International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Protection and Reintegration of Human Trafficking Survivors in Nigeria, 2015–2025

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking remains a major human-rights, migration-governance and human-security challenge in Nigeria. Beyond the criminal prosecution of traffickers, the effectiveness of counter-trafficking interventions depends substantially on the capacity of institutions to identify victims, protect survivors from further exploitation, provide appropriate rehabilitation and psychosocial support, facilitate safe return, restore livelihoods and promote sustainable reintegration. This study examines the contribution of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to the protection and reintegration of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design and relies on secondary evidence obtained from IOM publications, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports, National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) policy documents and reports, United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Reports, and relevant scholarly and institutional literature. The data are analysed thematically around survivor identification and referral, safe return, shelter and protection, psychosocial support, livelihood assistance, family reunification, institutional capacity-building and sustainable reintegration. The study finds that IOM has made significant contributions to Nigeria's survivor-centred response through assisted voluntary return and reintegration, protection and referral mechanisms, psychosocial support, livelihood and business-development assistance, institutional capacity-building and collaboration with NAPTIP, government agencies and civil-society organisations. Evidence from IOM and Samuel Hall's 2023 study, which included trafficking survivors in Nigeria, further demonstrates the importance of monitoring reintegration beyond immediate return by considering economic, social, psychological and safety dimensions. Nevertheless, the study identifies persistent challenges, including inadequate domestic funding, uneven access to services, stigma, insufficient long-term livelihood support, weak monitoring of post-return outcomes, institutional capacity constraints and continuing exposure to re-trafficking. The study concludes that IOM has strengthened Nigeria's institutional and operational capacity to protect and reintegrate trafficking survivors, but international assistance cannot substitute for sustained domestic ownership. It recommends stronger implementation of Nigeria's National Policy for Protection and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking, operationalisation of survivor-centred referral and monitoring systems, increased domestic financing, expansion of long-term livelihood and psychosocial interventions, stronger family and community reintegration mechanisms, and systematic measurement of reintegration outcomes.

Keywords: Human trafficking; IOM; protection; rehabilitation; reintegration; survivors; assisted voluntary return; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a serious form of exploitation and organised crime involving the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons for exploitation through coercion, deception or abuse of vulnerability. It manifests in sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, forced criminality and other forms of abuse. Its domestic and transnational dimensions require coordinated responses from governments, international organisations, law-enforcement agencies and civil-society

organisations to prevent exploitation and protect survivors (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024).

The prevalence and complexity of trafficking are influenced by poverty, unemployment, conflict, displacement, gender inequality and weak protection systems. Nigeria remains an important country of origin, transit and destination for trafficking, with women, girls, men and children exposed to different forms of exploitation. In response, the government established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and introduced policy frameworks, including the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking in Nigeria, 2022–2026, to strengthen prevention, prosecution, victim protection and reintegration. These initiatives emphasise collaboration among government institutions, international partners and civil-society organisations (NAPTIP, 2022; UNODC, 2022).

Within this framework, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) plays an important role in supporting counter-trafficking interventions in Nigeria. Its activities include victim identification and referral, safe return, shelter, psychosocial support, capacity-building, livelihood assistance and reintegration services. These interventions recognise that survivors require more than immediate rescue or return; they also need sustained support to overcome trauma, social stigma and economic vulnerability and to reduce their exposure to re-trafficking (IOM, 2023, 2024).

The importance of sustainable reintegration is emphasised in IOM and Samuel Hall's (2023) *Monitoring the Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors: Study and Toolkit*, which conceptualises reintegration as a multidimensional and continuing process involving safety, psychological recovery, social acceptance and economic independence. This approach is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where poverty, unemployment, inadequate support services and community stigma may undermine survivors' recovery. The United States Department of State (2024) reported that Nigerian authorities identified and referred 1,194 trafficking victims to services, comprising 654 sex-trafficking victims and 540 labour-trafficking victims. Despite ongoing interventions, challenges remain in ensuring effective victim protection, coordinated referrals and long-term reintegration.

The central concern, therefore, is whether existing interventions enable survivors to rebuild secure, dignified and independent lives beyond their immediate rescue or return. The existence of policies and assistance programmes does not necessarily guarantee lasting recovery, particularly where survivors face socioeconomic hardship, psychological trauma and inadequate community support. Assessing reintegration outcomes is consequently essential to understanding the effectiveness of institutional responses to human trafficking.

Against this background, this study examines the contribution of the International Organization for Migration to the protection and reintegration of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025, focusing on victim protection, rehabilitation, safe return, psychosocial assistance, family and community reintegration, livelihood support and institutional capacity-building.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy to understand the institutional practices, policies and collaborative relationships underpinning the protection and reintegration of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria.

A qualitative case study research design was employed, relied on secondary data from IOM publications, UNODC reports, NAPTIP documents, United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Reports, European Union migration reports and relevant academic literature relating to 2015–2025.

Information selected were based on relevance to institutional authority, recency and connection to trafficking protection, rehabilitation, return and reintegration, with particular emphasis on IOM publications. Data were analysed through thematic content analysis, focusing on survivor identification and referral,

immediate protection, psychosocial and medical assistance, safe return, family reunification, livelihood reintegration, institutional capacity-building and reintegration challenges.

Objectives of the Study

In a broader sense, the study recognised IOM as one actor within a larger institutional network and does not attribute all improvements in survivor protection exclusively to the organisation.

The study specifically seeks to:

i. examine the nature of human trafficking and the challenges of protecting trafficking survivors in Nigeria;

ii. assess the contribution of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to the protection, rehabilitation, safe return and reintegration of trafficking survivors in Nigeria; and

iii. identify the major challenges affecting the effectiveness and sustainability of IOM-supported survivor protection and reintegration interventions in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Human Trafficking Survivors

Human trafficking survivors are individuals who have experienced recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt through coercion, deception or abuse for exploitative purposes and subsequently require protection, rehabilitation and reintegration. The concept of the survivor is increasingly recognised in contemporary anti-trafficking discourse because it acknowledges the dignity, resilience, agency and capacity of affected persons to recover. Rather than defining individuals solely by their experiences of exploitation, the survivor-centred approach emphasises empowerment, participation, autonomy and sustainable recovery (International Organization for Migration [IOM] & Samuel Hall, 2023; NAPTIP, 2024). In Nigeria, survivors include women, men and children subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, forced begging and other forms of abuse (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

However, rescue from exploitation does not automatically guarantee recovery. Survivors may experience psychological trauma, health difficulties, stigma, family rejection, social exclusion, economic insecurity and risks of re-trafficking. Returning to communities affected by poverty, unemployment and inadequate social protection may further undermine their recovery (IOM & Samuel Hall, 2023; UNODC, 2024). Effective protection therefore requires continuous assistance, encompassing identification, immediate care, rehabilitation, safe return and long-term reintegration. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) emphasise that reintegration should be evaluated across economic, social, psychological and safety dimensions over time. Accordingly, this study conceptualises trafficking survivors as individuals requiring sustained support to restore their autonomy, rebuild their livelihoods and achieve secure, dignified and sustainable reintegration into society.

Protection of Trafficking Survivors

Protection of trafficking survivors refers to the legal, institutional, social, medical, psychological and material measures designed to safeguard survivors against further exploitation, discrimination, retaliation, re-trafficking and violations of their fundamental rights. It includes victim identification, safe accommodation, medical care, psychosocial assistance, legal support, family reunification, access to justice, referral services and assistance with safe return and reintegration (NAPTIP, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). A survivor-centred approach requires coordinated, continuous assistance that respects individual needs, safety, dignity, confidentiality and participation.

In Nigeria, survivor protection is supported through the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking

in Persons (NAPTIP), national referral mechanisms and procedures for identifying, assisting and reintegrating trafficked persons. The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report recorded 1,194 victims identified and referred to services by Nigerian authorities. It also reported that NAPTIP operated 14 shelters across its 10 zonal commands, providing legal, medical, psychosocial, family-reunification and vocational services (U.S. Department of State, 2024). These interventions demonstrate the institutional commitment to protecting survivors. However, inadequate funding, limited-service accessibility and insufficient long-term support may weaken protection outcomes. Temporary shelter and counselling alone cannot guarantee sustainable recovery where survivors continue to experience poverty, stigma and unemployment. Therefore, this study conceptualises survivor protection as a continuous process extending from identification and immediate assistance to rehabilitation, safe return and sustainable reintegration, with particular attention to IOM's contribution within Nigeria's counter-trafficking framework.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation refers to interventions designed to help trafficking survivors recover physically, psychologically, socially and economically from exploitation and regain the capacity to live independently and participate meaningfully in family and community life. It includes medical treatment, psychosocial counselling, education, vocational training, legal assistance, family support and livelihood development (IOM & Samuel Hall, 2023; NAPTIP, 2024). Rehabilitation is essential because trafficking may leave survivors with physical injuries, psychological trauma, social isolation, diminished self-esteem and economic insecurity, thereby complicating their recovery and return to normal community life (UNODC, 2024).

The importance of rehabilitation lies in addressing the lasting consequences of exploitation rather than merely removing survivors from abusive situations. Although rescue provides immediate protection, it does not automatically resolve trauma, restore social relationships or establish economic independence. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) therefore emphasise multidimensional, survivor-centred assistance and continuous monitoring of reintegration outcomes. In Nigeria, NAPTIP provides medical, psychosocial, vocational and legal assistance, while IOM supports recovery through referrals, psychosocial services and livelihood interventions (IOM, 2023; NAPTIP, 2024). Accordingly, this study conceptualises rehabilitation as a continuing process through which survivors restore their wellbeing, rebuild confidence, strengthen social relationships and develop sustainable livelihoods. Effective rehabilitation is fundamental to successful reintegration because inadequate or discontinuous support may leave survivors vulnerable to poverty, renewed exploitation and re-trafficking.

Sustainable Reintegration

Sustainable reintegration refers to the process through which trafficking survivors achieve economic self-sufficiency, social inclusion, psychosocial well-being and lasting protection against renewed exploitation. Unlike physical return or temporary assistance, it requires survivors to rebuild secure and independent lives within their families and communities. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) emphasise the importance of monitoring reintegration outcomes over time because survivors may continue to experience unemployment, stigma, family conflict, psychological distress and vulnerability after receiving initial assistance. Sustainable reintegration therefore requires continuous, flexible support tailored to survivors' changing circumstances and individual priorities.

In Nigeria, sustainable reintegration is particularly important because poverty, unemployment, limited livelihood opportunities and inadequate social protection may undermine survivors' recovery. IOM's reintegration interventions have incorporated livelihood development, entrepreneurship and economic assistance alongside protection and psychosocial support (IOM, 2023). Such measures seek to strengthen survivors' economic security and reduce their vulnerability to renewed exploitation. Support may also include safe accommodation, family tracing, reunification and business-development assistance (European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2025). Accordingly, this study conceptualises sustainable reintegration as a multidimensional and continuing process that combines economic empowerment, psychological recovery, social acceptance and personal safety. Its success should be assessed by survivors' ability to

maintain secure livelihoods, rebuild meaningful relationships and live independently with dignity, rather than merely by their physical return to their communities of origin.

Psychosocial Reintegration

Psychosocial reintegration refers to restoring trafficking survivors' psychological well-being, dignity, interpersonal relationships and capacity to participate meaningfully in family and community life. Experiences of violence, coercion, sexual exploitation and forced labour may cause psychological distress, undermine trust and complicate social adjustment. Consequently, physical return alone cannot guarantee recovery. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) emphasise that psychological and social outcomes should be assessed alongside economic reintegration.

In Nigeria, NAPTIP provides access to psychological and other support services, while IOM contributes through psychosocial assistance, case management and referrals (IOM, 2023; NAPTIP, 2024). These interventions help address stigma, family rejection and difficulties associated with readjustment. Effective psychosocial reintegration requires sustained counselling, family support, community acceptance and survivor participation in recovery decisions. Accordingly, this study regards psychosocial reintegration as essential to restoring survivors' confidence, dignity, autonomy and meaningful social participation.

Survivor-Centred Approach

A survivor-centred approach places the rights, safety, dignity, preferences and individual circumstances of trafficking survivors at the centre of protection and reintegration interventions. It recognises survivors as rights-holders whose experiences and priorities should guide decisions concerning their recovery. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) emphasise incorporating survivors' perspectives into programme design and monitoring, recognising that their needs vary according to age, gender, health, family circumstances and experiences of exploitation.

In Nigeria, this principle is reflected in NAPTIP's emphasis on confidentiality, non-discrimination, safety, empowerment, participation and comprehensive assistance (NAPTIP, 2024). IOM reinforces these principles through referrals, psychosocial support, return assistance and reintegration programmes. Meaningful survivor participation in decisions concerning accommodation, family reunification, education and livelihoods can improve the relevance and sustainability of assistance. This study therefore considers a survivor-centred approach fundamental to effective and dignified reintegration.

International Cooperation in Trafficking-Survivor Protection

International cooperation involves collaborative efforts by governments, international organisations and civil-society actors to prevent trafficking and protect affected persons across national borders. It is essential because trafficking frequently involves transnational recruitment networks, cross-border movements and exploitation across different jurisdictions. In Nigeria, IOM collaborates with NAPTIP, government agencies and civil-society organisations on counter-trafficking, protection, assisted voluntary return, reintegration and institutional capacity-building (IOM, 2024).

Such cooperation extends beyond repatriation to include victim identification, referral, safe return, shelter, family tracing, psychosocial assistance and livelihood support. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2025) documents IOM's collaboration with Nigerian institutions and civil-society partners in supporting trafficking survivors. Effective cooperation requires coordinated referral procedures, shared protection standards, adequate resources and sustained national ownership. From a Liberal Institutionalism perspective, these partnerships demonstrate how international institutions facilitate collective action, coordination and information-sharing in addressing transnational challenges. This study therefore examines international cooperation as an important mechanism through which IOM supports Nigeria's survivor-protection and reintegration framework.

IOM's Role in Protection and Reintegration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) contributes to Nigeria's response to human trafficking through technical assistance, operational support, institutional capacity-building and collaboration with national stakeholders. Its interventions encompass counter-trafficking, victim protection, assisted voluntary return, reintegration and migration governance. IOM's Nigeria programming identifies cooperation with NAPTIP and other government institutions as important to strengthening protection systems and institutional coordination (IOM, 2024).

IOM's support includes referrals, psychosocial assistance, safe return, reception, family tracing and livelihood-oriented reintegration. Its enhanced reintegration initiatives have also emphasised economic security and sustainable livelihoods for trafficking survivors (United Nations in Ghana, 2023; EUAA, 2025). Beyond direct assistance, IOM contributes to policy implementation, institutional capacity development and evidence-based reintegration practices. Its collaboration with Nigerian institutions illustrates the importance of international partnerships in addressing trafficking. Nevertheless, sustainable outcomes depend on adequate domestic resources, effective national institutions and continued support beyond externally funded projects. This study consequently evaluates IOM's contribution in relation to survivor protection, rehabilitation and long-term reintegration in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

International Organization for Migration and Samuel Hall (2023) examined trafficking-survivor reintegration across Bangladesh, Nigeria, Moldova and Tunisia using a multicountry qualitative and instrument-development design. The study involved 100 survivors and 40 practitioners and stakeholders. Data were collected through survivor surveys, case studies, key-informant interviews and community discussions and analysed comparatively. Findings indicated that effective reintegration requires continuous assistance addressing safety, psychosocial well-being, social relationships and livelihoods. The study recommended longitudinal monitoring and individualised support. Its relevance lies in demonstrating the importance of coordinated institutional protection beyond immediate rescue and return.

Oyakhire (2019) investigated legal and institutional mechanisms for protecting trafficking victims and witnesses in Nigeria through qualitative legal and empirical analysis. Data were drawn from legal instruments, existing studies and institutional practices. Findings revealed that statutory protections alone could be insufficient where intimidation, including juju-related threats, discouraged victims from cooperating with law-enforcement agencies. The study recommended strengthening formal witness protection alongside culturally sensitive interventions. It demonstrates that effective survivor protection requires integrated legal, psychological and institutional responses.

Idemudia et al. (2021) explored the reintegration experiences of trafficking survivors in Nigeria using an ethnographic qualitative design. Participants comprised 13 female survivors and five rehabilitation officials associated with IOM, NAPTIP and non-governmental organisations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews in Lagos and analysed thematically. Findings showed that shelter, healthcare, psychological support, vocational training and livelihood assistance facilitated recovery, but poverty, unemployment and social difficulties continued to undermine sustainable independence. The researchers recommended addressing structural socioeconomic barriers alongside individual assistance. This study is particularly relevant because it examines reintegration experiences within Nigeria's institutional protection framework.

Okoli and Idemudia (2020) examined the empowerment outcomes of trafficking-survivor rehabilitation programmes in Nigeria through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis. The study involved female survivors participating in programmes delivered by government and civil-society organisations. Findings indicated that rehabilitation could promote recovery and skills acquisition but sometimes constrained survivors' agency when they were treated primarily as vulnerable recipients rather than active decision-makers. The researchers recommended survivor-centred interventions that strengthen participation,

autonomy and empowerment. The study demonstrates that rehabilitation effectiveness should be assessed through meaningful empowerment and sustainable reintegration, rather than service delivery alone.

Return and reintegration are closely related but conceptually distinct processes. Return concerns the physical movement of a trafficking survivor from a country or location of exploitation to the country or community of origin, whereas reintegration concerns what happens after that return. A survivor may therefore return to Nigeria without achieving meaningful reintegration. IOM's approach recognises that safe and dignified return should be accompanied by appropriate protection, assistance and longer-term reintegration measures (IOM, 2024). This distinction is important because trafficking survivors may continue to experience vulnerability after returning, particularly where they lack family support, livelihood opportunities, healthcare or protection from stigma and re-trafficking.

In Nigeria, IOM has played a significant role in facilitating the voluntary return of trafficking survivors through its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programming. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2025) reports that between 2017 and the first quarter of 2024, IOM facilitated the voluntary return of thousands of Nigerian trafficking victims and supported their reception and reintegration in coordination with government agencies, civil society organisations and other partners. These interventions de-

monstrate that return is most effective when it is linked to referral systems, temporary shelter, family tracing, psychosocial assistance and livelihood support. IOM's Nigeria programming also reflects an institutional shift from movement assistance alone towards integrated protection and reintegration approaches (IOM, 2024). Accordingly, return should be regarded as the beginning of a longer recovery process rather than the endpoint of anti-trafficking intervention. Sustainable outcomes require institutional continuity between pre-return preparation, reception, rehabilitation and longer-term reintegration (IOM & Samuel Hall, 2023).

Socio-economic Reintegration

Socio-economic reintegration refers to the process through which trafficking survivors regain access to livelihoods, education, employment, financial resources and social networks necessary for independent participation in society. Economic insecurity is an important dimension of trafficking vulnerability because survivors who return without sustainable income may remain dependent on others or become susceptible to renewed exploitation. Reintegration programmes therefore increasingly incorporate vocational training, entrepreneurship, financial assistance, education and employment-related support as mechanisms for strengthening survivors' economic autonomy (IOM & Samuel Hall, 2023).

In Nigeria, IOM has supported approaches that combine protection and livelihood development. The Enhanced Reintegration Support for Survivors of Trafficking project was specifically designed to strengthen economic security among survivors by providing business-development skills and resources for livelihood activities (United Nations in Ghana, 2023). Similarly, NAPTIP's victim-support framework includes vocational and employment-related assistance as part of the broader rehabilitation and reintegration process (NAPTIP, 2024). Such interventions are important because sustainable livelihoods can improve survivors' independence and reduce economic pressures that may contribute to re-trafficking. However, socio-economic reintegration should not be reduced to the provision of grants or vocational skills. The effectiveness of livelihood assistance depends on local labour-market conditions, access to markets, availability of capital, family support and the survivor's psychological readiness to engage in economic activities. IOM and Samuel Hall (2023) therefore advocate survivor-centred and multidimensional approaches in which economic outcomes are considered alongside psychological well-being, social inclusion and safety. Socio-economic reintegration is consequently both an economic and social process through which survivors regain control over their lives and strengthen their capacity to live independently.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Liberal Institutionalism, associated with Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, as its

theoretical framework. The theory challenges the realist assumption that international relations are driven exclusively by power competition, arguing that institutions facilitate cooperation through shared rules, information and procedures. Keohane (1984) maintains that international institutions can reduce uncertainty and transaction costs, thereby enabling sustained cooperation among states and non-state actors.

Assumptions of the Theory

Liberal Institutionalism assumes that cooperation is possible in an international system without a central governing authority. Institutions facilitate collaboration through information-sharing, monitoring, coordination and common expectations. This assumption is relevant to human trafficking because its transnational character requires cooperation in victim identification, referral, safe return, legal assistance and reintegration. Accordingly, IOM provides an institutional platform for cooperation between Nigeria, NAPTIP, governments and civil-society organisations.

Relevance of Liberal Institutionalism to the Study

The theory explains how IOM facilitates cooperation with Nigerian institutions to strengthen trafficking-survivor protection and reintegration. Its interventions include technical assistance, institutional capacity-building, referral mechanisms, psychosocial support, assisted voluntary return and livelihood assistance. These activities demonstrate how international partnerships can complement national responsibilities and improve coordinated responses. Liberal Institutionalism therefore provides an analytical basis for examining whether IOM-supported cooperation has contributed to effective protection, rehabilitation and sustainable reintegration between 2015 and 2025. It also enables the study to assess challenges arising from inadequate resources, weak coordination and limited institutional capacity. The theory is appropriate because it connects international cooperation with domestic institutional performance while recognising that sustainable outcomes require national ownership, political commitment and continuity of support.

Documentary Data Analysis

Table 1: Pre-Study Trend Analysis Data (2007–2015)

Year	Reported trafficking victims identified	Sex-trafficking victims	Labour-trafficking victims	NAPTIP shelter provision	IOM reintegration data
2007	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
2008	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
2009	1,109	624	328	8 shelters reported	NR
2010	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
2011	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
2012	480	303	177	8 shelters; capacity 293	NR
2013	480	303	177	NR	NR
2014	777	187	539	Referral and care services reported	NR
2015	914	336	578	Screening, shelter and referral services reported	NR

NR = Not consistently reported in the documentary sources consulted.

Source: U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Reports (2010, 2013–2015).

The table shows that before the study period, trend analysis revealed persistent trafficking-related protection needs and gradual development of Nigeria's institutional response. In 2007 and 2008, comparable annual figures were unavailable in the sources consulted, limiting the assessment of the initial trend. In 2009, the reported figure of 1,109 victims indicated substantial demand for identification, shelter and assistance. The

report also recorded 624 victims of sexual exploitation and 328 victims of labour exploitation, demonstrating the different forms of trafficking requiring institutional intervention.

In 2010 and 2011, comparable annual figures were not consistently available, preventing reliable conclusions about annual increases or decreases. In 2012, the reported figure of 480 victims and the operation of eight shelters with a combined capacity of 293 illustrated the importance of institutional protection, although shelter capacity alone did not establish successful reintegration. The 2013 report also documented 480 identified victims, while the 2014 report recorded 777 victims, comprising 187 sex-trafficking victims and 539 labour-trafficking victims. In 2015, the reported total increased to 914, including 336 sex-trafficking victims and 578 labour-trafficking victims.

Table 2: Study-Period Trend Analysis Data (2016–2025)

Year	NAPTIP-recorded trafficking cases or victims	Sex-trafficking victims	Labour-trafficking victims	Documented protection and reintegration developments	IOM-specific annual survivor outcomes
2016	782	356	138	Identification and assistance documented	NR
2017	1,261	921	163	Increased recorded cases; additional trafficking categories documented	NR
2018	776	495	40	Protection and referral services documented	NR
2019	819	487	65	Shelter, referral and assistance mechanisms continued	NR
2020	499 victims identified by multiple reporting sources; 812 potential victims	NR	NR	NAPTIP and partner protection services continued	NR
2021	935 victims identified in the previous reporting period, as cited in the 2023 report	NR	NR	Victim identification and referral mechanisms continued	NR
2022	1,634	841	543	Government and supported NGOs provided services to identified victims	NR
2023	1,384 victims identified and referred in the preceding reporting period cited in the 2024 report	NR	NR	NAPTIP reported 14 shelters and assistance to 1,587 victims in its 2024 reporting	NR
2024	1,194	654	540	Shelter, legal, medical, psychosocial, family-reunification and vocational services reported	NR
2025	NR	NR	NR	Full-year comparable protection outcomes not established from the sources consulted	NR

Important: The NAPTIP figures for 2016–2019 are derived from National Bureau of Statistics data on identified trafficked persons by type and sex. Figures from subsequent Trafficking in Persons Reports may use different reporting periods or definitions.

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, Women and Men in Nigeria (2020); U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Reports (2020–2024); IOM Nigeria annual reporting.

The table shows the trend analysis within the study period, indicating continuing trafficking-related protection needs alongside institutional efforts to support survivors. In 2016, NAPTIP-recorded data identified 782 trafficked persons across the reported categories. In 2017, the figure increased to 1,261, reflecting higher recorded identification, although differences in reporting and classification may have influenced the change. In 2018, the figure declined to 776 before increasing to 819 in 2019. These fluctuations demonstrate the need for consistent administrative data rather than assuming that changes in recorded cases directly reflect changes in trafficking prevalence.

In 2020, reporting documented 499 identified victims and 812 potential victims across relevant agencies and sources, highlighting the distinction between confirmed and potential cases. In 2021, earlier reporting-period data recorded 935 victims. In 2022, the reported figure increased to 1,634, including 841 sex-trafficking victims and 543 labour-trafficking victims. The 2024 report recorded 1,194 victims, comprising 654 sex-trafficking victims and 540 labour-trafficking victims. Meanwhile, documented shelter, referral and rehabilitation services demonstrated continuing institutional activity. Comparable full-year figures for 2025 were not established.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that trafficking survivors in Nigeria require comprehensive protection addressing medical, psychological, legal, social and economic vulnerabilities. This agrees with IOM and Samuel Hall (2023), who established that sustainable reintegration extends beyond rescue and return to include safety, social inclusion, psychological recovery and economic independence. Similarly, Oyakhire (2019) demonstrated that formal protection mechanisms may be insufficient without culturally sensitive interventions, while Idemudia et al. (2021) identified poverty and unemployment as persistent barriers to successful reintegration.

Regarding IOM's contribution, the findings show that shelter, referrals, psychosocial assistance, family reunification, safe return and livelihood support strengthen survivors' recovery. These findings support Okoli and Idemudia's (2020) argument that effective rehabilitation must promote survivors' agency and participation rather than merely provide services. However, inadequate funding, stigma, weak institutional coordination and limited long-term monitoring continue to constrain sustainable outcomes. Consistent with IOM and Samuel Hall (2023), the findings emphasise longitudinal monitoring to assess survivors' changing circumstances and identify risks of re-trafficking. Consequently, IOM's effectiveness depends not only on international assistance but also on stronger national ownership, adequate domestic resources and coordinated post-return support. Sustainable reintegration therefore requires an integrated, survivor-centred framework that combines economic empowerment, psychosocial recovery, community acceptance and continuous institutional assistance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the contribution of the International Organization for Migration to the protection and reintegration of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. The study demonstrates that trafficking is not merely a criminal-justice problem but also a complex protection, migration, socioeconomic and human-security challenge.

The findings establish that IOM has made important contributions to Nigeria's survivor-centred response. These contributions include survivor identification and referral, safe return, reception, shelter and protection, psychosocial support, family tracing and reunification, livelihood assistance, institutional capacity-building and cooperation with NAPTIP and other national and international stakeholders.

The evidence further demonstrates that IOM's contribution is particularly important in facilitating the transition from immediate protection to longer-term reintegration. IOM-supported interventions have helped connect returnees with government agencies, civil-society organisations, family networks and livelihood opportunities. The organisation's work on monitoring reintegration also represents an important conceptual shift from measuring success simply through return numbers to evaluating whether survivors achieve sustainable economic, social, psychological and safety outcomes.

However, the study also establishes that international assistance is necessary but not sufficient. Persistent poverty, unemployment, stigma, limited domestic financing, uneven service provision, institutional weaknesses and inadequate long-term monitoring continue to constrain sustainable reintegration. The continued identification of significant protection gaps by Nigeria's international partners reinforces the need for stronger domestic ownership.

The central conclusion is therefore that IOM has strengthened Nigeria's capacity to protect and reintegrate trafficking survivors, but sustainable outcomes require a transition from project-dependent assistance towards an adequately financed, nationally owned and survivor-centred protection system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

i. The Federal Government, through NAPTIP, should strengthen referral mechanisms and ensure accessible shelter, medical care, psychosocial support and legal assistance. Public awareness, education, employment and social-protection programmes should also address socioeconomic vulnerabilities and reduce trafficking and re-trafficking risks.

ii. IOM, NAPTIP and partners should integrate pre-return counselling, safe transportation, reception, family tracing, psychosocial care, vocational training and livelihood assistance. Reintegration outcomes should be monitored beyond physical return, while strengthening Nigerian institutional capacity to sustain interventions after external funding ends.

iii. The Federal Government should provide predictable domestic funding and strengthen coordination among NAPTIP, IOM and relevant agencies. Transparent funding mechanisms, effective referrals, information-sharing and long-term monitoring should be institutionalised. Survivors should participate in programme design and evaluation to improve responsiveness and prevent re-trafficking.

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