Why do Malians migrate irregularly?

The factors behind one’s decision to migrate are multiple and interconnected in a complex way.

1. Cultural factors
   - West Africans have always travelled throughout history
   - Migration is seen as a coming-of-age ritual

2. Self-propulsion
   - Emigrants tend to promote migration among peers and relatives
   - The diaspora can provide information & financial/logistical support

3. Hardship of accessing regular venues
   - Visas are hard to obtain
   - Embassies and consulates are often not accessible

4. Low levels of security
   - Terrorism and insecurity are widespread in some regions
   - Some Malians face personal persecution

5. Low levels of services and infrastructures
   - Drinking water and electricity are not available everywhere
   - Healthcare is often expensive
   - People feel they enjoy low quality of life

6. Socio-economic problems
   - Youth unemployment is very high
   - Education does not provide the required skills
   - Agriculture is not profitable
   - Climate change makes income unpredictable
What is the Malians’ migration imaginary?

The perception of MIGRATION

Intra-African mobility is very rooted in Malians’ collective consciousness.

Mali is seen as a country of no opportunities while Europe is seen as a borderless continent of infinite opportunities.

Paradoxically, Malians refuse to be in low-wage jobs in Mali but are willing to (temporarily) fill them in Europe.

Malians have nearly no knowledge of international protection and asylum procedures.

Many Malian migrants are driven by a great sense of naïve curiosity and religious fatalism.

The increasing awareness of risks does not suffice to discourage irregular migration.

The role of FAMILIES

Some families resort to migration to enhance their prestige or appease competition among siblings or within extended households.

Some Malians migrate irregularly to send remittances and help families remove the stigma of poverty.

Others migrate to escape family dynamics, e.g. arranged marriages.

The role of the DIASPORA

The Malian diaspora is increasingly aware of the downsides of irregular migration: poor reception conditions, mounting xenophobia, language barriers and isolation.

They play conflicting roles: advocating against irregular migration and shaping a distorted positive picture of migration in Europe through social media.

Sometimes the achievements of Malians living in Europe fuel the wish to migrate irregularly.

Returnees raising awareness on risks often lack credibility and struggle being acknowledged, trusted and heard.

Malians abroad sometimes provide perspective migrants with information on destination countries and migratory routes.
Malians accounted for 1.5-2% of the African migrant population in Spain between 2009 and 2018 (Spanish Ministry of Labour, 2018)

Men/women: 85%/15% (Spanish Ministry of Labour 2016-2018)

Regions with strongest presence:
1) Catalonia
2) Andalusia
3) Valencia

Spain and Mali signed a cooperation agreement on migration and in 2018 and set up a voluntary return programme for Malians

Malians residents are the 37th national group in Italy and the 6th among sub-Saharan African countries (ISTAT 2018)

Arrivals by sea peaked between 2014 and 2016 and continued to shrink since

Men/Women: 96%/4% (ISTAT 2016-2018)

Regions with strongest presence:
1) Lombardy
2) Lazio
3) Campania

International protection has become the second reason for entry of non-EU citizens after family reunification (Italian Ministry of Interior & National Commission for the Right of Asylum)
The role of the Malian diaspora in Italy and Spain

**RETURN of Malians**

Return can have a major impact on the economic and social balance of families.

It is widely underused among the Malian diaspora as conditions and compensations are not attractive if not coupled with income generating activities.

Returnees are reluctant to share their experience if return to Mali is perceived as a failure.

**The IMPACT on irregular migration**

Maliens abroad sometimes support irregular migrants out of solidarity or as an investment.

Returnees raising awareness on risks often lack credibility and struggle being acknowledged, trusted and heard.

**Migration and DEVELOPMENT of Mali**

The diaspora is currently engaged in small-scale development projects in Mali focusing on emergency-oriented interventions with little development impact (providing medical equipment and covering part of the medical staff’s salaries).

Embassies often fail to enable the diaspora and to act as a platform for coordination and information exchange.
Mali’s development agenda lacks impact as it is too influenced by external actors and does not respond to the socio-cultural specificities of the country.

Corruption is one of the top issues together with the underdevelopment of basic infrastructures and the inability to meet people’s needs.

The Malian government’s approach to irregular migration is thought to be ambiguous since taking a harder stance against irregular migration would jeopardise the political mandate.