



**SoTiN**  
Stamping out Trafficking in Nigeria

# HOW MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING FROM EDO STATE HAPPENS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The unsafe migration and trafficking affecting Edo state are particularly characterised by two modes of international travel:** first a minority by air, and the vast majority overland through Niger to Libya.<sup>1</sup>

**These modes of international travel are qualitatively different.** Both rely on deceptive practices encouraging and preying upon the erroneous belief that “*abroad is better*” for ambitious young people than Nigeria. However, with the international travel by air organised by the so-called “sponsors”<sup>2</sup>, there is a definitive exploitative outcome ready and prepared in the intended country of destination, whether this is domestic servitude or some other form of forced labour or sexual exploitation. With overland international travel on the other hand, the chances of a migrant actually getting into Europe in the era of the European Union’s “Fortress Europe” policies are so small that the commodity value of the migrant Nigerians, is realised, at the earliest possible moment for the traffickers, by sale into the slave markets of Libya.

**Many of the migrants, who fall victim to traffickers, may find themselves effectively multi-trafficked** if, as frequently occurs, they are kidnapped during their overland journey to extort further cash from their families.

**Trafficking from Edo seems to disproportionately affect women:** of the 22 female returnees interviewed in this research, 20 had been trafficked, most for sexual exploitation. In other words, 91 % of the female interviewees had been trafficked as opposed to 59 % of the 17 men interviewed.

The intensity of the belief that “*abroad is better*”, and that successful migration is routine and easily facilitated by the so-called “sponsors” who in reality are traffickers, is so profound and extensive that **traffickers do little work to recruit victims**. The prospective “migrants” (read victims) come voluntarily to them seeking help in migrating, in the belief that migration represents the only realistic prospect of improving ordinary Edo people’s lives from the poverty and thwarted ambitions that they currently experience.

Those who can, may pay the “sponsors” stated costs for migration upfront. **The “sponsor” bankrolls the cost of travel for those who cannot pay on the understanding that they will be indebted to the “sponsors” for the amount to be determined by the same sponsors when the “migrant” arrives at the destination.** To ensure that the debts will be fully repaid by the prospective “migrants”, they are made to undergo juju rituals binding them to promises to repay the “sponsor” from their earnings from work abroad. Overland migration is ostensibly cheaper than that by air, with returnees quoting figures of the order of less than US \$10,000 as amounts they swore to repay for overland migration compared to figures in excess of US \$ 40,000 for migration by air.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to premise that the movement of Edo State indigenes to Europe and other parts of the world through unsafe routes and by unsafe methods are characterised by two very different modes of travel and effect: unsafe migration and trafficking. Trafficking and migration are two very distinct phenomena. While trafficking is a crime and involves the exploitation of its victims, migration is not a crime, though unsafe migration may result in the migrant becoming a trafficking victim. The international travel for both unsafe migration and trafficking are usually organised by so-called “sponsors” who are traffickers. They prey on the vulnerability and naiveté of the prospective migrants to earn huge sums of money through the exploitation of their victims.

<sup>2</sup> Idem as above

**With travel by air, the juju and debt bondage are the real means of control**, reflecting the traffickers' intended levels of profit in cash or in kind from the exploitation of the "migrant's" labour or their sexual exploitation when they arrive at their destination.

**For overland travel, juju and debt bondage are in effect part of a pernicious confidence trick upon prospective migrants:** Nigerian "sponsors"/traffickers have no interest in or control over what happens to the migrants once they pass the borders of Nigeria and are sold on to other traffickers. It is at this point of sale at which the original Nigerian traffickers obtain the financial return on the trafficking of their fellow Nigerians.

**Even without the trafficking element, where travel is in unsafe conditions, migration across Niger, Libya and the Mediterranean would be enormously hazardous** given the dangers posed by the desert and the scale of banditry in Niger, war and the burgeoning slave economy in Libya, and the perils of trying to cross the Mediterranean in ill-suited and overcrowded boats. With the addition of trafficking, the certainty that migrant Nigerians will suffer considerable violence and exploitation becomes almost absolute.

**The above results outline the implications of this study for the SOTIN programme. We do not propose firm recommendations, as these ideas will need to be considered in combination with those of the other research studies and programme strategy. The following are however what may be considered as possible responses:**

- **Government should encourage and facilitate the environment for small business development** to ensure that young people have a much more realistic prospect of starting their own business or obtaining sustainable employment without having to migrate.
- **Government must ensure that trafficking is properly investigated and prosecuted** beyond its current, particularly in Edo state, paltry level<sup>3</sup>
- **There is a need for a comprehensive programme of awareness-raising on the risks and realities of unsafe migration and trafficking.** This should combine survivor-led advocacy, with a professional campaign using televisual, radio, print and social media channels, and training and preparation of Nigerian officials and law enforcement in identification and anti-trafficking response at key transit points.
- There is a need for social and behavioural change amongst the populace to recognise the opportunities available in the state. Such change must clearly evidence the fact that success can also be achieved at home, without the risks

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<sup>3</sup> See below – Discussion: Trafficking practice in Edo – Community attitudes

of unsafe migration. Such change must be championed by local role models and success stories.

- **There should be a major expansion of vocational and entrepreneurial education in Edo**
- **There should be provision of proper financing for new business start-ups,** particularly for women entrepreneurs.
- **Packages to aid returnee employment and reintegration are vital. Though there are already such packages available to returnees, they are not fit for purpose.**
- **Additional research is needed** on the impact of business development opportunities,<sup>4</sup> anti-trafficking options in Nigeria, the experiences of Nigerian migrants in Europe, and periodic evaluation of anti-trafficking programme interventions.

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<sup>4</sup> There are market development programmes, which have already been carried out in other programmes funded by DFID such as the DAI MADE programme in Delta and Edo States. The studies carried out in those programmes would be of relevant support to the SOTIN Programme.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Global Slavery Index<sup>5</sup> estimated that approximately 1.4 million Nigerians, or around 0.76 % of the country's total population, are living in a state of "modern" slavery, most of them being victims of unsafe migration and of trafficking<sup>6</sup>.

The US State Department's Trafficking in Persons' 2019 Report<sup>7</sup> gives some description of trafficking: *"Authorities identified Nigerian trafficking victims—often exploited by Nigerian traffickers—in at least 34 countries in four regions during the reporting period. Nigerian women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking within Nigeria and throughout Europe, including in Italy, Spain, Austria, and Russia; an international organization estimated 80 percent of all female Nigerian migrants in Italy are or will become sex trafficking victims..."*

*"Historically, most Nigerian trafficking victims in Europe have come from Edo State, via Libya...: Nigerians are exploited in Libya—by both Libyans and Nigerians—in forced labour in construction, agriculture, and prostitution in Tripoli, Sabha, Benghazi, and Misrata. Lured by the promise of reaching Europe, traffickers keep victims in "control houses" or "prostitution camps" located on the outskirts of Tripoli and Misrata until they can repay travel debts; sometimes before victims repay the debt, traffickers sell them again. Some trafficking victims in Libya reported Nigerian embassy officials in Tripoli asked for payment before removing victims from Libyan detention camps. Between April and November 2018, an international organization repatriated 3,160 Nigerians from North Africa, 80 percent of whom were repatriated from Libya. In 2017, the international organization repatriated more than 4,316 Nigerians from Libya, some of whom were trafficking victims or vulnerable to trafficking; **4,000 had departed from Edo State**<sup>8</sup>."*

This study aims to better understand the causes of outward migration and external trafficking<sup>9</sup> from Edo State, including:

- The experiences and motivations of survivors of human trafficking and unsafe migration;

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/regional-analysis/africa/> - accessed 3 Dec 2019.

<sup>6</sup> The term "modern slavery" is a recently coined term that incorporates slavery, forced labour and slavery-like practices. The definitions for these constituent terms reside in a body of international law most significantly the Slavery and Supplementary Slavery Conventions (1926 and 1956 respectively), the Forced Labour Convention and Protocol (1930 and 2014 respectively), and the Trafficking in Persons "Palermo" Protocol (2000), and the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf> - accessed 27 Nov 2019

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>9</sup> Trafficking – the process of rendering a person into a situation of exploitation is defined by the Palermo Protocol as consisting of three interlinked elements: **acts** (*Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons*); **means** (*threat or use of force, coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability; of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person*) and **purpose** (*sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices, illicit activities, practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs*)

- The processes of being recruited and trafficked from Edo State;
- The role of family, friends, and wider social norms in supporting or inhibiting Human Trafficking.

Hence this study aims to identify effective development responses to these causes at appropriate points on the decision-making journey, the migration paths and the trafficking continuum.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research focused on the accounts of returnees to Edo state. Access to interviewees was facilitated by two non-governmental organisations, Pathfinders Justice Initiative for women and Idia Renaissance for women and men. Further returnees were identified from the Edo State Returnee Database.

In total 39 returnees – 22 females and 17 males – were interviewed by Nigerian researchers from Viisau Technology Limited. This team worked with the report author on testing and finalising the interview template and piloting it with two returnees introduced to the researchers by Pathfinders.

Interviews were semi-structured in format covering the individuals' decision-making and preparations for the trip, including their motivations, how the trip was paid for, their experiences on their journey, the work that they did and how they were treated, how they returned to Nigeria, and their current attitudes to migration.

The interviews were recorded and written up according to a template. These write-ups were reviewed regularly by the author as the interviews proceeded in Nigeria so that adjustments to the question template could be made.

The reports of these interviews were then analysed by the report author for commonalities between accounts and key trafficking indicators.

These returnee accounts were also supplemented with additional four informed operators interviews and a review of four additional accounts of Nigerian victims of trafficking to the UK gathered by the report author.

The women interviewed all ranged between the ages of 21 and 35, apart from one woman aged 55. The male interviewees' ages ranged from 22 to 52, with six of the interviewees in their 20s, seven – the largest group – in their 30s, and 3 of the interviewees in their 40s. All were now resident in Edo state, the home state to the majority, with three originating from the Delta.

## 3. KEY FINDINGS

### 3.1 Some numbers

Of the 39 returnee cases, 30 were cases of trafficking. Of the 22 female returnees interviewed, 20 had been trafficked. In other words, 91 % of the females interviewed had been trafficked as opposed



to 59 % of the males. Hence this research supports the findings of the Global Slavery Index<sup>10</sup> amongst others, that trafficking disproportionately affects women and girls.

Of the women interviewed 15, or 68.2%, stated that they had ended up in sexual exploitation. Of all the migrants 46 % had not completed secondary school – the failure to complete education was similar amongst men and women.

Those who organized their own migration eschewing the assistance of “sponsors”, tended to fare better at evading exploitation than those who trusted acquaintances to assist them in the migration process. This is for the simple, often tragic, reason that it is the very act of trusting another person to help with migration that opens the prospective migrant to the vulnerability of trafficking and exploitation.

## 3.2 Motivations and social pressures

The desire for a better life was the overwhelming motivation cited by the interviewees for their decisions to migrate. Many interviewees stated poverty as a factor that pushed them towards migration. Repeatedly they described the ideal of “*abroad as better*” as one that they and their wider communities held.

One female interviewee stated that “*Poverty in my family and peer pressure influenced my decision to travel.*” She went on to say that it is the norm in her community to want to travel abroad for “*greener pastures.*”

Another stated that her mother and sister were fully in support of her trip although her mother was a bit scared. Generally, she said, “*the community applauds families who have members living in Europe.*”

But clearly, not all of this family and community pressure to migrate was aimed at hoping for a better life just for the migrating person. Another interviewee stated that, “*It is considered a norm for most girls to travel abroad in my community and take care of their families*<sup>11</sup>. So, my family was in support of my travel plans.”

But while many interviewees stated that their families knew of and supported their decision to migrate, it was by no means a universal story that families were encouraging their children to migrate. Sixteen of the informants– just over 41% - stated either that their wider family was unaware of their plans for migration or actively opposed to it. These 16 included 11 women, or 50% of all those women interviewed for this research. However, for this group, peer pressure and the prestige in the community that travel abroad entailed still spurred them to travel.

R. Evon Benson-Idahosa of Pathfinders Justice Initiative observes that in the 1980s there was considerable circular migration to Italy and other parts of Europe before “*the legislative wall that the EU put up to limit free movement, to stem migration and to drastically reduce asylum applications by migrants.*” This helps explain why, as one informant noted, travelling abroad is a common norm in her community and that “*people who get to travel are considered the most successful ones.*” Another

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/executive-summary/> - accessed 3 Dec 2019

<sup>11</sup> Emphasis added

male migrant stated that, *“None of my family members was aware of my travel plans. But I had an uncle who had a better life abroad and thought my story would be the same.”* Another male informant described how, in common with others from his community, his sisters *“had left Nigeria and were enjoying life abroad.”*

May Ikeora, author of *Bilateral Cooperation and Human Trafficking: Eradicating Modern Slavery between the United Kingdom and Nigeria*, noted: *“I think there is also something of a “herd mentality” about this. People get into certain types of activity because they see others doing it and being successful at it. So, they sort of ‘follow the crowd.’”*

The success stories that exist, some of them perhaps true, help maintain the belief that *“abroad is better”*, and counter any narratives that suggest any of the more brutal realities. Nosakhare Erhunmwunsee, Executive director of NAME Foundation, a Nigerian non-governmental organisation, observed that, *“Misinformation on social media is another factor pushing the youths out. Those who had gotten overseas paint the picture of ‘once you get out, life becomes better’ to their families and friends in Edo State. Many are deceived by their siblings, peers, friends and enemies to embark on the treacherous journeys.”*

Many of the interviewees also described their expectation that the overland journey out of Nigeria would be *“cheap and easy.”* This is an idea that is promulgated by the fact that the amounts “sponsors” demand repayment for appear much lower for migrants who travel overland compared to those who travel by air. For example, one migrant who travelled overland was forced to swear a juju oath that she would repay her trafficker 1 million Naira, or the equivalent of about US \$ 2,770. Another who travelled by air was required to swear an oath to repay around US \$ 45,000.

The reality, however, as migrants would soon discover, is starkly different from this comforting myth of cheap and easy.

## 3.3 Journeys

### 3.3.1 Trafficking by air

Bridget<sup>12</sup> was promised a better life and education in Russia by a lecturer at the University of Ibadan. She left Nigeria on the 5th March 2010, when she was 20 or 21. She was told she would have to pay back the sum of US \$ 45,000 for her travelling expenses. In Russia, she was transferred to Madam Tessy and her husband who made life hell for her. Madam Tessy’s husband beat her, threatened to rape her and mentally tortured her, in her words, *“attacked her spiritually”*.

She was forced by Madam Tessy and her husband into prostitution. Bridget paid 200 dollars every month for food. Her movement was restricted, and her passport seized. In Russia, she had to pay both madam Tessy and Dr Abbey which was not their initial agreement. Before she left for Russia, she took an oath and was forced to swallow the heart of a chicken. While in Russia, the juju priest kept threatening her that she would die if she did not give him two thousand dollars, a big ram, and

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<sup>12</sup> Not her real name

a big pig. After spending a year and a half with madam Tessy, she managed to run away and returned to Nigeria with the help of a friend.

Patricia<sup>13</sup> was introduced to a Nigerian madam who worked in Russia by a family friend. She was told she could make a lot of money working in a restaurant there. Patricia wanted a better life and thought it was worth the 50,000 Euro madam made her swear to repay through a juju ritual. Patricia flew to Russia from Lagos. There she found she was expected to become a prostitute, servicing around 8 men each night. She also did several “menial” jobs during the day. Most of her earnings were used to pay her rent, bills and her debt to her madam. She was unable to save any money during her time in Russia. Eventually, she became infected with a sexually transmitted disease. She was not treated and one day collapsed in the house. Her madam then threw her out. She was able to contact a friend from church who took her to a hospital and took her in until she recovered. A few members of her church donated money to assist her, which she used to get a passport from the Nigerian Embassy and fly back to Nigeria.

Josephine<sup>14</sup> was introduced to her madam through a cousin who lives in Russia. Over the years, she had heard of people who were taken to Russia by her madam and had a better life and she thought this could be a good opportunity for her and her family. However, when she got to Russia, she faced some terrible times, forced by her madam and her boyfriend into prostitution. They then took most of her money from her for food and debt repayment. Eventually, Josephine got into contact with someone from IOM who helped her return to Nigeria.

The number of people migrating by air amongst the group we interviewed was very small in number, four – three women and one man – or around 10% of the total. But of these, all three women were trafficked, and the methods of their trafficking echoed the experiences of the four additional accounts gathered in parallel to the research in Nigeria of trafficking by air to the UK.

Those who have been trafficked by air have suffered few, if any abuses en-route. However, their problems really start once they reach their destination. There, the traffickers have carefully planned how they are going to exploit the migrant for a sustained period of time and have organised systems of control and management to maximise the return on their investment.

It is unlikely that the cost of transporting a migrant from Nigeria to Russia is anything like the US\$ 50,000 or Euros 45,000 that Bridget and Patricia were forced to swear that they would repay. The real cost in terms of airfares and documentation is likely to be not more than a few thousand dollars – cheaper still if the migrant travels legally on their own passport and with a legitimate entry visa. Indeed the US TIP report for 2019 notes that *“Following relaxed visa requirements for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, traffickers fraudulently recruited Nigerian women for jobs in Russia and later exploited them in sex trafficking; as of early 2019, 1,863 Nigerians remained in Russia without travel documents.”*

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<sup>13</sup> Not her real name

<sup>14</sup> Not her real name

But, for these traffickers, debt bondage and juju are real systems of control, and the amount they make the migrant promise to repay is the amount they are expecting to realise in cash and in kind from their exploitation.

### 3.3.2 The Overland Journey

The vast majority of the trafficking cases encountered in this research related to migration overland through Niger and Libya, with the intent of crossing the Mediterranean to Europe by boat.

One female migrant described a set of experiences that were typical of overland migration: *“I had a terrible experience on my way to Libya. I was subjected to emotional, physical and mental torture. I drank the urine of my friend due to dehydration. On my arrival at the Niger border, we were attacked by Niger security personnel and spent two days in the forest. The truck I was transported in was attacked in the desert and I and the group of people I travelled with spent 7 days in the desert. We were forced to dress [in full body cover] to disguise ourselves. We were packed in a truck and tomatoes placed on top of us to hide our identities because we had no visas. I was not spared in Libya as my hut was attacked... which led to me running for my life before I met a woman who sexually exploited me and prostituted me in a brothel”.*

Travelling with documentation seemed to add little protection, however. Another female migrant, let us call her Innocence, travelled with an ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) passport which she personally paid for without the help of the person who later trafficked her. Her intended destination was Germany. *“I travelled by road and passed through Benin [city], Abuja, Kano, Agadez - Niger and finally arrived in Libya without a visa. I had spent five days in Niger and another week and 3 days from Agadez to the desert. While in the desert, my Hilux truck driver misplaced his vehicle tracker and that was the beginning of my misfortune. We got lost and were eventually left wandering around the desert for weeks without food or water. Lots of people died as a result of starvation and dehydration. We finally got to a place called Qatrun where we had water to drink and were able to wash our bodies.”*

Another female migrant, let us call her Hope, described *“a horrible and an unpleasant journey by road to Libya. I did not travel with a passport. I passed through Kano, Northern Nigeria into the desert, then Agadez finally arriving in Libya. I saw people die on the road, especially in the desert due to lack of water and food. I was packed with 23 other people in a Hilux truck but only 12 of them survived the journey. During my journey, I was sold at different points to various Arab men and finally to Africans who sexually exploited me and other girls and young women.”*

Another migrant, Martha<sup>15</sup>, described her journey, *‘It took me 3 months to get to Libya... Rape was the order of the day... some people died as a result of dehydration. Myself and 31 other passengers left Agadez, Niger on a Hilux truck and only 10 passengers made it to Libya alive. ‘*

One male migrant described his journey as follows: *“I left Nigeria in June 2016 for Libya along with four other boys. We travelled from Benin [City] to Kano, then Kano to Niger. Along the way, most of the young girls in the vehicle collapsed due to hunger and dehydration and they were resuscitated by*

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<sup>15</sup> Not her real name

*sprinkles of water and were given glucose before we finally got to Qatrun [a village close to the Libya border].”*

Another migrant, Idris<sup>16</sup>, describes similar experiences: *“In January 2018, I left Nigeria with the hope of crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Germany. I left Benin [City] for Kano, travelling through Agadez - Niger, the Sahara Desert before arriving in Libya. The journey was tough, stressful and dangerous. I suffered dehydration, starvation, fell ill and was also tortured by bandits. I saw people drink their urine when they were thirsty. On our journey through the desert, we were attacked by bandits and lives were lost – mainly little children who could not run: they were buried in the desert. My best friend was shot and killed on one of the occasions that we were attacked. Five people died from my Hilux truck, their valuables such as phones and money were stolen. The men who had nothing on them were beaten while the girls/young women were raped. On my way, I was sold by my connection man called Mr James and my mother had to send N200,000 so I could regain my freedom. In Libya, I worked as a labourer and slept on the streets for two months before I was able to rent an apartment.”*

Uniformly migrants’ accounts of travelling through the desert are of experiences of extreme violence and apparent incompetence on the part of those organising the transport through the desert, with this frequently leading to disaster and death. But, in truth, there is no real intent to ensure that the migrants complete the journey unharmed. Other perils also await.

One male migrant, Fortitude<sup>17</sup>, describes how, like Idris, he was kidnapped by bandits as soon as he arrived at Sabha. *“I spent 4 months being tortured with hard labour in the place they imprisoned me until I became very ill. My father sent the kidnappers 480,000 Naira for my release.”*

Another male migrant, Francis<sup>18</sup>, described how, at Qatrun, he was kidnapped and asked to pay a ransom. *“I told my kidnappers that I had paid all my money to my trafficking agent for my travel expenses, but they insisted I pay them the ransom to gain my freedom. I had to contact my fiancée in Nigeria who sent 50,000 Naira for my release”*

Martha’s<sup>19</sup> case is a slightly unusual one. She had paid 500,000 Naira of her own money to the bank account of her “sponsor”, “Madam Gloria”, a Libya based trafficker, before even leaving Nigeria. *“On getting to Libya I was taken to Lady Gloria’s place who requested for an additional 250,000 Naira before I could cross the sea. That was when I had to call my mother to raise the money.”*

In addition to their accounts of appallingly difficult journeys, these survivors describe another trafficking hazard that befalls many on this journey: abduction for extortion.

It is also plain from the many accounts of those interviewed for this research, that their original, Nigerian trafficker is never to be heard from once they pass the borders of Nigeria. Whether the migrant has paid upfront to someone to get them to Europe, or whether a trafficker has assured the migrant that they will cover the costs of their transportation to be repaid at a later date, whatever

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<sup>16</sup> Not his real name

<sup>17</sup> Not his real name

<sup>18</sup> Not his real name

<sup>19</sup> Not her real name

support the migrant may expect is wholly illusory once they pass beyond the borders of Nigeria: migrants are very much on their own when faced with extortion, and the cost of the transiting the Mediterranean, no matter what migrants believe, is certainly not covered in Nigerian traffickers' offers.

### 3.3.3 Crossing the Mediterranean

Returnees' accounts highlight a number of significant points about crossing the Mediterranean.

**First**, it is seasonal: One migrant described how crossing *"was delayed for... 3 months due to the weather conditions. So, I had to work as a maid in a house and did some prostitution to take care of myself. The night I was to cross the sea, the United Nations invaded the camp and me and a group of people were deported back to Nigeria."*

**Second**, attempting to cross the Mediterranean is expensive: Martha, above, describes how, after getting to Libya, she was asked for another 250,000 Naira to cross the Mediterranean. Idris states he spent the sum of N800,000 (N400,000 per trip) in two attempts to cross the sea to Europe.

**Third**, it is dangerous. Francis states that, *"I then travelled to Sabha to board the [inflatable] boat which was supposed to take me to Italy. My fiancée had to take a loan and sent me 150,000 Naira which I paid for the boat trip. While on the boat, the engine developed a fault and partially deflated, a lot of people died including two young men who were twins and a family of five except for the mother. The survivors were finally rescued by the Libya rescue team after two days on the sea."*

One female migrant stated that she tried to cross the sea three times. On the third occasion disaster struck and 100 out of 130 passengers perished. The survivors were picked up by the Libyan coast guard. Martha's boat also capsized during her attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. A Libya rescue team came to their rescue and handed them, she says, *"over to Nigeria Immigration Officers"*.

It is clear from these accounts that the casualty figures in attempts to cross the Mediterranean would be even higher were it not for the intervention of the Libyan coast guard. Hence considerably more of the accounts of overland migrants ended with their willing repatriation to Nigerian through the offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Nigerian Embassy than with successful migration to Europe. However, for the majority of the returnees, to return home was a relief after the trauma and violence of the overland journey.

### 3.3.4 Experiences of return and re-integration processes

The majority – 30 out of 39 or just under 70% - of the interviewees were completely negative about their migration experiences and categorically stated that they would never wish to migrate again and would not advise anyone to migrate. Many of these view their migration journeys as the most terrible experiences of their lives.

More surprising is that a small minority were much more equivocal. For example, Fortitude, above, who had been trafficked and tortured for extortion en-route to Libya, stated during the interview that he was still interested in migration. He explained that he had been rescued from the camp in which he was being held by a certain Mr Sunny, a Nigerian trafficker from Benin City resident in Libya, who his father had contacted for help. *“Mr Sunny... took me to his camp, treated me and provided shelter for me until I recovered. During my stay with Mr Sunny, I learnt to paint and work as a builder... was able to save enough to move to Tripoli (by the seaside) so I could cross the Mediterranean Sea. Apart from my horrible experience at the prison and desert, I enjoyed every other day I spent in Libya until my unsuccessful attempt to cross over to Spain.”*

For Bridget, above, the brutal trafficking to Russia for sexual exploitation that she described was, in fact, the second time she had tried to migrate. Her first experience had been overland to Libya.

In other words, the myth that *“abroad is better”* is a strong one, enduring even in the face of hard personal experience.

Most of the female interviewees in this project are now in employment, many of them with their own businesses, due to the support they received from the ETAHT and local NGOs on their arrival back home. For the male interviewees the situation was more mixed – 6, approximately 35%, were unemployed.

Support for returnees has the potential to have a positive impact by contributing to the development of the Edo economy. But even the sample who contributed to this research – unrepresentative in that contact with them was facilitated in the main by non-governmental organisations who have been endeavouring to assist them - indicate that there is insufficient support available to ensure all obtain access to decent work.

It is important to bear in mind that, as their accounts make clear, most of the returnees have witnessed, and often been subjected to, appalling violence. Hence, they will have returned to Edo deeply traumatised and presenting as *“failures”* in the context of their communities’ unrealistic expectations of migration. Without adequate support to reintegrate to their communities and obtain sustainable livelihoods for themselves, they may find themselves prey to exploitation and some may

in fact seek to try their chances again “abroad”, becoming re-trafficked in the process. These risks emphasise the necessity of proper support to returnees that comprehensively addresses their experiences and needs.

## 4. DISCUSSION: TRAFFICKING PRACTICE IN EDO

Trafficking, the process of rendering a person into a situation of exploitation, is defined by the Palermo Protocol, as consisting of three interlinked elements: **acts** (*Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons*); **means** (*threat or use of force, coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability; of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person*) and **purpose** (*sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices, illicit activities, practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs*).

The accounts above describe three types of trafficking under the Palermo Protocol definition:

- **Trafficking by air** – the transportation and receipt of a person by means of deception for the purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation
- **Trafficking overland** – the transfer of a person by means of deception for the purpose of sale as a commodity to other traffickers
- **Trafficking for extortion** – the transfer of a person by means of abduction and threat or use of force for the purpose of extortion.

### 4.1 Community attitudes

Accounts of returnees indicate that traffickers in Edo state make little effort to recruit their victims. The myth that “*abroad is better*” and the prestige associated with migration amongst Edo communities means that potential victims are the ones who seek out and request “assistance” to migrate, from those they refer to as “sponsors”, but who are in fact people smugglers, exploiters and traffickers. Thereafter, for migrants intent on using the overland route, trafficking requires little skill or knowledge on the parts of the traffickers. All it requires is that they can manage the transfer of trusting migrants to a point of sale beyond the Nigerian border, often directly into the slave markets of Libya at Sabha.

One would think that communities would rise up against such exploitative behaviour in their communities, but there is little evidence of this in the accounts of returnees. Generally, traffickers



seem to be regarded as offering a useful service to facilitate migration and hence are tolerated by the community.

This community acceptance of traffickers would seem to translate to, at least, indifference towards trafficking on the part of the police. Not a single returned survivor of trafficking interviewed for this research indicated that the police had evinced any interest in their experiences. Furthermore, as far as these returnees are aware their traffickers remain unharmed by either police or community and continue to ply their trade, selling trusting young Edo people into the trafficking routes of Niger and hence to the slave markets of Libya.

Lack of police action against traffickers is also noted in the US 2019 Trafficking in Persons report<sup>20</sup> which notes that *“NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons) received 938 cases for investigation, completed 192 investigations, prosecuted at least 64 suspects in 64 cases, and convicted 43 traffickers, compared with receiving 662 cases for investigation, completing 116 investigations, 43 prosecutions, and 26 convictions the previous reporting period.”*

In other words, Nigerian authorities in the year up to the 2019 report completed 20% of the investigations that had been brought to their attention. Furthermore, the number of cases brought to their attention (938) is itself but a fraction of the 3,160 Nigerians, noted above from the US TIP report, repatriated from North Africa between April and November 2018.

In Edo State itself, the figures were even more underwhelming as the US Trafficking in Persons Report notes: *“In addition, the Edo State Task Force (ESTF) was codified in the Edo state by its anti-trafficking law to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases in Edo state, and investigated 56 cases and initiated prosecutions in 20 cases; all 20 prosecutions were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.”*

## 4.2 Modes of trafficking

Consideration of the accounts of the majority who are trafficked suggests that, in comparison with trafficking by air, overland trafficking is an opportunistic and disorganised process.

The qualitative differences between the organisation and intent associated with travel by air and the much more chaotic experiences of those who travel overland, emerge from the simple fact that there are no safe overland migration options. Even legal overland migration with the migrants travelling on their own passport and with proper visas, would be extremely hazardous as much of the danger emerges from the spectrum of lawlessness that is exhibited along the route, from

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf> - page 354 - accessed 27 Nov 2019

banditry in Niger, to civil war in Libya as we can understand from returnees accounts as well as third party reports<sup>21</sup>.

The insecurity along the migration route means, as noted above, that migrants, as well as being trafficked for other forms of exploitation, also become trafficked for extortion. The risk of extortion from refugees and migrants is a trafficking practice that has been growing noticeably over the past decade since first identified in relation to Eritrean refugees at the beginning of the 2010s. This phenomenon was discussed by Lucy Heisterkamp in an article in 2016<sup>22</sup> for Open Democracy. She noted *“these kinds of kidnappings are now paralleled in other regions, including **Libya**<sup>23</sup>... As several NGO reports show, systematic violence against migrants for the purpose of extorting ransoms has become a widespread phenomenon on flight routes, organised both by private criminal groups and ostensibly also by state officials... this model of trafficking a genuinely contemporary phenomenon that commodifies the human experience of suffering and compassion in a hitherto unknown way.”*

So, even with the best possible outcome, this is a journey fraught with danger, including robbery, extortion and, particularly for women, rape.

Typically, when migrants cannot pay upfront for their travel, they make promises and juju oaths to repay the “costs” of “migration” organised by their traffickers. As with migrants being trafficked by air, these promises tend towards the tens of thousands of euros.

But, from consideration of the accounts of returnees from the overland route to Libya, it is impossible to conclude that the traffickers who offer options of overland migration are anything other than dangerous confidence tricksters. They offer naive migrants the prospect of easy travel and lucrative work. But they do little other than effect the migrants transfer to the Niger border where they are sold on to other traffickers there, people who have not even mastered how to safely navigate the desert. This is a point underlined by, among others, Hope’s account above, that she was sold on several times before ending up enslaved and sexually exploited.

Where a migrant can pay a trafficker upfront, this accords them little benefit: the trafficker will take their money and then still sell them on to traffickers in Niger. For example, Innocence raised the money for her journey by herself. She made an initial payment of 700,000 Naira to her “sponsor” before leaving Nigeria and another 130,000 Naira was paid in cash on getting to Libya. For this, she earned the privilege of a hazardous journey described above, to Tripoli, where, *“we were kept in a camp waiting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. I stayed at the camp till the United Nations invaded the premises and I was eventually deported back to Nigeria.”*

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-rights/executions-torture-and-slave-markets-persist-in-libya-u-n-idUSKBN1GX1JY> - accessed 27 Nov 2019

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/tortured-for-ransom-extortion-on-migrant-routes/> - accessed 1 Oct 2019

<sup>23</sup> Emphasis added

For the overland traffickers, juju and debt bondage are as much a part of the deception process as the promise of lucrative work or easy migratory passage. They give the appearance that traffickers are organised and interested in the long-term well-being, or at least the profitability, of the migrant. In reality, the trafficker is only interested in how much cash they can immediately realise from that person's sale on to the slave markets of Libya.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This research indicates that a migration culture has grown up in Edo state arising from on the one hand a set of push factors including poverty and a perceived lack of opportunities and services available in the state, and on the other hand a set of pull factors, including a general belief that work abroad is plentiful and lucrative, and migration to obtain that work is easy.

Into this culture a number of unscrupulous individuals have established themselves as “sponsors” to facilitate travel by the migrants, though they seem to satisfy the definition of traffickers, offering their supposed assistance to potential migrants to get to Europe while in reality using deception to deliver them by air or by land to a point of sale where the cash value of the migrant human being can be realised from other unscrupulous individuals.

Given the difficulties and costs currently associated with legal migration to Europe, and the continued belief of the wider community that traffickers provide a useful service, traffickers are effectively protected within their community and sought out for help by the very migrants upon whom they intend to prey.

The findings from this research evidence implications for the SOTIN Programme. SOTIN cannot at this stage propose firm recommendations, but the implementation phase will determine what types of proposed responses can be put forward. It is however necessary to evidence the fact that in order to address the trafficking and unsafe migration crisis from Edo the underlying causes externalised by the findings of this research must be addressed.

**The following are however what may be considered as possible responses:**

## 6. POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Maria Grazia Giammarinaro<sup>24</sup>, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking noted, following her 2018 visit to Nigeria, stated that, *“Prevention measures solely aimed at raising awareness of the risks of migration have proven ineffective and should be coupled with meaningful economic empowerment measures, such as job creation, business skills training and extensive tutorship during the start-up phase of a business.*

This is an observation that is echoed in the accounts of the returnees discussed above. Hence, possible responses to migration and trafficking from Edo state could fall into four categories: advocacy, awareness-raising, inclusive business and finance, and future research.

### 7.1 Potential advocacy

#### 7.1.1 Safe migration

In the absence of safe legal means to migrate, people will seek unsafe, irregular means, such as have been described above, something that has been exacerbated by the EU’s ‘Fortress Europe’ strategy<sup>25</sup>.

In 2009, the EU and Nigeria established a “Joint Way Forward<sup>26</sup>.” This included an agreement to intensify political dialogue and to hold at least a yearly senior officials’ meeting and a Ministerial dialogue. The main areas of priorities identified for such dialogue include peace and security, good governance and human rights, and economic development.

In parallel, the EU and Nigeria agreed to set up a *“local dialogue on migration and development, which aims at maximising the contributions of remittances and at preventing and reducing irregular migration and trafficking of human beings, and at organising and facilitating legal migration.”*<sup>27</sup>

It appears from the accounts of the returnees interviewed in this research that irregular migration across the Mediterranean has been substantially reduced, if not eliminated, by the actions of the Libyan coast guard and the danger and difficulty of the crossing itself. But this has brought with it a considerable human toll, as described above.

It is imperative that the Nigerian government uses the opportunities afforded by the dialogue with the EU to, where possible, reduce the risks currently manifest in the migration of

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<sup>24</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/visit-nigeria-report-special-rapporteur-trafficking-persons-especially-women-and> - accessed 27 Nov 2019

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/30/when-refugees-in-libya-are-being-starved-europes-plan-is-working?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/30/when-refugees-in-libya-are-being-starved-europes-plan-is-working?CMP=share_btn_fb) – accessed 2 Dec 2019

<sup>26</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/1621/nigeria-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/1621/nigeria-and-eu_en) - accessed 27 Nov 2019

<sup>27</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/1621/nigeria-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/1621/nigeria-and-eu_en) - accessed 27 Nov 2019

Nigerian nationals. This must include dialogue for increased access to simple, legal and affordable migration options for Nigerian nationals to the EU, as well as support for inclusive economic development in Nigeria, particularly in Edo state.

### 7.1.2 A more conducive environment for small and medium-sized business development

The report by a delegation of the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on their February 2018 visit to Nigeria noted that: *“approximately 40 per cent of the country's working age population is either unemployed or underemployed, and this figure is likely to be much higher among the country's youth. Nigeria's projected demographics will only intensify the urgent need for job creation and educational opportunities in the coming years.”*

As Nosakhare Erhunmwunsee observes, *“The government is not taking care of things in Nigeria. They are not interested in businesses valued at less than ₦50,000 [their tax regimes and policies kill small businesses]. So, there are insufficient incentives for small business development: taxes on small businesses are very high. Government business development policies are not enhancing anything.”*

May Ikeora also noted, *“Currently government policy does not create an enabling environment for the creation of small business. If this was addressed more people would likely want to stay rather than migrate: there is comparable prestige in Edo to being a business owner as to being a migrant.”*

Hence this is an area in which the government should be striving to encourage entrepreneurship to provide essential goods and services to the growing community, as well as to provide alternatives to young people other than migration.

### 7.1.3 Investigation and prosecution of traffickers

There has been considerable investment in police and criminal justice in Nigeria by DFID and others. Yet this does not seem to have produced a level of either investigation or prosecution of traffickers commensurate with the scale of trafficking activity in Edo state.

This suggests at least in part that the pressure for outside action against traffickers is not matched by a comparable political will to act either within the police or amongst those government officials responsible for the direction of policing. This in turn suggests that there is a lack of public pressure on these state agencies to act.

It is axiomatic that a nation cannot prosecute its way out of a trafficking crisis. But it is also true that in a trafficking crisis if the traffickers perceive that there is little chance of ever being held to account for their crimes then they will have little incentive to desist from their activities.

Hence any credible anti-trafficking strategy in Edo must include not only international advocacy for increased criminal justice action against traffickers in Edo state, but also national and community-based advocacy on this issue. The effectiveness of national and community advocacy on this issue will heavily depend on the effectiveness of meaningful anti-trafficking awareness-raising amongst the community and national actors.

## 7.2 Awareness-raising

### 7.2.1 Survivor advocacy

By far the most credible advocates for effective anti-trafficking action in Edo are survivors of trafficking who can speak with authority on the realities of both migration and the sort of work available to Nigerian migrants in Libya and beyond. It is important to establish a comprehensive programme of survivor engagement with key stakeholders, including young people who may be considering migrating, and community members and leaders who are encouraging young people to migrate. A specific programme for all of the secondary schools of the state should be established.

### 7.2.2 Professional media campaign

Drawing on survivor accounts of their trafficking and migration experiences the direct advocacy of survivors should be supplemented by a professional media campaign, including radio, television, print and social media channels highlighting the realities of trafficking and migration, promoting the idea of business startup in Edo and, perhaps most importantly, demanding a proper criminal justice response to trafficking in Edo state.

### 7.2.3 Awareness raising and “escape” options for migrants before they leave Nigeria

Many survivor interviewees spoke of travelling through Kano on their overland journeys. R. Evon Benson-Idahosa of the anti-trafficking organization, Pathfinders, observed that as regards prospects for safe overland migration, “*all bets are off after Kano.*”

Hence this and other key transit points, such as Abuja and Lagos airports, on migration routes should be targeted for particular attention. Nigerian officials in such locations should be trained in the identification of trafficking victims and develop standard operating procedures on their own immediate responsibilities and how to engage other key stakeholders in response. Police should focus some resources on such places where traffickers are likely to be operating with an intent to arrest and prosecute where possible and to gather intelligence on trafficking operations where an immediate arrest is not possible. Provision should be made in these places for support and rehabilitation facilities for potential trafficking victims who seek to take the opportunities at transit points to flee their traffickers. This should include access to traditional priests and religious leaders who can assure them that the juju oaths that they have sworn have no proper authority

## 7.3 Inclusive business and finance

### 7.3.1 Vocational and entrepreneurial education

Desire alone is insufficient to start a business. A person must also have the requisite skills to provide a service and run the business, be meeting a market demand and have the necessary financing.

Any anti-trafficking programme in Edo state must include market research to see what sort of business opportunities exist and then must provide vocational training to meet market needs. However, training must not be purely technical. It is not enough to train a person to be a motor mechanic, no matter how great the needs for motor mechanics may be. They also should be trained in the ancillary skills necessary to manage a business.

Likewise, it is insufficient to base business development planning on a single market research exercise. Students should also be trained in how to explore and develop entrepreneurial opportunities when they themselves identify market opportunities.

### 7.3.2 Financing for business startups

Technical and vocational know-how will often be substantially meaningless unless affordable financing for business startups is available. Finance and credit of sufficient scale to enable recipients to begin sustainable business must be offered to enable them to properly start a business that may eventually be able to grow to employ others. Particular attention should be paid to provision of financing to the business ideas of women. Their potential as agents of economic and social development, through their entrepreneurship and household financial decision making, must not be underestimated.

### 7.3.3 Support for returnees

As the accounts above indicate many survivors of migration and trafficking return to Nigeria traumatised and impoverished. Specific support should be provided to survivors. Certainly, some employment could be offered to returnees as survivor advocates (see above). But longer-term options, also rooted in vocational training and entrepreneurship should also be ensured so that survivors may, at minimum, obtain sustainable livelihoods for themselves, with some perhaps growing to become community leaders.

## 7.4 Future research

### 7.4.1 Research on trafficking risks and potential responses for migrants (and others) in Niger

Nigerian organizations and actors have a good sense of the institutional environment in Nigeria itself, sufficient that they may be able to negotiate the policy and institutional terrain to establish anti-trafficking programmes and advocacy in Nigeria. There is also a considerable presence of international actors in Libya, notably IOM, whose reporting of the situation there, and whose efforts at repatriation of Nigerians has done something to ameliorate the situation of many migrants.

### 7.4.2 Research on experiences on migrants who succeed in getting to Europe

The stories of success that permeate back from Nigeria migrants to Europe help maintain the myth that “abroad is better” amongst non-migrant Nigerians in Edo state. This is a major contribution to migration and thus rendering vulnerable to trafficking thousands of young Nigerians.

Research that describes the realities of life for Nigerians in Europe might help dispel some of the myths and inculcate a greater degree of realism amongst potential migrants about what they might have to expect work-wise were they to get to Europe, as well as better identifying the narrow options for safe migration that do exist.

### 7.4.3 Market assessment of small and medium sized business development opportunities in Edo state

As noted above there is a need for considerably more vocational and entrepreneurial education in Edo to open the prospects to young Edo people of fulfilling lives and sustainable livelihoods at home rather than chasing of “*greener pastures*” abroad. The first step in establishing economic development programmes to achieve these goals must be a proper assessment of the extant market opportunities in Edo to guide the establishment of any vocational training provisions.

### 7.4.4 Anti-trafficking engagement should be action-learning

Undertaking any of the elements above, or preferably a comprehensive programme involving all elements in coordination, must understand that their implementation should be undertaken on an action learning basis. That is there must be provision for careful monitoring and evaluation of each element and their effect in combination, to assess their impact and to feed into ongoing advocacy with government on the law, policies and practices that they must adopt to help eliminate the trafficking of Nigerians from every corner of the country.



**THANK YOU**