



Rabat Process
Euro-African Dialogue on
Migration and Development

Senior Officials Meeting Rabat Process

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Introduction

Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)

- Co-chaired by Nigeria and Switzerland.
- This marks the fourth Senior Officials Meeting of the Rabat Process conducted within the framework of the Cadiz Action Plan 2023-2027. Since 30 January 2025, Nigeria has assumed the chair of the Dialogue, working closely with the member countries of the Steering Committee and supported by the Rabat Process Secretariat, which is implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and funded by the European Union. The Chairmanship of the Rabat Process will be handed over to Switzerland for one year.
- The meeting attracted an audience of over 100 senior officials and delegates from 39 European and African countries, and from international and regional organisations.

Objectives of the meeting

- Present key trends and evolving dynamics shaping migration across the Rabat Process region;
- Review of the implementation of the [Cadiz Action Plan](#) under the Nigerian Chairmanship;
- Handover of the Dialogue Chairmanship to Switzerland, European member of the Steering Committee.
- Presentation and exchanges on the 2026 thematic programme of the Swiss Chairmanship.

This document offers a summary of the **presentations and contributions** made across the four sessions of the Senior Officials Meeting.

1. High-level opening remarks

The **high-level opening ceremony** was chaired by Dr Tijani Aliyu Ahmed, Honourable Federal Commissioner for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), representing Dr Bernard M. Doro, Honourable Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction. It was attended by H.E. Patrick Egloff, Ambassador of Switzerland to Nigeria; H.E. Gautier Mignot, Ambassador of the European Union to Nigeria and to the Economic Community of West African States; Albert Siaw-Boateng, Director of Free Movement of Persons and Migration, ECOWAS Commission; and Sedef Dearing, Deputy Director General and Director of Migration Dialogues and Cooperation, at the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

High-level representatives opened the meeting by underscoring the continued relevance of the Rabat Process as a trusted and constructive platform for cooperation at a time of growing global pressures on migration. **Nigeria**, reflecting on its Chairmanship, highlighted progress made under the Cadiz Action Plan – particularly on youth and skills, missing migrants, migration data, and cross-regional cooperation – and reaffirmed its commitment to partnership and human-centred governance as it handed over the role. **Switzerland** praised Nigeria’s leadership, recalling the Dialogue’s 20-year legacy of trust and cooperation, and outlined its priorities for 2026: protection and asylum, and return, readmission and reintegration, stressing the need for strong coordination amid shifting geopolitical and climate dynamics.

The **European Union** welcomed the achievements of the Nigerian Chairmanship and reaffirmed its support for a comprehensive approach to migration, highlighting progress on protection, evidence-based policymaking and the fight against trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. **ECOWAS** stressed that mobility remains central to West Africa’s integration agenda and encouraged partners to prioritise practical cooperation and cross-border coordination. **ICMPD** acknowledged Nigeria’s inclusive and dynamic programme, noting the expanded cooperation on youth engagement, missing migrants, migration data, climate-induced mobility and sustainable reintegration, and highlighted the Rabat Process’s unique role in supporting route-based, results-oriented cooperation as it enters its 20th anniversary year under Switzerland’s leadership.

2. Session I: Rabat Process migration outlook and strategic directions for 2026

The session opened with introductory remarks from the moderator, Monica Zanette, Head of Region Pan-Africa, at the ICMPD, who set the scene by recalling that migration dynamics across the Rabat Process region continue to evolve rapidly under the combined effects of protracted conflicts, climate-related disasters, governance transitions and increasingly constrained mobility environments. Referring to the [ICMPD Migration Outlook 2026](#), Ms. Zanette underlined that these factors interact in ways that reshape routes, diversify movements and heighten protection needs across West, Central and North Africa, as well as along the corridors towards Europe.

She also noted that African migration remains primarily intra-regional and that movements toward Europe represent only a fraction of overall mobility patterns. Yet, the humanitarian and operational pressures along migratory routes are deepening, with increased reliance on more remote and dangerous paths, narrowing protection space and reduced resources for assistance.

Against this backdrop, the moderator welcomed the participation of IOM, UNHCR, UNODC and the ICRC - each bringing complementary operational and institutional perspectives - to help unpack these trends, explore their implications, and identify areas where strengthened cooperation under the Rabat Process can make a tangible difference in 2026. Their assessments converged on the need for **route-based, protection-centred and evidence-driven approaches** that recognise the complexity of the current landscape and strengthen African-European cooperation.

Evolving migration dynamics and route reconfigurations – IOM

Sophie Nonnemacher, Senior Regional Policy and Liaison Advisor, MENA Regional Office

IOM highlighted a rapidly changing mobility environment, marked by significant shifts in migration routes and increasing volatility. Drawing on the [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#), IOM underscored that irregular arrivals to Europe decreased in 2025 (146,000 vs 195,000 in 2024), driven not by reduced migratory pressures but by major reconfigurations across the Rabat Process corridors. Increased interceptions and return practices across West and North Africa have redirected flows, while persistent instability, increase of smuggling activities and limited availability of safe, regular pathways continue to shape onward movement.

IOM also underscored a significant rise in climate-induced displacement, noting that disaster-related movements in West and Central Africa were four times higher between mid-2024 and mid-2025, driven largely by severe flooding in Chad, Niger, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, conflict-related displacement remains acute, with the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin continuing to generate large-scale movements - over 6.3 million people affected and 3.2 million internally displaced in the Lake Chad region alone as of October 2025. In light of these overlapping pressures, IOM called for **holistic, whole-of-government responses** that integrate humanitarian, economic, environmental and security considerations to ensure more coherent and sustainable migration governance.

In the follow-up exchange, IOM recalled that the [2025 African Union Summit](#) and the [AU-EU Summit in Luanda](#) renewed **shared Africa-Europe priorities on migration**, refocusing attention on the importance of addressing root causes and more broadly supporting resilience and development. Echoing the Cadiz Action Plan, IOM also stressed the importance of expanding regular migration pathways and emphasised that preventing irregular migration demands a corridor-based approach, linking migration management with local development. Finally, IOM noted that return, readmission and sustainable reintegration require coherent international cooperation and stronger engagement of local actors within national development strategies.

Protection risks and humanitarian realities – UNHCR

Arjun Jain, UNHCR Country Representative in Nigeria

UNHCR recalled that forced displacement in West and Central Africa has reached exceptionally high levels, with over 22 million people uprooted across the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and regions receiving inflows from Sudan. Despite widespread assumptions, most displaced people move short distances, remaining within their own countries or neighbouring states. Movements towards Europe remain comparatively limited and typically occur only after multiple, compounded crises affecting safety, livelihoods and services.

UNHCR expressed concern about the growing dangers along migratory routes, where stronger controls have pushed people toward longer and riskier journeys, marked by increased violence, exploitation, kidnapping and trafficking in human beings.

UNHCR also emphasised the need for **enhanced human-rights-based responses**, grounded in systematic registration, access to asylum and protection from refoulement. It encouraged partner countries to reinforce national asylum systems and make fuller use of peer-to-peer learning within the region, noting strong examples such as Nigeria's asylum framework. UNHCR also called for expansion of safe and regular pathways and for returns to remain voluntary and conducive to sustainable reintegration.

Humanitarian protection and risks of death and disappearance – ICRC

Sarah Klingenberg, Regional Internal Displacement & Migration Adviser for Europe and Central Asia, ICRC

The ICRC provided a detailed account of **protection challenges** facing migrants along routes in Africa and Europe, highlighting evidence gathered jointly with 17 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Women and children face particularly acute risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, deliberate family separation, loss of contact and lack of access to essential services. The organisation stressed that these risks are mutually reinforcing, exacerbated by the absence of regular pathways, financial constraints, conflict-driven displacement and uncertainty during transit.

The ICRC advocated for migration cooperation under the Rabat Process to be firmly anchored in international legal obligations, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. It called for systematic protection-risk assessments and greater use of humanitarian data in policy decisions. The ICRC also welcomed the creation of the **Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants**, which as of January 2026 includes 26 Rabat Process partner countries, and highlighted tangible progress already emerging from this initiative.

Looking ahead, it called for stronger operational capacities of focal points and greater emphasis on **prevention and risk reduction** along migratory routes, underlining that the number of migrant deaths and disappearances should serve as a key indicator of humane migration governance.

Criminal justice and the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings – UNODC

Chukwuma Uma Ume, UNODC National Programme Officer

UNODC stressed that addressing trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants requires a strong normative and operational foundation. It noted that enforcement efforts frequently target low-level actors, while high-value criminal networks remain largely untouched due to corruption, fragmented institutional mandates, limited cross-border cooperation and inconsistent data systems.

The agency emphasised the limited use of mutual legal assistance, extradition mechanisms, and joint investigations - factors that weaken efforts to dismantle organised criminal groups. UNODC highlighted the importance of **harmonised legal frameworks**, a shared understanding of trafficking and smuggling definitions, and victim-centred approaches that ensure affected individuals are protected, not criminalised.

Looking ahead, UNODC encouraged the Senior Officials to deepen **cross-regional cooperation** along the entire migration routes. It emphasised the need to strengthen joint investigations and prosecutions, particularly against high-value actors, and to invest in building the capacity of judges, investigators and prosecutors. The agency also encouraged constructive engagement with European partners to expand regular pathways, including temporary and skills-based schemes, as a means of reducing reliance on smuggling networks.

Overall direction for the Rabat Process in 2026

Across their interventions, the partner international organisations underscored the importance of a **coherent, route-based and people-centred approach to migration governance**. They collectively called for **stronger cooperation** between African and European partners on:

- protection along migratory routes;
- expanded regular and skills-based mobility;
- improved data and evidence for policymaking;

- strengthened justice and law-enforcement cooperation;
- sustainable and community-based reintegration;
- and the systematic integration of humanitarian and protection considerations.

These insights will support the Rabat Process in refining its priorities for 2026, reinforcing the Dialogue's commitment to coordinated, balanced and human-centred migration governance.

During the discussion, the **Central African Republic** highlighted the need for reliable and interoperable data systems to manage population movements, calling for a unified information-collection mechanism within the Rabat Process, a point to which partner organisations responded by reaffirming their support for harmonised definitions, stronger data architecture and better use of existing regional tools. **Togo** stressed the importance of addressing the drivers of irregular migration, warning that limited economic opportunities push young people towards dangerous journeys, and cautioning that reintegration assistance must not inadvertently encourage irregular attempts; in response, **IOM** reiterated its focus on community-based reintegration, while **UNHCR** and the **ICRC** underscored the need to integrate protection and dignity into all interventions. **Guinea** emphasised that migration governance must be rooted in peace, the rule of law and human development, calling for strengthened institutions, regional cooperation and rights-based approaches; partner agencies echoed this, with UNHCR recalling states' protection obligations along all routes, **UNODC** stressing the need for victim-centred justice frameworks, and IOM advocating for migration policies aligned with broader development strategies.

3. Session II: Reflecting on Nigeria's Chairmanship of the Rabat Process

Session II provided an opportunity to reflect on the achievements, priorities and lessons of Nigeria's Chairmanship of the Rabat Process, guided by the objective of promoting a practical, inclusive and context-responsive Dialogue. The session opened with the premiere of a [highlights video](#) showcasing the dynamic engagement that characterised the Nigerian Chairmanship throughout 2025.

Building on this introduction, **Nigeria** presented the activities organised during its mandate. In total, **11 actions** were addressed across **four thematic areas** of the Cadiz Action Plan. The first Thematic Meeting on Youth, education and innovation (Abuja, May 2025, co-chaired with Spain) underscored the role of young people, human capital, and innovation in shaping migration aspirations and opportunities. This was followed by a Thematic Meeting on missing migrants (Banjul, July 2025, co-chaired by The Gambia and Switzerland, with the support of the ICRC) which placed renewed attention on migrant protection, cooperation on search and identification, and support for families. Nigeria also highlighted the organisation of the first Rabat Process webinar on migration data, which reaffirmed the need for reliable, harmonised and timely data to inform policy choices. A major milestone was the Joint Thematic Meeting of the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey Processes (Lagos, November 2025, co-chaired with France), which reflected growing recognition that trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants require coordinated, cross-dialogue responses. Finally, Nigeria recalled the special event on climate-induced mobility (Abuja, January 2026, co-chaired with Switzerland), which drew attention to the importance of integrating climate considerations more systematically into national and regional strategies.

Area 1: *Development benefits of migration and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.*

Thematic Meeting on [Youth, Education and Innovation: Driving the Future of Migration](#)

Reaffirming its commitment to a human-rights-based, constructive and comprehensive approach to migration, **Spain** underlined the meeting's milestones, including the active participation of African youth changemakers, the contributions of African academia and diaspora experts, and the presentation of innovative initiatives such as National Electronic Labour Exchange ([NELEX platform](#)), the upcoming [EU Talent Pool](#), and successful circular-migration models with Morocco, as well as positive cooperation with Senegal, including the peer-to-peer engagement promoted through Senegal's BAOS regional network. Spain concluded by stressing that youth are

central to the future of EU-Africa relations, and that the Abuja meeting marked an important step toward a more equal and forward-looking dialogue.

Webinar on [Migration data for evidence-based policymaking in the Rabat Process region](#)

Nigeria reflected on the first dedicated thematic webinar on migration data, which brought together 70 participants, including officials from 13 European and 16 African partner countries, as well as experts from national statistical offices, migration observatories, and regional and international organisations. The discussions confirmed that harmonised and reliable data is essential for effective policymaking and highlighted the need for capacity building, whole-of-government coordination, and stronger regional collaboration.

Independent expert **Jason Gagnon**, who moderated the webinar, underlined that reliable, timely and harmonised data is essential for effective, rights-based policymaking, and stressed the pivotal role of national and regional observatories in standardising methods, consolidating data and linking research to policy. Contributions from Eurostat, the EU Joint Research Center, ECOWAS, StatAfric and several partner countries showed growing convergence around shared standards, while also identifying persistent gaps such as inconsistent definitions, limited resources and underuse of administrative data. M. Gagnon concluded by calling for smarter, purpose-driven data collection and stronger coordination across stakeholders, noting that the Rabat Process provides a solid foundation for advancing coherence and cross-regional learning.

Area 3: [Protection and asylum](#)

Thematic Meeting on [Advancing cooperation on missing migrants in the Rabat Process region](#)

The Gambia highlighted the significant progress achieved through the July Thematic meeting, co-chaired with Switzerland and supported by the ICRC. The first in-person exchange of the **[Network of National Focal Points on Missing Migrants](#)** gathered over 100 participants from 27 partner countries and produced action-oriented recommendations on preventing loss of life, improving search and identification, and supporting affected families. At national level, The Gambia has strengthened inter-agency frameworks and formally included families of missing migrants as key stakeholders in its task force's mandate, an important shift toward a rights- and family-centred approach. Looking ahead, The Gambia plans to conduct inclusive consultations to inform a national implementation plan on missing migrants, and reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with states, international organisations, civil society and affected families to advance a coordinated, human-centred response.

Switzerland highlighted the scale and urgency of the issue of missing migrants, noting record numbers of deaths and disappearances¹, especially along the Central Mediterranean route. It recalled its long-standing leadership on this issue, including integrating missing migrants into the Cadiz Action Plan, co-organising two thematic meetings with The Gambia and the ICRC, and establishing the Network of National Focal Points, now counting 26 partner countries in the Rabat Process region. Switzerland reaffirmed that only concerted, coordinated action can address this tragedy and committed to strengthening the Network and sustaining momentum during its Chairmanship.

The **ICRC** welcomed the progress achieved by the Network and underscored that addressing missing migrants relies primarily on state-led, multi-stakeholder cooperation. It highlighted practical advances emerging from peer learning - such as improved cross-border coordination in Mauritania and The Gambia - and encouraged remaining States to designate focal points and deepen engagement to turn promising practices into widespread norms.

Area 4: [Prevention irregular migration, fight smuggling of migrants & trafficking in human beings](#)

Thematic meeting on [Combatting migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings: Enhancing prevention, protection and prosecution frameworks](#)

In its capacity as Chair of the Khartoum Process, **France** emphasised the importance of cross-dialogue cooperation. It highlighted the success of the first joint Rabat-Khartoum-Niamey thematic meeting, which brought together nearly 200 participants in Lagos, Nigeria. Key conclusions included the need for an integrated regional approach,

¹ According to the IOM, nearly 9,000 people disappeared in 2024, the deadliest year on record: www.iom.int/news/2024-deadliest-year-record-migrants-new-iom-data-reveals

strengthened judicial cooperation, improved victim identification and protection, and a shared commitment to a 4-P approach (prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships). The meeting showed that irregular migration dynamics are increasingly complex, shaped by conflicts, climate pressures and rapidly adapting criminal networks, making integrated regional responses essential. France noted encouraging advances in victim protection and judicial cooperation, including early identification, digital investigation tools and growing involvement of local communities. It emphasised a broad consensus around a comprehensive 4-P approach - prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships - and stressed that the fight against trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling remains a shared political priority.

Interventions from the floor stressed solidarity, capacity building and African peer exchange. The Gambia highlighted the importance of collective responsibility and continued collaboration. The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) called for strengthened capacity building, including South-South and sub-regional cooperation, and encouraged progress on circular migration and labour-mobility models. The Nigerian Civil Society Network on Migration and Development welcomed the growing inclusion of non-state actors and encouraged future chairmanships to include their participation and funding more consistently.

Mid-cycle review of the Cadiz Action Plan (2023-2027)

Following the retrospective on Nigeria's Chairmanship, the Rabat Process Secretariat presented the Mid-cycle review of the Cadiz Action Plan, conducted in the second half of 2025 by ICMPD's Strategy, Results and Learning Unit. The review was described as a **constructive, forward-looking exercise** aimed at taking stock of progress since 2023, drawing collective lessons and guiding priorities for the remainder of the implementation period. Using a mixed methodology (document analysis, consultations with key actors and a survey of National Focal Points), the review assessed the Rabat Process's contribution as a platform for **dialogue, coordination and policy influence**. Senior officials were invited to use the findings as a **shared basis for strategic reflection** as the Rabat Process enters the second half of the CAP implementation period.

Overall progress from January 2023 to December 2025 was viewed positively. Thematic meetings created regular opportunities for exchange and learning, supported by substantive background documents, and in some cases contributed to concrete national developments. The creation of the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants was cited as a clear example of dialogue translating into sustained cooperation. Partners continue to value the Dialogue as a legitimate multilateral space for peer learning, confidence-building and coordination.

The analysis of the CAP's five priority areas showed diverse levels of engagement across themes, reflecting varied national contexts and priorities. Some areas, such as regular migration and mobility (Area 2), benefitted from particularly active involvement. Others saw progress in institutionalising topics, including migrant protection and sustainable reintegration, while also expanding participation to youth, civil society and new stakeholder groups.

The mid-term review identified **four strategic recommendations** to guide the remainder of the CAP cycle:

1. **Translate dialogue outputs into concrete national follow-up.** Partners are encouraged to shift from producing recommendations to implementing them. This includes developing national overviews of the CAP implementation, establishing post-meeting reporting routine for National Focal Points, and encourage reference countries to prepare short progress notes for their respective Areas.
2. **Clarify the position of the CAP within the broader dialogue architecture.** To reduce perceptions of overlap, future Chairs are encouraged to explain the added value of each planned activity "through a CAP lens" - how it complements other processes and contributes directly to the CAP implementation.
3. **Strengthen political ownership by anchoring CAP priorities in national policy cycles and budgets.** Partners could use existing national coordination mechanisms for CAP follow-up, explicitly reference the CAP priorities in national strategies, and use Senior Officials Meetings as periodic stocktaking moments to highlight concrete national progress.
4. **Broaden stakeholder engagement in a cost-efficient way.** Inclusivity can be enhanced by working through existing networks (diaspora, CSOs, private sector), using hybrid participation formats, and replicating successful engagement models at future thematic meetings.

Support programme for the Africa-EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue

Updates of the JVAP Follow-Up

Senior officials were briefed on recent developments within the [JVAP Follow-up](#), which has, since 2015, served as a shared monitoring platform for partners of the Rabat and Khartoum Processes to closely follow the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan. In 2025, a completely new infrastructure as well as a modernised methodology were launched, building on extensive consultations held in 2024. This upgraded framework enabled the first annual data-collection cycle as well as delegated access for multi-user data entry, to which **20 partners** contributed, reflecting strong engagement and ownership across the Dialogue.

Preliminary findings, currently in the last stages of a detailed validation, show both clear progress and persistent gaps. A significant share of reported initiatives - 60% of all initiatives and 42% of all funding - were submitted by DG ECHO, almost entirely under Domain 3 (Protection and asylum), with 408 out of 502 interventions attributed to this area. As in previous cycles, Domains 1 and 3 remain the most heavily invested, and projects continue to represent the vast majority of reported actions (97%), with policies accounting for 3%. These insights provide a robust basis for strengthening future programming, identifying under-reported areas, and enhancing knowledge-management practices.

Looking ahead, the JVAP Follow-up team will focus on completing data validation, producing a final narrative report, and updating the dashboards to continue supporting policymaking and dialogue. Efforts will also be made to improve partner guidance and database accessibility, and to lay the groundwork for the 2026 data-collection cycle, further strengthening JVAP Follow-up as a reliable instrument for transparency, coordination and evidence-based cooperation.

Updates of the MMD Grant Facility

One year after its launch, the first cycle of grants of the **MMD Grant Facility** has already demonstrated the strategic value and role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in advancing key priorities of both the [Joint Valletta Action Plan](#) and the [Cadiz Action Plan](#), particularly in the areas of protection and asylum, development benefits of migration, and the prevention of irregular migration. CSOs were highlighted not only as operational partners, but also as important contributors to an informed Africa-Europe dialogue.

The MMD Grant Facility - jointly funded by the EU and implemented by ICMPD - supports initiatives led by CSOs, research institutions, diaspora organisations and other nonstate actors, often in partnership with local authorities. Its objectives are to contribute to the **operationalisation of dialogue commitments** and to **foster knowledge sharing** by generating evidence and policy recommendations that enrich discussions.

In the **Rabat Process region**, **4 grants** have been awarded so far, supporting 11 CSOs across 10 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, The Gambia, Togo). Across the Pan-Africa region more broadly, 8 grants have benefited 29 CSOs in 25 countries, demonstrating the Grant Facility's wide geographic reach. Projects in the Rabat Process region cover the following JVAP domains (*click the links to explore the projects*):

- **Domain 1 - Regular migration and mobility:** [Connect' Diasporas: Partnerships with Local Authorities](#)
- **Domain 3 - Protection:** [PROMISE: Comprehensive protection and assistance based on the needs of migrants and vulnerable host communities to achieve more inclusive and resilient socioeconomic empowerment.](#)
- **Domain 4 - Irregular migration and trafficking:**
 - [SAFE-MIT: A shared foundation to protect against risks of irregular migration and trafficking;](#)
 - [OUESTAF - Regional pathways for the prevention of irregular migration, migrant smuggling, human trafficking and the protection of women and youth in West Africa and the Sahel.](#)

4. Session III: The Abuja Knowledge Paper | Partnering for sustainable reintegration: Advancing national reintegration systems led by countries of origin

Session III introduced the [Abuja Knowledge Paper](#)² developed under the Nigerian Chairmanship, with support from ICMPD. The Paper is a milestone in the Dialogue, consolidating evidence and stakeholder perspectives on nationally owned reintegration systems led by countries of origin (CoOs), and proposing a partnership approach to make reintegration more sustainable and better aligned with national priorities.

The session was moderated by Nazanine Nozarian, ICMPD Senior Thematic Specialist on Return, Readmission and Reintegration, and brought together a diverse panel of contributing actors. The discussion featured Cédric Dekeyser, Reintegration expert and leading author of the Paper, alongside Ambassador Catherine Udida, Director of Migrants Affairs Department at the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), Nigeria; Alexandra Sa Carvalho, Deputy Head, International Affairs Unit at DG HOME; and Lacinia Ouattara, Deputy Director in charge of prospecting, skills mapping, and coordination of employment opportunities, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and Ivorians Abroad, responsible for African Integration and Ivorians Abroad. Together, the panellists reflected on the Paper's findings and explored their implications for national and regional reintegration policies.



Core insights

In his presentation, M. Dekeyser noted the growing attention to reintegration systems led by CoOs and the benefits of such approaches. He explained that **nationally led systems** can improve sustainability, ensure accessibility and continuity of services beyond project timelines, align reintegration within local priorities and integrating them within existing sectoral policies, reduce reliance on short-term and fragmented external support, and reinforce accountability. He presented a set of **foundational elements** required for effective systems: political commitment, clear policy and institutional frameworks, a mandated lead agency, whole-of-government and whole-of-society engagement, accessible public services adapted to returnees' needs, robust coordination and referral mechanisms, strong data and monitoring and evaluation systems, decentralised service delivery, and dedicated resources.

He underlined that these systems must be built progressively, with strong country ownership, and with external partners adapting their support to national priorities, co-designing programmes, and ensuring long-term, coordinated assistance. He also addressed the limitations and concerns identified by stakeholders, including capacity gaps, due-diligence requirements, reluctance of some countries of destination to fully relinquish control, and questions around financial sustainability.

Panel discussion

During the panel discussion, **Nigeria** emphasised the country's experience with high levels of return and the need to strengthen reintegration governance to respond to diverse vulnerabilities. Nigeria described how its multi-layered migration governance architecture - from the national committee to technical working groups and sub-national reintegration committees - enables coordinated, decentralised and responsive reintegration services. Nigeria underlined the importance of community preparedness, psychosocial support, and case management, noting that reintegration begins from the moment of arrival and relies strongly on local-level engagement.

DG HOME reaffirmed the EU's strong support for national ownership as the basis for credible, scalable and sustainable reintegration. The EU highlighted lessons learned from major programmes, including the [EU-IOM Joint Initiative](#) and [Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme \(MPRR\)](#), and emphasised the need to shift from fragmented, individual packages towards support for national systems, legal frameworks, coordination mechanisms and state-led services. The Commission also described its [Team Europe](#) approach, aimed at improving

² The Abuja Knowledge Paper (full report and executive summary) is available on the Rabat Process website: www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/publications/the-abuja-knowledge-paper-on-sustainable-reintegration

coherence across EU institutions and Member States and aligning support with partner countries' development agendas.

Côte d'Ivoire shared its experience in overcoming fragmentation through the validation of a National Referral Mechanism and a National Strategy on Return and Reintegration, bringing multiple actors together under a single framework. While the country does not yet have a dedicated reintegration budget line, several ministries contribute through existing social support mechanisms, and discussions are underway to establish a reintegration budget allocation and a diaspora support fund to ensure long-term sustainability.

Main takeaways and recommendations

Across the session, several converging messages emerged:

- **Reintegration should be treated as a public policy domain**, anchored in national systems, with clearly defined roles, budgets, and coordination mechanisms.
- The **transition toward nationally led systems must be gradual**, context-specific and supported by long-term, coherent technical and financial assistance.
- **Decentralisation and local-level service delivery are essential** to ensure accessibility and tailored support for returnees across diverse regions.
- Reintegration should be approached through a **whole-of-government** and **whole-of-society** model, involving ministries, local authorities, CSOs, private sector actors and communities.
- External partners should prioritise **alignment, co-design and complementarity**, avoiding parallel systems and ensuring support strengthens national institutions.
- Sustainable reintegration requires **linking reintegration efforts with broader development and social policies**, including employment, social protection, education and community development.
- Sustainable reintegration must be **rights-based, ensuring dignity, protection, and non-discrimination** for all returnees, including those returning involuntarily.

In the plenary session, **Senegal** welcomed the paradigm shift toward national ownership, stressing the importance of reintegration approaches that promote community impact, ensure rights-respecting returns, and combat misinformation. The intervention emphasised the need for strong mechanisms to support both voluntary and involuntary returnees, urging partners to strengthen coordination and uphold human dignity throughout the return process. **IOM** echoed the importance of coherent systems, reminding participants that migration in West and Central Africa is predominantly intra-regional. It highlighted the need for reintegration policies that reflect this reality, rooted in national systems, supported by regional frameworks, and strengthened through coordination between migration and development actors, particularly at the local level. From a national implementation perspective, a reintegration officer from **Nigeria** welcomed the Knowledge Paper as a practical reference for daily operations. The intervention emphasised the need for dignified and rights-based returns, with early and tailored support for returnees, especially those arriving in vulnerable situations.

The session concluded with a shared recognition that the Abuja Knowledge Paper provides a solid foundation for continued dialogue and cooperation under the Rabat Process and that the transition toward nationally owned systems will require sustained partnership, policy coherence, and collective ambition.

5. Handing over the Chairmanship and presenting Switzerland's programme for 2026

During the closing session, **Nigeria**, represented by Dr Tijani Aliyu Ahmed, Honourable Federal Commissioner for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), representing Dr Bernard M. Doro, Honourable Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, **officially handed over the Chairmanship of the Dialogue to Switzerland**, represented by H.E. Patrick Egloff, Ambassador of Switzerland to Nigeria, representing H.E. Vincenzo Mascioli, State Secretary for Migration, State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Federal Department of Justice and Police. The latter was accompanied by Cristina Probst-Lopez, Head of International Cooperation, State

Secretariat for Migration, Federal Department of Justice and Police, who outlined the priorities of Switzerland's tenure as Chair of the Rabat Process.

Switzerland underscored that 2026 will be a milestone year, marking the 20th anniversary of the Dialogue. This anniversary is both a moment of reflection - recognising twenty years of trust-building and partnership between countries of origin, transit and destination - and a moment to chart the way forward. The incoming Chairmanship will build on the strong foundations laid by previous chairs, combining continuity with innovation and focusing on areas that require renewed attention.

Switzerland announced two main thematic priorities:

- **Protection and Asylum (Area 3)**, with special attention to **unaccompanied minors** and **missing migrants**, who face acute vulnerabilities along migration routes. Switzerland committed to strengthening cross-border cooperation, fostering peer exchange among countries of origin, transit and destination, and consolidating the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants, developed jointly with The Gambia and supported by the ICRC.
- **Return, Readmission and Reintegration (Area 5)**, building on the Abuja Knowledge Paper, Switzerland aims to deepen dialogue on good practices in readmission and consular cooperation, facilitate voluntary return, reflect on legal identity and civil registry systems, and explore approaches linking development programming with long-term reintegration. Switzerland stressed its intention to create spaces for constructive exchanges that benefit all partner countries.

In a spirit of continuity, Switzerland also reaffirmed commitment to **preventing irregular migration**, and to **combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings**, building on progress initiated under previous Chairmanships. Switzerland concluded its programme presentation by calling for whole-of-society engagement, strong partnerships at all levels, and sustained commitment from all Dialogue members.

In the handover, Nigeria shared closing reflections and thanked partner countries, organisations and the Rabat Process Secretariat for the constructive spirit that shaped its Chairmanship. It expressed full confidence in Switzerland's ability to ensure continuity and carry forward shared priorities and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the incoming Chair so that the Dialogue remains credible, responsive and action-oriented.

Switzerland, in formally accepting the Chairmanship, warmly thanked Nigeria for its excellent organisation and inclusive leadership. It noted that the discussions in Abuja reaffirmed the Rabat Process as a unique dialogue grounded in partnership, trust and mutual respect, and emphasised that lasting progress depends on **whole-of-route cooperation** across countries of origin, transit and destination. Switzerland closed by inviting all senior officials to leave Abuja with a renewed sense of purpose, signalling its readiness to guide the Dialogue through its 20th-anniversary year and to turn shared priorities into tangible results through a pragmatic, collaborative and human-centred Chairmanship in 2026.

PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH

- The meeting attracted over 100 participants, including from 39 European and African countries, and from international and regional organisations.
- Participants expressed very high overall satisfaction with the Senior Officials Meeting, unanimously recognising the relevance of the agenda, the quality of presentations, and the strong organisation provided by Nigeria. Satisfaction levels across all sessions were also outstanding, each achieving over 95% positive feedback, with working documents praised for making discussions clear, focused and practical.
- The event was covered by several local media outlets, including NTA Network and News Extra, and interviews are also available on YouTube.
- The Chairmanship handover was featured on ICMPD's corporate website through an [In-focus article](#).