

Dynamics of irregular migration from West Africa to Europe

Part 2: Parallel economy, slavery, and conflict zones: migration routes, a path strewn with perils in constant evolution

Illegal migratory departure, like any long term and distant departure for an individual, is the result of several months of preparation during which the future emigrant saves a maximum of funds and in some cases solicits his relatives to obtain financial and logistical support to enable him to make his travel project a reality. In 70% of cases, however, the departure is self-financed by the migrant alone¹.

Moreover, all of these candidates for departure are aware of the many risks they incur in attempting such a journey without any guarantee of success, which calls into question the relevance and usefulness of some of the public policies including communication campaigns highlighting the risks involved, which are found notably in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire and financed by the European Union. Emigrants generally tend to conceal these risks, even if they are aware of them, in order to exalt the potential success of the trip². Between 2014 and 2018, shipwrecks of migrant boats in the Mediterranean led to the death or disappearance of nearly 17,000 individuals. To this figure must be added the number of deaths of clandestine migrants on the African continent, particularly in the Sahara Desert (northern Niger, northern Sudan and southern Libya). Between 2013 and 2018, the death toll exceeds 7700³. These figures are relative and most likely well below the realities given the difficulty of obtaining an accurate overview.

Clearly drawn migration routes from Africa to Europe via the Maghreb

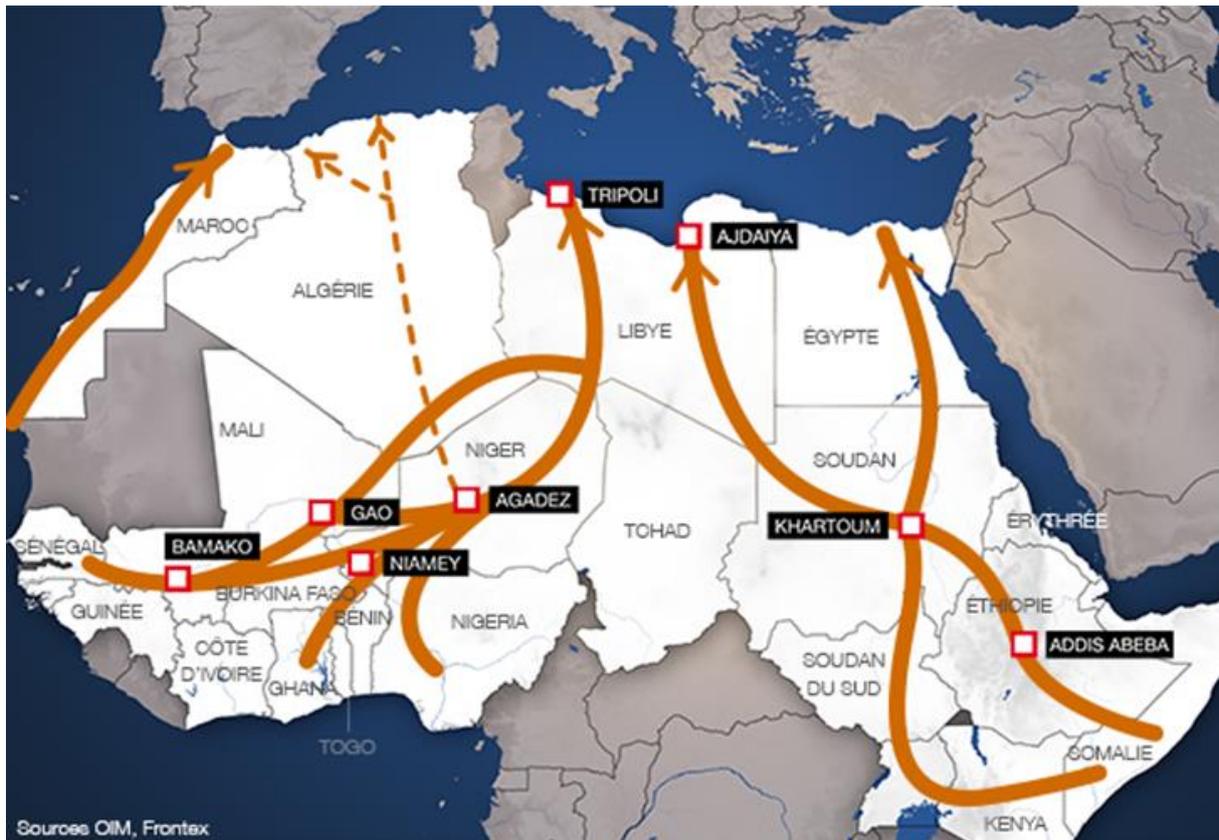
The migration route from Africa to Europe that is currently the most used is that through Morocco, with the International Organization for Migration reporting in 2018 that 42,000 migrants transited from the Kingdom of Morocco to Spain, 38,000 of them by sea. In comparison, the second migration route, which passes through Libya on its way to the Italian coast, has seen just over 20,000 African migrants pass through in the past year, although it has long been the first clandestine gateway to Europe.

From Côte d'Ivoire, the standard route starts in Gagnoa and passes most of the time through Burkina Faso and Mali, or through Niger, whose almost obligatory passage is Agadez before reaching Morocco, Tunisia or Libya.

¹ IOM - UN Migration, "Rapport de profilage des migrants Ivoiriens, Mai 2017-May 2018", International Organization for Migration - Côte d'Ivoire

² Interview with Ibrahim Sy Savané by Marie Miran Guyon, "Faces and Roads. Irregular migration from Côte d'Ivoire". *contemporary Africa*

³ According to the figures put forward in 2019 by the International Organization for Migration.



Map created by Radio France Internationale (RFI)
<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20171207-carte-routes-migratoires-africaines>

Some migrants sometimes go directly to Tunisia or Morocco by plane, particularly as entry and temporary stay in these states does not require a visa for Ivorian nationals. 62% of departures are by road, the others by plane; 70% of women emigrants from Côte d'Ivoire have, however, left their country of origin by plane, which can be explained by the physical harshness of the road journey, which involves crossing the Sahara.

For some Ivorian emigrants, Tunisia is also frequently envisaged as a final country of destination; in the end, it is the meetings on the spot (particularly of organized networks) that encourage them to go further, and in particular to cross the border to Libya before attempting the crossing to Europe.

Migrant smuggling, an illegal activity as a driving force of the parallel economy

While the passage through Niger has long been the main migration route, the Nigerien government has adopted much stricter laws than before since 2015-2016 to crack down on human trafficking and more specifically smuggling activities, which had become a veritable parallel economy over the years. The shortfall resulting from the drying up of this illegal economic windfall has been offset, albeit to a relatively small extent, by economic support programmes for former smugglers who have been converted to legal activities. However, in the face of the modest incomes and compensation offered by these programmes and the traditional employment prospects along Niger's migration routes, the lure of profit pushes many smugglers to maintain their activity, however illegal it may be, by taking more

risks for themselves and for the migrants, all for higher costs paid by the latter. In total in 2016, migrant smuggling generated illegal gains of more than 6 billion euros worldwide⁴.

As the smuggling activity is illegal and requires a network organization, it would be interesting to further analyse potential proven links between these networks and those of criminal organizations in the region. Such an analysis would make it possible to draw up a more precise map of the financial manna available to criminal and extremist groups in the Sahelo-Saharan subregion, particularly in the context of the hybrid theory, which develops the principle of a plurality of illegal activities carried out by the same organized and often identity-based criminal group (we can cite Islamist groups engaged in smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, terrorist operations and, in our case, human trafficking). These cross-border groups are able to operate throughout the Sahelo-Saharan strip as far as Libya, where the country's particularly anarchic situation is conducive to this type of activity and represents another risky step for migrants.

On the other hand, a less well-known phenomenon also contributes to the existence of a parallel economy linked to the migration phenomenon; a significant proportion of migrants, both men and women, work during their journey. In the case of Ivorian migrants, the latter have worked mainly in the construction and building sector for men, and in the social, household, hotel and catering sectors for women. In 10% of the cases, it is forced and unpaid labour⁵; in other words, slavery.

Changing migration routes as migrants face dangers

The plight of migrants in Libya, particularly that of Ivorian nationals who were victims of slavery, had been particularly disturbing to public opinion when it had recently been publicized in the media.

A quarter of the emigrants from Africa using the Central Mediterranean Route (CMA) are Nigerian nationals⁶. This route, which transits migrants through Libya in an attempt to reach Europe by sea, has three main sources of departure: The first, in the East, groups together individuals from the Horn of Africa, mainly Somali, Ethiopian and Sudanese emigrants. The second source, in the centre, is made up of Cameroonians, Central Africans and Nigerians and joins the flow of the third source of emigration at the level of Niger, in Agadez. The latter, for its part, is mainly made up of Senegalese, Malians, Ivorians, Burkinabe and Ghanaians who frequently transit through Agadez, the hub of migration flows from central and western Africa.

Since the legal tightening of the law against smugglers, other migration routes to Morocco and Algeria and then to Europe are taking shape, particularly through Mali, and the departure points for boats intended to take migrants across the Mediterranean are less and less located in Libya, as was the case around Tripoli and Adjabiya. Other factors also explain the decrease in migration flows through this GCR, such as Libya's geopolitical instability and more particularly the recent large-scale conflicts that

⁴ Figures provided in 2017 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

⁵ IOM Côte d'Ivoire, 2018, Op. Cit.

⁶ KIRWIN Matthew, ANDERSON Jessica, « Identifying the factors driving west african migration ».

have resumed between the internationally recognised authorities and the armed opposition forces, making the area particularly dangerous.

A major concern for States of origin, transit and destination of irregular migrants

International flows of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa via these routes represent a major political issue for African states as well as for European states bordering the Mediterranean. Public policies on migration governance have therefore developed through interactions between Africa and Europe.⁷

The Ivorian government is not deaf to the plight of its citizens who are trying, clandestinely, to reach Europe via the migration routes that cross Niger and then Libya to Italy, or that criss-cross Mali to Morocco and then Spain. There are many issues on which urgent action must be taken: the danger of road transport of migrants by smugglers in overloaded vehicles, on some of the deadliest roads in the region, crossing the Sahara, confinement in detention centres where living conditions are inhuman, human trafficking, even drowning in the Mediterranean.

⁷ NAKAYAMA Yumi « Migration governance : Migration within and from Africa », 2017.

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