

NEW MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN SENEGAL

UNDERSTANDING THE REACTIVATION OF THE WESTERN AFRICAN ROUTES

This research project is part of the “Safety, Support and Solutions along the Central Mediterranean Route” programme funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) which objectives include improving the understanding of migration trends by governments, humanitarian agencies and national organizations in a bid to formulate appropriate responses for vulnerable communities. Under this programme, six countries in West and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal) conducted research projects in 2018 and 2019.



Photo IOM, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Since the 2000s, migration dynamics from Senegal to Europe took on new forms. In 2006, it was estimated that out of more than 31,000 irregular migrants arriving in Spain by sea, half were Senegalese nationals. More recently, between 2017 and 2018, Spain, accounting for 45 per cent of all arrivals by sea in the Mediterranean in 2018, became the main country of destination in terms of irregular arrivals ahead of Italy. Thus, departures observed from the Senegalese coast in the mid-2000s, a phenomenon identified as “rowed boat” (or gaaly looco in Wolof) and again between 2016 and 2018, is one of the most popular migration dynamics in the country.

This research aims to establish a comprehensive profile of the migrants who travelled by sea from Senegal to Spain between 2016 and 2018; analyse the underlying factors in migration at the potential migrant level; and, identify how networks and mechanisms of irregular migration developed along the Atlantic coast work.

REACTIVATION OF IRREGULAR MARITIME MIGRATION ROUTES

Local authorities (governors), law enforcement agencies (police and gendarmerie) as well as the local communities with whom exploratory interviews were conducted in Saint-Louis, Thiès and Ziguinchor in July 2018 confirmed that irregular migration by sea to Spain restarted since 2015.

In July 2018, the Mauritanian authorities returned more than 200 Senegalese migrants on a boat off the Mauritanian coast. Other boats arrested in the summer of 2018 left the Senegalese coast (Kayar, Mboro, Fass Boye, Lompoul, Fatick, and Ziguinchor) as well as the Gambian and Guinean coasts, with the aim of reaching the Canary Islands (Tenerife, Las Palmas, and Gomera).

“We spent five days between Rufisque and Spain. Boats are now safer, as they are equipped with more powerful engines and navigation tools. We just upload the route coordinates into a GPS device and the rest runs alone.”

Interview with a returned migrant.

This research is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies conducted through a four-stage collection process:

- An **exploratory study** carried out in July 2018, including **nine (9) focus groups** in the targeted areas of departure with key actors (local authorities and representatives of civil society)
- A **questionnaire conducted with 356 migrants** who had at least one migration experience on the seaway between 2016 and 2018
- A **questionnaire conducted with 345 households** in the target areas
- **Six (6) focus groups conducted** with women (3) and men (3) from the communities in each targeted departure area.

In 2015, **5,309** migrants arrived in Spain by sea.

The number of arrivals increased between 2016 and 2017 from **8,261** to **22,108**, while in 2018 Spanish authorities recorded **58,525** arrivals on their coasts via the western sea route.

The migration routes along the Senegalese coast are **numerous, complex and changing** but also very well defined as they can adapt to a specific security and economic context in a rapid manner.

The Senegalese coastline is thus at the centre of people’s migration strategies and contributes to restructuring the national territory and migration systems.

MIGRANT PROFILE: YOUNG MEN LEAVING FOR SPAIN

31% of migrants are between 18 and 26 years old at the time of this survey.

36% of them attended primary school and **25%** went to secondary school.

The migrant profile is viewed in a **twofold** aspect: on the one hand, potential migrants with no migration experience (55%) and, on the other hand, those who tried the western sea route several times (45%). The lack of economic opportunities is one of the underlying factors in migration at both individual and family level.

ECONOMIC CRISES IN COASTAL REGIONS OF SENEGAL

In the three areas, the underlying factors of migration are mainly the **economic situation**, more specifically **environmental degradation** (scarcity of fisheries and deforestation), deficiency of means of production, lack of storage, processing and transport facilities, as well as poor business in fishery and farming. The lack of economic opportunities is confirmed at both the individual and household levels. Beyond these factors, social pressure and the central role played by networks of friends and relatives conveying a positive image of migration push young people into irregular migration.

MIGRATION AS AN INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE SUPPORTED BY NETWORKS OF RELATIVES AND FAMILY

The decision to migrate is usually made individually, but it can also be largely influenced by family and networks of relatives. The existing networks of close relatives in the places of destination are also an essential source of information for potential migrants.

66%
OF MIGRANTS ARE
ALONE IN THEIR
MIGRATION
DECISION-MAKING
PROCESS

61%
OF THEM HAD
ALREADY A RELATIVE
WHO ATTEMPTED
INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION

PREPARATION OF THE JOURNEY AND MARITIME MIGRATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Migration by boat can either be organized by a travel facilitator or by the migrant group. The preparation process, which also involves the family and networks of relatives, includes several stages: the search for information and funding, contact with the travel facilitator, mystical preparation and contact with the person in charge of gathering the migrants at the assembly point. **Forty-two per cent (42%)** of the migrants were fully aware of the risks associated with crossing by boat.

The sea route seems to be accessible to all. It is considered as the quickest (**31%**) and the cheapest (**44%**), according to respondent migrants.

"The increased security does not prevent departures but just changes the embarkation points (Rufisque, Kayar). I left from Nouadhibou because the departures are supervised by the security forces who give us information on routes, conditions of the trip and especially increased patrols."

Interview with a returned migrant

THE AMBIVALENT IMPACTS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION TO SPAIN

85%

OF RETURNEES CONSIDER
THEIR MIGRATION JOURNEY AS
FAILURE

The qualitative data collected showed that irregular migration has not led to long-term improvements in the economic situation of individuals, families and communities. Continued departures from these regions have in fact contributed to the fragility of these areas' stability and resulted in a lack of a young and dynamic labour force which compromises the stabilization of key economic sectors. Despite the ambivalent impacts of irregular migration and traumas associated with the difficulties encountered during the journey, **48%** of returned migrants plan to leave Senegal again. The majority of them would prefer to use the regular channel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SUPPORT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

- Support a synergy between different actors working on migration issues to set up common reflection and institutional frameworks.
- Continue to promote research, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on irregular maritime migration.

2. WORK TOWARDS SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF RETURNED MIGRANTS

- Establish psychosocial support structures for returnees traumatized by the journey and their experience as "failed migrants".
- Improve understanding of irregular maritime migration and return migration among government agencies.
- Through the establishment of networks of returned migrants, improve knowledge on regular migration patterns.

3. INVEST IN KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS

- Call on the government, national partners and development organizations to provide long-term economic opportunities in the areas of departure.
- Support adaptation and innovation in agriculture and other economic sectors in line with the needs of young people to make coastal regions more attractive.
- Finance development projects in the field of agriculture and fisheries linked to the local context and facilitate access to land and means of production.