

## **IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A CASE STUDY OF MIGRANTS FROM LIBYA TO ITALY**

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### **Abstract**

*The migration of a large number of African citizens to different European nations via the Libyan-Mediterranean route continues to represent a recurrent issue between Africa and Europe within the recent couple of decades, as the volume of migrants continue to grow consistently. This high rate of migration of African citizens to Europe in most cases create negative consequences on a number of these European countries, especially in the areas of their economic, social and political wellbeing. In certain other cases, the security of these European nations is also influenced by these rates of migration. In lieu of the above, this study focused on Italy in particular, as well as other African nations and investigated if Italy was considered a target country for migration or considered a transit country into other European countries by African migrants. It also examined the reasons that influenced African migrants to go through the Libya-Italian route into Europe and lastly, determined the human trafficking mechanisms in the Libya-Italian route into Europe.*

*The theoretical frameworks on which this study was predicated were the Push factors and the Pull factors that influenced migration to other nations. Furthermore, this study was designed as a qualitative research and employed structured face-to-face interviews that were mediated through Skype video calls to collect responses from the 20 interviewees selected for this research.*

*The study discovered that Italy is predominantly viewed as a sought after destination country by many African migrants and not merely a transit nation into other parts of Europe. This study also discovered that the major motivations that compelled Africans to migrate into Europe via the Libya-Italy route are extreme poverty, and the closure of the other routes into Europe, such as the Morocco/Tunisia route. Lastly, the study also discovered that there exists high degree of synergy in the activities of the various bodies involved in the various stages of travel in the Libya-Italy route, as there existed seamless transition from one agency to another in the different stages of migrants journey to Europe via this Libya/Italy route. On a final note, this study's recommendation among many others is that the governments of Libya and Europe should facilitate mechanisms that welcome migrants or refugees in line with the common objective of allowing personal independence and freedom from poverty.*

**Keywords:** Migrant, refugees, illegal migrants, legal migrants.

## 1. Introduction

Large-scale relocation of people from one region to another region, otherwise known as migration takes different tolls on both the receiving region and the region of departure. However, the determinants of either the positive or negative impacts of this migration are dependent on numerous factors existent in both nations. It is therefore based on this analogy that this research, which focuses on the migration of African citizens to various countries in Europe via the Libyan-Mediterranean route was conducted.

This mass volume of migration of African citizens has adversely affected many of these European nations, particularly their economic, social, political, and in other cases, the security of these European nations. This has consequently compelled a number of European nations to devise a mechanism towards the prioritization of policy reformations in a bid to regulate migration and the African refugee crises<sup>1</sup>. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR, 2015: p.56), in most instances, the migration of thousands of people from other nations into Europe on a yearly basis originates from predominantly the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa; therefore, a number of European nations are encountering challenges in a bid to keep up and maintain the European Union's standards for welcoming, and processing asylum applications, and consequently accommodating immigrants<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a number of African leaders also continue to fall short in their responsibilities of making available basic needs, infrastructural amenities, and welfare packages for their citizens in their different nations. The negative consequences of these failures is reflected on the continent of Europe and also in the growing volume of deaths of Africans who continually risk their lives to travel through the Libyan - Mediterranean route in the quest of seeking improved lifestyles in Europe<sup>3</sup>.

According to a European Commission report (2018), migrants and refugees are scattered across various nations in Europe. For example, Italy has encountered immense volume of migrants that arrived into the country over the years; or also Spain and Greece have witnessed substantial numbers of migrants looking for refuge in their countries. The IOM report (2015)<sup>4</sup> reveals that from the year 2014 and 2015, nations including Syria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Gambia, Somalia, Bangladesh,

<sup>1</sup> Park, Jeanne. Europe's Migration Crisis. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/europe-s-migration-crisis>, (2015). (Access Date 25 August 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Banulescu-Bogdan, N., Fratzke, S. "Europe's Migration Crisis in Context: Why now and what next". Migration Policy Institute 24. (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Telschow, F. Technical Report and Policy Paper from the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP). (November, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> International Organization for Migration, IOM. "Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals". United Nations Migration Report 2016: Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/italy/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals>. (Access Date 25 August 2020).

and Sudan proved to be the nations that have the largest source of migrants that arrived into Italy. Thus, as an African student, the researcher believes it would be appropriate and interesting to conduct this research on African migration to Europe, with special focus on the Libya-Italy route.

Italy and many other European countries have for an extensive period of time been deemed as a location where African migrants want to travel to, this is because many persons worldwide are constantly attracted to living in Italy and various other countries in Europe. This situation is especially so with Italy because of Rome and other numerous tourist attractions, which lure people from all spheres of life to desire to live in Italy. This desire to live in Italy or in other European nations makes reference to Africans' choices of labour migration to Europe, which began around the 1960s<sup>5</sup>. In the same light, in this era, over 243 million persons reside and work in countries that are not their birthplace, thus implying that immigrants represent 3.3% of the Globe's population<sup>6</sup>. The population distribution of foreign-born people in economically stable and technologically advanced regions, such as Europe increased from about 7% in the 1990 to over 10% in 2015, as Borjas, (2014) opine that "Higher percentages of the developed world is now increasingly made up of nations of immigrants". For example, according to him, around 11.5% of France's population, 13% of the population of Germany, 20% of the United States of America's and also 20% of Canada's population comprise of people that are all foreign-born.

Therefore, based on the foregoing information provided in the paragraphs above that this research attempts to examine if African migrants consider Italy as a target country for migration or consider Italy as a transit point into other European countries. In addition, this research seeks to know why African migrants go through the Libya-Italian route. And lastly, this study seeks to discover the human trafficking mechanism in the Libya-Italian route into Europe. This is because irregular migration is believed to possess demographic consequences on the labour markets, public finances and political landscapes of the host nations<sup>7</sup>.

The objectives of this study are therefore to carry out a qualitative research on the research objectives mentioned above. The importance of this research is that after its completion, future researchers would be capable of making reference to this study as reference material in the field of transcontinental migration, its regulation and control, its impact to the host countries, as well as its merits and demerits.

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<sup>5</sup> Icduygu, A and Yukseker, D. "Rethinking Transit Migration in Turkey: Reality and Re-presentation in the Creation of a Migratory Phenomenon". *Population Space and Place* 18, (2012). p. 442.

<sup>6</sup> Edo, A., Ragot, L., Rapoport, H., Sardoschau, S and Steinmayr, A. "The Effects of Immigration in Developed Countries: Insights from Recent Economic Research". Policy Brief, Centre d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internation, (2018). p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cited works, p. 2.

## 2. Problem Statement

Migration is the movement of a person or a group of persons in order to settle in another location, usually across a political or administrative boundary. This could either be temporary or permanent, and could also be voluntary or forced. In some instances, this movement across international borders could be considered as irregular when migrants enter another nation and stay or work without the appropriate documents and authorization required by the immigration regulations<sup>8</sup>.

The Italian context of migration is especially sophisticated and is characterized by various migratory dynamics and socio-political tensions. Italy is considered as one of the prominent destinations in Europe for migrants from Africa in the search of better opportunities. This has recently led to the increment in the arrivals of irregular entries of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers -predominantly from sub-Saharan African countries<sup>9</sup>. According to Istat (2017), within Europe, Italy has encountered the highest relative growth of her migrant population within the last two decades. Since 1998, the volume of immigrants has increased five fold, with an increment of 2,023,317 people from 2007 to 2016 (Istat 2017). Nonetheless, in this decade, regular inflows have decreased, portrayed in the slow growth of new foreign residents, around 33,000 from 2015 to 2017, (Caritas Italiana. 2018).

It is important to mention at this juncture that the reduction of the Italian labour market, as well as the emerging high rate of unemployment in the nation has compelled the government to immensely decrease the quota available for regular migrant workers. This restricted cap was imposed despite employers' rejection of the idea, based on their need for immigrant labour. Rather these employers of labour advised the government to hasten the procedures for employing asylum seekers and to re-creating legal migration into Italy for labour purposes. It is therefore based on the challenges identified above that this research seeks to meet the objectives already identified above, which also provides responses to the following research questions:

1. Is Italy considered a target country for migration or considered a transit country into other European countries by African migrants?
2. What are the reasons that influence African migrants to go through the Libya-Italian route into Europe?
3. What are the human trafficking mechanisms in the Libya-Italian route into Europe?

<sup>8</sup> Rohrmoser, F. 'Migration at the Southern Borders of the European Union: "The EU's Migration Policy towards the Mediterranean and the Case of Spain"'. Centre International de Formation Européenne Institut Européen des Hautes Études Internationales, (2010). p.10-13.

<sup>9</sup> Caritas Italiana. "Common Home: Migration and Development in Italy". (2018). p. 8-11.

### 3. Literature Review

This chapter deals with the review of relevant literatures that discuss some of the reasons why Africans, through the Libyan route, migrate to nations in Europe. In addition, before proceeding into the major discussions of this chapter, a brief definition of irregular migrations is presented, while also presenting brief information about Libya, which is one of the routes through which many African pass through to get into European nations.

#### A. Description of Libya

Libya is a country positioned in the Maghreb region of North Africa. It shares borders with the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and other surrounding nations such as Chad, Niger Republic, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. For numerous years, the Libyan-Mediterranean route into Europe has been utilized by many migrants, especially from Northern and Western African nations as the gateway transit and destination path into Europe, this is made possible because of Libya's geographic closeness and historical ties with Europe<sup>10</sup>.

In the opinion of Kate (2017), the European Union's restrictions placed on inward regular migration could have resulted into the increment of irregular migration influx into Europe via dangerous and illegal routes. This restriction has caused migrants fleeing from war, and seeking improved livelihood opportunities in European nations to become victims to human smuggling and trafficking agents that assure these migrants easy passage across the Mediterranean Sea and national borders<sup>11</sup>. It is also important to stress that in spite of the constant news regarding persons who experience dehumanization or in some cases, die in the course of their attempt to cross over into Europe via the Libyan desert and across the Mediterranean Sea, many African migrants continually travel through this dangerous route in their plan to migrate into Europe.

#### B. Irregular Migration

Irregular migration refers to 'the cross-border movement of persons that enter into a country without the country's legal permission to do so'<sup>12</sup>. In the same vein, the term 'irregular migrants' also describes migrants in any nation that are not entitled to either live nor work there, either because of the absence of a legal residence permit or due to the expiration of their allotted permit to stay in such a nation. It is also important to note here at this juncture that partly due to the

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<sup>10</sup> World Migration Report. "International Organization for Migration", 2018.

<sup>11</sup> North Africa Mixed Migration Hub, MHUB. Country Brief. Available at <http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Country-Profile-Libya.pdf>. (Access Date 25 August 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Vollmer, B. "Irregular Migration in the UK, Definitions, Pathways and Scale". Migration Observatory University of Oxford. (2011). p. 2, C-2.

complexities of definitions, statistical data regarding irregular migration and migrants are scarce.

Therefore, irregular migration is by definition not recorded and escapes statistical coverage. Implying that accurate measurement is almost unattainable<sup>13</sup>. This literature review is majorly concerned about the factors that compel people to decide to engage in irregular modes of migration. Therefore, given that the crux of the study is on migration flows and the challenges that it poses, it is preferred to understand the reasons why people migrate to other countries, and which factors are the most compelling factors in inspiring migration by irregular means to an European Union nation.

### C. Factors that compel migration among African Migrants

There are stringent factors that push citizens away from their nation of birth or of origin, as they begin to look out for other nations that are able to provide them with better life opportunities than their nation of origin cannot afford to provide to them. Therefore, based on existing available literatures, the following are some of the factors that cause migration from Africa via the Libyan-Mediterranean sea route into Italy.

#### I. Terrorism and Insecurity

A core responsibility of government in any nation is the protection of the lives and belongings of her citizens. Hence, if this governmental function is lacking, then the response of the citizens would be to devise means of ensuring their safety: one of which in migrating to other regions of the world where this important feature is assured. Many African governments have failed to make available sufficient security of lives and properties to their citizens, which allows for the existence of numerous political and religious insurrections across a number of African nations<sup>14</sup>. This widespread existence of insecurity and terrorism and sometimes, armed conflicts has caused the huge spates of migration of African citizens out of the continent, in search of security of their lives and that of their families in European nations.

#### II. Political Instability

Political instability in numerous African nations such as Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Somalia, and more recently Mali constitute another significant reason for the large-scale exodus of African citizens to Europe. In addition, series of religious crises, inter-tribal conflicts, the failure of political leadership, lack of trust and

<sup>13</sup> Cummings, C., Pacitto, J., Lauro, D and Foresti, M. "Why People Move: Understanding the Drivers and Trends of Migration to Europe". A Working Paper. Overseas Development Institute. ISSN: 2052-7209. (2015). p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Barungi, B., Odhiambo, O. & Asogwa, R. African Economic Outlook 2017: Nigeria. AfDB, OECD, UNDP. (2017).

uncertainty in future governments, military coups, political turmoil and violence are some of the feature of the political milieu in Africa<sup>15</sup>. All of the features constantly contribute to the degradation of the African political systems, thereby compelling her citizenry to seek for more political and social stability in other parts of the world, particularly Europe<sup>16</sup>.

### **III. Economic Instability**

Many studies have depicted that the migration of Africans to European nations is predominantly connected with economic challenges or other variables such as large-scale unemployment; inadequate income; the absence of economic growth; financial challenges and debts<sup>17</sup>. It is important to note that prior migration, most African migrants are either self-employed or earn daily wages that are not adequate to suffice for their monthly expenses. Therefore, based on the failures of most African governments to properly regulate, drive, stabilize and manage their economies for very many years, the migration flow of her citizens towards European nations has immensely risen.

### **4. Methodology**

The qualitative method of research was adopted for this study. This research depended on the primary means of data collection, especially in-depth interviews on respondents specially selected for this research. The participants for the study consisted of 15 African migrants that utilized the Libya-Italian routes into different parts of Europe, and also another 5 respondents from Italy and Germany that are members of staff of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Human Rights Watch (HRW). Table 4.1 below provides a tabular representation of the 20 respondents interviewed for this study.

**Table 4.1: Population of the study**

Nation of Origin	Frequency
Nigeria	2
Gambia	2
Senegal	1
Ghana	1

<sup>15</sup> Mathew, Okeyim, O. "The State of Migration of Nigerians into European Union to live in Spain". University of Alicante. Sociology II Department. Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of Alicante, Spain. (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Herbert, S. & Husaini, S. Conflict, Instability and Resilience in Africa. Rapid Literature Review 1427. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Danaan V. V. "Analysing Poverty in Africa through Theoretical Lenses. Journal of Sustainable Development; Vol. 11, No. 1. (2018).

Sudan	4
Eritrea	3
Somalia	2
Italy	3
Germany	2
Total	20

The responses from the interviews conducted in this research were transcribed, analyzed and extracted to answer each of this study's research questions.

## 5. Results and Findings

**Research Question 1: Is Italy considered a target country for migration or considered a transit country into other European countries by African migrants?**

According to the findings of this study, it is safe to assume that Italy is predominantly a sought after destination country for migration and not merely a transit nation into other parts of Europe. In addition, based on the responses provided by the interviewees, the major factors that encourage African migrants to migrate to Italy include some of the following: a welcoming and conducive society; economic opportunities; favorable wages; lesser rate of racism than other European countries; upholding of fundamental human rights; ease of documentation for both refugees and asylum seekers and many other positive reasons.

**Research Question 2: What are the reasons that influence African migrants to go through the Libya-Italian route into Europe?**

Findings discovered from the responses revealed that poverty represented the major reason why African migrants resorted to utilizing the Libya-Italy route into Europe. Put more clearly, they were either unable to migrate into Europe legally or were predominantly trying to escape from poverty in their countries of origin, in search of better opportunities in Europe. Another reason discovered to be the rationale for utilizing the route under discussion is Libya's closeness with the seashores of Italy and Libya's openness to freely receiving Africans from other nations into the country. This motivates them to proceed further and attempt to cross over to Europe through Libya's seashores that are inadequately policed and allows for the thriving of the smuggling of Africans through her sea.

**Research Question 3: What are the human trafficking mechanisms in the Libya-Italian route into Europe?**

While the researcher posed questions aimed at answering this research question, it was discovered that in line with the personal experiences of the respondents of this research, there appeared to be a high level of cooperation in the activities of the various bodies involved in the various stages of travel in the Libya-Italy route. This is due to the smoothness of transition from one agency to another in the different stages of the journey to Europe via this route. This cooperation also extended between the human traffickers or smugglers and many of the various patrol officers among the coast guards of both Libya and Italy that permit these human traffickers to continue with their illegal business even when they are caught 'in the act' on the sea.

## **6. Conclusions**

Based on the testimonies and comments of the interviewees, some of who are refugees and asylum seekers in Italy and other countries in Europe, some of who only visited Italy for different personal reasons during the conduct of this interview, this research concludes that Italy is predominantly viewed as a sought after destination country by many African migrants and not merely a transit nation into other parts of Europe. In addition, this research also concludes that the major factors that encourage African migrants to relocate to Italy include: a welcoming and conducive society; economic opportunities; favorable wages; lesser rate of racism than other European countries; upholding of fundamental human rights; ease of documentation for both refugees and asylum seekers and many other positive reasons.

Furthermore, this research also established the fact that some of the major motivations or reasons that compel Africans to travel into Europe via the Libya-Italy route are extreme poverty, which forced many African migrants to resort to using the Libya-Italy route into Europe. In clearer terms, most of these migrants were either unable to migrate into Europe legally or were consciously attempting to escape from poverty in their birth countries. Another reason discovered to incite Africans to use this route is Libya's closeness with the seashores of Italy and also Libya's openness to freely receiving Africans from other nations into the country. This encourages these potential migrants to proceed to cross over into Europe via Libya's coastlines, which are inadequately policed and permits the conduct of human trafficking and smuggling of Africans through her sea.

In conclusion, this research concludes that the human trafficking mechanism in the Libya-Italy route entail Africans from various countries converging in Libya, then from there finalize arrangements with human traffickers or smugglers to transport them via boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Libya, through the Island of Lampedusa and finally into Italy, after which other travellers going further continue with their journeys into other parts of Europe. In addition, the

conditions of travelling in this route under discussion are severely extreme and frequently lead to the deaths of many African migrants. This is confirmed by both the UNHCR and the HRW, some of whose staff were interviewed in this research.

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