Chapter 6
Social Experiences of Migrants

Abstract

The political, religious and economic crises rocking different regions of Africa served as push factors to migrating into Europe. Together with South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa hosts 85% of people in the world suffering from multidimensional poverty. The incessant religious conflicts and insurgences by the Al-Qaida Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and other terrorist groups have led to loss of thousands of lives, thus generating millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. African countries constitute more than half of the first 23 countries experiencing very high impact of terrorism in the world. Consequently, many Africans flee these unsavoury conditions by making a dangerous journey via the Sahara Desert towards Europe. In the hot desert, migrants experience rape, sexual abuse, kidnapping, hunger, thirst, exhaustion, violent attacks and death from traffickers and bandits who roam the desert to extort, rob and kill. It is reported that one third of deaths recorded in the entire migration process occur in the desert. On getting to Libya (the major corridor to Europe) migrants undergo human rights violations and abuses, dehumanization, unlawful killings, extortions, torture, slavery, rape and gender-based violence, forced labor, illegal detention and confinements in the hands of State and non-State actors encouraged by the so-called EU-Libya 2017 memorandum of understanding. The crossing of the Mediterranean Sea is considered the most dreadful part of the journey. Smugglers arrange migrants in an unworthy vessels or inflatable rubber boats on the sea. Usually, deaths occur on the sea as a result of over-loading, insufficient fuel supply into vessels, faulty engines, stormy weather, dehydration, hunger and suffocation from exhaust smokes. African migrants who finally make it to Europe must also contend with immigration detentions, language

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difficulties, battle for legal status, undertake low status job, experience racial discrim-
ination, prejudice and acculturative stress. Despite these post-migration difficulties
African migrants experience large happiness gains following migration to Western
Europe.

Introduction

As noted in Chap. 4, the migration process is in itself a social determinant of health.
The migration crisis is not only a challenge to host countries, but also a significant
burden to migrants’ mental health. The migrants’ journey to Europe is a tragic one
characterized by tortures, anguish, deprivations, violence and abuse. Considering
the gravity of migrants’ ordeals, it is unimaginable to assume that the gains acquired
when they reach destination countries in Europe surpass the physical, psychological
and social losses suffered en route. In this chapter we shall focus on describing the
social experience of African migrants from the countries of origin via transit regions
to the European continent.

Conditions in African Countries Push Migrants to Europe

Since post-colonial independence, virtually all parts of the African continent have
been rocked with political, religious, social, and economic upheavals. Africa hosts
the world poorest countries and predominantly nations with gross domestic product
per capita below $US1000 (World Population Review, 2019). The impoverished
condition of countries within the African region has orchestrated corruption, insecu-
rity, social vices, poor health facilities, food shortages, bad roads, poor educational
and welfare systems, unstable power supply, unemployment, terrorism, ethnic and
religious crises (Adefeso, 2018). Globally, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are
currently reported to host 85% of people suffering from multidimensional poverty
which is defined in terms of quality of health, education and living standard (Oxford
Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2018). In addition, two-thirds of chil-
dren in sub-Saharan Africa undergo multidimensional poverty while 56% of the
whole population are severely poor with a significant percentage residing in Nigeria
(17.3%) and Ethiopia (15.3%). The African continent neither experiences industrial
development nor significant economic growth as more Africans live in urban slums
day by day (Strauss, 2016).

Corruption, the bane of African socio-economic development, seems to be far
from being overcome. Although, corruption is generally problematic to all govern-
mental structures in the world, the phenomenon of corruption tends to operate in
African governance in a striking manner (Kpundeh, 1992). Compared to other world
regions, sub-Saharan African countries obtained the lowest average score (32/100)
in the 2018 Corruption Perception Index; 85% of nations within the African Union
had a corruption index score below the world’s average (Transparency International, 2018). Low scores stand for high corruption levels. Whereas countries like Seychelles (66), Botswana (61), Cape Verde (57), Rwanda (56), Namibia (53), Mauritius (51), Sao Tome and Principle (46), Senegal (45), South Africa (43), Morocco (43) and Tunisia (43) are at par and above the world’s average corruption index (43), all other African countries fell below the average with DRC Congo (20), Angola (19), Chad (19), Congo (19), Burundi (17), Libya (17), Equatorial Guinea (16), Guinea Bissau (16), Sudan (16), South Sudan (13) and Somalia (10) occupying the lowest bottom.

Further, the colonial and postcolonial political and geographical arrangements of Africa as mapped out by the European slave masters seem to perpetuate political and armed conflict within the continent (Achankeng, 2013). This is reflective in the Salim’s (cited in Bujra, 2002) categorization of nature of conflicts in Africa: territorial and boundary conflicts, internal conflicts and civil wars, succession strives in decolonized territories, ideological/religious and political conflicts, and irredentism and transhumance conflict. Recently, the Sahel, Nigeria and Somalia have been noted as hotspots for incessant religious conflicts and insurgences with significant spill-over effects on neighboring countries. Thousands of lives have been lost, millions of refugees and internally displaced persons have been generated as a result of these conflicts (Basedau, 2017). The revival of jihadist operations of the Al-Qaida Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) along the Sahel region, Al-Shabaab in East Africa and Boko Haram insurrection in Northern Nigeria have largely put the continent in state of unrest and made millions of victims of violence (Atta-Asamoah, n.d.).

Although unemployment rates seem low in sub-Saharan Africa given that the teeming youth population cannot afford to remain unemployed, it is important to note that majority suffer from underemployment and extremely poor working conditions in the informal sector (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Among North African countries, unemployment rates are considered very high and projected to remain steadily high in years to come (International Labour Organization, n.d.). In the region, youth employment is estimated at 34.8% in Tunisia, 32.6% in Egypt, 24.4% in Algeria and 30% in Morocco (The World Bank, 2019). According to the 2019 Global Peace Index, many African countries sending refugees to Europe are categorized as world regions with low and very low peace (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2018). Among these countries are South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic, Libya, DR Congo, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Eretria, Ethiopia, Niger, Congo and Kenya. In addition, African countries constitute more than half of the first 23 countries experiencing high and very high impact of terrorism in the world (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2018).

All these unsavory conditions and negative indicators serve as push factors for many Africans to seek better life and comfort in European and North American countries. The economic and political reforms put in place by African governments have largely failed to address these problems (El Kadi, 2019), thus creating despair for the young Africans, drive to flee the continent for greener pastures, and become forced and economic migrants in Europe.
African migrants accurately plan their journeys by the help of travel agents (or middle men), smugglers and sex traffickers. For example, traffickers recruit young girls from extremely poor families from Benin-City, Edo State and promise them lucrative jobs in Europe (PM News Nigeria, 2016). With poor knowledge of the risks involved and the kind of work they would be forced to do, these girls accept the attractive job offer in order to better their lives and cater for their poor families. Sex traffickers are usually older women nick named “Madame Sex Traffickers.” Based on their experience and “expertness” in trafficking, they are categorized as “Low Ranking and Upper Ranking Madame.” The cost of trafficking these young girls to Spain could be up to €10,000 which is mostly paid for by Madame Sex Traffickers or those involved in the transnational sex trafficking network such as the Supreme Eiye Confraternity (SEC). The SEC is known for drug peddling and international sex trafficking in Europe and other parts of the world (Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2016).

The Journey Through the Desert

The Sahara is the world’s biggest hot desert occupying almost a third of the African continent and considered to have one of the most extreme harsh climates (Ross, 2019). Migrants from sub-Saharan African countries including the Horn of Africa, Sudan, DR Congo, Cameroon, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Gambia and Nigeria transit through the Sahara Desert to reach North Africa and Europe. The sojourn from these countries to North Africa can be said to be relatively pleasurable until migrants approach the Sahara Desert where they become vulnerable in the hands of smugglers and traffickers given the lack of state protection in this region. Bini (2010) describes the Sahara Desert as “a place for the circulation of people, cultures, goods and ideas” (p. 123) despite its harsh and very dangerous terrain. Through the coordination of smugglers and traffickers, migrants depart Agadez using pickup trucks which individually conveys about 20–25 migrants up north towards the Maghreb (Knowles-Coursin, 2015). More than 80% of irregular migrations to Europe are coordinated by smugglers and traffickers who receive thousands of Euros to organize transportation, accommodations during transit, provision of fake travel documents and bribing of border officials (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement, n.d.). Up to 40 migrants can also be piled up into a small pickup van in a journey expected to take three to four days (Barbieri, Cannella, Deotti, & Peca, 2015). The journey, which is almost 2500 km to the north of Tripoli, is accompanied by death, hunger, thirst, exhaustion and violent attacks from traffickers and bandits who roam the desert to extort, rob and kill (Pearce, 2019). As a result, drivers often travel in groups to avoid attacks from bandits and militias (Press, 2017). However, this strategy does not work as almost all migrants are assaulted on the way.
Rape, sexual abuse and kidnapping perpetrated by smugglers, traffickers and bandits also are not uncommon as these are used as conditions to continue the journey (North Africa Mixed Migration Hub, 2016). Female migrants are also susceptible to sexual abuse by truck drivers when the trip is stopped for the night in some desert villages (Kazeem, 2018). Horwood, Forin, and Frouws (2018) reported an incidence where a pregnant woman was raped in the desert of Algeria before her children and other migrants, and subsequently abandoned for four days before being rescued by army patrol. These abuses could occur at multiple times throughout the journey (Horwood et al., 2018). Smugglers usually abandon sick migrants in the desert heat, cold and dust, and fail to pick up migrants who fell off from the truck while on transit (UNICEF, 2017a). Sick migrants are abandoned in the desert to avoid contaminating the whole group of migrants with infections (Altai Consulting, 2015). Consequently, an abandoned migrant finds their own way in the midst of the desert or is rescued by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) if found alive (Human Right Watch, 2018). Smugglers abuse migrants and display these cruel behaviors in the desert because no one is there to hold them accountable (Barbieri et al., 2015).

Estimating the number of dead migrants along the Sahara is almost impossible due to remoteness of the desert and thus, many cases go unreported. Numbers of deaths in the Sahara Desert are considered to be very high and almost equal the number of dead migrants in the Central Mediterranean given the multiple graves, dead bodies and skeletons found along the desert route (Baker, 2019; Horwood et al., 2018; Kazeem, 2018). In an interview of 381 migrants in Italy, it was reported that more than one third of deaths (38%) witnessed throughout migration process occurred in the desert (MHub, 2016). This figure is more than double the number recorded on the Mediterranean Sea (15%). In 2017, about 1700 migrant deaths were recorded on the African continent out of which over 690 cases occurred in the desert (IOM, 2018). Aside from dangers posed by bandits, traffickers and smugglers, deaths in the desert are often attributed to dehydration, starvation, sickness and lack of access to medication (Schlein, 2018). For example, BBC (2019) reported that about 44 Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants (which include women and babies) died in June 2017 from dehydration along the desert route after their vehicle developed mechanical fault in Northern Niger. Also, in October 2013, 92 victims of trafficking (consisting mainly women and children) died in the desert as they almost approached the Libyan border (Hirsch, 2013). There are circumstances where pregnant women lost their lives at the point of giving birth in the desert journey because of absence of trained professions to provide medical assistance (Plambech, 2017). In many cases migrants go without food or with small quantity of garri (flakes made from cassava) and only entitled to a bottle of water which is expected to last for a journey of four to five days to Libya (Barbieri et al., 2015). In other situations, migrants swallow toothpaste to avoid starvation (Lister, 2015). Due to these distasteful experiences, migrants sometimes describe their desert journey from Agadez to Libya as “the road to hell” (Barbieri et al., 2015, p. 6).

There also seems to be racial discrimination in the treatment of migrants. Barbieri et al. (2015) showed that smugglers discriminated against sub-Saharan Africans by depriving them of food throughout desert journey and provided only water mixed
with petrol. Sub-Saharan African migrants could also be kidnapped in the desert by rebels and then forced to call family members to pay a ransom for their release, else forced into marriage or get killed (IOM, 2017a; Press, 2017). Kidnapping may occur if agents or middle men failed to pay smugglers the total cost of the journey (Kazeem, 2018). This kind of situation makes migrants get stranded and vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers in the middle of the journey.

Cost of the journey from West Africa to Libya could range between €220 to €1000 Euros (Barbieri et al., 2015; IOM 2017a) and mostly subject to negotiation (Press, 2017). Specifically, cost of travel from Agadez to Southern Libya is estimated at around €270 (Sebha), €180 (Ghatron), €225 (Murzuk) while the entire transit to the coastline may range between 1800 and 2700 euros (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014). Those who don’t have money to pay smugglers cross the desert on foot for a period of two weeks to reach Libya. While many migrants are aware of the risks associated with travelling through the desert, others are not (UNICEF, 2017a, 2017b). In addition, some migrants deceived by their guard-friend may believe that the larger part of the journey to Europe would be by air without knowing that the entire sojourn is via land and sea (Nwalutu, 2016).

The Libyan Experience: Torture, Slavery and Abuse

Another major phase in the migration process is the awful experience on Libyan soil. At arrival in Libya—“the corridor to Europe”—migrants would expect to get a considerable relief from the sufferings and discomforts encountered in the Sahara Desert. Unfortunately, migrants undergo multiplicative anguish as exemplified by human right violations and abuses, dehumanization, unlawful killings, extortions, torture, slavery, rape and gender-based violence, forced labor, illegal detention and confinements in the hands of State and non-State actors (United Nations Support Mission in Libya/Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018). All these occur sequel to the mid-2014 renewed armed conflicts which were characterized by a collapse of the rule of law, breakdown of social order, lack of government control and weakening of the judiciary system. Consequently, smugglers, traffickers, criminal gangs, armed groups, and cultists wield uncontrollable power and became highly influential in the oil-rich Libya. The influence of smugglers, traffickers and militias are reported to be reinforced by political elites and corrupt government officials who profit from the smuggling business (Eaton, 2018).

On reaching the borders of Libya, migrants encounter several interceptions by desert patrol officials. Border officials may require individual migrants to pay a bribe of €6 or ask the driver to pay €157 for the entire group of migrants in order to cross the border. On successful arrival in Libya, migrants whose agents have not completed their travel fees or have been duped by travel agents are forced to call relatives in the migrants’ home countries to demand a ransom. If payments are not made immediately, affected migrants are beaten severely and cannot continue the journey to the Libyan coastline until such payments are received via bank transfer or
via MoneyGram or Western Union, secondary profiteers of the smuggling business. Bodies of migrants who die as a result of continuous beatings are taken and thrown off inside the desert (Kazeem, 2018).

Conveying migrants from Sabah to Tripoli may pose another hurdle as they must be kept hidden from law enforcement officers. In order to travel undetected, some smugglers may hide more than 20 migrants inside an empty fuel tanker with poked holes on it for air and light (Kazeem, 2018). Upon arrival in Tripoli, migrants are taken into ghettos which is similar to a “shopping complex” or warehouses where each smuggler, trafficker and militia group has their own store with migrants as “goods” to be traded with (Kazeem, 2018). Up to 45 migrants may be detained in rooms of not more than 30 m² for several months until they are able to pay ransoms. In these detentions, migrants are handled like “chicken”, harassed, beaten severely, exposed to diseases, poor sanitation, hunger and thirst, and some eventually die (UNICEF, 2017a). For migrants aiming for Spain via Algeria and Morocco, the “keepers” who are in charge of keeping migrants in various detention units are also involved in killing, torturing and raping trafficked women which may in the end result into pregnancy (PM News, 2016). These women are deliberately impregnated so that they can have better chance of being granted asylum in the EU. In addition, the pregnancy helps “keepers” to establish relationship with trafficked women and keep them under control.

It is estimated that there are at least 34 detention centers in Libya, out of which 24 are operated by the Libyan Government Department for Combating Illegal Migration (LGDCIM) (UNHCR, 2017). LGDCIM centers altogether hold about 4000–7000 migrants. There are also unknown numbers of unauthorized detention centers owned by armed groups to imprison migrants and perpetuate human right abuse (United Nations Support Mission in Libya/UNHCR, 2016). Tripoli alone has at least 13 of these unofficial detention centers run by powerful armed militias who get funding from the government(s) to buy food and other basic necessities for migrants, while on the other hand engage in trafficking and abuse of migrants (UNICEF, 2017a). In May 2019, a group of migrants detained for several months in Zinter, western Libya, protested the inhumane conditions to which they have been subjected. They were made to survive on one meal per day and live amidst piles of garbage containing sewage and maggots (Michael, 2019). Further reports showed that 22 migrants had already died as a result of hunger, disease and poor sanitation in the camp. In some detention centers, truckloads of migrants are taken to farms and factories to work without getting remunerated (Baker, 2019). Unfortunately, these armed groups are extremely powerful, operate with impunity and seem untouchable as the Libyan police cannot arrest them because of the fear of reprisal attacks (UNICEF, 2017a).

An air strike that hit the Tajoura detention center on June 2, 2019, further showed how unsafe Libya is for migrants. In this incidence, about 53 migrants were killed while 130 were injured (Evan, Dimitry, Christiaan, Malachy, & David, 2019). In addition, it was reported that guards opened fire at migrants as they attempted to escape from airstrikes (BBC, 2019). In many of the unofficial detention camps, sub-Saharan African migrants are manned and tortured by fellow sub-Saharan migrants who have also attempted to cross into Europe but failed due to financial incapacitation (Kazeem,
Migrants who are unable to pay ransoms up to €2300 are continually tortured and beaten until they are able to do so. If migrants’ family members at home could not send the required amount, migrants are taken to the “slave market” for auction which usually occurs in public squares, car packs and warehouses (Elbagir, Razek, Platt, & Jones, 2017). Migrants could be auctioned for price as low as €360 depending on migrants’ skills and abilities. Once sold to Libyan buyers, migrants are forced to work as painters, builders, tilers and in the trafficking industry (Kuo, 2017).

As many times as migrants escape slavery, they are caught, sold and bought again. Some Libyan captors further put scars on migrants’ faces to punish, identify and denote the number of times they escaped from detention (Baker, 2019). While men are forced to engage in hard labor without being paid for services rendered, women are “rented” out for sexual exploitation until relatives and friends in home country are able to pay for their release (Tinti & Reitano, 2016). An attempt to refuse to execute the assigned work results in several lashes (Baker, 2019). Those who are able to pay ransom would have to do menial jobs for years in order to gather enough money to continue the journey to Europe (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014).

As a result of rape and other sexual abuse, women who cannot protect themselves arrive in Europe pregnant (Mixed Migration Centre, 2018) and find it almost impossible to specifically identify who is responsible for the pregnancy. Due to poor access to birth control, migrant women insert materials from mattresses inside their vaginas to prevent pregnancies when forced to have sex (Plambech, 2017). Barbara et al. (2017) reported that seven out of eight sexually assaulted African women migrants who transited via Libyan sought for abortion at the Public Centre for Sexual and Domestic Violence (SVSeD) in Milan, Italy. Most of these pregnancies were found to have gone beyond the first trimester. The risk for sexual abuse is higher among women who travelled alone in the journey compared to those who travel with partners, family members or friends (Horwood et al., 2018). However, it is suggested that some women are neither forced nor trafficked but willing to work in the sex industry in order to fund the entire journey (Plambech, 2018).

In some isolated cases, people are coerced to give their blood, body parts or organs or offered cash in exchange (IOM, 2017b). Almost all these exploitations and abuses are reported to happen in Tripoli, Sabah, Sabratha, Walid, Bani Brak, and Zawiya (IOM, 2017b). Many women who take the Libyan route reported that they were ignorant of the risk involved before undertaking the journey and those who had a glimpse of it never knew the risk would be extremely high (Horwood et al., 2018). More recently, similar incidents in Libya are now occurring in eastern Sudan where smugglers and traffickers engage in torturing, abducting and selling of migrants and their bodily organs (Horwood et al., 2018). These inhumane treatments have necessitated the evacuation of migrants and refugees to their respective countries by international organizations such as the IOM and the UNHCR (Horwood et al., 2018).

Given that sub-Saharan Africans are highly discriminated against, they cannot walk freely on the street because of fear of being stoned, abducted for ransom and taken to dungeon specifically built to agonize Blacks (Nwalutu, 2016). It is documented that sub-Saharan African migrants are treated worse compared to other
migrants from Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip, or Egypt (UNICEF, 2017a). Migrants from the Darfur region describe the experience in Libya as worse than that experienced in Sudan (Jaspers & Buchanan-Smith, 2018). Other migration routes in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt seem impassable because of the tight security. For example, it may take migrants 50–60 attempts to reach Spain via the Moroccan route (Lister, 2015). The whole period of the journey to Europe may take up to ten years. This is largely because of the assaults experienced in Libya and financial incapacitation. Migrants need to work for a long time to earn enough money to continue the journey (Mixed Migration Centre, 2018). Despite these challenges, many African migrants don’t give up because of the ultimate goal of reaching the European soil (Nwalutu, 2016). Returning to country of origin seemingly is not an option for many migrants because of the stigmatization and shame of going home empty-handed.

The Sea Crossing to Europe

After spending about six months to ten years in Libya or Morocco making enough money, African migrants set out for the, in many respects, most dreadful part of the journey—crossing the Central or Western Mediterranean Sea to reach either Italy, Malta or Spain. It is a journey of chance at this stage (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014). As reported by participants of our own study, migrants cheer up themselves by singing the following song in one of the camps between Algeria and Morocco:

See Morocco See Spain.
When we get to Kamarakaro,
it’s the day of enjoyment, when the kamarat gathers in the last assembly,
no more banku, no more walking cellular,
far away from Rabat
victory ah eh!
victory ah eh!
far away from Rabat, victory ah eh!

Migrants are camped in nearby bushes until the boat appears in the night. They may remain in hiding for days in hunger because of failed departure dates given by smugglers (Nwalutu, 2016).

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1Kamarakaroo is a refugee camp in Ceuta.
2“Kamarat” means “black”.
3“Banku” means solid food made from cassava.
4“Walking cellular” means chicken feet.
Smugglers arrange less costly unworthy vessels, dinghies or inflatable rubber boats to convey migrants in a journey that may take about four nights (Altai Consulting, 2015; Mixed Migration Centre, 2018). Many at times, they deliberately use cheap unworthy vessels because of the assumption that migrants would be rescued by coast guides shortly after departure. In addition, migrants are deceived that they would be transported by ship to Europe within the shortest time. Unexpectedly, migrants only come realize it’s a dinghy when they arrive at the shore to depart in the middle of the night (Nwalutu, 2016). Altai Consulting (2015) also noted that groups of migrants at times make joint contributions to purchase cheap vessels to transport them to Europe.

In order to make huge profits, smugglers would pack up to 120 migrants and gasoline cylinders into a boat with capacity to convey about 50 persons (Barberi et al., 2015). In such a tight situation, migrants may not have the opportunity to sit or sleep on the boat throughout the entire journey. It is noteworthy that smugglers do not escort or lead these journeys. Once migrants are packed into small boats, one of them is given a compass for direction without any professional skills to handle such. Unfortunately, the compass may become dysfunctional leaving migrants stranded at the middle of the sea until a rescue operation by NGO vessels surface to save them (Barberi et al., 2015). Even if the compass works effectively, the foreman may not be able to pilot the vessel to the desired destination because of lack of professional training. Where there is no compass, migrants are told to “look at the stars” for direction (UNICEF, 2017a). While the initial plan was to sail directly to Italy, migrants may find themselves at the shore of Malta, Lampedusa or Sicily. It all depends where the sea waves lead them. In Barberi’s (2015) study, some migrants narrated how their boat developed fault and began to sink. Immediately, the crew panicked and threw themselves into the sea without the ability to swim while others swam with the aid of gasoline cylinders. About twelve persons sank and died in this occurrence. The sea voyage is an experience where mothers see their children dying of cold and hunger without being able to help, and where older brothers attempt to resuscitate a dead younger brother who was famished and dehydrated (Nwalutu, 2016).

Deaths occur on the sea as a result of insufficient fuel supply into vessels, faulty engines, stormy weather, lack of swimming skills, dehydration, hunger, suffocation from exhaust smokes and placing women and children below the deck (Mixed Migration Centre, 2018). In 2018 for example, a wooden boat that left Sabratha (70 km west of Tripoli) to Italy drifted for almost two weeks (due to faulty motor) until it finally stranded along Libyan coast of Misrata (Infomigrants, 2018). As a result of starvation, 15 out of the 25 migrants on-board died.

Reaching Europe via the Central Mediterranean has become more difficult since the operation of the Libya Coast Guards (LGC) began. Migrants’ boats are intercepted along the sea by guards and returned to the shore of Libya to experience another round detention and abuse (Horwood et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2017a). There have been numerous evidences showing the brutality of the LGC towards migrants once they are caught on the sea. One striking evidence was a video footage presented by The New York Times of how the LGC failed to rescue and help drowning migrants.
after their raft began to sink on the November 6, 2016 (Heller, Pezzani, Mann, Moreno-Lax, & Weizman, 2018). Migrants who struggled to get on-board the LGC ship were immediately beaten and tortured as the video shows. Fortunately, Sea-Watch (a humanitarian foundation based in Germany) was close by to recue some of the migrants who would have drowned due to the—to say the least—unprofessional attitude of the LGC. Some migrants who were already aboard had to jump back into the water to join Sea-Watch’s boat in order to avoid looming sufferings if they are returned to Libya. Twenty out of about 150 migrants lost their lives in that incidence (Heller et al., 2018). The LGC are also known for harassing, threatening and intimidating NGO ships providing rescue operations for migrants and refugees (Horwood et al., 2018). On May 9, 2019, a minimum of 65 migrants also died on the Mediterranean Sea after their boat capsized off the Tunisian coast due to strong waves (BBC, 2019). About 164 migrants have died on the sea en route to Europe in the first quarter 2019 (UNHCR, 2019).

Now in Europe: What Next?

Surviving African migrants who made it to Europe are disembarked at the Italian or Maltese shore. From there they try to reach other EU countries like France and Germany, or the UK. No matter the destination, the goal is to declare asylum and obtain refugee status. Generally, asylum seekers are restricted in immigration detention centers or in community centers until their cases are determined. Nwalutu (2016) related the experience of sub-Saharan African migrants who were disembarked at Malta. Newly arrived migrants were kept in detention for one and half years in a prison-like condition, and were only allowed to see the sun for two hours per day. Most of the migrants were refused residence permits even after 18 months in detention, and were deported to their respective countries (Nwalutu, 2016). On average, it takes up to four years for men and three years for women to get a resident permit in France which will be valid for at least for twelve months (Gosselin, Desgrées-du-Loû, Lelièvre, Dray-Spira, & Lydié, 2016). Absence or delay in granting residence permits remain a major source of psychological distress for migrants (Lamkaddem, Essink-Bot, Devillé, Gerritsen, & Stronks, 2015).

The rate of granting refugee status to African migrants and most especially Western African migrants is low because of the perception that a majority of them are economic migrants. Consequently, many of them end up in the streets looking for low-skilled and low-paid jobs. African migrants are known to undertake employments with remuneration lower than the minimum wage because of their undocumented status. Migrants in this category experience job related stress from work that is highly demanding, least preferred whilst at the same time offering low remuneration and unsatisfactory career prospects (Bhugra, cited in Chilunga et al., 2019). Black et al. (2016) showed that upon arrival in Europe only one third of a sample of
documented African migrants held higher status jobs matching the status they had in their home country. Many who are well-educated and had reached the mid-career level in their country of origin would need to start new degree programs or engage in former vocational training for proper integration into the labor market else they end up working as guards, construction workers, cleaners, and other poorly remunerated menial jobs (Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, 2018; Martín et al., 2016) or become unemployed (Pannetier, Lert, Jauffret Roustide, & du Loüa, 2017).

In addition, the barriers posed by language difference between host country and that of migrants could predispose feelings of depression and social isolation (Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, 2018). Among Black African migrants in the UK, Ochieng (2012) found that insufficient ability to speak in English contributed to poor access to health promotion information and services. Asides communication problems, other factors such as bureaucratic challenges, cultural difference and being undocumented continues to serve as barriers in accessing health care in European countries (Pavli & Maltezou, 2017). In addition, many undocumented African migrants obviously do not seek professional medical help because of the fear of deportation (Plambech, 2017).

Evidence also shows that sexual trafficking continues to be a problem for African women migrants making them “bear a disproportionate burden of HIV infection in Europe” (Marsicano, Lydie, & Bajos, 2013, p. 819). Trafficked girls are threatened and forced to make a remittance of about €40,000–€60,000 from sex work before they are set free by a sex trafficking ring. Lack of compliance could result into the so-called “crocodile tie,” where both hands are tied to the legs from behind for days without food and water (PM News Nigeria, 2016). Family members back home may be kidnapped and killed if victims hesitate to engage in sex work.

It is also noted that the level of prejudice against migrants is still high in Europe, and this poses a significant barrier to integrating to the sociocultural system of host communities (de Freitas et al., 2018; European Commission, 2011). For example, many African migrants in Germany perceived racial discrimination, precarious working conditions and high daily stress levels (Idemudia 2014). Integration of refugees and migrants in Germany has been considered to be problematic given the resentments in the German society and language barriers (Trines, 2017). Generally, sub-Saharan African migrants experience more discrimination in Europe compared to migrants from other regions (Beauchemin, Hamel, & Simon, 2015).

Additionally, transnational ties to the home country may put significant pressure on migrants to deprive themselves in order to send remittance to children, wife, husband and other relatives (Afulani, Torres, Sudhinaraset, & Asunka, 2016; Pannetier et al., 2017). As a result, migrants work for longer hours in order to meet the financial demands of family members in the country of origin. Despite these negative post-migration experiences, the 2018 World Happiness Report suggests that sub-Saharan and North African migrants generally experience large happiness gains following their migration to Western Europe (Hendriks, 2018).
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