

# perspectives

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POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

## AFRICA

### Not Always on a Boat to Europe: Movements of Africans within and beyond the continent



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## Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

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# Editorial

The current public debate on African migration to Europe is largely fuelled by visions of boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea, filled with desperate people in search of a better life. The narrative positions Africa as a “continent on the move” whose people are surging into Europe on a seemingly endless tide. European politicians propose that Africa must be helped with investment and development aid to reduce the poverty and conflicts that drive Africans from their homes. In the meantime, barbed wire, border patrols and reception camps ought to help manage the situation.

Although media images of desperate African refugees fleeing to Europe do portray the daily reality and the often-tragic consequences of the treacherous crossing, the framing conceals more than it reveals.

Certainly, the number of Africans living in Europe has increased. But, as Asmita Parshotam points out, most African migrants and refugees still move within the region and never leave the continent. For those who do look beyond Africa to improve their lives, Europe is not the only destination. Countries in Asia, the Americas and the Middle East are increasingly important for African migrants.

Oreva Olakpe looks past newspaper headlines of illegal migration and drug trafficking to investigate the fascinating and elaborate community structures developed by Nigerians living in Guangzhou, China. For twenty years, they have been learning to navigate an environment that is economically promising but often socially hostile. Brazil and Argentina are other emerging markets that have become part of the ever-changing geography of African migration. Regis Minvielle chronicles the precarious-

ness of African migrants' lives as the two countries reconsider the generous immigration policies that were created during their boom years. The Middle East has become another popular – and notorious – destination, particularly for East Africans. In the face of sharp increases in human trafficking, with young women being lured into exploitation by false promises of employment, Rosebell Kagumire calls on the Ugandan government to adopt an effective and victim-centred approach.

On the continent itself, South Africa remains a major destination. However, as Victor Chikalogwe relates, expectations of a safe new home-away-from-home have been dashed for many refugees and asylum seekers. Queer African migrants who come up against the xenophobic and homophobic attitudes that are prevalent in South African society often experience the same kinds of social and economic marginalisation they had hoped to escape in their home countries.

In Kenya, host to one of the largest refugee camps in the world, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is seeking to break new ground. In a clear departure from the humanitarian aid approach of the past, a new initiative aims to promote self-reliance among encamped refugees and local host communities alike. This programme is the flagship of Kenya's rollout of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which forms part of an emerging United Nations Global Compact on Migration. Although supportive of its ideas, Felicity Okoth is quick to identify a number of policy and political obstacles to its implementation.

Morocco, which will host the intergov-

ernmental conference to adopt the global migration compact in December 2018, is itself evolving from a sending and transition country into a destination for migrants. Souley Mahamadou Laouali charts the country's efforts to attract students from sub-Saharan Africa to its institutions of higher education, which is part of a campaign to improve its diplomatic relations with the rest of the continent.

Finally, Adaobi Nwaubani and Aly Tandian ask why and how many Nigerians and Senegalese still embark on long and winding journeys through corrupt officials, barbed wire and deadly seas to reach Europe. Their articles untangle a com-

plex web of social, economic and political dynamics at play on a continent where people have higher ambitions and are more mobile than ever before.

We hope that the articles gathered here will help to shed new light on aspects of the movement of African migrants that have remained on the margins of discussion, and to place the pressures experienced in Europe within a broader perspective.

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# Sliding Towards Disaster: Migration in European–African Relations

Asmita Parshotam

The debate on African–European migration is hotly contested, particularly in Europe, where some political leaders manipulate voter fears for their own political purpose while others face criticism for their failure to keep migration “at bay”. Media-fuelled perceptions of European countries being “swarmed” by Africans arouse deep-rooted insecurity about national identity, mistrust of “the other”, racism, and xenophobic attacks. Indeed, the world is witnessing increased anti-migration sentiments, as reflected in Australia’s Christmas Island immigration detention centre, US President Trump’s promise to erect a wall along the Mexican border, growing Israeli actions against African migrants, and South Africa’s own xenophobic attacks against foreigners in recent years. Foreign policy is increasingly inward-looking and aims to serve national interests above all else.

## UN Global Compact for Migration

Against this backdrop, there are ongoing efforts to draft a framework for global migration management, most notably the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), under the auspices of the United Nations. At the level of political rhetoric, at least, this process displays broad support for finding long-term and sustainable solutions. The final draft, released on 11 July 2018, is rooted in an understanding of human rights and fundamental freedoms for refugees and migrants. It clearly demarcates shared responsibilities amongst UN member states, pools resources to address mass migration, and provides a useful update on the important drivers of migration – for example, by reflecting on climate change as part of the explanation for the rise in migration levels. The GCM tackles important issues such as data collection and sharing, establishes coordinated international efforts on missing migrants and, importantly, espouses a human-rights approach to migration through catering for basic services for migrants. In total, it details 23 objectives that will inform the implementation of a global framework for migration management.

Unfortunately, the GCM is a non-binding document with no implementation mechanisms in place. This raises the question as to whether UN members will have the political will to implement its measures, such as affording migrants access to social services and benefits. It is equally concerning that the GCM references “national sovereignty” for UN members to determine their



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Africa and Europe have a complicated historical relationship with migration. While colonial ties and economic opportunities are part of the explanation for the movement of African people into Europe, this simplistic narrative fails to account for complex realities across the African continent; the push and pull factors behind migration, which range from shifting life ambitions among young urban Africans to global phenomena such as climate change; and the fact that not all African migrants (like many migrants globally) want to move to Europe.



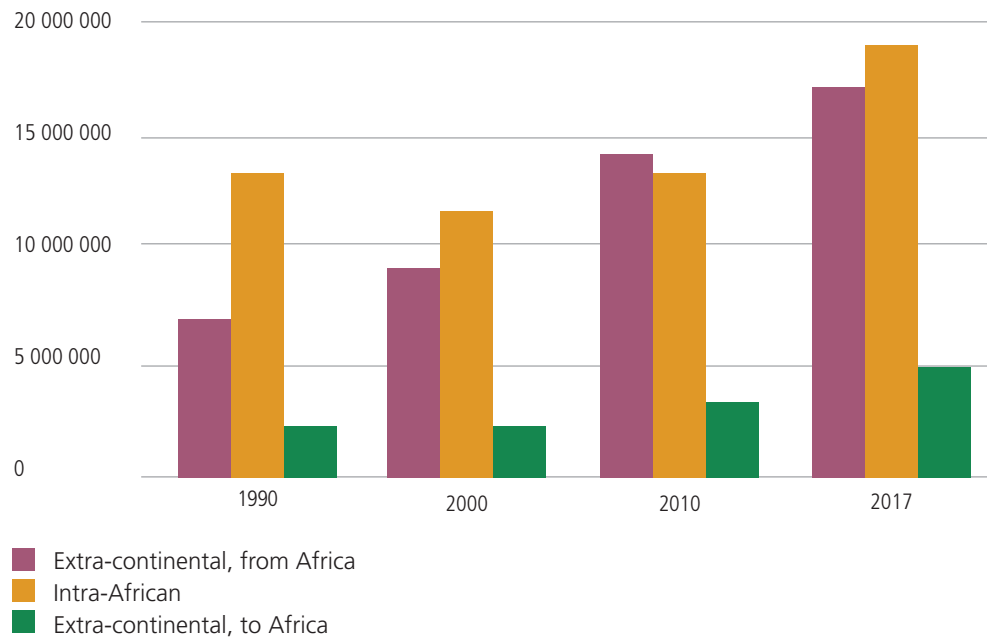
**AFRICAN MIGRATION**  
in thousands

Green dashed line	20-100
Blue dashed line	100-250
Purple dashed line	250-500
Orange dashed line	500-1000
Red dashed line	over 1000

**UN SUBREGIONS**

Light blue	Northern Africa
Green	Western Africa
Yellow	Middle Africa
Orange	Eastern Africa
Pink	Southern Africa

Intra-African migration. Source: FAO, 2015.



*Stocks of international migrants from, within and to Africa.*

Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017.

domestic migration policies. This leads us back to square one: the absence of binding international minimum standards for the humane and safe treatment of migrants. It is also worth questioning why some of the most powerful UN members have bothered to engage in GCM negotiations while their domestic policies display only increased hostility towards migrants – policies which are then replicated in developing countries under the pretext of “international best practice”.

In the absence of implementation mechanisms, the GCM is a toothless watchdog, unable to enforce change in member countries where domestic immigration laws do not offer protection or rights to migrants. Unless UN states are willing to bind themselves to higher standards and gradually work towards implementing a global system for migration management, it is hard to see the GCM as other than a glorified talk-shop.

## Myths and Misconceptions

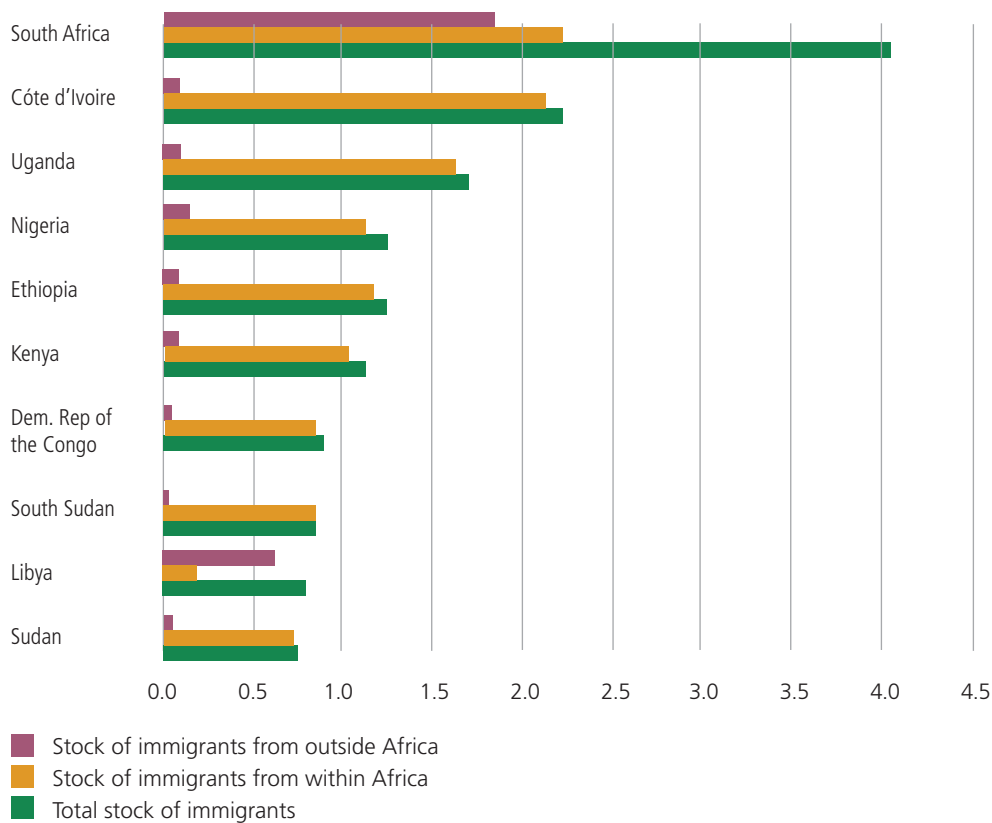
Behind these political and multilateral developments are wide-ranging misconceptions about African migration. Although it is

difficult to dispel myths with statistics, the hard data scarcely tallies with the images of desperate African migrants portrayed daily in European media. In fact, Africa is the least migratory region in the world.

The existing narrative discounts the fact that the majority of African migration occurs within the continent, and specifically intra-regionally: intra-African migration grew from 12.5 million in 2000 to 19.4 million in 2017, and more international migrants live within Africa than outside Africa.<sup>1</sup> Amongst African countries, South Africa is the highest recipient of African migrants followed by Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria, while Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan host large numbers of refugee communities.<sup>2</sup>

Although the number of African migrants living outside the continent has increased from 6.9 million in 1990 to 16.9 million in 2017<sup>3</sup> (indicating that while intra-African migration remains slightly ahead, this margin is narrowing) such statistics hardly correlate with the images portrayed in European media of migrants arriving on European shores, or requiring rescue from the Mediterranean Sea. Public discourse also fails to consider that recent African





*Countries with largest numbers of immigrants, 2017 (Millions).*

Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017.

migration to Europe is largely due to political and economic instability in countries in the northern and western regions of the continent.

Another misconception is that African people who migrate overseas are uneducated or semi-skilled. While there has been an increase in non-elite, sub-Saharan-African international migration since the 1990s, semi-skilled migration is still largely confined to continental movements. Those who travel outside the continent are often well-educated, moving for work or educational purposes, and they often continue to send money back to their families at home. Across sub-Saharan Africa, diaspora transfers to countries of origin were estimated at \$34 billion in 2017 alone.<sup>4</sup> Ethiopia's diaspora has one of the most successful remittance programmes, with contributions rivalling (and exceeding) official development assistance to the country and directly contributing to the country's socio-economic development. Nigeria's thriving, educated diaspora across the United States and the United Kingdom has played an important role in dispelling myths about migration and education levels amongst African migrants.

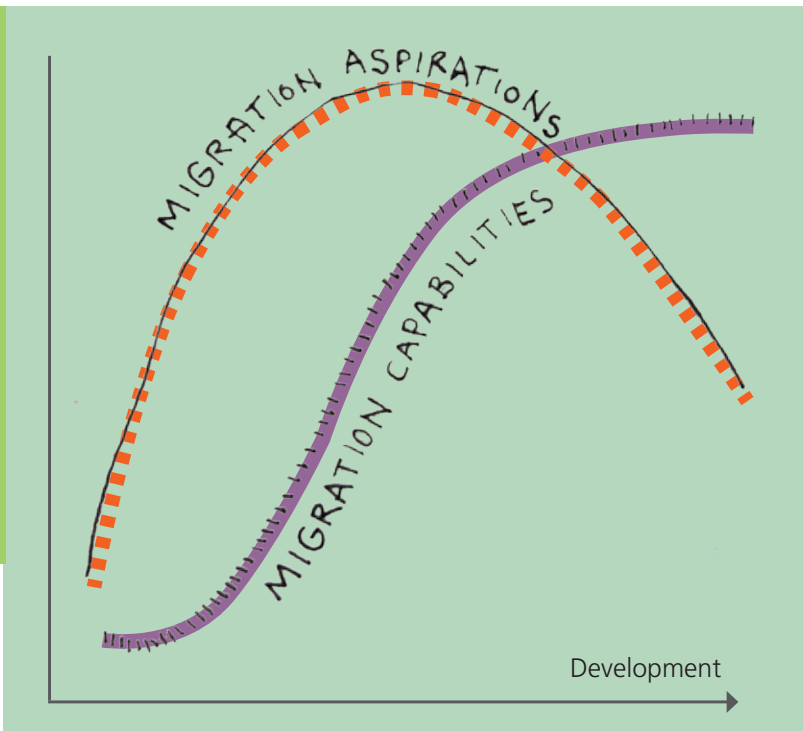
These misperceptions about African migration – and the seeming inability of African leaders to shape their own migration narrative – have encouraged European “development assistance” programmes that include increased funding for enhanced border control and addressing the so-called “root causes” of migration. Such efforts by EU politicians reflect both a misunder-

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**Greater levels of outward migration may be expected for as long as the economic opportunities, political freedoms and education levels remain more attractive outside Africa.**

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standing of the internal dynamics specific to regional areas and a failure to realise that continued development across Africa directly correlates with a growing middle class. A growing African middle class will, in fact, only enhance outward migration until such time as African countries achieve sufficient levels of socio-economic development and political stability. Greater levels of outward migration may be expected for as



*Hypothesized effect of human development on migration capabilities and aspirations.*

Source: African Studies Centre Leiden, 2015.

long as the economic opportunities, political freedoms and education levels remain more attractive outside Africa. This long-term reality contrasts starkly with the short-term views of EU politicians. Measures like opening processing centres on African soil, increasing border surveillance, and closing the Mediterranean route will do little to deter long-term migration (regular or irregular), which, to repeat, remains a fraction of overall African migration. European leaders should also give careful consideration to the “unintended” long-term effects of their proposals. For example, substantial evidence

An alternative view is that African countries can't properly set a migration agenda amongst themselves because of their vastly different economic levels of development and the benefits they reap from migration.

suggests that immigration restrictions and stricter visa requirements for African citizens have in fact interrupted circular labour migration by pushing labour migrants to settle permanently in Europe, which subsequently triggered substantial secondary migration through family reunification.<sup>5</sup>

African leaders must share the blame for the state of the international migration debate. They have been unable to coordi-

nate and lobby at the UN level for solutions that speak to African countries' needs, nor to find comprehensive solutions amongst themselves that would reap greater rewards for growth and employment. Politically and economically powerful countries such as Kenya and South Africa are not taking the lead to lobby for a more institutionalised form of intra-African migration. Although the African Union has formulated promising and progressive migration policies that clearly recognise migration as a tool for development, African countries are often themselves unwelcoming of African migrants. How can there be realistic and implementable multilateral resolutions when African countries have, thus far, been reluctant to really engage with the issues themselves?

An alternative view is that African countries can't properly set a migration agenda amongst themselves because of their vastly different economic levels of development and the benefits they reap from migration. For one example, 10 percent of Mali's GDP is directly funded from the diaspora.<sup>6</sup> For another, migration agreements between the EU and African countries offer development assistance in exchange for the repatriation of migrants – much to the chagrin of local civil society organisations who vocally oppose increased dependence on EU assistance.

## Political Will is Needed Urgently

European and African leaders are on a slippery slope to a dangerous destination, with repercussions that none are fully prepared for. In their migration agreements with countries like Libya and Turkey, EU politicians find themselves “supping with the devil”, which in turn undermines their image as promoters of human rights and protectors of the Western liberal order. Increased domestic anti-migration tactics – such as Italy's and Malta's refusal to allow migrant ships to dock, or Denmark's new forced-assimilation laws – reflect societies in which human rights are increasingly afforded only to those with the correct profile.

In African countries, the continuing failures of political leaders – to resist outside pressures, to improve their protection of migrant rights, to entrench domestic political stability, and to increase socio-economic and employment opportunities for their

burgeoning youth populations – are likely to accelerate existing migration trends, and to further undermine the possibility of forging a progressive and effective African position on migration.

What is urgently needed, therefore, in both Europe and Africa, is the political will to push for implementation of the Global Compact for Migration and to achieve its agreed objectives. Real solutions need to be found for refugee-hosting countries, especially for those without the financial or technical resources to undertake this mammoth task alone. The World Bank and the African Development Bank must identify financial mechanisms that can assist host countries with infrastructure development to enable refugees to live in humane conditions. Stronger political support is also needed for migrants' socio-economic devel-

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What is urgently needed, therefore, in both Europe and Africa, is the political will to push for implementation of the Global Compact for Migration and to achieve its agreed objectives.

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opment, including educational, financial and employment opportunities that enable them, in the long term, to contribute to their host communities.

At the end of the day, migrants who are displaced by political or economic upheavals are innocent individuals in search of a better life for themselves and their families – and they are the ones who will pay the highest price if the political inertia of European and African leaders is allowed to continue. ■■■

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- 1 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Economic Development in Africa Report 2018: Migration for Structural Transformation*, 2018.
  - 2 United Nations Economic Commission on Africa (UNECA), *Situational analysis: patterns, levels and trends of African migration*, draft report prepared for the African Regional Consultative Meeting on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Addis Ababa, 26 and 27 October 2017. Available at: [https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/SocialDevelopment/Global-Compact-Migration-2017/situational-analysis-migration-report\\_english.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/SocialDevelopment/Global-Compact-Migration-2017/situational-analysis-migration-report_english.pdf).
  - 3 UNCTAD, 2018, *op. cit.*.
  - 4 Robert Schuman Foundation, *European Union/African Cooperation: The Externalisation of Europe's Migration Policies*, April 2018. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0472-european-union-african-cooperation-the-externalisation-of-europe-s-migration-policies>.
  - 5 De Haas H et al., *UNECA African Migration: Draft report prepared for the Africa Regional Consultative Meeting on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, October 2017. Available at: [https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/SocialDevelopment/Global-Compact-Migration-2017/governance-of-migration\\_english.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/SocialDevelopment/Global-Compact-Migration-2017/governance-of-migration_english.pdf).
  - 6 Robert Schuman Foundation, *European Union/African Cooperation: The Externalisation of Europe's Migration Policies*, April 2018. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0472-european-union-african-cooperation-the-externalisation-of-europe-s-migration-policies>.

# Nigerian Migrants in China: Changing the Narrative

Oreva Olakpe

The Nigerian community in China is diverse and complex. Outside the gaze of Western media, much remains unknown about these people who have made China their home and the contribution they make to Nigeria's development and Sino-Nigerian relations. All too often, academic journals and Nigerian newspapers focus their attention on illegal migration, drug trafficking, crime and imprisonment<sup>1</sup>, fuelling negative stereotypes and creating a simplistic understanding of the Nigerian diaspora in China. By looking beyond the headlines, this article seeks to contribute to a narrative closer to the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants in China.<sup>2</sup>

## Early Migrants and Increasing Controls

Nigerian migration to China did not begin in earnest until the 1990s. Ibeh<sup>3</sup>, who could be considered one of the founding members of the Nigerian community in China, was one of the first Nigerians to migrate to the major port city of Guangzhou, about 120 kilometres northwest of Hong Kong. He arrived in 1996, after sojourning in Indonesia, Singapore and South Korea for work. It was a time when China just had started to open up to the international community as a result of economic reforms in the 1980s.

The time of Ibeh's arrival was the beginning of waves of Nigerian migration to China for business, education and other reasons, spurred by the country's economic growth and growing presence on the African continent. He fondly remembers how easy it was to get a Chinese visa and to extend it as

many times as one wished. But it wasn't all smooth sailing. Because of the relative isolation China had experienced, many Chinese were unprepared for the growing influx of Africans into their communities. Neither did the Chinese government have laws and policies in place to regulate migration at the time. Only in response to rising social tension in cities like Guangzhou did the Chinese government begin to tighten visa policies in the 2000s.<sup>4</sup> The visa-on-arrival policy ended and only short-term visas were issued.<sup>5</sup> Non-tourist visas, such as for business or employment, became more difficult to obtain. Unlike British nationals, for example, who can apply for 10-year visas with multiple entries, Nigerians nowadays usually only get 14- to 30-day single-entry visas. In addition, visa extensions in cities like Guangzhou are impossible to obtain for Nigerians and other Africans, but not for other nationals.<sup>6</sup> Staying in China now also requires police registration and regular status checks.

These stringent policies combined pushed many Nigerians, particularly those who arrived in the late 2000s, into the underground economy in order to survive. Seeking a better life and economic opportunities, many have inadvertently become "illegals", fuelling the crime narrative that dominates perspectives about Nigerians in China.

## A Community is Born

The actual size of the Nigerian community in China is difficult to determine, with the Nigerian government estimating it to be 10,000 in 2014.<sup>7</sup> The majority of long-term Nigerian migrants in China settled in Guangzhou to do business. Guangzhou is strategically located between the Chinese



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mainland and Hong Kong, and the early arrivals also found its business culture easy to adapt to. China's third-largest city has many small wholesale markets to buy goods for export that are easily negotiable, transportation is advanced, and the cost of living is not too high. Some Nigerians also feel that people in Guangzhou are more open-minded than in other cities, making for easier working relations between Nigerians and Chinese businesspersons.

Due to its size and history, the Nigerian community in Guangzhou has become an important source of information and support to Nigerians who want to do business or who face other challenges in China. According to Ibeh, the need for a support system was born from the problems faced by the first group of Nigerian migrants in the 1990s. This included limited access to accommodation and healthcare, which was due to discrimination and language barriers as well as business fraud. From the late-1990s onwards, the community grew organically, combining decades of living and business experience in China.

The need for a more close-knit community became more pertinent when Chinese authorities changed their approach towards African migrants in the early 2000s. As the population of Nigerians increased, so did

the social problems and tension with the local population. Around 2004, the older and more respected Nigerians decided to create a structured support and representation system that includes an elected president general and various executives. The community has also opened an office where Nigerians can register, make complaints or seek support.

## Community Functions and Interventions

Since then, community structures have delivered important responses in critical situations. When immigration checks and local mob violence led to the death of Nigerians in 2009<sup>8</sup> and 2012<sup>9</sup> – and in a context where crimes against Africans are all too often ignored by authorities – the community and other Africans came together to demand justice. When Isah, another Nigerian businessman, first arrived in China in 2012 and fell sick, it was information and support from the community that helped him to receive treatment without having documentation. When his local business partner reported him to police as undocumented and framed him for theft in 2013, causing the loss of all of his investment, the

*Nigerian migrants in a shopping street of Guangzhou.*

© Christiane Badgley/ [www.gzdreamfactory.com](http://www.gzdreamfactory.com)



Inside Tangqi Market, Guangzhou.  
© Christiane Badgley/ www.gzdreamfactory.com

community supported him by communicating with authorities and helped him get back on his feet. In numerous similar cases, the community has provided support during arrests, deportation, business-related disputes, burials, and more.

The community also interfaces between the Nigerian embassy and the Chinese government. People over-staying their visas is a big problem and many Nigerians are arrested. The community buys plane tickets for over-stayers every six months, depend-

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**There is even an informal justice system, with elected judges and a task force of volunteers to implement the judges' decisions.**

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ing on the funds they have available and how many over-stayers have been in jail for a long time without the means to leave.

There is even an informal justice system, with elected judges and a task force of volunteers to implement the judges' decisions. The decisions of the judges are binding on the members and are in accordance with Chinese laws and principles, which enables the community to live within Chinese rules as much as possible. Most of the cases resolved within the Nigerian community are business-related disputes and complaints, but when Nigerians commit crimes, the community may work with the Chinese police to find solutions. These functions have created a sense of pride and safety for Nigerians.

Despite the benefits it provides, the community is not without problems. Challenges include political disagreements,

differences in opinion with the Nigerian consulate in Guangzhou, and insulation from other African communities. Youth unemployment is another big problem. Obi, a young businessman and student, believes that the lack of legal job opportunities for Nigerians and other Africans in China force some people to survive by drug-dealing and other illegal activities, fuelling stereotypes and media headlines.

## Finding Success in a Foreign Place

Almost all members of the community are businesspeople running small, medium and large businesses. Despite severe discrimination, most have found success, notably in the shipping and handling of goods from China to Nigeria and other African countries, due to a trade boom over the last decade. Between 1996 and 2014, Chinese exports to Nigeria grew from USD185 million to over USD10 billion<sup>10</sup>, placing China at the top of the list of Nigeria's trading partners.

The older generation of Nigerian migrants are key investors in several Guangzhou businesses. From nothing, Ibeh was able to build an export business that grew to employ over 68 Chinese people in Guangzhou, as well as staff in Nigeria and other countries. Because he settled early in China, he never had the same visa or employment problems the younger generation faces. Within four years of migrating to China, Isah's business grew by leaps and bounds, despite the challenges he faced as an undocumented migrant. Festus Mbisiogu, the founder of Blue Diamond Logistics and two other companies in China, is another businessman known for his success in business as well as his contributions to the community. Mbisiogu, like Ibeh, migrated to China in the 1990s to build his empire.

Undocumented Nigerians often partner with Chinese locals who act as the face of the business for ease of registration, thereby contributing to the local economy. Even without resident permits, they pay taxes, employ Chinese staff and rent offices, just like those who do have papers. Isah believes that, regardless of the multiple discriminations they have faced, the Nigerians' success has led to a quiet acceptance and acknowledgement by Chinese society.

Most business owners also send money home and make investments in Nigeria.

Isah, who claims to have made millions of yuan from his business, sent 80 percent of his earnings to lift his entire family out of poverty in Nigeria. Uche, a 20-year-old student who is also running a successful shipping business, has been taking care of his siblings in Nigeria since he arrived in China in 2013 and plans to finance their education in the United States. There are countless stories similar to theirs.

The community leaders have also become business mentors. Ibeh, for example, has advised many young Nigerians who have been empowered to start their own businesses legitimately and he envisions a structured mentorship programme that could increase the exchanges between China and Nigeria for mutual benefit and development.

## Overlooked and Untapped Potential

Because many Nigerian business owners are invisible, even though they are bringing investments and creating employment, there is little awareness of the impact they have on the local economy, as well as in Nigeria. The crime-focused media discourse further obscures the dynamics in the community.

Driven by hard work, a strong sense of pride and the determination to become self-sufficient, many Nigerian migrants have

become successful, forming a community with well-established and efficient community structures that were created to address the problems of Nigerians in China. The status quo of legality and documentation has not stopped them from pursuing their dreams of creating better futures for their families and supporting their wider communities in Nigeria.

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The Nigerian government, like many other African governments, lacks the political will and foreign-policy resources to protect and promote the interests of its citizens in China. Thus, the community structures are also significant because they fill the gaps that the Chinese and Nigerian governments cannot. Given their years of experience in China, the migrant community could well play a greater role in guiding Nigeria's relationship with China. It is left to the Nigerian government to seek out their expertise to contribute to the development of Nigeria's economy and Sino-Nigerian relations. ■■■

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- 1 See: Haugen H.O, Nigerians in China: A Second State of Immobility, *International Migration*, Vol. 50 (2) 2012; The Sun, 535 Nigerians in China prisons for drug trafficking, May 2017. Available at: <http://sunnewsonline.com/535-nigerians-in-china-prisons-for-drug-trafficking/>; This Day, Nigerians Languish in Chinese Jails, March 2016. Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/03/17/nigerians-languish-in-chinese-jails/>.
  - 2 The data in this article is based on interviews with Nigerian and other African migrants, international organisations, churches, businesses and others, carried out between 2015 and 2016 in Beijing and Guangzhou by Oreva Olakpe.
  - 3 Names have been changed to protect the identities of interviewees.
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  - 5 Daouda C, *South-South migration and trade: African traders in China*, Policy Briefing, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, 2013.
  - 6 See: Haugen, 2012.
  - 7 See: Africa Independent Television, *Nigeria-China Relations Deepen As Senator David Mark Visits Chinese Parliament*, 2014. Available at: [http://www.aitonline.tv/post-nigeria\\_china\\_relations\\_deepen\\_as\\_senator\\_david\\_mark\\_visits\\_chinese\\_parliament](http://www.aitonline.tv/post-nigeria_china_relations_deepen_as_senator_david_mark_visits_chinese_parliament).
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# Argentina and Brazil: New Territories for West African Migration

Regis Minvielle

On 20 May 2018, fishermen rescued a catamaran that was drifting 110 kilometres off the coast of Maranhão State in northeastern Brazil. On board were 25 passengers from Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone who had set out from Cape Verde. The event received extensive media coverage and sparked interest in new migration routes from Africa to South America. Other than a few migrants who have hidden on freighters bound for the ports of Buenos Aires, Argentina or Santos, Brazil, the sea route remains unlikely. However, increased airline routes have considerably advanced South America as a destination for African migrants. South African Airways has operated a regular Johannesburg–São Paulo service since 1971, but more recently, in July 2013, Ethiopian Airlines opened a route between Addis Ababa and São Paulo via Lome. Six months later, Royal Air Maroc inaugurated three weekly connections between Casablanca and São Paulo. These flight paths are part of a new geography of African migration that is emerging in response to the fortresses erected in the global North.

shift boats operating from the Libyan coast, or they could look for another destination. Many decided to change their course and applied for visas from the Brazilian embassy in Tripoli. At first, Brazil was seen as a useful stopover on the way to the United States, a place they could earn enough money to recoup the high cost of air travel. Given their desperate situations, it didn't matter whether they travelled in a straight line: what mattered was to find a new base.

Once in Brazil, the Malians found that neighbouring Argentina offered even better wages, which meant better prospects for higher remittances to send to families at home. At that time, before the economic depression set in in 1998, the peso was still on a par with the US dollar and a real estate boom created a strong demand for labour. The Malians, already accustomed to construction work from their days in Libya, were able to fit right in.

Senegalese migrants started to arrive in the Argentine capital around the same time. Some were seduced by the stories of Guinean sailors who praised Buenos Aires as a wealthy city, like the cities in Europe. Others made connections at the Argentine embassy in Dakar.<sup>2</sup> Many of these Senegalese pioneers had already experienced migration in Saudi Arabia or other West African countries. Their economic and social success, enabled by real estate investments and marriages in the host country, inspired a new wave of Senegalese migrants in the second half of the 2000s. They now constitute the majority of African migrants in Argentina.

As with migration flows generally, the success of the pioneers attracted young people from the home country in search of status and prosperity. From Dakar to

## The Pioneers of the 1990s

The genesis of this migration goes back to the early 1990s. Due to the “closure” of the Mediterranean Sea<sup>1</sup>, Malian nationals who found themselves caught in the migration nets of North Africa faced three narrowing options. They could wait on Europe's doorstep in the hope that the door would re-open, they could take a chance in make-



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Douala, via Abidjan or Conakry, the quest for self-advancement fed on a set of structural push factors that exist in most sending societies: a saturated urban labour market, endemic unemployment, deteriorating living conditions in rural areas, and political and environmental crises.

Thus the pioneers, who had mostly arrived from urban areas and with migration experience, were succeeded by new figures: young single men, without trade or school qualifications, of rural origin, mainly from around the Senegalese cities of Diourbel, Touba, Thiès and Kaolack. Like their elders, they refused to sit at home and followed the scent of the generous immigration programmes offered by Brazil and Argentina.

## Open and Closed: Migration Policies in South America

After waves of European immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Argentina and Brazil tightened their borders in the 1970s with the rise of dictatorial regimes.<sup>3</sup> Instead of being associated with the settlement and development of vast territories, migrants were now linked to the fear of “outside subversion”, and immigration control became an integral part of

police surveillance systems. The view of migration as a security and control issue intensified again with the growth of cocaine trafficking in the 1980s.

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tion. This new thinking also raised the need to redefine migration policies, a project strongly endorsed by the centre-left movements that gained power in both countries in the early 2000s.

In Argentina, the government of Nestor Kirchner implemented the *Patria Grande* programme, which regularised the affairs of more than 630,000 undocumented migrants between 2003 and 2007. Other policies were

also reformed to the benefit of migrants. While waiting for the Argentine National Refugee Commission to rule on their fate, asylum seekers now receive a temporary residence permit that is valid for a period of three months and renewable several times. It gives the bearer the right to work, access to housing, public healthcare and public schooling for children, as well as freedom of movement.

In the same vein, the Brazilian government promulgated a law regularising all illegal immigrants who entered the territory before 1 February 2009. This and other new policies reflected not only Brasilia's desire to assert regional leadership but also to conquer new markets globally, including in Africa. Under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011), Brazil presented itself as a nation of African heritage, with a natural calling for greater presence on the conti-

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nent.<sup>5</sup> The 2005 opening of new embassies in Yaoundé and Kinshasa was part of this expansion strategy, bringing the number of Brazilian diplomatic posts in Africa to 35. By providing a network of access to visas, they played a key role in making Brazil an important gateway to the Americas for African emigration.

Those unable to obtain a Brazilian visa often turned to Ecuador, with its even more open migration policy. The country's 2008 Constitution affirms the right to migration and asserts that "no one shall be declared illegal by reason of his or her status as a migrant". This led to the abolition of visas and access to free movement for all foreigners. However, transcontinental migration soon put this measure to the test. According to the National Directorate of Migration, the diasporas from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Nigeria increased by 300 percent between 2008 and 2009, leading to visa requirements being reinstated for nationals of these countries in September 2010, and for Senegalese nationals in November 2015.

After entering Ecuador, the migrants – with the help of smugglers – cross through Peru and into northwestern Brazil, where they apply for asylum. While their application is processed, which can take several years, asylum-seekers keep a "*protocolo*" receipt that gives them the right to work and access services.

Although it is difficult to determine the numbers of irregular migrants, the figures of Brazil's federal police, which is in charge of immigration issues, show a clear trend. From 2000 to 2014, the tally rose from 3,726 to 15,554 Africans from 48 countries, including many West African states.<sup>6</sup>

## Precarious Activities

The documentation processes in Brazil and Argentina may differ, but the main occupation of migrants remains the same: street trading. A lack of skills and social capital makes it difficult for African migrants to integrate into the formal – and increasingly specialised and competitive – job market. The saturation of the street market in the metropolises of Buenos Aires or São Paulo, as well as competition with locals, has led migrants to shift towards medium-sized towns and into other low-skilled occupations. In southern Brazil, for example, some migrants are finding work in the agri-food sector. The states of Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul have many poultry factories, some of which export to the Middle East. These companies keep a Muslim workforce to guarantee their customers a Halal product. Religion thus becomes a resource for Senegalese as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees familiar with the *dhabiha* method of slaughter, which can only be performed by the hand of a Muslim invoking the name of Allah. However, the low wages (225–330 Euros per month) and harsh working conditions often send the Senegalese back to street trading.

Despite their increasing visibility in public spaces (sidewalks, railway stations, markets, squares, beaches, etc.), street vendors are not the only African figures around. In Brazil and Argentina, more and more small-scale migrant entrepreneurs are positioning themselves in the "ethnic market", exploiting the locals' growing interest in exoticism and African heritage. Women open restaurants, afro hair salons, and dance and percussion schools. African culture provides

marketable goods, including guided trips to Guinea or Senegal for drumming and dance classes. Others sell loincloths in the central district of República in São Paulo, mainly to Afro-Brazilian women seeking to revive their African roots.

## Conclusion

African migrants' initial hopes for success are often frustrated within a few months of their arrival in South America. Despite welcoming immigration policies and administration, the profits from street vending are often not as high as expected. They may cover the necessities of basic living, but there are no surpluses to send home as remittances – an important factor in the initial decision to leave. The life of a street vendor can also be dangerous, due to police repression and conflicts with other traders.

The feeling of having been misled is reinforced by the economic crisis and devaluations of the Brazilian real and the Argentine peso that have decimated remittances to families. The sacrifices endured on a daily basis are not converted into financial compensation. Instead of new riches in an American eldorado, most newcomers find only disillusionment.

The rise of right-wing governments has also called existing immigration policies into question. In the name of reducing public spending, the Brazilian government led by Michel Temer since 2016 is considering the closure of African embassies, signalling that the continent will again take a back seat in their foreign-relations priorities.

Since the beginning of 2017, the long-tolerated hawkers of Buenos Aires and São Paulo have been subjected to campaigns of stigmatisation and expulsion. Justifying police operations in Buenos Aires, the city's attorney-general, Luis Cevasco, characterised street workers as “delinquent organisations that appropriate the public space, circumvent taxes, launder money and disadvantage established traders”<sup>7</sup>. In addition, Argentinian President Mauricio Macri is speeding up the procedures to expel irregular migrants and those with a criminal history.

As seen elsewhere in Europe and the United States, the return of the political right and anti-migrant repression is increasing the precariousness of African migrants' lives. It may well lead them to again search out new territories. ■■■

*Translated from French.*

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# Stranded in the Middle East: Uganda Must Do More to Prevent Trafficking

Rosebell Kagumire

When I met Stella (not her real name), who is in her mid-twenties, she was still frail but out of danger. She had just arrived back from an eight-month ordeal in Oman, where a Kampala broker had sent her via an agent in Kenya. Stella's mother had borrowed over USD300 to enable her to travel when she was promised a job as a receptionist in the United Arab Emirates. When she landed in Oman, her nightmare unfolded. She was not going to be a receptionist but was forced to work for up to 20 hours a day in a family household, as a cleaner and cook, and at the family's shop. "I was stranded. I was waking up at 4am to work. After a few months, I started coughing blood. My employers had not paid me," she recalled. She eventually escaped with the help of two other Ugandans who worked in the same neighbourhood. The agency that had sent her, however, was not about to spend any money to return her to Uganda. She was held in a room filled with other foreign workers who were also unable to work because of various illnesses. Luckily, one of them had a phone and she managed to reach a WhatsApp group of Ugandans living in Oman. Eventually, her ticket home was paid for by Make a Child Smile, a Ugandan NGO that has been instrumental in repatriating many women from the Middle East.



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Stella's story is emblematic of the growing human trafficking problem in Uganda, which is driven in large part by youth unemployment. According to the African Development Bank, 12 million young peo-

ple entered Africa's labour force in 2015, yet only 3.1 million jobs were created.<sup>1</sup> Uganda's high youth-unemployment rate – which ranges between 60 and 83 percent, depending on the reporting standard – pushes its ambitious young men and women to go wherever there might be opportunities. This makes them easy targets for traffickers.

## Lack of Comprehensive Data

Due to the illicit nature of human trafficking and limited local attention, good data is hard to come by for Uganda and the wider East African region. The most comprehensive information currently available comes from the US Department of State<sup>2</sup>, which ranks Uganda as a country whose government does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The victim statistics continue to rise.

The Uganda Police 2017 Annual Crime Report registered 177 cases of trafficking in persons, a 41.6 percent rise from the 125 cases recorded in 2016.<sup>3</sup> Sixteen traffickers were convicted in 2016, compared to three in 2015. Over 300 cases have already been filed in 2018, but the police estimate that up to 50 girls are trafficked undetected every day. The increase in trafficking cases is well in line with the public outcry on social media platforms about Ugandan women stranded in various countries in the Middle East.

Human trafficking in Uganda is both a domestic and international phenomenon. Within its borders, Ugandan children as young as seven are forced to labour in agriculture, fishing, forestry, cattle-herding, mining, quarrying, brick-making, carpentry,

steel-manufacturing, street-vending, bars, restaurants and domestic service.<sup>4</sup> The US State Department report also shows that both girls and boys are exploited in prostitution; the main targets for domestic sex trafficking are girls and women between the ages of 13 and 24.

From an international perspective, Uganda serves as a source, transit and destination country. Young women are most vulnerable to transnational trafficking. Like Stella, they are often fraudulently recruited for employment and then exploited in forced labour or prostitution. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Turkey and Algeria are among the most common destinations.

## Female Face of Trafficking

Trafficking cannot be understood without applying a gendered analysis of the push factors at home as well as the vulnerabilities and risks both in transit and at the destination. Girls and women are at particularly high risk for domestic work and sexual exploitation because they are commonly taken out of school to provide income for the family. School dropout rates continue to be higher for girls than boys. Between 1995 and 2015, the rate of primary school dropouts stood at 53.6 percent for girls, against a total average of 42.8 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Women between the ages of 15 and 29 are also highly disadvantaged in the labour market. The 2015 School to Work Transition Survey, conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the International Labour Organisation, found that they faced higher unemployment rates, wage gaps, higher shares in vulnerable employment, and longer school-to-work transitions.<sup>6</sup>

Given these low levels of education and poor working conditions, women and girls are easily enticed to leave Uganda in hopes of a better future. Over the past 15 years, they have altered the predominantly male face of migration.

## Legal Framework Available

In 2010, Uganda ratified the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Known as the Maputo Protocol, it is still one of the most comprehensive legal instruments for the rights of African women.



Recognising the heinous nature of human trafficking, it requires African states to prevent and condemn trafficking in women, prosecute the perpetrators of such trafficking, and protect those women most at risk. However, 15 years later, in the context of increased inequality and lack of opportunities on the continent, human trafficking has become one of the most sophisticated kinds of organised crime.

Uganda is also a signatory to the 2003 United Nations Convention Against Organised Crime, which has been supplemented by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control of another person, for the purpose of exploitation”. It specifies that the use of any means of trafficking renders irrelevant any consent on the part of the victim.

*Maidames is a series of images of South/Southeast Asian and African migrant workers in Lebanon that explores reality and fantasy in the relationship between the domestic worker and her female employer. The “maid” becomes the embodiment of her “madam’s” fantasy. Title: Hana Lielit (2017).*

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Domestically, Uganda enacted the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act in 2009, which criminalises all forms of trafficking, including both sexual exploitation and forced labour, and sets out punishments ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment. The law also established the Ugandan National Counter Human Trafficking Task Force.

## Lack of Prosecution

Although the government has used this Act to investigate, prosecute and convict perpetrators, labour-recruitment agencies that are involved in trafficking are rarely brought to book, allegedly because of corruption and their connections to people in high places.

“When you find out who is behind these agencies, then you give up. These are very powerful people in Uganda and the labour-export market is a boom for them and the economy. Any attempts to question the means and how they make Ugandans vulnerable to trafficking and you will get warnings,” claims a fellow crime-reporter who wishes to remain anonymous. He followed

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It is hard to resettle back home if traffickers remain untouched or are not prosecuted in a way that protects the victims.

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a group of trafficked Rwandan girls after a police tip-off, but later both he and the police let the girls go because of intimidation by influential figures. Traffickers are known to have informants in Uganda’s security organisations who warn them about police operations.<sup>7</sup>

Alex Ssembatya runs Make a Child Smile, the NGO that helped Stella return to Uganda. He argues that the prosecution of agencies involved in trafficking requires such a high threshold of evidence that is difficult to achieve without risking the safety of victims. “In many cases,” he says, “we gather evidence and we approach the authorities but they toss you around for more while the agencies implicated continue their businesses.”

There are other problems, too. Often the victims of trafficking know the people who led them into it. It is hard to resettle back home if traffickers remain untouched or are

not prosecuted in a way that protects the victims. Some traffickers threaten to harm the victim’s family, preventing victims from reporting them in the first place.

## Shifting the Problem

The East African Parliament, the legislative organ of the East African Community, passed an Anti-Trafficking Act in 2016, but coordination among participating governments remains a challenge. As measures are slowly implemented at some border posts, traffickers make use of more remote crossings of the porous borders, making the journey longer and more perilous for victims of trafficking.

Increased controls at Entebbe International Airport have also caused traffickers to find new routes. Like Stella, an increasing number of rescued Ugandan women report that they were trafficked out of the country through Kenya, with the assistance of agents both in Kampala and Nairobi.<sup>8</sup> In July 2018, 20 Ugandan girls appeared in a Nairobi court after they were caught with forged passports at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and arrested in a probe of suspected human trafficking.

Also, border officers tend to focus on breaches of immigration law, rather than considering whether human trafficking has played a role. “The Uganda–Kenya border at Busia is one of the most used routes, but immigration officers lack clear guidelines on what to do with the victims, so they often detain them,” says Elizabeth Kemigisha, an advocate with the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers. “Victims are mostly treated as suspects under the Kenyan Citizenship and Immigration Act 2011 when intercepted.” As a result, victims are likely to fall back into the hands of the traffickers, after a fine is paid, while some remain stranded.

## Lack of Victim Support

In a recent interview with the local Daily Monitor newspaper, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Labour, Mr Pius Bigirimana, argued that it is hard for the ministry to rescue victims because “they are not known”. He continued, “We only help those we know because the local companies that took them abroad are responsible for the client’s return in case of a problem.” This lack of support for victims of traffick-

ing, because “they went illegally”, leaves thousands of Ugandans in limbo, often for months, until they manage to escape.

In the past, the Ugandan government put temporary bans on countries like Saudi Arabia in response to public protests about human rights violations. These, however, have lapsed, and no other mechanisms have been put in place to ensure the protection of Ugandan workers. Ugandan embassies in destination countries remain ill-equipped to assist trafficking victims.

Some reports indicate that Uganda’s response to victims of trafficking is so defective that police and other government employees have temporarily sheltered victims in their own homes upon return. “The government did not employ systematic procedures to assist victims, and availability of victim services was inconsistent,” as the US State Department diplomatically puts it.

The government’s efforts to provide victim protection do face financial constraints, but the heart of the problem is that authorities view the victims as criminals. Sex work is criminalised in Uganda, which creates a double layer of stigma and fear for victims to open up about their ordeals of sexual exploitation. Often they speak only of long hours of work and slave-like working conditions and are silent about sexual abuse.

Many traffickers use rape and sexual abuse to break the victim’s spirit, instil fear and ensure obedience. Women who fall pregnant along the trafficking routes are often forced into abortions. Yet, once rescued, the system also threatens to criminalise the victim and doesn’t offer sufficient rehabilitation services. Women and girls arrested during their journeys should not be treated as criminals and stripped of the

right to tell their stories and get adequate help. Trafficking survivors urgently need better access to medical treatment, counselling, emergency shelter, resettlement support, and skills development.

## Different Thinking Needed

Some good Samaritans and NGOs, like those mentioned above, have stepped in to fill the void created by the state’s inadequate response. Modern technology, which is often used by traffickers themselves to cover their tracks, plays an increasingly important role. Wetaase, for example, is building an open-data platform to track and reduce the incidence of human trafficking in East Africa. Still in the early stages of development, it provides information to citizens seeking to travel abroad and to those returning home from experiences of trafficking, as well as a toll-free hotline. Ugandans living abroad are increasingly using Facebook and WhatsApp as self-help tools to raise and respond to alarms.

Women’s Link Worldwide, an international human rights NGO, studies trafficking as a form of gender-based violence. Most of their research is based in Europe and Latin America, but women face similar challenges the world over.<sup>9</sup> There is need for a deeper look into the lives of women in East Africa who are at risk, those who are caught up in trafficking networks, and the survivors. The violence suffered on these routes needs to be documented and averted. More research into the structural issues that push women into these situations, holistic forms of protection, and psycho-social support for victims are urgently needed. ■■■

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# A Double Challenge:

## LGBTI Refugees and Asylum Seekers in South Africa

### Interview

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has seen a large influx of refugees and asylum seekers from across the continent. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Africa received the highest number of asylum seekers in the world between 2006 and 2011, the majority of whom originate from countries like Zimbabwe, Somalia or the Democratic Republic of Congo. South Africa's 2011 census, which provides the most recent official figures, found that there were about 2.2 million immigrants living in the country, representing 3.3 percent of the total population.

South Africa's generous legal provisions, which guarantee all asylum seekers the right to work and reside legally in the country while their papers are processed, its relatively large and modern economy, and its progressive constitution make it an attractive destination. This is also true for African lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people who seek to escape criminalisation and victimisation in their home countries. South Africa's post-apartheid constitution was the first in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, peoples' experiences on the ground are often much less favourable. Over the past decade, anti-immigrant sentiments have flared up across the country in form of large-scale xenophobic attacks, most notably in 2008, 2013 and 2015. The department of home affairs, responsible for immigration matters, is crippled by the lack of a coherent migration policy, poor management and corruption.

Victor Mdluli Chikalogue of People Against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP), a community-based non-profit organisation that works to protect and promote the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in South Africa, sheds light on the challenges faced by them, and LGBTI people in particular.

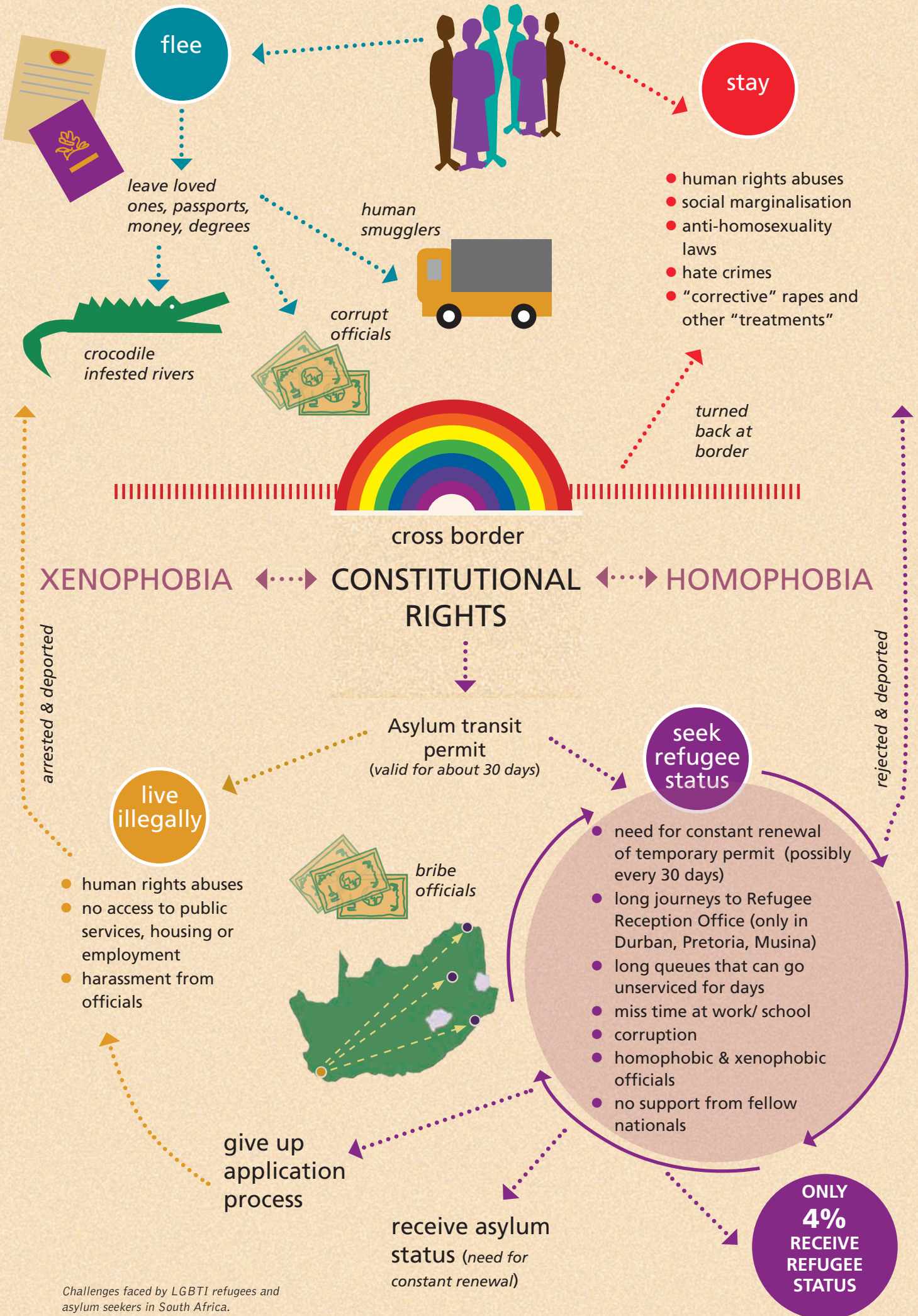


**Victor Mdluli Chikalogue** is the acting director and Gender Rights and LGBTI Refugees Programme Manager at PASSOP. Previously, Victor served as a youth coordinator for the Student Christian Organisation of Malawi and assistant coordinator for Transform Africa–Malawi Chapter, among others. Besides holding diplomas in project management and business administration, he is trained in gender-based violence issues and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**Perspectives:** Migration has long been a tense issue in South African politics and society. How would you describe the current mood in the country?

**Chikalogue:** The attitude of South African society towards immigrants, and especially LGBTI asylum seekers leaves much to be desired. The feeling of many ordinary South Africans on the street is that the people from other African countries have come here to wrestle away the already scarce economic opportunities available in a country with unemployment of around 27 percent. The various xenophobic flare-ups we have witnessed over the last decade are just the tip of the iceberg. Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the continent face xenophobia on a daily basis: when they go shopping, when they are looking for jobs, and in the neighbourhoods they live in. Rejec-





Challenges faced by LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa.

tion, cold responses and even insults are regular occurrences in their everyday lives.

Comments made by well-known politicians like the mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, calling migrants “criminals” or Minister of Small Business Development Lindiwe Zulu calling migrants “undesirable” do not help the situation. There clearly is no political will even at the top of government to address the issues.

For LGBTI people, the situation is compounded by the fact that, even though it has a very liberal constitution, South Africa is still a society full of prejudice and conservative views towards same-sex relations and gender nonconformity. Homophobic comments and, in some cases even violence, in the form of beatings, corrective rapes and killings, are part of the reality LGBTI people face. Law enforcement tends to turn a blind eye. Victims have come to realise that there is still a huge gap between the laws and their implementation in South Africa.

Many refugees and asylum seekers tell you about abuse and poor treatment by the department of home affairs. What are some of the challenges they face and their experiences?

In 2012, the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office and, a year later, Port Elizabeth stopped accepting any new cases, forcing asylum seekers in the Western and Eastern Cape to travel to Pretoria, Durban or Musina, close to the border with Zimbabwe, to renew their status. For asylum seekers in Cape Town, this means travelling to Pretoria at their own expense as frequently as every month, a journey most asylum seekers cannot afford. Asylum seekers often struggle to find employment, and

employers are not keen to grant days off of work every month to renew status. Even if the asylum seeker does make it to a Refugee Reception Office to renew their status, they are often placed in queues and not serviced for days or even weeks, missing valuable time at work or school.

The conditions at these centres are squalid. In a June 2018 visit to a Refugee Reception Office, the shadow minister of home affairs remarked that he had seen

animal shelters in better condition. Further, the policies used by the department of home affairs are inconsistently applied, and there seem to be no universal guidelines for accepting cases. Since December of last year, our organisation alone has seen 168 cases of refugee status withdrawal and 441 final rejections of asylum status and 713 appeal cases, many of which were administered without proper or consistent explanation. On paper, the framework that the South African government uses to evaluate asylum cases is fair and idealistic – anybody with a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin is eligible to apply. In practice, cases are frequently denied even with clear evidence that the asylum seeker will face dangerous circumstances if they are subjected to forced return. While the department of home affairs does not publish statistics regarding how many asylum seekers and refugees are being processed, we know that many asylum seekers are waiting for status, or have been denied despite having valid claims of persecution.

There are thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who languish for years under the stressful home affairs documentation and refugee status determination (RSD) process. Refugees and asylum applicants are frequently insulted and verbally abused by staff members of home

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affairs. We have seen dozens of instances where government officials and RSD officers have demanded bribe money from our clients in exchange for extensions and visa renewals. When clients refuse to pay, they have been subject to racist and vitriolic commentary, and often have their asylum documents ripped up right in front of them.

The South African government, despite having been instructed by the Supreme Court to reopen the closed centres in the Western and Eastern Cape, actively puts measures in place to make the refugee and asylum process as difficult as possible to deter new applicants and force applicants to return to their country, in contravention of the UN Convention on Refugees.

*Asylum seekers and refugees line up at a Refugee Reception Office.*  
© Lawyers for Human Rights

Where do most LGBTI asylum seekers come from, and what are some of the reasons they decide to leave their home countries?

There are no official statistics, but most of the cases we receive are from southern Africa. However, people come from all over the continent and even beyond, the Middle East in particular. Out of 76 cases – 53 gay men, 15 lesbians, six transgender women and two transgender men – that we have received since 2016, 15 ran away from persecution based on laws that criminalise homosexuality. The rest left voluntarily before their situation worsened.

The experiences many of the LGBTI asylum seekers have to go through in their home countries are very traumatic. They are not only faced with draconian laws but public rejection and humiliation. Many lose their jobs for being queer. More gruesomely, lesbians are often subjected to so-called “correctional” rapes, with some being forced into marriages and getting children. Gay men get gang-raped and in some instances castrated in an attempt to stop them committing “abomination”. Others are forced into mental health institutions or



Many LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers are forced to renew their status as frequently as every month.

### Is South Africa the oasis that many queer asylum-seekers perceive it to be?

undignified “treatments” at the hands of churches that perform exorcisms to rid them of their “homosexual demons”.

Given these circumstances, many have to flee in a hurry without proper travel documents or money. The journey to South Africa is itself filled with dangers ranging from extortion to rape and human smuggling. Most of the countries they have to pass through on their way, like Zambia or Zimbabwe, are also very xenophobic states that sometimes detain them.

Relatively speaking, South Africa is a safe haven, but there are also many problems. To many LGBTI asylum seekers, the realities they encounter come as a shock because of all the stories they heard about the liberal constitution and freedoms it guarantees to LGBTI people.

It already starts at the border. Despite the fact that South Africa guarantees refugee status to LGBTI people fleeing prosecution on the basis of their sexuality, some LGBTI asylum seekers are simply turned away at South African points of entry. One asylum seeker reported to us that he was told by an immigration official that “we don’t want gay people in South Africa”.

After asylum seekers express their reason for entering South Africa, they should receive a so called asylum transit permit that is valid for about 30 days and allows them to travel to one of the Refugee Reception Offices in Durban, Pretoria or Musina. Here they should be given

a 6-months asylum permit. However, there seems to be an unofficial policy among home affairs officials to make the process for LGBTI people as difficult as possible. No matter how strong the asylum case is, they only grant LGBTI people 30 days before they need to extend their permit or get their case heard again. This is done knowing that some people travel up to 1,600 kilometres to get to these centres.

Many LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers favour Cape Town because it’s supposedly a very gay-friendly city. Having to travel every month to Durban, Pretoria or Musina takes a toll on their finances and, when they succeed to find work, it puts them at loggerheads with their employers. We have cases of people who travelled all the way to Musina or Pretoria from Cape Town only to be told that they need to return at a later date after waiting in a queue for a week.

Many of the officials involved with interviewing and processing LGBTI asylum seekers are outright homophobic, despite being bound by their oath of office and the Constitution not to discriminate against anyone based on their sexual orientation. They mock and humiliate LGBTI asylum seekers, asking them to “prove” that they are gay.

In the end, according to our own numbers, only 4 percent receive refugee status. The rest are either given asylum status or they are rejected completely.

All of these factors have resulted in many LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers refusing to proceed with the documentation process and choosing to live as illegal immigrants. This denies them vital access to socio-economic opportunities like medical services, employment or housing. They also face the risk of getting deported back into the countries they fled from if arrested by immigration officials.

Some end up living in the streets, as they cannot afford decent hous-

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ing, and face constant harassment from law enforcement and immigration officials.

Migrant community networks often serve as a safety net for refugees and asylum seekers through social and economic support given to each other. Can LGBTI people count on the support of their compatriots?

It's challenging for LGBTI asylum seekers to take advantage of social networks from their fellow nationals once here in South Africa. What you need to understand is that these communities, be they Nigerian, Congolese or Ugandan, are still a kind of village community away from home. They have the same conservative beliefs and prejudices as their compatriots back home, from whom many of the LGBTI asylum seekers have fled.

In fact, LGBTI asylum seekers rarely want anything to do with their fellow tribesmen and compatriots as they have had very bad experiences with them. We have received reports where Congolese have attacked fellow Congolese LGBTI asylum seekers for "shaming" their nation. So, although social networks may have been helpful under different circumstances, they are rarely so in the case of LGBTI asylum seekers here in South Africa.

The most important social network is the LGBTI community itself and organisations in support of it.

What needs to be done to improve the situation for LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa?

We need training for the relevant public servants to ensure that LGBTI asylum seekers are treated fairly and with dignity. Comprehensive knowledge of the rights and procedures regarding gaining refugee status based on sexual orientation or gender identity is often lacking among officials. To stamp out endemic corruption at the department of home affairs, bribery should be met with stiff penalties. The department also has to reopen the Cape Town Reception Office as a matter of urgency to facilitate easy access to services for the local refugee community.

To ensure LGBTI people can live a dignified life once in South Africa, the police urgently need to take measures to protect and properly investigate hate crimes. There is also a need for shelter, nutritional support and health services, as I have pointed out.

The ultimate solution would be, of course, to make sure that LGBTI persons are safe in their home countries. But that remains a far-fetched goal in most instances. The emergence of at least one other country on the continent willing to admit LGBTI asylum seekers would help to take the pressure off South Africa as currently the only available destination. Mozambique, for example, has already decriminalised homosexual relations and is relatively less homophobic.

In the meantime, we as civil society will continue to provide safe spaces, apply pressure on government and raise public awareness. ■■■

# The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework:

## A Perspective from Kenya

Felicity Okoth

With a total of 22.5 million refugees, 40.3 million internally displaced people and 2.3 million asylum seekers, the world faces unprecedented levels of mass dislocation,<sup>1</sup> and the situation is likely to worsen. In this crisis, the low- and middle-income countries that receive migrants bear a disproportionate burden. The United Nations' 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants lays out a vision for a world in which refugees can thrive and responsibility is shared on a global scale.

To make its vision a reality, the Declaration proposes a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) which forms the basis for a Global Compact on Refugees. The CRRF promises better support for countries that host refugees. It also wants to ensure that refugees are integrated into host communities from the start, in order to improve the provision of basic services and livelihood opportunities. In a sharp departure from the traditional humanitarian approach, the CRRF promotes the self-reliance of refugees and host communities alike by building the local economies and creating mutual benefits and empowerment. Kenya, which hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Africa<sup>2</sup>, has embraced the initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Kenya's Refugee Affairs Secretariat acts as the focal point for the CRRF rollout in the country. In March 2018, it presented a draft national action plan to implement the 2017 Nairobi Declaration on Somali Refugees as part of a CRRF roadmap.<sup>4</sup> The roadmap includes, among other things, plans to facilitate the legal status of refugees who have legitimate claims to citizenship and/

or residency in Kenya through marriage or parentage. It also pledges to enhance refugees' self-reliance and inclusion in Kenya. The Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, established in 2015, is central to ongoing efforts to achieve this objective. As a case study, it offers valuable insights into some practical challenges the framework is likely to face.

### A New Approach: The Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement

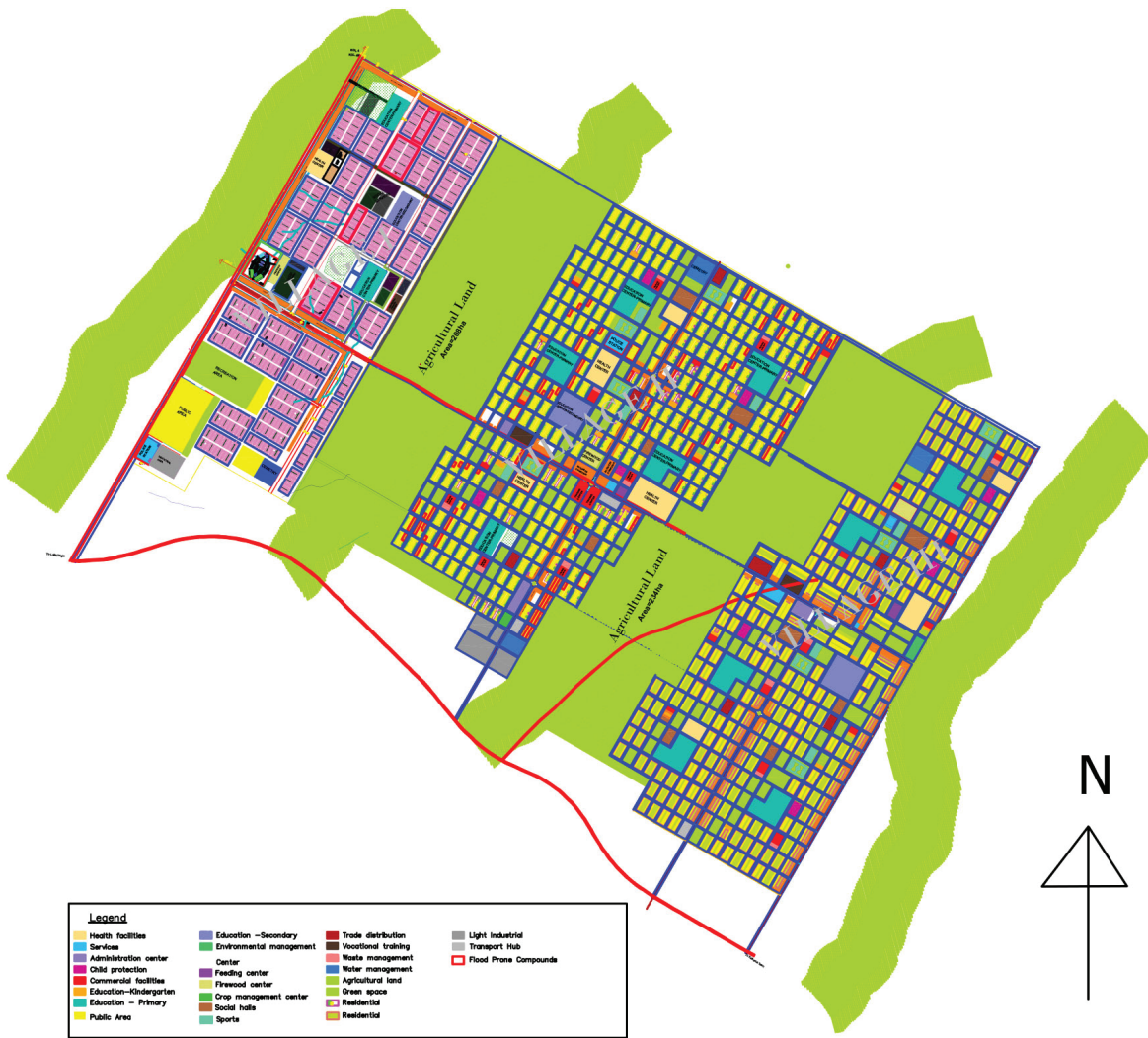
The majority of the almost 500,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya originate from Somalia (58.2 percent) and South Sudan (22.9 percent).<sup>5</sup> The average person in both groups has been displaced for 26 years, which highlights the need for durable solutions to a protracted situation. Currently, almost all refugees reside in the Dadaab refugee complex (49 percent) and in Kakuma refugee camp (38 percent).<sup>6</sup>

Following a continuous influx of refugees from South Sudan after the renewed conflict in that country since December 2013, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) asked the Kenyan government for additional land to expand the Kakuma refugee camp. The camp had long been congested, hosting a population of about 180,000: two-and-a-half times what it was designed for. In June 2015, the Turkana County government provided a site near Kalobeyei Township, about 40 kilometres northwest of Kakuma.

The Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement has since been touted as the sustainable answer to Kenya's long-term refugee challenges. As in



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Map of Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement. Source: UNHCR.

other refugee-hosting countries, this initiative enters a scene of tensions between poor locals, who often suffer drought and hunger, and refugees who receive free food and basic social services. In line with the CRRE, the project aims to promote the self-reliance of both refugees and host communities. Its integrated strategy is to promote social cohesion and economic development by providing both refugees (estimated 60,000 people) and the host community (about 20,000 people) with enhanced service delivery and better livelihood opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

The Kalobeyi Integrated Social and Economic Development Programme (KISEDPP), which was developed in collaboration with the UNHCR and the World Bank, provides the policy framework for improving the socio-economic conditions of the two target groups. Projects within KISEDPP range from investments in basic infrastructure to livelihood interventions in the form of agricultural projects. The programme is to be implemented over a 14-year period, from 2016 to 2030.

## From Pledges to Implementation

The UNHCR has emphasised the importance of proactive government involvement in refugee management and ownership of KISEDPP projects. In recognition of this, the Turkana County government has included refugees in its integrated development plan for 2018–2022. If adopted by the county

As in other refugee-hosting countries, this initiative enters a scene of tensions between poor locals, who often suffer drought and hunger, and refugees who receive free food and basic social services.

assembly, this will set an important precedent for the greater inclusion of refugees in Kenya's development.

Despite this enthusiasm, the programme faces various challenges. One

part of this relates to the transition that humanitarian agencies will have to make from the “soap-and-bucket” distribution approach to refugee management to a more sustainable and long-term development approach.<sup>8</sup> Several factors can make this a difficult turn. Some implementing partners lack the expertise or capacity to work across different forms of aid or to coordinate their activities. Others may specialise in either humanitarian or development aid and thus find it difficult to draw linkages between the two. If donor mandates and assumptions make a clear distinction between humanitarian aid and development aid, their institutional arrangements can present stumbling blocks to a humanitarian development approach.<sup>9</sup>

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**However, the greatest challenges to the success of the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement are political.**

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A second area of concern is the Kenyan government’s limited capacity to manage refugee populations.<sup>10</sup> For example, it was only in 2015 that the UNCHR handed the process of determining refugee status to Kenya’s Refugee Affairs Secretariat, and this was not accomplished without pitfalls.<sup>11</sup> There were stalled or suspended processes for registration and refugee-status determination, inconsistencies and delays in implementation and, for refugees going through the processes, burdensome administrative issues coupled with higher travel costs.<sup>12</sup>

It also took more than five years for Kenya to successfully devolve the responsibility for education and healthcare from the national level to counties. Given this fact, it will likely take a long time for the government to take over the running of schools and hospitals within the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. It is wishful thinking to believe that current refugee projects can be handed over any time soon.

The potential of KISED P agricultural activities to spur the local economy is also constrained by limited availability of water, seeds and equipment. Although refugees can cultivate food in small kitchen gardens, larger-scale cultivation would require considerable research into existing aquifers and investment in irrigation systems.<sup>13</sup> The UNHCR and its agencies in the settlement

are currently piloting an integrated large-scale farming project, but its sustainability is also in question due to Turkana County’s characteristic low rainfall. Moreover, to avoid conflict with local host communities that largely depend on natural and animal resources, refugees are not allowed to engage in animal husbandry or to cut down trees to sell as firewood. This further narrows their livelihood choices and limits their pursuit of self-reliance.

However, the greatest challenges to the success of the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement are political. Currently, all asylum seekers and refugees are required to live in their designated refugee camps and may not travel outside the camp without a movement pass. The 2016 Refugee Bill would have undone this encampment policy and provided refugees with the right to work and use land for business and farming. It was passed by parliament but rejected by President Uhuru Kenyatta in 2017, citing a lack of public consultation. Relevant stakeholders, including the UNHCR, the Refugee Consortium of Kenya and the Danish Refugee Council, are currently reworking the Refugee Bill, which will have to be tabled in parliament for debate. Given the current securitisation of migration following al-Shabaab terrorist attacks in Kenya, it seems unlikely that a policy allowing for the free movement of refugees will be adopted and implemented.

The inability of refugees to freely move outside the Kalobeyei settlement clearly has negative implications for the implementation of KISED P projects. In essence, the current policy does not allow refugees to access commercial markets outside the settlement. Thus training recipients will have limited avenues to utilise their acquired skills or to sell their products outside of the settlement.

The success of KISED P’s self-reliance approach will equally depend on the availability of adequate funding. It may be laudable to encourage refugees to create businesses that will provide them with more resources and reduce their reliance on often-inadequate humanitarian aid, but self-reliance projects require long-term financial commitment, too. The Kenyan government is unlikely to make such a commitment with 42 percent of its population living below the poverty line.<sup>14</sup> If the CRRF is to work in the global South, donor countries will again have to provide funding.



## Moving Forward

KISEDIP's integrated approach to the development of self-reliant refugees and hosts relies on coordination between implementing partners, development partners, local non-governmental organisations and civil society – and above all, on the involvement and goodwill of both local and national governments. Turkana County's inclusion of refugees in its development plans is a step in the right direction. Another is the national government's formation of a technical working group to develop the national CRRF framework. It is also commendable that the working group represents multiple stakeholders, including Kenya's Refugee Affairs Secretariat, the UNHCR, the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat, the regional Inter-governmental Authority on Development, and the Danish Refugee Council.

The “whole-of-society approach”<sup>15</sup> is a current buzzword in migration management. It acknowledges the important role that relevant stakeholders – including individuals, families, communities, voluntary associations and, where and as appropriate, the private sector and industry – play in support of national efforts towards the sustainable management of refugees. It helps to ensure that the public has a greater understanding of the importance and the complexity of refugee protection. This understanding can, in turn, broaden support for the political commitments and investments needed to make the CRRF a reality.

A “whole-of-government approach” is equally necessary. Because KISEDIP is a 14-year project, sustained political support at all levels of government will be crucial. Various government ministries are involved in the rollout of the CRRF, at both the national and county level. This includes the ministry of interior and coordination of national government; the ministry of devolution and planning; the ministry of education; the ministry of environment, water and natural resources; and the ministry of agriculture, to name but a few. County governments have the most direct contact with the host community, refugees and international relief agencies. All of them have a stake in the rollout of the CRRF, and specifically with regards to ongoing and planned projects under KISEDIP.

While Kenya's support of the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement development programme provides a good starting point, its sustainability will depend on the government's ability and willingness to follow through with actual implementation. Beyond building the capacity of relevant government officials at both national and county levels, it can only be hoped that the government's broad-based approach will also foster the necessary political momentum to end the current encampment policy and to provide for free movement and greater economic rights of refugees and asylum seekers by enacting the 2016 Refugee Bill. ■■■

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# Changing Migration Realities: Sub-Saharan African Students in Morocco

Souley Mahamadou Laouali

Morocco's migration realities are changing. Already a major sending and transit country for migrants to Europe, the North African kingdom has become a destination for a small yet growing immigrant community. This is particularly true in the education sector. In the face of restrictive migration policies and high education costs in Europe, Morocco is an attractive choice for students from the African sub-continent. In 2017, the country hosted approximately 18,000 students from sub-Saharan African countries, up from just over 1,000 in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

## Student Mobility on the Rise

Student mobility has shown an unprecedented increase over the last decade, as many institutions of higher learning actively seek to enrol international students. According to UNESCO, the number of graduating international students increased by more than 60 percent between 2005 and 2015, from 2.8 to 4.6 million. Africa accounts for about 10 percent of these students, with a mobility rate twice as high as the global average.<sup>2</sup>

Along with the traditional movement of students into the former colonial powers in Europe, intra-African student mobility is increasingly common. South Africa, Ghana and Morocco are major destinations, each attracting students from countries with which they share a degree of geographical, cultural and linguistic proximity.

## A Deliberate Effort: Increasing Higher Education Capacities and Diplomacy

However, the growing number of sub-Saharan students at Moroccan universities is not just the outcome of incidental factors: it is the result of deliberate efforts in the country's evolving immigration policy. Morocco was the first country in North Africa to take steps to deal with changing migration realities by, among other things, legalising irregular immigrants since 2014.

For more than ten years, Morocco has been negotiating bilateral agreements with sub-Saharan African states to facilitate scholarships and simplified visa requirements. Part of the goal of this "education diplomacy" was to improve the country's image within the continent, following the recognition of Western Sahara by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and Morocco's subsequent withdrawal from the continental body in 1984.<sup>3</sup> Morocco's integration into the African Union (AU) in 2017 can be credited in part to these efforts.

To accommodate the growing number of foreign students, the government dramatically expanded the public university system. Between 1997 and 2017, the number and capacity of public universities almost doubled. The private higher-education sector experienced similar increases.<sup>4</sup>

Although the vast majority of students still come from francophone West Africa, Morocco is gradually opening up to the Portuguese-, Spanish- and English-speaking countries by offering intensive language courses.



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**Le Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation communique :**

**Le Gouvernement du Royaume du Maroc, par l'entremise de l'Agence Marocaine de Coopération Internationale (AMCI), a mis à la disposition du Gouvernement du Sénégal cent cinquante (150) bourses d'études, au titre de l'année académique 2018/2019.**

Les filières proposées et les critères d'admission sont résumés dans le tableau ci-après :

Filières	Quota	Diplôme Exigé	Age maximum au 31/07/2018
1. Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles d'Ingénieurs	12	Bac S1, S2 avec au moins mention <b>Bien</b>	18 ans
2. Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles de Commerce	04	Bac Scientifique ou Economique avec au moins mention <b>Bien</b>	20 ans

The sub-Saharan students themselves say that they chose Morocco because of the relatively easy access made possible by simple application procedures for residence permits and the availability of bursaries. George, a 29-year-old student from Liberia, explains: "One of the benefits of studying here is that education is completely free as opposed to English-speaking countries. I knew nothing about Morocco before, but when I heard about the bursary and the possibility to learn French, I decided to come"<sup>5</sup>. Economic challenges and the lack of quality education in many parts of the continent are additional push-factors.

In 2017, Morocco granted about 8,000 scholarships, covering almost half of the approximately 18,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa affiliated to Moroccan universities.<sup>6</sup> Some receive scholarships from their countries of origin while many others rely on their families for financial support.

### Social and Economic Integration

The social and economic integration of these foreign students remains a challenge. Only a minority can speak and understand Moroccan Arabic, contributing to their social iso-

lation. Although racism is not considered a major issue, numerous students have been victims of various forms of discrimination. As Mohamed, a 25-year-old Cameroonian, expresses it: "I do not really like the fact that all Blacks are instinctively called 'My friend', or sometimes ... even 'Ebola'... Worse, there are even university professors who call us 'Africans' as if they are not Africans themselves ... I have a lot of Moroccan friends and I think that with the new generation, educated young people, things will slowly change"<sup>7</sup>.

A 2011 study by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reveals that only 2 percent

*Senegalese government statement on scholarships extended by the Kingdom of Morocco for the academic year of 2018/19.*

The social and economic integration of these foreign students remains a challenge. Only a minority can speak and understand Moroccan Arabic, contributing to their social isolation.

of migrants enjoy regular employment in Morocco, although 70 percent of them hold a diploma or degree.<sup>8</sup> While most major host countries allow foreign students to work while studying, there is no law that specifically deals with this issue in Morocco.

Because this is a grey area, few foreign students work to supplement their incomes. However, the problem of access to employment during studies in Morocco also concerns Moroccan students. There is no widespread culture of student employment and the unemployment rate of people below the age of 24 is high, at 26.5 percent in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

Sub-Saharan Africans who graduate are often employed in sectors that are not popular with the local population, such as call centres. The strong presence of highly qualified young adults in this industry reflects the “brain waste” to which many of them are subjected.<sup>10</sup> As a result, only a small minority of students plans to stay in the country after they have completed their studies. Most intend to work in their home countries or elsewhere where opportunities are available. While some Moroccan companies recruit qualified sub-Saharan managers from major Moroccan institutions for their subsidiaries on the African continent, there are few measures in place to enable their access to the labour market.

## Conclusion

International student mobility is set to continue growing. By opening its universities to foreign students, Morocco is using this trend to reshape its international relations on the continent. Sub-Saharan students who have been educated in the kingdom become ambassadors of Morocco's goodwill.

The increasing number of sub-Saharan students at Moroccan universities is also a significant aspect of the migration patterns on the continent. By developing and funding entrepreneurial support programmes for sub-Saharan graduates in their countries of origin, Western donors could help grow Morocco's bilateral efforts into triangular cooperation for the benefit of everyone. ■■■

*Translated from French by Nathalie Heynderickx.*

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# Oh Lord, Release My Visa:

## Religious Beliefs and Migration in Nigeria

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani

The world was horrified when the bodies of 26 Nigerian migrant women, aged between 14 and 18, were recovered from the Mediterranean Sea in November 2017, following their attempt to reach Europe in a rubber boat. Many Europeans probably wondered whether this incident would finally deter some migrants from braving the perilous journey across the sea in search of greener pastures in Europe. In 2016 alone, some 37,000 Nigerian migrants had arrived on Italian shores, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Most of them were from Edo, a majority Christian state in southern Nigeria with a long history of migration to Italy, and more than 11,000 were women. Once they get to Italy, reports the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC), 90 percent of the women end up in sex work.

Activists in Edo State, however, were never under the illusion that the news would have any effect. “Our experience ... is that they listen to you, ask questions, then they tell you that they have heard about it before,” says Augustine Onwubiko, former assistant coordinator of the Committee for the Support of Dignity for Women. To dissuade more women from migrating, her organisation takes their campaigns to schools, churches and markets across Benin, the capital city of Edo, showing them videos of migrants who faced horror at sea. “They even tell you worse stories that they’ve heard. Some will say, ‘It is not my portion,’” Onwubiko adds. Phil Inusa of the Girls’ Power Initiative, also in Edo, shares the same view. “We have been

showing them different videos [of] those trying to travel and what happens to them on the high sea and they still go,” she said. “It is an issue of ‘try your luck’. They say, ‘That was that one’s destiny. That is their luck.’”

In the same month, the world was once again horrified when CNN published a video of African migrants being sold as slaves in Libya. Between April 2017 and July 2018, the IOM rescued 9,159 Nigerians from Libya and returned them to Nigeria. One of these, 26-year-old Ehis, who had experienced slavery, torture and extortion, admitted that he had heard stories from other migrants long before he embarked on his own ill-fated trip. “I told them, that one is not my portion. Me, I will go,” he said. “It’s a game of luck. God is a god of mercy. Anyone who believes in his own god, let him go and see if he will succeed.”

The vast majority of Africans are deeply committed to the practices and tenets of Christianity and Islam, according to the Pew Research Centre, and large numbers from both religions also believe in making sacrifices to their ancestors for protection and other elements of traditional African religions. These Africans believe that life’s events are determined by unseen spiritual forces, some good and some evil. Good forces are responsible for wealth, health, peace, progress, productivity, longevity and other qualities of a wholesome life. Bad forces are responsible for poverty, disease, motor accidents, earthquakes and sudden death, to mention but a few. Pastors, imams and traditional spiritual priests are usually regarded as the masters of the spirit realm who are able, by their prayers and mysterious interventions, to invoke good forces and to forestall or disable bad ones.



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In many cities in Nigeria's Christian-majority south, a glance at the dozens of billboards advertising church programmes will give you an idea of the issues that require concentrated spiritual attention. Pastors organise special services where women can be assured of a man or a child of their own and men can be assured of a promotion at work.

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During testimony time at church services, people describe their battles and victories over the forces that control the issuance of visas at embassies: "The devil tried to stand in my way, but I kept trusting that the same God who parted the Red Sea for Moses would do it for me."

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With the battered Nigerian economy, migration to greener pastures abroad has joined the list of good things that people desire. A number of church banners advertise special events where the good forces that enable safe passage – by air, land or sea – can be invoked and the dark forces that harden the hearts of consular and border-control officers can be disabled. One banner in the streets of Benin boldly proclaims what attendees should expect from the forthcoming church event: "Abroad Must Favour My Family This Year!"

During testimony time at church services, people describe their battles and victories over the forces that control the issuance of visas at embassies: "The devil tried to stand in my way, but I kept trusting that the same God who parted the Red Sea for Moses would do it for me." The entire congregation claps and rejoices, congratulating them for the glorious achievement.

These lucky few with legal entry to Europe are usually granted a visitor's visa that expires in months, rather than an immigrant visa – but everyone knows that they have no plans of returning any time soon.

Across Europe, churches with largely migrant congregations hear similar testimonies. People tell of how they were miraculously able to find work despite not having legal documents, or how they were permitted to remain in the foreign country. Again, their testimonies elicit praise and worship for God.

Juju priests are certainly not left out of this. Some even claim to specialise in helping people cross over to Europe successfully. Migrants come to them before they embark on their journeys, seeking special blessings from the gods to ensure a smooth passage. Some migrants come seeking help to withhold the evil forces that jeopardised the success of others' trips.

Testimonies of their "powers" also abound. Patience, a former trafficker in Benin, recalls a batch of people for whom she had once arranged travel to Europe via Libya. "They were arrested on their way and locked up," she said. "When they got to Tripoli and wanted to cross over, policemen arrested them again. They really suffered. We had to send money from Nigeria to those police holding them before they were released. Among this set of people, one of them suffered so much. I had to go out and do some checking. I took his name to a juju priest, and I was told the problem is from his relatives who do not wish him well. That is the reason why he suffered that much." After some sacrifices to dispel the evil forces invoked by the malicious relatives, the snag in his journey was sorted out, and his jour-



ney to Europe was successful. He is now in Italy, selling secondhand clothes to other migrants, and has bought a piece of land back home, she reports.

It is these testimonies that cause faith to rise in the hearts of the faithful and reinforce the confidence of other would-be migrants, who see in them evidence that God is still in the business of doing miracles. Those who did not succeed in their attempts probably did not have enough faith, or did something wrong, or didn't seek the assistance of a spiritual leader with sufficient authority to command the forces that guard the doors of Western nations. Maybe next time they

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And so, no matter how many gory stories of death at sea or hard-hearted visa officials they hear, migrants continue to try, knowing that one person's luck/portion/destiny/star can indeed be very different from another's.

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should try a more powerful priest. And so, no matter how many gory stories of death at sea or hard-hearted visa officials they hear, migrants continue to try, knowing that one person's luck/portion/destiny/star can indeed be very different from another's. ■■■

# Senegalese Migration:

## Between Local Motives and International Factors

Aly Tandian

In Senegal, migration is one of the few topics of conversation of interest to everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnic group or profession. Travelling, for the majority of Senegalese, is not simply about getting a stable job or making one's fortune; it is also a path to social prestige and status. Senegalese languages are full of proverbs that highlight the value of travel. *"If you have a son, let him go. One day he will come back, either with money or with knowledge or with both."* *"He who does not travel will never know where it is better to live."* These proverbs shape social representations across the collective consciousness of Senegalese people and endorse their desires to travel.

Senegal's migration history is deeply rooted and ever evolving. The current migrants are part of a continuous mobility, travelling between places time and again throughout their lives. Now new destinations are taking shape in response to restrictive migration policies in Europe.

### Local Reasons to Migrate

In the 1980s and 1990s, structural adjustment programmes led to rising unemployment caused by the collapse of previously state-owned industries, loss of purchasing power, and stagnating salaries.<sup>1</sup> Many of those still working in Senegal joined the ranks of the "working poor", their salaries barely able to meet the needs of their families. As a result, many decided to migrate. Research carried out in Louga, in northern Senegal, tells us that certain professional

categories previously spared from retrenchment, such as teachers and state employees, now also choose to migrate in order to improve their incomes. The prospect of low incomes is even mentioned by university graduates. A good education no longer guarantees a stable job with an income high enough to support a decent life.

The impoverished situation of locals is aggravated by the relative wealth of returning migrants. Quite often, the influence of peers and their stories of the charms of migration play an important role in the decision to leave.

Family pressure is another important factor. "My sister always told me to do everything to join her in Spain. And all our discussions on Facebook were about this. I made it clear that my next project was not the trip but rather to get married. But she told me that I needed to be financially independent before marriage. For her, migration was the only door that was open," recalls Astou, a returning migrant.

Fallou, another returning migrant, experienced similar pressures in his family: "My mother kept pushing me to migrate, but she told me so only indirectly. To my brothers and me, she would mention the children of her friends who were abroad and who did a lot of things for their parents. As the eldest in the family, I came to understand that she was addressing me."

Although Astou was able to travel by regular means with a visa, Fallou ended up in Italy after crossing Mali, Niger and Libya. The fare for this journey by road varies between CFA franc 300,000 and 500,000 (450–750 Euros), plus the money paid at checkpoints, pushing the cost to up to CFA franc 800,000 (about 1,200 Euros). At check-



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points along these routes, migrants are asked to pay bribes to avoid assault, imprisonment or even death. All sorts of “pieces of identification” are requested from travellers to relieve them of their money.

Tickets are paid for in Senegal to avoid any quarrels en route. Travel times are not fixed. The companies set departures according to when they think that their buses will face little risk of being stopped by security agents. Major departure points include the capital Dakar and Tambacounda in the southeast. Collection points and routes are well established. A travel agency manager elaborates: “The bus leaving Dakar brings passengers to Bamako [in Mali]. From there, another takes those who want to continue to other countries and so forth. The agencies only manage the transport. The passengers themselves have to take care of the rest.”

## Impact of European Migration Policies

European migration policies have made their mark. In 2006, Spain became one of the first European countries to enter into bilateral cooperation with Senegal on maritime border control. The Spanish Guardia Civil, together with agents of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), patrolled Senegalese waters to stop maritime migration from Senegal to the Canary Islands. These measures massively reduced departures by boat, from 901 (with over 35,000 passengers) in 2006 to 101 (with just over 4,000 passengers) in the first half of 2007.<sup>2</sup> This maritime border control, combined with repatriation policies in Spain and later also Italy, first pushed departure



sites further south along the Senegalese coast and later dissuaded many migrants from embarking on the wooden “pirogues” (artisanal fishing boats) to make their way to Europe.

But it did not stop Senegalese youths from setting their sights on Europe. New routes to the Mediterranean crossing

*West African migration routes to Europe.*

Source: The Economist/ ICMPPD, 2017.

*At checkpoints along these routes, migrants are asked to pay bribes to avoid assault, imprisonment or even death. All sorts of “pieces of identification” are requested from travellers to relieve them of their money.*

emerged via Mali, Niger and Libya. The EU pushed the government of Niger to pass Law 2015–36, which addresses irregular migration and human smuggling. As an interlocutor in Niamey points out, “Currently, with the application of Law 2015–36, it has become difficult for West Africans to go beyond Agadez [city in central Niger, at the edge of the Sahara Desert]. They are imme-

diately seen as migrants who wish to go to Libya. We have the impression that ECO-WAS [Economic Community of West African States] stops in Agadez. There is supposed to be free movement in the ECOWAS region, but on the ground, people are doing something else. They are looking to make money from migrants.”

Europe's increased restrictions have also led to the emergence of new destinations. More and more Senegalese have decided on countries that share neither history nor geographic proximity with Senegal, including Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea and Brazil. The 2015 African Cup of Nations in

nation for migrants from the West African mainland.<sup>3</sup>

Latin America is much farther away, but Senegalese migrants state that the trip to the Americas is cheaper and now safer than the journey through North Africa. West African migrants first arrived in Brazil and Argentina almost twenty years ago, most of them coming from rural areas and between 20 and 30 years of age. The Senegalese were the first migrant group to ask for their status to be regularised in Brazil and, in 2009, around 800 received temporary residence permits.<sup>4</sup> In Senegal, the trade in fake Brazilian visas is flourishing.<sup>5</sup> Those who do not make the journey to Europe, the Americas or another African country often get stuck in the cities of Dakar and Saint-Louis in northern Senegal. They involve themselves in the informal sector alongside other young people who left the rural areas because of the lack of opportunities. They often become street vendors or make crafts from recycled material. The social pressure is too strong for failed voyagers to go home in shame. Their new activities are mobilising the necessary financial resources to resume their journey. Europe remains the destination of their dreams. ■■■

*Translated from French.*

The social pressure is too strong for failed voyagers to go home in shame. Their new activities are mobilising the necessary financial resources to resume their journey. Europe remains the destination of their dreams.

Equatorial Guinea and the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil created heightened attraction in recent years.

Cape Verde, geographically very close to Senegal, has enjoyed steady economic growth since 2000 and has a growing tourism sector, making it an attractive desti-

1 Cf. Demba Moussa Dembele, "Debt and destruction in Senegal: A study of twenty years of IMF and World Bank policies", London: World Development Movement, November 2003. Available at: [www.wdm.org.uk](http://www.wdm.org.uk).

2 Lorenzo Gabrielli, "Flux et contre-flux entre l'Espagne et le Sénégal. L'externalisation du contrôle des dynamiques migratoires vers l'Afrique de l'Ouest" ("Flows and counter-flows between Spain and Senegal. Outsourcing the control of migratory dynamics towards West Africa"), *REVUE Asylon(s)*, No. 3, March 2008. Available at: <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article716.html>.

3 Philipp Jung, "Migration, Remittances and Development: A case study of Senegalese labour migrants on the island Boa Vista, Cape Verde", *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 29: 2015. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/cea/1800>, DOI 10.4000/cea.1800.

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5 Pedro Noel and Laura Dixon, "Senegal: The Point of Departure", *Journalists for Transparency*, n.d. Available at: <https://j4t.org/stories/senegal-the-point-of-departure>.

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## About the Cover Artist

Gosette Lubondo was born in 1993 in Kinshasa (DRC), where she lives and works. Her father, a photographer, inspired her from a young age. In 2007, she decided to devote herself to photography while still a student. After studying graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa, she participated in numerous artistic workshops and projects to develop her own photographic style.

Gosette draws her inspiration from her daily life, from the various spatial and individual heritages that surround her. She works at the edge of the old and new, by questioning the memory of aging spaces. Her images reveal the traces left in these places, living witnesses of the history and the continual evolution of human life.

Through careful staging where she becomes the subject of her representations, she not only refers us to the past but gives a second life to these spaces which she considers vestiges of the past.

