

## Dynamics of irregular migration from West Africa to Europe

### *Part 1: Why leave? Vectors of clandestine departure to Europe*

Throughout the last 4 years, both regular and irregular migration flows from the West African region have increased sharply. While the figures often put forward and the scarecrow of a "rush to Europe" must be put into perspective, since a large proportion of migration flows are intra-regional<sup>1</sup>, it is nevertheless worth paying particular attention to them in view of the demographic outlook, which predicts that Africa's population will practically double by 2050<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Mostly intra-regional migration flows**

If we are only interested here in migration to Europe, we must however immediately put this theme, somewhat fantasized by the media and the political classes, into perspective; the ¾ of African migration takes place within West Africa, particularly from the landlocked countries south of the Sahara to the Gulf of Guinea<sup>3</sup>. The case of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire can be cited: it is a State that receives a high proportion of migrants; in 2015, Côte d'Ivoire had 2.2 million emigrants, out of a total of about 23 million inhabitants,<sup>4</sup> while about 1,200,000 people make up the Ivorian diaspora worldwide<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, the media tend to confuse the media by equating all emigrant individuals with political refugees, and public opinion thus easily associates the image of migrants with individuals seeking refuge and fleeing a country at war. They also maintain, whether voluntarily or not, the image of a human tide that would invade the European continent through Spain and Italy, and sometimes even that the majority of sub-Saharanans arriving in Europe would do so clandestinely<sup>6</sup>.

While the geopolitical instability in the southern and eastern Mediterranean makes this association understandable, it does not reflect the causes behind the migratory flows from south of the Sahara. Indeed, job opportunities and the search for attractive working conditions and remuneration are the main vector of emigration from the West African region. Demographic pressure is also a factor.

#### ***Insecurity, lack of freedom and political crises; undeniable but inoperative factors of emigration in the case of West Africa***

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<sup>1</sup> DESROUSSEAU J "Africa, land of welcome and integration of refugees? "Carto N° 52, March-April 2019: "In 2017, Europe will host 10% of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, or 826,000 individuals, compared to 6.7 million hosted by African countries, according to the United Nations".

<sup>2</sup> Figures from the National Institute of Demographic Studies, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> FOUCHER Michel, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> OECD figures for the year 2015

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs figures, 2018

<sup>6</sup> SCHOUMAKER et al, 2013

The political situation in the country of departure, mainly insecurity, and the inability of the State to provide sufficient protection of public order to guarantee the integrity of its citizens on its soil, are very logically identified as the motives for individuals to emigrate. Areas such as northern Nigeria, where the terrorist group Boko Haram has been operating for several years, or several regions of Mali, a key zone in the Sahelian powder keg where political, religious, socio-economic and identity conflicts are intermingled, quickly come to mind in West Africa.

However, these regions are not the most likely places to start; a 2016 study conducted by the Federal Government of the Republic of Nigeria showed that only 27% of the people in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria and 28% of the people in the North-Western region would prefer to live and work in another country if given the opportunity to do so. These areas are the main centres of criminal activity in Boko Haram and are therefore particularly unstable. However, the local population, mostly rural, remains attached to its place of residence and does not wish to emigrate from it.

#### ***The influence of "returnees" from the diaspora.***

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the lack of political freedom as a reason for migration could hardly be considered as such in view of the stability that the country has recovered since the end of the last political crisis following the 2011 elections. However, in addition to departures linked to the insecurity imposed by the conflict during this period, the political crisis had an indirect migratory leverage effect.

At the height of this political crisis, many migrations did indeed take place; individuals seeking political asylum, seeking to escape civil war or repression by one of the warring sides. A few years after the end of this crisis, among those migrants who fled the war by going into mass exile in Europe, a number of individuals chose to return home when the situation stabilised. They brought with them an image, an appearance of<sup>7</sup> economic prosperity gained in Europe<sup>8</sup> that sometimes had a strong influence on those who remained at home, isolated, during the crisis. In turn, these individuals influenced by the image of a European Eldorado conveyed by their relatives may then have been tempted to begin an economic migration to the northern Mediterranean.

#### ***The search for better economic prospects through professional opportunities as a first vector of departure towards the countries of the North.***

Secondly, there are socio-economic reasons, which are in fact the main reason for emigration to West Africa. This state of affairs starts from a simple observation; most countries in the West African sub-region have a relatively high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, who are increasingly numerous<sup>9</sup>. The case of clandestine migrants from Côte d'Ivoire, which was the subject

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<sup>7</sup> In many cases, individuals who left Côte d'Ivoire for Europe during the crisis returned impoverished.

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Mr SY SAVANÉ by Mrs Marie MIRAN-GUYON, 2017

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Figures, 2018

of a study by the International Organization for Migration, provides an overview of the<sup>10</sup>migratory driving force that is the prospect of employment and economic prosperity.

Studies of the profile of candidates for departure thus show that Ivorian migrants are mainly students and workers. The professional manufacturing sector is the largest provider of labour, accounting for 26% of migrant workers. The distribution sector comes next at 13%, with social services professionals in third place, representing 11% of the total<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, among both Ivorians and Nigerians, studies have shown that migrants are mainly individuals with relatively long education<sup>12</sup>.

The development of vocational training programs, while providing better employment opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire, also offers a better profile for hiring abroad, especially in Europe. According to a 2017 study by the OECD and CIRES, nearly 30% of Ivorians who have participated in a vocational training program would consider going abroad in the long term<sup>13</sup>. The trend is even more pronounced among women.

The destination of Ivorian emigrants also tends to vary according to their profile; 46% of men choose to migrate to an ECOWAS Member State (mainly Burkina Faso and Mali) against only 26% of Ivorian women emigrants. Conversely, 55% of Ivorian emigrant women choose France, against 41% of Ivorian emigrants<sup>14</sup>. Among these women, a quarter of them migrate for family reunification.

#### ***A heterogeneous set of secondary factors***

In connection with the Ivorian political crisis of 2011, since the return of stability and strong economic growth, there has paradoxically been a sharp increase in irregular migration. This increase can be explained precisely by the general rise in living standards that accompanies economic growth; a clandestine departure, like a legal one, represents a significant cost, which is estimated to be at least €3,000 per individual. We know that some smugglers will ask for two to four million CFA francs per person, or €3,000 to €6,000. The general rise in the standard of living allows more and more individuals to save a sum of this magnitude for a start<sup>15</sup>.

The family also plays an important role in terms of socio-economic influence, which in many cases pushes the younger generation to seek (often skilled) work in Europe, where wages and living standards are attractive, in particular to contribute to the needs of the family back home. We are also witnessing the opposite phenomenon: in some cases, the decision to migrate is an individual one, in

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

11 Konan, 2009

12 Kirwin & Anderson, 2018.

13 OECD/CIRES (2017), *Interactions between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Côte d'Ivoire*, Les voies de développement, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264277090-fr>.

14 Ibid

15 SY SAVANÉ, 2017.

response to the social weight that the family represents; in<sup>16</sup> other words, migration represents for some a means of extricating themselves from the straitjacket and the influence of the family circle.

Finally, to a lesser extent, there is evidence of a link between emigration and political stabilisation. This has led to the consolidation of the Ivorian administrative apparatus, particularly with regard to the cadastre and registration of land titles, which secures ownership and thus makes owners more inclined to migrate, knowing that they will not risk losing their land and property in their absence.

### ***Urbanization and demographic pressure, additional vectors of migratory flows***

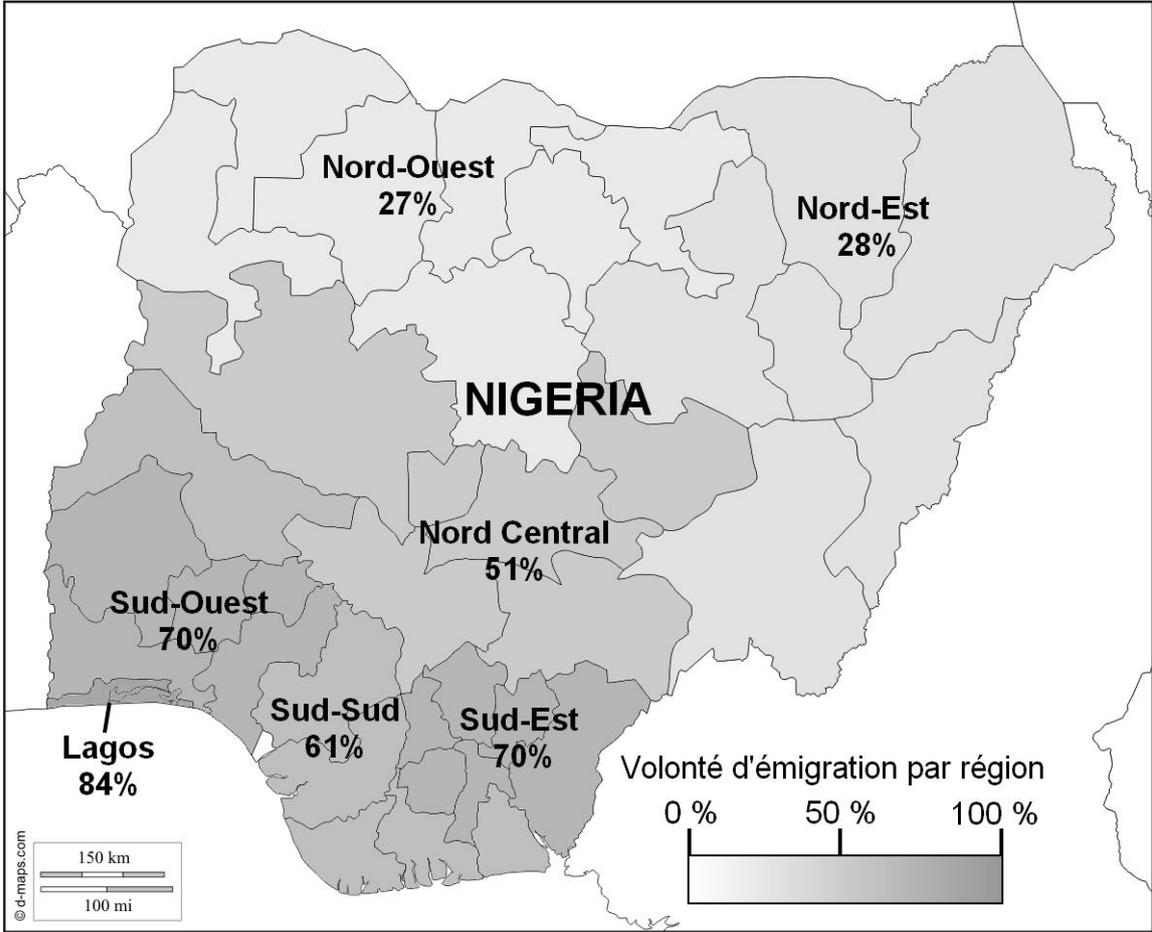
Finally, demographic pressure plays an undeniable role in migration dynamics; in 2018, 90% of illegal Ivorian migrants repatriated under an IOM programme<sup>17</sup> had grown up in urban areas and 70% of them lived in Abidjan.

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<sup>16</sup> FOUCHER Michel, 2019

<sup>17</sup> It is a voluntary return programme for migrants whose journey to Europe was unsuccessful, the majority of whom were repatriated from Tripoli. This programme was set up by IOM Côte d'Ivoire in partnership with the Ivorian government and with the support of the Netherlands. The "returning" migrants were questioned on their return about their profile and motivations in order to better understand the contours of the migration phenomenon from Côte d'Ivoire. This programme is detailed in the third opus of this analysis document, which is divided into three articles.

In the case of Nigeria, one of the main reasons for the desire to leave is also demographic pressure; indeed, 84% of Lagos residents interviewed in the aforementioned 2016 national survey stated that they would prefer to live and work in another country if given the opportunity, compared to only 27-28% of those surveyed in the North-West and North-East of the country<sup>18</sup>. Demographic pressure seems to be a major corollary to the willingness to migrate since it increases proportionally to the rate of urbanization in the territories where the surveys were conducted.



Map based on figures from the study conducted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2016 - Nicolas Klingelschmitt - 2019 Africa World Institute

This phenomenon, which is symptomatic of sustained population growth combined with an inadequate supply of housing and jobs, can de facto be associated with economic reasons for leaving.

**A "risks/opportunities" equation with changing data**

If the search for economic opportunities, in other words the prospect of more qualified and better paid jobs, is clearly the most powerful vector of clandestine migration from sub-Saharan West Africa, the question of the relevance of such an undertaking should be raised in the light of the evolution of the global context.

<sup>18</sup> (Kirwin & Anderson, 2018).

Is it a relevant choice for a young skilled worker to try to join a European state illegally to make a career there? In the current context and with a dose of foresight, given the low GDP growth of the states of the old continent in the face of the economic dynamism displayed by several West African states, or the regional and continental African integration policies announced in the face of fears of nationalist withdrawal by several member states of the European Union, the question is not insignificant.

In addition, the dangerousness of the clandestine migratory journey, the weakness of promises of migration management at the international level and the difficulties of the European community to coordinate on these issues appear to be further dampening the siren song of economic migration from West Africa to Europe.

Finally, another variable must be added to this migration equation, making it a little more complex: the environmental evolution of the African continent. Whether it is the IPCC reports, UNDP reports or government statements<sup>19</sup>, all indicators show that the whole West African region is concerned by this theme.

The success or failure of the States of this region in preserving the environment, in particular through policies of waste recycling, the development of green energy and sustainable urban planning, will inevitably have an impact on population movements within the region.

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<sup>19</sup> *"Rising temperatures reduce agricultural yields and accelerate the desertification process. Mali, 40% of whose GDP depends on agriculture, is hard hit by this warming"*, statement by Mr. Seyni NAFO, the Malian President's High Representative for the Climate, excerpt quoted by Jeune Afrique in P31 of N°3055.

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