

Gendered Borders



Editor's Note

Recent UN estimates put the number of African-born international migrants at roughly 45-46 million, with women constituting nearly half and approaching or exceeding parity in key OECD destinations such as the United Kingdom, France, Ireland, and Portugal. Most African migration movements remain intra-continental. However, those who reach Europe, North America, and the Gulf face multi-layered risks often shaped by gender—risks that rarely confront men in the same form or intensity.

In East and the Horn of Africa, women and girls constitute 50% of migrants, while across the continent, up to 80% of informal cross-border traders are women. Yet, the dominant image in the African migration narrative remains that of a young man climbing a fence or boarding a dinghy to Europe. The numbers indicate a different reality, but the global migration narrative has been slow to catch up with the reality of African women.

On the move, women and girls face exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking, and exploitation. When they arrive at their destination, they are often concentrated in informal domestic work, where isolation, wage theft, and abuse are common. Intimate partner violence also often persists or intensifies, compounded by the fear of deportation and limited access to support.

Yet, with these factors affecting African women in the broader global migration



ecosystem, their economic footprint tells a different story: 79% of Sub-Saharan African women migrants send money home regularly. These funds sustain households and finance small enterprises. Still, policy discussions frame the remittance economy around the male breadwinner, treating women as passive recipients rather than active contributors in Africa's roughly \$95–100 billion annual remittance flows.

Borders too are not gender-neutral. At regional crossings, 41% of women traders report sexual harassment by officials, and 18% report demands for sexual favours. On the Mediterranean route, a clinic on Lesbos found that 81% of sexual violence survivors were Africans, with most assaults occurring in transit, mainly in Turkey. This issue looks at African women on the move: what they carry, what they endure, and why migration policy continues to look past them.

Migration Monitor

African women go through channels that are not adequately covered in migration statistics. They face a multitude of gendered challenges while on the move and in their intended or accidental destinations across the world. They travel as domestic workers and traders; some also cross borders as asylum seekers. From the Gulf's kafala system to East Africa's trading posts and the Mediterranean asylum route, their journeys are characterised by gendered labour markets, border violence, abuse, and policy frameworks that see them only as victims. Below is a mapping of some of these movements in relation to some African countries.

NIGERIA

In West Africa, Nigeria remains a source of a significant share of the women trafficked to Europe. In Italy, the International Organization for Migration estimates that over 80% of Nigerian women and girls who reach Italy by sea are victims of human trafficking. Many arrive trapped by debt bondage, with recruiters threatening family members back home to maintain control. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has recorded over 800 convictions of traffickers, yet the network persists through the existence of a system in which former victims recruit new ones.

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is among Africa's largest exporters of domestic labour, with women forming the bulk of roughly 500,000 domestic workers deployed across the Middle East. There had been multiple bans on labour



migration from Ethiopia to Lebanon based on reports of severe abuse and worker suicides from 2008 to 2020. The bans did not stop the flow; women simply resorted to irregular channels. In recent years, Ethiopian authorities have organised evacuations from Lebanon, where economic collapse left many confined without wages for extended periods. Recruitment agencies and informal brokers in Addis Ababa continue to operate with inadequate oversight, presenting contracts in languages their clients cannot understand.

GHANA

Ghanaian women have increasingly moved to Lebanon and Kuwait for domestic work, convinced by promises that at times dissolve upon arrival. Many report completing their contracts without receiving the salaries they were owed. When conditions deteriorated in 2020, the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs evacuated over 2,200 Ghanaian domestic workers from Lebanon. At home, Ghanaian domestic workers contribute significantly to the remittance economy, with women dominating the receiving end of remittances. Roughly two-thirds, or 66%, of recipients are female, and much of that money goes directly into small businesses and household maintenance.

ERITREA

From East Africa, Eritrean women make up a significant portion of the asylum seekers who eventually reach Europe, though they rarely make headlines in that regard. Most of them travel through the Sudan-Libya corridor, where detention centres have become sites of widespread sexual slavery and violence. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) have documented cases of systematic rape and sexual slavery targeting Eritrean women in Libyan detention. Those who reach Italy or Germany often apply for family reunification to bring children left behind in Sudan or Ethiopia. European capitals have tightened these provisions, leaving mothers separated from their families for years while their children remain in camps.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa hosts Africa's largest immigrant population, but the gender gap in economic participation is stark. Among working-age immigrants, men are employed at more than twice the rate of women. Women migrants are mostly concentrated in private households as domestic workers,

often reporting violence, exploitation, hard labour, and abuse. At the Beitbridge crossing from Zimbabwe, women also report high levels of sexual violence. Rather than protection, the Department of Home Affairs has directed its energy towards document enforcement, leaving most immigrant domestic workers without formal legal cover and with little avenue for recourse when employers abuse them.

KENYA

Kenya is one of the major sending states for domestic workers to the Gulf from sub-Saharan Africa, with estimates of Kenyans in the GCC exceeding 400,000 workers. Reports of abuse and forced confinement in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar have prompted several government attempts to regulate the trade, including temporary bans and suspensions. Human rights monitors, including Amnesty International in its 2025 report, have documented Kenyan women subjected to conditions of forced or bonded labour, where employers control their movement and communication. Despite bilateral labour agreements meant to protect workers, recruitment agencies routinely bypass oversight, and criminal syndicates continue operating through back channels.

From our Writers

The Mobility Photobook: Archiving Somali & Its Diasporic Legacies through Gender.

Mohamed Mohamud

Somali Sideways has managed to collect hundreds of stories through different platform-breaking stereotypes, building a community through which narratives have managed to drive understanding.

The Somali diaspora across the African continent embodies a profound narrative of migration, identity, and resilience. Fleeing conflict, economic challenges, and environmental adversities, many Somalis have established thriving communities in cities such as Cairo, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Addis Ababa. These metropolises have

become focal points for exploring how migration influences identity formation, particularly through the lens of gender.

Locating Gender

In Johannesburg, Somali women navigate complex social landscapes as they work to preserve their cultural heritage amidst the integration into the greater South African society. This acts as a balancing act in maintaining the traditional practices and values within their communities and engaging with the various cultural dynamics at play in the city of Johannesburg. As different research has indicated, such women are passionately negotiating their cultural and religious identities against the given widespread global imagination of helpless victimhood.



In Nairobi's Eastleigh, commonly referred to as "Little Mogadishu," Somali migrants have established a bustling commercial hub. Here, women play important roles not only within their households but also in entrepreneurship, challenging traditional gender norms. Similarly, in Johannesburg, Somali women navigate complex social landscapes, balancing cultural preservation with integration into the broader South African society. As shown in research, these women actively renegotiate their cultural and religious identities, besides the globally spread imagination of helpless victims as the representation of Somali women.

In Cairo and Addis Ababa, Somali communities face unique challenges and opportunities. The migrants in Cairo often confront a number of issues related to legal status and economic integration, while proximity to their homeland allows Addis Ababa to convey comfort and complexity in identity formation. Across these cities, Somali women are at the forefront of the struggle in rewriting their roles and contributing to the community while challenging preconceived notions about gender within the diaspora.

The Sideways

Amplifying these diverse experiences is Somali Sideways, a storytelling platform for Somalis worldwide to reimagine the perceptions of Somalis. It began as a photography project that empowers people to share personal stories with a signature sideways photograph, symbolising a shift in perspective. It managed to give birth to an international community in which Somalis

can express themselves through sharing their experiences, challenges, and accomplishments that humanize and diversify the Somali narrative.

Over time, Somali Sideways has developed into a multidimensional project that has also seen other publications, such as Somali Sideways: Photobook in Changing Perceptions of the Somalis and Somali Sideways: Women Stories, highlighting the vital roles women in Somali communities play. In this respect, Somali Sideways has managed to collect hundreds of stories through different platforms-breaking stereotypes, building a community through which narratives have managed to drive understanding. By amplifying the voices of the marginalised and showcasing the positive portrayal of Somali worldwide, the platform challenges prevailing stereotypes and empowers people to take pride in their heritage and identity. Somali Sideways has been instrumental in bringing the global Somali experience to life through establishing a sense of unity and shared identity among Somalis across the diaspora through stories of migration and identity.

Diasporic Survival

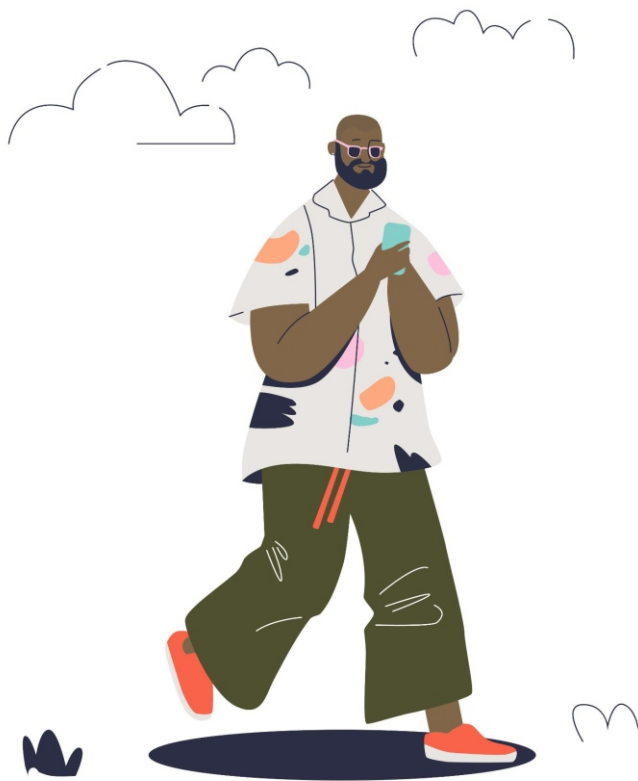
These diversities underpin the constant transformation of identity of Somalis outside of the Somali borders, reflecting on cultural continuities, challenges, and contradictions. Examples from the Somali Sideways podcast highlight how intra-African migration has moved toward or realigned established traditional gender positions.

Among many examples, one shows evidence of how in Johannesburg, the most financially productive part of most Somali communities comprises women-contributing by running business shops and entrepreneurial ventures. Projects like Somali Sideways go beyond the personal experiences of migrant lives but become important ways in which the complexities of Somali migration and flux of identity get archived and added to the broader discourse of African migration. They document nuances in how cultural practices are passed

on, adapted, or changed in a new setting—a holistic view of migrant experiences.

The Somali diaspora in Africa basically epitomizes the complex relationship that exists between migration, identity, and gender. Resilience and adaptability have granted Somali migrants continued making and remaking communities with much to teach about the wider story of African migration. Their stories of survival and retaining cultures are a testament to the strength of the human spirit.





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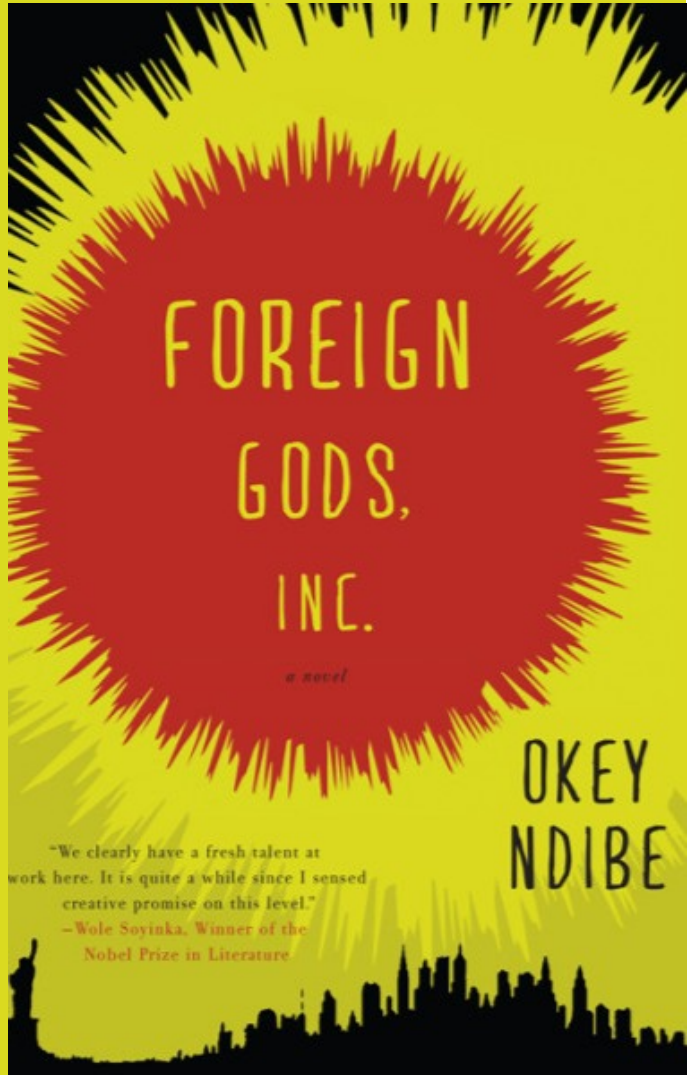
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What to Read Now

Foreign God's Inc. is a tale about Ike, a Nigerian man who migrates to New York but is unable to find a white-collar job despite having a degree in Economics. In order to make ends meet, he proceeds to become a cab driver. But pressure from his widowed mother and unsatisfied wife pushes him to return home in a quest to steal the statue of a deity and sell it to a gallery in New York. He has to overcome several hurdles including the worshippers of these deity and the expectations of his people back home as he returns from the diaspora.

Ndibe uses wit and humor to explore this nuanced topic, offering us a perspective into the experience of the immigrant in America. The story examines the ways modernity exaggerates perceptions of luxury and influences desires to own artifacts and appear exotic. This novel is an intelligent and vital work of fiction that offers a unique depiction of how corruption, segregation and societal pressure evades even the purest intentions.



Resources



Women in Migration Network

The Women in Migration Network (WIMN) is a community formed on the basis of women's migration experiences, working with organisations and migrant communities to strengthen advocacy for migrant women across countries. Its work focuses on amplifying migrant women's stories and experiences, building systems that support their rights and participation, and forming alliances with organisations that work toward a shared goal. Its advocacy covers issues including labour rights, climate change, gender equality, and regularisation of migrants' status.

Further inquiries: <https://womeninmigration.org/>

In Numbers

MIGRANT WOMEN'S DEATHS IN 2017

Since IOM's Missing Migrants Project began collecting data in 2014, it has recorded the deaths of

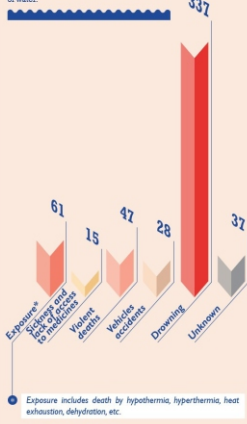
1,234 women.

DEATHS BY REGION OF ORIGIN



DEATHS BY CAUSE

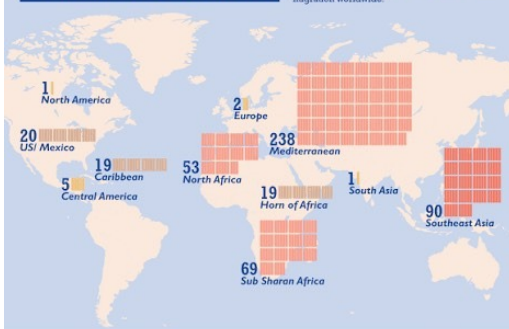
The vast majority of recorded migrant women's deaths were due to drowning – 337 women lost their lives while crossing a body of water.



As many deaths of women occur at sea, and in large numbers, the identities of those who die often remain unknown.

DEATHS OF MIGRANT WOMEN BY REGION OF INCIDENT

In 2017, the Missing Migrants Project recorded the deaths of 1,234 women during migration worldwide.



Source: IOM's Missing Migrants Project

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Migrant women face significant risks along migration routes. The images show recorded deaths of 1,234 migrant women from 2017, with drowning accounting for the largest share of known causes. The second shows the regions of where these deaths occurred, with the Mediterranean recording the highest number of deaths, highlighting the dangers women face across different migration routes worldwide.

Source : Migration data portal

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When you JOIN THE COMMUNITY, you get early access to:

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- Verified global migration updates
- Resources and opportunities
- Policy and data on migration explained simply
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The Mobility Gaze

SPORTS

Road to Riches

On the scout of easy money, Nigerian girls use all available tricks to make it to Europe

By Felix Umoru

TESSY JOHN, 25, A BEAUTICIAN, is determined to travel out of this country at all cost. In spite of her success at her beauty shop at Okokomaiko, Lagos, she believes that she can hit it big in Europe.

Her first attempt to travel to France failed when some touts swindled her of about N150,000 in 1978. She was undaunted. She made another move in 1999 to travel to Italy, which was also unsuccessful. Recently, her third attempt to travel to Italy with three other girls, using Niger-Delta Football Club as a front was thwarted by the officials of Denmark Embassy in Nigeria. Three times unlucky.

John Kate Thompson, Obiageli Okoye, Pauline Uli and Josephine Uti were selected to travel to Italy through Denmark. They could not produce any genuine reasons for their intended journey to Denmark. The embassy refused them visas. *Newswatch* can reveal that the women were going abroad for prostitution.

Last week, John told *Newswatch* that she was disappointed with the Danish Embassy. She, however, denied she was travelling to Italy via Denmark for prostitution. "I will surely travel out of the country. I know one day the opportunity will come," she said. John heard about her aborted journey through Teju Akin, a player with the Niger-Delta Club, who was sent by Paul, the coach of the Niger-Delta Club, to look out for young girls who are desperately interested in travelling abroad. John and the other three girls readily accepted the offer. The deal was that they were to travel free of charge. All their travelling documents were to be procured for them free of charge. They were reportedly told they were going to Italy through Denmark to work for a particular group. The name of the group was not disclosed to them, neither the nature of the job.

Syndicates that specialise in women trafficking often go the extra mile to provide everything for those selected girls who must appear well dressed. Sometimes, the syndicates provide them with the right dresses to make the girls appear respectable. They apply for visas as artists, models, or football fans.

Football tournaments now provide new channels to export young girls to Europe for prostitution. Since security checks for footballers is generally relaxed all over the world...

The syndicates are running a lucrative business. When they take out the girls, they hand them over to prostitution rings. What the girls earn is shared between them and the leaders of the syndicates. The girls make as much as \$30,000 each for their handlers.

Newswatch investigations revealed that the football club coach, whose team was to play a match for the DANA cup competition for Under-21 footballers in Denmark in July had sent some of his players to recruit young, beautiful girls to join the team to travel to Denmark. The coach who was simply identified as Coach Baul had a prior arrangement with one Prince, a Lagos-based lawyer. The lawyer

has a strong connection in Italy from where the girls are taken for prostitution. According to Akin, one of the players of Niger-Delta football team, John was to act as the team nurse, while the other three were to act as team secretary and wives to two officials of the team.

Newswatch learnt that at the Denmark Embassy, the two supposedly married women could not produce their marriage certificates. The others could not provide convincing answers to questions put before them by the embassy officials.

Coach Paul denied any involvement in the prostitution ring. He said that the women were actually back-up staff to provide welfare to the team. He said since the embassy refused them visa, the team would have to travel without them.

At the Festac passport office where the players were issued passports, Dare Fagbohun, public relations officer, told *Newswatch* that the immigration service had no right to deny passports to any applicants. He said there was no way one could differentiate between a prostitute and non-prostitute.

Prince, who was the main actor in the deal refused to speak to *Newswatch*.

The Niger-Delta Football Club is said to belong to Joseph Jagunlori, a former chief judge of Delta State. The DANA Cup tournament is a yearly event. But most Nigerian teams do not feature in it. According to Ntiero Effiom Ntiero, chief coach, Pelican Stars of Calabar, the Nigerian government does not encourage Nigerian soccer clubs to participate in it.

The Niger-Delta Club was said to have been sponsored by Oceanic Bank. But Lanre Babajide of the corporate affairs department of the bank, denied knowledge of the club and its sponsorship by the bank. He told *Newswatch*: "I do not have such a record as regards the sponsorship of the Niger-Delta Club to Denmark."

Football tournaments now provide new channels to export young girls to Europe for prostitution. Since security checks for footballers is generally relaxed all over the world, prostitution syndicates infiltrate football supporters clubs and use them to run their prostitution rings.

This 2002 newspaper report by *Newswatch* documents how a group of Nigerian women desperately seek opportunities to move abroad, to escape economic hardship, despite the numerous visa rejections and dangers of irregular migration. It highlights how syndicates exploit young women by presenting them with dangerous opportunities under the guise of a better life. This traces back the dangers of irregular migration and how challenges, economic hardship, and limited opportunities often leave women vulnerable to exploitation.

ARCHIVING

Archiv.ing digitises Nigeria's old newspapers and magazines to preserve history and foster accessibility.

The Community Corner

POP CHAT WITH DOZIE ANYAEBUNAM, THE HOST OF THE NEWCOMERS PODCAST

WHY MIGRATION?

Because I think immigration is the human story. We've always moved as humans from time immemorial. And so I think it's worth exploring what that move means to us on an identity, emotional, physical, and conceptual level. More often than not, immigration is discussed from the POV of politicians, which is often polarized, lacks nuance, and is attuned to their particular leanings and biases.

WHY THE NEWCOMERS PODCAST?

Launching The Newcomers was a chance to explore my earlier thesis from the POV of a Canadian immigrant, a country that I think runs one of the best immigration programs in the world. It was also a chance for me to try to make sense of the immigration journey and all the emotions I had to deal with when I moved to Canada 5+ years ago.



WHAT'S YOUR ONE SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE AS A MIGRANT?

Dealing with the fact that the way I view the world is fundamentally different from the way my kids see/view the world. I always say I am Nigerian-Canadian and my kids are Canadian-Nigerians. And why that seems to be only a label, there's such a massive gulf in how I interact with the world based of all the cultural scripts I moved here with. In a way, its equal parts exhilarating and exhausting, especially because I have to ensure that I don't pass on cultural norms and scripts that don't work here while also keeping them rooted to their Nigerian heritage.

We are building a newsroom & community that counters misinformation and bias in global mainstream news about African migration. We are working with local and cross-border journalists to challenge biased global reporting frameworks that shape migration. We want to disrupt extractive storytelling practices & expand the range of perspectives represented in international media discourse surrounding migration.

The magazine is independently funded by the Diaspora Africa team. Many updates featured in this publication are sourced from our Migration Monitor database, which tracks migration trends affecting African migrants and diasporic communities globally.

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