanitarian needs related to migration including returning migrants, enabling us to contribute to the influencing and implementation of global and regional frameworks and mechanisms such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

National Societies (NSs) in the Sahel have significant experience in assisting and protecting migrants along migration routes, thanks to the implementation of safe, neutral, and accessible Humanitarian Service Points

“The engagement of the Red Cross makes you feel that you are a human and that you have a right. They welcomed me back, they consulted me, talked to me. They brought me back to the society, made me calm down. After you've been bullied at home you are always welcome at the Red Cross, their doors are always open. Whenever you come here you know you will meet someone to talk to one or the other way.”

*Case Study: Community Engagement and Accountability for People on the Move*

(HSPs) - notably within the framework of DFID (Department for International Development) - and EUTF (European Union Trust Fund)- the Global Route Based Migration Programme<sup>9</sup>. HSPs respond to the needs of migrants, including those along the Atlantic route, through a needs-based response encompassing health services, provision of non-food items (NFI), PSS, first aid and RFL.

This programme was developed within the Sahel Plus Group<sup>10</sup> which brings together ten NSs in West Africa that have issues of common interest and it is complementary to the Global Route Based Migration Programme<sup>11</sup> whereby National Societies provide humanitarian assistance and protection to people on the move along migratory routes, including through Humanitarian Service Points and enhanced cross border and route based assistance. The same ten NSs also participate in a technical group on livelihoods. Both working groups participate in the Sahel NS Resilience Platform.

These NSs have experience in providing/facilitating food security and livelihoods programming for migrants in areas such as agricultural production and small business support in rural and urban contexts. The Red Cross Society of Guinea<sup>12</sup> has an entrepreneurship programme for returning migrants. Gambia Red Cross have an entrepreneurship programme for migrants. Mali Red Cross have an improved access to livelihoods programme.

This programme also is in line with the regional proposal for Sahel Plus NSs Food Security and Livelihoods VIGIE (Initiative du MouVement Croix-RouGe pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle au Sahel). The programme will align to the Africa Region Consolidated Food Security and Resilient Livelihoods Programme Approach that emphasizes integrated programming in supporting communities affected by disasters and crisis and provides a framework of transitioning through the humanitarian-development nexus. The programme will also benefit from global, Africa regional and sub-regional technical support.

### **Protection and Do No Harm**

According to the IFRC Migration Policy, assistance to people on the move will be accompanied by efforts to provide protection against abuse, exploitation and the denial of rights. Protection encompasses "...all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law, and refugee law". Protection is first and foremost a responsibility of authorities,

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<sup>9</sup> IFRC multi-year Global Route-Based Migration Programme aims to improve the safety and dignity of people on the move along migration routes in Africa, Europe, Middle East and North Africa and the Americas. The Programme includes the commitment of National Societies to scale up assistance and protection – primarily through Humanitarian Service Points - to the most at-risk people on the move.

<sup>10</sup> The Sahel Plus group comprises the following 10 Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies of Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, as well as the IFRC and the ICRC as observer members.

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<sup>12</sup> For further information see page 18 of Guidelines Livelihoods in Migration and Displacement Contexts [https://www.livelihoodscentre.org/-/guidelines-livelihoods-in-migration-and-displacement-contexts#:~:text=The%20guidelines%20include%20potential%20impacts,Social%20cohesion\)%20and%20cases%20examples](https://www.livelihoodscentre.org/-/guidelines-livelihoods-in-migration-and-displacement-contexts#:~:text=The%20guidelines%20include%20potential%20impacts,Social%20cohesion)%20and%20cases%20examples)

who have a responsibility to uphold the rights of all individuals within their jurisdiction.

A sample of IFRC programmes on migratory journeys are as follows.

	Assistance and social inclusion	Protection	Advocacy, communications and public awareness
<b>Countries of destination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of shelter solutions (e.g. collective shelters, rental support, emergency accommodation)</li> <li>• Reception centres</li> <li>• Food and non-food items</li> <li>• Health programmes, including mental health and psychosocial support</li> <li>• Language training and cultural orientation</li> <li>• Access to employment and education</li> <li>• Reception and integration of resettled refugees</li> <li>• Establishment of “safe points”</li> <li>• Search and rescue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoring Family Links</li> <li>• Family reunion</li> <li>• Counselling, orientation, referrals and legal assistance</li> <li>• Pre-departure support to returnees under certain conditions</li> <li>• Responding to needs in immigration detention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications and awareness-raising activities aimed at countering discrimination, fostering peaceful-coexistence and social inclusion of migrants</li> <li>• Advocacy for safe and legal routes for migrants</li> <li>• Advocacy to ensure migrants’ access to services</li> <li>• Reminding authorities of their obligations towards migrants</li> </ul>
<b>Countries of transit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of shelter solutions (e.g. collective shelters, rental support, emergency accommodation)</li> <li>• Food and non-food items</li> <li>• Health programmes, including mental health and psychosocial support</li> <li>• Community engagement and accountability</li> <li>• Camp management and coordination</li> <li>• Establishment of “safe points”</li> <li>• Work at points of first reception &amp; reception centres</li> <li>• Refugee resettlement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoring Family Links</li> <li>• Counselling, orientation, referrals and legal assistance</li> <li>• Support to victims of trafficking and slavery</li> <li>• Responding to needs in immigration detention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications and awareness-raising activities aimed at countering discrimination, fostering peaceful-coexistence and social inclusion of migrants</li> <li>• Awareness raising activities regarding onward journeys</li> <li>• Reminding authorities of their obligations towards migrants</li> <li>• Advocacy on access to services</li> <li>• Provision of information to migrants on options for legal migration</li> </ul>
<b>Countries of origin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resilience programming</li> <li>• Vocational trainings, livelihoods and income-generating activities</li> <li>• Reintegration assistance to returnees, including health and psychosocial support</li> <li>• Assistance to families of missing migrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of information to migrants (pre-departure briefings)</li> <li>• Restoring family links</li> <li>• Responding to needs in immigration detention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications and awareness raising activities aimed at providing information to would-be migrants to reduce potential risks on the journey or at destination</li> <li>• Reminding authorities of their obligations towards migrants</li> </ul>

## PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK

Our focus is to make sure that all people who migrate are safe, are treated humanely and with dignity, and ensuring that all people have the support they need to thrive in inclusive societies.

### Goal

**Support vulnerable returning migrants to lead safe, healthy and dignified lives with improved economic and social reintegration**

#### Pillar 1

##### Basic needs and strengthening livelihoods

# of vulnerable returning migrants have adequate levels of economic self-sufficiency in the host or return communities



#### Pillar 2

##### Inclusion and social cohesion

# of vulnerable returning migrants feel there is cohesion and collaboration at host or return communities



#### Pillar 3

##### Mental health and Psychosocial support

# of vulnerable returning migrants report the ability to cope effectively with life challenges



### Coordination and Cooperation

### Humanitarian Diplomacy and Advocacy

### Localisation and Capacity Strengthening

This programme sets out a regional framework with a common Goal and three common pillars of response (essential needs and livelihoods, support and strengthening, social inclusion and mental health and psychosocial support) and the corresponding enabling actions through which the Sahel National Societies will contribute towards. They will do so through their own unique country level plans of action which will be tailor made to suit their own context of returning migrants.

The programme will be guided by the Red Cross Red Crescent fundamental principles. As auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, National Societies are committed to assisting and protecting vulnerable migrants and

displaced population, whatever their status, according to their needs, without playing a role in coercive acts to control migratory flows, and without encouraging or discouraging migration. As such, a principled approach will be maintained throughout the programme, particularly when it comes to assisting returning migrants.

## TARGET POPULATION

In line with the Fundamental Principles, assistance and protection for people on the move will be provided based on priority humanitarian needs, and not on legal status or category. The IFRC will also ensure that support is provided to host communities, while also taking into account their vulnerabilities and immediate needs.

The direct target population are:

- I. returning migrants to their country of origin
- II. returning migrants in transit country
- III. host communities in country of origin and transit countries

## THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK

### Planned Operations

#### **Outcome 1: Returning migrants supported by the programme have access to sufficient and sustainable livelihoods**

Key Indicator 1.1	# of returning migrants who are provided with essential needs
Key Indicator 1.2	% of returning migrants who are employed or self-employed in sustainable livelihood activities by the end of the programme
Key Indicator 1.3	% of returning migrants provided with new skills to strengthen, diversify or protect their livelihoods activities

**Essential needs:** Tailored essential needs support, including promoting access to food, safe water, hygiene, household items, emergency shelter, and sanitation, through cash and voucher or in-kind assistance. These services may be delivered at Humanitarian Service Points and elsewhere. This action will complement the Global Route Based Migration Programme where it already exists in a country.

**Sustainable livelihoods:** Ensuring access to services and products that support and strengthen livelihoods in order to increase the self-resilience of vulnerable returning migrants in host and transit communities.

This socio-economic empowerment will be achieved by providing returning migrants (and more particularly young people) with the skills, resources and opportunities to create sustainable livelihoods in their host or origin communities.

There is no one-size-fits-all when designing livelihoods interventions. All contexts require systematic and participatory assessment of situations and needs, with a



meaningful engagement of groups and individuals including different gender, age, and backgrounds.

Community engagement plays a pivotal role in achieving this goal by involving local stakeholders in the identification of sustainable livelihood strategies. By collaborating with communities, we can harness local knowledge and resources to develop tailored interventions, such as agricultural diversification programmes or vocational training initiatives. Through participatory decision-making processes, communities become invested in the success of these initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability that enhances their long-term sustainability.

When supporting livelihoods, it is important to consider the interests, capacities, and barriers of the target population. In that sense, mapping existing livelihood opportunities, market dynamics and existing (and potential) value chains in the target areas is essential in order to define the livelihood actions to be supported on different levels: agricultural activities, vocational training programmes, individual or collective entrepreneurship initiatives, etc.

The livelihoods Interventions will be based on strong labour market and value chain analyses whilst taking into consideration returning migrants' aspirations, capacities and barriers.

Livelihood support will therefore include a range of different types of activities, including:

- Capacity building of returning migrants (improving human capital) by: facilitating access to the labour market; the creation of sustainable income-generating activities (vocational training, micro entrepreneurship / IGA (Income generation activities) management trainings, technical trainings, etc.); and developing sustainable livelihoods (face of the effects of climate change), mainly (but not only) in the rural context. Cash grant (or in-kind) distribution for accessing the assets required to start and develop livelihood activities (seeds, fertilizers, livestock, equipment, machinery, etc.), considering both investment needs and start-up capital.
- Facilitating and supporting access to physical, financial or natural resources (access to land, access to veterinarian services, microfinance institutions, etc.) required for the development and sustainability of income-generating activities.
- Facilitation of linkage with markets, through mapping market actors and employment opportunities, partnerships with private sector, accompaniment and guidance, etc., to support access to the labour market and the establishment of links with key value chain actors; and Facilitation of financial integration, through formal or informal mechanisms (savings and credit groups, for example).
- Basic Life Skills training (functional literacy, numeracy, basic IT skills, etc ...) and digital literacy.
- Legal support for accessing labour market.
- Social support may include social protection schemes, housing, education, medical support, childcare, legal services, etc.

Throughout the entire process, and until economic independence is achieved, the target group will receive guidance, coaching and monitoring, in order to achieve the objectives of resilience and economic self-sufficiency.

Livelihoods support will be also vital for vulnerable host communities' members, whose resources and tolerance for migrants may be stretched by the continuous movement of people and negative perceptions of migrants receiving preferential support. For this reason, the programme will also consider vulnerable members (households) from the host communities to facilitate integration and cohesion, as well as to avoid conflicts over access to resources (e.g., natural resources) by enabling and enhancing mutual sustainability.

The approach will be to focus on maintaining and developing skills, while promoting resilience, self-maintenance and an entrepreneurial mindset

The activities implemented by each of the NSs will follow relevant IFRC policies and guidance, including for example the Guidelines Livelihoods in migration and displacement contexts prepared by the Livelihoods Resource Centre of the IFRC, March 2022.

## **Outcome 2: Social cohesion between returning migrants and host community members is enhanced through the promotion of joint community activities**

Key Indicator 2.1	% of returning migrants who participate in social cohesion community activities
Key Indicator 2.2	% of host community's members who participate in social cohesion community activities
Key Indicator 2.3	% of returning migrants who report that social cohesion activities delivered over the project period are relevant to their needs

Social cohesion is essential for the successful integration of returning migrants into their host communities. By promoting joint community activities, such as cultural events, skill-sharing workshops, and infrastructure projects, this proposal seeks to bridge divides and foster mutual understanding between migrants and host community members.

The programme will facilitate the successful integration of returning migrants into host communities and the reintegration of those returning to their communities of origin in order to reduce their vulnerability. We will scale up our work to integrate programmes across inclusion and social cohesion, recognising that these issues are interlinked to the well-being of all people both in home and host communities.

These activities provide opportunities for interaction and collaboration, breaking down stereotypes and building trust. Through shared experiences, individuals from diverse backgrounds develop bonds of solidarity, strengthening the social fabric of the community and promoting inclusivity.

Going beyond "social cohesion activities" the programme will promote meaningful participation of migrants in the communities where they are found. To ensure they

represented and are their inputs reflected in community decisions. They are included and have access as well so social support services (locally as well as national systems).

Communities will be supported to strengthen social inclusion and respect for diversity, and to break down barriers and misconceptions. The programme will raise awareness among returnees, their families and communities on the social, psychosocial and economic impacts of migration.

National Societies' Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) teams will play an important role in undertaking the activities under this outcome by providing returning migrants with accurate and reliable information about, and safe and dignified referrals to, essential services and humanitarian assistance. This includes providing information about the scope of assistance and services provided by the National Societies and facilitating safe and dignified access to services provided by other actors.

The programme will strengthen initiatives to address negative and inaccurate perceptions of, and foster positive narratives about, returning migrants, and to promote inclusion. This includes awareness raising, education campaigns, intercultural exchange, and other initiatives to combat discrimination, exclusion and stigma and to build links and understanding between returning migrants and communities.

We will strengthen our provision of protection services to returning migrants, irrespective of their status. This includes providing services directly to migrants to help them maintain or restore family links and access to legal advice, counselling, and safe spaces (including for children and women).

The programme will also provide specialized services to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, torture, and trafficking, including to unaccompanied and separated children and families of missing migrants.

Returning migrants will be provided with information on their rights, and how to mitigate potential risks and reduce their exposure to harm. Safe referrals for returning migrants will be facilitated to enable them to access support, exercise their rights and seek redress for harm or violations suffered.

Engagement with states and relevant non-state actors will seek compliance with their obligations linked to the protection of returning migrants, and to minimise risks and harms.

Provision of Restoring Family Links (RFL) assistance to restore/maintain contact with returning migrants separated family members will also be provided.

Priority will be given to recruit returnees as volunteers to support the programme.

The response will also include considerations and approaches of Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)<sup>13</sup>, including through the set-up of complaint and feedback mechanisms. This will facilitate two-way communication with returning migrants and host communities while also providing an opportunity for them to report any corruption and malpractice hindering the rights of the targeted population. Volunteers will conduct community dialogue and information dissemination sessions, during which they will also collect community feedback.

### Outcome 3: Returning migrants have capacities to promote, achieve and sustain mental health and psychosocial well-being

Key Indicator 3.1	% of returning migrants who report improved psychosocial well-being (personal and interpersonal), resilience and capacity to cope with and alleviate suffering
Key Indicator 3.2	% of returning migrants who report having access to MHPSS
Key Indicator 3.3	% of returning migrants participating in MHPSS services who report that MHPSS activities delivered over the project period are relevant to their needs

The need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is widespread among returning migrants, especially in relation to trauma, loss of social status, and addressing issues of stigma and marginalisation.



The programme will provide MHPSS including psychological first aid (PFA), individual counselling, focus group discussions, family mediation, community mediation and special security measures. Referral pathways for specialised MHPSS will be established, together with integration or establishment of MHPSS coordination bodies. Special attention will be given to survivors of human

trafficking and those who have been subjected to sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Community engagement is instrumental in addressing these challenges by creating supportive environments that prioritize mental health awareness and access to psychosocial support services. By involving community members in the design and implementation of mental health programmes, we can reduce stigma and promote understanding of the factors contributing to mental distress. Through community-led initiatives such as counselling services, peer support

<sup>13</sup> For further information see the study of Humanitarian Service Points in the Gambia established by The Red Cross Red Crescent movement to assist people on move and returned migrants **Community Engagement and Accountability for People on the Move**, August 2023 <https://preparecenter.org/rchsp/>

groups, and awareness campaigns, returning migrants can access the resources they need to promote resilience and well-being.

## **Enabling actions**

### **Outcome 4: Coordination and Cooperation**

#### **Movement components (IFRC, ICRC, National Societies)**

We will ensure connected programmes and information systems between countries, National Societies and Movement components, and along migration routes. We will improve assessment and data collection to fully understand trends which will refine the tailor-made response.

Enhancing coordination and cooperation among the Movement components and with external actors—both within countries and across borders—will strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of the action with and for returning migrants.

The IFRC Secretariat will provide technical and financial support to the eleven National Societies. There are PNSs in-country that will continue providing support to the National Societies including British Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, French Red Cross, Italian Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross.

Therefore, coordination and cooperation across Movement members and done in a spirit of collective responsibility and complementarity, will strengthen the impact of our work with and for returning migrants.

Movement members will share information, knowledge, expertise and resources to strengthen their understanding of risks and harms to migrants and to reduce their prevalence, while also addressing needs and gaps in support.

We will leverage the IFRC Network presence in countries of origin, transit and destination to strengthen continuity of care, bridge assistance and protection gaps and promote effective and coordinated support along migration routes, including across borders.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will provide support to responding National Societies based on its mandate in conflict and violence-affected areas in countries covered by this programme. The ICRC and IFRC have a longstanding collaboration in the Sahel. In this context, these two components of the Movement have cooperated for many years. ICRC supports the Movement in the provision of security services in some of these contexts, while ICRC cooperation teams also work with the IFRC in support of the National Society Development objectives.

#### **International Humanitarian Stakeholders**

At the country level, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies will provide humanitarian services in close cooperation with external stakeholders in their respective countries, including the relevant national agencies leading the response, national, and international humanitarian aid organisations, and the local



and central departments of relevant ministries. The IFRC actively participates in inter-agency coordination efforts involving IOM, UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations.

Coordination and cooperation with external partners and other actors enhances support and strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian responses with and for migrants, including by reducing duplication and filling gaps.

Investing in transformative partnerships to strengthen principled humanitarian action will address the evolving needs of returning migrants.

### **National Government and Regional Structures**

Relevant national line ministries:

- Government policies, legal frameworks, etc.
- Institutional framework on migration
- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

### **Private Sector and Academia Engagement**

The IFRC strongly believes in the power of private sector and academia engagement. Together with the National Societies in the Sahel, we will work to develop partnerships with private sector organizations at the regional, national and local level. These support the lifesaving work of National Societies and complement their own local partnerships. Examples of such partnership would be with Agri industries, hotel and catering and training colleges.

## **Outcome 5: Humanitarian Diplomacy and Advocacy**

This outcome will ensure continuity of services to returning migrants and promote, protect and uphold their dignity and rights, with evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy on behalf of migrants.

The programme will support the strengthening of the capacity of National Societies to better manage and respond to the needs of migrants and displaced people at all stages of their journey.

We will influence states, authorities and other stakeholders through humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy which underpins the Movement's work with and for migrants. Humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy are critical tools to facilitate unimpeded access to migrants in need and, ultimately, the Movement's ability to deliver on the Migration Strategy.

Ground humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy efforts in normative frameworks, using rigorous and credible evidence and our principled humanitarian approach will draw on our expertise, local knowledge, on-the-ground operational action, analysis and learning, and ensure that humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy are informed and driven by the experiences and voices of migrants and communities.

In the same way, the programme will strengthen the capacities of the IFRC network to undertake humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy on relevant migration-related issues.

Likewise, we will strategically leverage the complementary experiences, expertise and access of the IFRC network to develop joint or coordinated statements, messages, and positions, as appropriate, in order to strengthen efforts to protect and assist migrants. We will also explore opportunities for joint or coordinated engagement in favour of migrants with other actors

Also, the programme will support the collection of returning migrants anonymised data collection to be able to fully understand trends, as well as efforts to respond to vulnerabilities in the region.

## **Outcome 6: Localisation and Capacity-strengthening**

This outcome will support the strengthening of National Societies' capacity to better manage and respond to the needs of returning migrants and host communities.

We will invest in the leadership, delivery and capacity of National Societies which is fundamental to the Movement's ability to leverage our collective strengths in implementing the Migration Strategy. This is aligned with the commitment of Movement members to localisation.

Strengthening our network of National Societies will ensure strong and sustainable entities that lead their own decision-making, planning, and programming in relation to migration, and who mobilise the resources needed to fund programmes and services appropriate to their contexts and aligned with the Fundamental Principles.

The promotion of a stronger understanding of our work with and for migrants across all components, and how this links to the Movement's mission and other aspects of our work, as well as to the distinct and complementary mandates and roles of components is designed to foster more coherence and greater internal synergies.

Drawing on the research, evidence and insights generated by the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab among others will enhance our ability to innovate and engage in evidence-based action,

The programme will strengthen the capacities of staff and volunteers to identify, mitigate and prevent protection risks and violations, and to address these through appropriate services, safe referrals, and dialogue with authorities. All work undertaken by staff and volunteers in this respect must be in line with applicable Internal standards and the "do no harm" principle, and take into account vulnerabilities related to age, gender, disability and other diversity categories.

## RESOURCE MOBILISATION STRATEGY

IFRC Strategic Engagement and Partnerships will develop a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy.

The following Partner National Societies have in the past been interested in supporting migration in African countries.

- Spanish RC
- Italian RC
- Netherlands RC
- British RC
- Danish RC
- Swedish RC

Other entities supporting migration in African countries are the following:

- Rockefeller Foundation / AA Resilience Centre
- French Government
- British Government
- Spanish Government
- Italian Government
- European Union

The European Union is currently waiting to complete new agreements with countries that have recently changed government, such as Niger and Mali.

Excluding the ESSN (Emergency Social Safety Net) programme the funding trends for migration in 2021 was mostly through Governments (44%), PNSs (35%), Multilaterals (12%) and the Private Sector (8%).