

FAKE NEWS

EUROPE'S FALSE NARRATIVE OF AFRICAN MIGRATION

The growth of far-right propaganda against migrant groups in Europe invokes a familiar image: overcrowded boats crossing the Mediterranean, migrants intercepted at sea, and heated political debates over border security due to “foreign threats.” These images have become so increasingly normalized that for many individuals, this image has become entrenched in their mind at the very thought of African mobility. However, these narratives fail to encompass the realities of an increasingly transnational globe, and utilize fear as a means of pushing political agendas.

Statistics amongst leading political scientists challenge the prevailing narrative of the “African migration crisis” that is so often spoke of in Europe. According to recent estimates, approximately eighty percent of African migration takes place within Africa (Bisong and Zanker, 2026). In fact, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation estimates that only about three percent of Africans lived outside their country of birth as of 2020. The question then begs: if migration of African peoples occurs primarily within the continent and only a small proportion of African people live abroad, why does African migration continue to be such a repeated discussion in European political and security debates?

The answer lies not in how Africans themselves are fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries, but in how the rhetoric surrounding the region and its people have come to be imagined and described. Over the past two decades, with the rise of far-right populist groups worldwide, African migration has increasingly been framed through the lens of border control, deterrence, surveillance, and irregular movement. While hundreds of thousands of traders move frequently between nations in West Africa, conversations of boats crossing the Mediterranean, which are far fewer in number, attract much more attention among news outlets. One is far more likely to see the image of a shipwrecked refugee boat in a newsheadline than a student relocating to another African country for university. As such, the

narrative of African migration has been reduced to racist and discriminatory attacks that cause great harm to those seeking asylum and misrepresent the realities of Global South migration.

One of the most interesting paradoxes of contemporary Africa-Europe migration relations is that the two regions often approach conversations of mobility from two drastically different perspectives. Across much of Africa, political actors often discuss migration in regard to remittances, labour mobility, education, trade, and development. In Nigeria, for example, migration has become a prominent discussion among its country leaders, but not viewed from the same negative gaze as that of their European counterparts. In fact, the term *Japa* has grown increasingly popular in Nigeria, a Nigerian slang of the Yoruba language literally meaning “to run away,” reflecting widespread discussions about foreign groups seeking opportunity and a brighter future within their country’s borders. Also, African countries benefit greatly from their diasporas, with remittances continuing to contribute billions of dollars annually to the Nigerian economy, supporting households, businesses, education and healthcare. BusinessDay, for instance, estimates that more than \$21.8 billion of Nigeria’s economy stemmed from diaspora remittances in 2025 alone. Therefore, migration is not only understood as a growing phenomenon, but also as a means of social and economic advancement for all those involved.

Europe, by contrast, approaches migration increasingly through the lens of security. This difference in perspective not only is reflected in rhetoric but also bears practical consequences, much of which is visible in the migration partnerships emerging between European institutions and African states. While African organisations such as the African Union and ECOWAS have often promoted mobility as an integral part of broader goals towards regional integration and economic development, European institutions have frequently centered on reducing arrivals, strengthening border management, and externalising migration controls beyond Europe’s territorial borders. Therefore, while both regions speak frequently about migration, their objectives differ greatly, so much so as to make it greatly difficult for effective compromise (Adepoju and Bjarnesen, 2026).

It is therefore essential that media outlets, political actors, and others challenge the dominant, yet false narrative, that African migration is primarily directed

toward Europe. In contrast, available evidence suggests that African mobility is far more diverse. There are countless reasons why people in today's world move from one place to another, whether that be education, employment, trade, family obligations, religious commitments, and/or personal aspirations. Many others also never leave the continent at all. However, only the movement of certain racial and ethnic groups are so discouraged as to spark such volatile discussions that depict migrants in such a negative light. These oppressive views result in significant barriers for those that are forced to flee their homes, limiting their movement and subjecting them to harm that could have been avoided if rhetorics shifted.

This paper does not seek to argue that migration poses no challenges, nor does it deny that tragedy befalls many who attempt to navigate irregular migration routes. Rather, it seeks to highlight that modern narratives surrounding African migration tell a false story. When the most dramatic forms of migration are the ones most visible to the public, they risk obscuring the larger patterns they are intended to represent.

It is not inherently an issue that Europe speaks so frequently of African migration; however, the problem arises when these conversations refuse to acknowledge how and why African populations move and their understanding of mobility. Without a more inclusive and understanding framing of this issue, discussions surrounding migration will only become more fraught with misunderstanding and tension. While Europeans fear the “crisis of African migration,” it might be better understood as facing a crisis of failing to understand the roots and understanding of African mobility in other regions.

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