

Repatriated. What Next?



Editor's Note

The deportation flight lands at dawn. The repatriation bus crosses the border at dusk. The evacuation plane touches down in the rain. And then what?

Oumar Diallo thought his ordeal was over when he boarded the plane home to Guinea. He had been intercepted at sea and limped past corpses in the Sahara. The EU-funded programme that flew him back promised follow-up assistance.

He received a five-day orientation course, but when he asked for medical help for a foot injury, he was told it was impossible. Kante, a 20-year-old from the same country, returned with dreams of learning a trade. However, the IOM ignored his calls. When he went to their office, they told him to stop calling. Between 2022 and 2025, more than 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants were repatriated from North Africa through EU-funded programmes. A staggering \$380 million was allocated for post-return assistance.

The African pattern is not different. From South Africa alone, over 100,000 Africans have returned since May 2026, fleeing a fresh wave of xenophobic attacks. Nigeria has promised one million naira (\$730) to each returnee. Ghana and Zimbabwe have secured 120 job opportunities and registered over 15,000 returnees for employment, respectively. But on the ground, the gap between announcement and arrival is very wide. Iniebong James returned to Lagos after ten years to find fuel prices sixteen times higher than when he left, in addition to trauma and community-



level stigma, prompting him to call for government support. Ahamadi Assani returned to Malawi with nothing, back into the very poverty he had fled.

Common features of the stories of African migrants returning home are the silence that follows the landing; the returnee who steps off the plane into a home that feels absolutely foreign; the trauma, stigma, and precarious living conditions; and governments that promise mental health support, vocational training, and seed capital while the returnees wait and wait. Some of these promises have only recently been announced, and the world watches as months pass without implementation.

Cover Illustration

The cover design features a signpost of directional markers, symbolizing the many pathways and possibilities associated with human mobility. The crowd gathered beneath it evokes the uncertainty that often accompanies migration journeys.

Migration Monitor

As the Global North and South Africa continue to crack down on African migrants using both the carrot and the stick, African nations are increasingly becoming destinations for displaced Africans who migrated in search of a better life or asylum. After returning home, what awaits these returnees who touch down in their countries of origin through deportation, repatriation, and evacuation? What are they going through, and what systems exist to support them and address the multitude of problems commonly associated with returned migrants?

GUINEA

More than 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants were repatriated from North Africa between 2022 and 2025 through EU-funded IOM programmes. The budget for repatriation and follow-up support reached \$380 million. Oumar Bella Diallo, 24, returned to Guinea after nearly a year of trying to reach Europe. The IOM promised him business support, but he never received it. Kabinet Kante, 20, wanted to learn a trade, but the IOM, which had promised him support, ignored his calls. When he went to their office, they told him to stop calling. He later started a WhatsApp group of more than fifty frustrated returnees who were unemployed and in critical need of support

NIGERIA

Over 1,000 Nigerians registered for voluntary return from South Africa. The government promised one million naira to each repatriated citizen. Iniebong James, 52, returned after ten years to find fuel prices sixteen times higher than when he left. He



came back to Nigeria with nothing after establishing a successful business in South Africa. Other returnees recounted losing businesses worth millions of naira and battling the stigma of being labelled criminals. The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons has outlined plans for psychosocial and socioeconomic support. But for now, they remain on paper, and the wait continues.

KENYA

Tens of thousands of Kenyans migrate to Gulf states every year. Returning workers face limited livelihood opportunities, financial constraints, psychosocial distress, and inadequate support services. On May 28, 2026, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, in partnership with the

International Labour Organization (ILO), convened a meeting to review the draft National Return and Reintegration Strategy. 11 returned migrant workers participated. The strategy remains in draft form, and implementation is still pending. For now, the promises exist on paper while returnees navigate the silence that follows their arrival and battle the various challenges of post-return life.

GHANA

Approximately 800 Ghanaians registered for evacuation from South Africa. The first 300 arrived in Accra in May 2026, including 26 who had been jailed for visa violations. The Foreign Minister, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, promised psychosocial support, financial reintegration packages, and 120 job opportunities through business owners. He also called on more entrepreneurs to offer placements to support the returnees. Ghanaian returnees were not different from

those in other African countries. The story is the same—lack, trauma, stigma, and shame. The promises have been made; the world now watches to see how they will be implemented.

ZIMBABWE

Nearly 21,300 citizens returned from South Africa through government-assisted arrangements since May 2026. Another 56,830 self-repatriated. Returnees arrived at Beitbridge reception centre, describing assault, robbery, and forced displacement. The centre processes 1,000 returnees daily. The IFRC reported long waits, cold nights, limited shelter, food, water, and psychosocial support. Over 15,000 returnees have reportedly been registered for employment. Even though it remains an announcement, with no evidence of implementation, the scale of need among returnees dwarfs the response from the authorities.





MALAWI

South Africa processed the exit of over 15,000 Malawian nationals. Ahamadi Assani returned home with free transport, saying he now has nothing to do and that his biggest challenge is returning to the very poverty he had escaped, only to find it in an even worse form. Another returnee, Hawa Troko, said she received no support and is now trying to figure out how to survive with her children, who were repatriated alongside her. This signals the silent battles returnees are fighting in Malawi, with no structured support in sight.

ETHIOPIA

More than 350,000 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia between 2017 and 2020. A Danish Institute for International Studies report found male returnees face severe reintegration challenges. Most arrive with empty pockets and debt up to 70,000 birr. They are called 50/50s, suggesting they are only half sane. Communities consider them losers. "There is no place for me here," one returnee said, lamenting how he has been treated since returning home.

From our Writers

Africa in Motion: Which Countries Are Gaining and Losing Their People?

Victor Ejechi

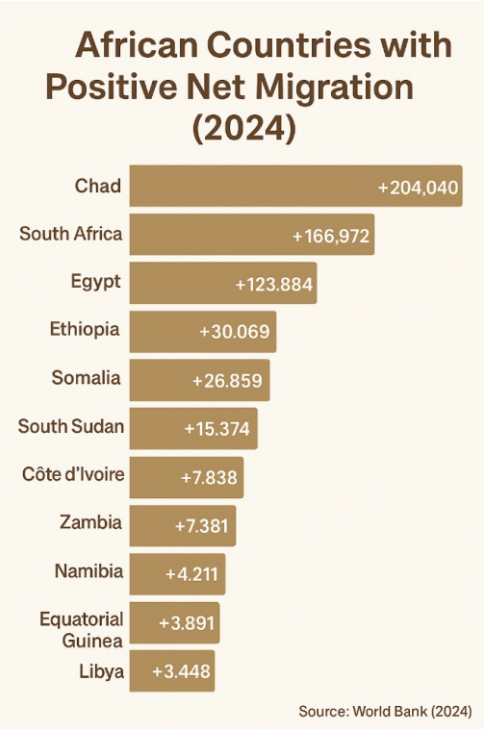
Behind the numbers, a story of movement, memory, and meaning on a restless continent.

When most people think of African migration, what typically comes to mind are the familiar, often tragic, images: overcrowded boats drifting across the Mediterranean, desperate journeys through the Sahara, refugee camps bursting at the seams. These snapshots — dramatic and emotive — dominate headlines and shape perceptions. However, they only tell part of the story.

Beneath the surface is a quieter, more complex narrative unfolding, one that isn't captured by viral videos or dramatic rescue missions, but by cold, complex data. The latest 2024 figures from the World Bank offer a lens into Africa's migration dynamics, mapping not just where people are going, but what they're fleeing, and what they're hoping to find. This isn't merely about migration as a crisis; it's about migration as a barometer of a nation's strength, stability, and vision for the future.

The numbers paint a divided continent. Thirteen African countries experienced positive net migration last year, indicating that more people arrived than departed. In contrast, 41 countries saw more exits than entries.





These shifts are not random, they are deeply shaped by conflict, governance, opportunity, economic strain, and even climate pressure, resulting as a map of movement that reflects both where people are fleeing and where they still see a future worth fighting for.

Take Chad, for instance, a landlocked country often overshadowed in geopolitical conversations. In 2024, it recorded the highest net migration gain on the continent, with over 204,000 new arrivals.

Most of these are refugees fleeing the civil war in neighbouring Sudan, where over half a million people were forced to flee following the escalation of armed conflict. Chad, despite its own fragility, has become an unexpected shelter in the storm. It's a

reminder that even the most precarious states can become lifelines when regional crises erupt.

Furthermore, South Africa, long seen as the economic powerhouse of the continent, registered the second-highest net gain, with nearly 167,000 people arriving in 2024. Despite growing social tensions and economic challenges at home, it continues to act as a magnet, not just for its neighbours like Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but increasingly for migrants from across the continent seeking work, education, and a semblance of stability.

In contrast, Sudan topped the list of countries with negative net migration, losing more than 544,000 people in one year alone. The magnitude of this displacement mirrors the severity of the crisis gripping the country. But Sudan is not an outlier.

Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mali, and Nigeria — each facing their own blend of political upheaval, economic strain, and insecurity — also reported significant population losses. For some, this loss is measured in the number of labourers crossing borders. For others, it's a slow leak of human capital: doctors, engineers, teachers — the very people needed to rebuild broken systems.

However, what is especially striking about Africa's migration landscape in 2024 is the significant proportion of movement that's intra-African. While Europe and North America remain destinations for many, the bulk of migration on the continent is happening within its own borders: from conflict zones to calmer neighbours, from

rural hardship to urban opportunity, from stagnation to possibility.

This internal mobility is both a challenge and an opportunity. It strains infrastructure and public services in receiving countries, many of which are already under pressure. Yet, it also highlights the continent’s interconnectedness, a regional resilience born out of necessity and proximity.

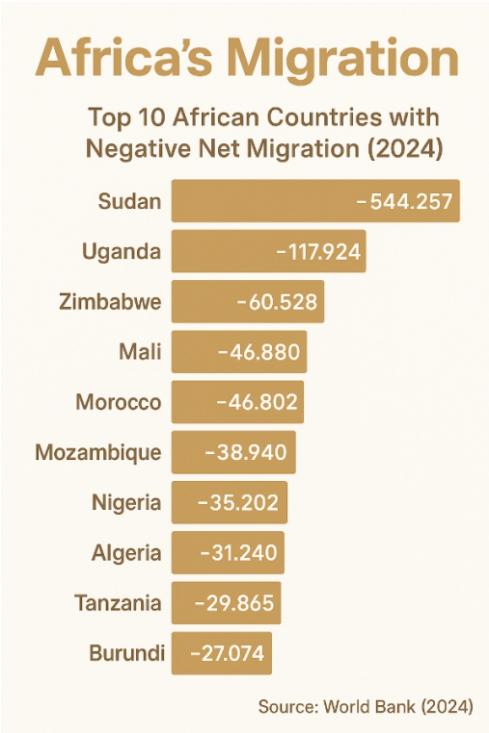
Migration is often portrayed as a symptom of failure from the government’s inability to meet the needs of their people. But it can also be a sign of agency. People are not just running away; they are moving toward something. A better school for their children. A safer street. A job that pays. A border that feels more like a gateway than a wall.

So, where are Africans going, and why? what does the balance, or imbalance, of these movements say about the countries they leave behind, and the ones they move toward?

Who’s Gaining, Who’s Losing

Thirteen African countries recorded positive net migration in 2024. Chad, South Africa, and Egypt top the list. Others, like Ethiopia, Somalia, Côte d’Ivoire, and South Sudan, saw smaller but notable inflows. For many, these gains are less about prosperity and more about proximity to crisis. Chad’s gain is almost entirely due to Sudan’s civil war, which has driven hundreds of thousands across the border. South Sudan and Ethiopia also benefited from regional spillover. Meanwhile, Côte d’Ivoire

continues to act as a labour hub in West Africa, attracting migrants from neighbouring countries wracked by political instability or economic malaise.



However, migration inflows also reflect domestic realities. Egypt’s +123,884 net migration figure in 2024 is partly due to its role as a transit state for both sub-Saharan Africans and Middle Easterners. It also remains a centre of attraction for regional professionals and students, despite a worsening economic crisis.

At the other end of the spectrum, 41 African countries lost more people than they gained. Sudan’s outflow was the most dramatic, but others — including

Uganda (-117,924), Zimbabwe (-60,528), Mali (-46,880), Morocco (-46,802), and Nigeria (-35,202) — also recorded sharp losses. These are countries either in conflict, economic turmoil, or transition, and sometimes all three at once.

In North Africa, Morocco and Algeria continue to see young people leaving in large numbers, often risking dangerous crossings to Europe due to lack of jobs, political disillusionment, and limited mobility. West African countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, reeling from coups and jihadist insurgencies, are also losing people rapidly.

Then there’s Nigeria; the continent’s demographic giant, where the “japa” wave of professional emigration continues to swell. The number might seem small relative to Nigeria’s size, but the profile of migrants who are mostly skilled, urban, and educated has outsized implications. The country isn’t just losing people; it’s losing capacity.

A Silent Exodus

Some of the most concerning migration losses are those happening under the radar — slow, consistent, and largely ignored. Countries like Burundi (-27,074), the Central African Republic (-15,357), and Eritrea (-12,696) are not in the headlines daily, but the steady outflow of their citizens speaks to long-standing governance failures, repression, or economic despair.

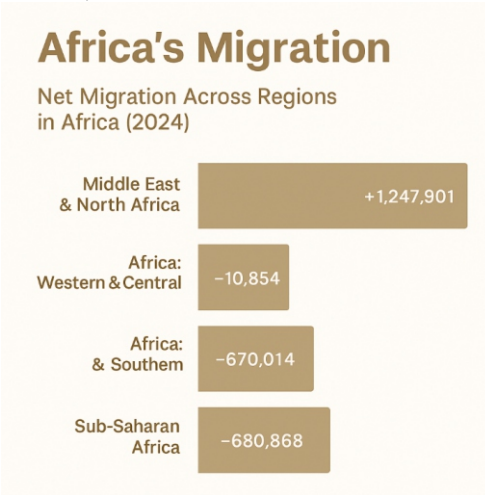
Even countries that were once seen as relatively stable, such as Kenya, Ghana, and Botswana, experienced net migration losses in 2024. This suggests that economic

hardship, unemployment, and rising living costs are eroding national confidence. When people with options start to leave, it raises deeper questions about who is staying — and why.

Migration as Development Mirror

Net migration is not just a demographic metric. It is a development mirror reflecting the policies that work, the crises that linger, and the futures people believe in. A positive balance doesn’t always mean a country is thriving, just as a negative balance isn’t necessarily a death sentence. Overall, these figures reveal which states are perceived as navigable, livable, or at least survivable.

They also tell us who shoulders the cost of crises . Chad and South Sudan, with already overstretched services, now host tens of thousands of new residents. Countries like Egypt and Ethiopia must balance inflows with inflation and political tension, and in South Africa, the politics of migration — often laced with xenophobia — will only intensify ahead of elections.



The Way Forward: Beyond Borders

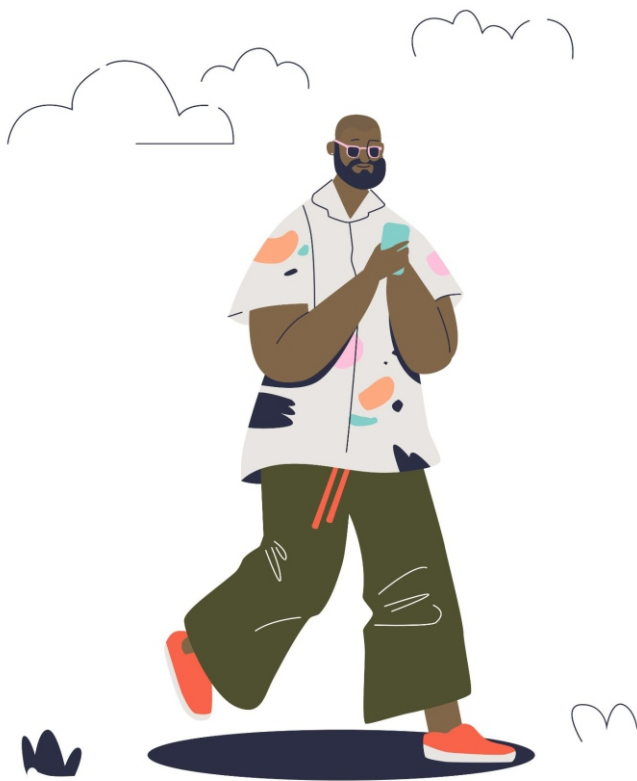
The African Union's vision of free movement under Agenda 2063 still feels distant. Visa restrictions remain common. Labour mobility is constrained by bureaucracy, and regional economic blocs often struggle with inconsistent implementation.

Yet, the need for a continental framework is urgent. Migration, if well-managed, can be a driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and social resilience. If poorly handled, it can deepen exclusion, stoke conflict, and fuel resentment.

The challenge for Africa is not to stop migration — that would be neither possible nor desirable. It is to understand it, govern it, and plan for it.

Migration is not just about people crossing borders. It's about people crossing thresholds; of hope, of fear, of possibility. In 2024, millions of Africans made that crossing and in the paths they've taken, the continent's future is being quietly redrawn.





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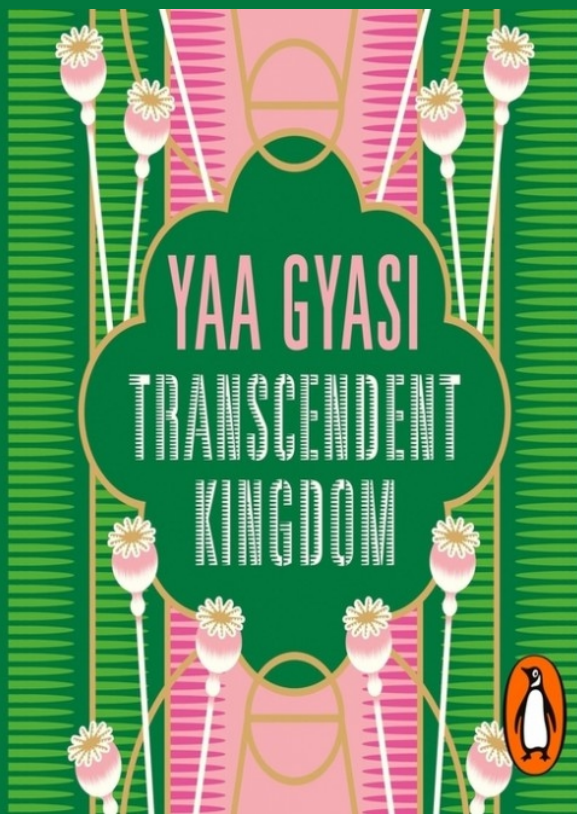
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What to Read Now

In *Transcendent Kingdom*, Yaa Gyasi offers a searing exploration of the immigrant experience through a Ghanaian-American family's displacement in the American South. The novel centers on Gifty, a neuroscientist whose identity is forged amidst the friction between her heritage and the harsh realities of Alabama. Gyasi masterfully depicts the family's migration as a journey of high hopes met with systemic "contingent regard," where their worth is constantly measured against a rigid, alien social hierarchy.



The clash of cultures is central to Gifty's struggle for belonging. While her mother clings to the evangelical faith of their Alabama community as a buffer against the isolation of the diaspora, Gifty turns to the empirical certainty of

her laboratory. Her scientific pursuit of mapping the neural pathways of addiction is a direct response to the "alien forces" that dismantled her family, specifically the opioid crisis that claimed her brother, Nana. For this family, the immigrant experience is characterized by a deep-seated alienation, where the "true self" is often obscured by the trauma of racialized poverty.

Ultimately, Gyasi examines how migration complicates the search for coherent self-functioning. Gifty's story is a meditation on the universal significance of autonomy for those whose lives are disrupted by migration. It captures the profound psychological cost of seeking home in a place that treats your presence as a puzzle to be solved.

Resources

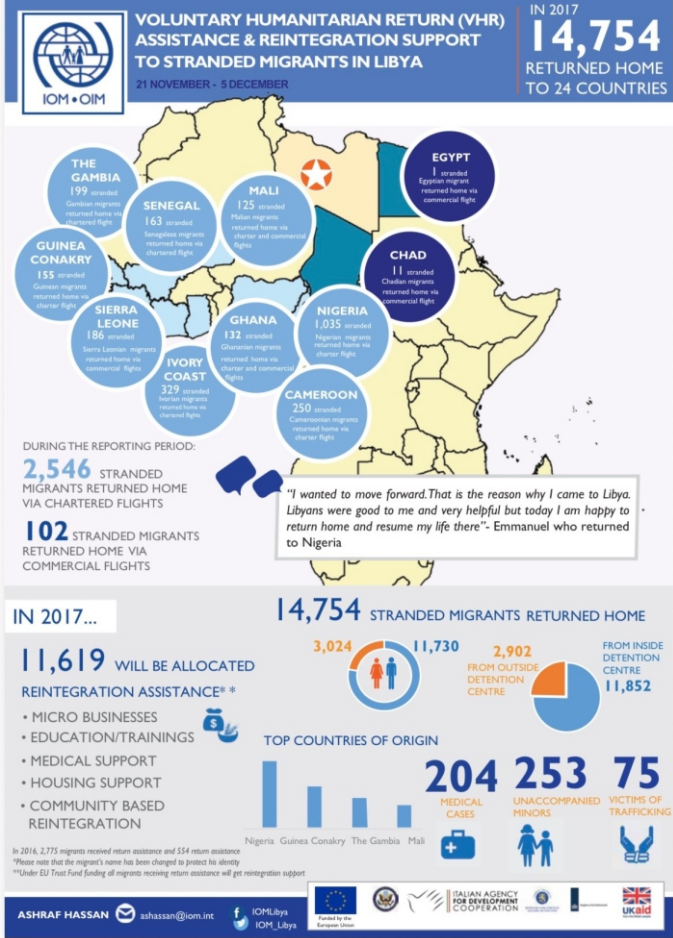


Patriotic Citizen Initiative

Established on February 4, 2010, PCI is a Nigerian non-profit organization that focuses on migrant protection, return, reintegration and readmission. Working with partners including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and European Union (EU). The organization actively addresses challenges related to with irregular migration, human trafficking and the reintegration of migrants returning to their home country. Its services include training and empowerment programmes, rescue support for migrants in transit, temporary and interim shelter, pre-departure counselling and the provision of stipends. PCI provides humanitarian assistance for an easier transition of vulnerable migrant into their communities

Further inquiries: <https://www.pcinigeria.org/>

In Numbers



The above infographic covers the return of migrants stranded in Libya in 2017. Between 21 November and 5 December, 2,648 migrants were assisted to return to their countries of origin. By this period, 14,754 migrants had been returned to 24 countries over the course of 2017, with Nigerians accounting for the largest share of returnees. The figures also highlight the vulnerabilities among those returning, including unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking and people requiring medical assistance. Alongside the returns, 11,619 returnees were expected to receive reintegration assistance, including support for businesses, education and training, healthcare and housing.

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM), Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) Programme, 2017.

The Mobility Gaze

NEWS 1

P.M. NEWS, Wednesday, 16 July, 2008

You Can Get a London

British Immigration Tells 'Model' Nigerian Student Who Was Deported Home

A immigrant who was deported to Nigeria despite being honoured by the Church of England for his contribution to British society has been given the right to return to the UK.

In a change of heart by the Government, Damilola Ajagbonna, 20, has had his case reconsidered by the Home Office and been granted a temporary residency to live here.

Mr Ajagbonna came to Britain with his mother when he was 11 and only discovered that he was an illegal immigrant and faced deportation after he was accepted for places at universities in Cambridge and Sheffield.

His achievements in education and community work have won him acclaim from both teachers and immigration campaigners.

When the Home Office said Mr Ajagbonna, who had missed the deadline to register his immigration

status by only a few weeks, had to return to Nigeria, the case became cause célèbre championed by the Church of England, MPs, teachers and immigration campaigners.

The Bishop of London, the Right Rev Richard Chartres, said yesterday that he welcomed the Home Secretary's "U-turn" on the case. "I congratulate the Home Secretary on this decision. It is unfortunate that Damilola was forced to return to Nigeria where he had not lived since childhood, but it is a huge relief that he has been allowed to return here," he said. "He has much to offer this country, and we were worried that the Home Office had not taken his past and potential contribution into account."

This year, Mr Ajagbonna attended a service at St Paul's Cathedral where the

Bishop of London awarded him the St Mellitus Medal for his contribution to his school, the Greig City Academy in Hornsey, north London, where he achieved 13 GCSEs and three A-levels.

His former headmaster, Paul Sutton, told The Independent after the decision was made to send him to Nigeria that Mr Ajagbonna was one of the school's highest achievers. "He has been an absolute star who has given unfailing support," he said. "It seems to me he is the very kind of person we need to keep. So it is quite bizarre that we are even thinking about deporting him."

His talents have also been recognised by the United Nations, who in 2005 appointed him an adviser on youth issues to a UNICEF organisation, Unicef. He was closely involved in one of the flagship

community projects run by the former Department for Education and Skills and held prominent roles in the Children's Rights Alliance for England.

One of the judges who heard Mr Ajagbonna's immigration case described these achievements as "spectacular". He said in his judgment: "I find the appellant's contribution

to youth culture in our society as a whole, and to his school society in particular, has been as remarkable. He is clearly an outstanding young man. He would appear both keen to learn and keen to give."

Mr Ajagbonna has now returned to Britain and is living in Luton. He intends to start a degree in September and train to

be a teacher.

"I have always regarded Britain as a just country and believed that as long as you played by the rules you will be treated fairly," he said earlier this year. "I find myself the victim of consequences of which I have no control."

A Home Office spokesman said it could not comment on individual cases.

ARCHIVING

Damilola Ajagbonna.

Punish Corrupt Policemen, Fashola Urges Lagos CP

By FEMI OGBURN

Gov. Babatunde Fashola.

Governor Babatunde Fashola of Lagos State has asked the new Commissioner of Police, Mr. Maxwell Akpo, to take stern action against corrupt police officers who were tarnishing the image of the police force to preserve the integrity of the force and publish the telephone numbers of all Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in the newspaper so that the public could have access to them.

Fashola, who spoke with the police boss, who paid him a visit at Akinola yesterday, urged Akpo to emulate his recent transparent move by making the numbers known to the public. Fashola promised that the state government would soon donate another set of equipment to the police to enable them fight crime in the state.

He stated that the crime rate in the state had continued to drop over time while he challenged all citizens to play their role by supplying information on the whereabouts of criminals to the police for prompt action.

Fashola urged the police high command to always strike a balance between knowledge of the terrain and the need to effect operational posting of officers when considering two police officers.

"I have worked with four different commissioners of police in the last one year. Such frequent changes have created issues of orientation with local mode and system," he said.

Earlier, Akpo had declared a zero tolerance against crime in the state, saying that the command under his leadership would not allow headlines and criminals to make life unbearable for people in Lagos.

Only two options are available to all criminals and the criminally minded in Lagos. That is to either repent of their bad and unlawful ways or relocate out of Lagos entirely.

"Nothing will be left to chance to ensure that the governor continues to hear good reports about the crime level and conduct of police officers in the state," he stated.

Akpo, Lagos Police chief.

Archiving digitizes Nigeria's old newspapers and magazines to preserve history and foster accessibility. (25 November 2002). TELL, Pg 32.

This front page covers two major stories, with a lead story about Damilola Ajagbonna, a young Nigerian boy who faced deportation due to pending immigration status but had it eventually overturned after widespread public support.

The Community Corner



Got a migration experience to share or want to be featured?

Send us a message on [WhatsApp at +44 7986 983956](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029va833333333333333333), and we will chat with you!

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When you JOIN THE COMMUNITY, you get early access to:

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- Verified global migration updates
- Resources and opportunities
- Policy and data on migration explained simply
- Help decide what you want us to talk about in our next issue

When Jeff Kwarteng Jacobsen visited Ghana, at age 14, what he felt wasn't anger but deep recognition. At that age, he was visiting his ancestral country after his Ghanaian parents had migrated and birthed him in Germany. Traditionally, second-generation immigrants often grow up with a highly curated version of their ancestral homeland. They grow and live through their parents' nostalgia, sparse local language use, and fragmented, censored and filtered out stories. To these second-generation immigrants, the homeland exists as an idea before it exists as a place. Thus, when they visit, the gap between the imagined and the real can be disorienting and deflating. The philosopher and cultural theorist Stuart Hall wrote extensively on how diasporic identity is never about returning to a pure origin but about negotiating between multiple, often contradictory, belongings. For Hall, the diasporic identity is structured around “the endless desire to return to lost origins.”

A full essay is available to read on Diaspora Africa's website.

Are you a traveller or just someone who is on the move? Share with us intriguing photographs of your travels. Send us a message on [WhatsApp +44 7986 983956](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029va833333333333333333)

We are building a newsroom & community that counters misinformation and bias in global mainstream news about African migration. We are working with local and cross-border journalists to challenge biased global reporting frameworks that shape migration. We want to disrupt extractive storytelling practices & expand the range of perspectives represented in international media discourse surrounding migration.

The magazine is independently funded by the Diaspora Africa team. Many updates featured in this publication are sourced from our Migration Monitor database, which tracks migration trends affecting African migrants and diasporic communities globally.

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