



Mixed  
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# Return and reintegration in the context of Senegal

## Strengthening the evidence base

# Introduction

As migrant receiving countries increasingly focus on 'return and reintegration' as a cornerstone of their migration management practices, much more evidence is needed to understand how sustainable such practices are, as well as the impact they have on migrants. This includes a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by migrants during return journeys, their needs and challenges after return, their longer-term rights and prospects, as well as their consideration of remigration and future plans. Exploring these return dynamics is crucial to understand the impact of current return practices and to design more effective, rights-based, and sustainable return and reintegration programmes and policies into the future.

Between February and May 2023, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) conducted 616 survey interviews with migrants who returned to Senegal about their experience of return, their needs and reintegration challenges, as well as their re-migration intentions. This paper comes out of the "Strengthening the evidence base on return dynamics" project, funded by the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF),<sup>1</sup> and is based on a pilot study of returns to Senegal. Research conducted for this project is part of MMC's broader work on returns that aims to enhance evidence regarding the dynamics and conditions surrounding return encompassing the needs and well-being of returnees, and the determinants that shape sustainable return and reintegration. By leveraging this knowledge, MMC aims to provide an evidence base for informing decision-making, policies and programmes that promote safe, dignified, and sustainable return and reintegration practices.

Complementary to this research paper MMC has also conducted research in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the use of force in the returns process to Senegal. A separate report, [Multiple and intersecting harms: Examining use of force in return and its detrimental impact on migrants' human rights during and after return to Senegal](#) outlines the findings.

## Definitions: defining return and contextualising 'voluntariness'

In this research 'return' encompasses the idea of going back or being taken back to the point of departure, often related to returning to one's community, culture, family or home. Return can be within a country's borders for people internally displaced, or across international borders for migrants. There are multiple different modes of return, including 'spontaneous' or independent return which refers to voluntary return without external assistance from States or other entities. Assisted voluntary return (AVR) refers to returns supported by governments or international organisations and embarked on voluntarily by migrants – though the extent of voluntariness is often subject for debate (see below). On the other hand, forced return is the act of sending someone back involuntarily to their origin, transit or a third country, usually based on administrative or judicial decisions and conducted by States.<sup>2</sup>

When discussing return and reintegration, it is crucial to recognise the ongoing debate that exists regarding how 'voluntary' AVR and spontaneous return processes may be when taking into consideration the socioeconomic pressures, restrictive and sometimes coercive environments, as well as the potential lack of viable alternative options that may exist in some host and transit countries.<sup>3</sup> There are also legitimate concerns about potential human rights violations during return processes, inadequate support services, and the transparency of information provided to individuals making decisions about returning.<sup>4</sup> To ensure that return choices are well-informed, free from coercion, and uphold the rights and dignity of migrants, continued attention in these areas is essential. Some of these aspects (for example, how voluntary respondents felt their return decision was, and their access to information prior to return) are explored through this paper, however others are explored at greater length through [MMC's complementary report on returns to Senegal](#).

- 1 Funded by the European Commission (DG HOME) and implemented by International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF) supports European Member States and Schengen Associated Countries (MS) to increase the effectiveness of their return and reintegration programming. The RRF provides operational and financial support to MS to facilitate the development of solutions and activities with an EU-added value in the area of return and reintegration, whilst bridging gaps between existing initiatives. In parallel, the RRF supports the implementation of the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration. For more information visit: [www.reintegrationfacility.eu](http://www.reintegrationfacility.eu)
- 2 IOM (2019) Reintegration Handbook - [Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance.](#)
- 3 Schweitzer, Reinhard (2022), '[How the Exclusion of Nongovernment Actors from the Austrian and British Return Regimes Affects the Quality of Voluntariness](#)', *Migration and Society: Advances in Research*, 5 (2022):29-42
- 4 Mixed Migration Centre (2024), [Multiple and intersecting harms: Examining use of force in return and its detrimental impact on migrants' human rights during and after return to Senegal](#).

## Summary of key findings

### Reasons for return and decision making

- Among respondents who returned to Senegal spontaneously, reasons related to general living conditions (61%), legal status in country of migration (40%) and personal reasons (37%) were the three most common responses.
- Among those returning via Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR), the three most common responses were reasons related to legal status in country of migration (56%), general living conditions in country of migration (52%) and opportunity to benefit from AVR programme (49%)
- Regardless of the type of return, respondents most commonly reported that they felt they had no choice in their return.

### Pre-departure preparation

- The majority of respondents (57%) felt that they were not well prepared for their return – this was the case regardless of country of return, as well as mode of return.
- Better organisation of the return trip (46%) and planning on arrival (43%), as well as cash assistance (39%), were among the main elements that would have made returnees feel more prepared.

### Challenges upon return

- The majority of respondents returned to their province of origin, or previous place of residence (86%). Their primary reason for returning to that location was to be with family and friends (84%).
- Having feelings of failure and shame was by far the most common challenge upon arrival in Senegal (cited by 69% of respondents) and was prevalent regardless of how respondents returned.
- Migrants returning via AVR more often reported challenges reuniting with family and friends (43%), whereas people who were forcibly returned more often reported facing financial challenges (35% reported facing debt, and 31% reported challenges securing an income).

### Livelihoods post-return

- While most respondents reported making money at the time of interview, three-quarters said that their household income did not meet their needs, with people forcibly returned worse off.

### Life satisfaction post-return

- Upon return, most respondents were not satisfied with their life as a whole (62%) and reported doing worse than prior to their migration. Those returning via AVR more often reported doing better as compared to other groups, despite high levels of dissatisfaction.

### Post-return assistance received and assistance needs

- Three-quarters of returnees interviewed had received no support since returning to Senegal. Respondents returning via AVR reported more often that they had received support. This support commonly included materials for income generation and help in starting a business.
- Family and friends (56%), followed by the United Nations (31%) were the most important sources of assistance.
- Assistance needs are high among returnees and are relatively similar across all return categories. Only 1% of those interviewed said they had no need for assistance.

### Re-migration intentions

- Despite reporting high levels of dissatisfaction with their lives, the majority of returnees interviewed (62%) plan to remain in Senegal over the next 12 months.

# Context: movements from and returning to Senegal

## Outwards migration from Senegal

Migration is a significant phenomenon out of Senegal. Irregular migration from Senegal northwards towards Europe occurs via the Central Mediterranean (CMR), Western Mediterranean (WMR) and Atlantic Routes.<sup>5</sup> However recently migration towards Europe from Senegal has been most prominent on the Atlantic Route towards Spain's Canary Islands, and sea departures have surged in 2023.<sup>6</sup> This trend has corresponded with increased attention and focus on the part of the EU, and member states like Spain, to address and curb these movements through bilateral arrangements with the key transit countries of Morocco and Mauritania, as well as countries of origin like Senegal.<sup>7</sup> While intra-regional migration from Senegal is also common, typically for the purpose of trade, employment, and education, the focus of this paper is northbound migration due to the increasingly challenging migration environment along routes towards Europe, and the growing emphasis of European migration policy on return and reintegration policy and practices.

## Returns to Senegal

Returns to Senegal occur across the spectrum, from spontaneous return and AVR on the one end and forced returns (deportations and expulsions), on the other. Returns across all these modes occur from within the region and, to a lesser extent, directly from 'destination' countries further afield in Europe. However, in the context of Senegal, as with many other contexts around the world, understanding both irregular migration and return is challenging, and data is often scarce.

## AVR

The most consistent and comprehensive numbers available on returns to Senegal are from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in relation to its AVR program. Since 2017, this program (working in conjunction with the Senegalese government and local partners) has assisted some 8,761 people to return to Senegal and has supported the reintegration of more than 5,000. The majority of returnees to Senegal who participate in IOM's AVR program return from Niger and Libya, key transit countries along the CMR.<sup>8</sup> However, given the

importance and uptick of migration towards Spain from Senegal, the lack of information about returns along the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes represents a crucial evidence gap.

## Forced Returns

Forced returns to Senegal include those deported directly by air into Senegal, people expelled directly across land borders (for example from Mauritania) as well as those expelled from one country into another country that is not Senegal (for example from Algeria to Niger) prior to their return to Senegal (for example either through AVR or spontaneous return). Data on forced returns from Europe are scarce and similarly, there are no official records of the number of expulsions directly into Senegal or from one country into another experienced earlier in return journeys.

## Spontaneous Returns

Much less is known about spontaneous, or independent, and non-assisted returns, including both the scale of returns as well as the experience and needs of returnees. Ethnographic research conducted with returnees in Senegal emphasizes that many returns from North Africa follow ill-treatment and are undertaken by migrants' own means, without assistance through AVR programmes.<sup>9</sup> The number of people returning outside of formal mechanisms is significant, according to stakeholders working with returnees in Senegal who were interviewed as part of scoping for this project. Thus, data scarcity persists regarding the number and profiles of migrants returning to Senegal and researchers and practitioners alike have specifically highlighted the substantial knowledge gap in relation to people who return to Senegal spontaneously.<sup>10</sup>

## Returns from Europe

It is important to note that returns from Europe, including AVR, spontaneous and forced returns, constitute a relatively small percentage of overall returns to Senegal. In the latest publicly available data covering the period from July 2018 – June 2019, IOM assisted 70 people through their AVR programme returning from Europe.<sup>11</sup>

5 **The Central Mediterranean Route (CMR)** describes mixed migration flows departing from North Africa – primarily Libya and Tunisia – seeking to reach Italy. The **Western Mediterranean Route** describes mixed migration flows from Morocco and Algeria to mainland Spain, Portugal, the Balearic Islands, as well as the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. **The Atlantic Route (also known as the Western African Route or the Northwest African Route)** describes mixed migration flows departing from North and West African countries such as Senegal, Mauritania, and Morocco towards the Canary Islands.

6 Mixed Migration Centre (2023), [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update, West Africa, Q3, 2023](#), and Mixed Migration Centre (2024), [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update, West Africa, Q4, 2023](#).

7 In 2023, the EU launched its Action Plan for the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Routes aiming to prevent irregular migration from Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal to Europe. For a more comprehensive overview of EU and regional migration cooperation and response please see Mixed Migration Centre (2024), [Multiple and intersecting harms: Examining use of force in return and its detrimental impact on migrants' human rights during and after return to Senegal](#).

8 International Organization for Migration (2022) [ASSISTANCE TO VOLUNTARY AND HUMANITARIAN RETURN 2017- JUNE 2022](#).

9 Rodriguez, Anne-Line (2019) [Research in Brief: Exploring assumptions behind 'voluntary' returns from North Africa — Refugee Studies Centre \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

10 Ibid.

11 International Organization for Migration (2022) [ASSISTANCE TO VOLUNTARY AND HUMANITARIAN RETURN 2017- JUNE 2022](#).

Despite the widespread discussion and policy attention on returns within the EU, the Council of Europe has highlighted that, as of June 2022 more than 16,000 Senegalese in an irregular situation in the EU received a return decision in the last three years. However, less than 1,000 have actually been returned.<sup>12</sup>

## Methodology

Research for this paper was conducted based on data from 616 quantitative 4Mi surveys carried out with returned migrants in Senegal between February

and May 2023. MMC's [4Mi Returns survey](#) utilizes the infrastructure and methodology of [MMC's 4Mi survey](#) while covering the following themes: profile and demographic information; drivers and influencers of migration; experience in last country of migration; return journey, including decision-making and conditions; return and reintegration experience; assistance received since return and remigration/future plans.

Data collection was carried out in and around Dakar, Mbour, Saint Louis, Kolda and Tambacounda, see Table 1.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1. Respondents by location<sup>14</sup>**

Province / Region	Women (n=56)	Men (n=560)	Total (n=616)
Dakar	4 (7%)	134 (24%)	138 (22%)
Kolda	4 (7%)	95 (17%)	99 (16%)
Saint-Louis	7 (13%)	93 (17%)	100 (15%)
Tambacounda	35 (63%)	89 (16%)	124 (20%)
Thiès	6 (11%)	149 (27%)	155(25%)

Sampling was carried out through a mixture of purposive and snowball methodologies, with key criteria guiding respondent selection. Respondents needed to:

- Be a Senegalese citizen of 18 years or more;
- Have resided outside of Senegal for more than one month prior to return;
- Have returned to Senegal between January 2018 to July 2022;
- Have engaged in migration that could be defined as 'migration à l'aventure' in Senegalese parlance and were not engaged in circular migration.<sup>15</sup>

To ensure a sample of respondents across all modes of return, enumerators were given targets for forced, spontaneous and AVR returnees. Initial scoping suggested that proportionally speaking female returnees were not numerous, so the MMC decided to proactively sample women from the beginning of the data collection. As data collection progressed the proportions of AVR returnees and returnees coming back from Europe in the overall

sample were lower than anticipated, and a decision was made to proactively target these groups as well to ensure comparison between the modes of return was possible.

## Limitations

Due to the complexities involved in sampling from an unknown overall population of returnees, a combination of purposive and snowball approaches was used. Thus, the analysis derived from this approach offers valuable insights into the experiences of a varied group of returnees and facilitates comparisons within this specific sample. Consequently, the data cannot be considered representative, but rather aims to capture a diverse range of returnee profiles in Senegal, with a specific focus on the type of return.

The clear definition of concepts was an integral part of the study and was emphasized during the training of the enumerators who conducted the survey. However, the data is a result of a survey interview and is subject to respondents' personal experiences and interpretations.

12 Council of Europe, (2022) [Senegal – Strengthening cooperation with Frontex](#).

13 Locations were selected based on after a rigorous scoping exercise and preliminary research involving interviews with over 70 resource people.

14 Percentages are presented as whole numbers for ease of reading. Due to rounding, they may not add up to exactly 100%. This will also apply to all graphs presented below.

15 Migration à l'aventure is often but not always characterized by periods of irregularity, undertaken in generally risky circumstances, in the hope of realizing ones' dreams.

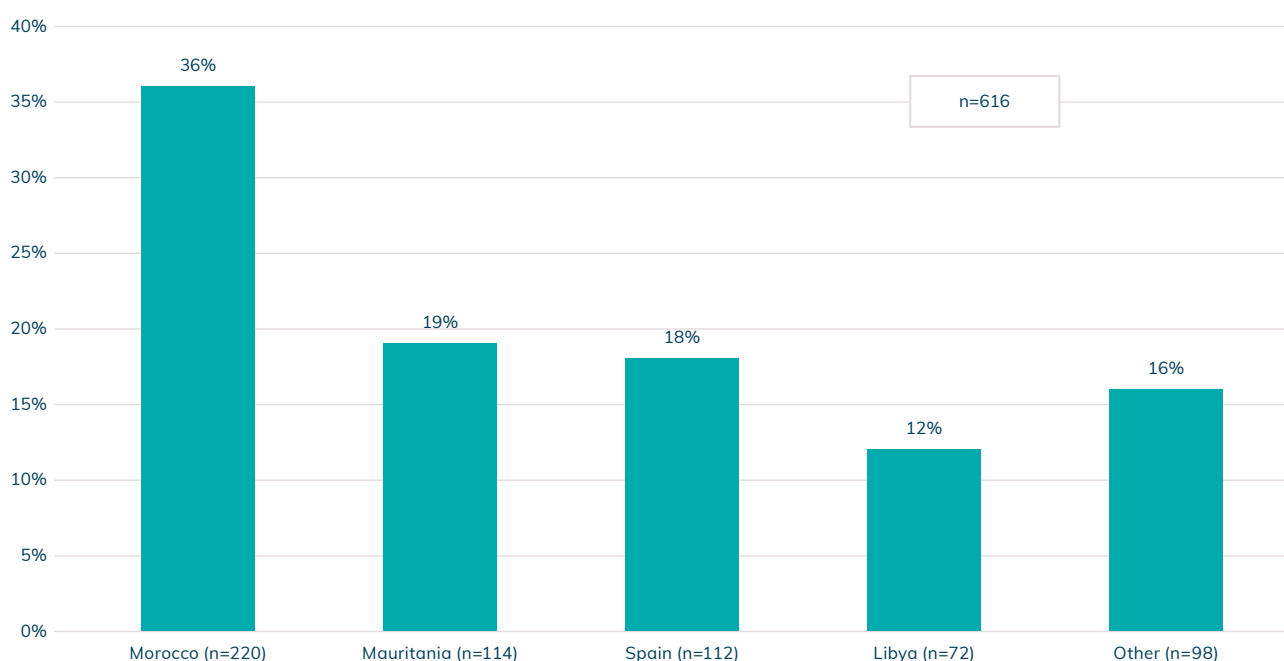
# Key findings

## Profiles

The majority of respondents interviewed were men (91%) in keeping with overall return dynamics to Senegal. While women were proactively targeted during sampling, they only made up 9% of total respondents. The average age of respondents was 35.

Respondents had returned to Senegal primarily from Morocco (36%), Mauritania (19%), Spain (18%), and Libya (12%). Respondents who returned from Europe made up 20% of the sample.

**Figure 1. What country did you return from?**



In terms of type of return, spontaneous returns represented the largest group (44%), followed by those

who were forcibly returned – either through deportation or expulsion (38%), and then AVR (17%).

**Table 2. Type of return<sup>16</sup>**

Type of return	n	Percentage
Assisted Voluntary Return	106	17%
Forced return	238	39%
Spontaneous return	271	44%

The majority of returns from Europe (n=138) were forced (68%), followed by AVR (20%) and then spontaneous returns (13%). The vast majority of respondents in the survey reported irregular status in their country of

migration prior to return (89%), as well as migrating irregularly at some point during their outward migration journey (86%).

<sup>16</sup> One respondent answered 'other' in response to this question. Therefore, figures showing disaggregation by type of return have a total n of 615, rather than 616.

## Reasons for return and decision making

Respondents primarily returned to Senegal due to their legal status and the general living conditions in their country of migration. Among those returning spontaneously and via AVR, personal reasons were also commonly cited

Among all respondents, the top three reasons given for returning to Senegal included reasons related to their legal status in country of migration (65%), general living conditions in country of migration (40%), as well as personal reasons (22%), among others.

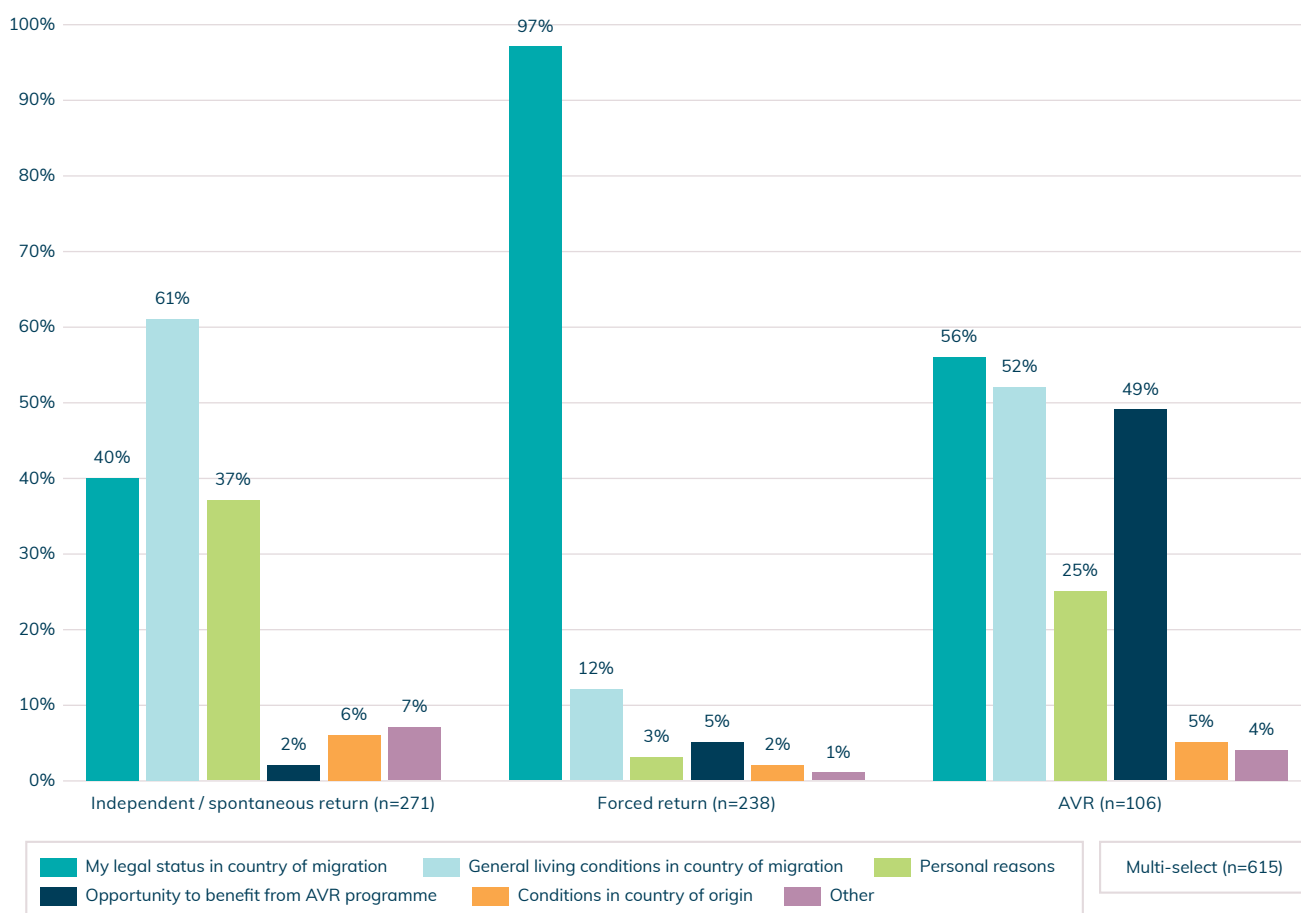
Reasons related to legal status in country of migration was cited as the most common reason for return among respondents who were forcibly returned (97%, n=238), as well as those involved in AVR (56%, n=106). AVR respondents also cited reasons relating to conditions in country of migration (52%), the opportunity to benefit from AVR (49%), as well as personal reasons (25%), see Figure 2.

Among respondents who returned to Senegal spontaneously (n=271), reasons related to general living conditions (60%), legal status in country of migration (41%) and personal reasons (37%) were the three most common responses.

**“I left in search of a better life, but unfortunately the living conditions were very difficult, and the local people exploited us with a meagre salary.”**

**49-year-old woman returning from Mauritania, interviewed in Tambacounda**

**Figure 2. For what reason did you return to Senegal? (Disaggregated by type of return)**

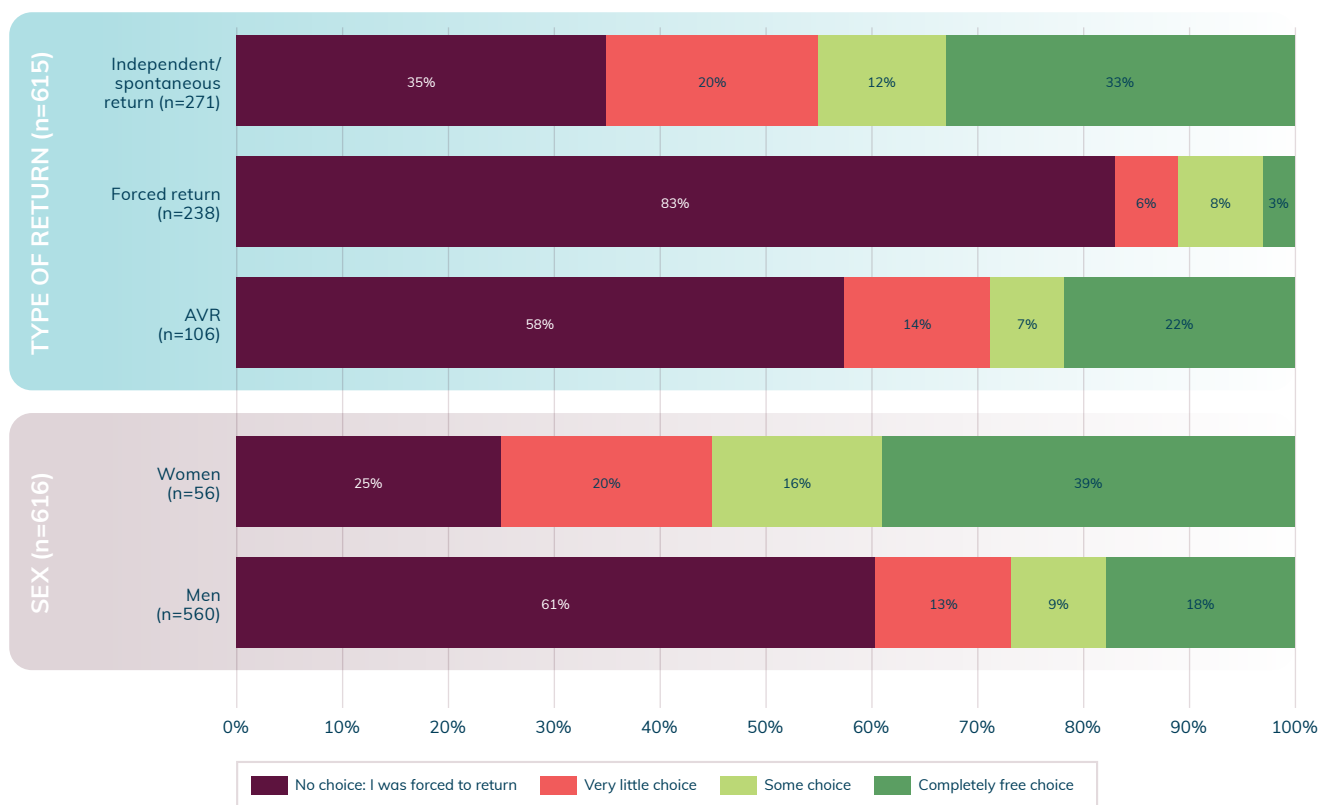


**Regardless of the type of return, respondents most commonly reported that they felt forced to return**

The majority of people interviewed (57%) reported that they felt they had no choice in their return to Senegal. Unsurprisingly respondents more frequently reported this when they were forcibly returned (83%, n=236).

However, feeling they had no choice in return was also common among recipients of AVR (58%, n=106) and spontaneous returns (35%, n=271). The highest proportion of respondents who felt their return decision was made as a completely free choice was those who returned spontaneously (33%, n=271), followed by those engaged in AVR (22%, n=106), see Figure 3.

**Figure 3. To what extent do you feel you had a choice in returning? (Disaggregated by sex, and type of return)**



Women respondents (n=56) more frequently reported making a free choice about their return (39%) or having some choice over their return (16%), as compared to men (n=560), who more often indicated that they had no choice in their return (61%). This may be due to the greater share of women who returned to Senegal spontaneously (77%) or via AVR (13%), compared to men (41% returned spontaneously, and 18% via AVR). However, these findings should be treated with caution due to the small sample size of women in this study.

**Pre-departure preparation**

*The majority of respondents felt that they were not well prepared for their return – this was the case regardless of country of return, as well as mode of return*

Over half of all respondents (57%) reported that they were not prepared at all for their return. An additional quarter reported that they were only slightly or somewhat

prepared for their return, compared to 16% who reported they were fully or well prepared for return.

Being unprepared for return was the most cited response for all participants regardless of country of return, as well as type of return, see Figure 4. Despite respondents who returned via AVR more commonly reporting to have received assistance prior to departure (46%, n=106), 61% did not feel at all prepared for their return. Respondents returning from non-European countries reported being more prepared for their return, compared to returnees from European countries. Close to a third of returnees from non-European countries (31%, n=478) reported they were slightly or somewhat prepared for return, as compared to 9% of returnees from Europe (n=138). This may be influenced by the high proportion of people forcibly returned among those interviewed from Europe.

By type of return, 21% of spontaneous returns and 19% of AVR recipients reported they were well or fully prepared for their return.



**Figure 4. To what extent did you feel prepared to return? (Disaggregated by type of return and country of return)**



Among those who reported being either fully or slightly prepared for their return (n=263), saving money (40%), contact with family (35%), cash support (24%), gathering information on the return journey (24%) and pre-departure counselling (24%) were some of the most frequently cited preparations they had taken prior to their return.<sup>17</sup> Only 15% of AVR returnees and 14% of forced returnees had saved money prior to return as compared to 60% of spontaneous returnees.

**“I was lucky enough to save money to take a flight. It wasn’t easy but God help us that we made it back.”**

**33-year-old man returning from Morocco, interviewed in Kayar**

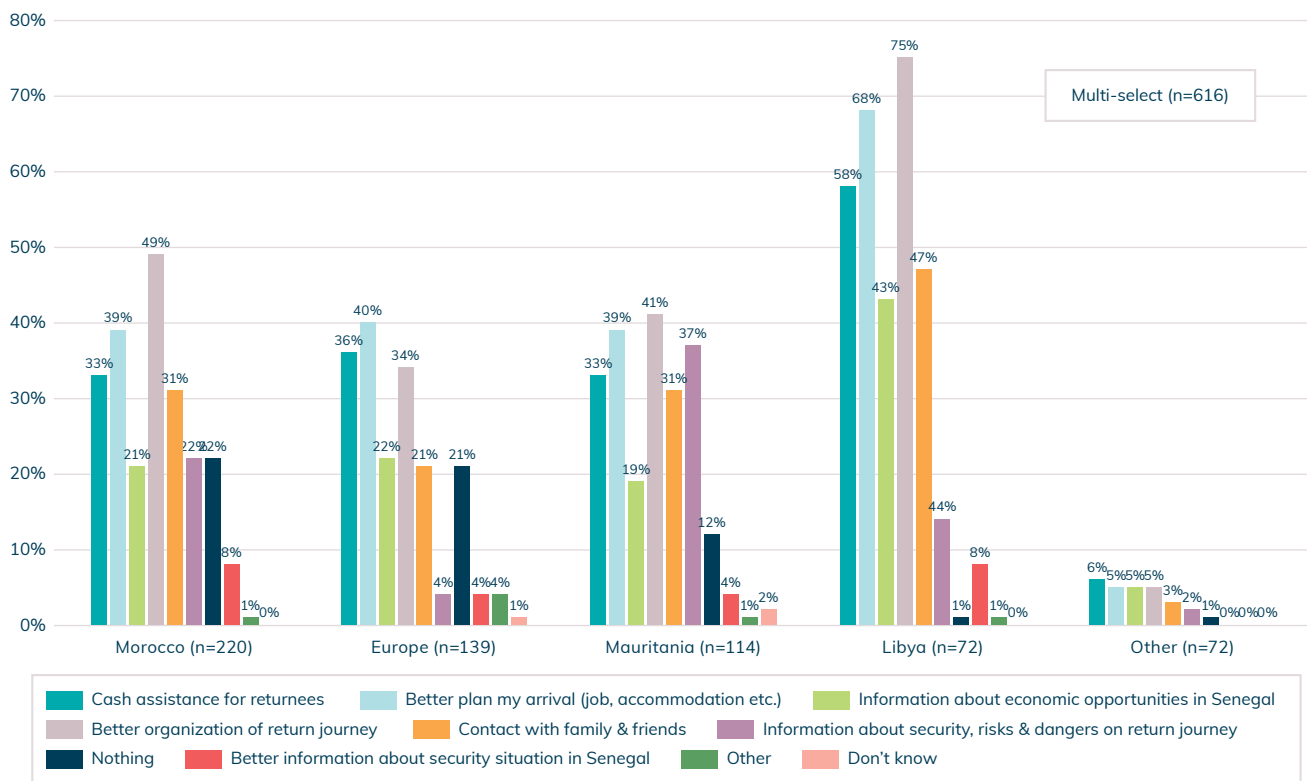
*Better organisation of the return trip and planning on arrival, as well as cash assistance, were among the main components that would have made returnees feel more prepared*

When asked what would have made them feel better prepared for return, better organisation of the return journey (46%), better planning before arrival (43%), as well as cash assistance (39%) were the three most commonly reported responses across all interviewed. Also, of note was contact with family and friends (30%), better information about economic opportunities in Senegal (26%), and information about security risks and dangers on the return journey (23%).

Regarding preparedness for return, people coming back from Europe somewhat less often reported things that would have made them more prepared, compared to those returning from non-European destinations, see Figure 5. This is despite the fact that the large majority of returnees from Europe did not feel prepared for return. A possible explanation for this could be that people coming back from Europe felt they had less control over their return in general and therefore had a harder time imagining things that could have increased their preparation.

<sup>17</sup> Gathering information on conditions in Senegal (12%), nothing (10%), conditional cash assistance (7%), organising jobs/accommodation in Senegal (4%), vocational training (2%) and other (2%), were among the other responses.

**Figure 5. What would have made you better prepared to return? (Disaggregated by country of return)**



“The experience of return has proved to me not to trust the words of the authorities with regard to the promises of projects in Senegal. For integration, migrants must be supported to set up development projects to facilitate their social reintegration.”

**40-year-old man returning from Italy, interviewed in Tambacounda**

## Arrival and challenges upon return

The majority of respondents returned to their province of origin, or previous place of residence, to be with family and friends.

Upon arrival to Senegal, most respondents went directly

to their province of origin or previous place of residence (86% of all respondents), with no notable difference when disaggregating responses by country or type of return.<sup>18</sup> Being with family and friends appears to be a strong pull factor and was by far the most cited reason to choose to return to that location (84% of all respondents).<sup>19</sup>

*Feelings of failure/shame are the most common challenge upon arrival in Senegal, regardless of how respondents returned*

The most cited answer when asked about the major challenges upon arriving in Senegal was the feeling of shame/failure upon return reported by 69% of all respondents, see Figure 6. This was cited somewhat less often by people who returned spontaneously (64%), which could be linked to the fact that they more often reported that they felt that their choice to return was a completely free choice, see Figure 5 above.

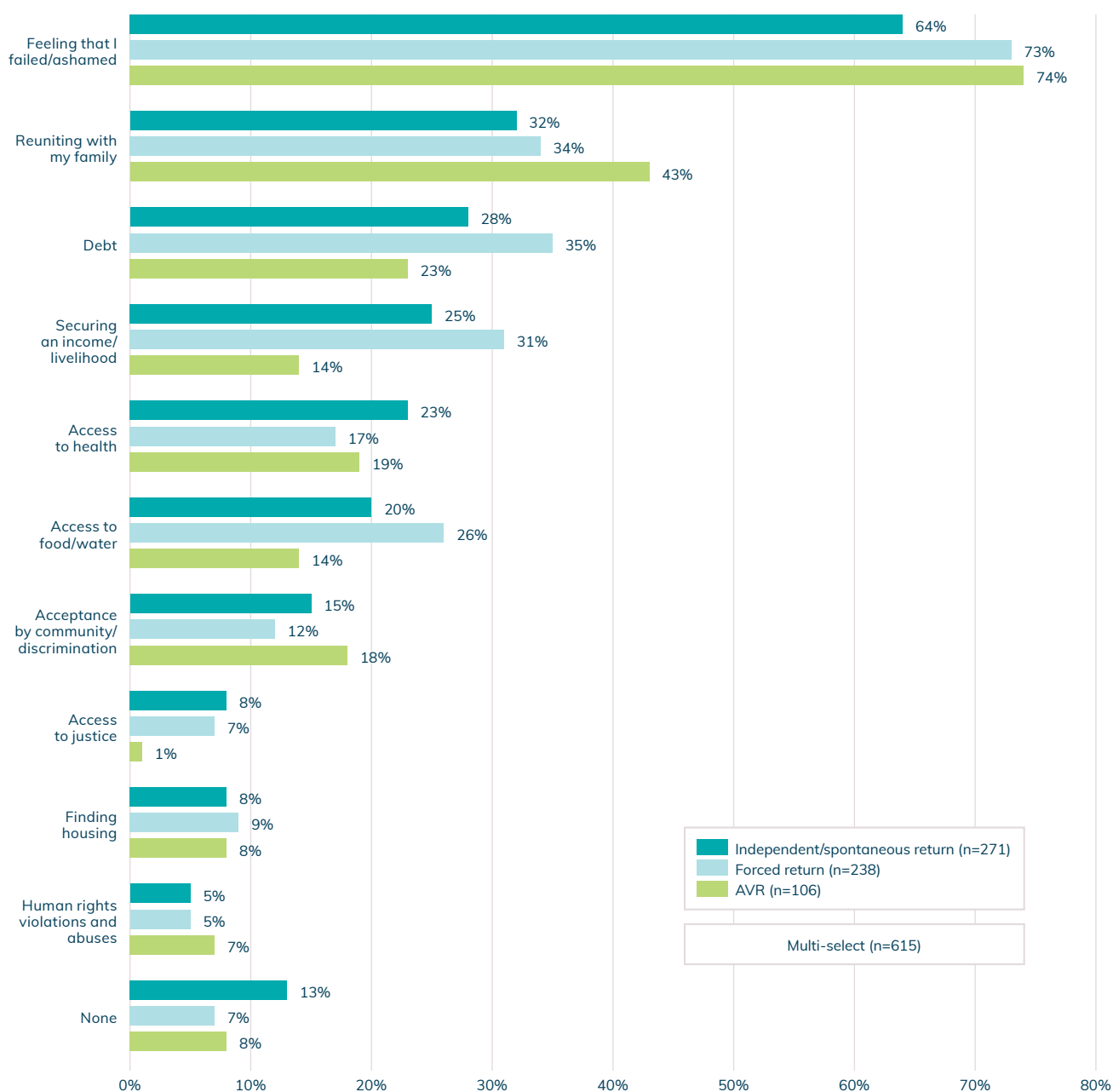
“...return is not easy – there is family shame and debts.”

**32-year-old man, returning from Morocco interviews in Saint-Louis**

18 Among other responses, 10% of respondents cited 'I went somewhere I'd stated before, but not my place of origin', and 4% responded 'I went somewhere completely new'.

19 Among other responses to selecting their current location, 22% did not feel they could go home for interpersonal reasons, 14% chose their location due to having more rights and freedom there, 14% for economic opportunities, 12% to join another community, 10% for better access to services, 5% better safety, 4% other and 1% for environmental factors (multi-select).

**Figure 6. What were your major challenges upon arriving in Senegal? (Disaggregated by type of return)**



*Migrants returning via AVR more often reported challenges reuniting with family and friends, whereas people who were forcibly returned more often reported facing financial challenges*

Reuniting with family was reported more frequently as a challenge by people returning to Senegal via AVR (43%), compared to spontaneous (32%) and forced (35%) returns, see Figure 6 above. Financial challenges including debt (35%) and securing an income (31%) were more common among people who were forcibly returned, compared to other groups. This is likely related to the lower number of respondents who were forcibly returned and who reported saving money prior to leaving. Among

people returning via AVR, challenges securing an income were reported by 14%, less than for spontaneous (25%) and forced (31%) returns. This may be due to the relatively higher levels of institutional support received by AVR recipients as compared to other groups.

When factoring in country of return, feelings of shame/failure upon return were mentioned slightly more often by people returning from Europe (76%) than by people returning from non-European countries (67%), although response was still high for this question among the latter group.

“I sold all my carpentry materials and incurred debts to take the boat to Spain. We were intercepted off the coast of Morocco and we were deported to a country without support. Right now I am struggling to pay off my debts.”

27-year-old man, returning from Morocco, interviewed in Saint-Louis

“In the sea there is a lot of danger and you see a lot of things – you can even go crazy. However, coming back with debts, shame and no money is also seriously difficult.”

40-year-old man, returning from Spain, interviewed in Saint Louis

## Livelihoods post return

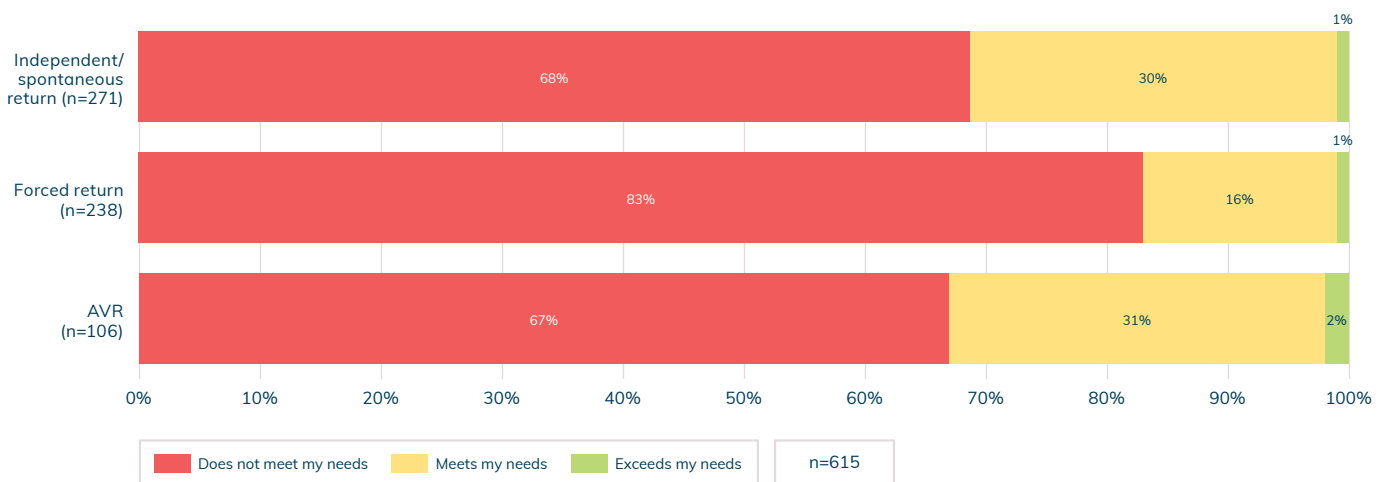
While most respondents reported making money at the time of interview, three-quarters said that their household income does not meet their needs, with people forcibly returned worse off

The vast majority of all respondents (88%) reported making money at the time of their interview with very minor differences based on type of return. However, among those who reported that they were making money at the time of interview, three-quarters said that their household income does not meet their needs. There was no difference based on where someone returned from, however, a greater difference was noted based on the type of return – both AVR and spontaneous returnees more often stated that their income meets their needs (around 31%) as compared to forced returnees (17%), see Figure 7.

“Reintegration to one’s country is very painful. After spending one’s belongings, you have to start from scratch.”

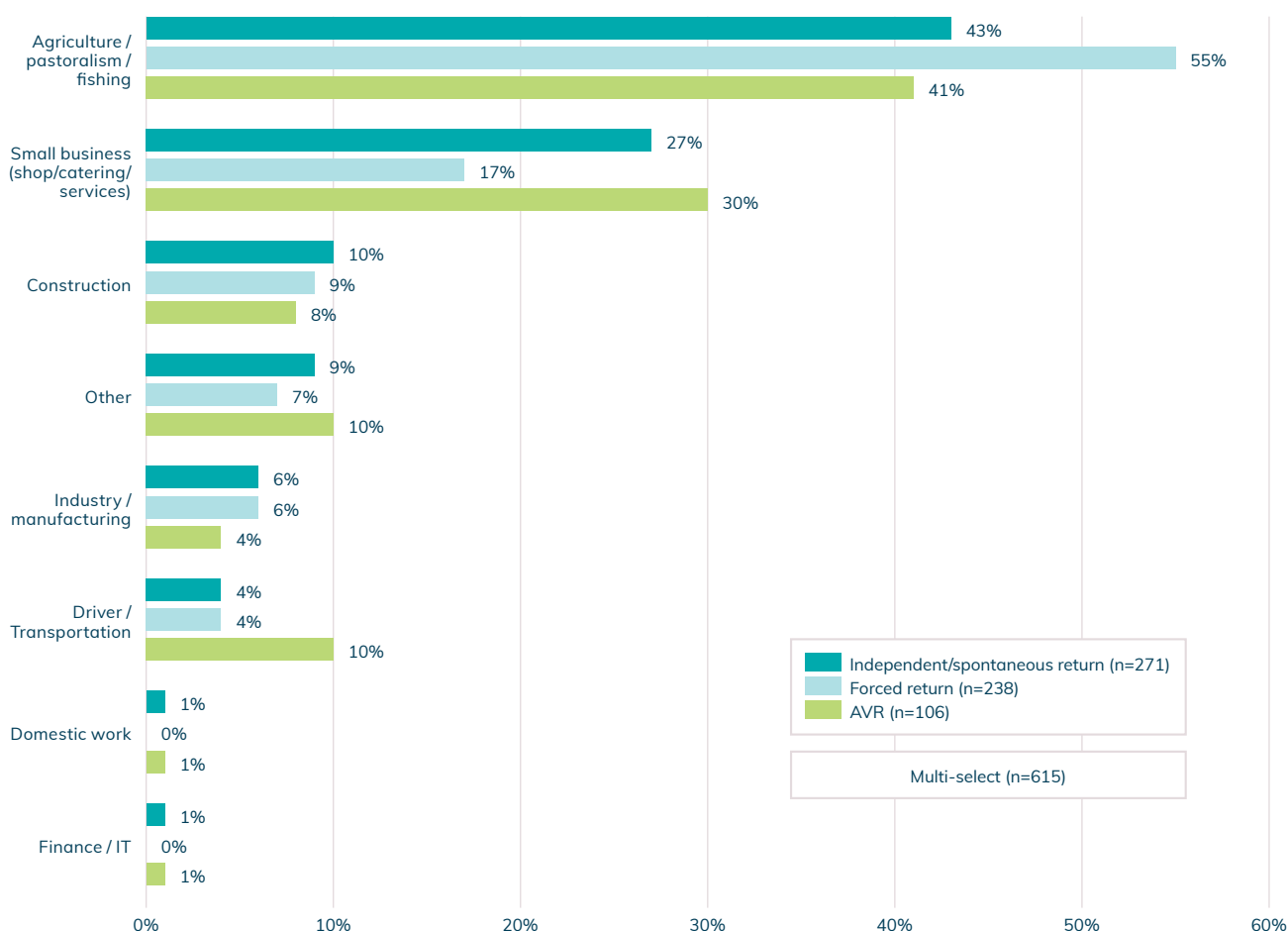
38-year-old man returning from Spain, interviewed in Dakar

Figure 7. Income compared to needs (Disaggregated by type of return)



For those making money, agriculture/pastoralism/fishing, small business, construction and transport were the most common sectors of employment, see Figure 8. People who were forcibly returned more often reported working in agriculture/pastoralism/fishing, compared to others, and those who returned via AVR were more frequently said they were making money in small business (30%) or transport (10%).

**Figure 8. What kind of sector are you making money in? (Disaggregated by type of return)**



## Life satisfaction and progress post-return

Upon return, most respondents were not satisfied with their life as a whole and reported doing worse than prior to their migration. Those returning via AVR more often reported having made progress since return as compared to other groups.

After returning to Senegal, the majority of all respondents (62%) reported they were not very satisfied or strongly dissatisfied with their life as a whole. When asked whether they were doing better in Senegal now, as compared to before they left, most respondents reported that they were doing a lot worse since returning to Senegal, see Figure 9. Respondents who were forcibly returned reported more commonly that they were doing worse (40% a lot worse, 18% a little worse) as compared to other groups. Conversely, those who returned via AVR were more likely to report that they were doing better (14% a lot, 33% a little) than other groups. When viewing the data by location of return, those returning from Europe more commonly cited doing a lot worse than those returning from non-European countries. This may be related to the higher proportion of people who were forcibly returned among this group.

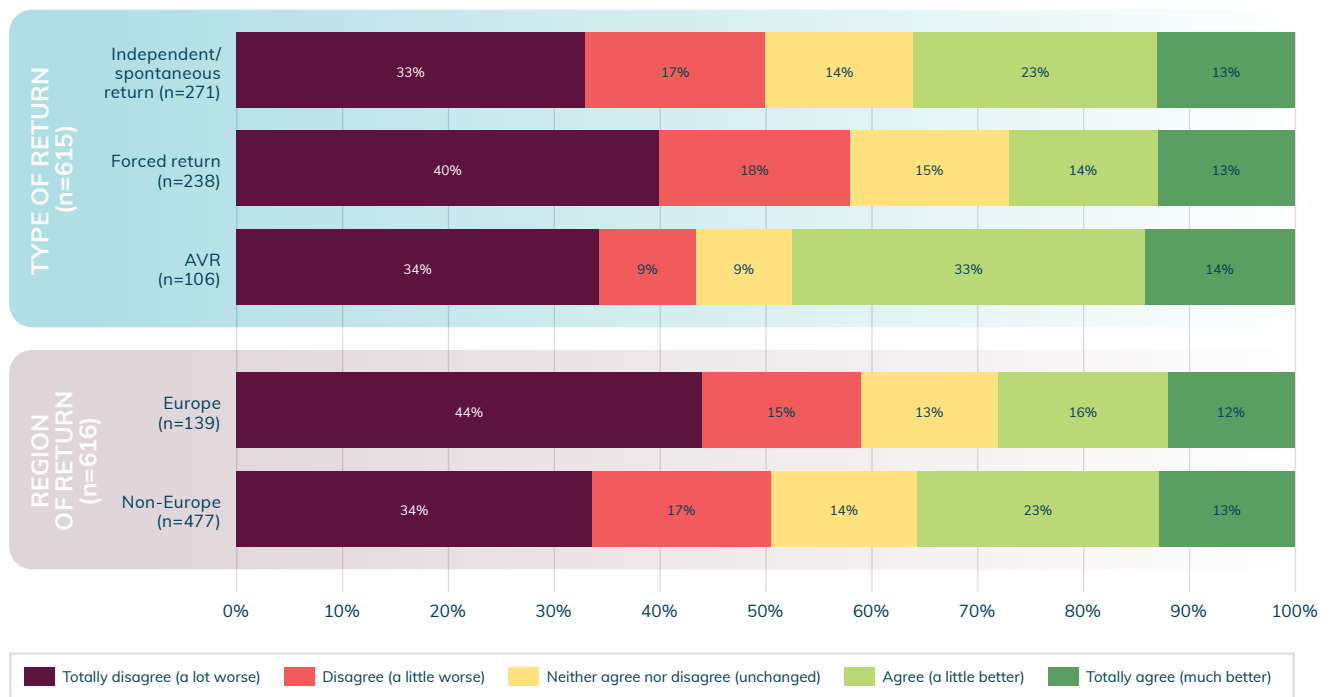
“I went into debt to go to Spain, but in the end I came back to Senegal in a worse situation. I am unsupported.”

**32-year-old man returning from Morocco, interviewed in Saint Louis**

“I’ve been through some very difficult things. I spent all my savings to take the boat to Spain and finally I am back here again in Senegal without a certain future.”

**26-year-old man returning from Morocco, interviewed in Saint Louis**

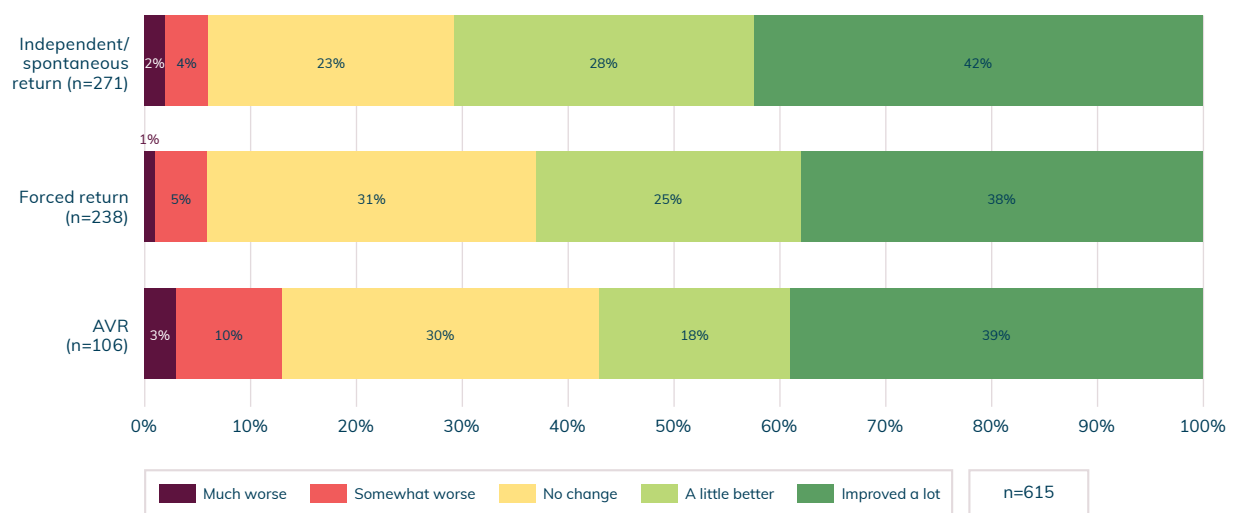
**Figure 9. How far do you agree: I am doing better in Senegal now than I was before I left Senegal (Disaggregated by type of return and region of return)**



Exploring reintegration dimensions further, survey respondents were asked how much progress they had experienced since returning to Senegal in the following areas: reconnecting with family or friends, employment/making a living, achieving their goals since returning to Senegal, and access to basic services.

Reconnecting with family/friends was the only category reported positively across all groups of respondents, with the majority of all respondents (65%) stating things had improved a lot, or a little in this area since returning to Senegal, with little noticeable difference between type of return, see Figure 10.

**Figure 10. How much progress since returning to Senegal? Reconnecting with family and friends (Disaggregated by type of return)**

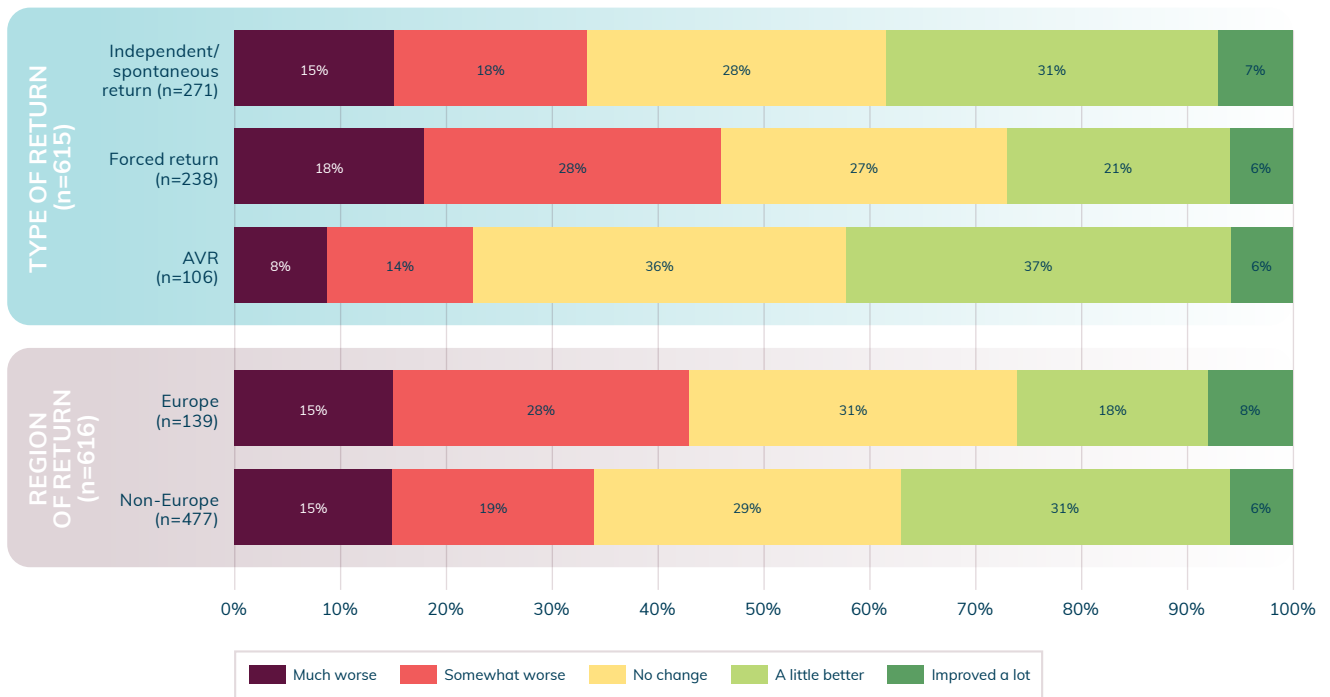


“It’s serious, it’s difficult to leave the family behind. It’s the hardest thing to do, coming back to my family with zero Francs and no more work.”

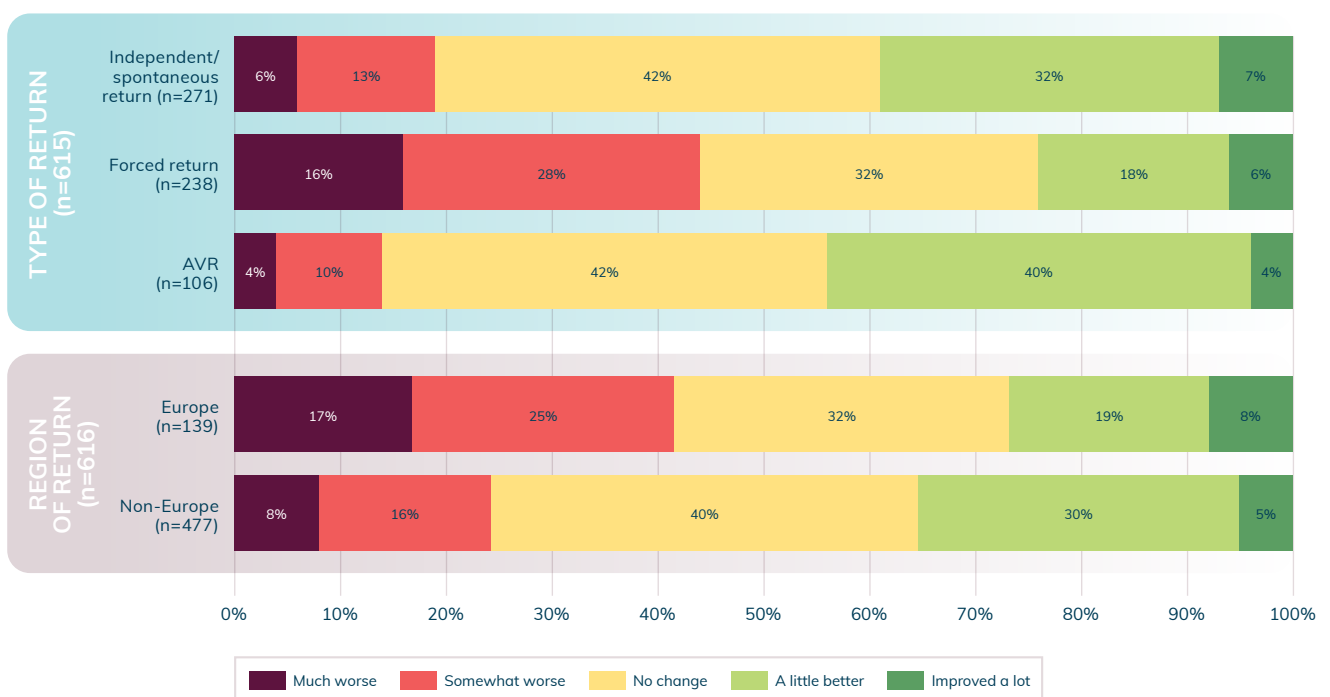
38-year-old man returning from Mauritania, interviewed in Saint Louis

However, regarding employment/making a living and achievement of goals, while respondents in general most commonly reported no progress at all since return to Senegal, people who returned via AVR slightly more often reported a little progress (37% and 40% respectively), as compared to the other groups, see Figures 11 and 12.

**Figure 11. How much progress since returning to Senegal? Employment/making a living (Disaggregated by region of return and type of return)**



**Figure 12. How much progress since returning to Senegal? Achieving my goals (Disaggregated by region of return and type of return)**



Respondents returning from Europe generally reported less progress in terms of employment/making a living and achievement of goals compared to those returning from non-European countries. For instance, in terms of progress towards achievement of goals, 42% of respondents returning from Europe noted a worsening situation, with 25% experiencing a somewhat worse condition, and 17% facing a much worse scenario. In contrast, only 24% of respondents returning from non-European countries reported a decline, comprising 16% who reported 'somewhat worse' and 8% 'much worse' in this area, see Figure 12. This may be related to the higher proportion of returnees from Europe in this sample who were forcibly returned.

As for basic services, access to healthcare and housing was reported particularly negatively by all respondents. For healthcare, 60% reported no change compared to pre-migration, while 18% reported things had worsened. For housing 64% indicated no change compared to pre-migration, and 7% reported a decline.

**“I lost all my investments. I'm starting my professional life from scratch. I've lost everything.”**

**40-year-old man returning from Morocco, interviewed in Saint-Louis**

## Post-return assistance received and assistance needs

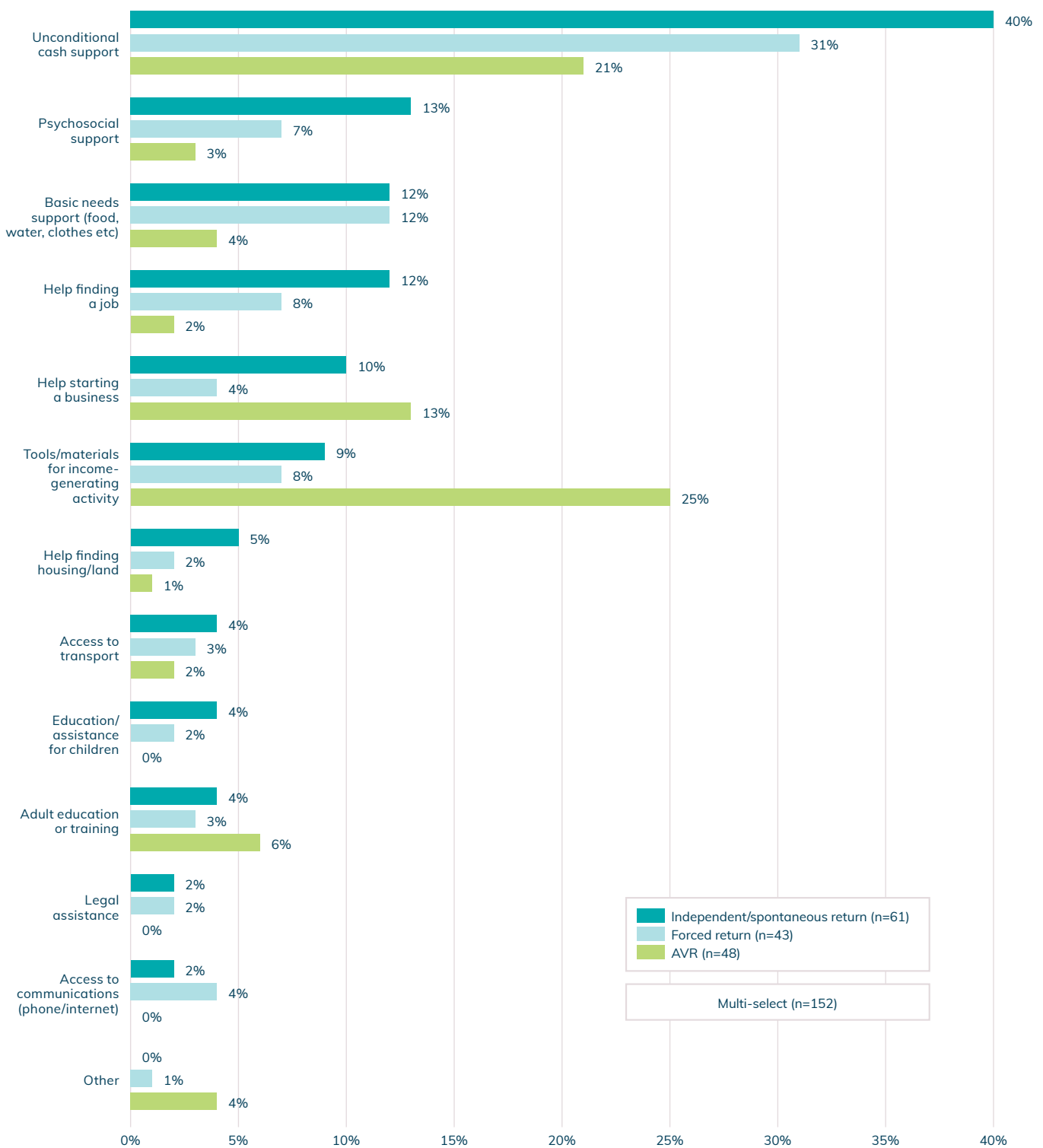
*Three-quarters of returnees interviewed had received no support since returning to Senegal. Those returning via AVR reported more often that they had received support. This support commonly included materials for income generation and help starting a business*

Overall, 75% of respondents reported they had not received assistance since returning to Senegal. For those returning from Europe compared to other locations, the difference in access to support was minimal (80% Europe, as compared to 74% for other locations). However, the difference was starker when analyzing data by type of return. People who had returned via AVR more often reported having received assistance upon return (45%), compared to 22% of spontaneous returns, and 18% of forced returnees.

Among those who reported receiving support (n=152), unconditional cash support, tools/materials for income-generating activity, and basic needs support (food, water, clothes etc.), were the most commonly reported types of support received, see Figure 13. For people returning via AVR who received support (n=48), tools/materials for income-generating activity (25/48) and help starting a business (13/48), along with unconditional cash support (21/48), were the most commonly received forms of assistance. This may account for the somewhat higher number of AVR returnees reporting they were working in small business post-return. However, caution should be taken with this analysis due to the small sample size of AVR returnees who received support. In terms of spontaneous returns who reported receiving support the majority, 40/61, reported receiving unconditional cash support and as discussed in the next section, this support was most frequently reported to have come from family and friends, see Figure 14.



**Figure 13. What kind of assistance or support have you received (since you arrived back in Senegal)? (Question asked to those who reported receiving assistance; disaggregated by type of return)**



Of the respondents who received assistance upon return to Senegal, 39% found it to be very useful and 25% described it as being quite useful. Those returning via AVR found the assistance received very useful (56%) or quite useful (21%) in a somewhat higher proportion.

Nations (31%). Among people who were forcibly returned, 27/43 received assistance from family and friends compared to 50/61 of spontaneous returns. Among those who received assistance and returned via AVR, the most cited source of assistance was the UN (36/48) followed by NGOs (10/48), see Figure 14.

**“I was assisted on my return journey, I had difficulties. When I came back, IOM gave me some farming equipment. With that I was able to grow and harvest a good amount that I sold, I then bought some animals and I’m making do with that for now.”**

**39-year-old man, returning from Libya, interviewed in Tambacounda**

**“I was a bit lucky to have an aunt who supports me a lot, both emotionally and financially. It’s thanks to her that I opened my own sewing workshop.”**

**28-year-old man, returning from Mali, interviewed in Tambacounda**

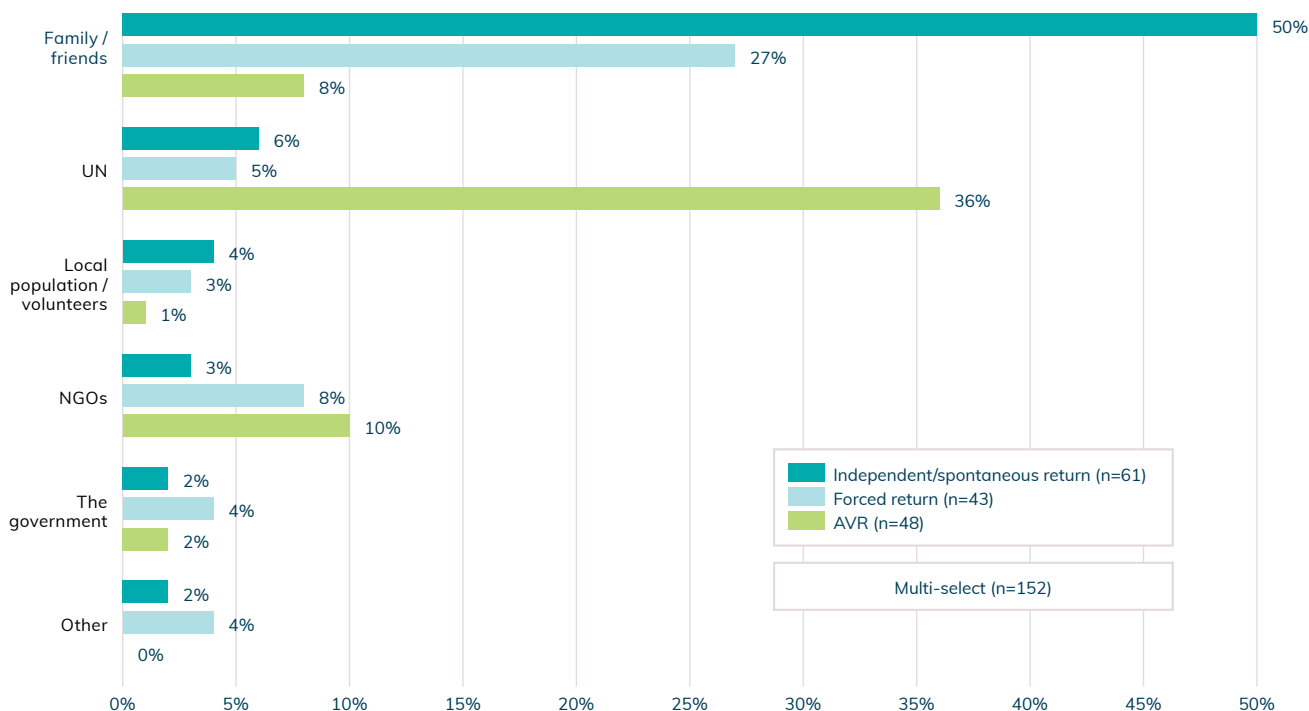
**“My return went well. IOM kept all its promises. On the other hand, I feel rejected by my family, my family members are only interested in the money I sent them.”**

**40-year-old woman returning from Morocco, interviewed in Tambacounda**

*Family and friends, followed by the United Nations, were the most important sources of assistance*

Overall, of the 152 respondents who reported having received assistance or support since returning to Senegal, 56% cited family and friends as the most important source of assistance, followed by the United

**Figure 14. Who did you receive assistance or support from? (Disaggregated by return type)**



**Assistance needs are high among returnees and are relatively similar across all return categories**

Only 1% of respondents overall said they had no need for assistance, see Figure 15. Differences in assistance needs were generally not considerable across type of return, but more people returning from non-European destinations reported needing help to find a job (46% versus 33%). Sixty percent of people returning via AVR said they needed help starting a business (compared to 47% of spontaneous returnees, and 37% of forced returnees). This is despite the fact that higher proportions of AVR returnees reported receiving tools/materials for income generating activity (25/48) and help starting a business (13/48), as compared to other types of returnees.

Eighty percent of respondents overall reported needing unconditional cash support at the time of interview,

followed by 74% who answered that they need tools/materials for income generating activities.

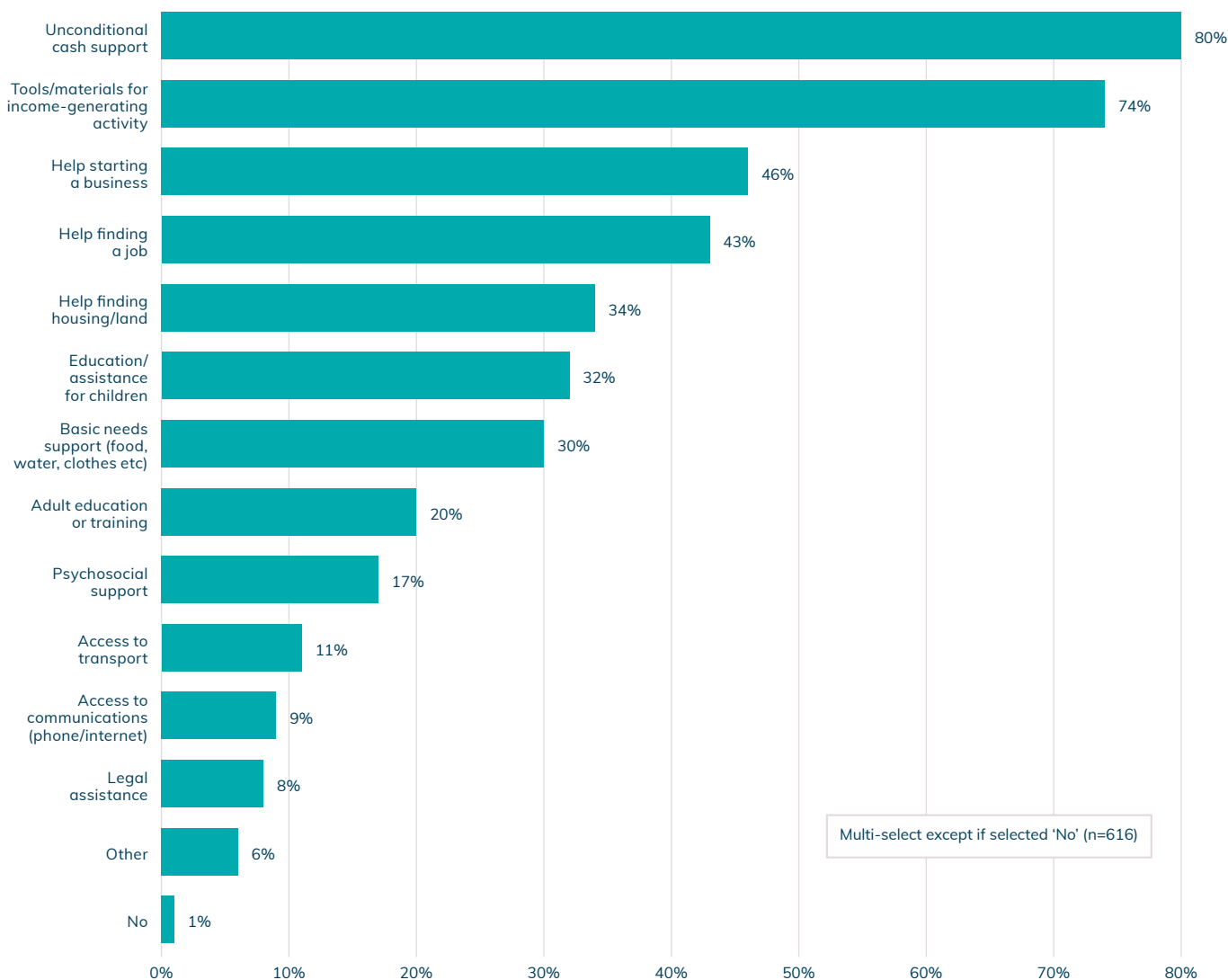
**“We need NGOs to help us so that we can work in our country.”**

**32-year-old man returning from Morocco, interviewed in Kayar**

**“It’s a very difficult period that I do not wish on anyone and if you don’t have very good support, it won’t be easy to reintegrate.”**

**32-year-old man returning from Mauritania, interviewed in Saint-Louis**

**Figure 15. Do you currently need assistance?**



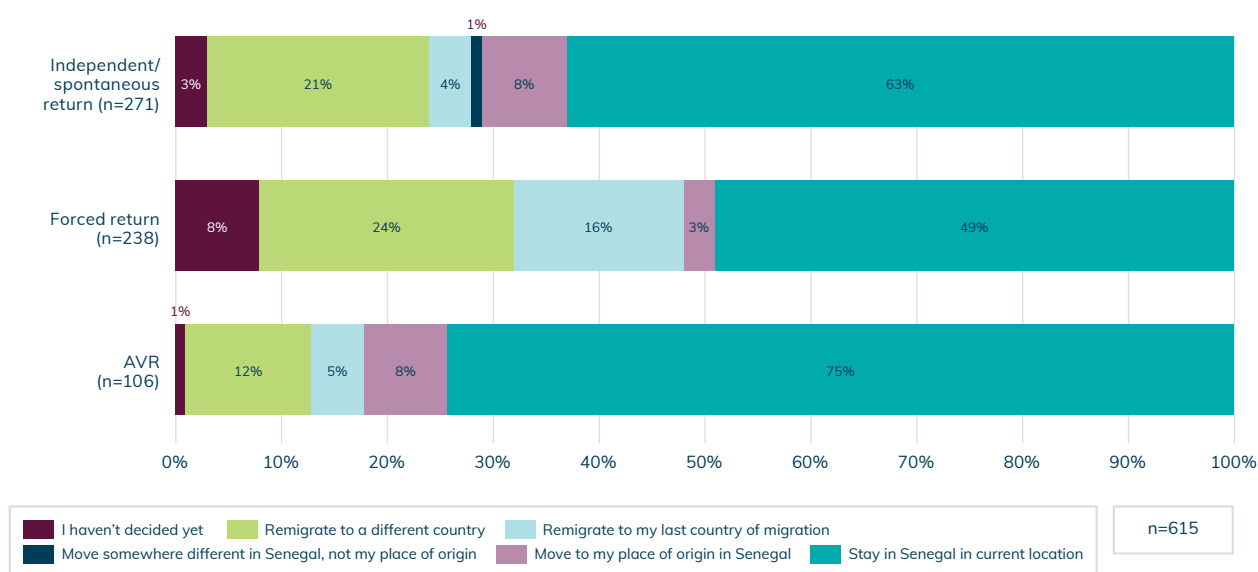
## Re-migration intentions

*Despite high levels of dissatisfaction with their lives, the majority of returnees plan to remain in Senegal over the next 12 months*

Despite expressing high levels of general dissatisfaction with their lives after returning to Senegal, the majority of respondents (66%) said they plan to stay in Senegal in the next 12 months.

People who returned via AVR more often reported that they intended to stay in Senegal (83%), compared to spontaneous returnees (72%), and those who were forcibly returned (52%), see Figure 16. Roughly one-fifth of respondents indicated they would migrate to a different country, with higher numbers among spontaneous and forced returnees, as compared to those returning via AVR. The highest proportion of respondents wishing to remigrate to their country of last migration was for those who were forcibly returned.

**Figure 16. What is your plan in terms of movement for the next 12 months? (Disaggregated by return type)**



In terms of comparison between people who returned from Europe as compared to non-European countries, people returning from Europe more often said they plan on re-migrating to the last country of migration (20%) in comparison to people who returned from non-European countries (6%).

The majority of respondents overall said they would not re-migrate again in an irregular manner (77%). This number is even higher for respondents who returned with AVR (85%).

**“Young people are leaving because they have no choice. If there were concrete support programs with follow up, they would be more likely to stay.”**

**31-year-old man, returning from Libya, interviewed in Kolda**

# Conclusion

This paper explores the experiences of migrants who have returned to Senegal in manners across the return spectrum from AVR, to forced and spontaneous returns, as well as from a variety of destinations within Europe and West and North Africa. The findings reveal a common thread; returnees, irrespective of their mode or country of return, encountered an array of obstacles and challenges pre-departure as well as after return. Regardless of how they returned, many reported feeling they had no or little choice in their return, and most felt that they were not well prepared for their return. Challenges persisted upon return, with the majority reporting difficulty meeting the livelihood needs of their households. For those forcibly returned, financial challenges were particularly common, including debt and issues securing an income.

Return for many was accompanied by feelings of shame and failure and the challenges faced upon return to Senegal also culminated in high levels of dissatisfaction with returnees' life as a whole, as well as feelings of little to no progress in key areas, such as employment and the achievement of goals, compared to pre-migration. What is clear from these findings is that the support needs of returnees across the board are high and remain largely unmet.

While access to assistance post-return varied, for example with people returning via AVR reporting slightly better access, there are significant gaps in meeting the diverse needs of returnees. However, despite high levels of dissatisfaction and limited access to livelihoods and assistance, a significant proportion of respondents expressed an intention to remain in Senegal in the next 12 months. Remigration hopes were slightly higher among those who had been forcibly returned to Senegal.

Improving pre-departure preparation, including better organisation of return journeys, planning upon arrival and cash assistance, as well as enhancing access to livelihood opportunities, offering psychological support, and bolstering community integration upon return, are imperative steps towards facilitating sustainable reintegration and improving the overall well-being of returnees in Senegal. Future research efforts should also focus on the longer-term needs of returnees, as this remains a clear knowledge gap as well as an area of response.

When designing policies or practices related to returns it is critical that they are grounded in clear legal frameworks, supported by evidence, and are designed to genuinely support voluntary decisions throughout the return process. This foundation is necessary to uphold the integrity of returns and make them more sustainable, safeguard human rights, and respect the dignity of migrants.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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