



IOM International Organization for Migration



IVORY COAST

MAPPING EXERCISE
LONDON, AUGUST 2008

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The aim of this Mapping Report is to guide IOM's outreach activities and communications strategies. The report does not purport to be exhaustive. The mapping consultant who conducted the exercise and wrote the report on behalf of IOM has taken every effort to ensure accuracy in his/her reporting and the views expressed in this report are his/hers. IOM cannot be held responsible for any omissions or inaccuracies.



INTRODUCTION

AIM OF THIS REPORT

This report summarises the results of a mapping exercise whose purpose was to identify the geographical spread, the main communication channels, and the services used by the Ivorian diaspora in the UK. The information gathered during this exercise will help IOM tailor its communication strategy to the needs of people who could benefit from two of its programmes: the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP); and the Assisted Voluntary Return for Irregular Migrants (AVRIM).

TARGET GROUP

The mapping exercise provided a useful insight into the Ivorian community in the UK.

- The Ivorian diaspora is composed of asylum seekers, refugees, students, and a few professionals. A large number of Ivorians have been through the asylum system.
- Ivorians represent a growing community, with the majority of them living in and around London.
- Most Ivorians rely on word of mouth for their information needs.
- The preferred language for most Ivorians is French. However, some happily read the free daily English language newspapers.

The mapping exercise has also enabled IOM to compile a contact list for further collaboration. This list will remain confidential and the exclusive property of IOM.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based upon both qualitative and quantitative data.

Various approaches were used including a standard IOM structured questionnaire translated into French.

Semi-structured interviews and extensive social networking with multipliers¹ across the country were also used to gather further information.

The fieldwork was carried out from mid-April 2008 to the end of June 2008. It was complemented by secondary data from national newspapers, the Home Office, and the United Nations' refugee and asylum organisation (UNHCR).

¹ This term is used to indicate individuals or organisations that are well known amongst diaspora groups and could therefore play a key role in delivering information.

1 THE IVORIAN COMMUNITY IN THE UK

1.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF IVORIAN MIGRATION IN THE UK

Before 1995, there was no visa requirement for Ivorian nationals entering the UK. Those who benefited from this arrangement may be seen as the first wave of Ivorian migrants to the UK. They could simply board a plane and be granted a visa at the port of entry.

In the early 1990s, most Ivorians coming to the UK were scholarship students. They were followed by a wave of students' union activists fleeing an increasingly intolerant régime. These students were often supported financially by their political masters in opposition, or by their own wealthy families.

The latest wave of Ivorian migrants to the UK is more heterogeneous with scores of people fleeing the hardship induced by the political and economic instability of the Ivory Coast, including secondary migrants coming from France. Since 1994, the Ivory Coast has gone through turbulent times, fuelled by the power struggle within the élite after the death of the first president Houphouët-Boigny. Fearful of bloodshed similar to that seen in neighbouring Liberia, many Ivorians decided to leave before the political storm broke. In 1999, the Bedie régime² was overthrown. In 2002, an attempted coup led by disgruntled former soldiers³ resulted in the most profound crisis in the country to date, with far-reaching consequences both within and outside the Ivory Coast itself, including for the diaspora in the UK.

Many Ivorians who now live in the UK are asylum seekers, refugees, or irregular migrants. Asylum seekers and refugees are in general well educated with a reasonable command of the English language. They are more likely to be former University or college students, or professionals.

Irregular migrants from the Ivory Coast tend to be people who overstay their permission to be in the UK but who are determined to remain because returning would be a personal failure and a disgrace for their families. In this group one also finds victims of the myth that there is "abundant employment" in the UK (one of the "pull" determinants). Secondary migrants coming from France and, occasionally, young men and women trafficked into the UK, have been victims of this illusion.

The irregular migrant population from the Ivory Coast also includes visa overstayers who are former students. They used to be the breadwinners for their families back home but now find it hard to cope with the twin burdens of this important responsibility and the pressures on them as students in the UK.

Within the Ivorian diaspora in the UK, secondary movement migrants coming from France are seen as slightly different from the rest of the community. It is believed that secondary movement arrivals are recognisable as two types of migrants.

The first is in general a family man with children, often nearing 50 years of age, who has spent a long time in France and has decided to move to Britain to find better employment prospects for himself and to enhance the chances of his children for a better life. Such people often bring children placed under their guardianship by their extended families. This type of migrant is unlikely to contemplate a return to the Ivory Coast soon. They are more likely to hold a passport from the European Union.

The second type is usually a young single man, between 20 and 30 years old, who has come to the UK after a failed attempt to settle in France and who is still musing over a definite place to settle.

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1043014.stm

³ *Ibid*

1.2 COMMUNITY GROUPS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

There are currently fifty community organisations officially registered with the Ivory Coast Embassy in London. These organisations include branches of the main political parties in the Ivory Coast, faith groups, and a few ethnically based solidarity groups. Some Ivorian social entrepreneurs have also set up charities and not-for-profit organisations in London and in the Midlands.

Relations between UK-based Ivorian community groups have been affected by the events of 2002 in the Ivory Coast. There has always been cross-ethnic collaboration for coping with issues like immigration, employment and social events but the main Ivorian political organisations in the UK have had tense and uneasy relationships until very recently.

The Ivorian diaspora has exported to the UK the widespread ethnic and regional structures which are such dominant features of politics in the Ivory Coast, and which imply a close correlation between political affiliation and ethnicity. In the Ivory Coast, many of the small community organisations set up for mutual assistance consist of members of the same ethnic group, or they come from the same geographical region, or they belong to the same religious congregation. These largely ethnically based organisations are generally very close politically to the main political parties. Thus, organisations from the Bete ethnic group are more likely to be close to the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) party – which has been the ruling party since 2002 – while another organisation made up of members of the Malinke ethnic group would be close to the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR), one of the main Opposition parties, which has its stronghold in the north of the country.

The 2002 conflict in the Ivory Coast exacerbated the political nature of these organisations. In particular, the ethnic groups of the Northern Ivory Coast decided to combine and face what they perceived as victimisation because they were viewed as sympathetic to the cause of the rebels.⁴ At the height of the conflict, the Ivorian community as a whole offered a picture of fragmentation and profound division, which manifested itself in London in the boycott of businesses owned by those seen as belonging to the opposing camp. In some cases the animosity led to complete or partial estrangement between former friends.

An attempt to heal the rift was initiated in 2007, after a shift in policy by an organisation originally created to defend the “institutions of the State”. This particular organisation has now become an umbrella community organisation with the aim of assisting all Ivorians in the UK in their daily lives. Many members of the community look back to the brief, but damaging, period of civil conflict with regret but there still remains a palpable climate of suspicion among political activists, which often surfaces at cross-party meetings.

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1043106.stm>

1.3 NUMBER OF IVORIAN CITIZENS IN THE UK

The exact number of Ivorians currently living in the UK is unknown, even taking into account the best estimates from official sources such as the Home Office and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Many Ivorians avoid any form of official registration, including with their local embassy in London.

There is a strong assumption in the Ivorian community that seeking asylum is the best way into the UK. The UNHCR⁵ reports that 2,170 asylum applications (excluding dependants) were lodged by Ivorian nationals between 1997 and 2007. 550 of them were recognised as refugees and another 360 were allowed to remain in the country with a status other than “refugee”. These figures suggest that only 910 Ivorians have been granted the right to remain legally in the UK through the asylum system over that period.

However, the Home Office’s Immigration Control Statistics⁶, which take into account broader immigration baseline data, do not provide a breakdown of the immigrant and passenger population from the Ivory Coast.

Recent attempts to map ethnic minorities in the press⁷ have focused on regions instead of a more detailed account by country of nationality. However, community leaders estimate that between 5,000 and 9,000 Ivorians now live in the UK.⁸ It is very difficult to verify these figures but anecdotal evidence does suggest an increase in the Ivorian community since the early 1990s.

1.4 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE IVORIAN COMMUNITY

Most Ivorians live in London. However, a sizeable contingent has moved to the Midlands and there are pockets of the community in Newcastle, Leeds and Glasgow. The attractiveness of London is based upon several factors. It is the best known British city to people in the Ivory Coast and the first Ivorians who migrated to the UK almost all went to London. The city’s cosmopolitan nature offers opportunities to meet other Africans. London is also viewed as the place where it is possible to maximise one’s chances of employment.

The majority of those living outside London are asylum seekers dispersed by the Government policy of alleviating the financial burden on local authorities in the south-east of England. This group broadly includes families, single mothers and many young men. Most of these asylum seekers pursue some form of education while working in low paid jobs, when they are legally allowed to do so. The more ambitious among them venture into self-employment locally or go into higher education in an attempt to secure employment in the UK or prepare for their eventual return to the Ivory Coast. In general, these Ivorians (including refugees and irregular migrants) see the UK as a temporary home. However, they seldom contemplate returning to the Ivory Coast before they are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the UK. In other words, they want to play it safe and would prefer to wait until granted ILR and then go back in the knowledge that they will be able to return to the UK if need be.

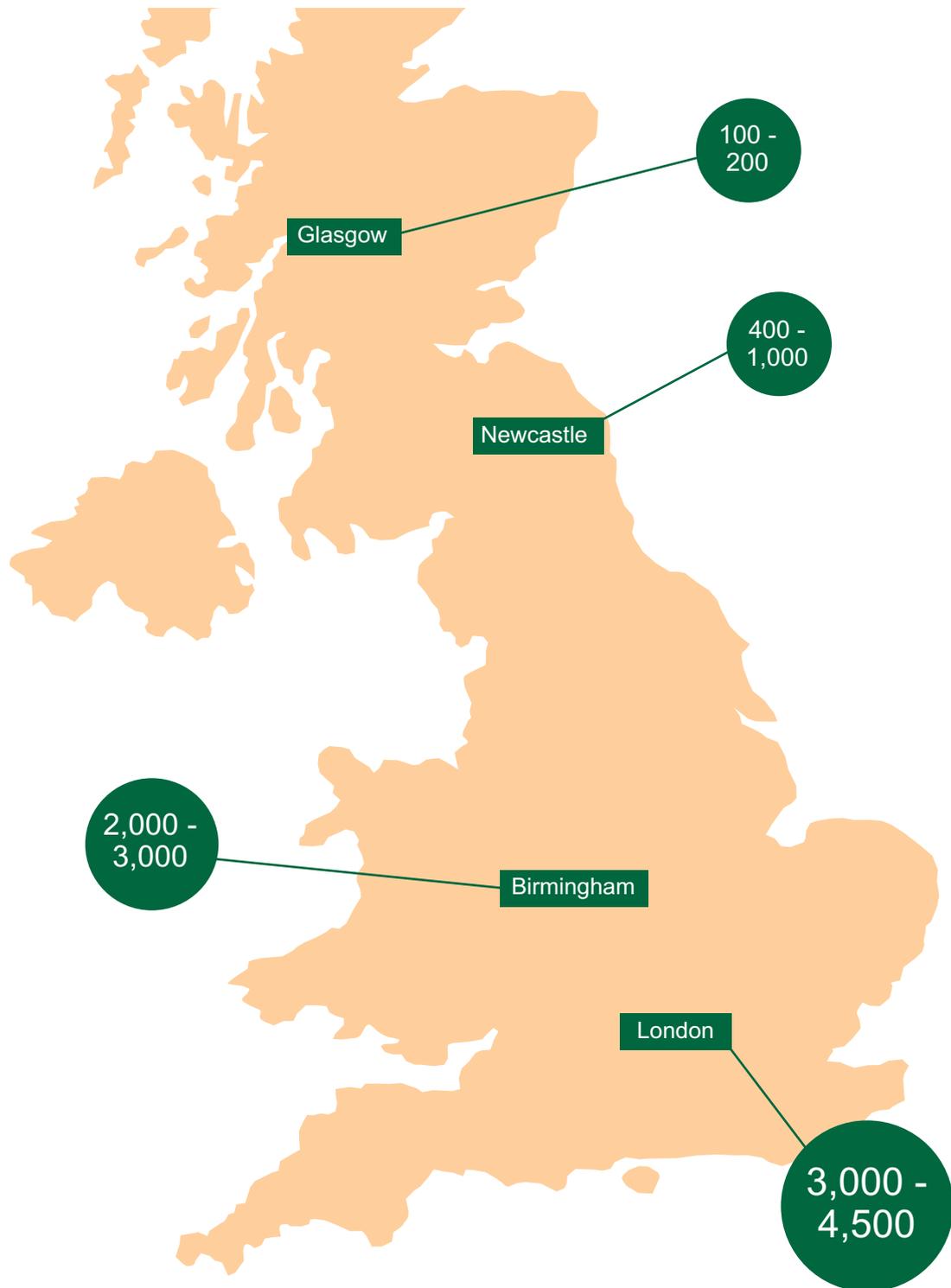
⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/45c063a82.html> accessed on 14/07/2008

⁶ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-publications.html> accessed on 14/07/2008, see the 2006 issue in particular

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/sep/08/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices>, ‘Migrant map of UK reveals surprises’, *The Guardian*. See also, ‘London: a World in one city’ at <http://www.theguardian.co.uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity>.

⁸ This is a lot more than UNHCR estimates would suggest is the case.

Geographical Spread of the Ivorian Community in the UK, 2008



The above figures are based on estimates supplied by community leaders.

1.5 DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP

The majority of Ivorians coming to the UK in the early 1990s were men but there has been a significant increase in the number of women coming to the country in recent years. This is explained mainly by family re-union and a shift in attitude towards migration. Most families now accept that men and women can be equally successful in Europe, judging by some successful examples over the years.

The age group most represented in the community is between 35 and 45 years old. Most came to the UK when they were still in their twenties, usually after a first degree or some form of work experience in the Ivory Coast. This is the group for whom a return is mostly likely to be contemplated. For some, life in the UK has been a series of harsh experiences, involving immigration wrangles and low-paid and low-skilled odd jobs. Once these men and women are eventually granted British citizenship or even Indefinite Leave to Remain, they embark actively on preparation for what they intend to do in the Ivory Coast as returnees. Others have been successful in coping with the harsh realities of moving abroad and are trying to spread their wings either in business or build a career across both the Ivory Coast and the UK.



2 MAPPING EXERCISE OUTCOMES

2.1 INFORMATION CHANNELS

The findings of this report are organised into two parts. The first relates to the communications channels used by the Ivorian community, while the second deals with the use of services. Unfortunately, the response to the questionnaires that were sent out was very low. Only 9 of the 55 which were distributed across the country were returned. However this timid response was counterbalanced by an extensive networking with community leaders and the consultant's participation in several meetings in England and Scotland. It is therefore important to read the following in conjunction with the earlier overview of the Ivorian community, in order to place the report in context.

2.2 PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Word of mouth is the preferred source of information in the Ivorian community. Most Ivorians are concerned with immigration, housing and employment issues. Hence, discreet and reliable information passed on by coded language within the community is important. Immigration matters in particular are considered daunting; the majority of Ivorians therefore rely upon someone with first hand experience to assist them throughout the asylum process.

Most Ivorian workers are in low paid jobs requiring few or no qualifications. Employers in such environments often recruit through word of mouth with the help of their existing members of staff, who are asked to bring in friends or acquaintances. This method of recruitment reinforces the place of word of mouth as an effective means of communication and it serves as a catalyst to new bonds of solidarity in the community.

The Internet is mainly used to keep in touch with news from the Ivory Coast. The website, *www.abidjan.net*, is by far the most consulted site within the community. It has a quasi-official status in the new media industry in the Ivory Coast. Its content provides links to daily newspaper cuttings, chat rooms, services, and radio and TV stations. The website is even the preferred medium for disseminating information in most Ivorian diplomatic representations abroad. The Internet is also extensively used in the community to communicate with friends and families who live in other developed nations. The majority of Ivorians use at least one of the free e-mail address providers, often with a French domain, ".fr". Most Ivorians with access to the Internet do so in the comfort of their own homes but young people generally use it in libraries or at school.

Newspapers are not very popular in the community. Unlike some other francophone groups with regular or *ad hoc* newspapers, there have been no publications just for the Ivorian community since at least 2003. People who read publications mostly use the free English language newspapers they find in public transport on their way to or from work. Examples in London are *Metro* and *London LITE*. Specialist newspapers such as *Loot*, *London Jobs*, and other papers of this nature, are also popular, in particular with men, because of their interest in cars or their need for a new job.

2.3 PREFERRED LANGUAGE AND FREQUENCY OF CONSULTING MEDIA

French, in particular, and its Ivorian version, is the preferred language for oral communication between members of the community. Access to French language news in the UK is largely through paid cable and satellite dishes. Subscription to these channels is often difficult financially but the majority of Ivorians will have watched cable or satellite TV at some stage in their lives in the UK. Most Ivorian adults prefer French language TV channels because they show programmes from their African counterparts, including *Radio Television Ivoirienne*, the State owned media group of the Ivory Coast.

Popular channels include *TV5*, *Canal + international*, *BEN TV* and *OBE TV*. The last two are not exclusively in French but their ethnically-orientated programmes make them very popular with the Ivorian community. Families tend to maintain their subscriptions for longer than single individuals, mainly for the benefit of their children, who watch the same English language programmes as their peers from school.

2.4 OTHER MEDIA

International phone cards are the other main communication resource used by the majority of the Ivorian community. These cards cost £5, on average, and are seen as less expensive than ordinary bills for home phones. With the increase in the availability of mobile phone services in the Ivory Coast, phone card usage has also rocketed because it is now possible to reach out to relatives in even the most remote areas of the country.

Graphical spread of the
African Community in the UK, 2008



3 USE OF LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER SERVICES

3.1 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The bus emerged as the most frequently used mode of transport across the UK. Most Ivorians believe it to be the most affordable yet the most uncomfortable. Car usage in the community is also high. The car is not only used by families, it also represents one of the easiest and least complex employment tools: mini cabs are very popular with a large majority of Ivorian men. The train is also a popular mode of transport in London where the Underground is used very frequently. Most Ivorians living in London use the Underground and the bus routes leading to and from south-east London. The north of London is another area where the Underground and the bus are widely used by the community.

3.2 LOCAL SOCIAL SERVICES

The use of services is conditioned by two main factors: awareness and needs. Immigration, employment and housing rank very high on the community's list of priorities. They reflect their needs and as a result services dealing with them are very popular. The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) are much used by those members of the community who are aware of their purpose. Job Centres are equally important, although they are attended more for benefit claims than job hunting. The latter is usually done through word of mouth.

Other services commonly used by the community are health centres, libraries and education centres. Most of these services are used by women for their families and by young people, among whom awareness of such services is very high.

3.3 PLACES OF WORSHIP

There are two main religions in Ivory Coast: Islam and Christianity. Muslims attend the numerous mosques across the country. They are organised in relatively small groups not only to worship but also for political purposes. Most Muslims in the community are from the Malinke or Mande ethnic group from the north and north-west of the Ivory Coast. Popular mosques attended by the Ivorian Muslim community include: Lewisham; Kent Islamic Centre, Brixton mosque, and the Nigerian mosque in the Old Kent Road, to name but a few.

The majority of Christians in the Ivorian community are either Catholic or Methodists. They appear to be a larger group than their Muslim counterparts. They are particularly vocal in the London area, where some congregations have their own churches or other places for worship. Christian groups are also scattered across the country and organised in congregations alongside other Africans from the same faith.

4 CONSTRAINTS

IOM is a well-known organisation within the Ivorian community and this awareness is almost universally associated with scepticism.

The organisation is seen by many community leaders as uncooperative because of its perceived reluctance to provide financial support for events that could reach out to community members. This sentiment is a great obstacle to genuine collaboration because multipliers try to bargain their help with IOM's work for this kind of financial support.

IOM is also perceived as another branch of the Home Office. The organisation is also thought to be unworthy of collaboration unless it changes its policy of "return" into one that would "help stay".

The scepticism and the antagonistic reaction to the organisation resulted at times in difficult relations between the consultant and some of his interlocutors.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concluding Remarks

Unlike other diaspora communities in the UK, Ivorians are a relatively small community, albeit one which is on the increase. They are also fairly new to the UK as it was only from the 1990s onwards that they started arriving in greater numbers than they did previously. Some Ivorians have come to the UK from France, after failing to settle down there.

Reliable estimates of the numbers of citizens from the Ivory Coast are difficult to compile and current available statistics are rather patchy. However, what we do know is that a large number of them have been or are asylum seekers.

In the Ivory Coast, there is a strong correlation between political allegiance and ethnicity. Hence background knowledge of political developments back home helps to understand the community in the UK. Ivorians over here are often affiliated to community organisations which are generally structured along ethnic lines.

Another dominating feature of Ivorians is their marked preference for information and news in French, though some of them would read the English “freebies” available on the public transport system.

Ivorians are rather sceptical about IOM, often considering it as an appendage of the Home Office.

Ivorians would prefer to contemplate return to their country of origin only if they are granted ILR in the UK. In other words, they would prefer to play it safe, especially in view of the lack of political stability and employment opportunities in the Ivory Coast.

Recommendations

- a) The majority of Ivorians live in Greater London. IOM should increase its efforts to disseminate information in the city through sustained campaigns that would coincide with events organised by Ivorian community organisations.
- b) In other parts of the country there is a very close collaboration between the Ivorian community and other Francophone Africans. IOM should explore ways and means of participating in any joint events organised by these community organisations.
- c) Word of mouth is the preferred source of information in the community. IOM should initiate a close collaboration with shop owners and community leaders through regular meetings and electronic communication, wherever possible. These intermediaries would be effective hubs to disseminate its information by word of mouth.

- d) French is the preferred language for TV viewing but Ivorians do not necessarily want flyers about voluntary return in French: this would appear to single out anyone who may be able to read them. Popular TV channels which could be contacted for publicity material include *BEN*, *OBE* and possibly *TV5*.
- e) African shops (including Ivorian ones), which sell DVD and Video cassettes of popular “soaps” from Nigeria, Gambia, and Ghana should be targeted by IOM information campaigns.
- f) IOM should try to disseminate its information in the free English language newspapers, which are distributed on public transport networks.
- g) IOM should use the quasi-official status and the large traffic enjoyed by www.abidjan.net to reach out to the majority of Ivorians who view it on an almost daily basis.
- h) The community’s umbrella organisation is the most politically active with strong connections with a large section of the community and with the embassy in the UK. IOM should try and take part in most of their activities, particularly those taking place in London.
- i) IOM must strive, in its information campaigns and outreach activities, to dispel the erroneous perceptions which Ivorians have about the role of IOM. It is important to present IOM for what it truly is, i.e. an international organisation which seeks to manage migration for the benefit of all and, in the UK, assists asylum seekers and other migrants who would like to return voluntarily to their home countries.
- j) IOM should also strive, in its information campaigns and outreach activities, to emphasise that the five year re-entry ban⁹ could be an additional barrier to return, if most Ivorians wait for a legal status before deciding to go back to their country.

⁹ Under new rules introduced by the UK Government a re-entry ban of up to 5 years may apply (depending on individual circumstances) to anyone who leaves the UK under an Assisted Voluntary Return programme.

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