



How West African migrants engage with migration information en-route to Europe

Studies on communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers to obtain information in countries of origin and transit, with particular focus on online and social media



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POLICY SUMMARY

The report findings support the case to invest in strategic communications as a means to effect behaviour change among potential migrants in origin countries and transit. Influencing the decision-making processes of (potential) migrants is a demand-based approach to reducing irregular migration. Reducing the number of people wanting to migrate irregularly reduces corresponding costs of border control, voluntary/ forced return, welfare services, and asylum processing. Strategic communications therefore offer a high return on investment relative to other migration management and protection measures. Where implemented appropriately, they also offer a non-coercive, rights-compatible approach to migration management.

Measures to counter irregular migration, people smuggling, and human trafficking along routes to Europe have proliferated since the onset of a new European crisis in migration in 2015. With inflows originally concentrated at Europe's Eastern Mediterranean border, since the EU-Turkey statement on March 2016, nationals arriving irregularly from West Africa via the Central Mediterranean have constituted the majority of irregular arrivals. The persistence of the challenge is illustrated by looking back to the 2006 migration 'crisis' in the Canary Islands, where West African nationals were also prominent.

The main EU policy document addressing the migrant crisis is the 2015 European Agenda on Migration. It comprises a package of measures totalling over €10 billion with the aim to reduce irregular flows and the vulnerability of irregular migrants by strengthening the protection space in the EU neighbourhood, and by bolstering the migration management capacity of EU and external actors.¹

Key to this strategy is the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Amounting to €2.9 billion,² it has been established to address the drivers of migration, mostly through conventional international development programming in major countries of origin. The Sahel and Lake Chad Window covers 12 countries, six of which are studied in this report.³ Examples of projects in the region include €11 million for economic opportunities in Gambia, €37 million in Mali, and €106 million in Senegal.⁴ EU Trust Fund-financed projects have a broad range of objectives, and many have no specific or measurable objective of influencing irregular migration. Project objectives are instead articulated in terms of protection and resilience, with the link to the rationale of the Fund, namely to reduce irregular migration, left implicit.

However, the high-level objectives of the EU to reduce irregular migration and bring an end to a sense of migration 'crisis' are clear. The 2015-2020 EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling is explicit in its objectives to reduce migrant smuggling. Among far-reaching measures to improve migration management through deterrence and coercive means, it resolves to utilise strategic communications as a means of developing a "counter-narrative" against smugglers' often deceitful marketing.⁵ A commitment to "increase the awareness of the risks of irregular migration and migrant smuggling [...] among vulnerable groups" was reiterated in the European Council conclusions of 10 March 2016. This approach assumes, firstly, that smugglers rely principally on social media to recruit migrants. Secondly, it assumes that migrants are persuaded to migrate by online marketing techniques. The findings of this study suggest that both assumptions are overstated. That is, on the West African-Central Mediterranean route, smugglers' online marketing exists but is not a core factor in motivating decisions or in recruitment.

Communications campaigns targeted at migrants have been launched by the EU and Member States in various guises over the past decade, and their prevalence is increasing. At the end of 2009, at least four Member States had information campaigns in origin and transit countries, aimed at reducing irregular migration.⁶ By 2016-2017, at least 13 Member States had launched such campaigns.⁷ The EU has funded a pilot information and awareness campaign run by the

¹https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_eam_state_of_play_en.pdf

² https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/africa/eu-emergency-trust-fund-africa_en

³ Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Senegal, and Mali

⁴ Additional funds are earmarked for resilience, migration management, and support to returnees. For a full list of approved projects see <https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/contracting-status-sahel-lake-chad-jan-2017.pdf>

⁵ Concerns were driven by smugglers' effectiveness on social media, where many use misleading messages to secure custom. For a discussion of such materials, see UNHCR (2017), From a refugee perspective, <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5909af4d4/from-a-refugee-perspective.html>

⁶ Three other member states had limited campaigns targeted at prevention of trafficking in persons. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/ad-hoc-queries/illegal-immigration/186._emn_ad-hoc_query_prevention_campaigns_and_irregular_migration_23dec2009_wider_dissemination.pdf

⁷ See 'Summary of EMN Ad-Hoc Query No. 2016.1100: Migration information and awareness raising campaigns in countries of origin and transit', available at <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/.../03/.../tk-bijlage-summary-ahq-info-campaign.pdf> as well as section 5.5.8 of http://www.emn.lv/wp-content/uploads/study_on_smuggling_of_migrants_final_report_master_091115_final_pdf.pdf

International Organization for Migration in Niger, and is one of the funders of UNHCR's 'Telling the Real Story' campaign in the Horn of Africa.⁸ Objectives are to raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration, and "uncover [the] lies" of smugglers. Social media is highlighted as core to smugglers' strategies.⁹

Campaigns have typically sought to raise awareness of the risks of migrating irregularly – for instance, by highlighting the physical dangers of the journey – or to sensitise populations to the risks of trafficking. Fewer have explicitly aimed to tackle the demand for irregular migration and associated smuggling services by identifying key points of intervention in the decision-making process.

The study finds that potential migrants from across the region rely on word-of-mouth communication to devise and implement migration plans. In contrast to other major regions of origin, such as Afghanistan, people smugglers play a diminished role in motivating migration journeys, and their presence on social media is a 'red herring', distracting from primary migration decision-making processes. Despite smugglers' evident presence online, most migrants engage their services face-to-face or by personal recommendation, usually after arriving in smuggling hubs such as Agadez. Meanwhile, mainstream media channels – television far more than printed press or radio – contribute to the 'greener pastures' principle, namely the widely-held idea in regions of origin that reaching a European destination will inevitably improve outcomes.

Given the pressing concern to address high flows through the Sahel to Libya, communications strategies should aim to provide localised, trusted information to those considering embarking on journeys towards Libya and Europe. Social media becomes more important in transit, as migrants seek to connect with advisors in the diaspora online. Effective strategic communications in this context requires focus in four key areas:¹⁰

- **Targeting** – addressing interventions to the groups most at risk of attempting irregular journeys with inadequate information, and tailoring them appropriately. The report indicates that lower educated (and poorer) groups tend to be the most confident about migration plans, despite having the least information.
- **Channels** – the best way to reach target audiences through *trusted* sources. There are important differences between national groupings in how information is accessed and processed, and the degree to which sources are trusted. Compatriots with experience of Europe, who had not 'failed' the journey, and who were not associated with authorities (including governments and international organisations) are most likely to gain the trust of the target audience.
- **Messaging** – the type of information in demand among potential migrants that has the potential to shape knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Study respondents most keenly demanded information about destination countries, and needed support in calculating the likely rewards for what they usually already understood was substantial risk. Where risks and rewards are more accurately assessed, there are likely to be fewer decisions to migrate.
- **Measurability** – indicators that programmes have brought about the desired change in knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and an understanding of the changing relevance and impact of channels and messages over time and between towns, cities and countries.

This study responds to a need for policies that assist West African migrants and potential migrants in more accurately appraising the risks versus rewards of irregular migration on the Central Mediterranean route. Many migrants underestimate physical and financial risks, overestimate their chances of successfully reaching destination and acquiring legal status, and have vague or inaccurate perceptions of what life is like after arrival.

A strategic communications campaign with a robust theory of change would offer:

- **Value for money** – irregular migrants generate significant costs en-route and after arrival in Europe. Investment in strategic communications offers high returns where it removes the imperative for humanitarian aid, coercive migration management measures and

⁸ <https://www.refugeecouncil.ch/news/archive/2016/e-platform-and-information-campaign-telling-the-real-story.html>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-informs/emn-informs-00_emn_inform_on_social_media_in_migrant_smuggling.pdf

¹⁰ The challenges of strategic communications are discussed in more detail here: https://www.wodc.nl/binaries/Cahier%202016-11_2683_Volledige%20tekst_tcm28-239610.pdf

security, and the costs of reception, processing asylum claims and, where unsuccessful, return.

- **A reduction in the demand for smuggling services** – the flexible, horizontal structure of smuggling along the Central Mediterranean route has made counter-criminal operations largely ineffective against people smugglers. A more promising way to undermine the ‘business model’ of people smugglers is to remove demand for their services by encouraging the use of legitimate channels for migration.
- **Social impact** – effective strategic communications are aligned with the motivations of those considering irregular migration. Appropriately-designed campaigns serve a social function of increasing potential migrants’ capacity to make choices in their own best interests. Moreover, the lines between smuggling and trafficking on the Central Mediterranean route are blurred. Strategic communications can be designed in such a way to undermine the recruitment of trafficking victims, in line with the EU Trafficking Strategy.¹¹

¹¹ EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings (2012-2016), https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/new-european-strategy-2012-2016_en

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the European Union's comprehensive approach to the migration crisis, the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home) commissioned Optimity Advisors and Seefar to strengthen the evidence based on communications for migration in West Africa and the Central Mediterranean route, as well as information gathering by migrants and asylum seekers travelling from West Africa to Europe. The study findings will support the development of a strategic communications campaign aimed at influencing migratory choices in countries of origin and transit.

A mixed methods study was designed to address the research questions. Fieldwork was carried out between May and July 2017:

- Review of the literature on migration and people smuggling from West Africa and through the Central Mediterranean route.
- A quantitative survey of 1,053 'potential' migrants in Senegal (169), Cote d'Ivoire (182), Gambia (180), Guinea (177), Mali (167), and Nigeria (178).
- Qualitative in-depth interviews with 85 West African migrants in transit in Agadez, Niger (25) and in Libya - Sabha (15), Bani Walid (15), Zuara (10), Sabratha (20).
- Qualitative in-depth interviews with 30 returnees from Europe (16) and Libya or Niger (14).
- Qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 Malians who had considered irregular migration but changed their plans, conducted in Bamako (10) and Mopti (5).
- Social media and online analysis using automated and manual searches of social media and online sources based on key words and phrases present in migrant interviews.¹² Researchers noted that with more time and resources, more sophisticated APIs can be utilised, allowing access and analysis of a greater volume of data.
- The social media analysis included 10 additional short interviews in Mali¹³ to further investigate the use of social media and online information in decisions around irregular migration. These qualitative insights were designed as a case study to give some contextual understanding to quantitative findings.

The findings of the report are shaped around evidence of 1) the kind of messages that influence migratory behaviour, namely how migrants make decisions to migrate, and 2) the expectations of migration versus the reality; and 3) the sources of trusted information that shape decision-making, the channels by which it reaches migrants and potential migrants, and finally 4) the specific role of social media.

Decision-making

- Respondents were motivated to migrate for diverse reasons, with common economic roots. Wealthier respondents in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire were more likely to base their decision on specific assumptions and goals, while poorer and less well-educated respondents from Guinea and Gambia had less clearly defined aspirations. Respondents acted on their aspiration to migrate after encouragement from peers at home or in the diaspora, or in rarer cases, after being approached/recruited by a smuggler or trafficker.
- European destinations were chosen on the basis of the respondent's perception of whether he/she would be successful in finding work. Legal alternatives, such as applying for European visas, were dismissed on the basis of low likelihood of success, high cost, and high administrative requirements.
- Respondents were mostly confident in their migration plans. This was despite Guinean and Gambian respondents admitting relatively little knowledge of essential components of migration, such as life in transit and destination.

¹² See the Technical Annexes for a full social media analysis methodology.

¹³ This brought the total number of interviews in Mali to 25.

Experiences of the journey

- Migrants' experiences in Libya were variable. Most cited problems with insecurity and the difficulties in finding work. Wage theft and physical abuse from employers was also a problem, and women were particularly vulnerable on this route to sexual assault. At the same time, a number of interviewees had established fairly stable livelihoods in Libya.
- With the exception of Ivorians, who more often arranged smugglers from home, and Nigerian women, who were often trafficked, migrants did not usually engage a smuggler until they reached Agadez. Smugglers' intermediaries approached migrants on arrival in Agadez and took them to the 'ghetto'.
- Migrants continue to pass from Agadez to Ghatrun and onwards to Sabha in Libya, while others travel through Algeria and into Ghat or Ghadames. Although migrants are usually free to agree terms with whichever broker he or she encounters, smugglers remained decision-making power over routes.
- Migrants knew there were risks involved with the desert and sea crossings, and some had heard about kidnapping, killing and violence against African migrants in Libya. However, many did not understand the extent to which these risks were true, especially once they experienced trauma crossing the Tenere desert stretch from Agadez to Sabha.
- Overwhelmingly, returnees felt that they had been sold an inaccurate picture of life in Europe. Many did not expect that their considerable physical, financial, and emotional sacrifices to take the journey would not result in rewards in Europe such as finding employment or quickly receiving asylum. The situation of returnees was further complicated by the fact that many faced stigma from relatives and friends once they returned home and found themselves without support.
- Potential migrants were split in the levels of confidence they had in their knowledge of the journey. Many felt confident that they had sufficient knowledge to plan their journey. However, they exhibited poor knowledge when asked to respond to various aspects of the journey, including knowledge of life in transit and destination countries, physical and financial risks, people smugglers, and routes.
- There is demand from migrants and potential migrants for more information prior to departure, en-route, and after arrival in Europe. If provided via the right channels, this information could influence behaviour.

Information and communication

- There is a difference in which information sources raise migration aspirations, and which shape migrants' decisions at departure, en-route and after reaching Europe:
- Pre-departure:
 - *Pull factors to Europe*– a high proportion of respondents watched television, and it appears that this plays an important role in shaping a positive image of Europe. Sports and drama programming were the most popular. However, except for Guineans' high trust of television for migration information, it was usually not a direct source of migration information.
 - Diaspora plays an important role in conveying messages and information about Europe and migration, and Facebook is an important channel of communications for these.
 - Very few actively searched for information online before migrating; those who did were mostly Nigerians and said they searched key words relating to the destination, such as 'asylum in Germany.' *Decisions on route/modus operandi* – respondents relied on encouragement and information from peers and/or family at home and in the diaspora before migrating.
- In transit:
 - Migrants in transit communicated with each other and smugglers' intermediaries overwhelmingly face to face and by telephone. Some migrants made contact with smugglers through social media, though this was comparatively rare.
 - While the internet and internet-based applications such as Facebook and WhatsApp were popular, usage depended on access. Less educated migrants and Senegalese had less internet access at origin.

- Migrants communicated with family while en-route using telephone calls and social media. While internet appeared more readily available in Niger, access was more difficult in Libya. Some migrants were illiterate and did not use the internet at all.
- In Europe:
 - Most migrants who had reached Europe said they called home at least sporadically. Some said they were not able to do so or could not do so as often as they wanted to because of high costs of phone calls. The internet offered a cheaper alternative for some. However, even though migrants often had access to the internet in Italy, family and friends in the country of origin often did not, meaning that migrants had to make contact via telephone.

The role of social media

- The social media analysis consisted of additional qualitative interviews with potential migrants in Mali, searches for keywords identified in the core research using Facebook and Twitter's integrated search function (applied programming interface – API), and analysis of engagement with migration-related web and social media pages using BuzzSumo.
- Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber are more commonly used as channels of communications rather than platforms to gather information on migration. Comparatively, Twitter and Skype are rarely used either to communicate or obtain information on migration.
- Social media's primary role in migration is to facilitate private communication between migrants, potential migrants and their networks. However, it has important secondary and tertiary functions:
 - *To connect migrants with smugglers* – there was evidence of migrants connecting with smugglers over social media, with several Arabic-language smuggling pages in Libya appearing active. There was no evidence of migrants using social media to engage with smugglers prior to Libya.
 - *To expand migrants' diaspora networks* – migrants en-route and in Europe used social media, primarily Facebook, to connect with others in the diaspora. Migrants then used these contacts as a source of information for the journey. A manual search of diaspora-themed social media pages showed occasional migration-related content but this kind of content was not often posted. Some used dating websites to find friends (of the same nationality), or with the explicit aim of starting a relationship with someone of the host country nationality.

Online content

- Migrant-dedicated pages funded by EU actors such as infomigrants.net and awaremigrants.org were rarely mentioned, and most content has not been shared beyond a few hundred people. In contrast, Arabic website 'Migrate with us' (immig-us.net), active on several social media platforms, has 320,000 'likes' on its Facebook page. It hosts an active forum where people pose and answer questions.
- In searching for the 'migrate with us' and other websites, some migrants were led to the EU's own immigration portal. The EU's own website therefore has some influence on migrants.

Recommendations

- The study recommends implementing a strategic communications programme in origin and transit countries.
- At origin:
 - Deliver messages targeted at remedying challenging misleading stereotypes about countries of origin and Europe using sports (men) and dram (women) programming, though note this is a medium to longer term endeavour.

- More urgently, use word of mouth advisers (i.e. in person or over the phone counsellors) to provide a credible alternative source of information to migrants. Advisors can support target groups in calculating the risks and rewards of migration, becoming more informed about legal migration options, and understanding the reliability of advice coming from family. Recruit advisers from target communities to ensure maximum trust and local knowledge.
- Ensure that campaigns are sufficiently flexible to respond to target groups, in particular, potential migrants who are 'high confidence, low knowledge'.
- Incorporate language of 'fate and faith' into messaging, to counter dismissal of the dangers of the journey as 'bad luck.'
- Target television and social media content towards demographics more likely to have access to the internet and television.
- Target migrants via television, word of mouth advisers, peers at origin, and via the diaspora pre-departure. In transit, target migrants via social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp.
- Centre messages on the asylum process and likelihood of success.
- Target key influencers with a distinct strategy. Key influencers include male family members of male migrants who often support the financing of journeys, and female family members of female migrants who exert pressure on them to provide for the family. Female family members (i.e. mothers) were often reported to oppose migration but less often influential.
- In transit:
 - Increase migrants' knowledge of support and safe areas in Libya.
 - Further work with host communities to soften stigma of return – with a particular focus in Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. Key influencers in countries of origin should also be encouraged to forgive debts incurred to finance migration and support returnees.
 - Create or partner with credible diaspora-based social media channels that allow migrants and potential migrants to interact with real people; demonstrate that not all in the diaspora can be relied on to deliver accurate information.
- The study findings also suggest wider policy considerations:
 - Analysis should be conducted to understand the possible adverse impacts of migration management policies in key transit countries such as Algeria and Sudan. In both countries, there are indications that authorities' handling of undocumented migrants is encouraging onward movement towards Libya and Europe.
 - Improve local integration opportunities of migrants in transit, in particular in Algeria and Libya, which are often the intended destination of migrants.
 - Introduce strategic 'enabling measures' for legal migration from the country of origin that support migrants in overcoming practical barriers to obtaining visas.

INTRODUCTION

Between the start of 2017 and 30 June 2017, approximately 47,000 West African migrants arrived irregularly in Italy.¹⁴ Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Senegal, and Mali were all placed in the top ten countries of origin in this period, making West African irregular migrants¹⁵ the biggest contributor to the 'migration crisis' in the EU since dramatic reductions in arrivals from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq to Greece.

While the establishment of relocation and resettlement programs aims to ease the pressures placed on Italy and Greece from irregular arrivals, West African nationals do not receive international protection at high enough rates to qualify. With returns of West Africans from Italy and elsewhere in Europe also low, interventions at earlier stages of the migration journey are also underway.

An array of preventive tools has been used by European policymakers to address the issue, including information awareness campaigns.¹⁶ However, campaigns have often operated on assumptions about the gaps in migrant knowledge, how migrants obtain and process information, and what kinds of information would a) keep migrants safer; and b) influence migratory behaviours.

The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) commissioned Optimity Advisors and Seefar to undertake a study on communications channels used by migrants and asylum seekers to obtain information on migration.

DG HOME stipulated four tasks to be achieved with this study:

1. Assess overall level of migrants' and asylum seekers' knowledge of the journey (routes, distances, risks and smuggling services available), intended destination (situation in destination country) and how they plan to reach the destination (procedures to get asylum and legal migration options) across different migrants' profiles.
2. Provide an overview on information and communication channels used by migrants arriving and staying in the EU (pre-departure, along the route and upon arrival):
 - a) How they obtain relevant and 'trustworthy' information
 - b) How they communicate with smugglers
 - c) How they keep themselves up-to-date during their journey and during the initial period of stay in the EU
3. Assess how migrants relay such information and which channels they use to communicate and exchange information with their peers in countries of origin, between themselves and the diaspora members in the country of intended destination in the EU.
4. Assess the role of social media in relation to other information channels in the context of migration and identify who is funding and operating the online content identified.

The report sections address these tasks as follows:

- Section one of the report, on decision-making, responds to task one.
- Section two on comparing perceptions and reality of the journey also responds to task one.
- Section three on information and communications channels responds to both task two and task three.
- Section four on social media responds to task four.
- Recommendations and technical annexes follow these four sections.

¹⁴ <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>

¹⁵ 'Irregular migrant' is used as an umbrella term applicable to all migrants who cross borders without legal authorisation, and includes asylum seekers and refugees.

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu_action_plan_against_migrant_smuggling_en.pdf, 6-8

SECTION ONE: DECISION-MAKING

Summary

At a basic level, the decision to migrate is based on a combination of motivations to move, or the aspiration and capability (financial, physical, or otherwise) to realise migration goals.¹⁷

Both aspiration and capability are based on perceptions of the risks and rewards of the journey, whose accuracy is determined by access to reliable information and its credibility in the eyes of potential migrants.

This section explores the key drivers of migration from origin countries, and factors in onward movement from transit countries. It then investigates how respondents plan to reach destinations, and the extent to which migrants have considered legal alternatives to irregular journeys. The section then continues with an assessment of migrants' destination intentions and motivations behind those choices. It concludes with reflections on the type of information which might influence decisions.

Findings

Findings from this section are:

- Economic challenges raise the aspiration to migrate, and migrants perceive the causes of this as poor governance and nepotism in the workplace; Malians often migrated with very specific goals, while others had more general ideas of 'greener pastures.'
- Decisions to migrate are catalysed by encouragement from friends at home, the diaspora in the EU or, more rarely, approach from a recruiter or broker.
- Destination choices were based on migrants' assessment of where they would be able to successfully arrive and find work. Sometimes this coincided with the presence of contacts, who assured migrants of support, or a perception of the economic vibrancy of a country.

Drivers of migration and onward movement

There is a distinction to be made between the factors that build the propensity to migrate, which are prevalent in the countries of origin, and the catalysts for departure, which determine how many actually migrate. The propensity or aspiration to migrate among the sample is primarily a product of economic conditions expressed differently between groups.

Overcoming poverty motivated most respondents in the study to leave their country of origin (figure 1). A majority (65%) of survey respondents overall cited either poor (27%) or no (38%) job opportunities as the primary push factor. Most migrant interviewees explained they were employed, but incomes were unreliable, and prospects for increasing it poor. Gambian, Guinean, and Malian respondents often performed dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs, without guaranteed wages. Decisions to migrate were often taken as a household income diversification strategy in response to poor economic prospects, with encouragement and financial support from family members.

Some migrants explained their precarious position as a function of limited access to education and poor governance.

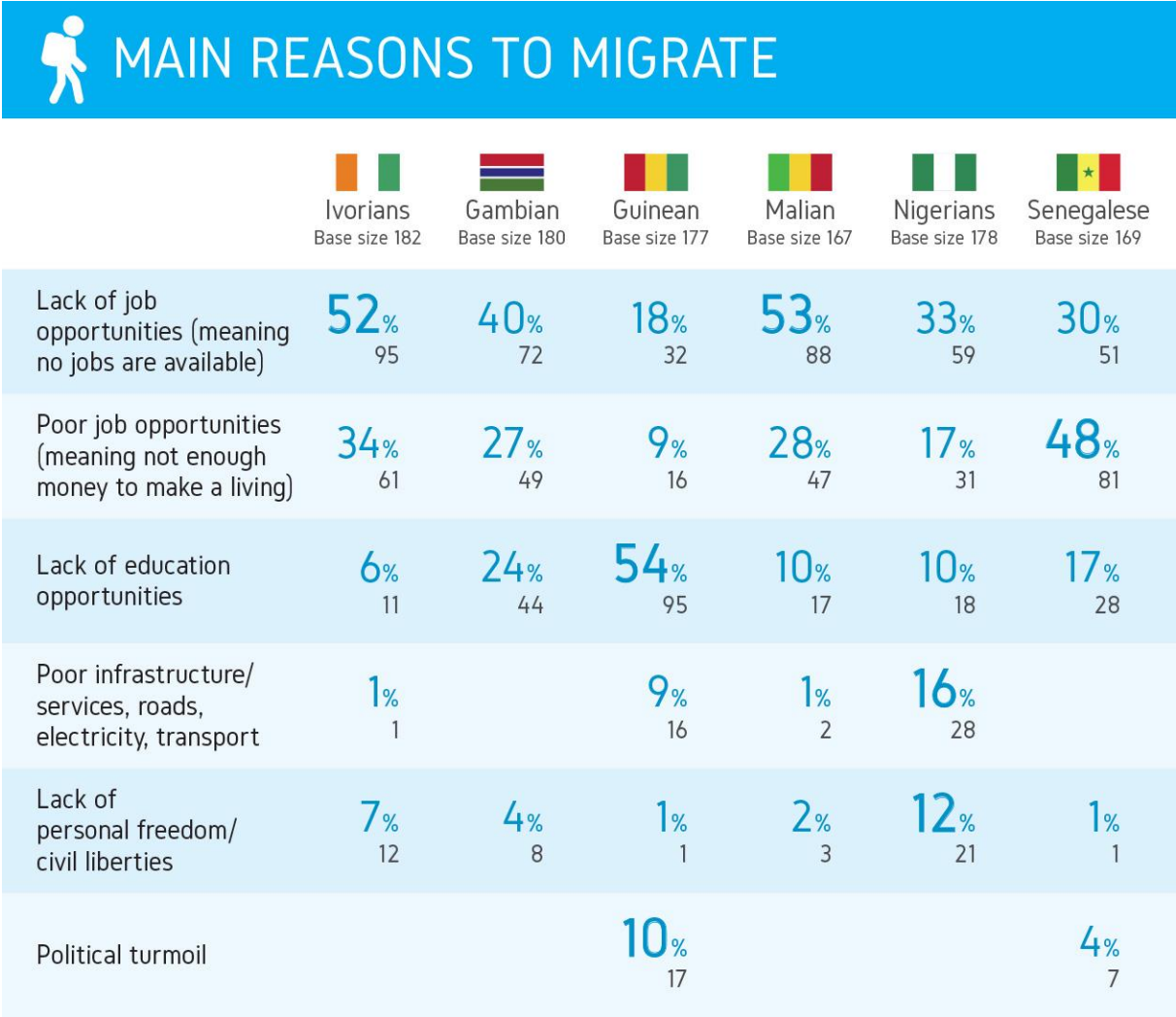
Respondents who had not finished secondary school, financial pressures usually forcing them out, felt there was little chance of advancement at home. Rather than aspiring to further education in Europe, most interviewees explained they expected their (low skilled) labour to command higher wages in Europe – among survey respondents, only 20% cited education as the main reason for migrating.

Several Guinean and Senegalese migrants said corruption and nepotism prevented economic progress. They viewed opportunities in education and employment as reserved exclusively for

¹⁷ http://compasanthology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/deHaas_COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf

higher classes or favoured ethnic groups. Conversely, Malians stayed in Mali after finding jobs through their family network.

Figure 1: Main reasons to migrate



Various circumstances can increase the financial pressures on somebody and/or decrease their perception that problems can be solved in the country of origin. Conflict and livelihoods often interact in this way. Notable in the sample was how break-up of the nuclear family—the loss of a parent to remarriage or death, for example—narrowed the prospects of children, often because there was no longer somebody to support education. It also increased financial pressure on the eldest children, who often felt a duty to provide for siblings. Family breakdown was a common factor in Nigerian departures.

The research findings revealed the reasons that people acted on their intention to migrate—the ‘catalysts’—were primarily:

- **Encouragement from the diaspora in the EU:** Many migrants departed because contacts in the diaspora advised them to migrate, or because they knew somebody who they perceived to have successfully migrated to the EU or Libya. Nearly all (70%) knew somebody who had (or was perceived to have) successfully illegally migrated, rising to nearly all Gambian (95%) and Nigerian (93%) respondents.
- **Local peer pressure:** Qualitative interviews signalled that respondents often considered migration for long periods but did not act on it until friends encouraged them to accompany them on the journey.
- **Presentation of an ‘opportunity’ by a recruitment agent/ broker/ smuggler/ trafficker:** Migrants often lack the know-how of how to migrate, or the confidence or contacts to do so. Agents often fill that void, and migrants often struggled to judge their trustworthiness. This was common but not limited to Nigerian women recruited from Edo

State in the south-east of the country, a known origin region of sex trafficking to Libya and Europe. Most respondents (84%) had not had contact with a smuggler. However, over a third (34%) of Malian respondents had been in contact with smugglers within the preceding six months. While this does not reveal who approached whom, it is suggestive of a much more active broker network in Mali.

It is worth noting that gaining access to funds was essential for people to migrate, but not the primary catalyst. While the migration literature increasingly asserts that many do not migrate because they are too poor,¹⁸ there was not always a positive association between acquiring funds and making plans for departure. Indeed, Malian interviewees who had changed their migration plans indicated the opposite – that gaining access to funds enabled them to stay and open businesses (case study 1).

The journey is relatively affordable, even for poor families where they pool resources. The costs of the journey to Agadez were attainable for most, at around EUR 50, or EUR 150 with bribes (all paid in local currency), and there is a widespread feeling that funds can be raised en-route. Moreover, just over a quarter (26%) of Nigerian women were offered 'depart now, pay later' packages. With no upfront fee, payment for the journey is recuperated later, likely through prostitution work in Niger and Libya.¹⁹

CASE STUDY 1

Changing plans: when development reduces migration

Interviews with Malians who intended to migrate then changed their mind offer strong evidence that development interventions can be effective, if targeted well. Respondents offered a range of reasons for abandoning plans, including a realisation that the journey carried real dangers, and that Europe is no longer 'El Dorado.' Many were afforded more time to consider their plans because they were unable to raise the necessary funds to pay for the journey.

Common to all accounts was an economic or education breakthrough. Malians opened or expanded businesses thanks to loans from family and friends who did not want them to risk the journey, an opportunity for further training provided by the Ministry of Education, and a grant through the *Programme de développement des compétences et d'emploi des jeunes* (PROJEC), which was used to open a bakery in Bamako.

Intended destinations

Decisions to travel to Europe are often stretched or 'fragmented' over the journey.²⁰ Migrants adjust intentions and decisions in response to new information and experiences encountered en-route. Understanding how and when decisions are made is key to designing interventions which respond effectively to migrants' information needs:

1. Europe from outset: most survey respondents (78%) and the majority of qualitative interviewees indicated that Europe had been their target from the start of the journey. This varied by nationality, from nearly all Ivorians (98%), to a smaller majority of Senegalese (64%). This category can be sub-divided into categories:
 - a. Without work: Some migrants aimed to travel as quickly as possible to the Libyan coast and depart for Italy. Migrants in this category were rare, as it requires substantial payments up front and most respondents were poor. Migrants in this category can be especially vulnerable if they encounter problems en-route or run out of money.

18 See for example, Michael Clemens (2014), *Does Development Reduce Migration?* <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8592.pdf>. The challenge may lie in reconciling macro- and micro-level assessments of migrant motivations, with the increased propensity to migrate at the national level obscuring more nuanced patterns at the individual and household level. For further exploration of this phenomenon see Paul Clewett and Isaias Tesfalidet, *Thinking Like a Migrant*, Migrating out of Poverty conference paper, <http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/files/file.php?name=clewett-thinking-like-a-migrant-update.pdf&site=354>

19 The dynamics of this have changed little since 2006, when Jorgen Carling published *Migration, Human Smuggling, and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, <http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs23.pdf>. See also Seefar (forthcoming), *Human Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, based on fieldwork carried out in 2016 with victims of human trafficking.

20 Other studies have also raised the issue of 'fragmented journeys' as a challenge to the image of unbroken flows from Africa to Europe. See http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/irs/crossingthemed/ctm_final_report_4may2017.pdf, 58

- b. With work: Those without sufficient funds saved to pay for the journey must work to fund subsequent legs. Most worked in Libya to fund the journey. Malian interviewees often worked in Algeria – for example, two migrants washed cars for between one and six months in Tamanrasset – while others found work in Burkina Faso and Niger. Some in this category can become settled, and not act on their intention to travel to Europe for prolonged periods.
2. Europe en-route: Interviewees in transit and returnees had sometimes decided to migrate to Europe while in a purported ‘transit’ country, usually Libya and sometimes Algeria, Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso. They make the decision to migrate onwards to Europe because economic conditions are unsatisfactory (e.g. inability to find employment or send remittances) or security is threatened (e.g. discrimination in Algeria or instability in Libya) in the transit country. Migrants of this category may make the decision to migrate to Europe as a ‘best worst’ option, because it is easier than returning.

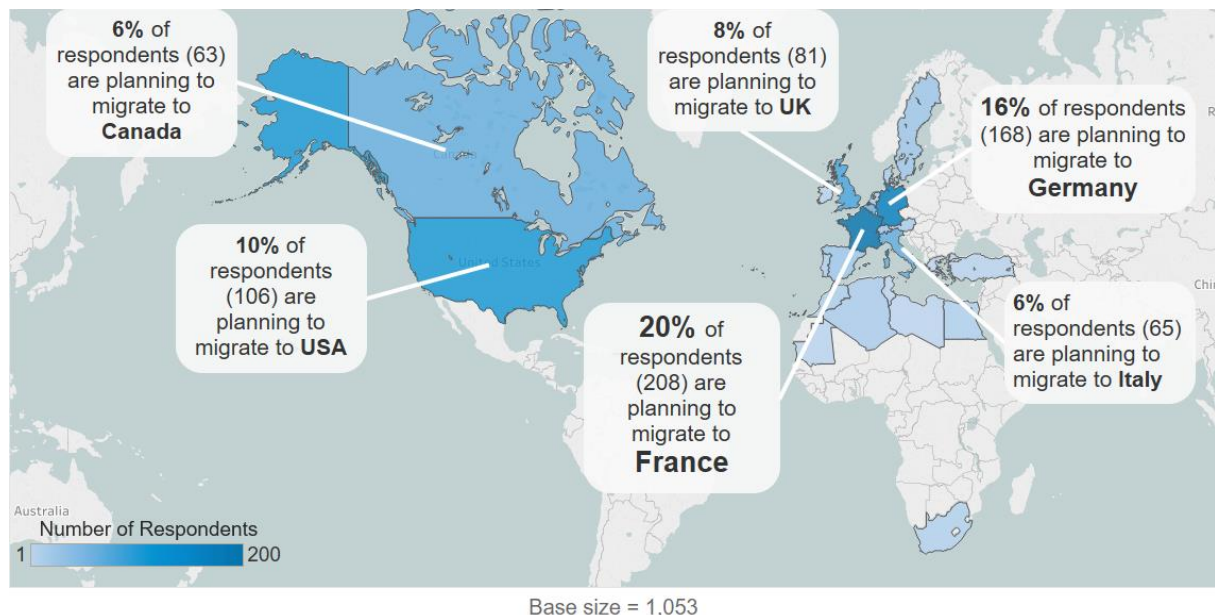
Of those intending to travel to Europe, there were no overwhelming preferred destinations. For instance, destination choice cannot be easily predicted by nationality. No majority in any nationality aspired to one single destination. France was the most popular ‘first preferred’ destination among francophone country nationals, but they were also more likely not to choose France than to choose it: over half of Ivorians (59%) and more than three quarters of Guineans (76%), Senegalese (79%), and Mali (80%) did not choose France.

In contrast, nationals of anglophone countries did not show a preference for the UK. Gambians (24%) and Nigerians (16%) both preferred Germany to the UK. Although not overwhelming, the popularity of Germany since the 2016 influx appears to have remained. Notable was migrants’ sense that the United Kingdom, though desirable, was too difficult to reach.

“In Great Britain there are strict rules...entering Britain with illegal way will cost a lot of money if you don’t want to get arrested by the police.” (Nigerian male)

That this opinion was held by several Nigerian migrants is indicative that it is more important for Nigerians to succeed in reaching or settling in Europe than it is to reach any one ideal destination country.

Figure 2: First preferred destinations of survey respondents



The fact that most migrants had contacts in their first country of preference appears to suggest that it was important to reach a specific destination within Europe - Senegalese, Ivorian and Guinean migrants were clear that joining friends and family was the reason why they had chosen this destination. However, there were indications that migrants were willing to change their destination of choice where it improved chances of success. Migrants did not always follow the advice of key influencers in the destination of choice. Equally, migrants in Europe do not always advise migrants to continue their journey to the same destination.

There is not a clear and direct correlation between potential migrants' network overseas and their preferred destination. The influence of network on the preferred destination varies by country. Networks of potential migrants are the most influential in Italy (45% of respondents aiming to migrate to Italy had contacts here), Spain (33%), and France (30%). This trend can be explained by the relative weakness of the Spanish and Italian labour markets: migrants were open to moving beyond the countries in which they had the strongest networks, only to countries where they were confident of securing employment without personal connections.

Countries such as Germany (26%) and Belgium (22%) most evidently attract migrants for reasons other than the presence of existing migrant networks. Germany is popular among Senegalese and Nigerian, and some Malian, migrants. This was due to a perception that there are good employment opportunities, and the German government treats migrants and refugees well:

"My preferred destination is Germany because there are so many job opportunities there, and because Germany provides good financial support that can reach 200 Euros. When I reach Germany and after one year of my arrival, I will be able to receive financial support and I can get residency." (Senegalese, male, 23)

Despite a relatively weak association between networks and destination preferences, many migrants were explicitly told by friends and family in the diaspora in Libya and Europe that they could find them work. Information on destinations was often limited to reassurances of the presence of a waiting job.

Jobs offered by friends to male migrants were in agriculture and construction, and other manual labour. Many claimed it was impossible for them *not* to find employment in Europe, and none found they had cause to be sceptical of job offers. Examples of positions offered are sales assistant in France (Nigerian), cleaner in Switzerland (Nigerian), at a horse stable in France (Senegal), and domestic help in Germany (Malian). Despite migrants' confidence in their destination choice, they had not conducted any prior research. Despite contacts in Europe often being strong advocates for migration, they often shared little of the detail of life at destination with migrants.

Nigerian and Gambian migrants had contacts in Italy but most had not been advised to migrate there. Migrants inferred that this was because contacts were not confident that they would be able to find work once arrived – when friends and family already in Europe would explain it is difficult to find a job, migrants would just change destination country.

Italy is a popular destination within the Guinean and Senegalese migrant communities. They usually have friends and family there, either settled or not. This contrasts directly with Nigerians, Malians, and Gambians, many of whom did not want to travel to Italy despite having contacts there.

Within the Ivorian migrant respondents, the most cited destination countries were France (because they have friends and relatives there and speak the language), Sweden (many mentioned job opportunities, asylum opportunities and humanitarian assistance), the UK and Germany equally. The UK and Germany were described as governments who grant asylum for three years. Germany was referred as having good policies for migrants, providing residency and financial support for three years or until they find a job. Respondents know migration is illegal but did not mention any EU regulations and rules on immigration.

"It's impossible not to find work in France"

This speaks to a trend running throughout the data that respondents base a large part of their migration decision-making on where they think they will find work. Respondents use different indicators of the likelihood of finding work (a government good to migrants; contacts in the country of destination; language ability, etc.), but are motivated by the same broad pull factor – jobs.

Given this, it is important for migrants to understand their prospects of gaining legal status and finding work at destination. The data showed that this is a major gap in respondent' knowledge. Respondents could not give details on their pathway to work, or the pathway to intended destination once in Italy. Nearly none mentioned asylum processes, immigration rules and policies, language barrier or integration matters. Where migrants acknowledge that there was a process, they were often vague on the details:

"There are people in Belgium who I know have applied for residency and they are waiting for approval now. They say that life in Belgium is good, and if you look for asylum, you need to be patient because it takes time." (Senegalese male)

Many did not have specific job 'offers' but claimed it is impossible for them not to find any kind of job in Europe: *"it's impossible not to find work in France"*.

The fact that the lack of detailed knowledge did not appear to concern migrants should also be noted as one indicator of respondents' willingness to travel to Europe unprepared, confident that life is guaranteed to improve. Interviews with returnees demonstrated the dejection that can ensue when migrants in Europe realise that it is difficult or impossible to realise their ambitions, with interviewees expecting to easily get legal status and integration support in Germany, Italy, and France, often failing to do so.

The great majority of migrants said they would have a much better life in Europe. Most did not specify what this entails, but work and a good income are the most used terms. All Ivorian respondents said they would receive asylum within a year in France, Germany or the UK, without disclosing how. Some migrants made reference to marriage once they are in Europe, associating stable work and a good income with the ability of getting married.

"I am looking to build my own house to get married and start my family life". (Senegalese, male, 24)

"After one year of my arrival, I will have a good job with a good income and I can expect that my life will be changed for the best". (Senegalese, male, 23)

Most returnees said they were very disappointed when arriving in Europe. Nearly none managed to apply for or receive asylum or otherwise regularise their status. As a result, they failed to access the expected services for migrants and refugees. Only one Senegalese returnee managed to receive asylum in France because he pretended to be from Ivory Coast. He returned because he had his status revoked on discovery of his real identity.

Many returnees from Italy thought they were going to receive language classes, accommodation, financial support and even vocational training in Italy. Although they did not disclose where they had obtained this information, it clearly indicates its inaccuracy or misinterpretation. It may be that previous waves of migrants did enjoy superior reception conditions in Italy, and have passed this experience back to current migrants. This points to a wider problem with migrants' perception that the diaspora in Europe, by virtue of their 'success', have the most accurate and reliable information. The rapid changes to migration policy in transit and destination countries meant that the migration experience now is very different to the experience of even a year ago.

CASE STUDY 2

Returning from the UK: The case of Olumide

Olumide returned to Nigeria from the UK after three years living in Manchester without legal status. During that time, he sought advice from his church pastor, a Nigerian living in Manchester, on what he should do to regularise his position. His pastor advised him against applying for asylum, as he had heard that the process often did not work out for Nigerians. He nonetheless recommended to him that he visit the 'Home Office' for advice. Indicating the severely limited understanding of both, Olumide said he had thought the Home Office was a branch of the Nigerian government. In the end, he decided that return to Nigeria was the best option. He crowdfunded his return to Nigeria through the social website Plenty of Fish and the support of the church congregation. Ethnic and non-ethnic churches are a place of sanctuary and trusted advice for many new immigrants, and potentially good interlocutors for diaspora messaging.

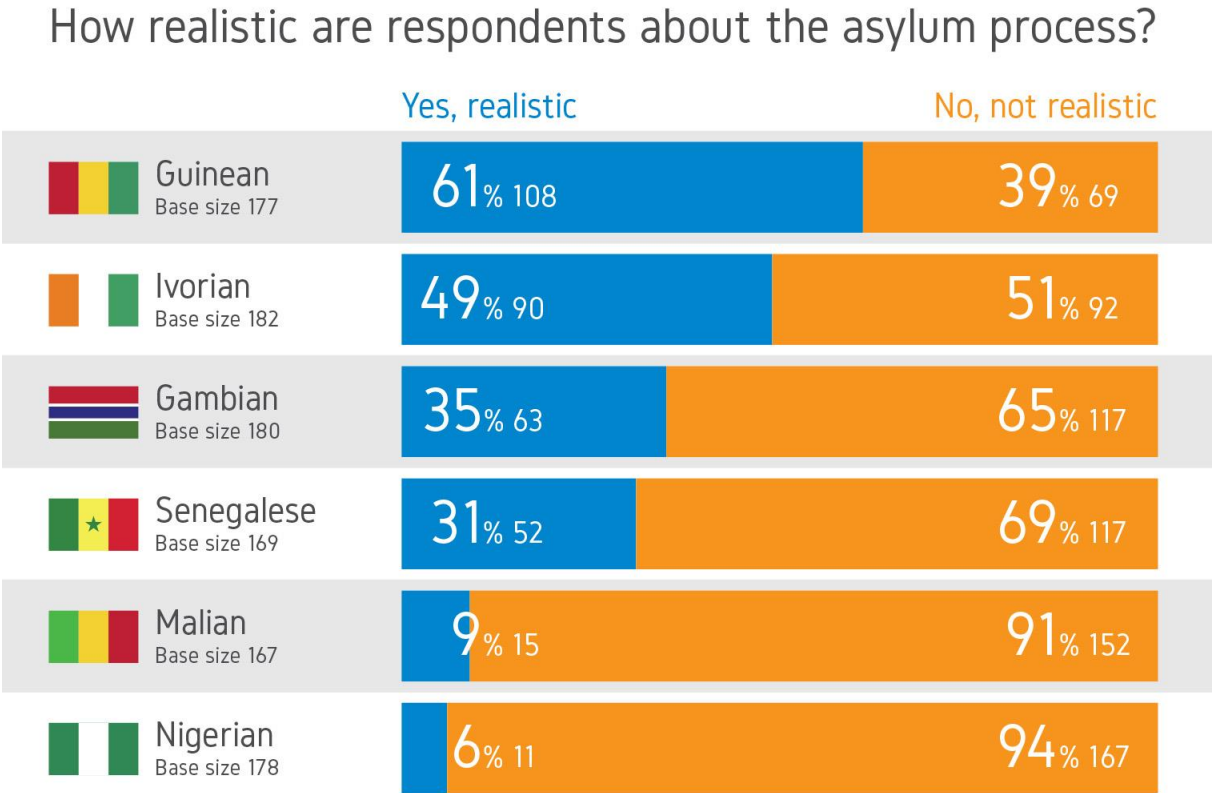
Migrants were aware irregular migration was illegal in the European Union. They knew in theory that deportation was possible but were confident that they would never be deported because of

Europe’s commitment to the human rights of migrants. One Guinean respondent specifically compared how he expected Europeans to treat him with the bad experience treatment received from ‘Arabs’ in Libya:

“Everybody knows that, but the Europeans are good people. They don’t have strict rules like in Arab countries. For example, even if they arrested you, they will treat you with respect and will not beat you.” (Guinea, male, 23)

In general, migrants were unrealistic about their prospects in Europe. Researchers judged the proportion of respondents with realistic expectations on the length of the asylum process and on the speed with which respondents expected to find work. The findings assume that seven months is the minimum period to get asylum status, and nobody would find work in less than five months. The above calculation also assumes that all migrants would be awarded asylum status. As such, they represent a ‘best case scenario.’ It found that a maximum of one third (32%) of migrants were realistic about their prospects. Guineans were most realistic (61%), while only 6% of Nigerians were (see figure 3).

Figure 3: How realistic are respondents about asylum prospects?



Influential information

Broadly, those who have decided to migrate are likely to be influenced by changes in three areas:

- 1) perceptions of their home country and the economic opportunities available,
- 2) a better understanding of the risks of the journey, and
- 3) a better understanding of the reality of life after reaching destination.

Respondents differed in the extent to which they believed economic ‘fixes’ could improve their situation. Ivorians (84%) and Malians (81%) overwhelmingly attributed their decision to leave to a lack of (good) jobs. Yet, stable employment (Ivorian 38%; Malian 31%) or increased incomes (Ivorian 47%; Malians 32%) would not persuade the majority to stay. The reason for this contradiction is not exactly clear.

However, Ivorians were mostly in work on departure, and simply did not believe their income could improve without migrating, suggesting a belief that regardless of immediate individual needs, long-term economic malaise necessitated migration. Meanwhile, several Malian interviewees did not intend to permanently abandon their households, but migrate temporarily to raise sufficient capital to start or improve businesses. In short, economic motivations do not necessarily mean that immediate economic opportunities will change minds.

In contrast, Gambians and Guineans indicated that they do make their decisions on a cost-benefit analysis. That is, a change in economic circumstances at home would make a difference to their migration choices. For example, more money (Gambian 79%; Guinean 95%) or stable employment (Gambian 84%; Guinean 92%) would make them more likely to stay in the country of origin. This suggests that interventions to signpost potential migrants towards jobs, or low skilled job creation schemes, might be expected to influence the desire to migrate.

Credible information on the journey and the reality at destination and in transit countries is likely to be influential. Migrants interpreted the risks of the journey in terms of how they affected anticipated rewards. That is, migrants feared less they would come to harm on the journey than they would fail and efforts would have been in vain.

Even before departure, most survey respondents from Gambia (73%) and Guinea (71%) declared they would likely stay at home if they learned their destination country would not fulfil their expectations. Many interviewees were migrating because they were confident that they would quickly find work at destination or had been quoted a minimum salary, which is likely unattainable in many cases. This discussion is expanded in the subsequent section.

SECTION TWO: EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES OF THE JOURNEY

Summary

This sub-section describes the knowledge and expectations migrants had of their journeys beforehand, as well as the actual experiences of migrants in transit and returnees in the context of their original perceptions and the ensuing reality. The objective of the section is to explore the accuracy of migrants' own perceptions of their knowledge before departing and the information they would find (or would have found) useful to improve their prospects.

Findings

Findings from this section are:

- Respondents are confident overall that they have sufficient information to plan the journey, despite many conceding they knew little about the journey, and life in destination and transit countries.
- Respondents claim to be knowledgeable of legal migration opportunities but most are sceptical of their ability to access them and few have attempted to do so.
- Almost all migrants contacted smugglers in Agadez, which for many migrants is the last stop before return to the country of origin becomes expensive and difficult. Smugglers determine routes and migrants thought it logical to defer to them as they were the 'experts'. Migrants thought routes via Morocco and Algeria were more difficult and more expensive than Libya.
- All migrants found Libya insecure. Nonetheless, experiences in Libya ran a spectrum from relatively stable migrants with jobs to repeated victims of abuse and severe hardship. Migrants in the more stable group primarily wanted to migrate onwards to Europe because of the difficult economic situation in Libya.

Knowledge and expectations of the journey

The level of knowledge of respondents contemplating and embarking on irregular journeys is an important indicator of priority areas of need for communications campaigns. Discrepancies between the expectations and reality of the journey highlight the most likely influential areas for communications messaging. This sub-section explores knowledge of the routes, distances and system of smuggling, and expectations of risks and outcomes.

Migrants encountered hardship en-route they were not expecting, but mostly did not regret embarking on the journey. Most qualitative interviewees, and 87% of survey respondents, knew there were risks involved with the desert and sea crossings. Several Gambian and Nigerian migrants had seen posters or billboards in Agadez warning of the dangers²¹ but did not learn anything that raised doubts in their mind about continuing the journey. Similarly, Ivorian respondents had heard about kidnapping, killing and violence against African migrants in Libya. Once migrants had crossed the Tenere desert stretch from Agadez to Sabha, the reality and trauma of the journey was evident. Migrants who thought they knew the risks of the journey, did not understand their extent.

The hardships experienced en-route, usually between Agadez and Libya or in Libya itself, made migrants more determined to continue their journey to Europe. The hardships endured in the first portion of the journey often increased migrants' appetite to continue the journey through Europe. As discussed below in this section in more detail, the cost to return overland to Niger and home is greater than the sea crossing to Italy. Migrants have a choice to pay more to once again repeat the hardships of the desert, and perhaps return to disappointment and debt, or take the risk to cross the sea to an assured better future in Europe.

Interviewees with returnees suggest that regret comes at a later stage, when migrants realise that their considerable physical, financial, and emotional sacrifices did not elicit expected rewards. All returnees interviewed had abandoned their plans to live in Europe either because they had either failed to reach Europe or had found Europe did not meet their expectations. Returnees from Libya had often been arrested – unable to secure release to attempt the boat crossing again, many

²¹ They could not provide additional detail on the organisation behind the posters.

accepted that they had failed and resigned themselves to returning home. Disappointment among returnees in European destinations stemmed from the inability to attain legal status, find work or otherwise integrate. Returnees were unanimous in their assessment that they had been sold an inaccurate picture of life in Europe. Many acknowledged they were not prepared for their journey and did not calculate the risks, finances and dangers adequately.

Part of the reason that returnees, and other migrants, held unrealistic expectations of life in Europe is that their friends and family abroad, who are predominantly claimed to be the most trusted source of information on migration (see section 3), are not reliable sources of information. Surprise at conditions throughout the journey and realities in Europe suggest that those who had made the journey before do not effectively or truthfully convey the reality of the journey and life in Europe.

There is demand from migrants and potential migrants for more information prior to departure, en-route, and after arrival in Europe.

Potential migrants were split in the levels of confidence they had in their knowledge. Respondents were asked whether they thought they had sufficient knowledge to plan their journey, to which 75% overall (79% male; 64% female) said yes. Despite this confidence in their own knowledge, when asked to respond to various aspects of the journey, including knowledge of life in transit and destination countries, physical and financial risks, people smugglers, and routes, many respondents had poor knowledge.

The interaction between perceived knowledge of the journey and readiness to depart can help refine communications in regions of origin. Overall, respondents are confident they have enough information to plan the journey but varied to a large degree in assessing their knowledge of important journey components. These components included knowledge of financial and physical risks, people smugglers, transport options, and routes, as well as knowledge of life and policies in transit and destination countries. Respondents were more likely to be confident in planning the journey if they knew somebody who had successfully migrated, were male (79%), of Senegalese or Malian nationality (91% each), or have completed at least primary (81%), secondary (74%) or university (79%) education.

The national typography below shows how migrants compare. It shows that Malians and Ivorians were most confident and knowledgeable on separate journey components, while Guineans and Gambians were least knowledgeable. Senegalese respondents were confident but less knowledgeable. As might be expected, the overall trend was for migrants who claim more knowledge of individual components to be more confident overall.

Potential migrants with higher confidence in the journey but low knowledge are a priority group for intervention, as they are simultaneously the least likely to proactively search for information prior to departure and the most likely to make poor decisions.

1. Lower confidence, lower knowledge: Guineans were the least confident, just over half (54%) feeling they had sufficient knowledge to plan their journey. This was reflected in the low proportions saying they were 'very knowledgeable' about people smugglers (10%), legal migration options (12%), and returns (5%). Most (87%) did not know how much the journey would cost, or how long it would take to pay back debts (95%). Migrants in this group are likely to seek information but lack reliable and credible sources. They may be more likely to proactively engage sources of information where they are made available.

Gambians also had low confidence levels in terms of their own knowledge of the journey, around two thirds (64%) feeling they had sufficient knowledge to plan the journey. Gambians also had low knowledge levels: around two thirds (68%) said they were uninformed about policies in destination countries, 81% about policies in transit countries, and 62% about life in transit – the least among all nationalities in these areas.

2. Lower confidence, higher knowledge: There were few in the study sample in this category. People in this category are less likely to want to migrate irregularly – the knowledge of the risks are off-putting for those without the confidence to tolerate them.
3. Higher confidence, lower knowledge: This group refers to the most overconfident migrants. Nearly all Senegalese respondents (91%) said they had enough information to embark on

the journey, yet nearly half (46%) admitted they did not know the countries they would transit. Tellingly, 78% did not plan to apply for asylum in the destination country, even though 56% said they were knowledgeable about destination country policies. Respondents with primary level education were similarly very confident in their plans (81%) but usually claimed less knowledge in each area.

4. Higher confidence, higher knowledge: Nearly all Malians (91%) reported they had enough knowledge to plan their journey. Most (81%) declared being knowledgeable about people smugglers and being aware of physical and financial risks (80% of Malian respondents). However, their knowledge on life in transit destinations is weaker – 60% of Malians are not at all knowledgeable about transit country policies, 46% of Malians do not know about what life is like in transit countries. This is pertinent as Malians often intend to stay and work in transit countries, and is an area of potential messaging.

Some of the willingness to accept risk stems from a quasi-fatalistic attitude to events. The majority of respondents from Cote d'Ivoire indicated that God would determine whether they were successful or not. Other nationalities were not explicit about placing faith in God, but discussed failure as a symptom of bad luck. Some Malians explained that they had wanted to go, but had not been able to raise the money. They interpreted this as fate, and instead focused on local futures. The fatalistic aspects of this could to some extent be related to the lack of planning and research into the journey, as well as a higher tolerance for risk among those who were aware.

*Language around fate and faith
may be powerful in
communications.*

Knowledge of legal migration options and alternatives

Migrants claimed to be aware of legal migration opportunities. Over three quarters (77%) of survey respondents said they were at least 'somewhat' knowledgeable about legal migration options. Respondents with university education (85%) were more likely to say they were knowledgeable about legal options. Guineans (61%) and Nigerians (65%) were less likely than other nationalities.

However, for most respondents, European visas were not even worth contemplating. Most migrants thought that applying to migrate through legal routes was out of the question because of the expense and administrative requirements. Most said that they knew they had no chance because they did not have a secondary school education or sufficient funds. A few migrants specifically stated that illegal migration was cheaper than legal migration. Migrants were unaware of mobility schemes²² introduced before or since the migration crisis. They may in any case not be targeted at the highest risk groups, whose pre-secondary education levels exclude them from university access.

Passports were difficult to obtain. Several migrants from Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea stated that it was too difficult to even obtain a passport. Again, this was because it often required the expense and time of travel to the capital, and the negotiation of formidable bureaucracy. Travelling in the ECOWAS area without a passport was possible given that migrants carried funds to pay bribes (EUR 10-30 each time).

Regional mobility opportunities. Citizens of the ECOWAS region are able to legally live and work in other member states.²³ It is estimated that millions have done so, and that intra-regional flows are greater than south-north flows, except in the case of Nigeria (more emigrants in the United States), and Gambia (Spain).²⁴ However, many travel intending to do so but find that economic opportunities have deteriorated or other reasons prevent them from remaining, and they subsequently decide to move on. One interviewee had stopped to work in three countries (not all of them ECOWAS – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Algeria), before arriving in Libya. This is expanded on in the subsequent section. Schemes to encourage intra-African mobility, such as the EU-funded intra-

22 For example, Erasmus Mundus, which expanded the number of places offered to African students in response. For a full discussion of the challenges of barriers to education mobility see Collett, Clewett, and Fratzke (2016), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/no-way-out-making-additional-migration-channels-work-refugees>, 13

23 Considerable practical and administrative barriers remain to cross-border work. Note also that the agreed protocol does not give citizens the 'right' of free movement, and states still maintain the right to unilaterally deny entry to other members' citizens.

24 See ICMPD and IOM for Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2015), A survey on migration policies in West Africa, https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/ICMPD_General/Publications/2015/A_Survey_on_Migration_Policies_in_West_Africa_EN_SOFT.pdf

ACP mobility scheme, which has provided scholarships for temporary exchanges were not on the radar of respondents.²⁵

Return is an option for migrants in transit, but stigma and debts are formidable barriers. Many returned to families who could not understand how or why they had squandered an opportunity to live outside of the country. In some cases, this meant that they were unable to return home or were disowned by family. Gambians and Senegalese families were generally receptive and welcoming and there were exceptions for all nationalities. However, stigma on return was not universal - Nigerians and Ivorians suffered the most shame on return.

Realities of the journey

Most migrants arranged their journey to Agadez with public transport. There were few migrants who arranged the whole journey in advance. Most travelled to Agadez on the basis of common knowledge of the routes in their local areas, then secured the services of a smuggler there. Almost all migrants contacted a smuggler for the first time in Agadez, Niger.

In Agadez, “*the smugglers come to you*” – migrants reported being met in the bus and taxi stations by smugglers. An intermediary then escorts migrants to ghettos outside of Agadez. Staying outside of town allegedly reduced the chance of being intercepted by police. Migrants met smugglers or intermediaries (referred by migrants as *kamsho*) at bus and taxi stations after arriving from the previous journey.

Migrants usually spent a period of four to ten days in Agadez before continuing the journey. Those who did not have funds remained in Agadez while waiting for support from home. There was no reported violence at this point, in Agadez – Nigerien smugglers were described by migrants as business-like but not abusive. Smugglers running the Agadez – Sabha route, mostly identified as Libyan, were reportedly harsher.

The situation from Côte d’Ivoire is different in that most respondents had arranged a smuggler from home before departing. Several Ivorians flew the first leg to Niamey, and one travelled via Lagos, joining the Nigerian route north through Kano. They travelled quickly, and in some cases reached the Libyan coast in a week. This cost more, between EUR 590 (Abidjan to Sabha) and EUR 3,050 (Abidjan to France). One Ivorian who had run out of money in Agadez regretted what he perceived as excessive expenditure on the first leg, because he found he could not afford the fee to travel to Libya.

Respondents knew relatively little about smugglers. A substantial number of respondents from all nationalities claimed Nigerien and Libyan smugglers knew each other, and some particularly closely, seemingly holding a friendly relationship. Other research points to the historic nature of the smuggling route, and strong ties between groups running separate segments of the route. Ethnic Tuareg and Arab smugglers have lived and worked on both sides of the Niger-Libya border and collaborated and competed in the trade of licit and illicit good for centuries.

In contrast, respondents themselves barely spoke to smugglers. Intermediaries took responsibility for almost all contact in Niger and Libya. Intermediaries often come from the migrants’ own countries and speak the same language.

Smugglers usually determined the route. The majority of migrants travel through Niger, before continuing their journey to Libya. Less often, migrants transited Algeria, before continuing to Libya. Malians, Guineans, and Gambians travelled through Burkina Faso beforehand. Nigerians usually travelled directly to Niger. Smugglers sometimes varied the route in response to changes in transit country border policies or conflict. Stricter enforcement by Algerian authorities, for example, may have decreased the prevalence of migrants on that route.²⁶ Several interviews stated that smugglers were the experts and it was logical to defer to them.

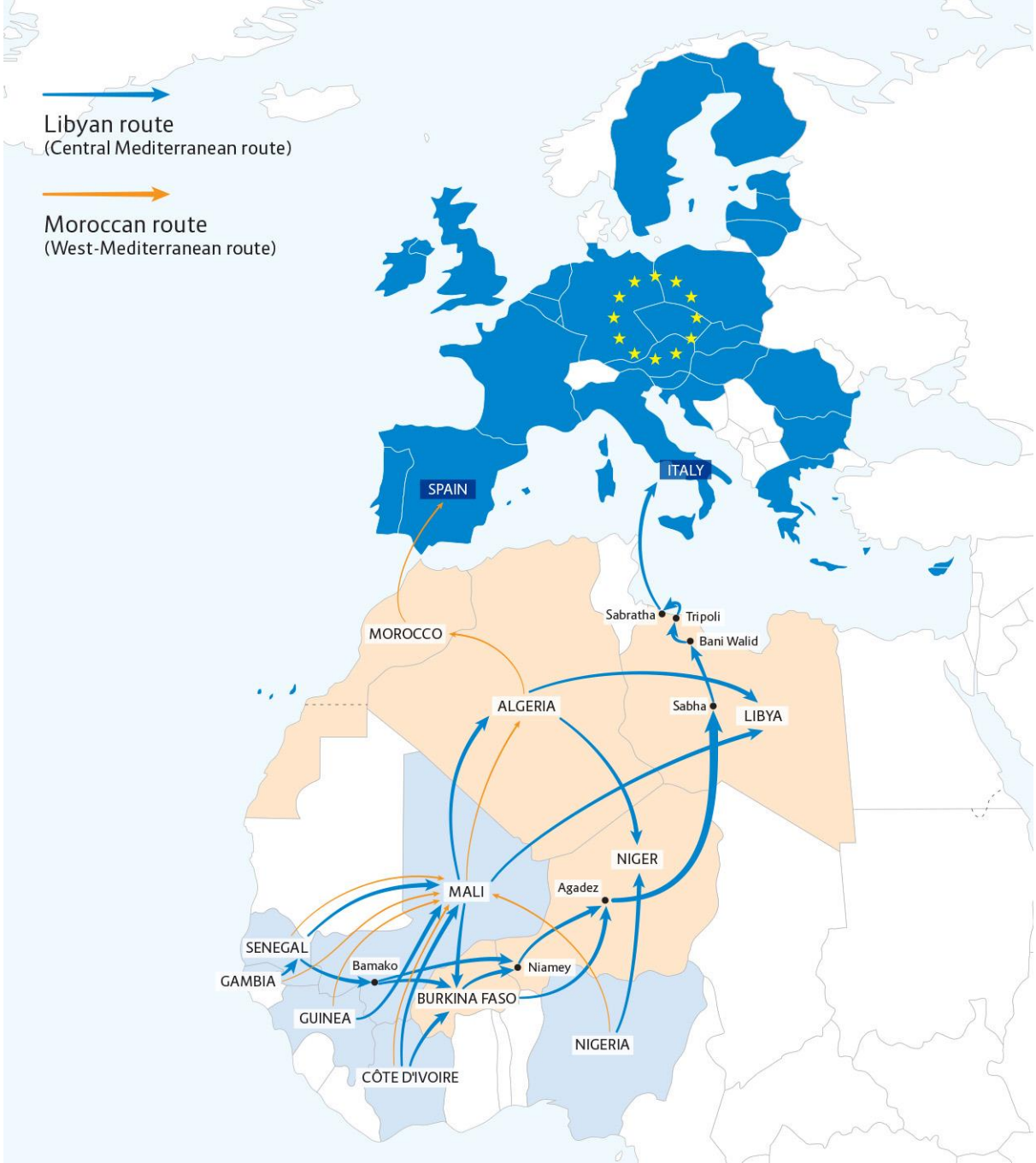
Migrants from Guinea and Senegal compared the Moroccan route to Europe and the Algerian route to Libya as more expensive and difficult than the Libyan route to Europe or transiting through Niger

²⁵ For example, intra-ACP schemes have since 2011 granted scholarships to facilitate exchanges between African universities, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/intra_acp_mobility/index_en.php

²⁶ For example, see the discussion of the northern Nigerien town of Séguéduine in the April 2017 IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix report, https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_hLuy9q1oXQSW5fSzFyN21XbXc/edit

to reach Libya. Many stated that the availability of smugglers and the access to Europe from the sea are factors that increase their chances of success in Libya compared to transiting through Morocco. Many also referred to the Algerian route to Libya as difficult because of the border police controls which seem relatively frequent. In comparison, borders between Niger and Libya have been described as porous.

Figure 4: Respondent migration paths from West Africa into Europe



Payment for journeys was nearly always up-front in the local currency. Given the low cost for most migrants of reaching Agadez, this implies that most migrants only become significantly indebted once they leave Agadez. Several respondents identified debt as why they were reluctant to return voluntarily.

As the journey becomes more difficult and expensive, migrants are less willing to halt and return – Agadez therefore continues to be a key point of intervention for programmes aiming to influence northward flows.

However, the situation is different for victims of trafficking. That their journey bore many similarities to smuggled migrants makes it difficult to draw clear parameters for this category, and

so interventions targeted at irregular migrants would have to assume they were targeting potential victims of trafficking too.

Most trafficking victims are recruited by means of deception rather than coercion. This usually defined the stories of those who had been trafficked. Some Nigerian women travelled to Libya unaware they were being trafficked, while others knew they would travel for prostitution but did not understand fully the terms of the deal. This varied from women who were under the impression that jobs were waiting in Europe or Libya, while others knew that they were travelling to work in Libyan or European brothels, but did not understand the likely terms of the deal. These women are hard to identify as they share a lot of the characteristics as smuggled migrants. Interviewees indicated too that Ghanaian and Malian women may be in a similar situation.

Life in Libya

Migrants' experiences of life in Libya varies between the relatively normal and the highly vulnerable. Levels of vulnerability impact how migrants think about their subsequent moves. While West African migrants are clearly vulnerable, their migration to Libya is not exceptional - Libyans are used to their presence and depend on their labour. At one end of the spectrum, respondents from Guinea and Senegal claimed they were satisfied with their lives in Libya and to have taken the decision to leave. They managed to find a job and regularly send money to their families. Many work as manual labourers: in the construction sector, as carpet cleaners, car washers, in marble factories, as tailors, and painters.

Many migrants from Nigeria, Gambia and Mali were less positive about their life in Libya, but were nonetheless stable. Their principal concern was the diminishing value of the Libyan Dinar, which was undermining their ability to send remittances home. Gambian interviewees indicated that they earned around LYD 20 per day on average - and LYD 50 if they were lucky. Currency exchange takes place on the black market, with LYD 20 worth only around EUR 6.

Interviewees aimed to save money to finance travel to Europe. Respondents who said they are satisfied with their lives in Libya and have a stable employment did not disclose how much they are paid, but they used the terms "good income" and "good money". However, many also had bad experiences at the hands of smugglers, and wanted to move on from Libya to escape violence and harm. At the same time, many migrants were surprised at how little they earned in Libya, given that it had offered gainful employment to compatriots for years before.

From the survey's responses, it seems the rule and not the exception for West African migrants to work in Libya. Although, many acknowledge the difficulties of living in Libya, such as insecurity, high prices, they concluded that their lives in Libya were still better than in their home country. One male migrant from Guinea stated: *"I advised my friends in Guinea to come to Libya because here there are more chances than in our country"*.

However, some respondents said their life in Libya has been very difficult. One Guinean male respondent said his living conditions in Libya are rough. He rarely manages to work and therefore save money to pay for the travel to Italy. Another one said that despite the fact that he can work in Libya, living conditions are very difficult. The youngest Guinean respondent of the survey (18 years old) said he sometimes had to work for 11 hours to earn very little money.

Female migrants are experiencing the most difficult lives in Libya. The only female Guinean respondent said her journey was harsh from the beginning because she had to work as a sex worker to finance her travel. She was also raped by two smugglers in Al Qatrun in Libya. She says she continues to work as a sex worker in Libya because she claims she cannot find any other employment.

Regardless of the reason, for migrants who wish to leave Libya, it is easier and cheaper to finance the journey to Europe than it is to return home. The costs of travelling between Agadez and Ghatrun were reported by migrants to be between EUR 200 and EUR 600. With the crossing to Europe around EUR 300 at the time of writing, and migrants able to earn to pay for the journey, borrowing money to return home, possibly to condemnation of the failed migration attempt, can be least attractive. Compounding this is low awareness of the existence of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes. The concentration of AVRR on migrants in (official) detention centres in Libya, almost exclusively in Tripoli, means that substantial numbers of those living in private accommodation in Tripoli, Sabha, Ghat and Ghatrun, among other towns, are

unlikely to hear of AVRR as an option. The crossing charged in Dinar also means that the currency challenges in Libya are less of an issue – migrants can earn in Dinar or have families transfer in foreign exchange.

Protection

Experiences of the journey and life in Libya ran a wide spectrum. Most migrants were aware of violence en-route and in Libya, but it did not appear to be the norm to be a victim of violence en-route or in Libya. Many migrants – usually those who were able to pay extra – found the desert crossing hard but passed into Libya without major issue. Many started work in Libya and were broadly satisfied with how the journey has worked out. Several migrants in this category commented on the dire situation of poorer migrants.

The most vulnerable migrants were those who could not pay, and women. Women who could not pay up front and were not travelling with men were in the most vulnerable category. Women experienced the most abuse and violence during the journey, including high vulnerability to rape. Interviews conducted with female migrants in transit in Sabha illustrated that the lack of work available to women in Niger and Libya, meant that while men could work in construction, tailoring, and agriculture, women lacked alternatives to sex work. This was the only realistic way for women to gather sufficient funds to travel to Europe.

It was also evident that migrants had a high tolerance for negative experiences en-route. One respondent from Guinea explained the harshest part of his journey was when his group was arrested by an armed-group in Mali and detained for a week. Despite this, the respondent said his journey had been good so far.

Some migrants interviewed in Sabratha explained the difference between Sabha and Tripoli. Although there is a lot of violence and insecurity in Sabha, one survey respondent from Guinea said that the host community was nicer than in Tripoli where he is sometimes not paid when he completed some work. If he tries to claim his fee, the employer would threaten him to denounce him to the police or beat him.

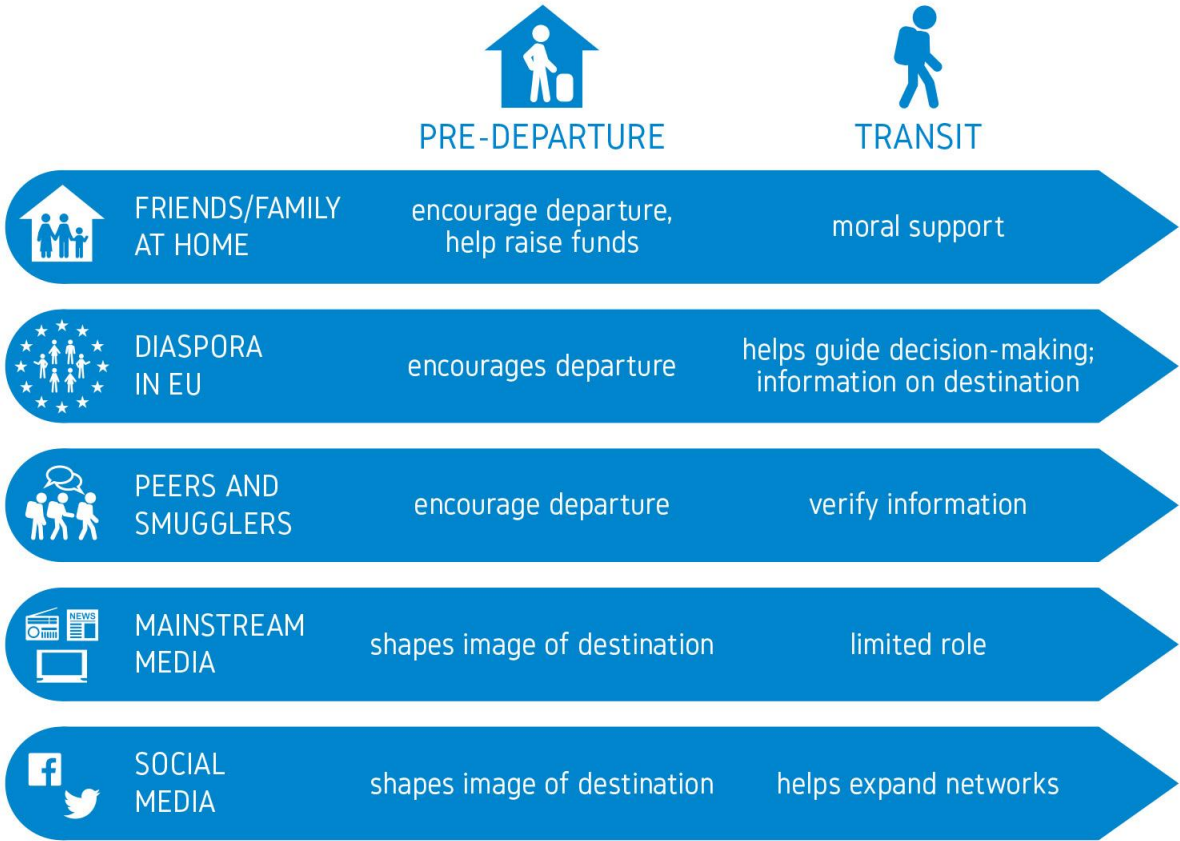
One Senegalese migrant explained that the situation for African migrants in Tripoli has improved since April 2017, when a militia who was particularly violent towards West African migrants, was expelled from the city.

SECTION THREE: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Summary

Respondents generally had access to a variety of information sources. Although migrants pointed to a great variety of information available online, this was not central to the decision-making process. Rather, migrants relied on people they knew, or compatriots for information (mostly in Europe or Libya). Where neither were available, they relied on information provided by smugglers, especially while en-route. Mainstream and social media content provoked conversation, and partly motivated journeys, but did not determine important choices.

Figure 5: How different sources of information influence migrants at different moments of the journey



This section explores the relevance of communication channels to migrants at each stage of the journey. These stages are pre-departure, transit (split between a. Niger, Algeria and Mali; and b. Libya), and 'destination', referring to any country in Europe.²⁷ It then explores further the role of the diaspora in shaping journeys.²⁸

Findings

Findings from this section are:

- Before departure, television influences the aspirations of potential migrants in the country of origin, while word of mouth communication with peers at home and in the diaspora in the EU assist in building plans. Radio had substantial listenership, especially among Gambians, but was not linked by respondents to their migration plans.

²⁷ This structure is chosen for clarity and simplicity, acknowledging that for many migrants, Libya and Algeria – and even Mali – are often destinations in themselves.

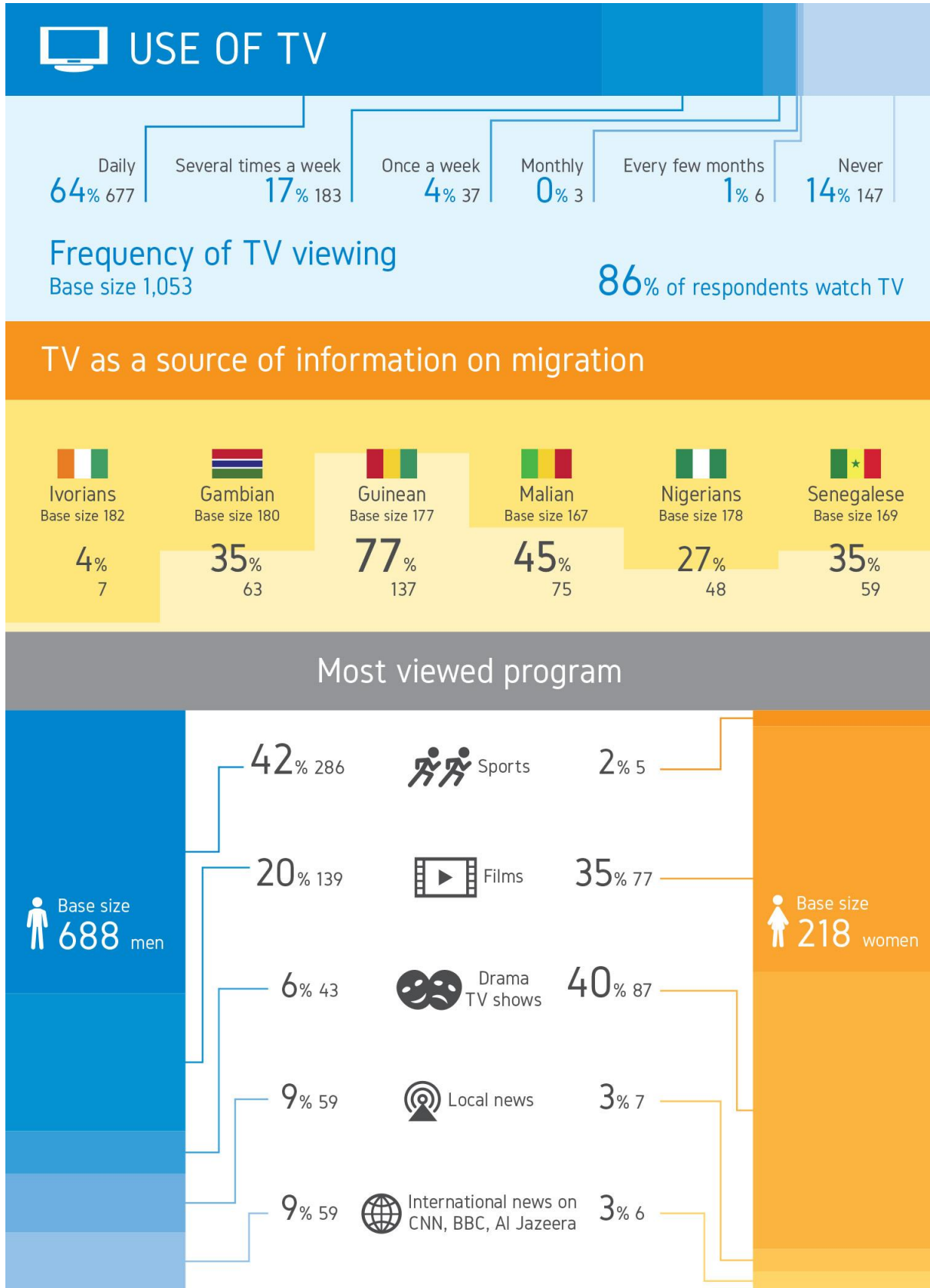
²⁸ The focus is on the diaspora in Europe, rather than Libya, unless otherwise stated.

- Migrants in transit rely on contacts in the diaspora for information the most and use social media, as well as peers travelling with them. If they have no existing contacts, they seek them out through social media. Regular phone calls, Facebook and WhatsApp were the most cited channels of communications with the diaspora.
- Access to the internet and its use are variable throughout the journey, with less educated and Senegalese respondents less likely to have access. Internet is mostly used for communication purposes rather than research. Those without access to the internet before departure are likely to be less confident about the journey.
- Migrants in Europe contact home and migrants in transit using social media and telephone.

Stage 1: Pre-departure in source

TV plays a particular role in providing information on migration to migrants (figure 6). Of the 37% of survey respondents who said they frequently referred to TV for migration information, 40% of the overall sample said they trusted this channel of communication the most with regards to obtaining information on migration. There is an exception for Guineans, where the majority claimed they frequently referred to TV for migration information (77%) and 88% said TV was the most trustworthy source of information. They viewed TV as trustworthy because it relayed authentic audio and images. It can be best understood as building an image of the destination countries. Furthermore, TV viewership was high, with 64% overall; Malian 88%, Nigerian 76% watching daily.

Figure 6: Television viewing habits



The news as a source of information was widely discussed among qualitative interviewees in relation to migration. The BBC was often mentioned in qualitative interview responses (both anglophone and francophone respondents), along with France24 (francophone respondents), indicating that these channels are very much viewed in relation to news. However, access to news sites was often online. TV viewership habits were reported more broadly to centre on sports (32%),

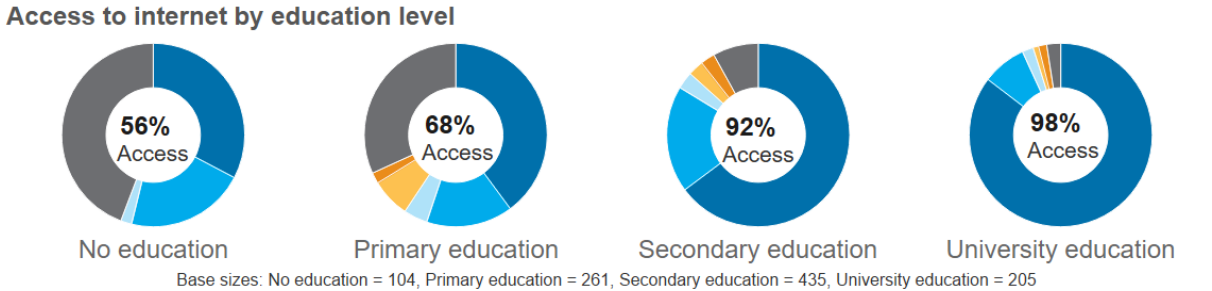
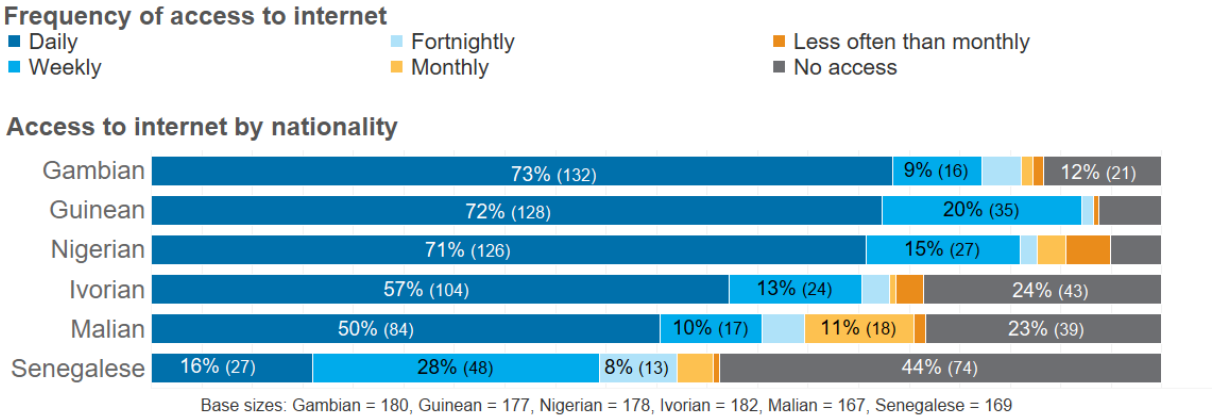
films (24%) and drama shows (14%). Sports shows were particularly popular among Guineans (51%) and men (42%), compared to 2% of women. Women were much better reached through drama shows overall (40%). This highlights a distinction between what migrants consider to be migrant information (stories of tragedies and successes in the Mediterranean, for example), and the sports and drama programming that builds an image of Europe over time.

Despite the merits of TV as a medium through which to reach potential migrants, caution must be exercised in terms of who it leaves behind. Nearly half of Senegalese respondents (45%) and a third of Ivorians (32%) never watched TV. Pertinently, there is an association between those who watch TV and those who have encountered awareness campaigns. Over a quarter (28%) of those without a TV were unaware of migration awareness campaigns – only 5% of those who were aware of campaigns had never watched TV.

Moreover, TV was an important source of inspiration to make the journey – migrants built an image of Europe over time through television that influenced their desire to travel and set their expectations for life there. However, it is important to note that migrants planned their journey through information gained from word of mouth sources. Awareness raising over television would therefore be a medium to long-term endeavour with the potential to correct inaccurate stereotypes about destination and origin.

The internet bears similarities to TV in that access is uneven, and its role in the migration process is quite specific. While most Guineans had accessed the internet at least weekly (92%), little under half of Senegalese respondents (44%) did not have access at all. Education was a good indicator – 44% without any formal education lacked internet access, while only 8% of those with a secondary education did.

Figure 7: Frequency of access to the internet



Still, Gambian survey respondents appeared to have better access to the internet than the national average of 5 users per 100 people.²⁹ Most (69%) accessed internet through their own mobile phones, rising to 78% of Nigerians and 87% of Gambians. Note that the use of 'feature' phones has proliferated in West Africa. These offer internet access in the form of basic browsing capability and certain supported applications,³⁰ but with slower processors will not be able to handle data-heavy content, such as films.

²⁹ Gambians 17%; Nigerians 47%; Cote d'Ivoire 21%; Senegal 22%. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>
³⁰ Note that WhatsApp, widely used on feature phones in West Africa, withdrew support for older operating systems at the end of 2016. It appears that many study respondents have upgraded their mobile phone model or found other workarounds. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2016/12/02/whatsapp-stop-working-older-phones-find-model-affected/>. Facebook Messenger

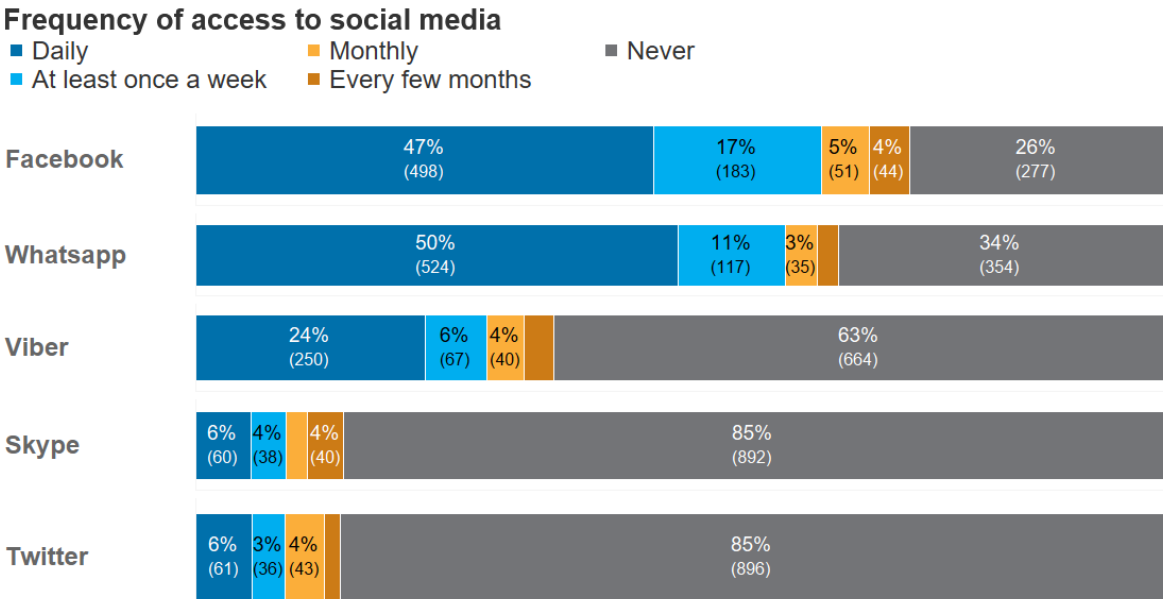
Migrants predominantly claimed their most trusted source of information on migration were their friends and family abroad. Respondents' use of the internet most frequently centred on social media (52%) to communicate with the diaspora and seek information and advice on migration. Social media was particularly important for Nigerians (73%). Social media are widely used as a channel of communication with the diaspora, who give advice on migration, rather than to search for content on (i.e. finding specific Facebook pages or groups).

These findings are important because respondents across all six nationalities said their friends and or family in Europe encouraged them or supported their decision to leave, but also provided them with advice and information on the journey or life in Europe. Therefore, social media plays an important role in how migrants communicate with the diaspora who has a substantive influence on making people leave. Facebook, and to a lesser extent Viber, WhatsApp and Skype facilitate this communication.

Few interviewees had conducted general online research before departing – they were mostly based in Nigeria. Many Guineans, Nigerians, and Senegalese said they searched for online sources on migration, very few Gambians and Ivorians said they did. Keywords were generic, focusing on elements of the journey (*migration to Europe, migration Libya, boats in Libya, migrants in Italy*) or processes on arrivals (*asylum in Germany, migrants in Italy*).

Even respondents who researched their journey online said they did not trust online sources. The reason behind this was unclear, but indicates that online sources play a prominent role in distributing information, would-be migrants turn to other sources for confirmation. Migrants said they trust their friends and family abroad the most (either well settled or who just arrived in Europe) with regards to migration. The BBC website, Irin News as well as the European Commission website were quoted a few times across respondents from all nationalities.

Figure 8: Frequency of access to social media



Radio is a common means used by development actors in West Africa to reach poorer and more rural demographic groups with poor access to electricity or low television ownership.³¹ This study suggests that radio would have a more limited effect in influencing potential migrants. A substantial proportion listen to the radio overall (60% listening at least once per week), and listenership is particularly high among Gambians (91% at least once per week). However, few respondents identified radio as a source of migration-relevant information (7% overall, 16% of Gambian respondents), and fewer said they trust it (5% overall, 7% of Gambians).

launched a 'lite' version of its application to better serve feature phone-owners, concentrated in developing countries, but currently excluding West Africa. 'Facebook for feature phones' also works for selected models. See <https://www.tweaktown.com/news/54241/facebook-launches-messenger-lite-app-feature-phones/index.html>, and https://www.facebook.com/help/mobile-basic/486772934767829?helpref=platform_switcher&ref=platform_switcher&rdrc.
³¹ See for example multiple projects by BBC Media Action, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/africa/nigeria/merci-project-madubi-drama>.

Stage 2: Transit before Libya

This section focuses on how migrants receive information about the route and journey in general while en-route, how they receive this information (channel) and what source they trust the most. For Senegalese, Ivorian and Guinean migrants, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are the principal transit countries. Algeria was less frequently transited by migrants.

Migrants relied on smugglers for information about the route. For some migrants, it was obvious that smugglers would be trusted to guide them as they were experts on the route, while many thought nothing of trusting them. This is especially true for Senegalese and Guinean respondents, who relied on the diaspora in the EU or migrants already in Libya to receive information on the journey. Migrants who paid in advance for their travel often had good experiences and had no personal reason not to recommend smugglers to others. Malians were particularly likely to trust smugglers' information. Other nationalities were less certain in their assessment of smugglers' credibility. Some migrants stated that smugglers could not be trusted but that they were forced to rely on them. Discussion between migrants is minimal. Migrants in transit often kept a quiet, low profile, so as not to draw negative attention from smugglers. Women were advised to remain inconspicuous.

Contact made with smuggler intermediaries (mostly in Agadez) was made with mobile phone calls. There was no evidence of reliance on an internet connection to stay in touch with smugglers. Nevertheless, migrants did frequently appear to have some access to the internet in Niger, mainly using connections to contact home and overseas networks via WhatsApp and Facebook messenger.

Stage 3: Transit through Libya

A substantial number of migrants said they relied on the diaspora and other migrants in Libya to obtain information on the prices of the crossing, availability of boats, contacts for smugglers while in Libya. Many respondents said they regularly discuss these topics along with risks and incidents in Libya with migrants they either live with, or who have already reached Italy or Europe. They stay in touch via the phone, Facebook, WhatsApp or Viber.

Migrants less often said they used the internet to find smugglers for the crossing. It is more likely that migrants who have been in Libya longer would use this option, as most online information appears to be in Arabic. While migrants may use the automatic translation feature provided by most up to date web browsers, the field team in Libya observed migrants accompanying smugglers to internet cafes. In these instances, smugglers would translate website content for the migrants. Websites included those operated by smugglers themselves, for example the 'boats from Libya to Italy' Facebook page, which shared news of upcoming trips and displayed phone numbers by which migrants could get in touch.

Stage 4: Europe

This section analyses how migrants and asylum seekers send information back to their countries of origin and transit, including within the EU, and what type of information they send.

Migrants in transit provided more detailed accounts on their communication with the diaspora than returnees from Europe and what information they send to their friends and family in their home country or in transit countries. This section will therefore mainly focus on accounts of qualitative interviews from migrants in transit rather than returnees from Europe, as there are too few of them.

Diaspora in Europe is quoted unanimously as the most trusted source of information on migration (all topics alike) by all respondents of qualitative interviews at all stages of their journey. This prevails whether people abroad are close relatives, or people migrants have solely contacted through Facebook and never met in person. Regular phone calls are the most used channel of communication between migrants in Europe or the diaspora (33%) and migrants in origin countries or in transit. WhatsApp and Facebook are also used: 28% and 12% respectively.

Migrants in transit explained they ask or discuss with other migrants in Europe or the diaspora how to reach Europe, what the prices are, smugglers' contacts, how life in Europe or a certain country is, how to reach Libya, what country they should go to, and other questions on the journey itself or life in Europe.

From the qualitative interviews of migrants in transit, it appears common for the diaspora to encourage people to leave and irregularly travel to Europe. Some respondents said their friends or families in Europe assured them they will have a job as soon as they arrive in the destination country.

"In Europe, I have contact with only one friend who is from my town in Guinea and he is working in France now. He has been there for three years and I communicate with him by Viber. He confirmed that when I arrive there, he will find me a job with him on the farm where he works." (Guinean, male, 18)

"My preferred destination is Germany, but my sister migrated eight years ago and she settled in Switzerland with her husband and children. They always encourage me to travel to Switzerland." (Senegalese, male, 23)

However, migrants in Europe are not reliable sources of information. Surprise at conditions in Libya and en-route suggest that the diaspora is often not effective in communicating the reality of the journey. Moreover, most returnees were disappointed and were not prepared for the realities of life in Europe as a migrant. This seems to indicate that although a great majority of migrants are regularly in contact with the diaspora, they either receive inaccurate information or misinterpret it. The following account is very common among migrants in transit who said they are regularly in touch with people in Europe, including migrants who recently arrived in Italy:

"My journey was so hard and so risky for me. I suffered a lot to reach to here. I did not expect that it will be as dangerous as it was." (Guinean, male, 25)

There were only two returnees who claimed they deterred peers at home from making the journey through phone calls to their home country. Further research would usefully explore further the nature of conversations between migrants and home.

CASE STUDY 3

Mali campaigns: Two active campaigns, but migrants unaware

"Mon Eldorado c'est le Mali" / "My Eldorado is Mali" (2014, 2015, 2016)

Donor

Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur et de l'Intégration Africain (Ministry of External Maliens and African Integration).

Messages and Methods

Awareness campaign on the dangers and risks of irregular migration. Consultations with the community on what sectors would create sustainable employment that would benefit from the government's assistance in line with the National Policy on Migration (Politique Nationale de Migration) adopted on September 3, 2014.

Locations

Bafoulabé, October 2014; Nioro and Yélimané December 2014; Kayes, February 2015 Koutiala; March 17, 2016 (conference with local authorities and officials); Koury March 18, 2016 (meeting with border authorities of Mali and Burkina Faso on entry and leaving criteria for migrants); Sikasso, March 19, 2016 (day of awareness on irregular migration); Zégoua, March 20, 2016 (meeting with border authorities of Mali and Côte d'Ivoire on entry and leaving criteria for migrants).

"Partir...Mais à quel prix?" / "To leave...But at what cost?" (June 2008)

Donor

European Commission and the Government of Mali

Messages and Methods

Awareness campaign on the dangers and risks of irregular migration. As part of the campaign, IOM will travel with government counterparts to the western and southern regions of Kaye and Sikasso, which have traditionally experienced high levels of migration to North and West Africa but also to Europe.

Locations

Kayes and Sikasso

Irregular migration awareness raising campaigns (origin and transit)

While a majority of migrants said they had seen videos and pictures on the TV or online of migrants dying in the sea, a minority mentioned having seen in-country campaigns on irregular migration. None referred to the community-oriented communications activities funded under the EU Niger pilot. The migrants who had come into contact with campaigns referred only to visual elements: one Senegalese respondent mentioned pictures on illegal migration and its risks in Gao, Mali and Agadez, Niger: "it was a huge picture showing migrants lost in the desert and pictures of cars, crashed, accidentally upside down, [cars carrying] illegal migrants... and some of them are dead [sic]".

The owner of the campaign is not disclosed and is probably not known. Only a few migrants mentioned IOM and its preventive campaigns on illegal migration. All described these images, videos and campaigns as useless in preventing people from leaving or pursuing their journey, regardless of their sources. This reason behind this is because migrants claim they know the risks and they are worth taking in trying to have a better life in Europe.

"During my journey, I have seen many campaigns about migration, like posters trying to discourage migrants from attempting to cross, but of course nothing will ever stop people from crossing." (Senegalese migrant in transit, male, 17)

"I saw information about humanitarian organisation in Morocco during my short stay but I did not trust them much because their objective is to dissuade us from going to Europe. I did not even want to know more about those humanitarian organisations because they are created by European nations to stop the illegal immigration. The only source I really trusted is my friends and family because they would never lie to me." (Senegalese returnee, male, 42).

From the desk research, some information on two prevention campaigns against irregular migration that were carried out in Mali between 2008 and 2016 by the Malian government were collated (case study 3).³² Results on the impacts of these campaigns are not available. The limited anecdotal evidence of their impact collected as part of this study suggest some positive effect from the creation of livelihood opportunities but little impact from media-based interventions, such as those warning of the dangers of the migration. Migrants use social media to find information on the journey – by connecting with real people, who they perceive as knowledgeable, who can advise them on their next steps –and feel that campaign websites do not fulfil that need. This is not to say that migrants are not interested in understanding the dangers of the journey, but that usefulness is key – the manner in which such information is presented on the websites was not considered useful by migrants.

³² <http://www.maliens-exterieur.gouv.ml/index.php/actualite/134-la-campagne-de-sensibilisation-sur-les-risques-et-dangers-de-la-migration-irreguliere-dans-la-region-de-kayes-mon-eldorado-c-est-le-mali>
<https://www.diasporaction.fr/conference-sur-les-risques-de-la-migration-irreguliere-a-sikasso/>
<https://mali.iom.int/news/information-campaign-aims-prevent-irregular-migration-mali>

SECTION FOUR: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Summary

This section corresponds to Study Task 4 and will “Assess the role of social media in relation to other information channels in the context of migration and identify who is funding and operating the online content identified” (see Appendix for methodology). Social media is not the main tool by which migrants receive information on migration. However, social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp were commonly cited channels of communication with the diaspora in Europe used by migrants in transit. Therefore, social media is important for connecting migrants to other people, rather than as a source of information about migration.

The study engaged further with social media to better understand the extent of its use, and the key influencers behind its use. This analysis draws on four data sources:

- Information from the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews in the six countries of interest to assess relative reliance on social media and online pages as a source of information and keywords to guide the search.
- Use of the online platform BuzzSumo to assess the extent to which websites and web pages with migration-related content were engaged with over the last six months.
- A public search of Twitter and Facebook run using the embedded APIs of these sites to query the search terms in users’ tweets and Facebook pages, as well as groups and events to determine how much certain topics were being talked about.
- A Malian case study: ten additional interviews to generate qualitative, contextualised insights to quantitative findings.

The results reflect the access and resource constraints of the study. More sophisticated analysis using larger amounts of data is possible and recommended based on the findings of the study.

Findings

Findings from this highlight that migrants (potential or in transit) use open content on social media less often as a source of information on migration. Social media is very much used to communicate, mainly with the diaspora in Europe or family and friends in countries of origin, but rarely used as a source of migration information.

Some migrants conducted research prior to departure by searching Facebook or Google for key terms. However, these sources are not trusted enough to make decisions based upon, by the majority of respondents.






Other findings show that:

- Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber) plays a limited role in migration-related decisions. Its most important role is as a conduit for communication with friends, family and acquaintances abroad who are the most trusted source of information about migration for migrants.
- Facebook is primarily used to communicate with friends and families, not as a source of migration information. However, open and closed diaspora pages and groups may be important in influencing and informing people about irregular migration through contact on Facebook.³³
- Twitter is not widely used, except among a minority of Ivorians (29%) using it weekly.
- Websites providing information on migration were not often referred to. The website www.immig-us.com (Arabic) was most common among those who did use websites. This forum and website is highly active.

³³ The social media analysis did not find much data on the use or efficacy of smuggler advertisements on Facebook.

- Migration related articles from general news websites in the region do appear to be among content that is most engaged with. In contrast, migration-specific awareness raising websites appear to receive fewer engagements.
- The case study in Mali (not compared to the other countries) reveals that people seek out general websites and Facebook pages and groups rather than migration-specific ones.
- The evidence suggests that migrants tend not to have direct contact with the smuggler at all, but instead communicate with intermediaries of the same cultural background, who work for the smugglers. The mode of communication most used are telephone calls or face-to-face.
- Social media is an important communication channel between migrants in transit, the diaspora in Libya and Europe, and friends/family in source countries.
- Although Facebook is the most important social media source for informing migrants about the journey and destination, it is still infrequently used. In contrast, migrants frequently use social media to communicate with friends and family at home and in the diaspora. Most contact with smugglers is by telephone, with the exception of Facebook connecting some migrants and smugglers in Libya.

Figure 9: Summary of use and frequency of social media

	Direct source of information on journey	Direct source of information on destination	Communicate with family/friends or diaspora in country of origin/in transit/destination	Communicate with smuggler
 WhatsApp	LESS OFTEN	LESS OFTEN	VERY OFTEN	RARE
 facebook	LESS OFTEN	LESS OFTEN	VERY OFTEN	LESS OFTEN
 Viber	RARE	RARE	VERY OFTEN	RARE
 Skype	RARE	RARE	RARE	ALMOST NEVER
 twitter	RARE	RARE	RARE	ALMOST NEVER

Facebook

Facebook is widely used among all nationalities. **Its primary use in decision-making is in facilitating communication between migrants and the diaspora in Europe.** Migrants used Facebook to ask or discuss a wide range of topics on migration and life in Europe. Guinean migrants use Facebook the most as a channel of communications with friends and family abroad with (40%).

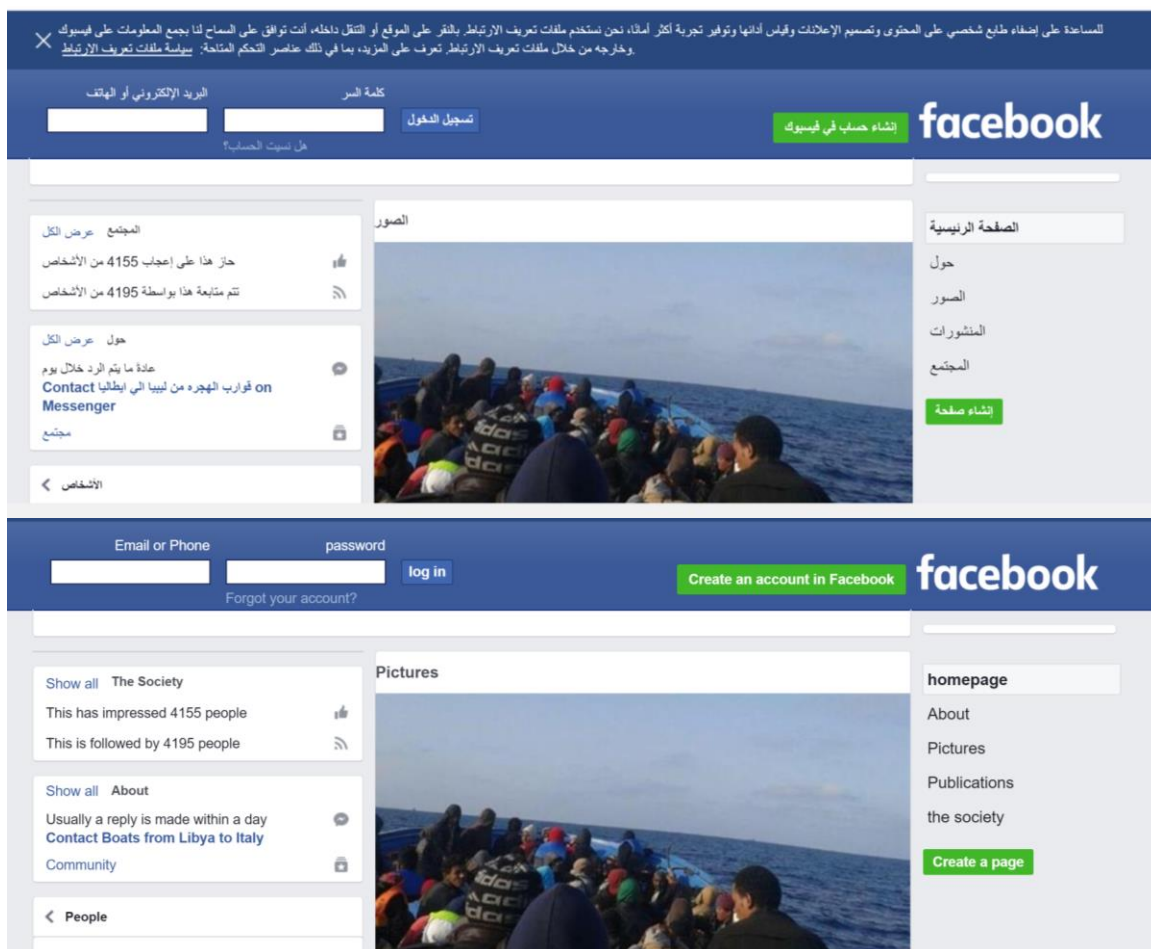
Facebook was also used by several migrants as a tool to connect with compatriots in the diaspora. A number of Gambian, Guinean and Nigerian respondents described conducting a search on Facebook for people from their nationality, then connecting with people in the diaspora and

beginning conversations. One Nigerian built up a friendship network in the United Kingdom through the dating website Plenty of Fish.³⁴

In some rare cases, Facebook was used to seek relationships with Europeans. One Nigerian returnee from Italy who had aimed to reach Denmark wanted to "find a 'whitee' [to marry]." Others knew people who had found girlfriends or wives through Facebook or other social media.

Smugglers in Libya used Facebook to advertise their services. Some migrants also obtained smugglers' contact information through their Facebook, but this was relatively rare among respondents. It appears that despite the activeness of smuggler pages online, social media can be something of a red herring – most migrants on the West African-Central Mediterranean route appear to be connecting with smugglers in person and by word of mouth recommendation. Several different pages were mentioned, including 'boats from Libya to Italy' (figure 10). Most migrants made contact with intermediaries face to face. Although researchers could not verify the identity of those who had created pages, the fact that most Facebook pages are in Arabic coupled with existing knowledge on smuggling networks suggests they are run by Libyan smugglers in Libya.

Figure 10: 'Boats from Libya to Italy' Facebook page, original language and translation



Social media is more important as a tool for connecting migrants across the migration route. Many respondents said they are in touch with people through Facebook that they have never met or do not know. They conduct a quick search on Facebook on what persons from their nationality might be in a preferred European country and send a contact request. Once contact is established, migrants continue to communicate and exchange information on the journey.

A minority of migrants uses Facebook to obtain information on migration on specific pages. Only 13% of respondent's report receiving information on migration from Facebook. Similarly, the Malian case study also revealed that interviewees used both general websites and general Facebook pages to inform themselves about migration, *not* migration-specific pages.

³⁴ <https://www.pof.com/>

Because of migrants' indication that they used Facebook groups to connect with migrants in the diaspora, an additional manual search was conducted to try to identify possible influential groups or pages on Facebook. This search was ad-hoc and influence was measured by the number of likes/followers. Search terms included: *in Europe, nationality, diaspora, en l'exterieur*. Table 2 provides the results of this search and shows the popularity of pages, and reflects on the relevance of content.

Table 2: Diaspora groups or pages based in Europe – search results

Country	Type	Comment
Gambia	Gambians in Europe Public group 12,208 members	Description: to share news and information about Gambia. Very little discussion on migration (fewer than 10 posts in 2017)
Mali	Mali Jolies Dew Facebook page 110,006 likes 114,848 follows	Identified through Mali case study (who described it as a diaspora group) Facebook description calls it a magazine. One interviewee in the case study described getting information about the journey from this page: <i>"c'est grâce à Facebook notamment la page Mali jolies Dew sur laquelle j'ai pu écouter et visionner des témoins qui ont retracé leur parcours comme un enfer"</i>
Nigerians	Nigerians in Europe Public group 17,689 members	Describes itself as fashion/lifestyle Approximately 10 posts on migration related topics in 2017 (mainly about returnees from Europe, posts advertising services to immigrate to US, Australia).
Cote d'Ivoire	Diaspora Ivoirienne & Africaine Facebook page 4,806 people like this 4,771 followers	Page description: A US based NGO to discuss ideas about democracy and development. Difficult to search pages for migration-related material.
Senegal	Tous les Sénégalais du Monde Facebook page 11,615 likes 11,522 followers	Very little description, posts do not seem to be about migration. Difficult to search pages for migration-related material
	Sénégalais de la Diaspora Closed Facebook group 3,648 members	Description: a group to bring together Senegalese living abroad. Linked to news website tukki.org
Guinea	Collectif Des Jeunes Democratés de la Diaspora Guinéenne Public Facebook group 4,674 members	Description: Group for sharing information about everything including politics. Three posts about migration in 2017
Mixed	Si Tu Sais, Tu Es Malien, Guinéen, Sénégalais, Ivoirien, Gambien Et Mauritanien Close group 107,008 members	Description: based in Mali but widely used by West Africans in the diaspora. A platform for sharing anecdotes, stories, and information about life in these countries

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is the most quoted channel of communications with friends and family abroad by Ivorian and Gambian migrants (19% and 62% respectively). They use these to be in contact with the diaspora in Libya and Europe, but also with family back home.

Websites

Analysis from the qualitative interviews of migrants in transit revealed several websites that migrants use before departing, on a more or less regular frequency to obtain information on migration. A manual research of each website was conducted to analyse the content and try to

identify the producer and funder of such information. Obtaining the funder of these webpages proved difficult (see Appendix for limitations in the social media analysis). The most quoted websites are the following:

- **Gate to Europe** was mentioned by interviewees from four out of the six countries (Senegal, Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria). Based on Google searches it appears likely that interviewees were referring to this [forum](#) which provides posts on a number of different topics. The forum contains practical information about different countries (entitled Gateway to Spain, Gateway to the UK etc.) such as how to use the underground in London. Many of these posts seem to be posted by administrators but sometimes the posts are replies to specific questions from users. The forum is fairly active and information produced on the forums is in Arabic. The website presents itself as a tourism website for Arab travellers. The organisation that has registered the domain is called Domains by Proxy and it is unclear who produces the information and funds the site.
- **immig-us.com** was mentioned by interviewees from Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. This website is the top result that appears in Google searches for the term "migrate with us". The domain is registered by Mahmoud Zakaria based in Cairo. The most [popular article](#) of the period between 1 Jan and 30 June was entitled 'The easiest nationalities can be obtained free of charge or for a fee' which had 3,300 Facebook engagements. In this period, each article on the site had an average of 177 shares on Facebook. The website's associated [Facebook page](#) has 320,128 likes and 319,725 followers. The site mainly posts in Arabic with information about migration in different countries. For example, recent posts include new Australian occupation shortage list, tips for searching for housing in Switzerland, and a post about asylum laws in the Netherlands. The site produces videos such as "Questions you may be asked in the Swedish Asylum Interview". Many posts receive upwards of 90 engagements (likes/comments) with some posts receiving over a thousand engagements.
- **Finding smugglers in Libya:** interviewees suggested that the phrase "قوارب الهجرة من ليبيا" /migration boats from Libya to Italy" was useful for searching for smugglers in Libya. A search with this phrase in Arabic produces two Facebook pages of smugglers. The [first](#) page is liked by 4,896 people and followed by 4,922 and includes posts with phone numbers for viewers to contact on Viber or WhatsApp. The most recent posts are from 2015 and share a closed Facebook group targeted at Syrians in Libya with 140 members. The [second page](#) is more active with recent posts from 24 July 2017. This page has 4,105 likes and 4,141 followers. The page advertises with posts about planned trips and includes contact phone numbers. From this page, it is possible to find the profile of [a person](#) who is offering boats from Libya. This person's most recent post is from 22 July 2017. Posts include advertising the price of a car travelling from Algeria to Libya (€650) and advertising the size of the boat (11 metres). Most of his posts receive at least 20 engagements (combination of likes and comments). He has 289 friends who mostly appear to be young men. All of these Facebook pages are very clearly marked by pictures of boats of migrants.

The European Commission website appears in searches for both Immigration to Europe and Gate to Europe, and was mentioned by one interviewee from Senegal as a source of information on migration. However, it was not always possible to match search terms with specific websites. Some of the terms/phrases that re-occurred through interviews but were not identifiable were:

- **To emigrate with us** - mentioned by interviewees in Senegal, Gambia and Cote d'Ivoire. It is possible that this [UK based website](#) is a pair of consultants who help arrange visas to the US, Canada and Australia. This may also be a version of the 'migrate with us' phrase which often leads to immig-us.com.
- **bawwabat Europa/ bawwabet Europa/ bawabat Europe** - mentioned by interviewees from Guinea, Gambia and Nigeria. One possibly connected result is a [Tunisian forum](#) about travelling and tourism. One of the sub-forums with recent activities is entitled '[Inquiries and requests for travel documents](#)' in which a number of people have posted questions regarding documents required for family reunification. The forum is mainly in Arabic.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study investigated how migrants obtain information for the journey, how they share it between themselves, and how this affects decision-making. In relation to strategic communications, the recommendations are as follows:

- Implementation of a strategic communications campaign with components targeted at origin, transit and destination countries could influence and reduce irregular migrant flows to Europe.
- There is a need to separate the sources of information that *influence* and *encourage* the aspiration to emigrate, from the sources of information and migration that *lead to departure*, and determine the smuggling process and route. For example, images transmitted via mainstream media construct the idea of a Europe of greener pastures. The knowledge and confidence necessary for departure is transmitted by word of mouth, locally and in the diaspora.
- Migrants in transit require more nuanced consideration of their motivations and decision-making while in Algeria and Libya. Migrants in transit in these countries must weigh the known costs of remaining or 'failure' and return against the unknown risks and rewards of migrating onwards to Europe. Communications should aid migrants in assessing these choices. This is different for those in transit in Niger. Before arriving in Agadez, Niger, most migrants are yet to make their biggest financial, physical, and emotional investments in the irregular journey. Their return home and reintegration is therefore likely to be more easily facilitated from Agadez and key transit points earlier in the journey such as Kano (Nigeria), and Bamako (Mali). Interventions here should counsel migrants on likely outcomes and the choice to terminate the journey before the stakes are raised.
- Migrants are interested in information which would help them assess the likely rewards of risky behaviour—rather than just the risks themselves. In addition, migrants could benefit from being informed about outcome risks, such as chances of asylum success and the consequences of failure – rather than just the risks associated with the journey itself. Communications should therefore not be perceived as 'scaremongering' or patronising, and instead engage fully in the decision-making process.
- Social media plays an important but limited role in the decision-making process for those that have access to the internet. Moreover, some of the individuals with the highest likelihood to irregularly migrate do not have access to the internet. Therefore, communication campaigns should prioritise offline methods among the poorest target demographics. Where social media content is developed, it should be targeted at higher educated, wealthier potential migrants.
- Communications can address aspirations to migrate irregularly by seeking to correct overly positive views of Europe and negative views of countries of origin over the medium to long term, principally using television programming and advertising. Processes leading to departure are best influenced through trusted personal networks.

Strategic communications

Humans interpret risk in ways that might appear irrational in terms of their self-preservation. The decision to ride a motorcycle—statistically far more dangerous than driving a car—shows how people make sometimes unnecessarily risky decisions. The decision to embark on an irregular journey is similar in that some knowledge of the risks is overlooked for the potential reward.³⁵ Moreover, although migrant deaths are likely underestimated,³⁶ in reality most migrants who intend to reach Europe successfully do so – just as most motorcycle journeys are undertaken safely.

Disappointing outcomes are more pertinent sources of regret. The chasm between the imagined outcome of an irregular journey and the actual outcomes result in poor calculations of opportunity

³⁵ <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/boat-understanding-migrant-journey>

³⁶ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/methodology>

cost. In other words, potential migrants either over-estimate the likelihood of a successful outcome or do not make a conscious assessment. Nevertheless, migrants' knowledge of the physical risks is often incomplete. While mostly assessing macro level journey risks accurately, migrants underestimate the actual impact of personal trauma likely to be experienced.

To some extent, migrants are aware of these gaps, evidenced by their demand for information on the asylum procedures and life in destination countries. With the demand for information present, the key challenge is in delivering information that is trusted and influential. That is, it will be acted upon by migrants and potential migrants, and change behaviour.

The key challenge is in delivering this information through trusted sources. While mainstream and social media is widely consumed, it is evident that social media performs an important but limited role in shaping migration decisions and trajectories. Migrants used social media to build their networks of contacts, for private communication with other migrants, contacts in the diaspora and home, and in some limited circumstances to connect with smugglers. Publicly held content on Facebook serves as a basis for discussion, or to signpost migrants towards real people, rather than encouraging departures in the first place. This is a use of Facebook that a communications strategy should seek to emulate.

The study concludes that there is demand from migrants and potential migrants for more information prior to departure, en-route, and after arrival in Europe. That is, the study findings showed that there is implicit and explicit demand for information from migrants that, if provided via the right channels, would influence behaviour.

Recommendation – implement a strategic communications information and awareness programme targeting migrants at origin, en-route and in transit.

Proposals for how to structure such a programme are detailed in the following conclusions and recommendations:

I. [SOURCE] Conclusion – aspirations to migrate are built over time, based on a narrative of a Europe of 'human rights' and economic opportunity, contrasted with poor governance and economic prospects at home.

West African nationals aspire to migrate because of a common belief that a better life is guaranteed simply by reaching a European destination. This is perpetuated by mass media, in particular television images (especially Guinea), and successful migrants returning with wealth. Narratives of poor governance and corruption (especially Gambia) contrast the country of origin with a Europe of 'human rights', where regardless of the exact outcomes, life is bound to be better.

Recommendation – communicate using trusted voices and factual messages customised to the circumstances and location of the individual. Use mainstream media and returning members of the diaspora in the EU to deliver messages. Be wary of using returnees who are seen to have failed to enter the EU or failed to make their life in Europe a success, unless there is special reason to believe they will be trusted. Migrants have most trust in family and friends who have been (or are) abroad to provide them with information about migration, more than various forms of media. This is because migrants often perceive the primary aim of media-based campaigns is to keep migrants out of Europe – a view exacerbated by overly negative content.

Expatriates and returnees who have made the journey are credible for their knowledge of the journey but can quickly become discredited if they are associated with perceived attempts to deny opportunities to the target group. Migrants from most backgrounds discussed the decision to migrate with friends and family at home.

Messages should centre on the chances of success at destination and should be adapted to the (mis)conceptions held by potential migrants about destination countries. For example:

- *Detailing the deterioration of reception conditions in Italy since previous years.*
- *Advising on the path to regularisation and employment, and the reality of working without documents, namely an inability to save and remit money.*

II. [SOURCE] Conclusion – while mainstream media and social media are influential in building the aspiration to migrate (the general feeling that life is better 'there'), word of mouth is core to the decision to depart countries of origin.

Migrants often felt confident enough to migrate because they were encouraged directly by peers at home or in the diaspora in Europe. While en-route, migrants often met new people and expanded

their networks, but always sought advice from individuals rather than institutions. In specific cases, proactive 'recruitment', commonly associated with but not limited to traffickers of Nigerian women, can perceptibly 'open' pathways to migration to those who otherwise would lack the knowledge and means.

Encouragement by family is also a key driver in the decision to migrate. Moreover, permission, blessing or financial support from family is important to many, with only a minority leaving without their parents' knowledge. Nigerian women trafficked into sexual slavery made decisions based almost entirely on conversations with extended family. The breakdown of family support structures can increase pressure to provide financially, which in turn can make migration seem a more attractive, or necessary, option.

Recommendation – communication campaigns on migration should seek to leverage the media over the longer term to change perceptions of origin and desired destination countries. More immediately, the strategy should harness the power of existing trusted voices to drive behaviour change.

Media, in particular television, could be used over the medium to longer term to challenge the 'greener pastures' narrative, whereby substantial numbers of West African citizens believe reaching Europe inevitably improves prospects, regardless of circumstances. This would be expensive and difficult to execute well, but the research supports it.

Questioning cultural stereotypes is a subtle process that would be undermined by 'hard' anti-migration messaging. Among the target audience, any message delivered by authorities on migration can be perceived as anti-migration, regardless of content. Drama and sports-related programming were popular among female and male respondents respectively. International programming aired in countries of origin may be particularly effective. Concepts should be tested with target audiences before production.

Use mainstream media and social media to signpost would-be migrants to credible word of mouth sources. Potential migrants widely consume information on mainstream and social media but do not trust it sufficiently to base decisions on it. Creating content that both engages migrants and leads to behaviour change would require signposting to a credible human source that can verify information. Multimedia may also make risks appear more real prior to departure because of the visual aspect. This will allow migrants to get beyond an impasse where they migrants know the risks but do not understand their impact.

Target key influencers – parents, families, diaspora – most migrants were dependent on the support of family members at home, and sometimes even their permission, to be able to migrate. Messages from family members are generally more trusted, especially where they are ultimately responsible for financing the journey, and financiers also have the power to forgive debts preventing return. Effective targeting would mean assessment of the communications habits of family members, which may mean more offline outreach, in local languages.

III. [SOURCE] Conclusion – while migrants share some commonalities with regard to migration motivations, when put in context, various distinct migration drivers require tailored messaging.

Core to this is how migrants define 'success,' with poorer potential migrants (from Gambia, Guinea) more often see no prospects of changing their life except through migration, and wealthier migrants (from Cote d'Ivoire, Mali) more likely to have made a strategic calculation that migration will help them attain a specific goal.

Recommendation – ensure that campaigns are sufficiently flexible to respond to target groups. *Strategic communications programmes should note key differences between how socio-economic and national groups consume information and respond to messaging. Guidance on alternatives to irregular migration, their value relative to investment, and how to access them may be more appropriate for poorer migrants who see 'no option' but to migrate. Wealthier migrants are more likely to have surveyed alternative options and calculated the relative risks and rewards of migration and may benefit more from more specific probing of assumptions made in their calculations, such as earning potential in Libya and Europe, and the ability to migrate onwards from Libya and beyond Italy.*

IV. [SOURCE] Conclusion – potential migrants' family members are key influencers. As mentioned in preceding conclusions, many migrants are dependent on family members

to finance journeys, usually male relatives. Select Malian interviewees indicated that they were persuaded not to migrate by intervention from parents. Some (Nigerian) female migrants negotiated their migration with female relatives (but did not always agree with their advice).

Recommendation – target components of the communications campaign at family members. Make it clear that they are enabling irregular migration, and that money lent to migrants may never be paid back. In line with following conclusions, emphasise the difficult experiences of migrants and the importance of accepting and supporting returning migrants.

V. [SOURCE] Conclusion – mass and social media have wide reach, but are less effective for reaching the highest risk groups.

There is an association between those who had internet access and those who had heard of awareness campaigns. Those unaware of migration awareness campaigns were significantly more likely to lack internet access (30%). Moreover, lesser educated respondents were less likely to have internet access (44%). Information is therefore less likely to reach them. Those with access are likely to do so through 'feature phones', which often run on a Java (rather than Android or iOS). Others do not own televisions or have intermittent power and so will only watch at certain times of day, or in communal places with dedicated power supplies, such as bars and cafes.

Recommendation – target television and social media content towards demographics more likely to have access to the internet and television. In poorer areas and areas with unreliable power, television messaging should target programming most likely to be viewed communally, such as sports games for men. Online content should be suitable for 'feature' cell phones. In poorer areas, place greater weight on radio and community relationships.

VI. [SOURCE / TRANSIT] Conclusion – Migrants often used the language of fate and faith to dismiss concerns about the dangers of the journey, believing they would not experience the 'bad luck' of those who have come to harm en-route. Despite this, the influence of religious leaders over potential migrants, in particular those in younger age categories, was found to be limited.

Recommendation – communications should not avoid the risks of the journey, but engage with this attitude. It should ensure that messages are highly adapted to the local context and the target audiences in those locations, with messages countering fatalistic attitudes to human life. Assess the influence of local religious figures, and seek partnerships if appropriate.

VII. [SOURCE / TRANSIT] Conclusion – television and peers have great influence at origin, while trusted voices on social media can be effective at reaching migrants in transit.

Before departure, television influences the aspirations of potential migrants in the country of origin, while peers at home and in the diaspora assist with the granular detail of planning.

Migrants in transit rely on contacts outside of their country of origin for information the most and use social media to contact them. If they have no existing contacts, they seek them out through social media. Regular phone calls, Facebook and WhatsApp were the most cited channels of communications with the diaspora. Travel companions often pool information received from the diaspora to make sense of it.

Recommendation – use a combination of channels customised to more specified target audiences.

VIII. [TRANSIT] Conclusion –Migrants must invest significantly in departing Agadez, meaning there is a small window of opportunity whereby migrants in Niger can return home with relatively little financial loss. Yet, migrants' awareness of existing communications campaigns was low or unknown.

Recommendation – carry out robust evaluations of awareness raising activities in Niger, and aim to capture the perspectives and experiences of migrants who have since moved on or returned to countries of origin. These perspectives are important to build a full picture of efficacy. Use this data to adjust communications activities in Niger.

IX. [TRANSIT] Conclusion – many migrants attempting the journey to Europe had established relatively stable livelihoods in Libya.

A more nuanced typology of the needs of migrants transiting Libya should be developed and applied in order to ensure the relevance of strategic communications and other interventions. Although economic and physical insecurity is pervasive, and many migrants encounter horrific abuses, it should not be forgotten that Libya continues to be a place where migrants live and work – often with satisfaction. Interventions in Libya should consider that the struggle to find work in Italy would be a worse outcome than continuing to work in Libya. In addition, interventions should include information on the difficulty of being granted asylum, life in refugee camps or detention centres in the EU, life in Europe if denied asylum, and the general hardships of living illegally in the EU.

Recommendation – increase migrant’s knowledge of support and safe areas in Libya. Signpost to existing livelihood programmes that have been demonstrated to change minds, and address other reasons for inclusion/ exclusion. Malians who changed their plans to migrate irregularly often did so because of a new opportunity at home. Some of these opportunities continue to exist but are not being accessed by the groups likely to migrate.

- X. [TRANSIT] Conclusion – many migrants rule out return because they anticipate stigma from origin communities and because they are unaware of assistance to return voluntarily.**

Recommendation – further work with host communities to soften stigma of return – with a particular focus in Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire. It remains extremely difficult to return, with many returnees unable to reconcile with families. Greater understanding among communities in countries of origin would enable more to make the difficult decision to return voluntarily from Libya and Europe.

- XI. [TRANSIT/ DESTINATION] Conclusion – migrants in transit rely on migrants in the diaspora in the EU to make decisions.**

Migration plans are often, and perhaps understandably, modelled after the successful journeys of peers already in Europe, and the diaspora continues to be a trusted source of information on the journey. Many migrants seek out new contacts with compatriots based in Europe via social media channels.

However, the study has shown that migrants in the diaspora are unreliable interlocutors. The fast pace of change in transit and destination country policies and contexts, means that the journey and asylum application of one migrant can become unrecognisable just weeks later. Most pertinently, the severe difficulties migrants now face moving onwards from Italy are not known by migrants in transit.

Recommendation – consider a diaspora based communications campaign. Migrants’ reliance on those who have successfully completed the journey offers an opportunity to create an online platform for trusted interaction with migrants. This would be more effective than displaying content online, which migrants are less likely to absorb passively.

Messages should also communicate that many voices in the diaspora provide inaccurate information because the migration context changes rapidly, and those who were successful before faced wholly different obstacles. The aim should not be to discredit diaspora voices. Rather, migrants should be able to access a reliable online source that can support them in discerning between accurate and inaccurate information.

Recommendations for wider policy

- XII. Conclusion – heavy handedness emanating from migration management policies in Algeria (and Sudan) may be increasing onward movement.** Testimony from migrants indicates that heavy-handedness, discrimination, and a lack of legal status in Algeria has made it more difficult for migrants to live and work there. Similar scenarios have been reported in Sudan. Although initiatives to improve migration management expect to reduce irregular migration, there is evidence that such measures have often encouraged onward movement to Libya and Europe.

Recommendation – the European Union and member states should aim to influence the approach to migration management in key transit countries to reduce the potential for adverse effects. This could include appraising migration management policies for their potential to prompt the onward movement of migrants to Libya and Europe, as well as their impact on

human and labour rights. Improvement to local integration opportunities and regularisation of work would be important corollary steps to reducing onward movement.

TECHNICAL ANNEXES

Study tasks and methods

	Research methods	Section
<p>TASK 1</p> <p>Assess overall level of migrants' and asylum seekers' knowledge of the journey (routes, distances, risks and smuggling services available), intended destination (situation in destination country) and how they plan to reach the destination (procedures to get asylum and legal migration options) across different migrants' profiles</p>	<p>Quantitative survey among potential migrants</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with migrants in transit</p>	<p>Section 1. Decision-making</p> <p>Section 2: Expectations and realities of the journey</p>
<p>TASK 2</p> <p>Provide an overview on information and communication channels used by migrants arriving and staying in the EU (pre-departure, along the route and upon arrival):</p> <p>How they obtain relevant and 'trustworthy' information</p> <p>How they communicate with smugglers</p> <p>How they keep themselves up-to-date during their journey and during the initial period of stay in the EU</p>	<p>Quantitative survey among potential migrants</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with migrants in transit</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with returned migrants</p>	<p>Section 3: Information and communication channels</p>
<p>TASK 3</p> <p>Assess how migrants relay such information and which channels they use to communicate and exchange information with their peers in countries of origin, between themselves and the diaspora members in the country of intended destination in the EU</p>	<p>Quantitative survey among potential migrants</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with migrants in transit</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with returned migrants</p>	<p>Section 3: Information and communication channels</p>
<p>TASK 4</p> <p>Assess the role of social media in relation to other information channels in the context of migration and identify who is funding and operating the online content identified.</p>	<p>Quantitative survey among potential migrants</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with migrants in transit</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with returned migrants</p> <p>Social media analysis</p> <p>Desk research</p>	<p>Section 4: The role of social media</p>

Methodology

This report focuses on how to support the development of contextualised migration information and awareness raising campaigns by better understanding how migrants gather information about routes towards the EU, transport possibilities, about the smugglers that can facilitate their journey and the costs of this facilitation. 11 research questions were designed focusing on messaging and channels of communications,

Research questions

The research questions aim to generate the evidence required to tune existing strategic communications and design new programmes. Research questions therefore contribute to two categories: messaging and channels. 'Messaging' refers to data that informs the content of the messages that are part of the awareness raising campaigns. 'Channels' refer to evidence that informs how to best communicate those messages. There is some cross-over, but research questions are broadly as follows:

Messaging

- 1) What is the level of knowledge of migrants and asylum seekers of the journey?
- 2) What is the level of knowledge of migrants and asylum seekers on intended destination?
- 3) How do migrants and asylum seekers plan to reach the destination country (procedures to get asylum and legal migration options) and how does this differ between different types of migrants (age, gender, nationality)?
- 4) What is the experience of migrants on their journey?

Channels

- 5) How do migrants and asylum seekers obtain relevant and trustworthy information?
- 6) How do migrants and asylum seekers communicate with smugglers?
- 7) How do migrants and asylum seekers keep themselves up-to-date during their journey and during the initial period of stay in the EU?
- 8) Do migrants communicate/keep in touch with peers in country of origin? How (including through which communication channels)?
- 9) Do migrants communicate/keep in touch between themselves throughout the journey? How (incl. through which communication channels)?
- 10) Do migrants communicate/keep in touch with the diaspora members in the country of intended destination in the EU³⁷? How (including through which communication channels)?
- 11) What social media (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, etc) do migrants use to gather information about migration?
 - a. Which are the most influential ones?
 - b. Who operates them?
 - c. Who funds them?
- 12) What role do social media play vs other media types?

Methods

A mixed methods study was designed to address the research questions. Fieldwork was carried out between May and July 2017:

- Review of the literature on migration and people smuggling from West Africa and through the Central Mediterranean route.
- A quantitative survey of 1,053 'potential' migrants in Senegal (169), Cote d'Ivoire (182), Gambia (180), Guinea (177), Mali (167), and Nigeria (178).
- 85 in-depth interviews with West African migrants in transit in Agadez, Niger (25) and in Libya - Sabha (15), Bani Walid (15), Zuara (10), Sabratha (20).
- 30 in-depth interviews with returnees from Europe (16) and Libya or Niger (14).
- 15 in-depth interviews with Malians who had considered irregular migration but changed their plans, conducted in Bamako (10) and Mopti (5).

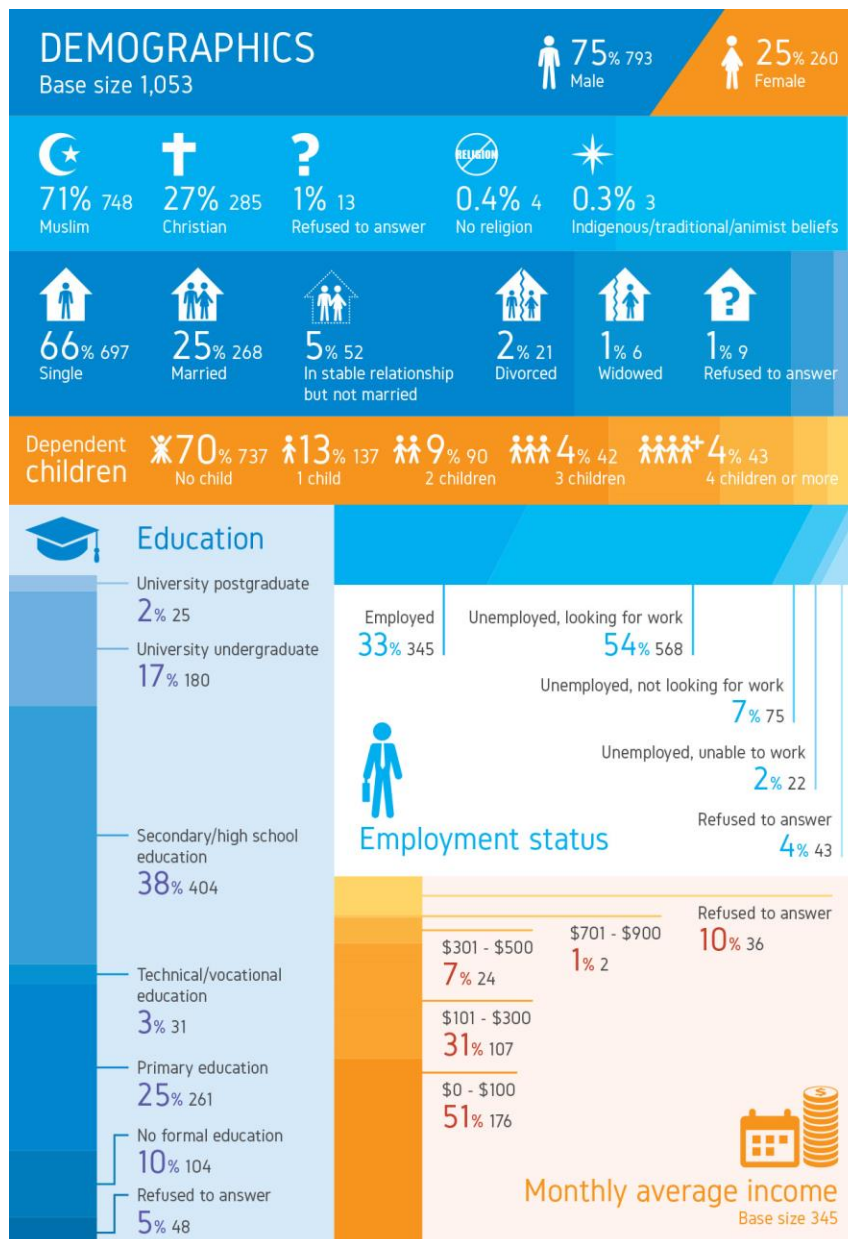
³⁷ Potential migrants, migrants in transit and returnees.

- Social media and online analysis using automated and manual searches of social media and online sources based on key words and phrases present in migrant interviews.³⁸
- A Malian case study: the on-the-ground researcher in Mali conducted ten additional interviews to investigate further people’s use of social media and online information in decisions around irregular migration. These qualitative insights were designed as a case study to give some contextual understanding to quantitative findings.

Sample recruitment and profiles³⁹

Respondents to the quantitative survey were recruited using a non-probabilistic snowball sampling technique in which respondents were identified through referral of other migrants within the same target group. This form of sampling is used when research subjects are difficult to locate, and continues until the predetermined sample size is reached or exceeded.

Figure 11: Survey sample demographics



³⁸ See the Technical Annexes for a full social media analysis methodology.

³⁹ Further detail is included in the Technical Annexes.

A screening process defined the limits for both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. All respondents were therefore between the ages of 16 - 44 years old, and intending to migrate irregularly outside of the ECOWAS region within the next 12 months.

Quotas aimed to collect a minimum sample of 20% women. Three quarters (75%) of respondents were men, 25% were women. Malian respondents were mainly men (95%). In contrast, more than a third of Ivorian respondents were woman (35%).

No other quotas were applied. The sociodemographic composition of the sample was therefore a product of the snowballing sampling technique. Most respondents had low formal education - 25% had not completed secondary school, and 38% had not progressed to further education. Less than a fifth (17%) had completed an undergraduate degree. Low education levels and income levels were similar. The majority of Gambian (87%), Malian (57%), and Guinean (55%) respondents earned less than USD 100 per month. Nigerian respondents were better off, yet 86% nonetheless earned under USD 300 per month. Most high earners were found in Senegal, 15% of whom earned more than USD 301.

Limitations

- Reliability of results – research focused on illegal or taboo activity, such as being smuggled, which can elicit evasive or untruthful responses. To mitigate, enumerators recorded the level of difficulty of the survey for respondents (15% somewhat difficult, 1% very difficult), and impressions of honesty (96% 'honest').
- Bias in sampling technique – snowball samples naturally accumulate responses from within the same social networks used to share information on migration. Respondents are therefore more likely to have knowledge and attitudes in common. This is considered in the analysis.
- Difficulty engaging returnees from Europe – the target number of interviews (3) was met in all target countries except Gambia (one returnee interview from Europe) and Guinea (one returnee interview from Europe). Returnees were recruited through personal networks and, in Senegal, gatekeeper NGOs. Difficulties in recruiting returnees stemmed from:
 - Locating returnees - in Senegal and Gambia in particular, identifying migrants who had returned from Europe was difficult. Even after approaching NGOs involved in supporting their reintegration, researchers were unable to identify candidates.
 - Persuading returnees to engage with the research - some did not want to repeat their story after multiple approaches by journalists, researchers, and government departments. Some asked for a financial incentive for participation, especially as some were in considerable financial distress. Researchers were not permitted to pay an honorarium. In Côte d'Ivoire, four returnees suspected the researcher was working for the government. As a result, they were unwilling to participate, as they feared reprisals for migrating illegally.

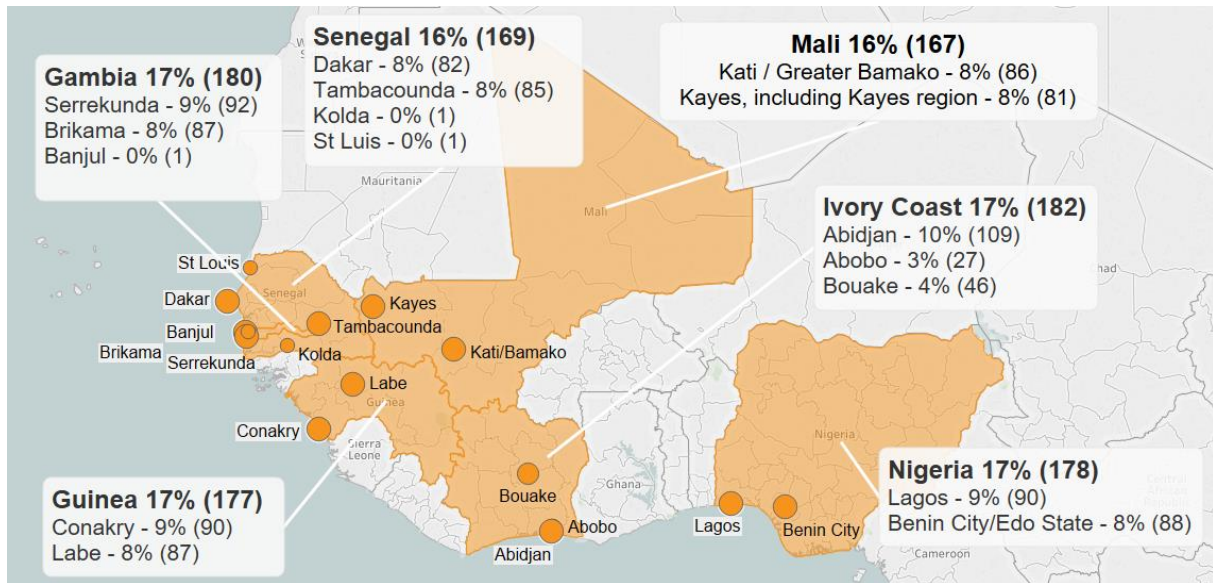
Quantitative Survey Sample

Location of respondents – total sample of 1,053 respondents took part to our survey in six different countries: Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

Age of respondents – lower and upper age limits of 16 and 44; almost half (45%) of respondents 25 to 34 years old.

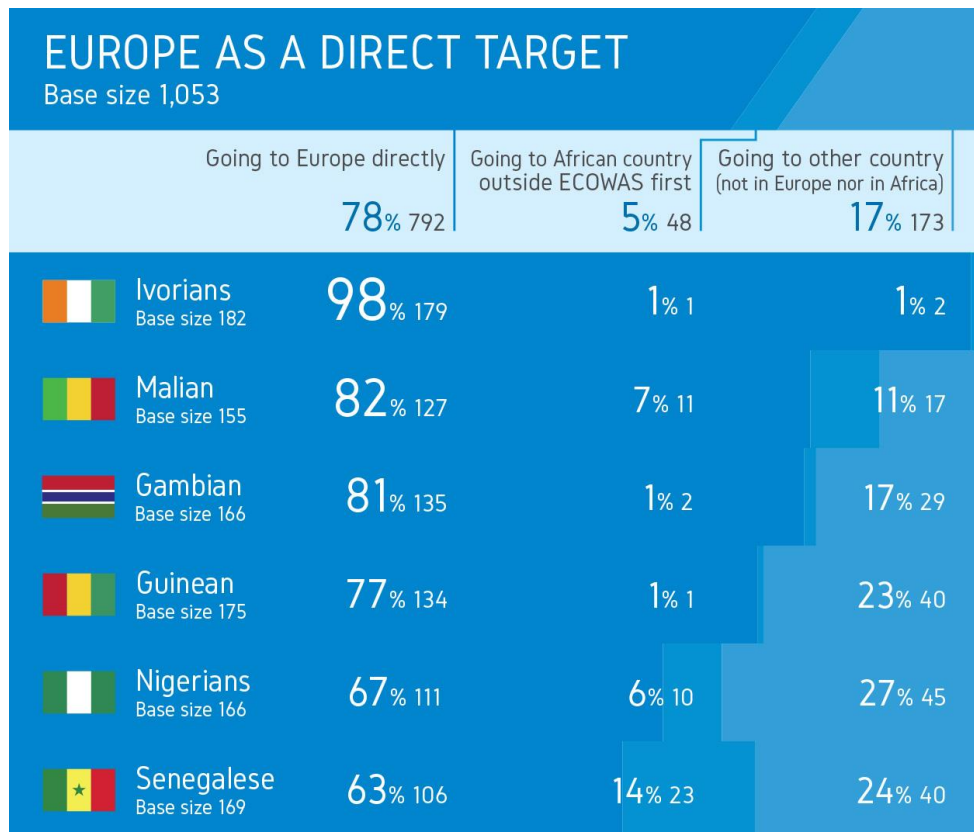
Sex of respondents by nationality – 75% of respondents are men, 25% are women. Malian respondents were mainly men (95%). Over a third (35%) of Ivorian respondents were women.

Figure 12: Location of respondents



Nationality	Men # (%)	Women # (%)	Total # (100%)
Ivorian	119 (65%)	63 (35%)	182
Gambian	129 (72%)	51 (28%)	180
Guinean	122 (69%)	55 (31%)	177
Malian	159 (95%)	8 (5%)	167
Nigerian	127 (71%)	51 (29%)	178
Senegalese	137 (81%)	32 (19%)	169

Figure 13: Migration destination intentions



Ethical considerations

The research adhered to the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct.⁴⁰ All interviewees and survey respondents were engaged on condition of anonymity. Details that could identify interviewees, such as names of personnel, or specific place names were removed by the field team prior to analysis. Interviews and surveys with minors were conducted in line with Seefar's 'Children in Research' policy, developed together with an external consultant.⁴¹

Market Research Code of Conduct

Throughout the research project, Optimity Advisors and Seefar adhered to the MRS Code of Conduct.⁴² The key principles which Optimity Advisors and Seefar will adhere to can be summarised as:

- Researchers shall ensure that participation in their activities is based on voluntary informed consent.
- Researchers shall be straightforward and honest in all their professional and business relationships.
- Researchers shall be transparent as to the subject and purpose of data collection
- Researchers shall respect the confidentiality of information collected in their professional activities
- Researchers shall respect the rights and well-being of all individuals
- Researchers shall ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities
- Researchers shall balance the needs of individuals, clients, and their professional activities.
- Researchers shall exercise independent professional judgement in the design, conduct and reporting of their professional activities
- Researchers shall ensure that their professional activities are conducted by persons with appropriate training, qualifications and experience
- Researchers shall protect the reputation and integrity of the profession.

⁴⁰ See appendices for full principles adhered to.

⁴¹ [1] The policy requires researchers to adhere to the 11 principles of good practice. These are: 1) legal compliance; 2) justification for inclusion at research design phase; 3) assessment of and adjustment to risks specific to minors; 4) ongoing dialogue with donor, contractors and sub-contractors; 5) enhanced informed consent; 6) training of researchers; 7) adult witnesses to interviews and focus groups; 8) secondary confirmation of informed consent; 9) anonymity and duty to inform of danger; 10) sensitivity of questioning; 11) proactive termination of interview. Note that all minors interviewed were at least 15 years of age. The basis on which the inclusion of minors in research is justified is a qualified assessment that the benefit of giving voice to minors outweighs the risks of their participation. Following this assessment, researchers decided to proceed.

⁴² <https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/mrs%20code%20of%20conduct%202014.pdf>

Social Media Analysis Methodology

Aims

The aim of the analysis of social media was to:

- Establish how influential social media and online platforms are to potential migrants.
- Identify what types of websites/pages are engaged.
- Collect data on the demographics of those engaging with social media.
- Identify who is funding/producing content for influential pages/websites.

This analysis draws on four data sources:

- Information from the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews in the six countries of interest to assess relative reliance on social media and online pages as a source of information and keywords to guide the search.
- Use of the online platform BuzzSumo to assess the extent to which websites and web pages with migration-related content were engaged with over the last six months.
- A public search of Twitter and Facebook run using their embedded APIs to query the search terms in the users' tweets and Facebook pages, groups and events to determine how much certain topics are being talked about.
- A Malian case study: ten additional interviews to generate qualitative, contextualised insights to quantitative findings.

Limitations

The project inception report envisaged this analysis being done through three steps:

- Generating search terms/keywords/phrases - identified through qualitative research. These keywords/phrases would be used through social media search platforms to identify key websites/pages of interest.
- Reviewing the websites/pages to collect data on user demographics and look at how content was engaged by potential migrants.
- Analysing trends in activity, influencers and demographics using a combination of keywords to establish popular/influential websites, as well as gender and age distribution of the online migration community and who is funding and/or producing content for these sites.

It became apparent that it would prove difficult to fulfil all the aims that had been set out for the analysis. This was the result of a number of factors that fell into two broad categories:

- **Keywords and languages:** A key challenge, noted from the beginning of the project, was to identify suitable keywords or key phrases. Keywords or key phrases that are too generic are likely to lead to a large amount of irrelevant data and false positives. Phrases that are too long or specific, however, may not yield insights (and miss close others). In the planning stage, it was envisioned that keywords and phrases would be identified through the qualitative interviews, which did happen. However, in many cases, keywords/phrases identified were quite generic. This may be in part because the interviews were conducted in local regional languages and not in English or French, which were the languages used for the keywords. These languages were picked as survey respondents reported that these were the languages they used when searching the internet.
- **Availability of relevant data through online search platforms:** There are limitations in terms of what online search platforms are able to provide. These platforms were designed to be used by marketing agencies to monitor brand awareness and engagement and so work best with very specific inputs. In addition, there are limitations around the data that is available. It is not possible to simply search with keywords on all publicly available content on Facebook (in contrast to Twitter). It is, of course, only possible to search publicly available pages/groups and many of these pages and groups would be private. Gaining demographic data on users is also not always possible, as some social media platforms do

not collect this data. Pinpointing location with accuracy may be difficult if users are not geolocated. On websites/blogs it may be possible to easily find a location, but on social media profiles it may be more dependent on factors such as language used or time zone set by user. Searches and analyses of this scale would normally require a longer timeline and a more substantial investment.

As a result, it was necessary to adapt the methods in order to try to answer some of the questions set out in the inception report. It is envisaged that with more time and financial resources, a more comprehensive analysis of social media trends could be conducted, using Application Programme Interfaces (APIs) that more comprehensively mine social media data.

Websites and Facebook pages cited by respondents

Website	Language(s)	Content and usage
Gate to Europe ⁴³	Arabic	Forum in Arabic discussing various aspects of migration. Mentioned by several Nigerian and Gambian migrants.
Immigrate with us (immig-us.com) الهجرة الى اوروبا	Arabic	Website active on social media channels: Facebook (320,095 'likes'); YouTube (997 subscribers, top video 26,857 views); Twitter (2,804 followers). The most popular article between January and June of this year was: 'The easiest nationalities can be obtained free of charge or for a fee.'
Mainstream: BBC News, France24	English, French	Cited widely by all nationalities as a reliable source of information
Awaremigrant.org		Funded by Italian Government. Website and active on social media channels: Facebook (44,000 followers), YouTube (five videos over 100 views, top video 39,000 views), Instagram. Mentioned by one respondent (Ivorian).
Infomigrant.net	English, French, Arabic	Collaboration between news outlets. 304 articles have an average of 426 shares, primarily on Facebook. Mentioned by one respondent (Malian)
Google.com	All	Mostly Nigerians, Guineans and Senegalese said they googled information before departure
Facebook: Migration boats from Libya to Italy قوارب الهجرة من ليبيا إلى إيطاليا	Arabic	Smuggling website in Libya, offering boat travel in wooden boats and zodiacs from Sabratha, as well as other bespoke smuggling services such as forged documents. 4,195 followers
Mali Jolies Dew ⁴⁴	French	Identified through Mali case study (who described it as a diaspora group) Facebook description calls it a magazine One interviewee in the case study described getting information about the journey from this page: <i>"c'est grâce à Facebook notamment la page Mali jolies Dew sur laquelle j'ai pu écouter et visionner des témoins qui ont retracé leur parcours comme un enfer"</i>
Plenty of Fish ⁴⁵	English	Dating website used by undocumented Nigerian in the UK to build network of friends.

43 <https://www.otlaat.com/arabtravelersforum/forum36/>

44 <https://www.facebook.com/Mali-Jolies-Dew-302747330070588/>

45 <https://www.pof.com/>

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