



**TRANSCULTURAL
CAMPAIGNING**



PLANNING TO EARN, LEARN AND RETURN

Mapping of the Francophone Sub-Saharan Diaspora in Germany and Austria

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Auswärtiges Amt



AUSTRIAN STUDY CENTRE FOR PEACE
AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION – ASPR



Bundesministerium
Landesverteidigung



TRANSCULTURAL CAMPAIGNING

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Layout&Design: BakOS DESIGN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been carried out without the financial support of both the German and the Austrian Government. My thanks go to Ms Ruth Müller from the Germany Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Günther Barnet from the Austrian Ministry of Defence for placing their trust in this project and providing the newly founded agency Transcultural Campaigning with its very first project.

Setting up contacts with the various French-speaking African communities in Austria and Germany would not have been possible without the advice and support of activists and researchers in both countries. I would like to express my gratitude to MP Karamba Diaby, as well as Joyce Maria Muvunyi, Mika Kaiyama, Amadou Touré, Vaya Tatah, Tahir Della, Markus Oesterlein and Ulrike Tontsch in Germany – and my ex-colleagues from UNHCR in Berlin and Nuremberg, particularly Anna Büllsbach, Henrike Janetzek-Rauh, Sebastian Anstett and Stefan Telöken. In Austria my thanks to go to Irene Hochauer Kpoda, Franz Schmidjell and Simon Inou.

The active participation and commitment of community mobilisers were instrumental in organising focus group discussions. We have to thank Pierre Maré in Vienna, Hervé Tcheumeleu in Berlin, Keita Balde in Munich and Passau, Joelle Vormann-Pfeifer in Bamberg, Robert Katianda in Nuremberg and Momo Sissoko in Cologne.

The individual interviews with experts Franck Kamate, Jaspers Ngansu, and Keli Kpedzroku greatly helped us interpret the results.

FOREWORD

Modern European governance favours a participatory approach to policy making that – in addition to determining the consequences of existing or proposed policies and documenting their impact – takes into consideration the views of those affected by certain policies and strives for consensus building before decisions are made. In the field of migration policy however, a narrow top-down approach is still the norm. The views and experiences of migrants and asylum-seekers are usually not taken into account when formulating migration management strategies.

The study at hand is an attempt to introduce a participatory element into migration policy concerning a defined group i.e. sub-Saharan Africans from francophone countries who came to Germany and Austria as asylum-seekers.

This paper not only provides a very detailed overview of the migration pattern of the target group, it records the decision-making process prior to departure and analyses the current situation of the target group and their future perspectives.

The research team was surprised at the analytical depth, sobriety and realism with which the respondents are looking at their situation in spite of the high emotional impact it has on their current and future lives. The documentation of their authentic views and assessments are at the core of this paper.

The research also lists policy suggestions that the diaspora members themselves are presenting to policy makers in Austria and Germany, all of them feasible and reasonable, notwithstanding their level of political desirability in a migration-averse climate. While it is quite common to consult all kinds of interest groups before making political decisions, it is completely unusual for migrants to be asked to make their own suggestions on how to manage migration. In this respect, this project is unique as it taps into the experience and knowledge of the affected migrant community.

The idea for this study emerged in discussions between the author and Ms. Ruth Müller from the Steering Group Strategic Communication in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin about the role that different diaspora groups were playing or could play in migration management. The German government financially supported the research in Germany while the Austrian part was subsidised by the Cooperation Programme between the Austrian Study Centre on Peace and Conflict Resolution with the Austrian Ministry of Defence.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present Study on francophone African asylum-seekers in Austria and Germany is based on statements from 159 affected persons (including 35 women) in seven cities.

The following topics were explored:

- Motive for migration
- Knowledge before departure
- Itinerary and choice of destination country
- Europe: Image vs reality
- Integration issues
- Sustainable return programs
- Role of the diaspora in migration mitigation

The study uses a combination of methods: Empirical material was collected in focus group discussions in Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Passau, Nuremberg, Bamberg and Cologne and validated in an expert panel of recognized refugees, well-integrated in Germany. The results were supplemented by one-on-one interviews with three French-speaking experts without a history of asylum, as well as a briefing with UNHCR.

MAIN RESULTS IN BRIEF

- Most asylum-seekers from French-speaking countries of sub-Saharan Africa never planned to apply for asylum. Their goal was to earn money, gain professional experience, and then return and make a living in their home country. Lacking other options for legal migration, they were pushed onto the asylum track – often by the authorities themselves – given that openings for regular labour migration of Africans are scarce.
- A minority had grounds for flight covered by the Geneva Refugee Convention, in particular Malians and female respondents from all countries of origin.
- The typical asylum-seeker in this target group is a 25 to 30 year old male, with a high school diploma or skilled worker training. He has tried to build a livelihood, first at home and then in neighboring countries. Only when that did not work out did he decide to travel onwards to Europe. In some cases, fleeing to Europe was the only way out of Libya where the situation for blacks is extremely dangerous.
- Almost all respondents said that they did not have a specific destination in mind, but only wanted to “get to Europe”. Onward movement within the EU



happens coincidentally, sometimes based on random suggestions from compatriots. Very few respondents reported that they came to Austria or Germany by design because they learned German at school or because they have relatives in one of these countries. Some deliberately choose countries other than France or Belgium because they are opposed to the former colonial powers' policies in Africa.

- The group of French-speaking Africans craves education to a degree that the authors of the study have never encountered in other migrant groups. They want to learn German as soon as possible and develop professionally and complain that they only have access to very few basic courses.
- Most francophone asylum-seeking Africans find it hard to bear their forced inactivity and uncertainty about their future. They want to fend for themselves rather than being looked after. Their living conditions cause them stress and psychosomatic problems.
- If their younger siblings wanted to follow them to Europe, most focus group participants would strongly advise them against coming.

- Returning home “empty-handed” is shameful and carries the stigma of failure, given that migrants originally set out make a living for themselves and support their families. Relatives in the country of origin are unaware of legal residency requirements or asylum procedures and cannot understand the difficulties African migrants are facing in Europe.
- When asked about sustainable return programs, virtually all respondents reject cash grants. If they arrived home with money, that would either be seized by the authorities or claimed by the family. Respondents would prefer vocational training and mentoring in setting up their own business in Africa as well as protection against arbitrary taxation and bureaucratic obstruction. Efficient financial support should take the form of microcredits or small grants released in installments.

Focus group participants themselves made a number of suggestions regarding migration management, integration and return policy which are listed in the study. Those include:

- Introduction of time-limited work and study programmes for young Africans in Europe
- Job creation in Africa (eg. promotion of processing and manufacturing industries)
- Moving away from development cooperation toward investments in the economy
- Establishment of a roster of policy advisers from the African diaspora
- Seeking the advice of diaspora experts to optimise the efficiency of cooperation projects
- Creating safeguards against nepotism and corruption in bilateral projects

The purpose of the study was to introduce a participatory element into migration policy as is the standard in modern democracies for most political issues. The project team believes that it is essential to consider the views and knowledge of those affected by migration policy in order to define sustainable solutions acceptable to all parties.

The study was conducted between September and November 2018 by the Agency Transcultural Campaigning, specialised in migration research and communication. The work was largely funded by the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin and benefited from a grant by the Austrian Ministry of Defense in coordination with the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende Studie zu frankophonen Afrikanern mit Fluchterfahrung in Österreich und Deutschland basiert auf Aussagen von 159 Betroffenen (davon 35 Frauen) in sieben Städten.

Abgefragt wurden folgende Themenkreise:

- Motivation zur Migration
- Wissensstand vor der Abreise
- Reiseverlauf und Wahl des Ziellandes
- Vorstellung von sowie Realität in Europa
- Integrationswünsche
- Nachhaltige Rückkehrprogramme
- Rolle der Diapora in der Migrationsprävention

Die Studie verwendet einen Methodenmix: Empirisches Material wurde in Fokusgruppendifkussionen in Wien, Berlin, München, Passau, Nürnberg, Bamberg und Köln gesammelt und in einer Expertenrunde mit längst anerkannten und in Deutschland integrierten Flüchtlingen validiert. Ergänzt wurden die Resultate durch Einzelinterviews mit drei französischsprachigen Experten ohne Fluchterfahrung sowie durch ein Briefing mit dem UN Flüchtlingshochkommissariat (UNHCR) in Nürnberg.

DIE WICHTIGSTEN ERGEBNISSE IN KÜRZE

- Ein Großteil der Asylwerber aus den französischsprachigen Ländern Subsahara-Afrikas wollte niemals Asyl beantragen, sondern im Ausland Geld verdienen, berufliche Erfahrungen sammeln und dann eine Existenz im Heimatland aufbauen. Mangels anderer Möglichkeiten der legalen Migration wurden sie – oft von den Behörden – in die Asylschiene gedrängt, weil es kaum Möglichkeiten der reguläre Wirtschaftsmigration gibt.
- Eine Minderheit hat Fluchtgründe im Sinne der Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention, darunter auffallend viele Malier sowie weibliche Respondenten aus allen Herkunftsländern.
- Der typische Asylwerber aus der untersuchten Gruppe ist ein Mann, zwischen 25 und 30 Jahre alt, mit Matura oder Facharbeiterausbildung. Er hat zunächst versucht im Heimatland, dann im benachbarten Ausland eine Existenz aufzubauen. Erst wenn das nicht gelang, ging er nach Europa. Manche mussten aus Libyen flüchten, weil dort die Lage für Schwarze äußerst gefährlich ist, und es von dort leichter ist, nach Europa zu gelangen, als die Wüste in südlicher Richtung zu durchqueren.

- Fast alle Befragten gaben an, dass sie kein spezifisches Zielland anpeilten, sondern nur „nach Europa“ wollten. Die Weiterreise innerhalb der EU ergibt sich meist aus einer Kette von Zufällen und basiert oft auf Ratschlägen von Landsleuten. Nur ganz wenige Respondenten berichteten, sie seien gezielt nach Österreich bzw. Deutschland gekommen, weil sie in der Schule Deutschunterricht hatten oder weil sie Verwandte in einem dieser Länder haben. Einige vermieden es bewusst, nach Frankreich oder Belgien zu gehen, weil sie die Politik der ehemaligen Kolonialmächte gegenüber ihren Heimatländern ablehnen.
- Die Gruppe der französischsprachigen Afrikaner ist beseelt von einem Bildungshunger wie ihn die Studienautorinnen nie bei anderen Migrantengruppen kennengelernt haben. Sie wollen rasch Deutsch lernen, um sich beruflich weiterzubilden und beklagen, dass ihnen zu wenige Bildungsangebote offenstehen.
- Die meisten frankophonen Asylwerber/innen leiden unter ihrer erzwungenen Untätigkeit und der Ungewissheit über ihre Zukunft. Sie wollen nicht versorgt werden, sondern ökonomisch auf eigenen Füßen stehen. Diese Lebensumstände rufen Stress und psychosomatische Probleme hervor.
- Jüngeren Geschwistern würden die meisten Fokusgruppenteilnehmer leidenschaftlich davon abraten, ihnen zu folgen.
- Die Rückkehr „mit leeren Händen“ führt zu einer sozialen Stigmatisierung als Versager, da die Migranten aufgebrochen sind, um für sich und ihre Familie zu sorgen. Die Verwandten im Herkunftsland wissen nichts von Aufenthaltstiteln und Asylverfahren und können ihre Schwierigkeiten in Europa nicht nachvollziehen.
- Befragt zu nachhaltigen Rückkehrprogrammen lehnen so gut wie alle Befragten Rückkehrprämien in bar ab, da das Geld bei der Ankunft von den Behörden konfisziert oder von der Familie beansprucht würde. Sie wünschen sich vielmehr eine Berufsausbildung und Mentoring beim Aufbau eines eigenen Business in Afrika und Schutz vor willkürlichen staatlichen Auflagen. Als finanzielle Unterstützung schlagen sie Kleinzuschüsse oder Mikrokredite vor.

Ergänzt wird die Studie durch eine Liste von Anregungen zur Migrationsprävention sowie Integrations- und Rückführungspolitik aus den Reihen der Betroffenen selbst. Darin werden unter anderem genannt:

- Reguläre Arbeits- und Studienaufenthalte für junge Afrikaner in Europa
- Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen in Afrika (z.B. Förderung der verarbeitenden Industrie),
- Wirtschaftsförderung statt Entwicklungszusammenarbeit
- Schaffung einer Beraterliste aus Mitgliedern der afrikanischen Diaspora
- Einbindung der Diaspora-Experten in alle Kooperationsprojekte, um sie effizienter zu gestalten
- Vorkehrungen gegen Vetternwirtschaft und Korruption bei bilateralen Projekten

Zweck der Studie war es, den in modernen Demokratien üblichen Dialog mit Betroffenen auch in die Migrationspolitik einzuführen. Nur in einem partizipatorischen Verfahren können nach Ansicht des Projektteams nachhaltige Lösungen gefunden werden, die für alle Seiten akzeptabel sind.

Die Untersuchung wurde von der Agentur für Migrationskommunikation und -forschung Transcultural Campaigning im Herbst 2018 durchgeführt. Die Arbeit wurde maßgeblich vom Auswärtigen Amt Berlin gefördert und erhielt eine Zuwendung vom österreichischen Verteidigungsministerium in Koordination mit dem Österreichischen Studienzentrum für Frieden und Konfliktlösung in Stadtschlaining.

RESUMÉ ANALITIQUE

Le champ de cette étude porte sur la situation des Africains francophones ayant une expérience de migration vers l'Autriche et l'Allemagne. Elle est basée sur les déclarations de 159 personnes concernées (dont 35 femmes) dans sept villes.

Les thèmes suivants sont abordés :

- Motifs de migration
- Connaissances avant le départ
- Itinéraire et choix du pays de destination
- Europe : attentes et réalité
- Souhaits et contraintes liés à l'intégration
- Programmes de retour durable
- Le rôle de la diaspora dans la réduction de la migration irrégulière

L'étude utilise une combinaison de méthodes : des données empiriques recueillies lors de discussions de groupe à Vienne, Berlin, Munich, Passau, Nuremberg, Bamberg et Cologne et validées par un groupe d'experts réunissant des réfugiés reconnus et intégrés en Allemagne. Les résultats ont été complétés par des entretiens individuels avec trois experts francophones sans expérience de fuite, ainsi que par une réunion d'information avec le HCR.

LES PRINCIPAUX RÉSULTATS

- La plupart des demandeurs d'asile originaires de pays francophones d'Afrique subsaharienne n'ont jamais envisagé de demander l'asile. Leur objectif était de gagner de l'argent à l'étranger, d'acquérir une expérience professionnelle, puis de rentrer et arriver à avoir une existence décente dans leur pays d'origine. En l'absence d'autres alternatives de migration légale, ils ont été poussés sur la voie de l'asile - souvent par les autorités - car il y a peu de possibilités de migration économique régulière pour des Africains
- Une minorité a des raisons de fuir au sens de la Convention de Genève relative au statut des réfugiés, en particulier les Maliens et des femmes de tous pays d'origine.
- Le demandeur d'asile type du groupe cible est un homme âgé de 25 à 30 ans, diplômé du secondaire ou ayant une formation d'ouvrier qualifié. Il a d'abord tenté d'acquérir ses moyens de subsistance dans son pays d'origine, puis dans un pays voisin. C'est quand cela ne marchera pas qu'il décidera de voyager vers l'Europe. Ceci a été aussi le seul moyen de fuir la Libye

où la situation est extrêmement dangereuse pour les personnes d'origine africaine.

- Presque tous les répondants ont déclaré ne pas avoir de destination particulière, mais simplement vouloir atteindre l'Europe. Le voyage à l'intérieur de l'UE résulte généralement de coïncidences et de conseils de compatriotes. Très peu de répondants ont déclaré être venus en Autriche ou en Allemagne parce qu'ils avaient appris l'allemand à l'école ou parce qu'ils avaient des parents dans l'un de ces pays. Certains ont volontairement évité d'aller en France ou en Belgique parce qu'ils ne sont pas d'accord avec la politique de l'ancien pouvoir colonial.
- Le groupe d'Africains francophones est poussé par une soif d'éducation que les auteurs de l'étude n'ont jamais rencontrée dans d'autres groupes de migrants. Ils veulent apprendre l'allemand rapidement, pouvoir avancer professionnellement et ils se plaignent qu'ils n'ont accès qu'à des formations très basiques.
- La plupart des demandeurs d'asile francophones souffrent de l'inactivité forcée et de l'incertitude quant à leur avenir. Ils ne veulent pas être pris en charge, ils veulent être autonomes. Leurs conditions de vie les stressent et leur cause des problèmes psychosomatiques.
- La plupart des personnes interrogées conseilleraient fortement à leurs jeunes frères et sœurs de ne pas suivre leur démarche.
- Un retour « les mains vides » est vu comme honteux et conduit à la stigmatisation sociale de l'échec, car les migrants ont entrepris de subvenir à leurs besoins et de soutenir leurs familles. La famille restée dans le pays d'origine n'a pas connaissance des conditions d'obtention de permis de séjour et des procédures d'asile, et ne peuvent pas concevoir les difficultés que les migrants africains rencontrent en Europe.
- Interrogé sur les programmes de retour durable, la quasi-totalité des répondants ne souhaite pas de subvention en espèces, l'argent étant confisqué à l'arrivée par les autorités ou encore réclamé par la famille. Ils souhaiteraient plutôt bénéficier d'une formation professionnelle et d'un encadrement pour pouvoir créer leur propre entreprise en Afrique, ainsi que d'une protection contre des taxations arbitraires et des harcèlements bureaucratiques. À titre de soutien financier, ils suggèrent des petites subventions ou des micro crédits distribués en tranches.

L'étude est complétée par une liste de suggestions faites par les participants aux groupes de réflexion pour la prévention de la migration et la politique d'intégration et de rapatriement. Parmi celles-ci on trouve:

- Établissement de courts séjours de travail et programmes d'études en Europe pour les jeunes africains,
- Création d'emplois en Afrique (par exemple promotion des industries de transformation et de fabrication),
- Promotion des investissements plutôt que coopération au développement
- Création d'une liste de conseillers choisis dans la diaspora africaine
- Inclusion d'experts de la diaspora dans les projets de coopération afin de les rendre plus efficaces
- création de barrières contre le népotisme et la corruption dans les projets bilatéraux

Le but de cette étude était aussi d'introduire un dialogue entre les décideurs politiques et les personnes touchées par la politique migratoire, ce qui est habituel dans les démocraties modernes quand on traite de questions politiques. L'équipe du projet estime que ce n'est que dans un processus participatif prenant en compte les expériences et les opinions des personnes affectées par les politiques migratoires que des solutions durables acceptables pour toutes les parties peuvent être trouvées.

L'enquête a été menée par l'Agence Transcultural Campaigning, spécialisée dans la communication et la recherche sur la migration en automne 2018. Le travail a été en grande partie financé par le Ministère fédéral des affaires étrangères à Berlin et a reçu une subvention du Ministère autrichien de la défense en coordination avec le Centre autrichien d'études pour la paix et la résolution des conflits à Stadtschlaining.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE TYPICAL CASE

The typical asylum-seeker from a francophone African Sub-Saharan country in Germany and Austria is male, between 25 and 30 years of age. He has formal education up to secondary level, often finalised but sometimes interrupted due to financial constraints. Education is expensive and the most common reason for discontinuation is the death of the father and main breadwinner in the family.

Typically, the young men would first try to make a living in their own country of origin, but jobs with decent salaries are rare. They can usually be found in civil service, but it requires connections to the establishment to get such jobs. In the private sector, jobs are precarious, i.e. insecure and badly paid. Some try starting their own business but give up when they experience unreasonable taxation and bureaucratic demands.

It is the lack of perspectives that makes them quit and try their luck in another African country. If this does not work out or if they meet people who convince them that Europe is a better solution, they move on, often attempting and failing to obtain visas and travel in a regular manner, before they resort to counterfeit visas or the services of a smuggler.

Within Europe, African migrants first try staying in the country of arrival. Only if they find themselves without support and in untenable situations, do they consider other destinations recommended by fellow-Africans. Germany sometimes is such a recommended destination. Austria is rarely the chosen destination, but they become trapped when their fingerprints are taken, and the Dublin Regulation does not allow them to travel onwards.

With very few exceptions, these young people never knew about asylum nor were they looking for refugee status, but once in Europe they discover that residency laws are much stricter than in their region of origin. Their only chance of avoiding illegal stay is an asylum claim even though they would prefer other channels that would allow them to learn – earn and return. It is the ultimate goal of the majority of migrants to return to the country of origin after a few years, with some savings and new skills enabling them to support themselves and their families.

The majority regrets coming to Europe. In most cases, they would advise their younger siblings not to follow them but to try harder to make a living in Africa.

Two factors cause francophone African asylum-seekers unprecedented stress and frustration: uncertainty about their future and the unproductive lives they live, not being able to fend for themselves or send money to their families. Nonetheless, they dread being sent back empty-handed. Their family and friends would consider this their personal failure and they would end up ostracised and sometimes with massive debts to repay.

The migration patterns of female migrants from francophone African countries differ more widely than those of men. The typical case would also be a woman in her twenties. Her reasons for leaving are of a more personal nature, often harassment by family members or in the work place. Her travel to Europe is often facilitated by a male relative or friend and she may have a small child conceived during her journey or in the country of asylum. She is looking for safety rather than economic betterment.



PUSH-FACTORS AND PULL-FACTORS

In order to prevent migration to their territory, many EU Member States resort to deterring measures such as lowering social assistance to asylum-seekers, limiting their freedom of movement and introducing more restrictive asylum legislation. All of this is addressing pull-factors of migration, the underlying assumption being that potential migrants carefully choose their destination countries according to their “attractivity”. In fact, only very few migrants aim for a specific destination country due to language competencies or family ties there.

The main motivators for migration derive from the situation in the country of origin. It is primarily push factors that influence the decision to leave. Economic reasons (lack of perspective, unemployment) are sometimes reinforced by socio-political factors (lack of security, armed conflicts of varying intensity, various types of personal harassment).

When trying to prevent additional irregular migration from Africa to Europe, European governments should put the emphasis on alleviating push-factors. Concentration on reducing pull-factors alone is inefficient and, in many cases, not compatible with international legal standards and humanitarian traditions of EU Member States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ASYLUM IS THE WRONG CHANNEL

Young francophone Africans come to Europe on the assumption that the one great obstacle is entry to European territory. They are unaware of legal constraints regarding residency and access to gainful employment within the European Union. Possibilities of study visits and temporary work programmes are rare for Africans and the majority are forced to claim asylum without really qualifying for international refugee protection. As can be expected, their chances of getting refugee status are small.

This leads to a lose-lose situation for all parties. The asylum-seekers are caught up in a lengthy and frustrating procedure that will more often than not lead to rejection. An expensive state machinery is kept busy for several years processing a claim that should never have been filed in the first place.

PROPOSED MEASURES

- Reception countries should therefore open up **regular migration programmes** offering temporary jobs and study for Africans with several beneficial effects: Decongesting overwhelmed asylum systems, undermining the business model of smugglers, cutting back deaths at sea, addressing the need for temporary workforce in several sectors of the European economy and diminishing wage dumping and exploitation.
- A minority of cases deserve to be examined in an asylum procedure, as elements of persecution or war and violence were crucial in the decision to leave. In those instances, the **duration of asylum procedures should be reduced** so that the persons concerned are not forced to spend years in a state of uncertainty and economic dependence. If the nature of the asylum claim does not lend itself to a swift decision, asylum-seekers should at least be allowed to generate some minimum income. This would not only be advantageous for the self-esteem and dignity of the persons concerned but would also relieve the financial burden on the receiving country.

ASSUAGE HUNGER FOR EDUCATION

If the researchers were to point out one feature that collectively characterises francophone Africans from Sub-Saharan countries in Germany and Austria, and that distinguishes them from other groups of African migrants interviewed in previous projects, it is an incredible eagerness and seriousness about learning and self-development. Undoubtedly, there are ambitious individuals in any given group of people. Many migrants are interested in acquiring new skills. However, in all discussions the authors had with hundreds of Somalis, Nigerians or Eritreans, they never detected this hunger for learning as a common group trait across practically all respondents.

The conviction that European training and education is by far better and more desirable than what they can access in their countries of origin and that European diplomas would open up new possibilities at home runs deep among this group. But their hopes remain unfulfilled. As asylum-seekers with a small probability of recognition, they have no or very restricted access to language courses or professional training.

PROPOSED MEASURES

- Training programmes that furnish young Africans with marketable vocational skills or perfect what they have learned already would serve multiple purposes.
- **Training programmes run in African countries by European companies** would help create a young dynamic workforce at salaries much below the level of other regions in the world and reinforce economic ties between Africa and Europe. It would reduce poverty migration, boost the economic development of African countries and stabilise them.
- **Time-limited company traineeships in Europe** would reinforce economic ties, help create a well-trained staff for European investment projects in Africa and provide a smooth and simple way of technology transfer benefiting the African economic landscape.
- **Short-term traineeships for asylum-seekers and rejected asylum seekers** prior to return would allow them to come home with a few savings and some new skills. This would not only mitigate the stigmatisation returnees are facing but would make return more sustainable and reduce re-migration. However, such programmes have to be crafted in a way that they do not develop into a pull-factor for new cohorts of migrants.



PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

While push-factors are the most crucial motivators for migration, there is a whole range of dreams and myths about Europe that reinforce the desire to come here. The image of Europe is heavily influenced by the media where young people look at modern cities and beautiful cars. Another factor of influence are those Africans who made it in Europe and ostentatiously display their wealth when coming to visit.

Those migrants who are disappointed with Europe and try to convey more cautionary messages are often met with scepticism and disbelief. Because these messages directly contradict cherished perceptions about Europe associated with the possibility of a brighter future, their counterparts at home insinuate that those people just refuse to share the good life they have in Europe with newcomers, a phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance.¹

PROPOSED MEASURES:

Campaigns aiming to induce attitude change under such circumstances require a strategic approach that is determined by three essential components:

- **Credibility of the information sources:** Especially in societies with a strong oral tradition – as most African ones – institutional information (e.g. messages by European governments or the European Union) does not carry persuasive power. Hence classic posters or TV spots will not have the desired impact. The source of information must be people from within the community who are considered knowledgeable about migration. The diaspora and returnees can play a crucial role, as can local influencers such as teachers, religious leaders or popular figures from spheres of sports, film or music.
- **Suitable information channels:** Sensitisation campaigns need to re-enact traditional communication patterns. In oral societies, it is prudent to apply various forms of face-to-face communication and interactive exchanges on social media as well

¹ The concept of cognitive dissonance introduced in 1957 by the American social psychologist Leon Festinger explains what happens when a person is confronted with information that contradicts perceptions or beliefs they have about an issue. Incompatible pieces of information cause discomfort and the person in question diffuses it by dismissing the unwelcome information and/or its source as untrustworthy. Hence, cognitive dissonance could be described as a barrier, immunising the recipient against the impact of conflicting views.



as moving images (TV, cinema, and public screenings) combined with community discussions. Printed materials such as billboards, flyers etc. should only be used as complementary media. In francophone countries, however, there is a valued tradition of comic books (*bande dessinée*) which combines written and visual information and may serve as an impactful tool for conveying information on migration to and life in Europe.²

- **Comprehensive campaigning:** The dream of Europe is powerful and emotionally charged among youth in Africa. Trying to change the attitude of an entire generation therefore requires a comprehensive communication strategy that (1) uses multiple channels and (2) is sustained over an extended period of time. The central lever for inducing societal attitude change is the triggering of a lively and emotional discourse within the community that can shake up established beliefs.

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

Africans from francophone countries who have lived in Germany or Austria for some time have acquired a dual understanding of the European and African side of migration. They have experienced social, economic and communication processes in both continents and are willing to get involved actively. Policy makers in Europe do not sufficiently make use of this expertise when designing policies and projects pertaining to European-African relations and migratory movements.

PROPOSED MEASURES:

- **Integrated diaspora:** It would be advisable to engage in new, innovative ways of cooperation, which would include the institution of a roster of African-European experts to advise decision makers in the planning, and implementation of projects aimed at reducing irregular migration and introducing new forms of cooperation.
- **Returnees:** Rejected asylum-seekers who have to return to their country of origin are the most credible and persuasive messengers when it comes to warning the youth of the dangers of irregular migration. If furnished with some basic communication and project management training, returnees could engage in sensitisation and information campaigns in the countries of origin and inform youth about regular and irregular migration. There are already a few small-scale initiatives to that effect and this concept deserves to be further expanded.³
- **Grass roots cooperation:** Formal European-African cooperation at government level is well established and has its merits. However, additional twinning projects and cooperation at grass roots level, i.e. between European and African small towns and villages would be much closer to delivery point and as such more efficient. Such small programmes would not require state funding but could rely on private initiatives. Moreover, they would help counter prejudice and false information on both sides and debunk mutual stereotypes and myths.

² Pie Tchibanda, Tchibemba, 'Les clandestins à la mer – les tribulations de Yado', UNHCR 2010; Available at <http://bit.ly/2S81GGY> (accessed 21 January 2019)

³ UN News, 'Nigeria: Awareness-Raising radio show on perils and opportunities of migration launched by UN agency', 30 October 2018. Available at <http://bit.ly/2DBN0XO> (accessed 21 January 2019); and Louise Hunt, 16 August 2018, 'Returning from Libyan detention, young Gambians try to change the migration exodus mindset', IRIN. Available at <http://bit.ly/2DLBBZ8> (accessed 21 January 2019)

TARGET GROUP AND RESEARCH METHOD

WHY FRANCOPHONE AFRICANS?

Not much is known about the migration of French speaking Africans to non-francophone countries.

Many other groups like Afghans, Syrians, but also Somalis, Eritreans and Nigerians have been studied more extensively than francophone Africans in non-francophone countries.

From a research point of view, this particular group had the potential to provide us with more knowledge regarding:

- **Triggers of mixed migration flows:** Recognition rates among francophone Africans are very low, most of them are not considered refugees and have little chance of obtaining legal residence, so the research can shed light on the mechanisms triggering mixed migration.
- **Choice of destination countries:** For French speakers, countries like France, Belgium or even Luxembourg seem a more logical environment than countries where German is spoken. Is the country of asylum a matter of choice or coincidence?
- **Sustainable return programmes:** With a high probability of being returned to their country of origin, what kind of repatriation assistance would best suit the needs of affected persons and make their return socially acceptable and sustainable?

DO FRANCOPHONE AFRICANS CONSTITUTE A GROUP?

The francophone Sub-Saharan asylum-seekers participating in this study came from 14 different countries, mostly in West and Central Africa. When disaggregated by nationality, they constitute comparatively small sub-groups, so it is legitimate to ask whether they can be researched together as an entity.

During the research, it turned out that indisputably national and ethnic affiliations are strong, and most diaspora organisations are formed along those categories. However, the francophone background also constitutes a strong linguistic, historic and cultural link. It is reinforced by the usage of the Franc CFA in West and Central Africa as common currency that shapes economic and political relations with France. Another commonality for some of them is the experience of living in the ECOWAS area, a region that allows easy travel and exchanges. In effect, francophone Africans in Germany and Austria socialise, get along well with each other and have no inhibitions about speaking out in mixed groups. Moreover, their narratives about migration and asylum overlap to a considerable extent.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS PLUS EXPERT VALIDATION

This study combined two methods – focus group discussions and expert validation – in order to balance out weaknesses of each individual method and make sure results are intersubjective and their interpretation is underpinned by evidence.⁴

Focus group discussions are a method used in qualitative research to explore views and opinions of persons with similar backgrounds. While interviews and questionnaires allow for the examination of pre-defined topics, focus group discussions approximate free-flowing discussions.⁵

When exploring the opinions of persons in precarious situations, focus group discussions exclude one crucial bias that may occur with other methods such as questionnaires or structured individual interviews: Respondents speak spontaneously and do not second-guess what the interviewers want to hear, nor try to please them by giving the answers they think are expected.

Properly executed, the focus group method provides in-depth analytical data. The free interaction of the group may lead to unexpected results, because relevant facts can also be come up even though that were not originally asked for. In this way, as Friedrichs puts it, “non-public opinion can be raised”.

Facilitators bring up themes in a very broad manner and encourage the group to debate in a natural flow, allowing free association of thoughts. Interventions by the discussion facilitators are restricted to a minimum. Only when necessary, they establish the order of speakers or steer the group back to the topic if they digress too much. However, they abstain from asking direct questions or commenting on what is being said. Thus, the group discusses issues important to their members rather than those pre-determined by a researcher. As participants agree or disagree with each other the researcher is able to assess sentiments prevailing in each group.

Results gained from focus group discussions (FGD) are considered generally valid when theoretical saturation is reached. In social research, this is the point in time when

patterns emerge. New focus groups no longer deliver new results, but only confirm previous findings. In this study, saturation point was reached in the 4th round of discussions, which was held in Bamberg.

The facilitators took notes and recorded the discussions (unless participants disapprove). The meandering course of the original debates needed to be systematised in two steps.⁶ First, the minutes were entered in a thematically structured database which mirrored the research topics: reasons for flight / migration, statements relevant to life in Europe, deliberations about return to the country of origin. This content was then analysed in detail. Statements and views were weighed in respect of the frequency and intensity of their occurrence. At this stage, general hypotheses were formulated, and patterns are described.

In a second phase, the research team presented the preliminary findings to experts for validation. This is a method for testing hypotheses and checking the permissibility of generalizations and deductions. They consulted persons knowledgeable of but not affected by the issues at hand. That was done through discussions with resource persons in a group set-up and in three individual interviews. The resource persons originated from francophone African countries, were connected in the community in Germany but were not implicated in an asylum procedure. Most of them were recognized as refugees many years ago and are well-integrated in Germany.

Of the three individually interviewed experts, two had recently arrived from West Africa as university students, one was a well-integrated community activist. Hence, they have the knowledge but also enough distance to the issues of asylum and migration to provide expert opinions and validate hypotheses formulated by the research team.

In addition, the researchers conducted a fact check with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Nuremberg.

⁴ Intersubjektivität und argumentative Interpretationsabsicherung; See: Hussy, Schreier, Echterhoff, 'Forschungsmethoden in Psychologie und Sozialwissenschaften', Berlin-Heidelberg, 2013, P. 277.

⁵ Friedrichs, 'Methoden der Empirischen Sozialforschung' Reinbek, 1973, p. 246 et seqq, 247.

⁶ Ayaß / Bergmann 'Qualitative Methoden der Medienforschung', Reinbek 2006, p. 124 et seqq.).

SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS AND COMPOSITION OF GROUPS

Participants were mobilized by snowball sampling, a random chain referral system whereby members of the target community recruit other members and so on. This method is used in social research for exploring groups that are dispersed, socially marginalized or suspicious of official questioning. It was therefore crucial for the research team to identify community mobilisers in each location who are well connected and trusted, so they could reassure potential participants about the usefulness of discussions where they could express their opinions and speak about their problems in full confidentiality. Participants were paid EUR 20 each for their time and expenses.

During discussion rounds, initial weariness invariably dissolved, and discussions were open and lively. In several cases, participants thanked the researchers for listening to and recording their views.

Meetings took place in seven cities: Vienna, Berlin, Passau, Munich, Bamberg, Nuremberg and Cologne. The research team conducted 13 focus group discussions, one round of expert validation in a group discussion as well as three one-on-one interviews with resource persons of Franco-African origin as well as one expert briefing with the UNHCR team in Nuremberg.

In this study, all meetings were conducted in French by two facilitators, Melita H. Sunjic and Shannon Kahnert. The discussions were recorded after permission was given by all participants. Only one group, female only, did not agree to be recorded.

The 159 participants originated from 13 countries. 22% of the respondents were female. Participants of the focus group discussions had the right to remain anonymous to the researchers but were required to specify their countries of origin. Attendance lists were kept for the record but signed with names of the participants' choice.

The age range of respondents had to be estimated by the researchers. In focus group discussions, the vast majority of participants were aged between 25 and 35. A small number of interviewees was younger than that and only some four persons were older than mid-thirties. There were no minors among the respondents. Some women brought along infants, but these were not counted.

The average age of the resource persons was considerably higher (40-60 years).

| Date | Location | Male | Female | Total |
|--------------|---------------------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| 29 SEP 2018 | FGD Vienna 1 | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| 29 SEP 2018 | FGD Vienna 2 | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| 26 OCT 2018 | FGD Berlin 1 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| 26 OCT 2018 | FGD Berlin 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 26 OCT 2018 | FGD Berlin 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 27 OCT 2018 | FGD Berlin 4 | 13 | 2 | 15 |
| 27 OCT 2018 | FGD Berlin 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 02 NOV 2018 | FGD Passau 1 | 9 | 0 | 9 |
| 03 NOV 2018 | FGD Munich 1 | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| 03 NOV 2018 | FGD Munich 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 15 NOV 2018 | FGD Bamberg 1 | 16 | 7 | 23 |
| 16 NOV 2018 | Briefing by UNHCR in Nuremberg, | | | |
| 17 NOV 2018 | FGD Bamberg 2 | 17 | 1 | 18 |
| 18 NOV 2018 | Nuremberg (Expert Validation) | 16 | 10 | 26 |
| 18 NOV 2018 | Individual expert interviews | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 24 NOV 2018 | FGD Cologne | 16 | 1 | 17 |
| Total | | 124 | 35 | 159* |

*Children not counted

| Country or origin | Respondents |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Senegal | 58 |
| Cameroon | 35 |
| Mali | 22 |
| DR Congo | 17 |
| Benin | 6 |
| Ivory Coast | 6 |
| Togo | 5 |
| Burundi | 4 |
| Burkina Faso | 2 |
| Central African Republic | 1 |
| Gabon | 1 |
| Gambia | 1 |
| Rwanda | 1 |
| Total | 159 |

Some groups were diverse with regard to countries of origin, some rather homogeneous, depending on who organized the focus groups.

With the exception of two very young participants (from Mali), all respondents had impressive formal school education as evidenced by the fluency and sophistication of their French. Most respondents had vocational training at high school level and above. While they were not explicitly asked about their educational background, they themselves readily brought up their professions and fields of expertise when talking about their past in Africa or about plans for their future.

STRUCTURE OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Each round of focus group discussions took between 90 minutes and 2 hours and centred on three thematic areas. Participants were asked to discuss them in chronological order. They were encouraged to talk freely after each topic was introduced. Facilitators only intervened if the participants digressed too much. If questions were asked, they were open-ended or asked for clarification purposes.

FIRST THEMATIC FIELD

LOOKING BACK TO AFRICA

Introduction: Think back to your time in Africa; tell us when and why you decided to leave. Explain what you knew about Europe and what you expected for yourselves. Tell us about the image you had of life in Europe.

This part of the discussion served to explore the motivation for migration and pre-departure level of information as well as the migration trajectory:

- What does the target group know about life in Europe, particularly asylum procedures, residence permits, access to legal employment, everyday life;
- Who influences the decision to leave – the migrants themselves, their family, peers, smugglers, the diaspora;
- Which information sources shape the image young Africans have of Europe;
- What triggers the actual departure;
- How are routes selected;
- How much is planned in advance how much just happens;
- How did they end up in Germany/Austria, by design or at random?

SECOND THEMATIC FIELD

CURRENT LIFE IN GERMANY/AUSTRIA

Introduction: Tell us about your current life and your legal status. How do your lives compare to the expectations you had back home? What advice would you give your younger siblings if they want to follow you?

In the second section, researchers were interested to learn about the reality of life in Europe for the target audience as well as the feedback they were giving to their friends and neighbours back home.

- How does the situation Franco-Africans find themselves in upon arrival in Europe compare to their expectations and dreams before departure;
- How well do they understand the legal procedures pertaining to asylum, legal residency and access to labour market;
- What does the diaspora report home, do they sugar-coat the situation and why;
- Was the journey worth the risk (advice to younger siblings)?

THIRD THEMATIC FIELD

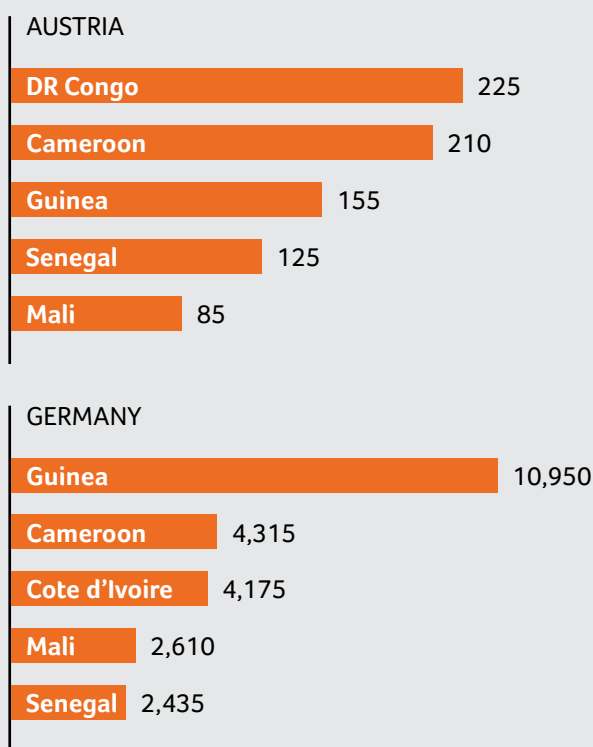
PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction: What would you like to achieve in the next couple of years now if you can stay in Germany/Austria? As your chances to get protection status are small, you will probably have to return. What kind of support or re-integration assistance would help you? Would you have a recommendation for politicians in Germany/Austria regarding migration from Africa?

The final part of the discussion centred on the most sensitive issues, i.e. exploring the effectiveness and sustainability of return programmes.

- What life would they like to have in Europe, what is the life plan they came for;
- What kind of information and support would they need at their stage of the asylum procedure;
- What kind of voluntary return packages would appeal to the respondents;
- Which measures in the countries of origin would prevent the stigmatization of returnees;
- What can be done locally to debunk the myths about Europe and to decrease migration pressure?

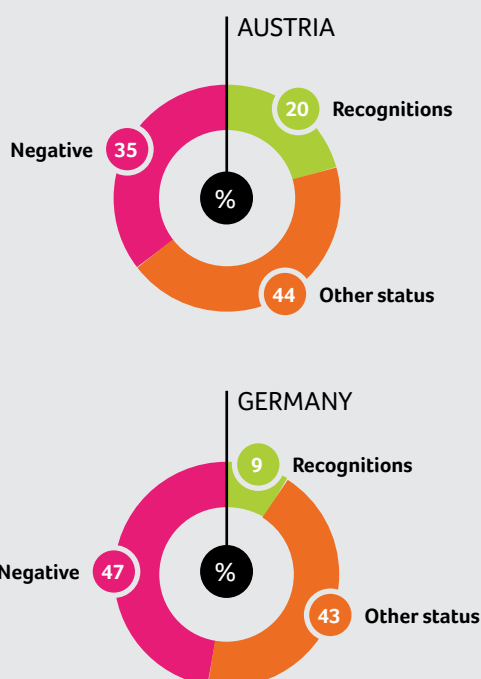
TOP 5 FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



TOTAL DECISIONS

January 2015 to December 2018

| Country | First Applications | Recognitions | Other status | Negative |
|---------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| Austria | 1,030 | 295 | 640 | 510 |
| Germany | 29,680 | 3,945 | 18,845 | 20,615 |



STATISTICAL OVERVIEW⁷

It is difficult to determine how many francophone Africans live in Austria and Germany, as being a French speaker is not a characteristic captured in European statistical data. The same is true for asylum-seeker data. Asylum-seekers of several years ago might have left, be recognised refugees or even become naturalised Austrian or German citizens today.

In order to come to some approximation this study looked at asylum statistics from 2015 to end 2018. During this period, Germany registered 30,000 new asylum claims by the target group, Austria 1,000. The overall size of the community of francophone Africans of concern to asylum authorities (i.e. persons still in the procedure, awaiting return after final rejection or with some form of temporary status) is estimated at 90% of the new arrivals i.e. 27,000 in Germany and 900 in Austria. This is based on the assumption that asylum claims predating 2014 should have been decided by end 2018, as their numbers were lower. Thus, persons who arrived before 2015 most probably no longer have dealings with asylum authorities because they either have refugee status already or were rejected and left. On the other hand, the large influx of asylum-seekers in 2015/16 created a backlog and slowed down asylum processes. Therefore, adding up the new arrivals from the past four years minus 10 % (cases that were decided or persons who left in the meantime) provides an educated guess at the size of the community in an asylum related status.

The ranking of the four of the top five countries of origin varies in Germany and Austria, but the most striking difference is DR Congo, which tops the list in Austria and only comes seventh in Germany. Another, less accentuated difference is Ivory Coast, third country of origin number three in Germany and number 6 in Austria.

Chances to be granted refugee status were rather small in past years as a comparison between the number of new arrivals from 2015 to 2018 and the decisions taken in the same period (though not necessarily the same cases) seems to reflect that. The chance to have some other status that grants temporary stay was higher during that period.

⁷ All data in this chapter are based on: European Commission, Eurostat database on "Asylum and managed Migration" available at <http://bit.ly/2TRFvGv> accessed 15-18 (accessed 15-18 January 2019).

AUSTRIA 2015-2018: ASYLUM-SEEKERS FROM FRANCOPHONE SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES

| Country of Origin | Total New Applicants 2015-2018* | Positive Recognized 2015-2018** | Other Decisions ** 2015-2018*** | Negative 2015-2018** |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Dem. Rep.Congo | 225 | 130 | 215 | 110 |
| Cameroon | 210 | 85 | 145 | 100 |
| Guinea | 155 | 40 | 80 | 80 |
| Senegal | 125 | 10 | 55 | 60 |
| Mali | 85 | 0 | 15 | 30 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 85 | 20 | 50 | 40 |
| Benin | 60 | 0 | 35 | 55 |
| Togo | 25 | 0 | 10 | 10 |
| Niger | 20 | 0 | 10 | 5 |
| Burkina Faso | 20 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Chad | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Burundi | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 |
| Central African Rep. | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gabon | 0 | 0 | 15 | 15 |

* Missing final 12/12/2018

** "Other Decisions" includes various statuses such as humanitarian status, subsidiary or temporary protection

*** Only up to 3 quarter of 2018

GERMANY 2015-2018: ASYLUM-SEEKERS FROM FRANCOPHONE SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES

| Country of Origin | Total New Applicants 2015-2018* | Positive Recognized 2015-2018** | Other Decisions ** 2015-2018*** | Negative 2015-2018** |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Guinea | 10,950 | 2,020 | 6,185 | 6,240 |
| Cameroon | 4,315 | 300 | 2,540 | 3,260 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 4,175 | 375 | 1,695 | 2,295 |
| Mali | 2,610 | 220 | 1,715 | 1,815 |
| Senegal | 2,435 | 120 | 2,585 | 2,735 |
| Togo | 1,310 | 110 | 690 | 975 |
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 1,035 | 475 | 1,200 | 950 |
| Benin | 870 | 55 | 750 | 780 |
| Burkina Faso | 730 | 45 | 565 | 620 |
| Niger | 505 | 25 | 310 | 370 |
| Chad | 465 | 75 | 410 | 395 |
| Central African Rep. | 110 | 35 | 95 | 80 |
| Burundi | 100 | 50 | 70 | 50 |
| Gabon | 70 | 40 | 35 | 50 |

** "Other Decisions" includes various statuses such as humanitarian status, subsidiary or temporary protection

*** Only up to 3 quarter of 2018

AUSTRIA: POSITIVE DECISIONS 2015-2018

| Country of Origin | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 30 | 35 | 45 | 20 | 130 |
| Cameroon | 25 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 85 |
| Guinea | 10 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 40 |
| Senegal | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 0 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 20 |
| Burundi | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| Mali | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Benin | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Togo | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Niger | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Burkina Faso | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chad | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Central African Rep. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gabon | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

GERMANY: POSITIVE DECISIONS 2015-2018

| Country of Origin | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Guinea | 75 | 210 | 1235 | 500 | 2,020 |
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 30 | 30 | 340 | 75 | 475 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 10 | 20 | 230 | 115 | 375 |
| Cameroon | 5 | 10 | 190 | 100 | 300 |
| Mali | 15 | 40 | 135 | 30 | 220 |
| Senegal | 0 | 30 | 80 | 10 | 120 |
| Togo | 5 | 5 | 70 | 30 | 110 |
| Chad | 20 | 25 | 30 | 0 | 75 |
| Benin | 0 | 15 | 35 | 5 | 55 |
| Burundi | 0 | 10 | 25 | 15 | 50 |
| Burkina Faso | 5 | 5 | 25 | 10 | 45 |
| Gabon | 0 | 5 | 30 | 5 | 40 |
| Central African Rep. | 0 | 5 | 30 | 0 | 35 |
| Niger | 5 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 25 |

AUSTRIA: OTHER DECISIONS 2015-2018

| Country of Origin | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 50 | 55 | 90 | 20 | 215 |
| Cameroon | 40 | 30 | 55 | 20 | 145 |
| Guinea | 25 | 30 | 25 | 0 | 80 |
| Senegal | 5 | 25 | 25 | 0 | 55 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 5 | 15 | 25 | 5 | 50 |
| Benin | 5 | 10 | 20 | 0 | 35 |
| Mali | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 |
| Gabon | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 |
| Togo | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 |
| Niger | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 |
| Burkina Faso | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Burundi | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Chad | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Central African Rep. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

GERMANY: OTHER DECISIONS 2015-2018

| Country of Origin | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Guinea | 175 | 790 | 4735 | 485 | 6,185 |
| Senegal | 35 | 1320 | 1220 | 10 | 2,585 |
| Cameroon | 115 | 310 | 2015 | 100 | 2,540 |
| Mali | 110 | 340 | 1240 | 25 | 1,715 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 50 | 85 | 1450 | 110 | 1,695 |
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 140 | 125 | 860 | 75 | 1,200 |
| Benin | 25 | 190 | 535 | 0 | 750 |
| Togo | 35 | 40 | 585 | 30 | 690 |
| Burkina Faso | 30 | 160 | 370 | 5 | 565 |
| Chad | 105 | 110 | 195 | 0 | 410 |
| Niger | 25 | 80 | 200 | 5 | 310 |
| Central African Rep. | 0 | 5 | 90 | 0 | 95 |
| Burundi | 5 | 10 | 45 | 10 | 70 |
| Gabon | 5 | 10 | 20 | 0 | 35 |

AUSTRIA: NEGATIVE DECISIONS 2015-2018

| Country of Origin | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | Total |
|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 20 | 20 | 45 | 25 | 110 |
| Cameroon | 15 | 10 | 35 | 40 | 100 |
| Guinea | 15 | 15 | 20 | 30 | 80 |
| Senegal | 5 | 20 | 20 | 15 | 60 |
| Benin | 5 | 10 | 20 | 20 | 55 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 5 | 10 | 20 | 5 | 40 |
| Mali | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 30 |
| Gabon | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 |
| Togo | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 |
| Niger | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Burkina Faso | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Burundi | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chad | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Central African Rep. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

* Only up to 3 quarter of 2018

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

FIRST THEMATIC FIELD

LOOKING BACK TO AFRICA

LACK OF PERSPECTIVES

The main driver for leaving the country of origin is a lack of perspectives after finalising education. The variety of professions of focus group discussants was impressive. Among those specifically mentioning their professional background there were a pharmacist, a real estate agent, a law student, a baker, a chef, several football players, a musician, secretaries, restaurant workers, beauticians, a seamstress, a welder, car mechanics, painters, masons, an electrical engineer, etc.

We have diplomas, but no job opportunities.

We are not poor; we are middle class.

What kind of life is it when you have to walk for 10KM to find water? This is not what I went to school for.

Having invested money and effort to study and learn a trade, young Africans expect a better status. They find it humiliating to accept bad conditions, menial employment and poverty and try to improve their lives instead. If they do not succeed at home, they consider migration a normal means of seeking new opportunities.

Most participants claimed that qualification is not the decisive factor for getting a job at home. They say regular, lucrative employment with a large company or the state requires connections and/or bribing. Jobs with private employers are badly paid and insecure. Sometimes people are cheated out of their salary, but there is no authority to turn to for redress.

The topic of corruption as a career impediment came up in all groups. Numerous respondents described how they or their families had tried small businesses but ended up paying so much tax that it was not profitable to continue.

We all have a profession, but if you do not have parents who are directors or well connected to the government you do not find a job.

If you try running a small business, you pay too much. Tax authorities decide deliberately and you never know how much they will ask you to pay.

Corruption hampers you at every step, I whether you are self-employed or have a job.

If you want a steady job, you need to take part in corruption and overlook irregularities.

Participants blame neo-colonialism for unfair terms of trade between Europe and Africa, which creates poverty in their countries. Unemployment is high in all francophone African countries, especially among the youth, regardless of their qualifications. Young people are losing faith in their future. The vast majority of participants agree that Africans do not want to leave but are forced by circumstances. They demand that Europe should stop supporting dictatorships and invest in economic projects and increase employment chances in Africa.

The vast majority of university graduates do not find a job.

80 % of young men have no job.

Africa is boiling; the youth has education but no perspective. Elites are power hungry and do not care about the young generation.

We have gone to school, some have studied. It is the economy and political situation driving us out of our country. (Cameroonian male)

In Benin, ambitious people are blocked.

It is sad and tough in Mali (C'est la tristesse et la galère). Politicians are corrupt, no perspective for the youth. We are being pushed to leave.

NOT ENOUGH MEANS TO FINALISE EDUCATION,

Education plays a dominant role in the value system of young Franco-Africans. Next to the lack of job opportunities and pressing economic needs, the desire for more and better education is a powerful migration driver. Those who have an education want to refine it in Europe, those who did not manage to finish their studies leave with the hope to complete them abroad. One man went to law school in Mali but had no more money to continue after his father died. One participant had three years of university but could not finish due to financial constraints.

It depends on family finances whether and how long you can study.

Many participants expressed a real hunger for education and vocational training. They pointed out that at school they were constantly told that the best education one can get is in Europe, so they followed that call. Most left with very concrete plans which training they want, e.g. decorator, mechanic, hairdresser, truck driver, chef, cashier, waiter, teacher, athlete.

As for national differences, two groups stood out: Participants from Cameroon had the highest level of formal education; most of them had completed or at least started tertiary education. By contrast, the two respondents with the lowest levels of education (few years of schooling, semi-literate, little to no French) were from Mali. Not surprisingly, they said they fled from war-torn areas, which makes them refugees rather than migrants.

REASONS FOR FLIGHT VS. MIGRATION

Admittedly, jobs and education are the two reasons for leaving most frequently quoted by the respondents. However, the portion of potential refugees among Franco-Africans remains considerable. The war in Mali, the political situation in several countries, such as Benin, Togo, Senegal and Ivory Coast, were mentioned. The number of problem areas, local wars, ethnic conflicts, Islamist terror and increasing numbers of Internally Displaced Persons constitute powerful push factors.

Respondents complained that such developments remained under the radar of asylum authorities in Germany and Austria and were not sufficiently recognised in the asylum procedure. Their countries of origin are considered safe because there are no full-blown wars. The types of individual persecution, which many people had experienced are not seen as relevant for asylum in Europe although it would be covered under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Several respondents told stories of their struggle against corruption, the lack of freedom of speech, threats by influential powers (male participants) or by relatives (female participants) and the unwillingness of police to protect them.

A big factor is security. Mali is under pressure by terrorism and Islamism. It is push factors, not pull factors that make people leave.

Senegal is not a safe country; you can easily be killed over small issues. There is no war but there is no peace either.

In DR Congo, there are thousands of people killed each month. There is rape, people are not free to talk, there is permanent danger, but media do not cover this. There is an ongoing war in the Kivu Provinces.

FAMILY REASONS FOR MEN

Several participants mentioned the loss of the father as the trigger for leaving. The demise of the head of household seems to be a major blow to the economic safety of families in West Africa. Two students said, that they could no longer afford going to school and left. One man from a farming family faced difficulties after his father's death. The oldest brother took all the land and he had nothing to live off.

Senegalese respondents claimed that the death of the father was the point in time when young men have to leave. If they are the oldest sons, they take on the responsibility for the entire family and need to make enough money to fend for all of them. Two participants reported that being younger sons, they lost their inheritance to older brothers and were left without means.

I decided myself to leave when my father died. I had financial but also had medical reasons.

FAMILY REASONS FOR WOMEN

The vast majority of women respondents pointed out that they had personal troubles causing them to leave. They were persecuted by family members or harassers and not helped by the police. Some of the women said that they had well paid jobs and no economic reasons for migration but personal ones. Those few women, who elaborated on the nature of their family problems, mentioned forced marriage, sexual harassment and threats by supervisors.

The trip to Europe was usually the decision of men in their lives, uncle in one case, or partners in most other instances.

In one case, the woman had been persuaded by her partner to accompany him to Spain. Upon arrival, he abandoned her at an airport. Not knowing what to do, she presented herself to the police. Other participants said they had also heard stories of men persuading women to come along and, once in Europe, left them. (The reason is unclear, but one might speculate that border controls in Europe are less rigorous for couples than for single males.)

PULL-FACTORS EDUCATION AND MEDICAL INSURANCE

Push factors, i.e. problems in the countries of origin, are the main triggers for leaving the country, but there are pull factors as well. The single most mentioned one among Franco-Africans was education:

- European education is considered better.
People want quality vocational training, which they cannot get in Africa.
The temptation for leaving is big because you see people less educated than you, who studied in Europe and now are much better off than you ever will be in Cameroon.
Those who return with European diplomas find work.

Somewhat unexpectedly, social security came up as another element attracting Africans to Europe. Participants reported how the entire savings of an African family may be spent if one member of the family falls sick. A woman explained the drama caused by lack of medical insurance: She had problems delivering her baby and urgently needed a caesarean. Nevertheless, while lying in the hospital in pain, she was asked to give a deposit otherwise she would have been kicked out in spite of her condition.

One man from Senegal said he was lucky that as a football player he sustained injuries in Europe and not in Africa. European doctors saved him.

- I would never have pulled through and started a new life back home.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS ABOUT MIGRATION

The decision to up and leave is normally not a spontaneous one but follows a period trying different solutions. There is no consistent pattern in the way decisions are made and accounts differ a lot. Some said it was the family (parents, siblings) encouraging them to leave, some say peer pressure. Half the participants claimed it was their personal decision to leave, influenced by no one.

- 80% of the decision was European media influence, 10% the family and 10% personal decision, which influenced me.
You cannot stop a man who yearns to leave. (On ne peut pas empêcher un homme qui a faim de partir.)
In Benin the wish to leave for Europe is very ingrained in the youth. Going to Europe means success (aller en Europe, c'est réussir) and you give it all to reach this.
The media encourage people to leave; they paint a disastrous picture of Africa.
In Africa we think Europe is paradise. Even though everyone knows people who died en route, they still wanted to get to that "paradise".
Let's not forget, it is a minority that wants to come to Europe. Many people never want to leave Africa.

Media and the image they present of Europe play a big role as influencers, as do peers. Practically all participants have friends who "went mbeng" (used in Cameroon for "went to France" = "migrated to Europe") which inspired them. However, it seems that women are more influenced by family persuasion than by peers.

Another influencing factor is the conduct of persons who live in Europe and visit Africa, Africans and Europeans alike.

- Europeans who come to Africa advertise how rich they are. They throw money around.
All the Europeans you see in Senegal are rich, of course this impresses the youth.
The apparent wealth of those who have been to Europe paints a false picture.



It depends on the circumstances and reasons for leaving whether young migrants tell their parents before or not. One former university student was told by his friends to leave and make a better life, but the final decision was taken jointly with his mother. This is rather the exception to the rule. In general, parents are against the trip so some of the participants left without telling their families.

Parents in Cameroon would never accept that their child face the dangers of the desert and the sea.
My parents were against me going to Europe, but I went with friends.

People who live abroad, be it within Africa or in Europe, are role models. If young people think the other person is competent to give advice, they will listen – and often come to regret it. One musician was persuaded by a German tourist to come with her, as he would make “much more money.” It turned out that the woman had no idea about legal procedures and residence permits. He had trusted her and lost years of his life attempting and failing to legalise his stay in Germany.

LOOKING FOR LOCAL SOLUTIONS FIRST

People try different things after finishing school. They move to the capital, looking for employment or starting their own business. They take on jobs for which they are overqualified and get frustrated. Only if nothing works, they try African countries and, finally, Europe.

Even then, they look for legal pathways first. Most people do not want to go to Europe in an irregular manner. One male participant spoke German and tried to get a visa. Only when several attempts failed he took on blue-collar work in Cameroon but could not make ends meet. This was a typical example echoed by many other respondents

I had not planned to come to Europe; it was desperation and a chain of events, which brought me here.
You do not leave your country with a light heart.

CHOICE OF DESTINATION

The final destination is often the result of many different attempts. A typical story is that of a man from Benin who spent four years in Algeria and said that Arabs often cheat their African workers, not paying out the agreed salaries. He tried Libya and ended up in prison, managed to flee and had no other way to get out quickly but go to Italy. One participant said, he wanted to try other sub-Saharan countries, but concluded that those were all tyrannies. One man from Cameroon spent 2 1/2 years en route, North Africa, Italy, Switzerland, France then Germany. His chosen destination was Europe.

Others explored legal possibilities, like the student who without success tried to obtain a student visa for Belgium, Czech Republic and Ukraine. He finally got one for Turkey and studied in Istanbul for three years. When his family ran out of money, he could not continue. There was nothing to keep him in Turkey and he did not feel like returning home without a diploma, so he moved on to Europe.

For a few respondents the first destination was the Gulf region. One Senegalese went to Dubai, where the situation proved untenable. Only then did he proceed to Europe.

Once migrants decide to go to Europe, they usually have no destination country in mind. The majority of respondents said their plan was “getting to Europe” and they ended up in Germany or Austria by chance.

Smugglers promise to take you “to Europe”, that is the goal.

All I wanted was to come to Europe in search of security; I had no specific destination in mind.

Why is it Europe for us? In all African countries, the situation is difficult. Europe seems the best option; (Europe, c'est la solution).

When people resolve to go to a specific country, it is often due to friends or family they have there. In general, people go where they feel they have some support system.

Here, an acquaintance (une connaissance) is very valuable, like family.

A small number of respondents said they chose Germany/Austria on purpose because both countries had not been colonial powers. For the same reason several participants said they deliberately avoided France because of its colonial past and the way it still kept former French colonies in a political and economic stranglehold.

Why would I go to the country that caused the problems I am running from?

COMING TO AUSTRIA

The vast majority of participants in the Vienna focus group discussions said they arrived in Austria by chance. Many planned to continue to Germany but were obliged to stay because their fingerprints were registered here (Dublin Regulation).

Two students among the participants, one male and one female, said they chose Austria on purpose as they have relatives here.

One young man from Burkina Faso said he came because his father wanted him to and bought him a fake passport.

One female respondent had been planning more carefully. She said she wanted to come to Austria because it never was a colonial state. She prepared and learned German in advance.

We had hoped that Austria would help us.

COMING TO GERMANY

Many participants tried several European states, mostly Italy, Spain and France before proceeding to Germany based on advice given by friends. Those who took the Balkans route in 2015 mostly ended up in Germany as they followed the flow.

A considerable number of participants said they moved on to Germany from elsewhere because of the opportunity for education and training. They typically use the German word “Ausbildung”.

A participant from the Central African Republic took a legal route, came to France with a visa because he knows people in France. He proceeded to Germany as he had the impression that there were more jobs, and he spoke some German anyway.

A man from Senegal tried France and Belgium with a valid visa. After several months he continued to Germany because he “heard it was better”. He entered the country without papers and was advised by police to ask for asylum. That had never been his intention but seemed the only possibility to legalise his status.

Those who specifically picked Germany as their destination usually tried legal pathways first but resorted to irregular migration if that did not work.

The reasons they gave for choosing Germany were knowledge of German or networks of friends or relatives.

Two young men had very particular personal reasons to come. One said his calling in life is automotive engineering and for him, Germany is the pinnacle of car making expertise. The other one said he was “in love with German football.”

Germany gives “assurance”, some basic legal and social security.

Training and education is much better in Germany than in France and Belgium even though French is spoken there.

If you have health problems, you are better off in Germany.

Many people speak German in Cameroon. There are programmes for young Cameroonians to come to Germany, but they have to bribe local officials first. Germany should look into that.

The colonial past still plays a role in the way Africans view European countries. Some Cameroonians mentioned that Germany had once been the colonial power in their country, but their rule was considered more humane than French colonialism. German as a foreign language is heavily promoted and has increased its lead despite mounting competition from other languages, which makes Germany a logical choice.⁸

Several participants mentioned the brutal colonial history of France and Belgium, which made them go to a different country.

LEVEL OF ADVANCE INFORMATION

Only three to four respondents mentioned that they purposefully conducted internet research prior to departure. Everybody else said their information came from a combination of media and word-of-mouth. They knew about Europe from TV. Media create an appealing image of Europe. They show tall buildings, big cars and well-dressed people. The darker sides are not covered and there is never any hint that poverty exists in Europe.

Even one of the resource persons interviewed for expert validation, a student, said that he had been expecting all students in Germany to drive flashy cars and wear designer clothes and was very surprised to see how they struggled to make ends meet.

One woman from Cameroon was especially inspired by the nice fashionable clothes all Europeans seem to be wearing on TV.

In Africa, there is only positive coverage of Europe, just as there is only negative coverage of Africa in Europe.

In European films they sell us a dream.

In Africa we think Europe the El Dorado.

People in Mali think that money is practically growing on trees here.

Many focus groups mentioned Africans living in Europe who come visiting. They described how these people flaunt their wealth and show off their nice clothes. They become role models creating a pull factor for migration. One man said he saved money for a long time to come to Europe.

Another important source of information is Facebook. However, the information given by the diaspora is much embellished. Prior to departure, the participants did not anticipate all the difficulties they would be confronted with.

They show high life (une grosse vie) and tell you a positive story.

Some say they do suffer, but also make money.

Africans from Europe tell you that you can earn a lot more money, but they do not mention the bureaucratic problems.

They do not show you how cold it is and how traumatised you will be. (Homeless rejected asylum-seeker)

There was a minority of respondents who had a different view, especially those who did not come for economic reasons but in search of protection. For them, diaspora reports did not seem to play a role in their decision to leave. They said they ran when life got dangerous because of war and tribal struggle. They were not minding difficulties ahead.

Everyone knows how difficult the situation is in Europe now. People come because the suffering is too much in Africa.

I fled the war and was just looking for a safe place. (Man from Mali)

⁸ Goethe Institut, ‘German as a Foreign Language Worldwide: 2015 Survey’. Available at: <https://www.goethe.de/en/spr/eng/dlz.html> (accessed 2 January 2019).

DANGERS OF THE JOURNEY

Routes are decided at random in many cases. People follow the advice of fellow Africans as they go, spontaneously. Ad hoc decisions are taken without consulting independent sources of information. The duration of the journey from the country of origin to Europe ranged from a couple of weeks to several years. One man says it took him three years of travel and work to arrive in Europe.

As for the journey itself, most people were aware that it might be difficult, but did not know the full extent of dangers, including imprisonment, torture, rape and slavery. Most respondents thought that the journey was worth the risk, compared with the lack of perspective of continuing life at home and the promise of a brighter future once they arrived in Europe.

None of the participants wanted to talk about smugglers (*passeurs*), they rather mentioned “helpful friends” who facilitated certain legs of the journey. Only half a dozen respondents mentioned using a fake visa to come to Europe. Others looked for cheaper options:

🗨️ | *I went on foot, with the map on my phone.*

Traversing the Sahara is dangerous in itself. The respondents saw people lose their lives in accidents or die of thirst because the drivers did not allow them to take enough water. A woman said that in Africa the journey was more life threatening for male travellers. Men took greater risks and used more dangerous modes of travel. As for assaults, women were sexually abused, but men were brutally tortured or beaten to death.

At least half of the participants said they did not head for Europe right away but tried to make a life in different countries in Africa. Several participants spoke of prior experience in North African countries where they were vulnerable to exploitation. The stories resembled each other: Looking for work in Algeria or Libya; working hard but not being paid; frequent racist attacks in the streets. Even small children can attack Africans with impunity. If they retaliated, they would run into even greater trouble. Police and militias harassed them regularly, extorted money or detained them in dreadful prisons.

In a few cases respondents said they never even wanted to go to Europe. However, when one is caught up in Libya in dangerous situations it is easier to try to reach Italy than to cross the desert in reverse.

🗨️ | *If you try to defend yourself, the whole African community will suffer.*

Sometimes you are not paid for your work and you have no redress.

There is nothing you can do because locals and police are against you.

You could be killed for insisting on your rights.

Judging by the routes taken, at least half of the respondents must have crossed the Mediterranean in a boat. Nonetheless, they avoided describing the boat ride, and it transpired that this was a traumatising experience. Some only mentioned in passing that they saw people die. A young man, minor at the time of travel, said he was separated from his mother who was put on a different boat and never heard from again.

🗨️ | *When you leave, you think what can happen? God will help.*

Crossing the Mediterranean is a horrible experience.

Most people said they did not inform their family about the predicaments they endured during the journey so as not to upset them.

🗨️ | *One cannot fully comprehend the horrors without actually experiencing them.*

The truth remains between us. (La vérité reste entre nous.)



SECOND THEMATIC FIELD CURRENT LIFE IN GERMANY/AUSTRIA

DREAM AND REALITY IN EUROPE

All participants said life in Europe was very different from what they had imagined, and in all cases more difficult than anticipated. For young Africans the time after arrival is an anticlimactic experience. They hope to start a new life right away, which includes jobs, self-reliance and enough money to support families back home but find out that this is not as easy as they thought.

- When you first arrive, you think it's glorious (*c'est la gloire*). You will have freedom and money.

In Europe everything is in place unlike the corrupt system in Africa.

Here people are more tranquil and have health care.

People think that the danger is the journey as such, once you are here you will be at ease and life will be good.

Complicated rules around residence and asylum as well as uncertainty about their future lives are a source of constant distress for all asylum-seekers. In all focus groups, participants said that sitting idle in refugee centres, not being able to work and waiting for several years for a status make them feel miserable. Some reported that they have waited for 5 to 6 years without a decision. One man from Senegal says he regrets coming here; Germany was "a complicated country".

Participants did not expect it to be easy in Europe but were surprised that the worst problems are psychological ones.

- Life in Germany is difficult, people are not easy-going, it is all stress, no fun.*

*Back home we joked that stress was the disease of the white people (*maladie des blancs*) and now our everyday life is full of stress.*

I am stressed all the time for fear of being returned after all I went through.

*This life makes no sense. (*Cette vie ne sert à rien.*)*

You lose valuable years of your youth.

Sleep – eat – sleep – eat – sleep – eat, that is my life.

When coming to Europe many people said, they just wanted to “earn, learn and return”. Hence, they are surprised at how unwelcome they are. One man from Senegal said he found it hard to deal with authorities who permanently suspected him of lying.

They do not believe what you say.
Europe with its demographic development has a need for immigration.
Europeans can go and work in Africa any time, why is this not reciprocal?

They are overwhelmed with complicated systems and red tape in Europe. Several participants mentioned they find it hard to cope with the frequent official letters being sent to them, written in bureaucratic, difficult German. One man said that often even his German friends were not able to understand their meaning.

These letters are giving me a headache.
(Ces lettres cassent la tête.)

Most respondents conceded feeling guilty all the time because they had no money to spare and send back to the family. A man from Cameroon said he expected opportunities to work and get ahead, instead he is overwhelmed with bureaucracy. People start asking themselves, if it was worth the risks and costs.

Here in Europe, you have to put a lot of effort into moving on. With this effort I could have made it in Africa as well.
You only know the true story once you arrive. I would never have come if I had known how hard it would be.

Even those who have access to the labour market soon understand that willingness to work and informally acquired professional skills do not suffice. They see that the first obstacle is language, the second are qualification papers. All groups understand the necessity to learn German quickly, also because few people speak French in Germany. As Africans, they expected to find jobs where they could make money and improve their skills at the same time. They were not aware of the importance of formal qualifications.

For working in Europe, you need advanced diplomas (des grands diplômes)
In Mali you learn by doing, here it is first learning then working.
So, I have to go to school first, which was not part of my plan.
In Africa you can work even without papers, it is very different from Africa.

Respondents who had legal residence and jobs said they still did not find what they expected in Europe. Once they have paid for food, rent and public transport, there was not enough money left to send home to the family. This is particularly hard on those who left children behind.

The family in Africa thinks that all people in Europe are rich and press for money to be sent.
White people pay you well for your work, but life is very expensive.
I need to study, work and send money back to the family.

DESIRE FOR INTEGRATION

Many participants raised the issue that integration and language courses are not provided for all asylum-seekers equally. Nationalities that have a low probability of getting refugee status do not have the access to integration measures such as language courses or vocational training during the asylum procedure in Germany. This is a main cause of frustration. They feel that West Africans are discriminated in comparison to people from other parts of the world, particularly Eritreans, Somalis and Sudanese but also Syrians.

We feel blocked and lose one, two years.

Participants complain that they have no right to attend German classes. Some are entitled to the most basic level of language training (A1). Living in refugee accommodation, they are rarely in touch with German speakers and cannot pick up the language in everyday life. Only a football player said he learned German quite swiftly as he was playing in a club with Germans.

A few of the participants said they found other solutions to learn German, sometimes with NGOs, sometimes paying themselves for tuition. A woman told the researchers that she is very keen on becoming a nurse but is facing a structural problem. To be admitted as a nursing student she must speak German at B2 level, but with her legal status she is only entitled to courses up to B1. She cannot afford to travel to the city and pay for an additional course. So far, she was not able to secure a place in an advanced language course.

Those whose claims have already been rejected are not entitled to any language classes and have no money to pay for courses themselves.

Parents would like their children to learn German early. Used to the French system of preschool (*école maternelle*) from the age of 3, parents complain that children under six are not allowed to attend school.

All participants dream of finding a job. They say that they want to work and rather pay tax themselves than receive assistance funded by taxpayers' money. Participants are aware of the debate in Germany about migrants who are not willing to integrate and hold different views. They keep pointing out that Africans are hardworking and do not want to rely on social support whereas in their view "the Syrians do not work".

- We have hands to work, we do not need to be cared for.*
- They give us fish, but they don't give us a fishing rod.*
- We want to integrate but we are not allowed to.*
- It is racist how asylum-seekers from West Africa have no rights to go to school and learn and integrate.*
- There are Senegalese who have been in Europe for five years and never had classes.*

Participants agree that Germany is not spending money for refugees in an efficient way. In several groups, participants report that they received an *Ausbildung* (vocational training) for up to three years and now are not allowed to work even if they have an employer who wants to keep them. Others started a training but were not allowed to continue. They complain that the situation got more restrictive for African asylum-seekers recently. At least two persons reported that they were trained in care of the elderly (*Altenpflege*) but no longer had the right to work. They will be sent back home. So, Germany paid to train them in a profession that is sought after in Germany but not all that useful in Africa.

Man, from Senegal has been waiting for six years for a final decision in his asylum case. It was easier for Africans in 2013, he says. When he arrived, he was placed in a centre, could work and learn German. He felt he had all opportunities for integration. Later this "right to integration" was withdrawn.

- Several years ago, it was easier. We learned the language, got an Ausbildung and had no problems with police ever.*
- A bakery took me on and wanted to keep me, but authorities said no.*

All participants agree that dealings with the authorities are difficult, but that they experience a lot of solidarity and support from locals. Several participants have been in Germany for a couple of years and speak German by now. Many men have regular girlfriends, and some have children born in Germany. They say relationships is the one problem they do not have. Young African men underline they were "not like Arabs". They emphasise that there are no incidents of sexual assault committed by Africans.

- I would like to get married and get on with my life, but I might be sent back.*
- We lose years of our life here.*

Those whose situation is regularised, with a status that allows access to employment (*Beschäftigung gestattet*) have mixed experiences. Most say it is relatively easy to find work. Many of the participants with good education complained that more often than not they are offered jobs below their qualification.

- You have 100% opportunity to get a training, find work, you have 100% chance to be a human being (d'être un homme).*
- They do not value us. (On nous ne donne pas la valeur.)*

Some participants with residence permit report how much red tape one faces in Germany when trying to start a business. They would like to have a one-stop-shop where they would obtain all the necessary information and some advice.

LEGAL ISSUES AND ASYLUM MATTERS

Nearly all focus group participants said they had known nothing about asylum or the difficulties of getting legal residence in a European country. None of the asylum-seekers had advance information about legal requirements for living in Europe. Only one university student had heard of asylum before leaving.

Only very few persons claimed that they had serious political problems at home and wanted to stay permanently and get asylum status. The vast majority of respondents would prefer other forms of residence, stay for several years, learn something and work. They think that asylum is not the right channel for them.

- We need skills development here and jobs at home.*
- If you have a job, life in Africa is easier.*
- Give us 5 years of legal stay and train us.*

When confronted with the question of legalising their status, asylum seemed the only legal way. In most cases police and authorities advised them to apply, in one case it was a friend living in Europe. One person already speaks German and came to study, but visa extension is a problem. He would need to go back to Mali to apply from there which he cannot afford. So, he lodged an asylum claim.

🗨️ *I did not want asylum, but I was told it is the only way to legalise my stay.*

Those Africans who feel they are in need of international protection, criticise several aspects of the asylum procedure in Germany. In their view, the asylum authorities (BAMF) are not taking into consideration low profile-conflicts in Africa. Another problem is interpretation. One man said he rejected the French interpreter and did the interview in German because the interpreters' French was worse than his German. Non-French speaking Malians do not get interpretation in their local languages.

🗨️ *The safe country of origin list does not reflect the situation on the ground.
If Mali is such a safe country, why is there European military on the ground?
Senegalese are not even heard, we have waited for interviews for a long time. This is tiring. (Nous sommes fatigués.)*

EVERYDAY LIFE IN EUROPE

The vast majority of focus group participants live in reception centres and find life there testing. One person said there were five people sleeping in one room. They deplore the monotony of their lives and report that psychological problems are rampant in the camp.

A woman says that she is constantly stressed and cannot sleep for fear of deportation. The whole group agreed. Years of life in uncertainty is hard for all of them to bear.

Asylum-seekers are provided with food and lodging but would much rather take care of themselves. They find it humiliating not be allowed to work and to be given monthly pocket money instead.

🗨️ *The worst of all is the camp. (Le pire, c'est le camp.)*

REPORTING HOME

What people tell their families at home about life in Europe differs from case to case. Some say they do not tell the truth about Europe to their families because they would not believe them anyway. Others say that before, people did not want to believe negative stories, but this is starting to change. Some say they do not tell the truth when communicating with family because they are embarrassed.

🗨️ *My family thinks 15 Euro per day is a lot of salary.
Those who have not experienced it, cannot understand the stress under which we live here.
They will not believe us that life here is like a mild form of prison (une petite prison).
They think we want to keep them out, so we have more for ourselves.*

If their younger siblings were to ask them for advice, the overwhelming majority would tell them not to come, especially not in an irregular manner. They should only travel to Europe if it is legally possible. Otherwise it is better to stay at home. If they insist on migrating, they should at least have a defined purpose, a life project (*avoir un projet*). Participants cautioned that the decision to migrate is a very individual and personal one. A man said he would tell his younger brother not to come, however, push factors were maybe stronger.

🗨️ *I will support them, it is too dangerous, and the trip is expensive.
Some sell all they have, and it will be lost because they only get menial jobs.
Once you are here, you lose many years of your life and there is nothing you can do about it, you cannot correct this decision.
They do not know how we live and suffer here. For them, even the little money we can send is of great help.
Why do you want to come? Stay there, it is less stressful.
I did not know how it would be. I would not have indebted my family if I had known.*

A small minority has different views. One participant puts complaints about life in Europe in perspective: Africans in Europe are affluent in comparison to those who stay.

Yes, people die, but it is better to die while trying and with a chance to make a better life than to starve and die at home.

People come in search of freedom.

Come by all means, because any life in Europe is better than circumstances at home.

EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION

West Africans perceive the asylum laws as systemic discrimination against their group and are of the opinion that Somalis and Eritreans get preferential treatment.

The government does not like West Africans.

Senegalese are treated unfairly, they are at the very bottom (*en bas, en bas, en bas*).

All participants agreed that they experience racism as well as solidarity in German/Austrian society.

Concerning experiences of racism, there were great geographical differences. Africans in Berlin describe racism as a daily problem, ranging from unfriendly behaviour and verbal abuse to physical attacks. One participant reported how several African families organised a picnic in a park. A group of German men attacked them physically. The children were traumatized after this incident and did not want to leave the house.

However, physical attacks are the exception rather than the rule.

The difference between racist behaviour in Turkey and in Germany is that in Turkey it is physical aggression, in Germany more verbal.

In other cities the situation seems easier. In Passau the participants told the researchers how they were bonding with German peers, colleagues and employers. A woman from Mali living in Cologne said in all her years in Germany she had “never experienced racism”. In Nuremberg, an African community has been established for many years. They are well integrated and play a role in the city’s political and cultural life. In Vienna, respondents mentioned both growing racism as well as people who supported them.

VIEWS ON EUROPE’S ROLE IN AFRICA

In all discussions about the reasons for flight and migration from Africa, participants insisted on discussing the larger context and criticised that political

and economic relations between Africa and Europe are uneven. Those primarily serve European interests and create poverty, corruption and conflicts in Africa, which, in turn, become the main drivers of migration. Yet, when Africans come here as victims of such failed policies, European politicians do not assume responsibility.

Politics in Africa are shaped by Europe, but they do not accept Africans when they come here because of those problems.

Europeans are welcome in Africa, not the other way around.

Europe plays a double game: They support dictatorial regimes, but they fight the subsequent exodus.

Agriculture has been destroyed by monoculture farming of cash crops such as coffee or cocoa beans for the European market while the local population has nothing to eat. Unfair terms of trade and unfair prices for raw materials are being flagged. Participants list Africa’s natural resources such as diamonds, precious metals, oil and rare minerals all being exploited by western companies but bringing no wealth to Africans.

Europe is making millions of Euro off Africa.

When I look at the price of coffee here and what they pay us, I think where does all that money go?

At school we learned that Congo was very rich, but the Westerners, they just exploit our raw materials.

Another hotly disputed topic is that of European exports to Africa. Cheap agricultural produce destroys local farming. Europe arms exports enable dictators to survive and wage wars on their people. Europeans are perceived as financing corrupt elites all over Africa to the detriment of the general population.

Africa does not produce weapons, but there you see people circulate with weapons. Here in Europe, which produces them, you do not see armed people.

Europe should stop financing corruption in Africa.

You will never see the son of a politician take the boat to Europe.

French policy in Africa is particularly contentious among the respondents. They are upset that France controls the currency (Franc SFA) in 14 African countries and the exchange rates are disastrous. France controls state finances and investments in these countries.

We work for nothing.

Africa needs fair terms of trade, then it can sustain its population.



THIRD THEMATIC FIELD PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

THE EARN – LEARN – RETURN CYCLE

When asked about their plans for the future, the overwhelming majority of participants dream of legalising their status, getting jobs and gaining experience in their profession. They want to acquire professional skills that will be useful at home. In the long term, they want access to affordable loans to invest in their own businesses in Africa, so they can return.

- I am a car mechanic. With what I can learn in Germany, I want to open my own workshop.*

My dream is opening a communication agency in my hometown. In Europe I want to work in communications to get some experience.

Allow us finalise our training in Germany before you send us back.

Give us a chance here. Let us learn the language and make some money.

Those who are already here, their situation should be regularised – at least temporarily.

After all the suffering we went through, how can we return empty handed?

Let us work for some time after the negative decision, save some money and then deport us.

The smaller portion of respondents are those who fled from war or individual persecution. Not surprisingly, they have a different outlook on repatriation. Especially participants from Mali and women from all countries of origin are overrepresented in this category.

One man said he would rather kill himself than bring shame to his family. They would say he screwed up his chances in Europe and must have slept all day instead of working to repay his debts. Another man said young Africans take great risks to come to Europe and to find a better life. If they are rejected, what do they go back to, he asked.

- It was easy to earn money in Mali. I ran from danger, not after money.*

Meaningful return programmes are not possible, as they are just going to send us back to our deaths.

It is the problems of our country that keep us from returning, not the economic perspectives.

Helping us is not about money. What is money if you are dead?

The risks we took and years we lost cannot be paid. Return should only be voluntary.

People who are forcibly returned might end up in prison.

RETURN IN SAFETY AND DIGNITY

The respondents in all groups were well aware that the probability of their asylum claims to be accepted were very small and that there was a realistic chance that they might be sent back.

The overall consensus was that the asylum procedure takes too long. Therefore, those who are sent back no longer have a network to return to. In addition, during the asylum procedure claimants should be given the chance to acquire a qualification which will be marketable whatever the outcome of the procedure.

While we are here, train us in professions that are useful in Africa.

Even though the issue of being repatriated is painful and sensitive to them, respondents had of course thought about it and looked at the fate of fellow-countrymen who had already been sent back.

Many knew of stories where forced returns have led to personal catastrophes. Several participants tell stories of voluntary returns where people were promised money upon arrival but never received what was pledged. In several focus groups, participants reported of cases where assistance was not even enough for the returnee to pay a bus ticket from the airport to his hometown.

Across all nationalities, participants agree that being sent back is linked with shame and stigma. It is seen as dishonourable to return empty handed. They have debts they need to repay. One man said he would rather commit suicide than be sent back as he would be ostracised at home.

It is a disgrace (une honte) to be sent back with nothing to show.

Even my mother won't speak to me.

I am 34 years old and have no penny on my bank account.

Let us work and save some money while we wait for repatriation.

What we ask is comparatively little money seeing that we have lost years of your lives.

My people will think I was just messing around with women and drugs during my time in Europe.

DISAPPROVAL OF CASH ASSISTANCE

Across all focus groups, the vast majority argued unanimously that cash assistance for returnees is counterproductive. Some of it would immediately be extorted by the authorities if they knew the returnees arrived with money. The rest would be requested by the family. They were adamant that the entire sum would be gone in no time and without any sustainable effect. One participant said that if returnees are given financial assistance it might even work against them and they might end up in prison and forced to pay a fine. They also cautioned that cash would be a pull factor for new migrants.

The consensus was that material assistance for reintegration would be much more suitable. Contrary to the picture of greedy migrants often painted by European media, the requests were quite modest. Tools for starting a business for example, a micro loan or a small monthly allowance during a reinstallation period. Only one person had the rather unrealistic idea that he should be given a lorry to start a transport business, but he was mocked by the other participants.

Everybody agreed that if financial assistance was given, it should be channelled through a bank account,

Money will be spent. (On va le manger).

Avoid cash!

If you give money, they will come back to Europe for more.

No money can compensate us for what we went through.

If you give them EUR 5000, they will have to pay 2000 to the police at the airport.

Create jobs; do not give money.

Small loans would help.

In all, only a handful of participants had different views and favoured cash assistance. One man explained that money was better, there was too much red tape for starting a business at home and cash would help.

We do not want to return empty handed.

CREATING INCOME AND JOBS

As most of the respondents dream of starting an enterprise in Africa, they debated how to salvage that project even if they were deported. What they need most, they said, is protection from bureaucratic randomness. All groups proposed some kind of independent reinstallation monitoring, someone to turn to for a business plan and advice. If the local authorities knew there was such a control system in place, they would be more restrained regarding over-taxation and other arbitrary demands.

Most participants have conventional business ideas: Repair shops, small agricultural projects, a fashion salon, a PR agency. Some however want to put to good use what they learned in Germany. A Senegalese man was trained in care of the elderly (*Altenpflege*). He would now like to introduce a system of looking after the old who often live alone in villages. This is a new concept in Africa. For that, he would need a partner organisation and financial support. He thinks such projects could be a useful and an innovative approach to development cooperation.

We can be productive and with a business, we can support more persons.

Follow up on returnee projects by external control, technical and financial.

Each project of a returnee should help at least one other person (family) to stay.

A number of discussants dampened the excitement of the other participants by invoking the political dimension. A man from Ivory Coast summarised the concern like this:

Our skills and projects will not suffice. The countries need security, democracy, economic safety and social care.

INDIVIDUAL SOLUTIONS

Potential returnees are of the opinion that reinstallation projects should be developed on a case-by-case individual basis. European institutions should mentor individual returnees locally and provide advice and support for launching small enterprises. All participants said solutions should be tailor-made. That would make them cheaper and more sustainable at the same time.

Ask returnees what their project is; help individually.

We need some kind of buddy system that will help us reintegrate.

Investments would be small; it is not a question of money but of legal security.

Most focus groups agreed that embassies should work directly with the returnees, cutting out state structures. Reinstallation support should not be channelled through government institutions because “everybody will take their cut”. It should be organised by Embassies or EU structures. They also criticised that some African governments had received large sums for taking back their own citizens. They claimed this money is siphoned off and does not reach returnees.

If the government is given money, it disappears.

State reintegration programmes are financing villas for the sons and daughters of our leaders.



PARTICULARITIES OF SUB-GROUPS

FEMALE RESPONDENTS

Migration from Africa to Europe is a largely male phenomenon. In most cities, focus group discussions were male-only or with very few women. To compensate for this imbalance, the (female) researchers organised a women-only focus group in Munich. In mixed groups, they specifically encouraged women to contribute to the discussions.

When talking about the reasons for leaving home, female respondents do not focus on economic reasons but the need for protection. They mention individual persecution by family members or various forms of harassment at the workplace or fleeing from forced/violent marriages. Their journey is often facilitated by a man, partner or relative, who advises them how to come to Europe or accompanies them.

Many women attended the focus groups with babies or toddlers. Judging from their accounts of the time of arrival, many must have conceived their children on route or in Europe, but they were not speaking about the circumstances of their pregnancies or the fathers of these children.

With small children to care for, women appeared more concerned with the near future than with life projects. Their objectives are more immediate such as living in safety, having good accommodation and access to medical care for themselves and the children. They find life very stressful in Europe, particularly the uncertainty about the future. Most women complained about difficulties to sleep and constant fear of deportation.

Integration is a concern. Female respondents frequently mentioned the difficulties of learning a new language while taking care of children. They would like to see their children going to pre-school from the age of three, as is usual in the French education system. For one they want their children to learn German. Secondly, they would like some spare time to learn the language themselves.

Several women miss the comfort of a large African family, where the female members distribute daily chores such as child care, cooking and household work amongst themselves, and they would like to have a larger community to fit in.

🗨️ *One of the strangest things in the beginning was that I was the only black person around most of the time.*

As for their views on life in Germany/Austria, they are distinctly more positive than men, especially with regard

to freedom and human rights. One university student also talked about freedom of speech and that she had managed to establish herself independently.

As a woman, I am free to do what I want.

It is much easier for women.

No one tells me what to do, and there are no arranged marriages.

In daily life, African women seem to be less targeted by racists. One woman from Mali who has lived in Germany for several years even said that in all this time she had “never” experienced racism.

Like men, women fear to be returned, but for different reasons. They do not mention the shame of coming back without money but fear for their safety.

The problems we ran away from persist.

When asked if they would tell their younger sisters to come as well, all female participants categorically said no.

RESPONDENTS IN AUSTRIA

There were no significant differences between the statements of francophone African asylum-seekers in Austria and in Germany.

The groups in Austria discussed very intensely about the necessity to have a goal in life if one wants to make it in Europe. However, that that may have been a result of group dynamics rather than a difference between asylum countries.

You must have a concrete goal (*Fais ton projet*).

I had no future at home, here I found my dream.

As for the choice of destination, only one female respondent said she selected Austria because she had relatives in Vienna. She prepared and learned German before coming. All other respondents said they either came with no specific destination country in mind or ended up in Austria on their way to Germany because their fingerprints were taken, and they were obliged to stay.

Regarding integration, people are struggling every day. Participants say they often feel unwelcome. It is not uncommon to be insulted on the street.

Life in Vienna is tough, but one has to face difficulties and make it work.

Sports gave me the strength to stay.

PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Among the 159 persons interviewed there were three with serious disabilities: one blind man and one man in a wheelchair in Austria, as well as one former athlete who had sustained serious injuries and was treated in Germany.

All three said that they were getting more support and medical care than would have been possible in their countries of origin. They are able to cope with everyday life even though they do not have the support of an extended family. They are benefitting from services for disabled.

PERSONS IN PRECARIOUS LEGAL SITUATIONS

Separate small discussion rounds were arranged to get insight into life in particularly precarious situations, notably of persons with legally binding deportation orders pending. In Berlin, the researchers spoke with three rejected male asylum-seekers in their late twenties and early thirties from West African coastal states who live in hiding.

The men went underground to avoid deportation. They are living on the streets and manage to overnight in the houses of friends and sympathetic acquaintances from time to time. One of them said it took him four years to save up for coming to Europe. Being a truck driver by profession, he expected to find well-paid work. He was not aware of the problems with residency. He feels misled by Africans in Europe who never speak about all the difficulties, only that one can make lots of money. His image of Europe came from TV.

One musician followed a German woman to Europe because she had told him how much money he would make. However, the relationship fell apart and he was left in the street with no status. They all fear the shame of being returned home empty handed.

Europe is shit. (*L'Europe, c'est Scheiße.*)

Without papers, life is hell.

In Munich, researchers met with two very young men (around 20) from Mali who live in reception centres awaiting forced return. Both men appear devastated and hopeless. They say police will pick them up any day now to fly them back to war-torn Mali. One came as a minor under tragic circumstances and lost his mother.

He spent seven years in Europe and has no place to go back to in Mali. He is afraid of the war.

Another group in a particularly difficult situation are those who were registered in other EU Member States before but continued to Germany not understanding the consequences. They are now undergoing the so-called in a Dublin procedure, which can take up to six months. Only then they will know in which Member State they can start their asylum procedure.

It is a stressful status. They want to “go to school” (attend language and integration courses) but are not eligible due to their undetermined status.

With my status, I cannot even get a library card!
In the asylum centre police carry out controls all the time.
They come to pick up people for deportation at night. I am very stressed and cannot sleep.

RESPONSES BY COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

When correlating the responses given with different countries of origin, no significant differences are noted.

The only observable demographic distinction was the educational level of respondents by nationality. While the majority of focus group participants had secondary school education, Cameroonians appeared educated above average (many persons with tertiary education) while the level of education among Malians seemed below average (little formal schooling).

The only other correlation was the motivation for leaving the country of origin. The majority of respondents from all countries except Mali primarily listed economic reasons while the need for protection was mentioned less. Among Malians, this trend was reversed (as was the case with female respondents.)

DIASPORA SUGGESTIONS FOR MIGRATION POLICY ACTIONS

The following recommendations have been extracted from the focus groups discussions with recent asylum-seekers (at all stages of the procedure) as well as meetings with well-integrated members of the francophone African diaspora.

Economic migration is a fact of life. People will go where they see a perspective.
There is even reverse migration of young Portuguese to Angola and Mozambique.

SENSITISATION AND PREVENTION IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

- Sensitisation campaigns and warnings alone will not help for two reasons: Firstly, people will not believe the messages and suspect a hidden agenda. Secondly, such campaigns can only reduce pull factors. However, the primary triggers of migration are push factors in the countries of origin.
 - The main reason for migration is the lack of life perspectives, especially for young Africans with an education and professional skills. Job creation is the only way of keeping ambitious young people in their home countries.
 - European companies consider African countries mostly as raw material suppliers. They should also invest in processing industries, which would be cheaper and more ecological. (Example: Cotton is shipped from Africa to Asia to produce textiles and garments that are then shipped to Europe.)
 - Job creation and vocational training projects in African countries are often marred by corruption. Europe should make sure that access to such projects is not determined by the applicant's connections but by qualification.
 - Economic cooperation should not only concentrate on major cities but also help develop more rural areas. Rural exodus is the first step of migration.
- For the price of the deportation of one person, you can create numerous jobs in Africa
- Women should be the primary target of income generating projects. They are the ones managing the families in Africa.

- Most cooperation happens at the level of states or capitals. Twinning projects with towns and even villages would have much more direct impact. It would also be less expensive, help develop civic structures in Africa and meet with more acceptance in Europe. Such twinning projects should include exchange programmes for students and workforce.
- Trained ambitious young Africans need opportunities to upgrade their qualifications in Europe, work a while and then return. A few such programmes already exist, but one has to pay bribes or have connections to be admitted. More and better-managed projects are needed.

🗨️ *Creating Jobs in Africa is cheaper than border controls.*

TREATMENT OF AFRICAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN EUROPE

- For the majority of Africans, asylum is not a suitable channel, but they often have no other way to legalise their residency. Europe should create a system of time-limited migration programmes, which combine skills development with decent salaries and a clear end-date.
- Europeans create temporary job openings for East Europeans or Asians. The same could be done for Africans. By now, many African countries have a well-trained ambitious young workforce.
- Even those who are in an asylum procedure or awaiting deportation should have a possibility to acquire vocational skills that can be useful back home and earn a little money. It would make return socially more acceptable and sustainable.

RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

🗨️ *Give targeted support the returnees. State programmes for repatriation only finance villas in Dakar.*

- Return assistance should be individual and tailor-made. It should include technical and business advice and probably material assistance and small loans, not one-off cash payments.
- Reintegration support should extend over a period of a year or more and include access to advisors who have similar areas of expertise. There should be progress monitoring by international structures (EU, embassies, the UN or international NGOs) to provide

legal security to new businesses and protect them from arbitrary interference by local authorities.

- Monitoring should continue until the businesses are self-sufficient.
- There also should be room for out-of-the-box business ideas and projects in remote areas based on the experience people gained in Germany/Austria.
- Local financial structures should be used: Mali, for example, has a well-functioning network of savings banks (caisses d'épargne), including in rural areas.

🗨️ *Do not give us cash, talk to us and understand our projects*

AFRICAN-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

- Germany/Austria should use the expertise of Africans living in Europe. Many projects go wrong because they are developed without local knowledge. The diaspora has both the understanding of local circumstances and the European perspective. They know what works and where the pitfalls are.
- Help create an intellectual elite in Africa. Let them study here but combine it with reinstallation programmes for young professionals, so they have something to return to and do not stay abroad.

🗨️ *Do not work with the caimans (= corrupt politicians). Keep your projects well clear of government structures!*



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