

Migration: The Mediterranean as Death Trap for African Youths

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Abstract

The essence of government is basically the provision of governance to her citizens. Where such exists, society will be stable as citizens can afford decent meals, housing, healthcare, security, and other opportunities owing to the positive decisions of the government. Where the reverse is the case, then such a society as evident in Africa would experience more of her youth align with the concept “Japa” – a popular word in Nigeria that translates to migration. This paper examines the underlying impact of the Mediterranean route on the mortality of young Africans, who attempt to cross over to the other side of the aisle for a better life, howbeit illegally. The paper argues that the Mediterranean as an interface route, between Africa and Europe, is not only a death trap to young African immigrants but an opportunity for such youths to bid farewell to a continent, in this case, a country that ungraciously disdains her young. The paper interrogates the sustainability of the Mediterranean as a death trap and questions if there is the hope of a better continent for the African youth. Beyond extant literatures, primary data was solicited from 60 respondents and presented in a tabular form using simple percentages. The Paper reveals that the demographic characteristics of African migrants who arrived Europe successfully via the Mediterranean, as well as the dead or missing were mostly young and educated people within the age range of 15 to 35. The paper also shows that, social seclusion in the form of deprivation and especially the Eldorado dream are the main reasons that compel the African or Nigerian youth to engage in the decision to emigrate regardless of the associated risks of even dying in the Mediterranean. Inter alia, paper recommends the intervention of international communities in developing a multilateral monitoring process around the Mediterranean Sea.

Key words: Migration, Mediterranean, Youth, Mortality, death trap, irregular migrant

1.1 Background

Any society without a clear structure for managing the affairs of people is definitely an unorganized society. This speaks to the need for a government to be in place to undermine disorganization and of course unruliness. The essence of government is basically the provision of governance to her citizens. Simply, the term governance is a structure designed to assure responsiveness, accountability, rule of law, transparency, equity, stability and security, inclusiveness, and empowerment¹. On the other hand, international organizations like the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) define governance as the exercise of authority or power in order to manage a country's economic, political and administrative affairs². Meaning, society is stable, and citizens are happy as they can afford decent meals, housing, healthcare, security, and other opportunities owing to the definite and people centered decisions of the government. The provision of all these is what we occasionally refer to as good governance. Naturally, the state exists because the people have handed their will to a few to rule over them and provide good governance to them. In John Locke's philosophy, the essence of good governance which is a vital reason for the existence of the state, is because the people prefer a civil society than a state of nature, where all the ingredients of good governance are outrightly absent. However, in today's Africa, the concept of good governance seems to have been consigned to the sewers leading to a pitiable condition for the continent especially the Nigerian youths.

The lack of basic needs, the assurance of employment, security and safety has forced the African youth, to engage in the decision to migrate to other countries, to seek a better life and opportunity which in many cases are not even there but merely an "Eldorado"³. Migration is a good thing. However, when the decision to migrate is forced, then it means something is not right. To us, migration on the part of the youth in Africa particularly Nigeria is a

¹ International Bureau of Education (2021). Concept of governance.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance>

² International Bureau of Education (2021). Concept of governance.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance>

³ Parsons, A. (2021). Migrants 'see the UK as El Dorado so they'll keep coming', say people in Calais. Sky News. September 8. <https://news.sky.com/story/migrants-see-the-uk-as-el-dorado-so-theyll-keep-coming-say-people-in-calais-12402157>

forced migration. This is so because, the right to have a job in one's own country is not there rather is based on godfatherism or ethnicity, and opportunities that supports ingenuity is lacking. Many of the youths without any support to attract opportunities have no choice but to make a forceful decision to leave their countries of origin. In many cases, this migration comes in the form of opting for education or further studies or employment opportunities in the destination countries and is mostly either regular or irregular migration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as, the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border or within a state⁴. On the other hand, the UN Commission on Human Rights defines migration as displacement due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations⁵. Therefore, hardship, lack of opportunities, lack of medical support or qualitative education and police brutality constitutes human rights violation, and these inform the decision of the African youth, particularly the Nigeria youth to emigrate. A decision aligned to by no fewer than 70 percent of young able Africans⁶, and which has ruined and shattered many families. In this work, we contextualise the IOM definition of migration, and restrict it to mean, movement of a person or a group of persons across international border. Furthermore, terms such as irregular migrant and undocumented migrant are however used interchangeably to mean one and the same thing – migrants that enter a country illegally.

Africa, according to⁷ and particularly rural Africa is home to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalized youth in the world. Many of these young Africans have emigrated to other parts of the world due to their inability to achieve in their home countries. It is worrisome that a young African would graduate from the university at a very young age and would be without a job for many years. ⁸revealed that the overall unemployment rate in Nigeria had risen to 13.9%, with the youth unemployment rate

⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019). Africa's youth: Jobs or migration? Demography, economic prospects and mobility. 2019 Ibrahim Forum Report.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015) UNHCR Global Trends – Forced displacement in 2014". UNHCR. 18 June. <https://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

⁶ Integrated Regional Information Networks News (IRIN), (2007). "Mali: Rural youth rarely find fortunes in the city." (October 12). <http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportId=74772>.

⁷ Min-Harris, C. (2010). Youth migration and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empowering the rural youth. *Topical Review Digest: Human Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa*.159 (2), pp. 159–186.

⁸ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2016). Unemployment/underemployment report, Q3, 2016. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov/>

having risen to 25% from 24% in 2015 and rose to 33.3% in 2020⁹. The odds in this case according to Professor Nnanna is quite enormous for young Nigerians with youth unemployment soaring to 42.5%¹⁰.

Even at age 40, many young Africans still find themselves leaving with and being fed by their parents. This has undermined the social life chances of many African youths. In a micro-level study of the determinants of late marriage, ¹¹noted that a significant relationship exists between poor socioeconomic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage. They found out that socioeconomic status undermined decision-making in pre-nuptiality. Meaning that many young persons (especially males) could not get married because of their prevailing poor socioeconomic circumstances even after graduating from universities with degrees.

⁹ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2020). Unemployment/underemployment report, Q4, 2020. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>

¹⁰ Nnanna, J. (2022). Towards reducing unemployment in Nigeria: A case for job creation hubs. *Businessday*, June 22. <https://businessday.ng/backpage/article/towards-reducing-unemployment-in-nigeria-a-case-for-job-creation-hubs/>

¹¹ Nduonofit, L.E & Nwala-Cadger, G. (2015). Unemployment and late marriage. A study of post graduate students of the University of Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research*, 3(1), 1-9.

The decision to emigrate in many circumstances has led many African youths to their deaths. In majority of cases, migration out of Africa does not entail the normal route. Instead, the option always available and considered easy but illegal has always been through the Sahara Desert, and cross over the Mediterranean into Europe. This route over time has consumed numerous young Africans, rendering their dreams and families shattered. Studies according to the International Organization for Migration Missing Migrants Research (IOM-MMR) reveals that in 2019 alone one in thirty-three people died attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Growing up in Africa is no crime, neither is electing those to lead the country a crime. Rather, the provision of governance has become a most difficult task in Africa, making the continent a continuous recipient for aid money which never ends up in development projects but developing pockets of corrupt leaders. This has undermined healthcare, education, employment opportunities, etc.

Young Africans have attempted to create the needed change they deserve for several ways. They have campaigned for good governance, they have voted in an election, all to no avail. Moreso, they have engaged in peaceful demonstrations to change the mind of the government of the day to listen and initiate transformations that would see young people unleash their potentials, all to no avail, until the “Arab Spring.” In many cases, and in some African countries, the government on various occasions have responded with iron fist. For instance, in Nigeria, there has been incessant harassment, extortion and killing of youths by men of the Special Anti-robbery Squad, popularly known as SARS; a unit of the Nigeria Police Force established in 1992 with the sole objective to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of heinous crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping¹². Youths all over Nigeria in unison decided to come out *en masse* and demonstrate peacefully against such brutality, so that the Nigerian State can reprove and transform the circumstances. Rather, this active but peaceful demonstration was met with stiff draconic response by the government, leading to the death of many young Nigerians.

Situations like this and many more constitute the push-factors that underscore the decision in young Africans to migrate irregularly out of the

¹² Onuh-Yahaya, Z. (2021). 'We Just Want to Live'—Youth and the #EndSARS Protests. <https://republic.com.ng/february-march-2021/youth-and-endsars-protests/>

continent in search of greener pastures, and on many occasions, many do not get to their intended destinations, rather meet their Waterloo either in the Sahara Desert or in the Mediterranean. In majority of cases, the Mediterranean is the flash point, the barrier and gap between a dashed hope and a better life ahead. Many young Africans have met their end at this point, and many have also crossed to embrace the anticipated Eldorado in Europe. Several studies have been carried out in this direction,¹³ focused her study on youth migration and poverty, arguing that youth migration impoverishes the rural sector. On the other hand,¹⁴ were more concerned about conditions especially the role of living conditions in countries of origin as the driving force of migration. Others,¹⁵ looked at migration and mortality in the Mediterranean from a humanitarian perspective, whereas;¹⁶ focused their study on the implications of urban growth on youth migration decisions in Nigeria.

1.2 Purpose

This paper explores the underlying impact of the Mediterranean route on the mortality of young Africans, who attempt to cross over to the other side of the aisle for a better life, howbeit illegally. It is the thesis of this paper that the Mediterranean as an interface route, between Africa and Europe, is not only a death trap to young African immigrants but an opportunity to bid farewell to a continent that graciously disdains her young. Some of the queries of the paper are as listed below:

- What are the demographic characteristics of migrants cut short by the Mediterranean?
- Why are young Africans leaving their respective countries to die in the Mediterranean?

¹³ Min-Harris, C. (2010). Youth migration and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empowering the rural youth. *Topical Review Digest: Human Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 159 (2), pp. 159–186.

¹⁴ Kuschminder, K.; De Bresser, J. & Siegel, M. (2015). Irregular migration routes to Europe and factors influencing migrants' destination choices. Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, University of Maastricht. <https://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/uploads/1436958842.pdf>

¹⁵ Tizirai-Chapwanya, G. (2018). The Mediterranean Sea Death Trap: A Humanitarian Overview. <https://www.cbsolicitors.co.uk/blog/the-mediterranean-sea-death-trap-a-humanitarian-overview/>

¹⁶ Amare, M.; Abay, K.A.; & Arnt, C. (2021). Youth migration decisions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Satellite-based empirical evidence from Nigeria. *Population and Development Review*. 47(1), pp. 1-29.

- Is there hope of a better continent for African and Nigerian youths?
- Is the Mediterranean a sustainable death trap?

1.3 Leaving Africa - African youths and irregular migration

Migration is not a novel concept, neither does it translate to uncertainties of life. Through the ages there has always been movement of people from one place to the other¹⁷. Most people do not recollect that the history of the world is the history of migration. Throughout the past 2000 years or more, humans have migrated, seeking newfound lands, natural resources, better social, cultural, and economic conditions or escaping wars, persecution, or ethnic tensions. At this point, the transatlantic slave trade comes to mind, it has been qualified as the “great migration”¹⁸, where “colonialists took control of African human mobility, transported and channeled them to the New World and other regions to provide hard labor for the vitalization of American and European economies”¹⁹. Clearly, migrations have over the centuries influenced human history as in the great migration, and shaped new cultures as well as the wealth of many nations. Those who misunderstand the concept, and its long tradition are only misguided with the idea that Europe is the splendor and hope for young African migrants. This is a façade of falsehood, because the centrepiece of African migration is internal – within the continent and not totally outward.

Statistics have shown that Africa hosts more than 67% of the global migrant population, and more than 70% of Sub-Saharan African migrants move within the continent, and South Africa, Côte d’Ivoire and Uganda are majorly the receiving countries. When compared to Europe, in 2017 the EU hosted roughly 9 million African migrants, a figure relatively less than the

¹⁷ Emina, W.I. (2021). Migration and social integration: Emerging dynamics. Centre of Excellence International Journal for Migration and Global Studies. 1(1), 20-40.

¹⁸ Curtin, P. (1997). Africa and global patterns of migration. In, W. Gungwu (Ed.), Global history and migration (pp. 63–94). Westview Press.

¹⁹ Idemudia, E. & Boehnke, K. (2020). Patterns and current trends in African migration to Europe. In, Idemudia, E. & Boehnke, K. (Eds.) Psychosocial experiences of African migrants in Six European Countries: A mix method study. Social Indicators Research Series, 81. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48347-0_2

number of Africans hosted by Africa in same year²⁰. Earlier, ²¹reported that the volume of migration within West Africa and to other regions of the continent is at least ten times greater than toward European countries. Achieng corroborates this by challenging the narrative, arguing that most African migrants are not crossing oceans as most Western migration reports about Africa would have it, but rather the majority of African migrants' cross land borders within Africa and not to Europe; and that about 94 per cent of African migration across oceans takes on a regular form and not irregular²².

Scholars,²³ have argued that the specific motivations of irregular migrants have not been extensively explored. However, we cannot refute their position as to why it has not been explored. In this work, we argue differently using the Nigeria context as a rationale. The decision to migrate irregularly amongst the Nigeria youths is fundamentally spurred by the lack of governance, translated to mean lack of opportunities for young able-bodied men and women who see no hope for their future where they continue to stay in a country with a leadership that has no responsibility for a replacement generation. A study by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation ²⁴clearly stated that “almost 80% of potential African migrants are driven by the hope for better economic or social prospects,” and these migrants are “mostly young, educated and roughly count as many women as men”²⁵. Supporting this view, Ikuteyijo stated that migration is seemingly an escapist strategy for survival. His position stemmed from the fact that, “the prevalence of extreme poverty in Nigeria and other West African countries functions as a

²⁰ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019). Africa's youth: Jobs or migration? Demography, economic prospects and mobility. 2019 Ibrahim Forum Report.

²¹ Charrière, F., & Frésia, M. (2008). West Africa as a migration and protection area. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/49e479c311.pdf>

²² Achieng, M. & El Fadi, A. (2020). What is wrong with the narrative on African migration? In, Adepoju, A.; Fumagalli, C.; & Nyabola, N. (Eds.). Africa migration report: Challenging the narrative. International Organization for Migration. Addis Ababa. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/africa-migration-report.pdf>

²³ Kuschminder, K.; De Bresser, J. & Siegel, M. (2015). Irregular migration routes to Europe and factors influencing migrants' destination choices. Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, University of Maastricht. <https://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/uploads/1436958842.pdf>

²⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019).

²⁵ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019).

major push factor for youth migration in the sub-region”²⁶. Others like²⁷ is of the view that the lack of good quality job opportunities represents a severe challenge for Africa, and this underscores the multitudes of young people resorting to migrate abroad especially to Europe. Generally, as a matter of certainty, the basic rationale for the decision to emigrate is nothing more than the hope and thought of a better life and opportunity in the destination country.

However, there is a need to revisit the concept of irregular migration as used here. Citing Jordan & Duveli (2002:15). Kuschminder et al. (2015) defined irregular migration or migrant, as someone who crosses a “border without proper authority or violating conditions for entering another country”. Their definition simply means any form of movement or migration that is outside the scope or ambit of the law of the transit country. In clear terms, this is illegal migration - Migration that is outside international agreement as to how one is supposed to enter into another country.

On the other hand, the international organization for migration (IOM) (2011) defines irregular migration as any movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving country. Well, this is clear and apt on the basis that the migrant in question moved or decided to enter another country from improper regulation protocol. They (migrants) are usually without passport or the right documentation. However, their rights as humans are protected under international principles. Here lies the problematic for many young migrants, that is, the protection of rights. In majority of the transit or destination countries, the migrant, in this case; the irregular migrant cannot access regular employment. Meaning, they would usually secure irregular employment. Irregular employment in this case, for us is simply menial jobs. As undocumented migrants, the laws of the destination country do not allow them to maintain a regular employment. Data has shown that globally some 30 million people, are in an irregular situation in terms of their employment

²⁶ Ikuteyijo, L.O. (2020). Irregular migration as survival strategy: Narratives from youth in urban Nigeria. In, McLean, M.L (Ed.) West African youth challenges and opportunity pathways, Gender and cultural studies in Africa and the diaspora. Palmgrave MacMillan.

²⁷ El Ouassif (2021). The Challenge of the youth bulge in Africa and the Middle East: Migration and the brain drain. NATO Southern Hub. Policy Centre for the new South. January.

status and various human rights violations are associated with such irregularity of employment (United Nations, 2015). These young migrants who succeeded and crossed the Mediterranean are usually confronted with the worst situations of employment. This is so because irregular employment translates to maltreatment or human rights violation.

1.4 The Mediterranean and mortality of young Africans

As previously mentioned, migration is not a novel concept neither does it connote disaster, rather, it entails movement from one locality or place to another. Migration has been occurring for decades and will continue as people will always migrate, 41 million Africans emigrated to other parts of the world in 2020. A significant increase from 22 million migrants in the year 2000 (Saleh, 2021). For young African migrants, the concept however connotes movement from home country to a destination of better opportunity and hope of a better life for self and for other family members left behind. Migrants represented about 3.4% of the global population in 2017, and there were 36.3 million African migrants in 2017, 11 million live in Europe, almost 5 million in the Middle East, and more than 3 million in Northern America (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019; Relief Web, 2021). However, in recent time the concept of migration is now clearly linked with mortality as many Africans especially young ones meet their end in the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean Sea is connected to the Atlantic Ocean. It is also a linkage point between Western and Southern Europe and North Africa, as well as Asia. The Mediterranean Sea has an area of 2.5km and a dept of about 1,500m. It is a very important sea as it plays critical role in the development of shipping and trade across Europe. Presently, the Mediterranean Sea has become very topical in the migration discourse owing to the number of migrant deaths or humanitarian disaster regularly reported (Sylla, 2022). Majority of African migrants who “japa” (a new migratory word in Nigeria that means to ‘leave the country’ for Europe from their home country eventually go through the Mediterranean route, crossing by boat to get to Europe. The ²⁸significance of the Mediterranean Sea in

²⁸ International organization for migration (IOM) (2011), Making migration work for all. <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

migrant crossing lies in the fact that it is an avenue for those without the requisite documentation to migrate successfully into a country of destination. This is a very dangerous route, with slim opportunities of successful arrival into a country of destination, yet the desperation of hope motivates many migrants to take this route. Thus, life in the Mediterranean is quick, short and bleak.

Since 2014, according to the international organization for migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project, forty-eight thousand two hundred (48,200) migrants across the globe have either died or are missing in their quest for a country of destination. However, data set as shown in figure 1 indicates that majority of the migrant death occurred in the Mediterranean. As such, no fewer than 23,970 migrants have either died or went missing globally attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, especially through the central Mediterranean (Missing Migrants Project, 2022). Moreso, as shown in figure 2, a total of 22,594 migrants of African origin perished in the Mediterranean Sea between 2014 and 2021 in their attempt to cross to Europe (Statista Research Department, 2021). In 2016 alone, as indicated by the longest bar (see figure 2), a total of 5,143 African migrants died or went missing. The data further revealed a downward slope for the year 2021 with a recorded 1,369 deaths. ³⁰³¹³²³³

²⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015) UNHCR Global Trends – Forced displacement in 2014". UNHCR. 18 June. <https://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

³⁰ Saleh, M. (2021). Number of emigrants from Africa from 2000 to 2020. Statista. December 6. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1231600/number-of-emigrants-from-africa/>

³¹ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019). Africa's youth: Jobs or migration? Demography, economic prospects and mobility. 2019 Ibrahim Forum Report.

³² Relief Web (2021). African migration trends to watch in 2022. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA. December 20. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/african-migration-trends-watch-2022>

³³ Sylla, K. (2022). Mediterranean Disaster: Why is the African leadership silent? Open Society Initiative for West Africa. <https://www.osiwa.org/newsroom/mediterranean-disaster-why-is-the-african-leadership-silent/>

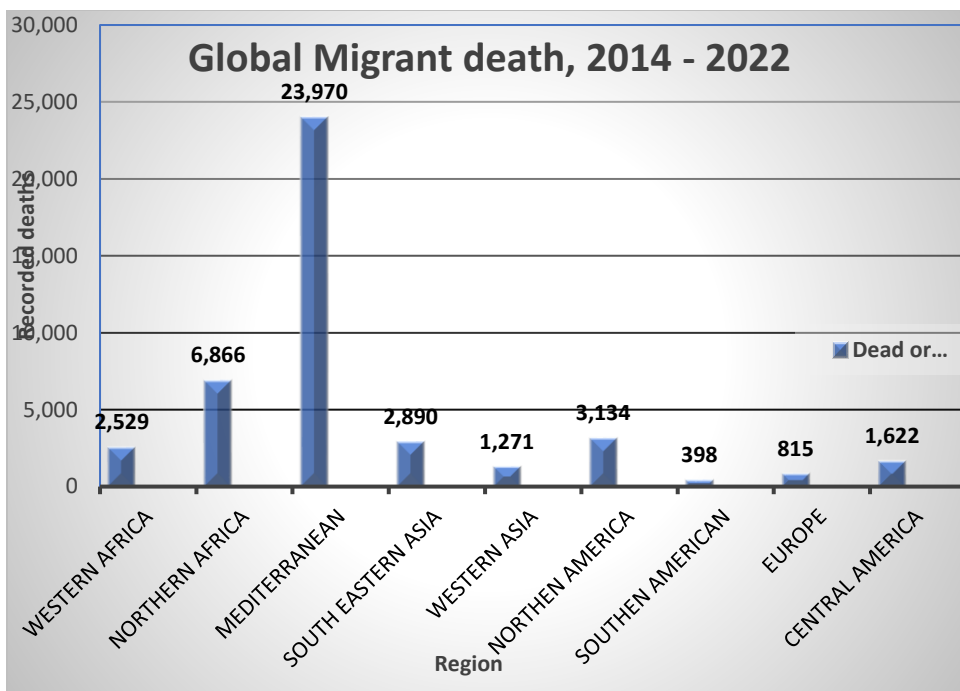


Figure 1: Global Migrant death or missing, 2014-2022 Source: Missing Migrants Project, 2022.

According to the IOM Missing Migrant Project, the figures are already rising for the year 2022. From January 1 to September 8, a total of 1,280 African migrants have already died or went missing attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea (Missing Migrant Project, 2022). One wonders, why are young Africans leaving their respective countries to die in the Mediterranean? The answer to this may not be farfetched, “Eldorado” – the desperation for a better life away from one’s own country with fewer and lesser opportunities. It is apparent that while many African migrants die or become missing before reaching their destinations, many more actually reach the defined destinations. Studies exist that show the number of African migrants that successfully arrived their destination crossing the Mediterranean especially through the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). From 2017 to 2019, Nigeria and Tunisia topped the list of nationalities that successfully arrived in Spain crossing the Mediterranean (Fedorova & Shupert 2020). A greater number of these African migrants are the young and educated (Borgnäs, 2018; Laczko et al., 2017). Corroborating this, according to the United Nations Development Programme, majority of

young African migrants are mostly those with higher education or schooling in tertiary institutions at the time of their departure, as such are not people without educational background. (UNDP, 2019).

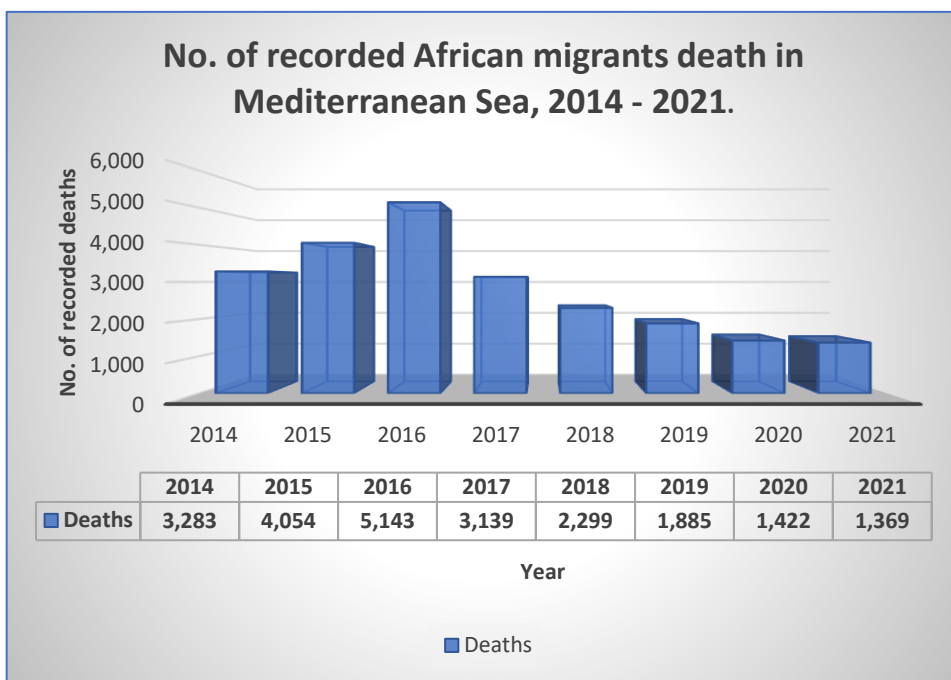


Figure 2: Recorded African migrants' death in the Mediterranean, 2014 – 2021.

Source: Statista Research Department, 2021.

The demographic characteristics of African migrants revealed that they are mostly youths, young persons within the social category of 15 to 35 years of age (The Conversation, 2020; Jaji, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018). Many of these young persons are usually deported in their quest to migrate and reach the country of destination. The desperation of hope that spur these young people often ended up in the Mediterranean disaster. Young Nigerians have been reported to top the list of deported migrants. Between 2016 and 2018, majority of young Africans deported from Italy, South Africa and Libya were Nigerians. According to the Conversation, in 2016, over 20,000 migrants involved in the Mediterranean Sea crossing were reported to be

from Nigeria (The ³⁴Conversation, 2020). As shown in *Figure 3*, the demography of migrants is not restricted to males or men only as many would think. Both women and children are involved. While that of the men is obvious (72.8%), 19.8% and 7.4% of migrants that arrived the Mediterranean Sea in 2021 were children and women respectively.

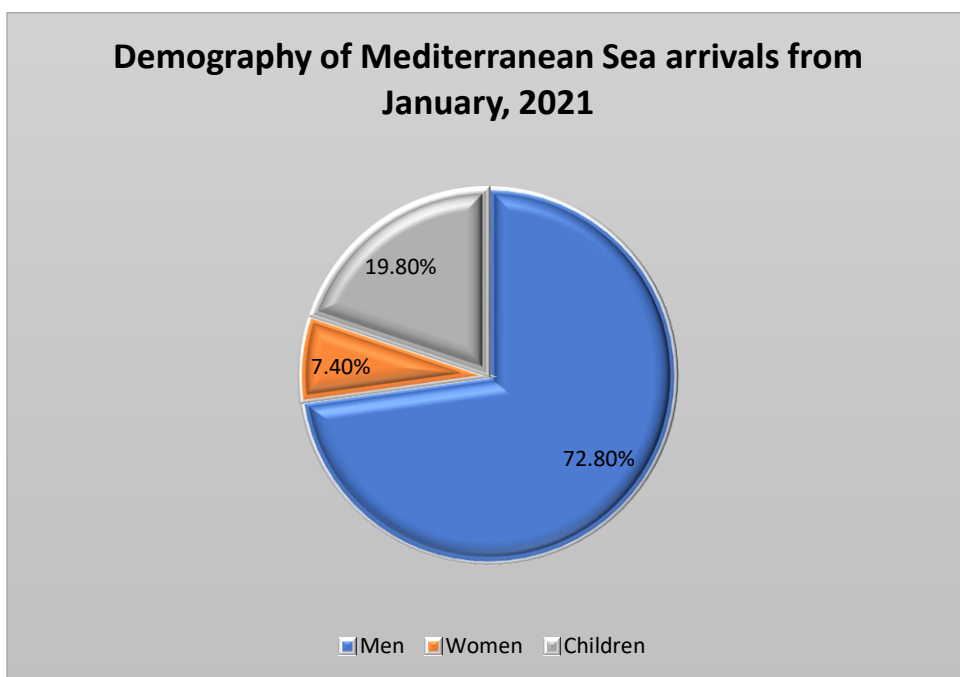


Figure 3: Demography of migrants arrived the Mediterranean. UNCHR, 2021.

³⁴ The Conversation (2020, January). Why young Nigerians risk illegal migration to find their ‘Eldorado’. <https://theconversation.com/why-young-nigerians-risk-illegal-migration-to-find-their-eldorado-129996>

1.5 African Youths and the European Eldorado

In a landmark study, *Scaling Fences: Voices of Irregular African Migrants to Europe*, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), found out that the motivation to emigrate by young Africans was not merely driven by the idea of getting a job or asylum seeking, that many were already working in their home countries, however, the prospects of earning income in the home country could not possibly hold them back from their decision to move. The study believed there was more to the decision to travel undocumented in spite of the staggering associated risks. The study found that;

“Migration is a reverberation of development progress across Africa, albeit progress that is uneven and not fast enough to meet people’s aspirations. Barriers to opportunity, or ‘choice-lessness’, emerge from this study as critical factors informing the calculation of these young people,” (UNDP, 2019:86).

On the other hand, Hannoum argues in the same line about African youths’ decision to emigrate irregularly in spite of the immense risk. To him, just like the UNDP, poverty is not a strong enough variable that explains why an African youth would choose to die at the Mediterranean. Rather, he argues that “the youth are usually motivated by the desire to reinvent a new life in a Europe that exerts tremendous fascination on the imagination” (Hannoum, 2021:169).

The above underscores the rationale behind young Africans, especially Nigerians opting to die in the Mediterranean rather than stay back in their home country, at least to fulfil and achieve the desired Eldorado and in many cases die in a strangely imagined society of hope, than die in a country where social deprivation obscures the liberty of hope. On this note, many of these young migrants who eventually could not reach their intended destinations – Europe, due to one reason or the other especially where they ran out of money-- ended up being sold into slavery in transit countries like Libya and Saudi Arabia. Many who successfully dared the Mediterranean and crossed over to Europe, their Eldorado, found it is not as anticipated, thus end up in newfound occupations like prostitution, and in extreme cases, some ended up on the slaughter slabs of smugglers and human traffickers,

where their vital organs like kidney are harvested and sold leaving them with severe health conditions (Ojoye, 2017).

Apprehension data on irregular migration from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicate that no fewer than 200,000 to 300,000 African migrants enter Europe yearly and illegally, while another 100,000 who attempt to enter are intercepted, and many others lose their lives” (UNODC, 2006: 5). The journey for a better life and opportunity by the African migrant are shrouded with tales of woes and agonies of an imagined Eldorado. These agonies and woes reflect what Olusegun Adeniyi titled as, “from frying pan to fire” (Adeniyi, ³⁵2019). Successful arrival in the destination country does not translate to mean a better life. It rather entails a lot of efforts, perseverance and struggle synonymous with situations and experiences from the country of origin, as their well-being, access to services such as health and education, in most cases are largely not accessible. Generally, it has been reported that migrants upon arrival in Europe *were kept in detention for one and half years in a prison-like condition and were only allowed to see the sun for two hours per day* (Nwalutu, 2016). In many cases, majority of these migrants as Nwalutu reported were refused residence permits even after experiencing many months in detention and were eventually deported. Where they are not deported it would take a minimum of three to four years to secure residence permit, and mostly, these young African migrants would have to survive the harsh European environment doing low-paying and menial jobs, which are the only opportunities available as a result of their irregular migratory status. Government policies in Europe, according to Nwoye (2019) deny “irregular” African migrants the right to work in Europe, and irregular migrants compared to asylum seekers and those seeking for protection are segregated against in many cases.

Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, (2018) posited that another challenge faced by African migrants has to do with language barrier. They argued that in many European countries where English is not spoken, most African migrants especially those from English speaking African countries like Nigeria are unable to fit in, and the same situation confronts those from Francophone

³⁵ Adeniyi, A. (2018). *From Frying Pan to Fire: How African migrants risk everything in their futile search for a better life in Europe*. Bookcraft Africa.

Africa in the United³⁶ Kingdom. The language barrier according Ochieng (2012) cited in Nwalutu (2016) strongly contributed to their inability to access vital information related to health services, as such when sick and in dire need of medical attention, Idemudia & Boehnke stated that most African migrants as a result of their undocumented status would not be able to seek medical attention for fear of being deported (Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020; Plambech, 2017). This begs the question as to why the African migrant, especially those from Nigeria would want to die in the Mediterranean, given semblance of situation in country of origin? The answer to this again, lies at the heart of the migrant, and that is the certainty of hope as opposed to the migrant's country of origin where, years of toiling in menial jobs does not translate to a future rather more hardship reinforced by social exclusion in all the dimensions of social life. As Hannoum stated, the migrant imagines and hopes to reinvent him or herself, and be liberated from the fetters of bad governance.

1.6 Theoretical Orientation

In this work, we anchor the explanation of migration, particularly the aspect of African migrants vanishing in the Mediterranean Sea on the theory of social exclusion. Most theoretical explanations of migration and the decision to emigrate have mostly dwelled on the political economy of migration, push-pull model or economic theories of globalization and migration (Song, 2018; Faridi, 2018; Epstein, 2012). These models though apt in their explications have always tended to look at migration as a single variable and given a blind eye to mortality, disaster or death at the Mediterranean. In this work, our goal is to look at the decision to emigrate, the associated risks and death plus possibility of missing at the Mediterranean as a function of deprivation which is rooted in social exclusion. As a model, social exclusion is relatively a nascent theory, and is credited to the early writings of René Lenoir (1974) (Sen, 2000; Jordan, 1996). Lenoir had argued that a tenth of the French population were socially excluded. According to him, many people including the “aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, and single parents” are

³⁶ Jaspars, S., & Buchanan-Smith, M. (2018). Darfuri migration from Sudan to Europe: From displacement to despair. London: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Retrieved from [https:// www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12384.pdf](https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12384.pdf)

amongst those that the French society had excluded from economic cum political participation. (Sen, 2000:1). Drawing from this, Silver³⁸ added to the list and included other categories believed to be socially excluded, including:

*“a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding” (Sen, 2000.1).*³⁷

Clearly, as a theory, social exclusion according to the United Nations refers to a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state. This simply means that individuals or people are not mainstreamed into the realities of social life. They are unable to participate economically, socially and culturally and are unable to sustain the little they have and have a good life. In other words, they are deprived in all aspects of life. This definition simply denotes that an individual member of a society requires for instance an employment yet is unable to get employed to earn income, make a living and to take care of self and family. Access to employment and many more as listed by Silver³⁸ are duties every responsible government owes her citizens. The United Nations Agenda 2030 as a principle enshrined in the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) presupposes that every person has a right to enjoy minimum standard of well-being. With regards to the above example, such a person or persons without access to employment by extension income and or, opportunities, cannot afford access to healthcare, and other associated things that enhances social life. To that extent, one is deprived of social life. Deprivation as earlier mentioned is rooted in social exclusion. The instances adumbrated can spiral to various elements that could ordinarily dislocate

³⁷ Sen, A. (2000). Social exclusion: Concept, application, and scrutiny. Social Development Papers No. 1. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29778/social-exclusion.pdf>

³⁸Silver, H. (1995). Reconceptualizing social disadvantage: Three paradigms of social exclusion. In, Gerry Rodgers, Charles Gore, & Jose Figueiredo (Eds.) Social Exclusion: Rhetoric, reality, responses. International Institute for Labour Studies

family or group social stability in the society leading to poverty and hunger that can reinforce psychosocial issues.

From the above, migration therefore is a derivative of such deprivation or sustained deprivation, that are direct offshoots of social exclusion. Most African countries like Nigeria lack governance, healthcare, education etc. and pensioners suffer or die even before the arrival of their supposed pension payment. Citizens are frustrated in many realms and dimensions, and there is no hope in sight. The hope of a future is bleak and perhaps not there especially where one is not connected to 'the powers that be' (those in political position). The option in many cases usually available for many is to "Japa" – migrate or leave the country. In very many cases, the idea of migration or the decision to emigrate is a calculated irregular one.

1.8 Methodology

This work is purely a qualitative study, that relied on primary data gathered from randomly selected respondents and analyzed descriptively using simple percentages. The essence of the individual-based interview was mainly to support the work with qualitative empirical information about young African's risk behaviour around migration and their plans to travel legally or illegally and the justification behind the intention to move in spite of the knowledge of associated risk. We drew on a detailed questionnaire administered in person to 60 respondents, male and female (over 18 years of age) who had once travelled out of the country and those with intentions to travel in the Rumuosi area of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Those who had once travelled had successfully arrived in Europe undocumented, via the Mediterranean at least three years before they were interviewed for this study. However, in the course of this study there were no clear means to determine if some of the respondents actually travelled as claimed.

1.9 Findings

Amongst the 60 respondents, 80% (48) were males and 20% (12) females (see figure 4). As shown in the Table 1, 13.3% (8) of the respondents claimed to have successfully arrived Europe illegally and will still travel out, 33.3% (20) have plans to emigrate to Europe within the next two years. 16.7% (10) have plans to leave by end of the year as their plans have already formed. 15% (9) have no plans to leave, not that they do not want to leave

but believe they cannot afford the money to sustain the travel. The rest, 21.7% (13) have no intentions of leaving soon but have strong long-term plans to migrate, howbeit legally. Apparently, on a general note, while 65% (21) of the respondents have plans of leaving the country to Europe illegally, 35% (39) have the intention of emigrating legally (see Table 2). Majority of the reasons or justification given by the surveyed respondents for wanting to emigrate out of the country is “a better life and future” (which speaks volume of the supposed Eldorado) and “survival” (need to earn better income) (see Table 3). Surveyed respondents were told of the obvious and looming danger in attempting crossing the Mediterranean Sea, many had responded in the same manner translated to read as the comment of Chike (one of the respondents), “I would die trying to get to Europe than stay in a country where youths have no hope”.

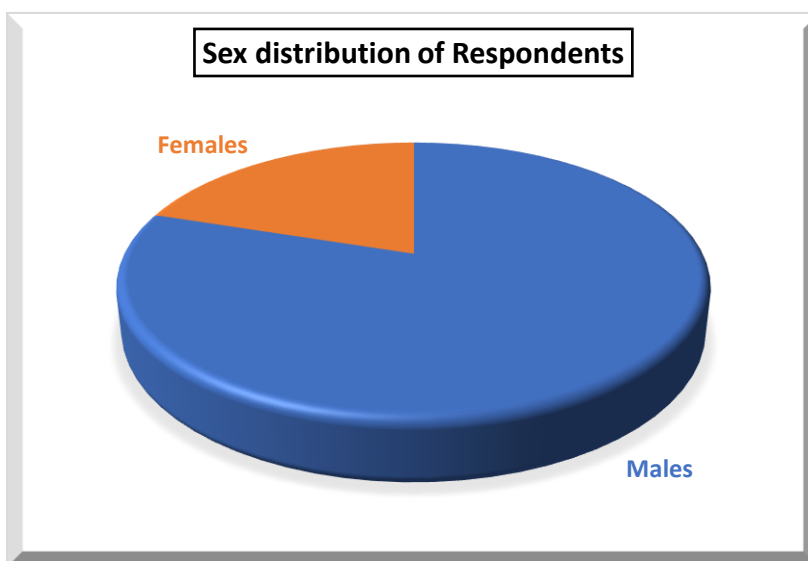


Figure 4: Sex distribution.

Table 1: Intensions to migrate

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Previously traveled to Europe	8	13.3
Will travel out this year	10	16.7
Will travel out in 2years time	20	33.3
Want to travel but no money	9	15%
Have future plans to travel out	13	21.7
Total	60	100

Source: Field work, 2022.

Table 2: Response on intended process of emigrating

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Legally	21	65
Illegally	39	35
Total	60	100

Source: Field work, 2022.

Table 3: Reasons for the intension to migrate

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Survival and better income	16	26.7
Better life and improved future	31	51.7
Make money for my family	9	15
Education and work	4	6.6
Total	60	100

Source: Field work, 2022.

Conclusion

From the outset, the paper was set to comprehend the impact of the Mediterranean route on the mortality of migrant Africans, who attempt to cross over to the other side of the aisle (Europe) for a better life. As observed here, the paper has shown that the Mediterranean Sea as an interface route, is not only a death trap to young African migrants but an opportunity for, especially Nigerian youth to bid farewell to their continent and country that has consistently secluded them from socioeconomic development.

As we have noted, the demographic characteristics of African migrants who arrive Europe successfully via the Mediterranean and those who did not make it but their lives were cut short by the Mediterranean Sea are mostly young and educated people within the age range of 15 to 35.

Social seclusion in the form of deprivation and especially the Eldorado dream are the main reasons that compel the young African or Nigerian to engage in the decision to emigrate, regardless of the associated risks of even dying in the Mediterranean.

Drawing on new data sources, the study has shown that migration is more internal in Africa than Europe. Meaning that, the majority of African migrants continue to move within the continent than outward, to Europe. Moreso, the decision to emigrate is mostly an irregular one, and a costly one at that.

This is 2022 and 2023 is an election year for Nigeria. Once again, governance would be put to test, where this is appallingly unsatisfactory,

then the hope of a better country for the Nigerian youth may most likely be a hopeless one. This would naturally set the tone for the Mediterranean Sea to be a sustainable death trap for young Africans, and or Nigerians, as social seclusion may deepen or thrive more forcing the young ones to emigrate howbeit illegally. The paper recommends the following:

- The United Nations and the EU for all practical purposes should impress on African, especially Nigeria government to concentrate more on churning and implementing policies that would facilitate socioeconomic development in-country.
- More efforts must be in place by international organisations and the EU to protect, and rescue migrants from the Mediterranean. The statistics can be reduced if a multilateral approach to monitoring is deployed round the clock and not merely responsive.
- Socioeconomic development in the country should target young persons with a focus on entrepreneurship development, as government alone cannot provide all the required jobs.
- Another approach at reducing this phenomenon has to do with creating inclusive opportunities across the country irrespective of ethnicity, religion or education.
- The Nigeria populace must wake up and make a decisive decision in the 2023 elections in order to decide their future, and must demand accountability and force government to do the needful even by peaceful demonstrations.
- The study relied on very small data set: we recommend going forward, that an expanded sample size should be used for future studies that may perhaps consider how migration is hurting Africa.

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