Moving Towards Europe
Diverse Trajectories and Multidimensional Drivers of Migration across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Abstract: The introduction defines the understanding of migration adopted in this study, and describes the scope of the research as well as the methodology and data used. Taking into account the non-linear nature of cross-border movement and dynamically shifting migration decisions en route, the analysis is grounded in the premise that mixed migration journeys towards Europe cannot be seen in isolation from the conditions and developments in the wider regions across which they unfold. Therefore, besides inquiring into migration drivers in countries of origin, the study also examines the social, economic, political and security conditions in countries that act as transit, destination and host contexts for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, paying particular attention to policies and gender- and sexuality-specific dynamics. The introduction also provides an overview to all routes observed in this book.

Keywords: mixed migration | Europe | decision-making | transit | destination | host context

Migration has been typically seen as a function of a set of push factors operating in an origin country paired with pull factors operating in a destination context. This reading is often accompanied by an understanding of cross-border mobility as a ‘direct movement from A to B’ (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett 2016: 12; see also Schapendonk 2013: 12). Such approach attributes little importance to what happens en route and how changing conditions across the contexts in which journey(s) are conducted inform migration processes, patterns and outcomes. Often implying a narrow focus on the crossing of a single border, such reading also tends to totalise diverse forms and experiences of migration under the regular/irregular binary, depending on whether that single border-crossing was authorised or unauthorised in nature. Further, the need to make sense of different forms of population movements from a conceptual and analytical point of view as well as a public policy perspective leads to classification exercises that rely on a clear-cut separation of human mobility into that motivated by political reasons, persecution and conflict on the one hand, and that driven by social and economic reasons (e.g., escaping poverty, accessing livelihoods, or for education or family-related factors) on the other. These categories often fall short of matching the complexity of real-life migration, the intertwined motivations underpinning human mobility, including from a gender- and sexuality-sensitive perspective,
and of morphing plans, motivations and intentions shaped by conditions faced and experiences lived throughout the journeys (Crawley and Skleparis 2018).

Population movements taking place in past decades in different regions of the world, including those eventually reaching the external borders of the European Union, defy such straightforward and simplistic conceptions of drivers, trajectories and forms of migration. Instead, the notion of ‘mixed migration’ has been gaining increasing traction, emphasising the multiplicity, diversity and dynamically shifting nature of the factors motivating migration, the means and modalities of travel throughout the journey(s), and the legal statuses, rights and vulnerabilities of people involved in contemporary population movements (see Mixed Migration Centre 2021).

Indeed, these movements can be better seen through the lens of ‘fragmented journeys’, ‘broken into a number of separate stages, involving varied motivations, legal statuses and living and employment conditions’ for those who are undertaking them (Collyer 2010: 275). Therefore, a focus on the structural conditions and contextual factors in the countries of origin, while necessary, is not sufficient to understand what drives and shapes fragmented journeys or ‘serial migration of consecutive movements’ (Crawley et al. 2016: 28). Neither does a static understanding of a single destination leave room for the modification of plans and intentions vis-à-vis changing conditions during such journeys. Further consideration should be given to the conditions, dynamics, legal and policy frameworks in transit contexts, host countries and different destination alternatives for a more complete and nuanced understanding of mixed migration. Besides placing greater emphasis on secondary drivers informing onward movement (Crawley et al. 2016), approaching migration journeys as non-linear processes unfolding in, and being shaped by different contexts also requires paying attention to the (changes in) opportunity-constraint structures that facilitate, hinder or alter the pathways of cross-border mobility (e.g., entry-exit regulations, border control measures, availability of and access to migrant smuggling services in restrictive border regimes).

The main focus of this study is therefore on the drivers that inform (changing) patterns of migration from a set of origin countries mainly, but not exclusively, relevant for mixed flows arriving in the EU. In identifying key patterns, the analysis therefore places particular emphasis on irregular arrival trends and asylum applications in the EU in the period between 2009 and 2020. Taking into account the fragmented nature of cross-border movement and dynamically shifting migration decisions en route, the analysis begins from the premise that these movements cannot be seen in isolation from the conditions and developments in the wider regions, across which journeys unfold. Therefore,
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besides inquiring into migration drivers in the countries of origin, the study also examines the social, economic, political and security conditions in countries that act as transit, destination and host contexts for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Particular attention is paid to how such conditions across different contexts combine and interact in informing migration dynamics.

Indeed, whilst the single chapters depart from one country of origin and view the EU in its role as a point of (last) destination, they conceive of the context in which migration journeys unfold as a broad space of mobility interlinking several origin, transit, destination and host countries in South-Central and Western Asia, the Horn of Africa, West Africa and the Sahel, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)\(^1\) and Europe. Beyond geographical proximity, it is also the interlocking of the political, economic, security and (migration) policy landscapes that make these different contexts part of common spaces of mobility.

Beyond structural conditions, policies on and beyond migration play a role in shaping the multiple contexts in which migration journeys are conducted.\(^2\) In particular, EU migration policies have increasingly been oriented towards prevention through a mixture of internal and external measures. Growing

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\(^1\) This terminology diverges from strictly geographical references and some of it carries some colonial ‘baggage.’ The term Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is used in order to best represent the expansive region of diverse origin countries on the ‘Atlantic Route.’ The authors consulted with regional experts and examined data from a total of 52 countries collectively defined as the LAC region, according to the United Nations Population Division. These countries draw from North, Central and South America and informed our overall analysis of the Atlantic Route; ultimately, the case study countries are selected from Central and South America. Regarding the Horn of Africa and Sahel, these denominations are widely – and formally – accepted, including by African organisations, and denominated areas which cannot be strictly defined as ‘West Africa’ (such as Mali for example). Finally, instead of the widely used term Middle East which reflects a Euro-centric reading of the region, we prefer to use the geographic and thus less politically loaded term Western Asia.

\(^2\) While a lengthy discussion of policy effects on migration dynamics is beyond the scope of this introduction, it should be noted that scholarship has underlined the limited capacity of migration policies to generate their intended effects particularly in terms of ‘the overall volume and long-term trends of migration,’ and pointed out ‘substitution effects’ of restrictive policies, e.g., diversion of flows to contexts with less restrictive policies, redirection of migration channels from regular to irregular, expediting or postponing the timing of movement, or discouraging return (de Haas 2011:25–27). The academic literature has instead attributed greater influence to non-migration policies, e.g., in the labour, macro-economic, welfare, foreign, trade or aid realms (Czaika and de Haas 2013: 489).
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The externalisation of such measures generates a closer interplay with policies developed in origin, transit, destination and host countries. The analysis therefore also seeks to shed light on the implications of EU policies and their ripple effects on migration governance in the contexts connecting Africa, Asia and the Americas to Europe. Across the chapters, attention is paid to how national policies have been developed, changed or enforced (also) as part of migration cooperation with the EU, and how these might have influenced certain migration dynamics in combined – and sometimes unintended – ways. In particular, the aim is to shed further light on the ways in which the interplay between EU and non-EU migration policies influence conditions, alternatives and opportunity-constraint structures for those considering (onward) migration, including in gender- and sexuality-specific ways. While covering the entire set of non-migration policies is beyond the scope of this volume, to the extent possible, consideration is also given to the implications of the wider set of EU foreign, security and development policies – which are increasingly interlinked with EU migration policy objectives – for the contexts making up the space(s) of mobility under consideration.

Starting from the research focus and analytical framework outlined above, this introductory chapter will now briefly explain the rationale of the case selection and the data used in all chapters, before providing an introductory overview of mixed migration dynamics in the wider spaces of mobility connecting the three macro-regions to Europe via five major routes observed in this book.

1.1 Case selection and data sources

In order to gain a better grasp of the conditions and policies informing the patterns and trajectories of mixed migration flows relevant both for the EU and from an interregional perspective, this study focuses on three larger spaces of mobility connecting Europe with South-Central and Western Asia via the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR); with the Horn of Africa, West Africa and the Sahel via the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) and the Western Africa Route (WAR); and with Latin America and the Caribbean via the Atlantic Route (AR).

Along the EMR, we have chosen three case studies, namely Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. This is firstly because the movement of Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians – the latter exclusively in the last decade – not only constituted the bulk of mixed flows in the immediate regions where they are situated, but also represented a large share of spontaneous arrivals on the EMR particularly in the second half of the 2010s. Also, while conflict and insecurity feature predominantly in shaping
migration from all three countries, they also present differences in terms of the inflection points of the conflict and the extent to which it has been protracted so as to generate deeply ingrained implications for the overall political and economic context. Beyond origin countries, the main components of this mobility space are as follows: Turkey acts both as a destination and host country, mainly for Syrian refugees but also for Afghans and Iraqis, and as a transit context for westward movement for all groups. Iran has been a major destination hosting a sizable Afghan population and a smaller group of Iraqis, while acting as a transit country for Afghans moving westward. Pakistan is another major host country for Afghan populations, which, to a lesser extent than Iran, also constitutes a crossing point for westward movement. Lebanon is among the major host countries for Syrian refugees, whereas Jordan has been highly relevant for subsequent waves of Iraqi migration, and the relatively more recent Syrian refugee movement. The EU, while receiving a smaller share of mixed flows relative to the countries in the regions, also witnessed increasing arrivals from these origin countries in the past decade, and especially during the large-scale movements that took place in 2015–16.

Along the CMR, the WMR and the WAR, this book focuses on Eritrea, Mali, Nigeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Some cases, especially Eritrea and Nigeria, represent origin countries from which a large share of migrants and asylum seekers have irregularly entered the EU territory in the last decade mainly via the CMR, while Mali constitutes a relevant origin country for movements shifting between the CMR and the WMR. Most countries also show differences in terms of how structural drivers operate in informing migration, shedding some light on the interaction between socio-economic and political-security factors. For instance, in some cases protracted and/or localised conflict situations or prolonged political repression act in tandem with socioeconomic challenges (e.g., Mali, Nigeria and Eritrea). In others, a combination of social, political and economic drivers sustains EU-bound out-migration (e.g., Morocco and Tunisia). The case studies will also look at how drivers in origin countries interact with social, economic and political developments in transit (e.g., Niger, Algeria, Libya and Morocco) and destination contexts (e.g., Libya, Italy and Spain), and how factors in transit countries can shape secondary movement to the EU independently from the drivers operating in origin countries. Developments in certain countries of transit and destination (such as Niger, Libya, Italy or Spain) could be relevant for more than one origin country among those identified as case studies: this is due to the complex geography and fragmented nature of routes connecting the macro-regions to Europe.
Along the AR, the gradual decrease and then increase in immigration and foreign nationals in residence, as well as the continually increasing and recently significant number of asylum seekers in the EU stand out. Moreover, there seems to be a changing demography in terms of gender. These overall patterns are examined in this book in further detail in three case studies: Colombia, Honduras and Venezuela. These cases have been selected because they represent the most important migrant patterns to the EU in the last five years, and are related to the significant growth of international protection applications. As the data and literature reflect that Spain is the leading destination in the EU for Latin American and Caribbean mixed migration, the case of Spain receives particular emphasis.

In terms of the time frame, the main focus is on the period between 2009 and 2020, while attention is paid to historically contextualising migration. This time frame has been selected due to the availability of systematic and complete data on spontaneous arrivals and asylum applications in the EU, and as it provides us with multiple observation points before and after the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in Europe. Further, the second half of the decade consequently saw significant developments in terms of EU migration governance, generating effects for the wider political and policy context shaping human mobility. Such policy changes have also taken place beyond the EU, as several countries have had to tackle growing population movements in the last decade.

In order to have a comprehensive perspective on the patterns of mixed migration in the EU over this period, the analyses use publicly available Frontex data on detection of irregular border-crossings on the EMR, CMR, WMR and WAR. Frontex data have been chosen due to their systematic and complete nature when it comes to spontaneous arrivals at all EU external borders in the period under consideration (provided at monthly frequency, broken down into nationalities in the majority of cases). Yet, as is the case with all apprehension figures, which can act only as considerably reliable approximations for irregular migration (Triandafyllidou 2010), Frontex data can only serve as an estimate of the actual volume of mixed flows reaching the EU. Moreover, Frontex data reflect the number of what the Agency refers to as ‘detections of “illegal” border-crossings’\(^3\): as the same person may be apprehended multiple times while crossing the border, the figures are thus likely to reflect a number higher

\(^3\) While ‘illegal’ is the term used by Frontex and will therefore be used throughout the book when making direct references to Frontex data sources (and other secondary sources) using this term, we do not endorse the use of the notion of illegality when referring to unauthorised border-crossings or stays. When referring to the crossing of international borders, entry or stay in the territory of a state other than one’s country
than that of actual persons who were apprehended while crossing the border.\textsuperscript{4} It should also be noted that some nationalities go unnoticed, as they are lumped in the unknown/unspecified category, such as the Palestine refugees from Syria in secondary displacement on the EMR. On the CMR/WMR/WAR, Frontex data signal a large number of persons detected at the external border with unspecified Sub-Saharan nationality. Besides apprehension data, annually aggregated data on asylum applications (at the EU and member state level) provided by Eurostat are used in order to complement the analysis with a focus on asylum-related patterns.

On the AR, migration takes place via air travel. Thus, attempting to determine irregular migration is difficult, as at the time of entry into the EU many migrants have at least temporary legal documentation for what may ultimately end up being a longer and irregular stay. Thus, on this route, alongside a qualitative literature review, data from Eurostat, Spain’s National Statistics Institute (\textit{Instituto Nacional de Estadística}, INE) and the United Nations Population Division are triangulated. In looking at Eurostat trends, a limitation includes that the nationalisation procedures established with origin countries (e.g., bilateral agreements between Spain and several LAC states allowing migrants residing in Spain to naturalise in as little as two years) can affect immigration statistics. Eurostat data and indicators (immigration and asylum applications) therefore must be qualified to an extent.

The analyses focusing on the AR also utilise statistics on Spanish municipal registrations of Colombian, Honduran and Venezuelan nationals (municipal registers are annually updated by the INE). One of the drawbacks of this data is that foreign nationals who have not renewed their registration are automatically removed from the register every two years (Oliveau et al. 2019). The aforementioned ‘expedited’ pathways to nationalisation mean that after acquiring Spanish nationality these individuals are no longer accounted for in the numbers on registered foreign nationals (\textit{ibid.}), which makes it necessary to work with data on place of birth rather than nationality.

\textsuperscript{4}Frontex data do not specify whether the persons apprehended while irregularly crossing the EU borders had international protection in a third country or whether they lodged an asylum application after entry into EU territory. Yet, given the mixed nature of the flows, these figures include border crossings by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
Finally, with regard to data on most population movements examined in this book, there is a ‘need for socially disaggregated data (gender, age, marital status and nationality) that help us to better understand the changing flows and trajectories and the implications for policies concerning transit, reception and relocation’, as argued by Kofman (2019: 2186). While Eurostat asylum application statistics are sex-disaggregated (and are analysed in this volume), no such breakdown is provided by Frontex data on irregular crossings. The scattered and non-systematic nature of disaggregated data has been a major shortcoming in particular with regard to arrivals in Europe, as underlined by Shreeves (2016: 4): ‘Data collection on arrivals is problematic and disaggregated figures for all land and sea arrivals are unavailable’ (see also Fry 2016). Beyond limited sex-disaggregated data, accessing systematically collected quantitative data on (the experiences of) migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who are single men/women, self-identifying as LGBTQI+, of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, travelling with/without children, or on male/female (accompanied and unaccompanied) children on the move is even a bigger challenge. The contributions in this volume will therefore seek to provide qualitative data and analyses accounting for such social differences and to reflect on the ‘gendered experiences of mobility’ (Kofman 2019: 2188), to the extent possible.

1.2 The Eastern Mediterranean Route

While in maps dotted with arrows the EMR is often depicted as starting from South-Central and Western Asia and directly connecting to the eastern borders of the EU, it represents merely the last crossing point of a larger and diversified space of mobility. Before uniting in this culmination point, journeys often follow splintered, non-linear directions. Nevertheless, movement from Afghanistan typically follows passes through Iran (sometimes after a detour via Pakistan) and Turkey, while unauthorised movement from Iraq and Syria to Turkey mainly takes place at the respective land borders. Most spontaneous arrivals in the EU are recorded at the borders of Greece, and to a lesser extent, those of Bulgaria and Cyprus. Border control measures, mobility restrictions and the limitation of legal channels typically augment the need to use facilitation services at different stages (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012; Fargues 2017). Episodes of route (re)diversion between the sea and the land borders separating Greece from

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5 For further information, see Migration Data Portal: Gender and Migration, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/gender-and-migration.
Turkey in the past decade manifest ‘substitution effects’ of restrictive migration policies (de Haas 2011: 25–27), which typically lead migrants and smugglers to seek adaptation strategies, rather than halting mobility (Karaçay 2017).

Informed both by the diversion of some of the movement from Africa mainly towards the EMR due to reinforced border controls by Italy and Spain and an increase in mixed flows from different regions in Asia, irregular crossings at the EMR increased in the 2000s (Fargues and Bonfanti 2014). In the period between 1995 and 2009, journeys reaching the EMR via Turkey were mainly undertaken by Iraqis, Pakistanis, Iranians, Afghans and Palestinians (İçduyuğ 2011: 5). In the 2010s, Bangladesh and North African countries (e.g., Morocco and Algeria) also ranked among the top origin countries for this route, while migrants and asylum seekers from East Africa (Somalia and Eritrea in particular) had been increasingly using the EMR in the early 2010s. The aftermath of the Syrian war changed the picture both in terms of the overall volumes (see Figure 1.1) and, to a certain extent, also the composition of irregular arrivals in the observed period, with Syrians ranking as the first nationality since 2013 with the exception of 2019, when Afghanistan topped the list.

![Figure 1.1: Irregular border-crossings on the EMR (land and sea total), 2009–2020](source)

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Frontex (2021) statistics.

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*Based on authors’ analysis of Frontex (2021) statistics on ‘Detections of illegal border-crossings.’*
The so-called ‘migration crisis’ was largely baptised as such following the 2015 peak on the EMR, composed mainly by the movement of Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis – and others who were either on the move or considering migration, and whose movement was arguably facilitated by the temporary opening of a transit corridor between the EMR, the Western Balkans and the EU countries to the west and north, which was likely to be influenced by the large-scale Syrian refugee movement (see Fargues 2017: 11). While gender-disaggregated data is scarce when it comes to arrivals, there has been an initial increase followed by a drop in the share of female asylum seekers and children during the large-scale movements in 2015–16, as demonstrated by Kofman (2019: 2189): from the summer of 2015 on and particularly in the autumn of 2015, the share of women and children arriving in Greece (predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq) significantly increased. With the entry into force of the March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, the gender balance tilted back to favour men, with their share increasing from 38 per cent in February to 47 per cent in April, and 63 per cent in June 2016 (ibid). The relative decrease in the number of women and children is considered to be caused by the fact that the crossing became more difficult and dangerous after the EU-Turkey Statement (ibid.).

On the EMR, the three origin countries observed in this book – Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – are all marked by conflict. This choice comes at the expense of taking into account other contexts in which no active conflict is present, but where migration represents a coping strategy in the face of political repression, violation of human rights, lack of rule of law, wide economic inequalities, and inability to access decent jobs and livelihoods. This situation is typically also a result of colonial/imperial history, geopolitical rivalries, ongoing foreign intervention and low-level conflict or slow violence. Some such cases in the macro-region under consideration include Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey and further away Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Furthermore, the mixed flows received by the EU in this period are largely overshadowed by the scope of the population movements in the regions in which the main countries of origin are situated. Despite the overall reduction in the volume of mixed flows reaching the EU in the second half of the 2010s partially as a result of the policy measures elevating the hurdles to mobility at and beyond the EMR, many migrants and asylum seekers continued moving towards (and between) countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran and Pakistan. For example, Turkey has witnessed growing irregular arrivals since 2016, particularly of Afghan nationals, with record highs in the number of apprehended irregular migrants in 2018 and 2019 (see Okyay
in this book). Turkey has also been receiving an increasing number of Iranian migrants moving regularly (e.g., through buying property) particularly since the financial and economic crisis in Iran following the US sanctions in 2018 (Ziabari 2021). At the same time, in the aftermath of the 2016 attempted coup and in a context of democratic backsliding, in the period between 2017 and 2020 Turkey also ranked among the top five countries from which irregular crossings on the EMR originated.7

In short, human mobility in this large mobility space is more complex and diverse than the movement of the three main nationalities this book focuses on. Beyond arrivals in Europe, mixed flows, often driven by intertwined reasons – but essentially marked by human insecurity in the wider sense of the term – continue to unfold following various trajectories, albeit receiving relatively less scholarly and policy attention in the EU. Yet, further bordering work and preventive policies largely dominate the current landscape, while legal and safe mobility options to the EU or other destinations in the macro-region remain limited. This is against a background of sustained, if not augmented, political, security and economic challenges in many origin, transit and host countries in the wider region. This picture is likely to have implications for the mixed migration journeys on the EMR and the regions connected to it, as well as for the risks and precarity involved for the persons undertaking them.

1.3 The Central Mediterranean Route

The Central Mediterranean Route is conventionally described as one the of major corridors chosen by irregular migrants headed towards Europe from multiple areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Horn of Africa, West Africa and the Sahel. The route transits through Libya or Tunisia and finally reaches Malta and Italy, after crossing the Mediterranean Sea. While usually framed as a linear trajectory, the CMR should be better understood as part of composite migratory trails converging at certain transit points on the Mediterranean coast of Africa. Moreover, flows reaching the CMR are closely linked to complex migratory dynamics at the regional level.

The CMR has not always been the key corridor for irregular migrants to arrive in Italy, as its development into a ‘route’ is relatively recent and mainly coincides with the period analysed in this book. Over the last decade, the CMR

7 Based on authors’ analysis of Frontex (2021) statistics on ‘Detentions of illegal border-crossings’.
decisively took centre-stage in European policy-making due to the sudden and significant increase in irregular arrivals. During this period, the passage of the Mediterranean Sea has been labelled as the ‘deadliest’ journey in the world (UN News 2017), underlining the deadly risks faced by migrants not only on the sea trail to Europe, but also on the previous corridors crossing the Sahara Desert.

At first Italy showed some resolve in tackling the humanitarian costs of the CMR, for instance by deploying the naval mission Mare Nostrum in 2013. Yet, the agenda of many European governments and institutions has then further shifted towards the priority of stemming irregular arrivals, especially as movement along the CMR intensified over the years.

The most prominent national groups heading towards Italy along the CMR in 2009–20 have been by far Eritreans (119,128 arrivals, 14.21 per cent of the total) and Nigerians (99,056 arrivals, 11.82 per cent), followed by Tunisians (64,390 arrivals, 7.68 per cent). Although conventional wisdom has depicted the CMR as a linear trajectory from African countries to destinations in Europe, large numbers of non-African migrants have also used this route: for instance, Syrians have ranked fourth among the national groups on the CMR in the observed period (63,651 arrivals, 7.59 per cent). Another relevant non-African flow originates in Bangladesh. The rest of the nationalities ranking in the top ten in the past
decade come from the African continent (Somalia, Mali, Gambia, Sudan and Côte d’Ivoire).\(^8\)

The functioning of the CMR – and of the various legs composing it – also presents a gendered dimension: gender can have significant consequences for the experience of migrants from many African countries, as migrant women report a high vulnerability to abuse in countries of origin, transit and destination (IOD PARC 2018). Gendered effects are also reflected in the higher travel costs faced by women compared to men: it has been estimated that on average migrant women pay 31 per cent more than men on the same trajectory, which makes gender a ‘statistically significant determinant of the cost of the journey’ (UNDP Africa 2019: 42).

Available datasets from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the time frame of our analysis indicate that the proportion of male migrants arriving by sea in Italy along the CMR has consistently remained above 70 per cent since 2016, when the flow was at its peak. Women's relative share among registered migrants arriving in Italy across the Mediterranean Sea reached the highest point in 2016 with 13 per cent (UNHCR 2016). Children have also been travelling along this dangerous route – 20 per cent of the total flow in 2019, the most significant proportion over the last few years (UNHCR 2019).

While over the last decade the CMR's visibility has grown for European observers, it should be noted that EU-bound movements on the trails composing the CMR are just a component of much larger and complex spaces of mobility unfolding in regions like West Africa, the Sahel or the Horn of Africa. Moreover, despite the widespread focus dedicated by politics and media to Europe as the supposed ultimate destination of African asylum seekers and refugees, many states sitting in the geographies connected to the CMR, such as the Sahel or Eastern Africa, host a significant share of displaced people from neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, it must be emphasised that recent EU policy measures aiming at enhancing cooperation on migration management with countries of origin and transit along the different legs of the CMR follow a decades-long history of European engagement with the African continent, which is rooted in the colonial past of many EU member states. While it is not possible here to detail the political, economic and social consequences of European actions in several African countries, two general aspects need to be emphasised to better contextualise the analysis on drivers. First, the structural factors influencing migration

\(^8\) Based on authors’ analysis of Frontex (2021) statistics.
decisions have been impacted to varying degrees by the policy initiatives of European actors over decades in multiple fields (trade, investment, development, peace and security, etc.). Second, the deepening cooperation on migration management between the EU and a number of African countries is grafted onto an established – and often imbalanced – relationship, which still provides the EU with many policy tools to leverage its position on migration vis-à-vis its African partners.

### 1.4 The Western Mediterranean Route

The WMR refers to the corridor that migrants choose in entering Europe via travel from North Africa into Spain, either via the Strait of Gibraltar from Morocco’s Tangier to Spain’s Tarifa, or crossing the Moroccan land border into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The WMR inherits a history of broader mobility between North Africa and Europe related to colonial ties, geographical proximity and political, economic and social conditions; between the 1960s and 1990s, this mobility was even viewed favourably as mutually beneficial for both regions (Lahlou 2018).

In the period between 2009 and 2020, apart from nationals of Morocco and Algeria, Sub-Saharan countries of origin that regularly rank in the top ten nationalities engaging in irregular border-crossings on the WMR include Mali, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Gambia.\(^9\) Out of these nationalities, some periodically fall out of the top ten (Cameroon in 2019 and 2020, Nigeria in 2012 and 2013, Burkina Faso in 2011–13 and Gambia in 2013, 2014 and 2020).\(^10\)

In the past few decades, the volume and pathways of movement on the WMR have varied in tandem with shifting migratory patterns and governance dynamics, and the route has become popular with migrants from increasingly diverse origin countries. In terms of North Africa, interregional relations, including political disputes between Morocco and Algeria, often translate to fragmented migration management. Within West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States underpins interregional cooperation and migration regulation to some extent, with most countries in the region working on their own migration policy (Devillard et al. 2015).

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\(^9\) Based on authors’ analysis of Frontex (2021) statistics.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Spanish and EU border control initiatives including securitisation and externalisation policies, as well as international political and humanitarian interventions, can affect all stages of the journeys along the route. The EU and its member states have employed militarisation and deportation at land and sea borders as forms of migration control on the WMR (Topak and Vives 2020). Apart from these measures attempting to manage irregular migration from Africa, in a post-9/11 context mobility from the geographies under consideration can also be conflated with Islam and terrorism (Lahlou 2018). Such securitisation discourses, often gendered, may not only be applied to frame the flows coming from North Africa to Europe, but can also shape North African perceptions of Sub-Saharan migration (Natter 2014).

At the same time, EU migration policies have increasingly targeted origin and transit countries sitting along the trails culminating in the WMR, engaging in partnerships with Sub-Saharan countries pivotal to the route like Mali (currently engaged in 2020–4 joint programming), and offering these countries funding and resources for migration management (Andersson and Keen 2019). Simultaneously, the United Nations and other international actors, also with security and development agendas, engage in missions and programmes in West Africa. All of these measures, besides informing the WMR flows, generate effects on informal economies revolving around transit migration in cities acting as mobility hubs in West Africa, while having repercussions in terms of political and societal conflict (Moretti 2020).

In the ten-year time frame under examination, these international actors have become especially attentive to the WMR, particularly with reference to a peak in flows in 2018. In parallel with this overall trend, the route registers similar patterns of crossings of nationals of the case countries examined in this book, as illustrated in Figure 1.3 below. The number of border crossings in the case countries on the WMR more than doubles in 2017, and doubles yet again to reach a drastic peak in the year 2018. While crossings decrease from 2018 until 2020, the volume remains much greater than in the years 2009–16. In parallel with this overall trend, the route registers similar patterns of crossings of nationals of the case countries examined in this book, as illustrated in the figure. The factors behind and implications of these trends are further examined at the country level in the following chapters.
Figure 1.3: Irregular border-crossings (IBCs) by sea and land on the WMR by case studies, 2009–2020

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Frontex (2021) statistics.

Journeys on the WMR typically start in Sub-Saharan origin countries before proceeding to the desert path, and then reaching North Africa and the Mediterranean. The International Organization for Migration’s Displacement Tracking Matrix particularly highlights Gao in Mali and Agadez in Niger as two transit places on the WMR (Bensaâd 2003). The paths from these two cities usually meet in Tamanrasset, Algeria, before proceeding on through other Algerian cities and entering Morocco. Meanwhile, Senegalese traditionally transit through Mauritania on their way to Morocco (ibid.). Again, it should be highlighted that these trails remain in constant flux.

It should also be qualified that travel along the WMR does not necessarily entail a final destination in Europe, with interregional mobilities characteristic of livelihoods in areas of origin and transit. The WMR overlaps with interregional migration characteristics of Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly West Africa, with movements related to negotiating limited economic opportunities, poverty, subsistence and harsh environments, as well as aspirations, among other factors. Indeed, with regional mobility patterns motivated by informal work in seasonal mining, the socioeconomic ecosystem of the region is heavily intertwined with the business of migration (Bolay 2021).

Besides the desert journey, the sea journey can also be dangerous. Apart from the sea passage, crossings into Ceuta and Melilla often attract political, media or humanitarian attention, particularly in Spain, as sometimes several hundred migrants have attempted to cross the six-metre barbed wire densely equipped with surveillance technology and manned by police patrols (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020). In 2018, the Spanish government announced it would remove the humanitarian-condemned barbed wire in selected areas, opting for a higher
fence instead, though this remains to be materialised (Europa Press 2018). Migrants also attempt a dangerous and deadly method, swimming to these enclaves.

As a final key consideration, on the WMR, it is estimated that at all stages of the journey from Africa to Europe, most migrants rely on smuggling organisations or are subject to trafficking, which takes different forms as kidnapping, extortion, forced labour, slavery, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking and detention (Malakooti 2020; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012; Lahlou 2018). While there are intermittent efforts to curb these practices, they seem to be on the rise, and are perpetrated by smuggling organisations linked to different local criminal groups, which may also collaborate with state authorities or European criminal organisations (Ventrella 2017).

1.5 The Western African Route

More recently, the WAR has served as an alternative to the WMR traditionally utilised by migrants from North, West and Central Africa. This route includes a multitude of departure points on the West Coast of Africa, Morocco, the Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal and sometimes Gambia. Some of these points are more than 1,500 km away from the ultimate destination of the Canary Islands, Spain. The journeys can vary from one or two days if travelling from Tarfaya in southern Morocco, to eleven or twelve days from Senegal, depending on conditions (Monreal Gainza and Paredes 2021). Regardless, the journey is also risky and dangerous, often conducted in small fishing boats. The route’s profile is predominantly male, although recent trends indicate a possibly diversifying profile (ibid.).

It goes without saying that movement on this route is less intense than on the WMR, although it has been experiencing a substantial increase in crossings from 2018 forward. The top ten countries of origin for migrants tracked by Frontex as irregularly crossing the border on this route from 2009 to 2020 consistently include Morocco, Senegal with the exception of the year 2016 (where strikingly there was only one Senegalese migrant recorded) and Mali with the exception of 2016 (with no record of Malians) and 2017 (only one Malian being recorded). Gambia and Guinea often rank in the top ten as well, while occasionally falling out of the list.\(^{11}\)

\[\text{Based on authors’ analysis of Frontex (2021) statistics.}\]
Most notably, in looking at recent trends, the final months of 2020 saw a significant and exponential rise in migratory flows to the Canary Islands (see Figure 1.4), most likely linked to border closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The exceptional year of the pandemic has also witnessed further diversification of nationalities on the WAR. It should be noted, however, that even such growth in volume may not reflect the actual number of those who set out on the journey in the first place.

![Figure 1.4: Irregular border-crossings (IBCs) on the WAR, 2009–2020](image)

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Frontex (2021) statistics.

### 1.6 The Atlantic Route

From the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been a slight acceleration of migratory movements from LAC countries\(^\text{12}\) to Europe. The addition of these new arrivals to migrants remaining in Europe despite the 2008 crisis implies that sizeable populations from the LAC countries reside in Europe. The vast majority is concentrated in Southern Europe with almost 59 per cent living in Spain in 2020, where they either remain or proceed on to settle elsewhere thanks to established networks throughout Europe. Italy hosts 14 per cent of all LAC nationals, followed by France with almost 7 per cent and the Netherlands and Germany with 5.8 and 5.3 per cent, respectively. Despite mobility restrictions

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\(^{12}\) The LAC region referred to here is defined according to UN Population Division (2020) to include a total of 52 countries.
in the pandemic context LAC migration experienced only a slight decrease in 2020, as people continue to search for better living conditions.

In general terms, growing migration towards Europe can be characterised by a young and feminised demographic profile, with many of these immigrants working in low-skill occupations, being overqualified or underemployed in European destination countries. The diversity of migration from LAC countries tends to be diluted in terms of socioeconomic background as a consequence of the limits of the labour insertion, networks and opportunities provided by European destination countries. At the same time, socioeconomic mobility can be facilitated by social networks’ aid in social and cultural reproduction, rights claims, employment opportunities and maintaining relationships with origin countries (Yépez and Herrera 2007). Despite the importance of this migration to Europe, it should be noted that of the 43 million LAC nationals who have migrated globally, almost 60 per cent (25.5 million) reside in North America whereas 26.3 per cent of LAC migrants (11.3 million) are located in another LAC country, and only 11.2 per cent have settled in EU member states (UN Population Division 2020).

The AR, both historically and currently, reflects a diverse history between the LAC region and Europe (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Avila-Tàpies 2019). While also clearly tied to international markets and labour dynamics, migration from LAC countries to Europe, and backwards, is highly characterised by ‘transgenerational’ migration, understood as the migration of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of emigrants who moved in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. From the late nineteenth century until World War II, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese emigration to the region was prevalent (Yépez and Herrera 2007). Overall, historical migration patterns reflect colonial ties and networks, and consequent varying dynamics of immigration and emigration, between the LAC region and Europe.

From 1990 onwards, larger economic migration came first from Peru, Dominican Republic and Cuba to Italy and Spain, and later included Dominicans, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Colombians and Bolivians who often settled in Italy, Spain and Portugal (Yépez and Herrera 2007). Financial crises in 1999 in Ecuador and 2001 in Argentina spurred greater migration, followed by more arrivals from Colombia given the economic situation, displacement and violence (Martínez and Golias 2005); in fact, in the period examined in this study, there has been a gradual increase in international protection applications. From the destination context perspective, particularly labour migration patterns can be explained by significant demand for migrant workers in care work and construction in Spain, while it could also be attributed to potentially attractive conditions
in Spain, including the absence of entry visa requirements, common language or culture, or previous social ties.

This modern labour migration has often been characterised by feminisation, and particularly the Spanish case is described as a family-orientated welfare state with a societal preference for Latin American care workers, based on common language among other factors (Sassen 1998; Martínez and Golias 2005). The recession following the 2008 financial crisis in Spain was thus of significant importance for feminised migration patterns, in that migrant domestic workers faced increased competition and stratification among domestic workers (Hellgren and Serrano 2019). In the past decades, family reunification is affecting the demographics, which currently reflect higher percentages of male migrants.

The financial crisis, unprecedentedly affecting migrant employment in Europe, led to changes in the demographic profile of LAC migrants. However, legal uncertainty and similarly worsening economic situations in various LAC countries, as well as an increasingly restrictive immigration policy in the United States, have also implied continued LAC emigration to Europe. Moreover, the literature notes that migration from LAC to Europe (and specifically Spain) does not represent a simplistic labour or economic dynamic, but is rooted in historical ties in combination with globalisation or transnational networks that facilitate multiple identity and belonging (Pérez-Caramés et al. 2019).

Despite the difficulties of obtaining reliable data to analyse recent trends along the AR, UN data on LAC nationals in EU member states is useful in shedding some light on the trends in the past decade: LAC migrants residing in the EU-27 first fell from 4,080,277 in 2010 to 3,932,524 in 2015, rising again to a total of 4,793,959 in 2020, with migration to Spain making up 58.81 per cent of all migration to the EU that year. The gender breakdown included 41.7 per cent male and 58.3 per cent female migrants.

Focusing on Spain, as the prominent case in illustrating these patterns, the Spanish INE provides information on LAC nationals residing in the country. In Figure 1.5 below, the number of South American nationals gradually decreases over the decade until 2017, when the number of registrations rise again. As for Central America and the Caribbean, the numbers rise until 2013, then decrease until 2015, to steadily increase from that point on. As observed in the literature, these patterns are likely to be related to decreasing immigration as a result of the Spanish 2008 recession and the ensuing crisis, growing return migration, and increasing naturalisation of LAC nationals in Spain. The latter factor is facilitated by a fast-track process for residents and the Historical Memory law entitling those with Spanish grandparents to acquire citizenship with relative ease (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2017).
Turning from immigration to asylum applications, the numbers reflect a gradually rising trend in the analysed time frame. In terms of destination countries, when looking at the averages between the years 2010, 2015 and 2020, member states receiving the largest LAC applications (in order) are: Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany Sweden and the Netherlands. In 2020, applications from the LAC states made up 19.29 per cent of all asylum applications to the EU (91,020 out of 471,900) with a 50–50 breakdown of male and female among those applications recording gender. These numbers reflect a substantial increase from the earlier benchmarks, with a total of 4,240 and 7,295 asylum applications from LAC states in 2010 and 2015 respectively.

References


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\(^{13}\) Authors’ analysis based on Eurostat (2021) data.


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