



MPC Social Services

Serving Moscow since 1991

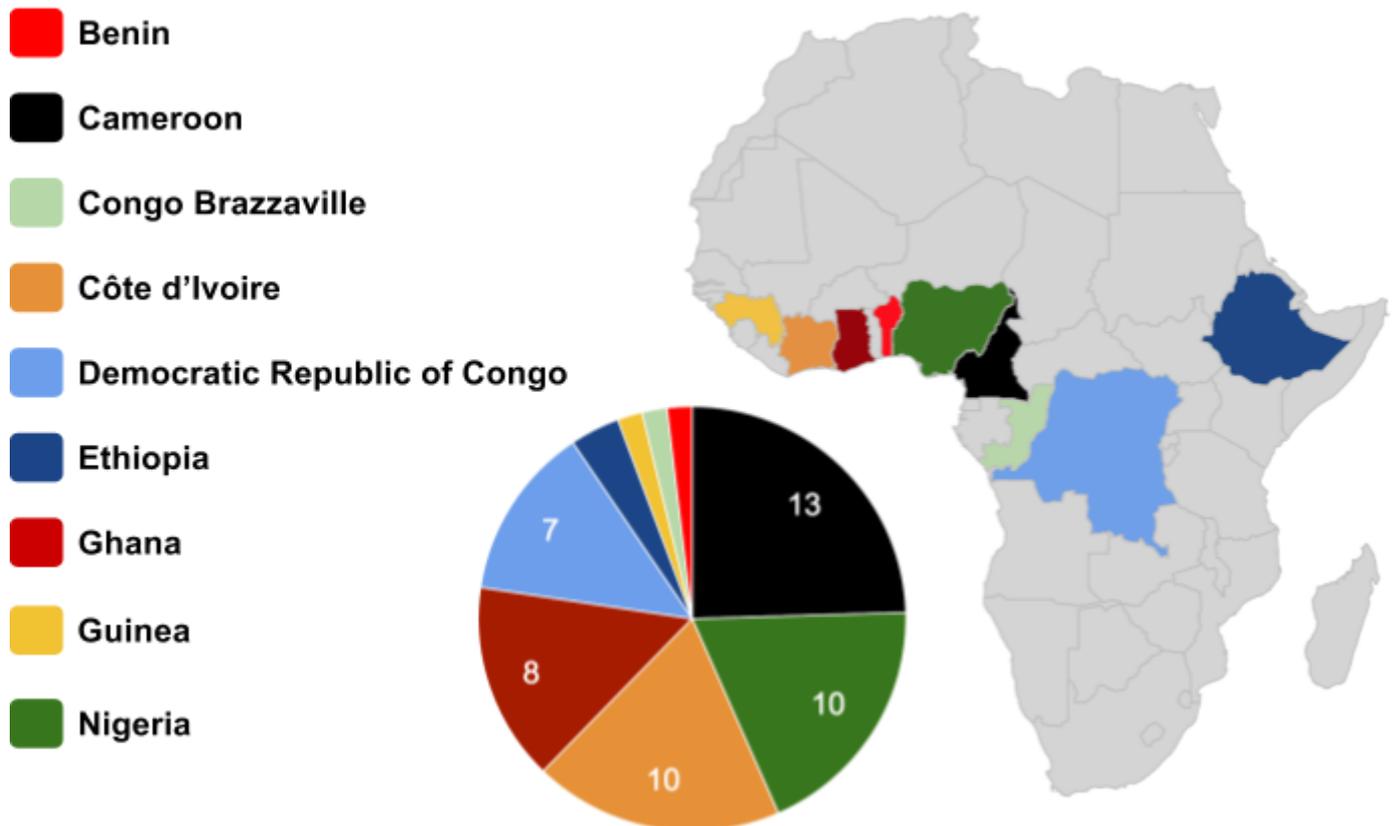
Repatriation Report 2015-2016

In the last 25 years, MPC Social Services has encountered thousands of African people who are in Russia because they were trafficked or defrauded. Many of them were told that a \$2,000 or \$5,000 payment for flights, visas, and housing would connect them with a good job in Europe. They arrive to find a much harsher reality. Instead of the job opportunity of their dreams, immigrants are often abandoned in Moscow and their money is stolen by scammers posing as headhunters.

Employment prospects in Russia are dismal for African immigrants. Even well-educated professionals are reduced to handing out flyers or cleaning homes. They cannot access the Russian government's social support system. Immigrants with children are even worse off, as Russian schools frequently refuse to accept undocumented children. It is almost impossible for them to earn enough money to escape from this cycle of poverty.

Between December 2015 and December 2016, MPC's *Homeward Bound* repatriation program has helped **53 people** to return to their home countries. The majority came from Nigeria, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Other countries of origin include Guinea Conakry, Ethiopia, Congo Brazzaville, and Benin. **Nine** of the 53 people repatriated were babies and children.

Countries of Origin



Who We Help

MPC's repatriation program has changed the lives of people like **Grace***, a 28-year-old woman from Cote d'Ivoire who was told by an unscrupulous "agent" that if she moved to Russia, she could be cured of sickle-cell anemia, an incurable and painful disease. Grace and her husband spent much of their savings to come to Russia, a place with no answers. Two months after they arrived here, Grace found out that she was pregnant. When their son was four months old, her husband was taken to a deportation center. This May, Grace and her five-month-old son were able to return home because of the repatriation fund.

Efie* was told by a trafficking recruiter in Ghana that there was restaurant work available in Russia and agreed to come. The traffickers prepared her documents and visa, and told her she would have to pay back some of the money she earned but that it wouldn't take very long to do so. Efie's ticket was booked to arrive in Moscow one week before her visa expired. At the airport, she was met by a man who kept her at his place for three weeks, telling her they were looking for a restaurant position for her. Once her visa had expired, she was told she would be doing sex work. Efie cried and begged them to let her go back home, but her boss told her that she owed \$30,000 before she could leave. She worked for this boss for several months, but then was sold to another boss. In early 2016, they returned her passport to her so that she could work in another city, but instead she took that opportunity to run away and hid at a friend's place for two months. She tried to earn money selling perfume on the street, but it was not enough even to pay her rent. She was referred by an acquaintance to the repatriation program and returned home in June 2016.

Alex* left his home country of Cote d'Ivoire because of instability following the 2010-11 civil war. He was told by an acquaintance that he could find work in Russia and live a better life. When he arrived, he was told by other Africans that there wasn't actually good work in Moscow, and he would be better off moving to Europe. Alex was given contact information for someone who could help him prepare documents to go to France if he paid a fee. This person arranged his plane ticket but no visa, so Alex arrived at the airport and was turned away. The only kind of work he found in Moscow was handing out advertisements on the street, which paid very low wages that were not enough to survive on, and also caused him some health problems over time. After trying for a long time to save money to go back home, but never earning enough, he found out about MPC's repatriation program and was able to return home in December 2015.

** Names changed to protect client privacy*

Funding

We are extremely grateful to the generous supporters of the repatriation program, whose donations have granted these individuals and families a chance at restarting their lives back at home.

MPC Social Services received a total of **\$17,303 USD** for the Homeward Bound fund between November 2015 and December 2016, which has been spent on the **53 people** we have assisted. MPC contributed an average of only **\$260 USD** per person to cover flight and document costs, roughly half of the average flight cost. 44 of the 53 people helped pay for their flights and only 9 people needed us to fully fund their flights. Funding was provided by the *Homeward Bound* appeal at the Harvest Ball in 2015, individual donations, and client contributions towards their own flights.

A Word from Our Supporters

"I first donated to the repatriation program as a goodwill gesture at the Harvest Ball. When asked to help on the committee I agreed, although somewhat reluctantly, because of work and time issues. What I have found over the past six months is **a practical, effective, and low-cost way to help people who are in dire straits and hopeless situations**. The stories are wrenching and often emotionally draining. But the outcomes are excellent. **We help people restart their lives** after finding themselves in a dead end. As an individual, you can make a profound contribution to other people's lives. Please consider it."

Fred, donor and repatriation committee member

"My participation in the repatriation committee has both opened my eyes to the plight of some of Moscow's most vulnerable residents and served as **an education in cross-continental economics, geography, and humanity**. I have been saddened and angered about the situations that many African residents of Moscow end up in but encouraged to learn of concrete ways that they can be helped. I have been particularly impressed by the work of MPC staff as they provide such meaningful services to those in need. It has been a privilege to get to know all involved and see the **truly life-changing and life-saving impact** that the repatriation fund has had."

Iverson, donor and repatriation committee member

"I am absolutely convinced that **the repatriation program is the most adequate, beneficial and useful answer to the needs of the community of African migrants**. I was really happy to donate to the repatriation program and will continue doing so, as I could see first-hand how the people I met would be able to escape this dead-end in which they found themselves and restart a new life. I know that MPC takes extreme care in managing the money donated for the program, buying the cheapest flight tickets available, staying in contact with those who are repatriated, and requesting that the candidates for repatriation also contribute toward the costs of the tickets to the extent possible. I felt that I was extremely privileged in being able to help them and am therefore **convinced that the program has to continue**, especially now that migrants in Russia are becoming more vulnerable each day."

Lilly, donor and repatriation committee member

The Process

Like most programs at our center, the repatriation program runs almost exclusively through word of mouth. Potential clients hear from their friends and compatriots that MPC offers repatriation assistance and they come to inquire further.

When someone first expresses their interest in the repatriation program, MPC staff conduct a brief **intake interview** to assess their current situation and their eligibility to be considered for assistance. Based on this, we can make a recommendation on the next step for them to take, typically either preparing missing documents or moving on to a second interview.

In the case of lost passports, embassies can provide an Emergency Travel Certificate or *laissez-passer*. This is a temporary identifying document issued for the purpose of returning to one's country of origin in the absence of a valid passport. In the case of an overstayed visa, the person must receive an exit visa by

attending a court hearing and paying a fine of five thousand rubles. This is a form of voluntary deportation and constitutes a five-year ban from entering Russia.

In the **second interview**, our repatriation committee of four to six members asks the whole story of how they came to Moscow, what their experience has been here, and what their plans are after returning home. We inform them of our goals for this program - to work on scam prevention and thereby stop the cycle of scam and trafficking victims getting stuck in Russia. The second interview is conducted by a different set of interviewers than the first interview.

Based on the two interviews, the repatriation committee can make its **decision** about what assistance to provide in each case. The decision is made on a case-by-case basis and depends on the information received in the interviews. Unless it is very clear that the person has no way to raise money toward their ticket, we require some contribution toward the ticket cost. This is to discourage complete dependence and to ensure a level of commitment to the decision he or she has made. In addition, the contribution helps each person regain a sense of self-efficacy that was often lost during his or her time in Russia.

Once all documents are in order and a person's ticket has been booked, we conduct a brief **exit interview** with the person returning, during which we collect contact information in their home country (relatives' phone numbers, email addresses, etc.) and request that they make every effort to contact us upon arrival so we are assured of their safe return. At this time, they sign a document to specify what level of consent they give us for using their information for fundraising and awareness-raising. Lastly, we remind them of their responsibility to spread the word against scams and to be honest about their experience in Russia to others who are considering traveling abroad.