

ITALY

Outspoken but unheard

How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea route

October 2019



Mixed
Migration
Centre

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This study was conducted by REACH, in partnership with the Mixed Migration Centre. It was funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).



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About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

About the Mixed Migration Centre

The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move. The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and global and regional MMC teams are hosted by the DRC offices in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis and Yangon.

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SUMMARY

The relation between refugees and migrants¹ in mixed migration flows² along the Central Mediterranean Sea route (CMR)³ and the diaspora⁴ in Europe remains poorly understood. While some research suggests that diasporas in Europe act as a ‘pull factor’ for migration to Europe,⁵ diaspora members are also frequently hailed as potential key interlocutors in the provision of information and other types of support to refugees and migrants in countries of origin and *en route*.⁶

The present assessment, conducted by REACH in collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), aims to explore the relationship between diaspora members in Italy and refugees and migrants along the CMR, in countries of origin, *en route*, and at destination. The study presents three case studies on refugees and migrants from Mali, Eritrea and Bangladesh. Nationals from these countries were selected based on three key factors: (1) having arrived in Italy after travel along the CMR between 2017 and 2018, (2) their presence as diaspora communities in Italy and (3) representatives of three primary regions of origin among irregular sea arrivals to Italy: West Africa, East Africa and Asia. Based on a total of 75 individual semi-structured individual interviews with refugees and migrants (30) and diaspora members (45) and 7 key informant interviews⁷ in Italy, the study adopted a qualitative research approach aimed at investigating (1) the diaspora’s role (direct and indirect) in shaping migration decision making in countries of origin, (2) its role in providing support to refugees and migrants *en route* and (3) its role in providing support upon arrival, as well as exploring differences across nationalities when comparing the findings.

The study finds that contact between diaspora members and (prospective) refugees and migrants along the CMR was limited among respondents from Mali and Bangladesh. Diaspora groups of these nationalities reportedly played an indirect role in shaping decision-making over migration of prospective migrants in the country of origin. Also interaction during the journey was reportedly limited. The Eritrean community displayed more contact between prospective refugees and migrants and diaspora members in Europe, confirming previous research on this group in particular.⁸ Diaspora members, when asked about migration by (prospective) refugees and migrants, reportedly mostly tried to discourage people back home from making the dangerous sea journey. This advice, however, was likely to go unheard, as diaspora respondents felt they were perceived as gatekeepers. In contrast, their mere presence in Italy, and, in some cases, their positive accounts to family back home (made to not make close family members worry) reportedly influenced the widely held belief in the country of origin that Europe is a land of opportunity, thereby indirectly influencing the decision to migrate. This was despite of diaspora members’ warnings about the dangers of the trip and likely unmet expectations once in Italy, in terms of living and working conditions.

Pre-departure contact and influence on migration decision-making in the country of origin

- **While the vast majority of diaspora members interviewed in Italy were reportedly in regular contact with individuals in their countries of origin, recent arrivals reported limited interaction with the diaspora in Europe prior to their departure.** This may be because the majority of diaspora respondents were in contact with their close family only and, to a lesser extent, with both family and friends. In contrast, only eight out of twenty-five respondents among recently arrived Bangladeshi and Malian refugees and migrants reported having been in touch with diaspora groups in Europe before leaving home, highlighting

¹ For the purposes of this assessment, the expression “*refugees and migrants*” refers to all people on the move along the routes studied including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and other populations (such as victims of trafficking and unaccompanied and separated children) unless a distinction is otherwise made.

² The Mixed Migration Centre defines “*mixed migration*” as “cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities” ([MMC’s Understanding and use of the term Mixed Migration](#)).

³ In the context of this study, the ‘Central Mediterranean Sea Route’ shall denote migratory transit routes through Africa, both from the Horn and West and Central Africa towards North Africa (with Libya being a key transit point and destination country in its own right for some refugees and migrants) and the Mediterranean Sea.

⁴ There is no widely accepted definition of “diaspora”. For the purposes of this assessment, the International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM) definition has been adopted. IOM conceives *diaspora* as migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. IOM also refers to them as *transnational communities*, because they comprise people who are connected to more than one country (IOM, [World Migration Report 2018](#)).

⁵ See for instance writings on the case of Eritrean and Nigerian diaspora communities in France and Italy. Also: Crisp, J., [Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regime](#), 1999.

⁶ Crisp, J., [Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regime](#), 1999.

⁷ Key informants included humanitarian workers and migration experts working in Italy.

⁸ See for instance: UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019.

a disconnect between assessed diaspora members in Europe and refugees and migrants travelling along the CMR.

- **Diaspora members interviewed shared information about life in Europe mostly with family or close friends.** What they shared entailed mixed messages, with a slight majority painting a positive picture of their life in Europe, in order to not make family members concerned about their safety or conditions. Some respondents were reportedly open about the difficult situation many of them faced in Italy.
- When diaspora members were contacted by someone in their country of origin who was considering migrating along the CMR, **the majority of them reportedly advised against the journey or suggested to attempt migrating through regular routes instead.** However, respondents from all three nationalities felt that their counterparts often did not trust their warnings, with some respondents suggesting that people back home would regard them as gatekeepers, thereby disregarding their advice.
- **While the majority of refugees and migrants interviewed had reportedly not aimed to reach Europe when they left home, those who did (10/30) had reportedly been influenced by the positive notion of Europe as a land of opportunities when deciding to leave.** In this context, the presence of the diaspora in Europe was not reported as a factor in deciding on Europe as initial destination by most respondents. Among those who wanted to reach Europe when they left home, diaspora presence appeared to have had a role in influencing their destination choice in an indirect way, through their presence and the image they were (inadvertently) sending back home. This was in contrast to respondents' advice on migration, which was almost in all cases not to migrate irregularly via the CMR.

Interaction and support during the journey

- **Interaction between diaspora members and refugees and migrants *en route* along the CMR appears to be limited.** Overall, respondents held that diaspora members in Europe shared little information with refugees and migrants *en route*. Information on routes was reportedly not shared much. Most reported information sources used by refugees and migrants to inform the choice of routes were smugglers (reported by all Bangladeshi recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed) and people they met during the journey. When diaspora members did share information on migration routes, this was reportedly based on previous personal experience and may put individuals at risk if such information is outdated.⁹
- **The role of diaspora members in information sharing on the journey and potential protection risks faced differed between nationalities interviewed.** Recent arrivals among Malian refugees and migrants, for instance, reported having been well informed about the risks of the journey, but decided to migrate anyway. This was due to the fact that respondents had gone to Libya for work and, once the security situation in the country deteriorated, needed to leave.¹⁰ Reportedly, the irregular sea route was the only way to leave the country for respondents, due to the difficulty to leave the country via land/ plane once irregular in Libya and, in the case of Eritrean nationals, their inability to return to their country of origin.
- **Bangladeshi respondents felt that Bangladeshi refugees and migrants were usually less informed about the dangers of the trip,** compared to the other nationalities studied, often citing the *dalal*¹¹ as the main source of partial – and often wrong – information shared. The Eritrean diaspora was found to be the most active in sharing information about the dangers of the journey, although diaspora members and key informants agreed that such warnings were likely to go unheard among Eritreans, because people's motivation to leave Eritrea was reportedly so strong that nothing could deter them.
- **The majority of actions suggested by diaspora members and recently arrived refugees and migrants to make the journey safer were attempts to persuade people not to migrate.** All but one

⁹ See also: UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019.

¹⁰ Four Malian respondents specifically mentioned the lack of legal pathways out of the country as a reason why they had to move irregularly and thereby expose themselves to the dangerous sea journey.

¹¹ The Bengali term 'dalal,' or 'broker' in English, is used in Bangladesh to describe a person who arranges the transportation of persons from one location to another. The term can also be used to refer to a 'financial stockbroker,' as well as a migrant smuggler or a human trafficker. Joudo Larsen et al., 2012, 'Trafficking in persons monitoring report: January 2009 - June 2011' Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, 36.

individual interviewed reported that they would never recommend the journey to anyone, because of the level of protection risks they themselves had experienced, which included robbery, kidnapping and other forms of extortion.

Interaction and support upon arrival

- **Interaction between recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members interviewed in Italy was limited.** Among thirty recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed, only eight reported being in contact with diaspora members in Italy, with none reportedly knowing a formal diaspora association. Similarly, only one third of diaspora respondents reported having been in contact with recently arrived refugees and migrants and, of them, only two reportedly knew the individual before reaching Italy.
- **More than half of diaspora members who were or had reportedly been in contact with new arrivals reported having provided them with some kind of support.** Most reported types of support provided were accommodation, help with the language, help in accessing legal assistance or accessing other types of services. The level of support received differed by recently arrived refugees and migrants' living situation: individuals living in reception centres¹² were less likely to receive support from diaspora members.

¹² A reception centre is defined by IOM as "a location with facilities for receiving, processing and attending to the immediate needs of refugees or asylum-seekers as they arrive in a country of asylum". IOM, [Asylum procedures](#), 2012.

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List of Acronyms

CMR	Central Mediterranean Sea route
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
II	Individual interview
ISTAT	Italian National Institute of Statistics
KII	Key informant interview
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MMC –ME	Mixed Migration Centre – Middle East
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
IO	International organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
RMMS	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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INTRODUCTION

The relation between refugees and migrants¹³ in mixed migration flows¹⁴ along the Central Mediterranean Sea route (CMR)¹⁵ and the diaspora¹⁶ in Europe remains poorly understood. While some research suggests that diaspora groups in Europe serve as ‘pull factor’ for migration to Europe,¹⁷ diaspora members are also frequently hailed as potential key interlocutors in the provision of information and other types of support to refugees and migrants in countries of origin and *en route*.¹⁸ Some recent research has started looking into the relationship between diaspora groups and refugees and migrants, for instance in Denmark, analysing Afghan and Somali diaspora groups’ perceptions of recent refugee and migrant arrivals, or among Syrian and Iraqi diaspora communities in Europe, exploring their interaction with recently arrived refugees and migrants to the continent.¹⁹ However, the role of diasporas in Europe, their level of interaction with refugees and migrants along the CMR, as well as the level (and type) of support they offer to (potential) refugees and migrants remains poorly understood. Furthermore, these dynamics are likely to change significantly²⁰ between different diaspora communities, for instance depending on their countries of origin, as well as on the length of stay of these groups in Europe.

IMPACT Initiatives (henceforth ‘IMPACT’) and its inter-agency initiative REACH conducted research on mixed migration dynamics within Libya and found that existing social ties outside of Libya were the second most trusted source of information among refugees and migrants interviewed in the country.²¹ At the same time, a study conducted by IMPACT, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between December 2018 and January 2019 in Italy, found that information shared by Eritrean and Somali diaspora groups in Europe with refugees and migrants along the CMR on routes and protection risks was sometimes outdated, presenting acute protection risks for individual interviewed *en route*.²² This finding is also confirmed by a study commissioned by the European Commission, which found that the dissemination of incomplete information by diaspora groups in Europe may limit recently arrived refugees and migrants’ access to rights and assistance in Italy, in some cases heightening their exposure to risk once in the country.²³ This raises questions regarding the extent to which information held and shared by diaspora communities about migration routes and protection risks *en route*, as well as about procedures to follow once in Italy, may actually put (prospective) refugees and migrants at risk.

The present assessment report, conducted by REACH, in collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), aims to explore the relationship between diaspora members in Italy and refugees and migrants along the CMR, in countries of origin, *en route*, and at destination, focussing on three case studies: Mali, Eritrea and Bangladesh. The case studies were selected based on 1) the top nationalities of arrivals in Italy from the CMR between 2017 and 2018, 2) the presence of diaspora groups in Italy, 3) the representativeness of three primary regions of origin among sea arrivals in Italy, namely West Africa, East Africa, and Asia. As of January 2019, 21,226 Malians, 8,776 Eritreans,

¹³ For the purposes of this assessment, the expression “*refugees and migrants*” refers to all people on the move along the routes studied including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and other populations (such as victims of trafficking and unaccompanied and separated children) unless a distinction is otherwise made.

¹⁴ The Mixed Migration Centre defines “*mixed migration*” as “cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities” ([MMC’s Understanding and use of the term Mixed Migration](#)).

¹⁵ In the context of this study, the ‘Central Mediterranean Sea Route’ shall denote migratory transit routes through Africa, both from the Horn and West and Central Africa towards North Africa (with Libya being a key transit point and destination country in its own right for some refugees and migrants) and the Mediterranean Sea.

¹⁶ There is no widely accepted definition of “diaspora”. For the purposes of this assessment, the International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM) definition has been adopted. IOM conceives *diaspora* as migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. IOM also refers to them as *transnational communities*, because they comprise people who are connected to more than one country (IOM, [World Migration Report 2018](#)).

¹⁷ See for instance writings on the case of Eritrean and Nigerian diaspora communities in France and Italy. Also: Crisp, J., [Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regime](#), 1999.

¹⁸ Crisp, J., [Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regime](#), 1999.

¹⁹ RMMS, [Split Loyalties](#), December 2017. MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), September 2018.

²⁰ See for instance the findings of an MMC study on Syrian and Iraqi diasporas in Denmark: [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), 2018.

²¹ IMPACT/UNHCR, [Refugees and migrants’ access to food, WASH, shelter and NFI and assistance](#), November 2018.

²² IMPACT/UNHCR, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019.

²³ The study found, for instance, that the inability of diaspora members to help refugees and migrants with accessing legal procedures (i.e. asylum applications) in some cases contributed to their engagement in the informal economy where respondents were more exposed to poor working conditions and abuse. Sanchez et al., [A study of the communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers in Italy, with a particular focus on online and social media](#), 2018.

and 139,995 Bangladeshis resided regularly in the country.²⁴ While the presence of Eritreans and Bangladeshis in Italy dates back respectively to the 1970s and late 1980s,²⁵ Malian arrivals have a relatively recent nature,²⁶ with a more significant increase in arrivals from the CMR following the outbreak of the civil war in Libya in 2011 and the renewed conflict in Northern Mali in 2012.²⁷ Moreover, the CMR is also a relatively new route for Bangladeshi refugees and migrants, whose numbers have risen significantly only since 2014.²⁸

The assessment focuses on (1) the diaspora's role (direct and indirect) in shaping migration decision-making in countries of origin, (2) its role in providing support to refugees and migrants *en route* and (3) upon arrival. The assessment also explores (4) if and how these dynamics differ between the three selected nationalities. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and findings draw upon a total of 75 in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews with recently arrived refugees and migrants (arrived between January 2017 and March 2019, 30 respondents) and diaspora members (arrived between 2004 and 2016, 45 respondents), and 7 key informant interviews conducted with humanitarian workers and migration experts working in Italy (6 of them being of Eritrean descent themselves) between 20 May and 26 June 2019. The level of disaggregation selected aimed at providing the perspective of both recently arrived refugees and migrants and more established diaspora members.

The report consists of three parts. The first part explains the methodology and analytical framework employed and presents both demographic and socio-economic profiles of individuals interviewed. The second part presents the key findings of the study. In line with the three research questions, this part consists of three corresponding sections: (1) the diaspora's role (direct and indirect) in shaping migration decision-making in countries of origin, (2) its role in providing support to refugees and migrants *en route* and (3) upon arrival. Differences in findings between nationalities are reported in each section. The final part is the report's conclusion, highlighting main take-aways and information gaps emerging from the study.

²⁴ Source: Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) Data (last updated January 2019) available [here](#). Since this data does not take into account the number of Malians, Eritreans, and Bangladeshis with an irregular residence status, the actual figures are likely to be much higher.

²⁵ For further information on the Eritrean diaspora in Italy and EU see Marialibera Iavasilie (2012) [Exploring the Eritrean diaspora in Italy and in the United Kingdom](#); Nicole Hirt (2014), [The Eritrean diaspora and its impact on regime stability: responses to UN sanctions](#), *African Affairs*, 114 (445), 115-135; Tricia M. Redeker Hepner (2008), [Transnational governance and the centralization of state power in Eritrea and exile](#), *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (3), 476-502.

For further information on Bangladeshi immigration to Italy see Melanie Knights (1993), [Bangladeshi Immigrants in Italy: From Geopolitics to Micropolitics](#), *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (1), 105-123, and the IOM Italy Briefing, [Current migration trends from Bangladesh to Italy](#), June 2017.

²⁶ The history of Mali has long been characterised by emigration, with most Malians moving within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) area. Emigration to Europe has, for colonial legacy reasons, historically been mainly directed towards France. Since the 2000s a shift in migration patterns has seen a rise in West Africans crossing the Mediterranean from the Maghreb towards Spain and Italy. See De Haas, [Irregular Migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union](#), 2008.

²⁷ IOM, [The Malian migration crisis at a glance](#), 2013.

²⁸ IOM, [Current migration trends from Bangladesh to Italy](#), June 2017. According to some sources, the rise in irregular boat migration by Bangladeshi nationals to Italy since 2014 can be attributed to a change in Italian legislation, which saw a stark reduction in visa quotas reserved for Bangladeshi nationals' legal travel to Italy. For further information please see Cupolo Diego, [Explaining the Bangladeshi migrant surge into Italy](#), *The New Humanitarian*, June 2017.

METHODOLOGY

The present section outlines the methodology that was used. It starts with an overview of the analytical framework employed, definitions used and overall framing of the research questions. It then proceeds with a detailed overview of the assessment's methodology, including an overview of secondary and primary data collection methods and potential limitations. It closes with a section on the profiles of respondents, with detailed information on demographic and socio-economic profiles of both recently arrived refugee and migrant and diaspora members respondents, to guide the reading and interpretation of the findings in the following chapter.

Analytical framework

Analytical approach

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do diaspora groups (focusing on Bangladeshi, Eritrean and Malian groups) in Italy shape the decision-making process of refugees and migrants over migration to Europe via the CMR?
2. How does support provided by diaspora groups, including information shared, in Italy shape the exposure to protection risks of refugees and migrants *en route* to Europe along the CMR?
3. How does support provided by diaspora groups shape recent refugees and migrants' situation upon arrival in Italy?
4. How do above explored dynamics differ between different diaspora groups' countries of origin (here Eritrea, Mali, Bangladesh)?

In line with the research questions outlined above, the following definitions and theoretical concepts lay the foundation for the design and analysis of the study.

Defining 'diaspora'

The term *diaspora* has been extensively discussed, however, there is no single agreed-upon definition. For the purposes of this study, the IOM definition of diaspora has been adopted, as it is the definition commonly employed in migration policy circles. Based on a review of the current academic literature, IOM conceives *diaspora* as migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background.²⁹ IOM also refers to them as *transnational communities*, because they comprise people who are connected to more than one country. Most scholars agree that the distinguishing characteristic of diasporas from other migrant groups is the presence of strong cultural, linguistic, historical, religious, and affective ties with the country or community of origin, or a sense of shared identity and belonging.³⁰

The study takes into account the fact that migrants may not identify themselves as part of the diaspora but simply as members of a community with a shared national background, and that they may not fit the transnational pattern.³¹ Such disconnect has been explicitly addressed in the interview questions, in order to make sure to include in the study only people who do identify themselves as 'diaspora', as defined within the ambit of this study.

Transnational networks and the migratory experience

The analytical framework of this assessment is based on a thorough review of existing academic literature on migration theories and, more specifically, on the role of the diaspora and translational networks in shaping the migratory experience of (prospective) refugees and migrants. On the basis of the academic literature, the present study regards migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of social transformation, development and

²⁹ IOM, [World Migration Report](#), 2018.

³⁰ Van Hear, *New Diasporas*, 2005; Bakewell, *Which Diaspora for Whose Development?* 2009; R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, 2009.

³¹ Castle, de Haas and Miller highlight that not all migrants necessarily fit the transnational pattern. "Temporary labour migrants who sojourn abroad for a few years, send back remittances, communicate with their family at home and visit them occasionally are not necessarily "transmigrants". Nor are permanent migrants who leave forever, and retain only loose contact with their homeland." Castle, de Haas, Miller, *The age of migration*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.43.

globalisation. According to de Haas,³² globalisation has increased the ability of refugees and migrants to maintain social ties over long distances, as well as the flow of information and “new ideas”. According to migration system theory, pioneered in the 1970s by the geographer Mabogunje,³³ such flows play an important role within migration processes because they create contextual feedback mechanisms. The concept of *contextual feedback mechanisms* is particularly relevant when analysing the role of the diaspora, because, in its broader sense, it refers to “migration-affected changes in the communities and societies, which in turn affect migration”.³⁴ Examples of contextual feedback mechanisms are remittances, which can support people in the countries of origin, but can also increase inequality, and aspirations among potential new migrants. Such mechanisms can also give rise to a “culture of migration” when migration becomes associated with success and staying at home with failure.³⁵ Importantly, such approach does not ignore the *agency* of migrants, which is the “limited, but real ability of human beings to make independent choices and to change structural conditions”.³⁶

Migration scholar Crisp³⁷ highlighted how the global networks and transnational communities of which refugees and migrants are part, can link people of the same family, community, ethnic group or country, as well as different migrant categories. According to him, such global networks and transnational communities can play a significant role in shaping a (prospective) refugee or migrant’s migratory experience by providing:

1. *information* to prospective people on the move (concerning the quality of life at destination);
2. *financial resources*;
3. *organisational infrastructure*;
4. *substance and support* (legal advices, employment, etc.) when they arrive.

At the same time, some scholars have also pointed to the limitations and negative dimensions of diaspora communities in shaping the migratory experience of (prospective) refugees and migrants. As Van Hear has argued, while the diaspora may provide its members with subsistence and support, diaspora communities may also be characterised by division, exploitation, repression and even political violence.³⁸ Collyer also points out that migration assistance from social networks does not automatically happen, noting that refugees and migrants may have limited resources and might not always see the arrival of more refugees and migrants as beneficial, particularly if they are perceived to compete for jobs, housing and other resources.³⁹

The design of the present assessment moved from Crisp’s definition of what a transnational network can provide and applied it to the capacity (and willingness) of diaspora members to furnish support, either in the country of origin (e.g. through remittances), during journey (through financial resources, sharing of contacts, etc.), and at destination. At the same time, when designing research questions and tools, the study acknowledged:

- the possible negative dimensions of diaspora groups;
- the possible limited relevance of such ties to someone’s migratory experience;
- the role of other dimensions (e.g. the regulatory apparatus, such as policy changes), and broader processes of social transformation, which can affect both migration itself and the role of the diaspora.

Methodology Overview

REACH adopted qualitative research methods to explore the role of the diaspora in Italy in shaping migration decision making, protection risks *en route* and the situation upon arrival of refugees and migrants travelling via the CMR to Italy. Such methods included individual interviews conducted with both refugees and migrants originating from Mali, Eritrea, and Bangladesh who arrived in Italy via the CMR between 2017 and 2019 and members of diaspora groups in Italy from the same countries.

³² Castle, de Haas, Miller, 2014, *The age of migration*. Palgrave Macmillan

³³ Bakewell, de Haas, Kubal, 2011. Migration systems, pioneers and the role of agency. Norface migration Discussion Paper No. 23.

³⁴ Castle, de Haas, Miller, 2014, *The age of migration*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 44.

³⁵ Massey et al., 1993, *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*.

³⁶ Castle, de Haas, Miller 2014, *The age of migration*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 31.

³⁷ Crisp, 1999, Policy Challenges of the New Diasporas: Migrant Networks and their Impact on Asylum Flows and Regimes. Transnational Communities Programme: Working Paper Series.

³⁸ Van Hear, 2005, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*.

³⁹ Collyer, 2005, When Do Social Networks Fail to Explain Migration? Accounting for the Movement of Algerian Asylum-Seekers to the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:4, 699-718.

Population of interest and sampling strategy

Refugees and migrants, and diaspora member respondents, were sampled purposively on the basis of their (1) nationality, (2) time of arrival in Italy and (3) route taken. The assessment aimed at including only people from Mali, Eritrea and Bangladesh who had arrived via sea from 2004 to 2019, with the purpose of exploring whether and how migration experiences differ on the basis of country of origin and length of stay in Italy. Diaspora members were sampled in two sub-groups, based on their length of stay in Italy (10 to 15 years and 4 to 9 years).

Nationalities were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Countries from which significant flows of refugees and migrants have arrived through the CMR in Italy between 2017 and 2018;
2. Countries from three different regions of origin, all travelling along the CMR: Mali for West Africa, Eritrea for East Africa, Bangladesh for Asia;
3. Countries with diaspora presence in Italy.

The populations of interest were sampled purposively, and were disaggregated by the amount of time spent in Italy:

- **Recently arrived refugees and migrants:** individuals who had arrived in Italy via the CMR between 2017 and 2019
- **Diaspora members** (diaspora members who had reached Italy travelling via the CMR):
 - In Italy for 10 to 15 years, arrived between 2004-2009;
 - More 'recent' diaspora groups, arrived in Italy between 2010-2016.

During the course of data collection, few modifications were applied to the original sampling:

- During data collection, the population of interest for Bangladeshi diaspora members was extended to also include individuals who had reached Italy regularly. This was done in response to the difficulty in identifying a sufficiently high number of Bangladeshi respondents who had arrived in Italy via the CMR between 2004 and 2009. Previous research confirms that more established, long-term, Bangladeshi diaspora members are more likely to have reached Italy through legal pathways, as Bangladeshis starting arriving irregularly in Italy via the CMR predominantly once since 2014, reportedly as a result of a change in policy on visa quotas for foreign nationals intending to work in Italy.⁴⁰
- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with migration experts, community representatives of the Eritrean community in Italy and social workers were conducted to explore the experience of recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants. This change was implemented in response to the inability of the field team to identify recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants during the data collection timeframe (*please see box 1 'Challenges faced in identifying the population of interest and mitigation strategies adopted' for further information*).

⁴⁰ For further information please see Cupolo Diego, "[Explaining the Bangladeshi migrant surge into Italy](#)", The New Humanitarian, June 2017.

Box 1: Country case study selection: recent trends in arrivals¹ and diaspora presence in Italy

The country case studies were selected based on three criteria: 1) a significant number of arrivals in Italy along the CMR between 2017 and 2018, 2) the presence of diaspora groups of the same nationalities in Italy, 3) the representativeness of three primary regions of origins among sea arrivals in Italy, namely West Africa, East Africa, and Asia.

Mali

Malian refugees and migrants are among the top 10 nationalities of sea arrivals from the CMR to Italy each year from 2016 to 2018. In 2016, 10,010 Malian nationals arrived irregularly via sea, compared to 7,118 in 2017. In 2018, the number of Malian arrivals decreased significantly to 876 individuals, mirroring the overall decrease in sea arrivals to Italy that year.¹ The history of Mali has long been characterised by emigration, with most Malians moving within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) area. While emigration to Europe has, for colonial legacy reasons, historically been mainly directed towards France, Italy also hosts a significant Malian diaspora population with, as of January 2019, 21,226 Malians are registered as residents in Italy. Their overall presence in the country is likely higher, due to the likely presence of Malian nationals in an irregular situation in Italy.²

Bangladesh

Irregular boat migration by Bangladeshi nationals travelling via the CMR to Italy is of a relatively recent nature and has been tied to both the deterioration of living conditions for Bangladeshi workers in Libya and a change in Italian visa provisions for Bangladeshi nationals. Between 2016 and 2018, 17,140 Bangladeshi refugees and migrants reached Italy via the CMR, figuring among the top 10 and Top 5 of arrivals respectively in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, the number of Bangladeshis arriving via sea decreased, but resumed again in 2019: up until May 2019 Bangladeshis were among the top five nationalities arriving in Italy via sea that year, constituting 9% of all arrivals. Bangladeshis have a strong diaspora presence in Italy. In 2018, 139,953 Bangladeshi nationals resided regularly in Italy, making up the eighth largest non-EU community in the country. As of January 2019, the majority of Bangladeshi residents hold a long-term residence permit (55% of all registered residents, and increase of 6.5% compared to 2017).³

Eritrea

Between 2015 and 2018, Eritreans have been the third largest group of individuals reaching Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, with the majority reaching the continent via the CMR.⁴ While in 2016 Eritreans were the second most represented nationality among sea arrivals with 20,718 people reaching Italy that year, 2017 saw a significant decrease in Eritrean arrivals (a decrease by more than two thirds, 7,052 individuals), following by a proportional rise in 2018, when Eritreans became the most represented nationality among arrivals in Italy from Libya, constituting 14% of all sea arrivals, 3,320 individuals that year. The history of Eritrean migration to Italy dates back to the early 1960s.⁵ Italy is currently home to 8,773 Eritrean residents legally registered in the country.⁶

¹ Data on sea arrivals to Italy are retrieved from the Italian Ministry of Interior, available here for [2019](#), [2018](#), [2017](#). Data on sea arrivals in 2016 can be retrieved from UNHCR, available [here](#).

² Source: [Istat 2019](#).

³ For further information on Bangladeshi immigration to Italy see Melanie Knights (1993), [Bangladeshi Immigrants in Italy: From Geopolitics to Micropolitics](#), *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (1), 105-123, and the IOM Italy Briefing, [Current migration trends from Bangladesh to Italy](#), June 2017; IOM, [Current migration trends from Bangladesh to Italy](#), June 2017; Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali, ["La comunità Bengalese in Italia"](#), 2018.

⁴ Mwangi Esther, ["Out of Eritrea. What happens after Badme?"](#), June 2018

⁵ For further information on the Eritrean diaspora in Italy and EU see Marialibera Iavasile (2012) [Exploring the Eritrean diaspora in Italy and in the United Kingdom](#); Nicole Hirt (2014), [The Eritrean diaspora and its impact on regime stability: responses to UN sanctions](#), *African Affairs*, 114 (445), 115-135; Tricia M. Redeker Hepner (2008), [Transnational governance and the centralization of state power in Eritrea and exile](#), *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (3), 476-502.

⁶ Source: [Istat 2019](#).

Secondary data review

The secondary data review informed the research design, including the definition of the research scope, research questions and the development of the data collection tools. The questionnaires were developed based on previous research and migration theory's concepts of diaspora and its role in shaping migration dynamics. Furthermore, secondary data sources were used to triangulate primary data collected. The main sources of secondary data were (1) REACH studies on mixed migration dynamics in Libya;⁴¹ (2) a study by the RMMS on the connection between diaspora members and recently arrived refugees and migrants among select nationalities in Denmark;⁴² (3) a study by MMC-Middle East on the relationship between the diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrian and Iraqi nationals;⁴³ (4) a European Commission study on communication channels used by asylum seekers and

⁴¹ REACH, [Refugees and migrants' access to food, WASH, shelter and NFI and assistance](#), 2018; IMPACT/UNHCR, [Mixed migration routes and dynamics in Libya](#), May-December 2018; REACH, [Libya situation overview – Tripoli](#), April 2019; IMPACT/UNHCR, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019.

⁴² RMMS, [Split Loyalties: Mixed Migration and the Diaspora Connection](#), 2017

⁴³ MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), 2018.

migrants in Italy⁴⁴ and (5) the IOM 2018 World Migration Report.⁴⁵ Online reports from specialised information sources, as well as academic papers, were also included in the secondary data review.⁴⁶

Primary Data Collection

Data collection took place between 20 May and 26 June 2019 in Sicily and mainland Italy through a local partner. Findings draw on primary data collected through 75 in-person, open-ended, in-depth interviews of which:

- 30 with recently arrived refugees and migrants originating from Mali and Bangladesh (15 each);
- 45 with diaspora members originating from Mali, Eritrea and Bangladesh (of whom: 24 arrived between 2004 and 2009 and 19 between 2010 and 2016; 15 per nationality group).

Table 1: Breakdown of number of respondents by nationality and year of arrival

Nationality / time of arrival in Italy	Refugees and migrants	Diaspora members		Total
	2017 - 2019	2010 - 2016	2004 - 2009	
Mali	15	6	9	30
Bangladesh	15	10	5	30
Eritrea	0	5	10	15
Total/ group	30	45		75

In addition, seven key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with humanitarian workers and migration experts working in Italy, with six of them being of Eritrean descent. KIIs were held as part of a mitigation strategy in response to the challenge of identifying recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants as respondents (*for more information, please refer to the limitations section*).

Preliminary discussions with actors knowledgeable about the context, such as service providers, civil society members, (international) non-governmental organisations ((I)NGOs), international organisations (IOs) and diaspora associations were conducted to guide the selection of the population of interest, their geographic distribution across Italy, data collection sites, and other relevant information to inform research design. Data was recorded manually in respondents' mother tongue, transcribed on a computer, translated into English, and coded with the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.Ti. All staff involved in data collection activities were appropriately trained in the delivery of tools and the questionnaire was duly piloted. Inconsistencies in transcription were clarified during debrief sessions with data collectors and adequately cleaned before the coding process.

⁴⁴ Sanchez et al., [A study of the communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers in Italy, with a particular focus on online and social media](#), European Commission, 2018.

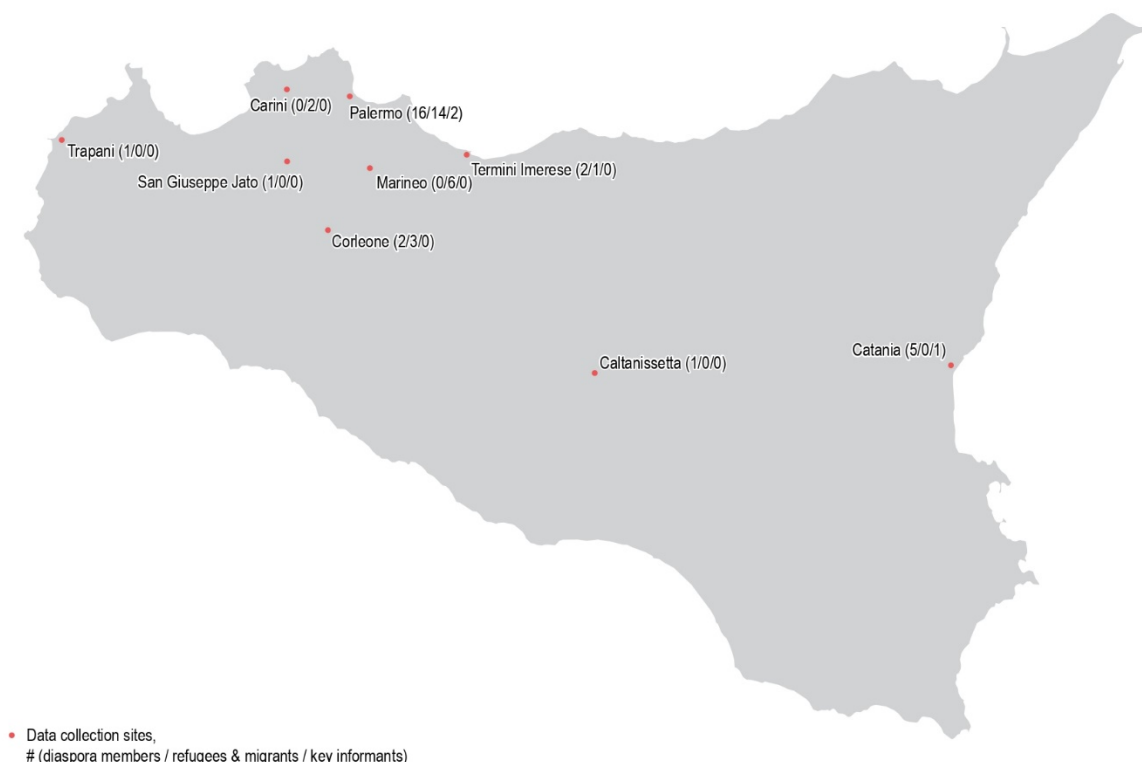
⁴⁵ IOM, [World Migration Report](#), 2018.

⁴⁶ See for instance: Dekker et al., [Smart Refugees: How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making](#). *Social Media + Society*. 2018; IOM, [African migration to the EU: irregular migration in context](#), 2019; M. Belloni, ["Why don't you move onwards?": The Influence of Transnational Ties and Kinship Obligations on Eritrean Refugees' Feeling of Being Stuck in Italy](#), in T. M. Woldemikael (ed.) *Postliberation Eritrea*, Indiana University Press, 2018.

Map 8: Data collection locations, by type of respondent⁴⁷



Map 9: Data collection locations, by type of respondent, in Sicily



Individual interviews with recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members

Interviews with refugees and migrants were conducted in Sicily and mainland Italy by REACH data collectors in the respondents' mother tongue, namely Bambara for Malians, Tigrinya for Eritreans and Bengali for Bangladeshis. Prior to the start of data collection, REACH field staff were trained on qualitative data collection methods and in best practices in interviewing refugee and migrant populations. For protection purposes, only refugees and migrants aged 18 or above were included in the study. Furthermore, in line with the Italian law on data protection (d.lgs.196/2003), informed consent was obtained from respondents prior to each interview.

Most interviews were administered in-person, with the exception of four interviews with Eritrean diaspora members which were conducted remotely by phone, after referral by an in-person contact in Italy. Phone interviews were introduced as mitigation measure in the last week of data collection in response to the difficulty faced by field teams in identifying respondents of Eritrean nationality.

Individual interviews with key informants

In the last week of data collection, KIIs with respondents knowledgeable about the Eritrean community in Italy were introduced as mitigation strategy in response to the difficulties encountered in reaching out to recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants. Seven in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with key informants (KIs) based in Sicily and mainland Italy. The aim of interviewing KIs was two-fold: (1) to aid the field teams in identifying more recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants and (2) to enhance understanding of recent changes in Eritrean migration to Europe.

KIs (6 out of 7 being of Eritrean descent themselves) were selected based on their specialised knowledge on the Eritrean community and included humanitarian and social workers, as well as migration specialists. KIIs were administered both in-person and remotely by REACH staff.

⁴⁷ Respondents outside Italy, were interviewed remotely over the phone.

Box 2: Challenges faced in identifying the population of interest and mitigation strategies adopted

During field level data collection, field teams encountered challenges in identifying two sets of respondents, leading to a modification of the sampling methodology during data collection. These were (1) recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants and (2) recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants and Eritrean diaspora members.

(1) Recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants

While field teams were able to identify recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants as potential interviewees, respondents were reluctant to participate in the study and difficult to gain trust from. According to preliminary discussions with actors knowledgeable about the context, this is likely to be connected to respondents' fear of jeopardising their asylum application, in response to recent changes in Italian legislation towards refugees and migrants. The majority of recently arrived Malian respondents (12/15) held an uncertain legal status, either awaiting decision on a pending asylum request or waiting to appeal a rejected application. Further, in informal sites Malian respondents had limited availability to participate, as potential respondents were looking for occasional informal work.

The following mitigation strategies were adopted to respond to the challenges identified:

- Data collectors were trained in providing additional information and reassurance about the anonymity of the research and its humanitarian scope.
- The questionnaire was slightly simplified between the second and the third week of data collection, in order to reduce the time of the interview while keeping all key questions in place.
- Field teams conducted interviews with Malian respondents in the evenings, after respondents finished their work.

The sampling target was reached in the fourth week of data collection. Two interviews were excluded from the study due to poor quality.

(2) Recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants and Eritrean diaspora members

Field teams faced significant challenges in reaching out to Eritrean respondents. Main challenges identified were:

- Recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants were difficult to locate, because they tend to leave Italian reception centres few days after having arrived in Italy with the intent to either stay in informal sites or leave the country. According to KIs (6/7), Eritrean refugees and migrants' main intention once arrived in Italy is to leave the country and reach family and/or friends in Northern Europe. Most KIs (5/7) reported an average time spent in Italy of around one month, being the time to re-organise and move towards the northern border with Switzerland or France. The transitory profile of Eritrean refugees and migrants in Italy is also confirmed by other secondary sources.¹
- Diaspora members were unwilling to talk, reportedly due to the same policy changes as mentioned by Malian respondents, and due to recent political events in respondents' countries of origin. Diaspora members were also reportedly hesitant to take part in the study out of a general fear that recent migration measures adopted by the Italian government may negatively affect their asylum requests after the peace treaty between Eritrea and Ethiopia.²

The following mitigation strategies were adopted to mitigate the low response rate by Eritrean nationals:

- Between the second and the third week of data collection, KIIs with people knowledgeable about the Eritrean community were added to collect data on the experiences of recently arrived refugees and migrants and their interaction with diaspora members in Italy, and to identify further locations for primary data collection with Eritrean respondents from diaspora communities.
- In the third week of data collection the population of interest of recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants was expanded to include recent Eritrean refugees and migrants who arrived in Italy via the UNHCR humanitarian evacuation scheme from Libya. Unfortunately, processing times to gain access to the centres where this population group was hosted were too long to include respondents.
- In the fourth week of data collection, interviews with diaspora members via phone were added as data collection method, to include diaspora members who lived outside of Italy but arrived via the CMR. In total three respondents were interviewed via phone, whom had all been personally introduced to the data collection team by a trusted source or friend to mitigate the risk of reduced levels of trust;
- The total timeframe of data collection for the Eritrean population of interest was extended from four to five weeks, to extend the timeframe within which potential respondents could be identified and reached.

Mitigation measures adopted yielded the following results: the sample of Eritrean diaspora members was reached in the fourth week of data collection. Recently arrived refugee and migrant interviews were replaced with seven KIIs with persons knowledgeable about the experience of recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants in Italy.

1. M. Belloni, *"Why don't you move onwards?": The Influence of Transnational Ties and Kinship Obligations on Eritrean Refugees' Feeling of Being Stuck in Italy*, in T. M. Woldemikael (ed.) *Postliberation Eritrea*, Indiana University Press, 2018.

2. For further information on the peace treaty between Eritrea and Ethiopia, signed in September 2018, please see <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/eritrea>.

Ethics procedures

Data collection activities adopted a 'Do No Harm' approach to avoid causing any harm or injury to assessment participants. The assessment adhered to the following guiding principles to ensure that data collection was ethically sound:

- **Informed consent:** this study was conducted with participants aged 18 years or above only. In line with Italian legislation, respondents gave their written consent to take part in the assessment and participated in interviews on a voluntary basis. Before the beginning of the interview, each participant received a paper copy of the information note, which detailed the data collection objective, output and methodology and provided a dedicated phone number for complaints in case of staff misconduct.
- **Confidentiality:** this study ensures that the confidentiality of the information provided by respondents was respected. All personal information in datasets was made anonymous and excluded from the final report.
- **Ethics in data collection:** the research design and development of data collection tools took into account the sensitivity of the issues discussed. In this view, REACH data collectors received a dedicated training on conducting data collection with vulnerable groups, identifying signs of distress and managing sensitive data collection situations.

Limitations

- As this assessment employed qualitative research methods, results are indicative only and cannot be generalised for the entire population of refugees and migrants travelling along the CMR, nor for the entire population of diaspora members in Italy or other European countries.
- According to KIs, refugees and migrants who are well connected in Italy tend to live outside the official reception system once they have filed their asylum application and prefer to live in a private accommodation. As the majority of recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed (23/30) were, at the time of data collection, living in state-run reception centres it is likely that their views, as presumably less connected individuals, may be overrepresented at the expense of better connected, but more difficult to reach, refugees and migrants who may be more likely to stay in private housing. During data collection extensive effort was made to reach out to individuals who lived in private accommodation, yet, their views are likely to be underrepresented in the present sample.
- Due to the abovementioned challenges (see box 1) encountered in identifying recently arrived Eritrean refugees and migrants, their experience may be underrepresented in this study.
- As predicted during the preliminary research design phase of the assessment,⁴⁸ the experience of female refugees and migrants and diaspora members may be underrepresented in this study. Only six women out of seventy-five respondents were identified and included in the assessment. All of them were diaspora members.
- The views and experiences of refugees and migrants originating from Mali, Eritrea and Bangladesh who moved to other European countries after arriving in Italy, as well as of diaspora members from the same nationalities living in other European countries, are not represented in this study.
- Not all respondents responded to all questions. Relevant sub-sets of the overall sample are specified for each finding.

⁴⁸ In reference to recent arrivals (2017-2019), the percentage of adult women per nationality accounts for: 3% for Mali, 20% for Eritrea, 0% for Bangladesh (of all arrivals from said countries). IOM DTM Mixed Migration Flows on the Mediterranean, [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#). In reference to diaspora members, the percentage of adult women per nationality accounts for: 4% for Mali, 44% for Eritrea, 27% for Bangladesh (of all residents in Italy from said countries). ISTAT Data, [January 2019](#).

Respondents' profiles

This section presents a brief overview of respondents' profiles in terms of their personal and socio-economic profiles and locations interviewed in Italy, to ease reading and contextualisation of findings.

Recently arrived refugee and migrant respondents

All recently arrived refugee and migrant respondents were male and the majority of them was aged between 18 and 24 years old. Most tended to be in a sensitive situation in Italy, with pending or appealed asylum requests, with the majority being hosted within the official Italian reception system. The self-reported educational level of respondents tended to be low, with the most frequent highest reported educational level being primary school for both Bangladeshi and Malian respondents. More than one third of Malian respondents had reportedly not accessed any education.

Personal profile

Gender and age

The majority of recently arrived refugee and migrant respondents interviewed in this study were male and aged between 18-24 years old. Four Bangladeshi and one Malian were slightly older, aged between 25-34 years old.

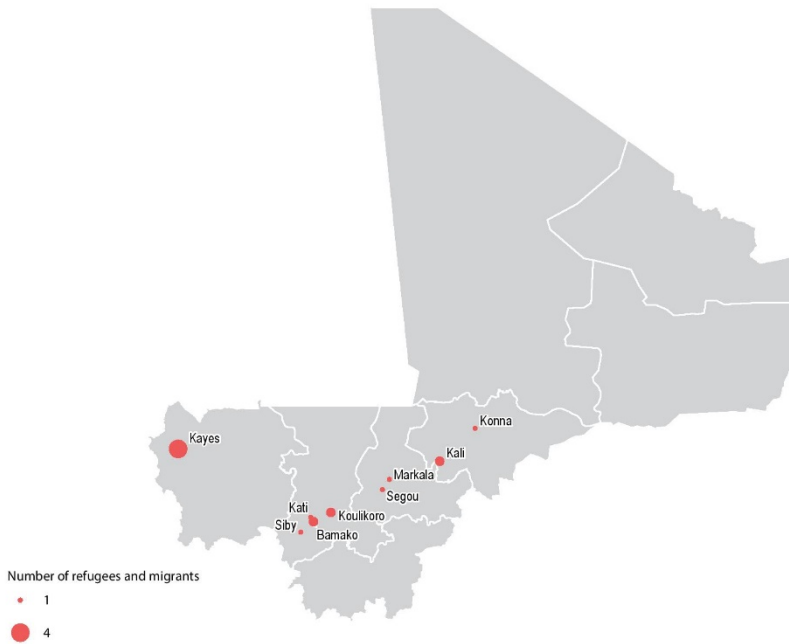
Areas of origin

Recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants interviewed came from two main administrative divisions: Sylhet (districts of Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Habiganj 9/15), in the north-east of the country, and Dhaka (districts of Dhaka, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj 6/15). Areas of origin of recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants tended to be more varied. The relative majority came from the city of Kayes (4/15), on the banks of the river Senegal, while others came mostly from urban communities located along the river Niger or from rural villages nearby (in the regions of Koulikoro, 4/15, Mopti, 3/15, Bamako, 2/15 and Segou, 2/15).

Map 10: Areas of origin of Bangladeshi refugees and migrants interviewed



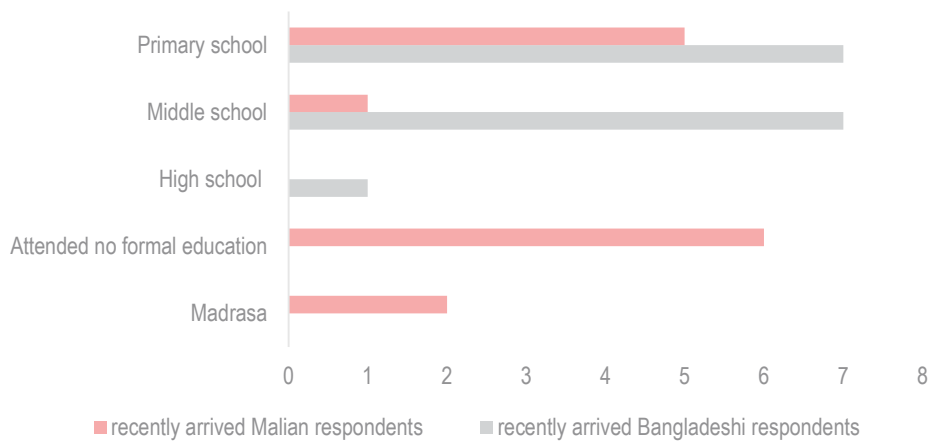
Map 11: Areas of origin of Malian refugees and migrants interviewed



Socio-economic profile

The relative majority of respondents had attained a limited degree of education prior to leaving their country of origin, with the relative majority having attended primary school only. The majority held a pending or appealed asylum request at the time of data collection. Most lived in state-run reception centres.

Figure 3: Self-reported level of education attained in the country of origin⁴⁹



⁴⁹ "Madrasa" was defined as "Quranic school" or "College for Islamic instruction".

Figure 4: Living situation of recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed

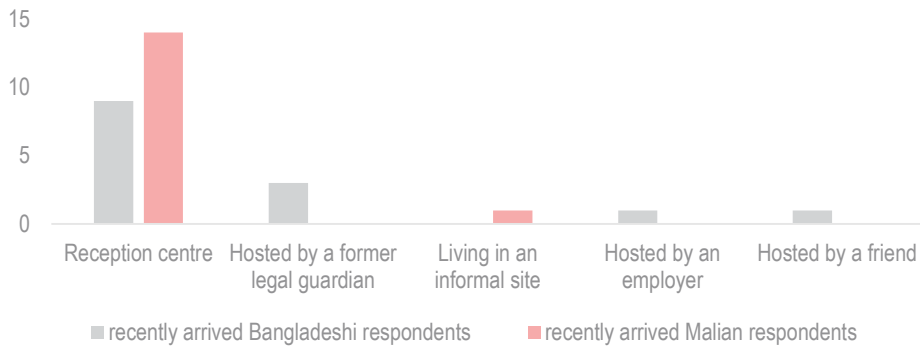
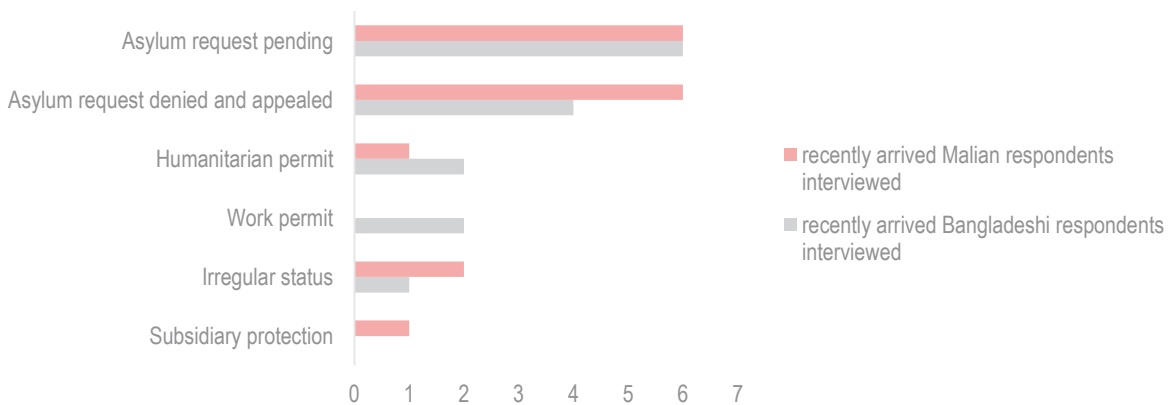


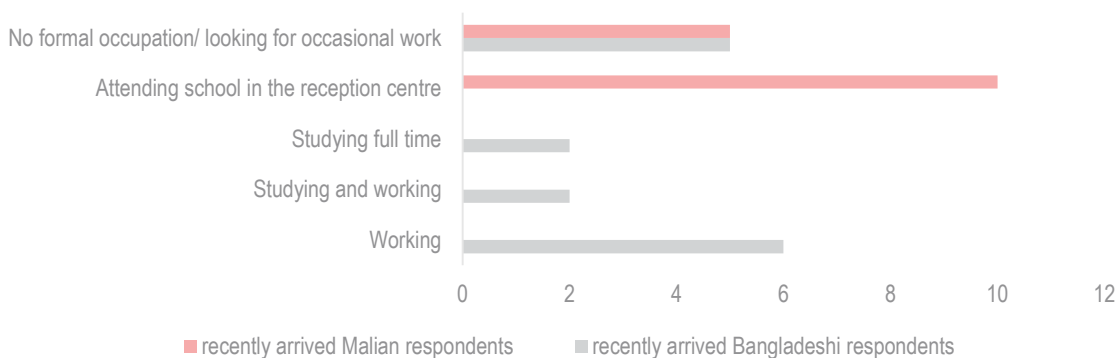
Figure 5: Legal status of recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed



Occupation

Occupational profiles differed between Malian and Bangladeshi respondents with the majority of Malian respondents reportedly going to school (with the reception system), compared to the relative majority of Bangladeshi respondents who worked. Of Bangladeshi respondents who worked (8/15), half had a work contract while the other half worked irregularly.

Figure 6: Self-reported occupation status of recently arrived refugees and migrants in Italy



Diaspora member respondents

Diaspora member respondents were almost equally divided between diaspora who were in Italy for the longer (arrived in Italy between 2004 and 2009, 24/45) and shorter term (arrived between 2010 and 2016, 21/45). No notable variations were found between the two groups in terms of personal and socio-economic profiles. The majority of them had reached Italy irregularly via sea (36/45), with the remaining nine respondents being Bangladeshis who had reached Italy through legal pathways (five through family reunification, three with a work visa, one did not specify).

Personal profile

Gender and age

Compared to recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed, diaspora member respondents tended to be more mixed, with greater variations in respondents' gender and age.

Figure 7: Gender of diaspora members interviewed, by nationality

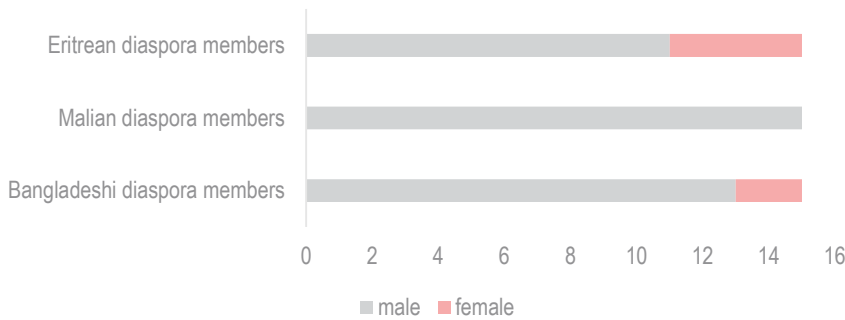
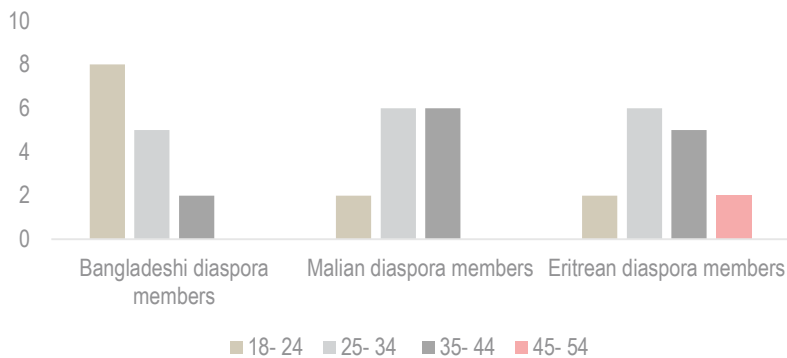


Figure 8: Age groups of diaspora members interviewed, by nationality



Areas of origin

Bangladeshi diaspora respondents were from three main administrative divisions: Dhaka (districts of Dhaka, Madaripur and Narajanganj, 8/15), Sylhet (6/15), in the north-east of the country, and Chittagong (district of Chandpur, 1/15). One third of diaspora respondents from Mali originated from Gao (5/15), in the east of Mali, followed by four individuals who originated from Segou and its surroundings (Konobougou) and three from the region of Kayes (3/15). One Malian respondent each originated from Bamako and Kola, in the southern region of Sikasso. More than half of Eritreans (9/15) came from the city capital Asmara and surroundings (Adi Hawesha), with two respondents originating from Keren, the second most-populated city in Eritrea, and the remaining ones coming from the southern region of Debub (Mendefera and Dekenhare, 2/15) and the western region of Gash-Barka (Teseney, 1/15).

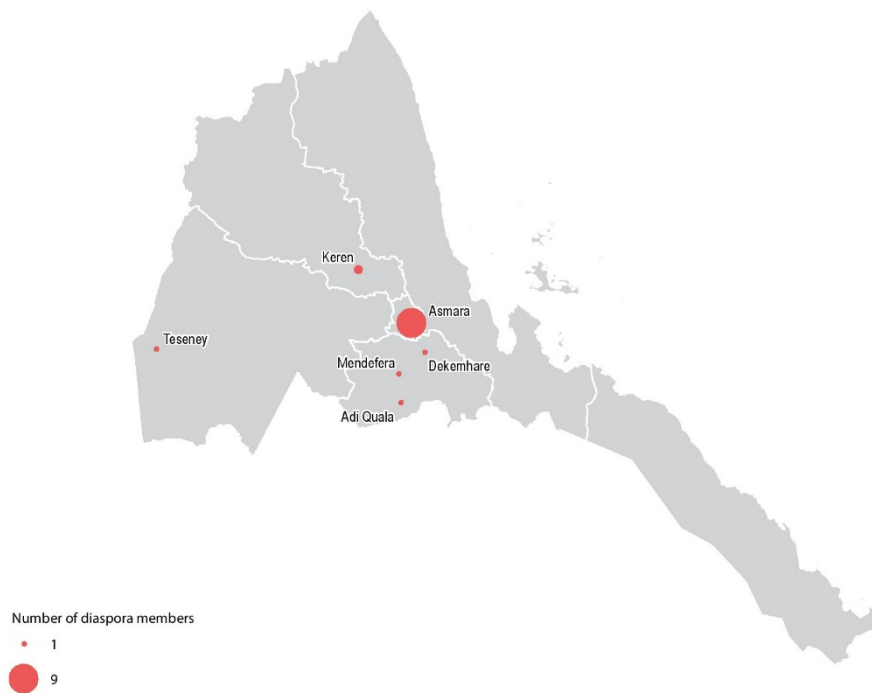
Map 12: Regions of origin of Bangladeshi diaspora members interviewed



Map 13: Regions of origin of Malian diaspora members interviewed



Map 14: Regions of origin of Eritrean diaspora members interviewed

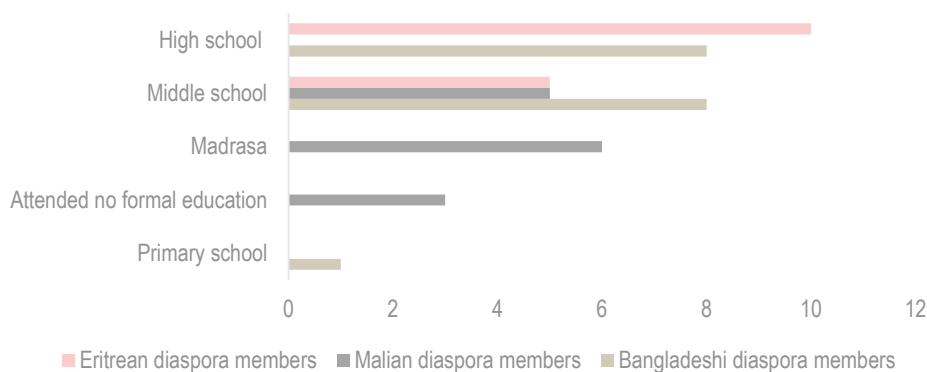


Socio-economic profile

Educational profile

Educational profiles of interviewed diaspora members were mixed with Eritrean respondents displaying the highest education levels achieved among diaspora members interviewed. Malian diaspora member respondents had received the least education of the three groups, with more than half of respondents not having attended any formal education (3/15) or only Quranic school/ Madrasa (6/15), thereby mirroring educational levels among more recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants interviewed.

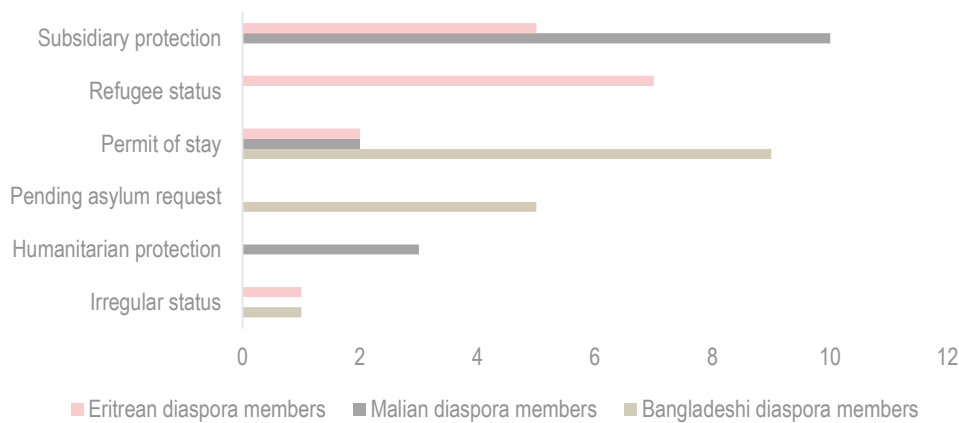
Figure 9: Self-reported level of education attained, by country of origin



Legal status

The legal status of diaspora members interviewed differed by respondents' countries of origin with Eritrean nationals being most likely to receive refugee status, compared to Malian respondents who mostly held subsidiary protection, or Bangladeshi respondents, who were in Italy with a permit of stay, often tied to family reunification or work permits.

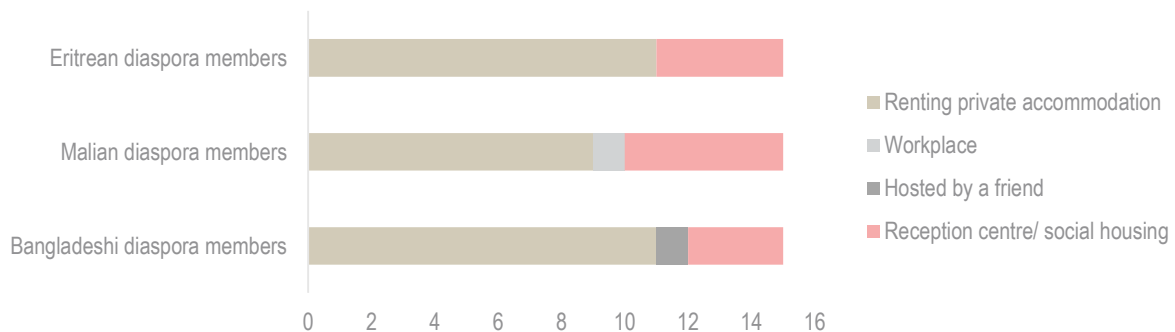
Figure 10: Legal status of diaspora members interviewed, by nationality



Living situation

The majority of diaspora members interviewed lived in privately rented accommodation, frequently renting a room with other flatmates, illustrating their higher degree of being settled in Italy than refugees and migrants. Nevertheless, 12 out of 45 interviewed diaspora members still lived in reception centres and social housing, even though they had stayed in Italy for at least three years, which might indicate their more vulnerable situation in the country and more limited ability to afford living in privately rented accommodation, compared to the other nationalities studied.

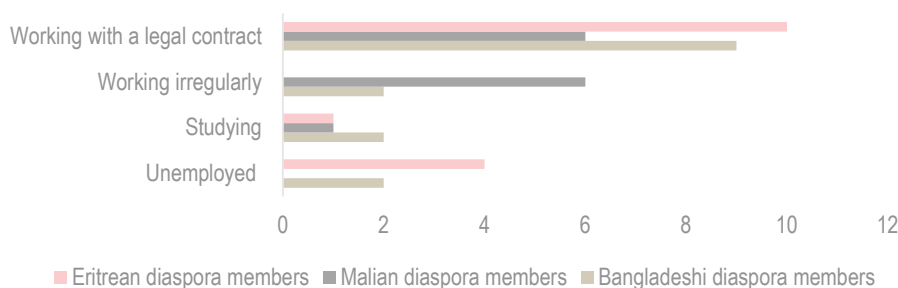
Figure 11: Living situation in Italy, by nationality of diaspora members interviewed



Occupational status

The majority of diaspora members interviewed had a job at the time of data collection, however, the types of employment differed by nationality. Malian respondents emerged as the most vulnerable group, with the majority working in low-skilled jobs (11 out of 14 people working) and almost half of them doing so irregularly. The majority of Bangladeshi diaspora members worked with a legal contract, as did Eritrean diaspora members interviewed.

Figure 12: Occupational status of diaspora members interviewed, by nationality⁵⁰



⁵⁰ Please note that two Malian nationals did not respond to this question.

FINDINGS

1. How does the diaspora in Italy shape migration decision-making in countries of origin?

This section explores the role of the diaspora in Italy in shaping migration decision-making of prospective refugees and migrants⁵¹ travelling along the CMR. This section is based on the perspectives of both diaspora members and recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed in Italy. It provides an overview of the interaction between diaspora members and prospective refugees and migrants before the journey; information shared about life in Europe; the diaspora's influence in choosing destinations; and support provided by diaspora members to prospective refugees and migrants before the start of the journey.

KEY FINDINGS

- The vast majority of diaspora members interviewed (44/45) are in regular contact with people in their countries of origin, mostly with their family (35/44) or with family and friends (9/44).
- **Two thirds of refugees and migrants interviewed from Bangladesh and Mali reported not having been in contact with diaspora members in Europe before the journey (17/25).**
- The majority of diaspora members interviewed (20/32) share a positive image of their life in Europe with people back home, often reporting only positive stories to family members to not make them worry.
- **Most commonly reported advice given by diaspora members to individuals in the country of origin considering to migrate through the CMR was not to come (23/28)** because of the dangers of the journey (12/28), and likely unattended expectations at destination (6/28), in terms of ability to work and general living conditions.
- Before departure, only one third (10/30) of refugee and migrant respondents intended to reach Europe. All reported having been influenced by a positive image of Europe, among other drivers. Only one reported a direct role of the diaspora, since his aim was to reach his uncle in Italy.
- **Only 8 out of 30 refugee and migrant respondents reported having received some kind of support in order to start their journey, and only one of them from diaspora members in Europe.**

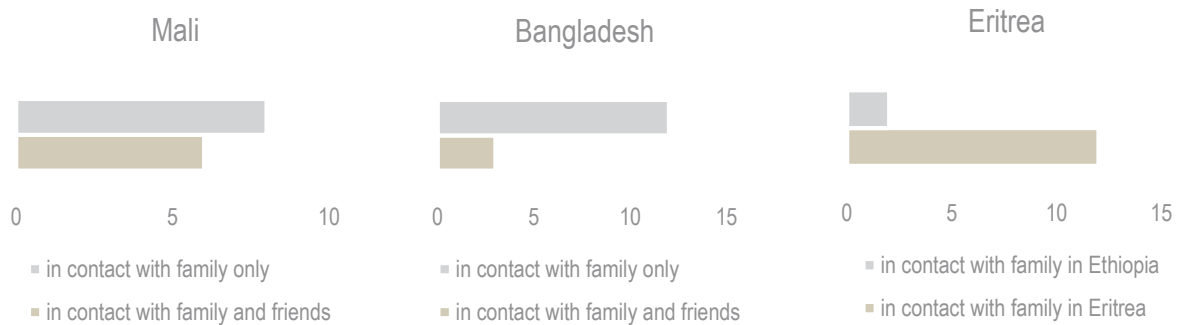
Level and type of interaction between diaspora members in Italy and individuals in the country of origin before the journey

The vast majority of diaspora members interviewed in Italy reported to be in regular contact with individuals in their country of origin (44/45). The majority of them reportedly communicated only with their close family (35/44),⁵² and, to a lesser extent, with both family and friends (9/44). Communication was reportedly frequent, taking place either monthly (17/42), daily (12/42), weekly (10/42), or 'often' (3/42, duration not specified). The level of interaction between diaspora members in Italy and people in the country of origin tended to differ by country of origin, with Eritrean respondents reportedly being in touch only with family members, compared to Malian and Bangladeshi respondents who, albeit to a lesser extent, were reportedly also in touch with extended family and friends in the country of origin.

⁵¹ "Prospective refugees and migrants" are defined in this context as individuals who are (still) in their country of origin and in the process of considering whether or not to migrate.

⁵² Please note that not all respondents responded to this question.

Figure 13: Level of interaction of diaspora members with people in the country of origin, by country



More than half of diaspora members (25/38)⁵³ reported sending remittances back home, often “when possible” or if solicited because of an emergency (9/18).⁵⁴ Only a few reported being able to send money home regularly (2/9). Bangladeshi respondents were particularly likely to send money back home: 11 out of 13 Bangladeshi diaspora members interviewed reported sending remittances back home, however only one reported doing so regularly.⁵⁵ Malian respondents were least likely to send remittances, reportedly as a result of their vulnerable situation in Italy, mainly employed in informal, low-skilled jobs, which did not allow them to save sufficient funds to send back home. Seven out of eleven Malian diaspora respondents, who responded to this question, stated that they sent money back to their family in Mali, and only one of those reportedly did so regularly each month; others (4/7) sent money when possible and “not too much”. Eritreans respondents were more likely to send money back regularly, possibly because the majority of them (10/15) declared to have regular jobs. Of those who sent remittances (9/14), seven reported sending an average proportion of 15% of their salary back to their family in the country of origin each month or every two months. Except for Eritrean diaspora members interviewed, who had never returned to their country of origin after leaving, more than half of Malian and Bangladeshi diaspora members (17/30) went back to their country of origin at least once since arriving in Italy.

While diaspora members tended to be in regular contact with people in the country of origin, recently arrived refugees and migrants reported limited interaction with the diaspora in Europe prior to their departure. Only eight out of twenty-five respondents among recently arrived Bangladeshi and Malian refugees and migrants reported having been in touch with diaspora members in Europe before leaving home.⁵⁶ While half of Malian respondents (5/10) reportedly were in contact (4/5) or knew (1/5) other Malians living abroad, only three out of fifteen recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants declared being in contact with diaspora members living outside their country of origin prior to departure, with one of them not living in Europe. Only two respondents (one Malian and one Bangladeshi) mentioned that their families were receiving money from a relative living abroad while they were still at home.

Information shared about life in Europe

Three out of four diaspora members interviewed reported sharing information on their life in Europe with the people they were in touch with in their country of origin (32/45). Of them, a majority (20/32) shared a positive image of their life in Italy, reportedly to avoid making their family worry about them (8/20). One third of respondents (12/32) reported openly sharing information about their life, work and school, including the challenges they faced, with family and friends back home. Notably, 10 out of 45 diaspora respondents (five Malians and five Eritreans) stressed that they shared information about their life in Europe with their closest family members only, such as their spouse (Mali) or brothers, sisters and parents (Eritrea). This illustrates that information shared is selective, in that people share different information with different people, thus contributing to creating a conflicting image of life in Europe (see box 3).

⁵³ Please note that not all respondents responded to this question.

⁵⁴ As reported by nine out of eighteen individuals who responded to the question on the frequency of sending money back home.

⁵⁵ Please note that five of the 15 Bangladeshi diaspora members interviewed had reached Italy through family reunification, hence had at least part of their family already in Europe. Please also note that not all respondents responded to this question.

⁵⁶ Not all respondents responded to this question.

"[They do] not always [believe me]. Some of them may think that I made my fortune here in Italy and I don't want that others do the same. But they don't actually know what my life in Italy is like."

Malian, 24-35 years old.
In Italy since 2009.

When respondents shared information on the challenges they faced in Italy, people back home reportedly dismissed it, because they reportedly felt that the respondent did not know anymore how difficult the situation back home was (supposedly worse than any type of life they could be leading in Europe), considering that the person still was in Europe and did not return. Furthermore, accounts of hardship were often contradicted by positive images of Europe portrayed by other diaspora members, or from diaspora members sharing information with friends through other means (e.g. social media). A 2018 study highlighted the increasing role of social media in influencing refugees and migrants' decision on migration, with more trust

attributed to information from existing social ties shared through social media.⁵⁷ At the same time, it is possible that negative stories may also exert influence on potential refugees and migrants and discourage them from leaving.⁵⁸ This demonstrates the complexity of the dynamics that shape the role of diaspora communities in deciding to migrate.

Almost half of diaspora members interviewed (21/45) reported having been asked information on life in Europe, and advice on whether to attempt the journey, by individuals in their countries of origin who were considering to start the journey. Among respondents who had reportedly not been approached about advice on the journey and life in Europe, seven individuals reported what they would have said, had they been approached.

"Actually they don't care, when you tell them not to come here because it's dangerous, they reply that it's better to die at sea than to end up dead in Mali."

Malian, 39-years old.
In Italy since 2006.

The most reported advice shared about life in Europe and the journey was to not start the journey, reported by 23 out of 28 respondents and/or at least try to take a regular route instead (9/28). Respondents were reportedly outspoken about the severe protection risks prospective refugees and migrants were likely to face during the journey (12/18) and the likely unattended aspirations once at the destination in Europe (6/18). The suggestion to attempt the regular route was particularly reported by members of the Eritrean diaspora (7/9), who advised to register to UNHCR's relocation scheme in Ethiopia, and endure the long processing times, rather than start the journey, which was considered unbearably violent.

Among Malian diaspora respondents who had been approached for advice on the decision to leave, six out of eight advised against starting the journey, with one person suggesting trying, and another suggesting going to Algeria instead. Of the individuals who had asked for advice, one reportedly followed the advice and did not come, and two attempted the journey, with one of them reportedly dying in Libya and the other reaching Italy. Similarly, all six Bangladeshi respondents who had been asked information about the journey by people back home reportedly advised the individual not to come. Reportedly, two of the people who had asked information followed the advice and did not leave, while two others did leave and arrived in Italy.

⁵⁷ Dekker, R., Engbersen, G., Klaver, J., & Vonk, H., 2018. Smart Refugees: [How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making](#). *Social Media + Society*.

⁵⁸ MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), September 2018.

Figure 14: Self-reported advice given to people in the country of origin about irregular travel via the CMR to Europe



When asked whether people back home who were considering to migrate irregularly to Europe would listen to diaspora members' advice and account of life in Europe, 18 out of 45 diaspora members felt that people would not listen or only partially listen to their advice. Half of them (9/18) reported that this was because individuals who were considering to migrate in their countries of origin believed that the situation elsewhere must be better than their current one, either back home or, for Eritrean nationals, also in Ethiopia or Sudan- no matter what respondents told them. Some also felt that, as they had managed to migrate 'successfully'- defined as having reached their intended destination, Europe- people back home would regard them as gatekeepers, who would not want to share their success with others (2/18). According to one respondent, this was especially a challenge if the image of life in Europe in the country of origin was overly positive, making it almost impossible to counterbalance that image.

"75% of the people don't believe what we tell them (about the reality of life here) because in Eritrea they lead a difficult life. So they prefer to go to countries where there is democracy and freedom. Looking for what they don't have in their country of origin."

Eritrean, male, 45-years old.
In Italy since 2007.

Figure 15: Diaspora members' perception of prospective refugees and migrants in the country of origin trusting their account of life in Italy



Some diaspora members reportedly felt that the people back home with whom they were in touch with believed what they told them about life in Europe. Some of them (4/9) thought this to be the case because they only reported on positive experiences, hence reinforcing the pre-existing positive image about life in Europe. Others thought their contacts believed them because they only shared challenges they faced in Europe with close family, by whom they felt understood (3/9). Some thought that people would trust their word that the journey was risky (2/9). Eighteen respondents reportedly did not know whether individuals in the country of origin would trust their accounts of life in Europe.

Box 3: Destination Europe: Imaginary vs Reality

Both diaspora and recently arrived refugee and migrant respondents for whom Europe was the intended destination (10/30), reported that life in Europe was perceived in their countries of origin as extremely positive. This was reportedly due to the (expected) ease of finding a job, earning money, and overall leading a wealthier, safer and freer life. At the same time, respondents acknowledged that, even before they left, they were aware that there were likely challenges also once in Europe, however, these were not strong enough to dissuade them from trying. This was particularly apparent among Malian respondents, who reported that life in Europe is *“not easy but some make it”*.

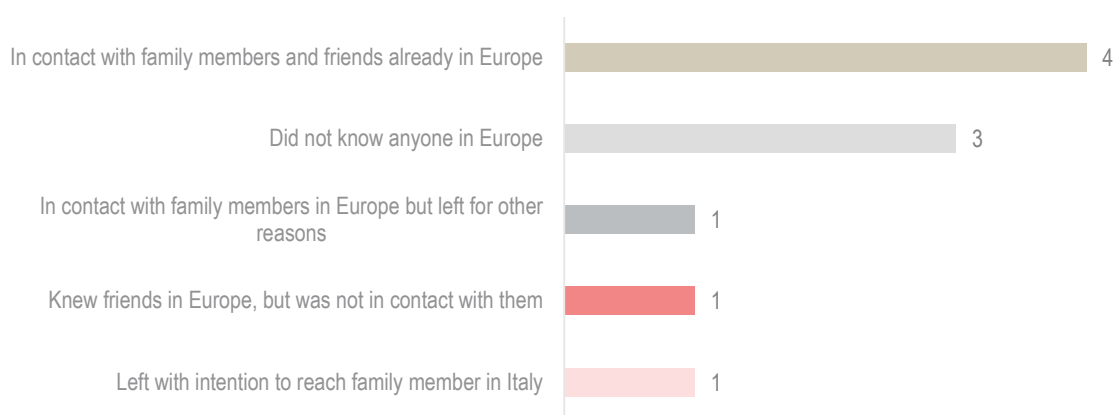
The notion of possible success in Europe, while abstract and not necessarily likely, was frequently mentioned as the key factor underlying the decision to migrate, despite accounts of how difficult the journey to, and life in, Europe may be. Europe, in this context, was perceived as a land of opportunity, where individuals can have a chance at success, in stark contrast, reportedly, to respondents' countries of origin. This notion of Europe was widespread across nationalities, with, for example, Bangladeshi respondents reporting that *“in Bangladesh everyone shares this idea”*. For all three nationalities, most identified sources of this notion of Europe as a land of opportunity were the sharing of success stories of people who had migrated in the neighbourhood, remittances that diaspora members sent home, as well as internet, social media, and TV.

The strong belief in Europe as a land of success is remarkable particularly considering the challenges diaspora members interviewed face in Europe, with some living in very vulnerable conditions. Here, differences were found based on respondents' countries of origin: the majority of Malian and Eritrean diaspora members, for instance, reportedly did not agree with the image of Europe as a land of opportunity (11/13), mostly due to the challenges they faced in their everyday lives. At the same time, though, they did maintain that life in Europe was better than in their countries of origin, either due to the lack of economic opportunities (Mali) or lack of freedom (Eritrea). In contrast, the majority of Bangladeshi diaspora members still believed in the positive image of Europe, either fully or partially (reported by five and six out of fifteen respondents respectively). This was reportedly due to better economic prospects and the opportunities which come with more wealth, notably better education. Bangladeshi diaspora members who stressed the challenges around life in Europe had mostly arrived in 2015 and 2016 irregularly via boat and were still struggling with obtaining documents and finding work.

Diaspora members' influence in choosing a destination within Europe

The majority of recently arrived refugees and migrants reportedly did not intend to reach Italy when they started their journey (20/30). Of the ten individuals who reportedly intended to reach Italy from the beginning of their journey, seven Malians and three Bangladeshis, all reported having been influenced by the positive idea of Europe when deciding to leave (see box 2). The reported role and level of interaction with the diaspora in their decision-making process varied from individual to individual with half of respondents being in touch with diaspora members abroad (all in other countries than Italy), and others having left without reportedly knowing anyone in Europe. Only in one case did a respondent report to have left because of a diaspora member in Italy, with, in the rest of cases the diaspora reportedly playing an indirect role in shaping the decision-making process over migration.

Figure 16: Level of contact with diaspora in Europe among respondents whose initial destination was Italy/Europe



Among respondents who did not intend to reach Europe when they left home, the most commonly reported intended destination was Libya (12/30), followed by Algeria (6/30), Dubai (1/30) and Sudan (1/30). Most had stayed in their initial destination for months or years, with the decision to migrate to Europe taken at a later point. Malian respondents who reportedly had not aimed to reach Europe when they left Mali (8/15) had spent an average of 1.8 years in Libya or Algeria, before deciding to move northward, reportedly as a result of the worsening situation in Libya. The worsening situation for refugees and migrants in Libya was the most reported reason for onward travel to Italy, reported by 18 out of 25 respondents who responded to this question, also the most reported reasons cited by recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants.

Among Bangladeshi refugees and migrants interviewed, only three out of fifteen intended to reach Italy when they left home, with 10 out of 15 aiming at moving to Libya, one to Sudan, and one to Dubai. Nine out of the fifteen respondents reported having been advised by the *dalal* to go to Libya and Sudan,⁵⁹ reportedly for job opportunities and ability to get a visa there. On average, Bangladeshi respondents spent 1.5 years in Libya, with variations from three months to a maximum of four years. Those who wanted to reach Italy from the beginning stayed in Libya respectively three months, four months, and one year.

In this context, the presence of the diaspora in Europe was not reported as a factor in deciding on Europe as initial destination by most respondents. Among those who wanted to reach Europe initially (10/30), diaspora appeared to have had a role in influencing their destination mainly in an indirect way, through their presence and image they were (inadvertently) sending back home. Only one respondent openly reported his intention to reach Italy, because his uncle lived there.

Support provided by the diaspora in Europe to prospective refugees and migrants prior to their departure

A minority of recently arrived refugees and migrants reported having received some kind of support to start their journey (8/30), of whom one had received money from diaspora members in Europe. The other seven respondents had reportedly been helped by their family in the country of origin to pay for the journey. The limited interaction between recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members emerging from the study is mirrored by an equally limited support provided by diaspora members before departure, for all three studied nationalities.

Both recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants and Malian diaspora members reported that the Malian diaspora in Italy provided very little support to prospective refugees and migrants to start their journey, both in terms of advice and financial support. Among diaspora members interviewed, only two out of fifteen reported having been asked support by people who intended to leave Mali. Those who were asked were reportedly asked about the routes to take, even though one respondent held that this is not normally asked, since “*routes are*

⁵⁹ The Bengali term ‘dalal,’ or ‘broker’ in English, is used in Bangladesh to describe a person who arranges the transportation of persons from one location to another. The term can also be used to refer to a ‘financial stockbroker,’ as well as a migrant smuggler or a human trafficker. Joudo Larsen et al., 2012, ‘Trafficking in persons monitoring report: January 2009 - June 2011’ Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, 36.

always the same", and routes are usually determined on the way, as the individual travels from bus station to bus station with other individuals on the journey. Similarly, the majority of recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants (12/15) reportedly did not tell anyone about an intention to reach Europe when they left home, thereby diminishing their chance of receiving support. Of the remaining three, two reportedly told their families in the country of origin and one respondent told family members living in Europe (France), and, in these cases, relatives provided support, including financial help, for the journey. In those cases, support received included: money for the journey, ransom fees and boat fees (two out of three respondents) and contact with smugglers in Libya. One respondent reported support in arranging the crossing by boat.

Among Bangladeshi respondents support to start the journey, either received or provided, was reportedly rare. Among the 15 recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed, only five had reportedly received external support prior to departure, which was given by the family in the country of origin in the form of financial support.⁶⁰ Similarly, among Bangladeshi diaspora members interviewed, only few had reportedly been asked for support by someone in the country of origin to start their journey (3/15). In these cases respondents declined to help, because they either felt the journey was too dangerous and that they did not want to support the individual's decision to travel irregularly, or because they did not have the financial means to help.

"I didn't want to come to Europe initially, I wanted to stop in Libya and to work there. The reason I came irregularly from Libya to Italy is because I had no other choice [...] I always felt in danger, mostly when I was kidnapped for the first time at the airport in Libya. That was the moment when I felt most in danger because I had no idea about what was happening. Then I was kidnapped many other times and I suffered from violence. [...] I don't think [diaspora members] they can do much, because people living in Bangladesh would probably not believe what people living in Europe tell them, about what happens in Libya and the deaths at sea."

Bangladeshi, male, 25-years old.
In Italy since 2017.

Among Eritrean diaspora members interviewed, only one respondent reported having sent money to his two brothers in Eritrea in order to help them travel to Europe. Another respondent held that he had been asked money by his brothers and sisters in Eritrea to leave, but that he was unable to support them. He also specified that even if he were able to send money, he would prefer them to move to a country within Africa, rather than to take the dangerous sea route.

⁶⁰ One individual reported having taken a loan from the *dalal*.

2. How does the diaspora shape exposure to protection risks of refugees and migrants *en route*?

This chapter explores the extent to which the information and support provided by diaspora members in Europe to refugees and migrants en route along the CMR contribute to shaping their exposure to protection risks during the journey. It does so by focusing on the level and type of interaction between the two groups during the journey, types of support provided, and level of updated information on the journey held by diaspora members in Europe.

KEY FINDINGS

- **During the journey, limited interaction took place between diaspora members and refugees and migrants.** Only three refugees and migrants (3/15) were reportedly helped by diaspora members while *en route*, and only two diaspora members reported having provided support to people in transit (2/45).
- **Diaspora members were found to have a limited role in providing information on the journey** to refugees and migrants and, when they did, information shared was based on previous personal experience, with a high risk of it being outdated.
- **Of all refugees and migrants interviewed, only four reportedly received information on protection risks from diaspora members.** More than half of refugees and migrants interviewed reported being aware of the risks of travelling irregularly before departure (19/30), although with significant differences between countries.
- 7 out of 15 Bangladeshi refugee and migrant respondents suggested that **diaspora should have a stronger role in raising awareness in the country of origin on the risks of the journey and on the situation in both Libya and Italy.**
- The journey along the CMR was generally believed, by both diaspora members and recent arrivals, to be more difficult than in the past, because of European changes in migration policy and the deterioration of the situation in Libya (38/66).

Interaction during the journey and support provided

According to interviews conducted with both recently arrived refugees and migrants as well as diaspora members in Italy, the levels and types of interaction between the two groups during the journey along the CMR was reportedly limited. Overall, while half (15/30) of refugee and migrant respondents reported having received some kind of support from other people *en route*, only three of them were helped by diaspora members in Europe. Similarly, among 45 diaspora members interviewed, only 4 reported having received requests for help from refugees and migrants in transit. Only two of them had provided support upon having received the request.⁶¹ This is in line with previous research showing that diaspora members do facilitate journeys but they do not necessarily do so in a planned way, often providing support only under extreme circumstances.⁶² Often, this is particularly the case in relation to financial support, perhaps linked to the fact that the diaspora in Europe may face severe financial limitations themselves.⁶³

When respondents received or offered support to refugees and migrants *en route*, this included both financial support and support in terms of information offered or contacts facilitated. The two out of four Malian respondents who had received support by diaspora members in Europe, for instance, had received financial support from family in Europe and, in one case, help in identifying and establishing contact with a smuggler in Libya to arrange the boat trip to Italy. The latter also reported having received advice from his family members in Europe on how to behave during the journey to minimise his exposure to risks. Advices included avoiding getting into fights with anyone, not to panic while on the boat, and, in case the rescue boats arrived at sea, to stay calm and not to attempt swimming towards the rescuers.

⁶¹ Please note that the term 'support' in this context was interpreted to include both financial and non-financial types of support, including the sharing of information, being in regular contact as a means of psychosocial support or else.

⁶² MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), September 2018; RMMS, [Split Loyalties](#), December 2017.

⁶³ Crisp J., 1999, "[Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regimes](#)", UNHCR.

Among the eight recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants who had reportedly received support while *en route* (out of 15), only one person had reportedly received support by diaspora members, with respondents mainly relying on family in the country of origin for support. In the cases where respondents sought support from their family in Bangladesh, respondents had reportedly asked for support to either pay their ransom when kidnapped (5/8) or to pay for the boat trip to Italy (3/8). Among Bangladeshi diaspora members interviewed, only one reported having been asked for support by a friend who was kidnapped for ransom in Libya. He reportedly did not have the financial resources to pay the ransom fee and reported that, at the time of data collection, his friend was still held in captivity in Libya.

“Yes, they gave me some advice on how to behave during the journey. Especially on how to behave on the boat. For example, not to move too much, don’t make trouble with other people, to stay quiet. Also what to do once the Italian boat would come rescue us: not to get anxious, stay quiet, and never jump in the water and try to swim in order to try to reach them. Many people can’t wait, I needed to stay quiet and wait for them to come and rescue us.”

Malian, male, 18-years old.
Arrived in Italy in 2017.

Several KIs and a diaspora member interviewed reported that it is common for the Eritrean diaspora in Europe to collect money collectively to help free Eritrean individuals held for ransom in Libya. This is also confirmed by other secondary sources and was explained by key informants as a way to mitigate the high rate of Eritreans held for ransom in Libya.⁶⁴ Other studies have also pointed at other types of support offered by the Eritrean diaspora to people *en route*, such as facilitating contact to smugglers and providing financial support.⁶⁵ Among the 15 Eritrean diaspora members interviewed, only four responded to the question on support provided by diaspora members to refugees and migrants *en route*, illustrating the sensitivity of the issue and suggesting that further research is needed to unpack this phenomenon in greater depth.

Information shared about routes

Overall, diaspora members in Europe appeared to share little information with refugees and migrants *en route*, with very few reporting sharing information on routes specifically. Most reported information sources used to inform refugees and migrants’ choice of routes were smugglers (reported by all Bangladeshi recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed) and people on the way.

“The routes are always the same, so they don’t really ask us here.”

Malian diaspora member, male, 24-years old.
In Italy since 2011.

When diaspora members did share information on migration routes, this was reportedly based on previous personal experience. According to recent research conducted on the experiences of East African refugees and migrants in transit through Libya to Europe, information sharing might in some cases put individuals at risk. This might

for example happen when diaspora members share information that is outdated.⁶⁶ This may also serve to explain why respondents reportedly relied on information on routes from people they were travelling with or smugglers, rather than individuals who had reached their destination, possibly years before them.

Information shared about the journey and protection risks *en route*

Nearly two-thirds of recently arrived refugee and migrant respondents reported being aware of the risks of travelling irregularly via the CMR before leaving their country of origin (19/30). The reported protection risks known were the risk of death at sea (13/19), risks associated with crossing the desert (4/19), the situation in Libya (3/19), risk of death (3/19), kidnapping (2/19), and general distress (1/19). Four out of eight respondents indicated the diaspora as a source of information on protection risks, while others indicated TV (2/8), travel companions (1/8) and the smuggler in the country of origin (1/8).

The role of diaspora members in the sharing of information about the journey and potential protection risks faced differed between nationalities interviewed. Recently arrived Malian refugees and migrants, for instance,

⁶⁴ On crowdfunded ransoms collected through social networks see Sally Haiden, [The Families of Migrants Held Hostage Are Using Facebook to Raise Money for Smugglers’ Ransoms](#), February 2019.

⁶⁵ UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019

⁶⁶ UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019

reported having been well informed about the risks of the journey (13/15), but decided to migrate anyway. This was reportedly because usually respondents had gone to Libya for work and, once the security situation in the country deteriorated, needed to leave. Reportedly, the irregular sea route was the only way to leave the country for respondents, due to the difficulty to leave the country via land or plane once irregular in Libya and, in the case of Eritrean nationals, their inability to return to their country of origin.⁶⁷ In this context, the diaspora's role in sharing information about the dangers of the trip was limited, as respondents felt that the information itself did not stop them from attempting the journey.

This view was also confirmed by Malian diaspora members, who reported that recently arrived refugees and migrants were aware of the risks but decided to travel anyway (10/15). In this context respondents held that, whatever they told people back home – or already *en route*- regarding the risks of the trip, their advice would likely go unheard. In contrast, Bangladeshi respondents felt that Bangladeshi refugees and migrants were usually less informed about the dangers of the trip, often citing the *dalal* as the source of partial – and often wrong – information shared. All recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants interviewed (15/15), for instance, reported that the *dalal* had reassured them that the situation in Libya was quiet and that the journey would have been smooth and without risks- a description which widely differed from respondents' experiences once *en route*. Only one respondent reported having been warned about the risks of the journey by his friends in Europe who had travelled before him. However, even in this case, the respondent held that these warnings were counterbalanced by the reassuring words of the *dalal*.

“Yes, I knew that there would be risks. For example, the dalal in Bangladesh told me about the risk of being kidnapped, although he convinced me that it was something, which happened only very rarely. My friends who did the trip before me had told me about the violence, about the kidnappings in Libya and especially about the journey through the sea, but not at the level of the risks that I faced. At the end I listened to the smuggler and not to my friends. I thought that in Libya it would have been hard but not as it was: at the level of being beaten with iron sticks, or being left with no food, or being forced to only drink salty water, and of the danger of embarking in such small boats with so many people.”

21-years old from Sylhet, male.
Left Bangladesh in 2018.

“Yes, I knew it was dangerous but I did not care [...] Yes, I felt in danger but I did not care, I just wanted to arrive in Italy. [...] Considering how much I suffered during the journey I would never suggest to anyone to come here.”

Malian, male, 20-years old.
In Italy since 2017

When describing the dangers respondents felt exposed to as a result of the incorrect information shared by the *dalal*, 14 out of 15 individuals reported that their journey would have been safer had they known the reality of the situation in Libya. In this context, seven out of fifteen respondents interviewed held that the Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe should have a stronger role in raising awareness in Bangladesh about the risks of the journey and the reality of life for Bangladeshis in both Libya and Europe. This thinking was confirmed by Bangladeshi diaspora members, as 14 out of 15 respondents held that recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants are generally not aware of the extend of the risks they are likely to face along the CMR, as, if they did, they would not leave.⁶⁸

Table 2: Main actions suggested by diaspora members in Europe to make the journey safer for refugees and migrants *en route*

Malian diaspora	Bangladeshi diaspora
Inform about the challenges of the journey (5/8)	Raise people's awareness back home on the situation in Libya (4/13)
Inform about likely unattended expectation around life in Italy (2/8)	Try to persuade them not to migrate (4/13)
Behavioural tips for the journey (1/8)	Raise people's awareness back home on the risks of the journey (3/13)
Dissuade them from leaving (1/8)	Suggest to try regular path although difficult (1/13)
	Warn them against <i>dalal</i> 's false promises (1/13)

⁶⁷ Four Malian respondents specifically mentioned the lack of legal pathways out of the country as a reason why they had to move irregularly and thereby exposed themselves to the dangerous sea journey.

⁶⁸ Only one respondent felt that recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants were better informed about the risks of the journey than Bangladeshis who had arrived previously in Italy via the CMR.

Notably, the majority of the actions suggested by diaspora members to make the journey safer were attempts to persuade people not to pursue the irregular journey, which is the same advice that resulted from most of refugees and migrants interviews: because of the level of protection risks experienced, almost all refugee and migrant respondents reported they would never recommend the journey to anyone (29/30).⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the Bangladeshi case, awareness raising back home was also mentioned by interviewed refugees and migrants as something diaspora members in Europe should engage in, in order to warn against leaving via the CMR. Similar dynamics were also found in previous research exploring the connection between diasporas and recent mixed migration flows,⁷⁰ where diaspora members were found to perceive it as their responsibility to warn against the risks of the journey, as well as to inform about the reality of life at destination, yet, at the same time, they did not feel they were considered a reliable source of information. This was also confirmed by recently arrived refugees and migrants, who stated that they had left even though they knew the difficulties of the journey, illustrating the complexity of the role of certain drivers. Exploring this was not within the scope of the present assessment but would need to be further examined in potential follow-up studies per country of origin.

The majority of Eritrean diaspora members interviewed held that Eritrean refugees and migrants were aware or at least partially aware of the risks before leaving (14/15), thanks to information shared either by diaspora groups online (11/11) or directly through being in touch with diaspora members abroad (3/11).⁷¹ YouTube and Facebook were reported (by five respondents) as the main tools used by activists and diaspora members to denounce the conditions of Eritrean refugees and migrants while *en route* along the CMR and especially while in Libya. The distinct patterns of Eritrean migration along the CMR have also been found in other studies, which suggest that Eritreans have distinct transitory profiles, moving along the route in closed smuggling networks, facing particularly severe protection risks *en route*, compared to other nationalities traveling along the CMR.⁷²

"I didn't know of any risk before leaving because the smuggler told me that the journey would be very easy. He said we would arrive regularly from Dhaka to Libya and from there we would continue by boat. Halfway through the journey by sea an Italian boat would have arrived to take us in. [...] I would warn them against the route from Libya onwards. In Libya migrants suffer continuous violence. When I was a prisoner there I remember I was with 180 to 200 people divided in three rooms of small-medium size. We stayed there for 24 days eating only once a day and drinking salty water (probably taken from the sea). Then we remained without food for six days and we drank just salty water. I would never recommend to anyone to start such a journey."

Bangladeshi diaspora member, male, 19-years old.
Arrived in Italy via sea in 2016.

While the Eritrean diaspora was found to be the most active in sharing information about the dangers of the journey, diaspora members and key informants agreed that such warnings were likely to go unheard among Eritreans, because people's motivation to leave Eritrea is so strong that nothing could deter them. As such, most reported advice given by diaspora members to individuals aiming to reach Europe was to try travel through legal pathways. Among diaspora members interviewed, five out of fifteen respondents reported having applied for family reunification and/or to UNHCR relocation schemes on behalf of family members in Ethiopia or Libya, in order to help them reach Europe through legal means.

Diaspora and refugees and migrants' perception of journey's changes

The majority of both recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members interviewed held that the journey along the CMR was more difficult in 2019 than in the past (38/66). This was reportedly due to a set of changes in migration policies implemented by the EU and its members states along the route and notably in Italy.⁷³ Respondents based their understanding on stories diaspora members and refugees and migrants had heard from people who had travelled after or before them, as well as on their knowledge of recent changes and latest migration-related⁷⁴ and political events in the Mediterranean region.

⁶⁹ Only one respondent reported he would suggest to attempt the journey.

⁷⁰ RMMS, 2017, "[Split Loyalties: mixed migration and the diaspora connection.](#)"

⁷¹ Not all respondents answered to this question.

⁷² UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019, Bram Frouws, Director of the Mixed Migration Centre, interviewed by The Guardian, [Refugees at high risk of kidnapping in Horn of Africa, research reveals](#), 9 January 2019.

⁷³ For more information, please consult, UNHCR/IMPACT, [Mixed migration trends and dynamics in Libya: The impact of EU migration measures on refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2018.

⁷⁴ Especially events related to search and rescue operations led by NGOs in the Mediterranean in 2018 and 2019, see for further information: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/2019-update-ngos-sar-activities>.

3. How does the diaspora shape the experience of recently arrived refugees and migrants in Italy?

This section explores the role of the diaspora in Italy in shaping the experience of recently arrived refugees and migrants in the country. It focusses on the interaction between the two groups, the level of support provided by diaspora members to recently arrived refugees and migrants in accessing their rights and in providing other types of support.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Interaction between diaspora members and refugees and migrants upon arrival in Italy was found to be limited.** Only 8 out of 30 refugees and migrants reported contact with diaspora members; 15 out of 45 diaspora reported contact with recent arrivals.
- **More than half of the diaspora respondents who were or had been in contact with new arrivals (9/15) reported having provided them with some kind of support** (e.g. accommodation, legal, financial assistance).
- The majority of diaspora respondents showed only partial knowledge of migration policy changes in Italy (30/45). **Seven out of 45 respondents had an extensive knowledge on the reception system and latest developments on legal procedures and migration policies.**
- **When not able to directly provide support to refugees and migrants, the majority of diaspora respondents (30/45) knew groups, such as diaspora groups or civil society organisations, which could provide relevant support,** with variations between countries.

Levels and types of interaction in Italy

Overall, interaction between recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members in Italy appears to be limited. Among 30 recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed, only eight (of whom five Malians and three Bangladeshi) reported being in contact with diaspora members in Italy, with none reportedly knowing a formal diaspora association. While the Malian community is a relatively recent diaspora in Italy, which may explain the more limited level of interaction, this was more surprising for Bangladeshi respondents, considering the longstanding presence of Bangladeshi in Italy since the 1980s.⁷⁵ These findings suggest a disconnect between recently arrived Bangladeshi refugees and migrants, who arrived via sea, with more established diaspora members who were more likely to arrive to Italy through legal pathways, such as through work permits and family reunification.⁷⁶

Similarly, diaspora members interviewed reported their interaction with more recently arrived refugees and migrants to be limited. **One third of respondents (15/45) reported having been in contact with recently arrived refugees and migrants and, of them, only two (2/15) reported knowing the individual before they reached Italy.** The remaining 13 had met them only once in Italy, with 4 of them specifying they had met at the centre/shelter where they were living.

The Eritrean diaspora displayed different dynamics. Eight out of fifteen respondents did not reply to the question, four of them reported not being in contact at all with recently arrived Eritreans, with only three respondents knowing recent arrivals. Among those who reportedly had no contact, one person underlined the fact that all Eritreans he knew had arrived at least five years before him. Among the three respondents who had been in touch with recent arrivals, all reported not knowing them from before, and one of them was living in Germany at the time of the interview and said he had met recent arrivals there. Two other respondents reported having been in contact with refugees and migrants in transit only briefly, and that they “all went to other European countries” and they “are not in touch now”. These findings are in line with both what was witnessed by the data collection team (who, as

⁷⁵ Melanie Knights, [Bangladeshi Immigrants in Italy: From Geopolitics to Micropolitics](#), *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp.105-123, 1996.

⁷⁶ M. Rahman, M. Alamgir Kabir, [Moving to Europe: Bangladeshi migration to Italy](#), *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 142, February 2012.

explained in the challenges section, was unable to identify Eritrean recent arrivals in Italy to interview), and with what had been highlighted by KIIs (6/7), namely that Eritrean refugees and migrants' main intention once arrived in Italy is to immediately leave the country in order to reach contacts in Northern Europe. Most KIIs (5/7) reported an average time spent in Italy of around one month; time to re-organise and move again towards the northern border. Furthermore, recent arrivals tend to leave reception centres (often located in remote and isolated areas) after a few days, and prefer to settle in cities, often in informal sites (e.g. by squatting). Since they often leave reception centres, many Eritreans do not apply for asylum in Italy, reportedly because they fear getting stuck in the country as procedures take too long, and try to avoid being registered at their arrival in order not to be sent back to Italy following Dublin III procedures,⁷⁷ once they succeed in crossing the border.

Level and type of support provided by diaspora members to recently arrived refugees and migrants

More than half of diaspora members who were or had reportedly been in contact with new arrivals (9/15) reported having provided them with some kind of support (see box 3). Main reported support provided was (1) help with language (5/9), (2) support with accommodation by hosting them (5/9), (3) legal assistance (through contacts) (4/9), (4) help in accessing services (including medical facilities) (3/9), and (5) finding a job (1/9).⁷⁸ Among all interviewed diaspora members (including those who had reportedly not been in contact with new arrivals), six respondents considered it important to stress their inability to provide support because of their socio-economic condition, even if they had been asked for help. Socio-economic profiles of diaspora members interviewed show that almost one third were still living in state-run facilities (13/45), such as reception centres (10/13), some kind of social housing (2/13) or shelters (1/13), even though they had been in Italy for at least three years, illustrating their marginalised situation in the country.

Box 3: Main types of support provided by diaspora members to recent arrivals

1. **Accommodation**, by hosting recent arrivals
2. **Language**, often acting as interpreters
3. **Legal assistance**, through providing contacts with lawyers and civil society organisations
4. **Accessing services** (including health-care or dealing with authorities)
5. **Finding a job**, through contacts within their social networks

The level of support received by diaspora members differed by recently arrived refugees and migrants' living situation, with individuals living in reception centres being less likely to receive support from diaspora members. A likely reason for this is that individuals who have close ties with diaspora members are more likely to live with them than to live in reception centres, while individuals who do not have such ties are more likely to rely on the official reception system for support. The majority of interviewed recently arrived refugees and migrants lived in reception centres (23/30), which was also their main source of support. Through the reception system respondents accessed accommodation, legal assistance and a monthly pocket money.

Respondents who were not living in reception centres were more likely to rely on diaspora members for support: six out of thirty respondents reported receiving help with accommodation, with some being helped by their former guardian (from when they were previously living at a centre) (3/6), others being hosted by friends (2/6), and one individual helped by a civil society association (1/6). Only one recently arrived individual reported having received financial support from a diaspora member in Italy, who, in his case, was his uncle, living in Rome.

Level of support provided by diaspora members to recently arrived refugees and migrants to access their rights

Almost all interviewed refugees and migrants (29/30) reported receiving or having received some kind of legal assistance since arriving in Italy. None of them had reportedly received legal assistance from the diaspora. The majority received legal assistance from the reception centres in which they were hosted (23/29).

⁷⁷ According to Dublin III procedures, the asylum request by a third country national is to be presented in the first European country the person arrives in – usually, either Italy or Greece – and where he or she was identified by local authorities. Reference: [European Union, Dublin III Regulation \(EU\) No 604/2013, 2013](#).

⁷⁸ Respondents could cite as many types of support as they had received.

However, more than two-third (15/23) reported not being satisfied with the level and type of information they had received. Of those who were dissatisfied, eight individuals felt they had not been informed properly, five reported not having received any information, and two individuals reportedly did not know whether they had received any information on their rights in Italy. Some reported relying on civil society groups and volunteers for information. The remaining six respondents who had received legal assistance (6/29), reported having received it from either their former guardian at the centre (3/6), a civil society organisation only (1/6) or from an Italian friend (1/6).

The majority of refugee and migrant respondents (18/30) showed a partial knowledge of recent migration policy measures implemented, especially of those affecting them most, such as the abolition of the humanitarian permit and requirement to have a job contract in order to legalise one's stay (9/18). Other reported an overall sense of an anti-immigrants political (and sometimes social) attitude (9/18). Consequently, they reportedly perceived migration to Italy to have been easier in the past, in terms of both the ability to obtain documents and find jobs, and to live in a more politically "hostile" environment than previously. The remaining twelve respondents reported not knowing much about migration policy in Italy. Existing research on communication channels among refugees and migrants in Italy illustrates that the level of information about one's rights and how to access them is key to reducing refugees and migrants' vulnerability and their exposure to potentially abusive situations, such as informal, potentially exploitative work.⁷⁹

"Yes, the situation for migrants in Italy has worsened. Today in order to renew the permit of stay, you need a job contract; but who gives you a job contract today?"

Malian, male, 25-34 years old.
In Italy since 2009

As previous research has pointed to the risks of diaspora members in Europe providing partial or inaccurate information, diaspora members were asked about their level of knowledge about recent migration policy changes, as a proxy indicator to assess their ability to share information about legal assistance and refugees and migrants' rights to recently arrived individuals in Italy. **The majority of diaspora members interviewed had at least partial knowledge of recent migration policy changes in the country (37/45)**, with seven of them reporting to have extensive knowledge of the topic. Eight individuals were reportedly not informed at all about recent policy changes. Most reported policy changes mentioned were: the abolition of the humanitarian permit and the need for a work contract to renew the humanitarian permit for those who already hold it (mentioned 13 times), specific changes in the reception system, including the reduction of services provided in reception centres, reported by ten individuals, and longer citizenship application processing time from two to four years, reported in nine cases.

While diaspora members reportedly did not provide recently arrived refugees and migrants with legal support, the majority of them reportedly knew organisations they could refer individuals to seeking advice (30/45), with variations by nationality. This included diaspora associations or civil society groups. The Eritrean diaspora emerged as the best-informed group, with 12 out of 15 diaspora members interviewed reportedly knowing where to refer individuals in need of legal assistance to. Among Bangladeshi respondents, nine out of fifteen respondents felt able to refer new arrivals to relevant organisations, while among Malian diaspora members a comparatively low six out of 15 respondents reportedly knew organisations that could help recently arrived refugees and migrants. In all three cases respondents were mainly knowledgeable about civil society organisations, with only five out of the 30 individuals reportedly knowing of diaspora associations which could provide legal support.

⁷⁹ Sanchez et al., [A study of the communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers in Italy, with a particular focus on online and social media](#), 2018.

CONCLUSION

Many of the refugees and migrants who have reached Italy via the CMR between 2017 and 2019 come from Mali, Eritrea, and Bangladesh.⁸⁰ Individuals from these countries are also represented among the refugee and migrant population in Italy, although size and length of stay of these diaspora communities in the country varies. In the wake of recent research which has started looking into the relationship between the diaspora in Europe and recent refugee and migrant arrivals to the continent,⁸¹ the present assessment, conducted by REACH in partnership with MMC, aimed at exploring this relationship in the context of mixed migration flows along the CMR. The study adopted a qualitative research approach aimed at investigating what kind of contact exists between established diaspora members in Italy and (prospective) refugees and migrants travelling along the CMR, what kinds of information and support the diaspora provides, and how this influences refugees and migrants' decision-making over migration to Europe, as well as their exposure to risks both *en route* and upon arrival.

Pre-travel contact and the diaspora's role in shaping migration decision-making

- While diaspora members tended to be in regular contact with people in the country of origin, recently arrived refugees and migrants reported limited interaction with the diaspora in Europe prior to their departure from their country of origin. **This disconnect suggests that, for the nationalities studied, those who decide to migrate irregularly through the CMR may not necessarily be those with personal contacts in Europe.**⁸² Furthermore, two thirds of interviewed refugees and migrants had not intended to reach Italy when they left home. When they did, it was because of the deteriorating situation in Libya and the impossibility to return to the country of origin. **In this context, the diaspora in Europe was not reported as a factor in deciding on Europe as initial destination by most respondents.**
- When diaspora respondents were being approached by someone who had the intention to migrate, **the majority of them reportedly advised against the dangerous journey or suggested to attempt migrating through regular routes.** However, diaspora respondents felt that people in the country of origin were unlikely to believe their messages about the difficult conditions many of them lived in, as well as the risks associated with the journey. Some suggested that people back home would regard them as gatekeepers if they shared negative information and disregard their advice.
- **Negative messages shared with individuals considering migrating appeared to be contradicted by the more positive images the same diaspora members sent back home,** reportedly to avoid making their family worry about them. Diasporas then seem to indirectly contribute to the positive image of Europe which was reported by refugees and migrants who intended to reach Italy as having influenced their decision to migrate as well as their choice of destination.

Interaction and support during the journey

- **The level and type of interaction between diaspora members and recently arrived individuals interviewed in Italy during the journey along the CMR was reportedly limited.** Overall, half of refugee and migrant respondents reported having received some kind of support from other people *en route*. Of them, only two had reportedly received this support from diaspora members in Europe. Similarly, only a few diaspora members reported having received requests for help from refugees and migrants in transit, and even fewer provided support. This is in line with past research showing that, when in contact, diaspora members do facilitate journeys but they do not do so in a planned way, often providing support only under extreme circumstances,⁸³ perhaps also because, as highlighted by the socio-economic profiles of diaspora respondents, diaspora members interviewed in Italy faced severe financial constraints.

⁸⁰ Data on recent sea arrivals to Italy are retrieved from the Italian Ministry of Interior. Data for 2018 is available [here](#); for 2017 please see [here](#).

⁸¹ See for instance MMC, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), 2018; RMMS, [Split Loyalties](#), December 2017; MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), September 2018.

⁸² Please note that the majority of respondents (23/30) were staying in reception centres at the time of data collection and, as such, less likely to have extensive contacts in Italy. Please consult the methodology section for further information.

⁸³ MMC-Middle East, [Diaspora, transnational networks and migration among Syrians and Iraqis](#), September 2018; RMMS, [Split Loyalties](#), December 2017.

- **Overall, respondents held that diaspora members in Europe shared little information with refugees and migrants *en route*, with very few reporting that information on routes, specifically, was shared.** Most reported information sources used to inform refugees and migrants' choice of routes were smugglers (reported by all Bangladeshi recently arrived refugees and migrants interviewed) and people along the way. **When diaspora members did share information on migration routes, this was reportedly based on previous personal experience** which, as highlighted by recent research, may put individuals at risk, as such information may be outdated.⁸⁴
- The role of diaspora members in sharing information about the journey and potential protection risks faced differed between nationalities interviewed. However, **all respondents agreed that the diaspora's warnings about the risks of the journey was only one among many factors potential refugees and migrants took into consideration when deciding to migrate and, frequently, not the most important one.** Investigation into the impact of those other drivers on decision-making and risk-taking of refugees and migrants did not fall within the scope of this assessment and would therefore need to be examined in further detail in future research.

Interaction and support upon arrival

- **For the three nationalities studied, interaction between recently arrived refugees and migrants and diaspora members in Italy appears to be limited.** Nevertheless, more than half of the diaspora members who were or had reportedly been in contact with new arrivals reported having provided them with some kind of support. At the same time, diaspora members interviewed did not always appear to be in the right condition to offer help: among all assessed diaspora members, six respondents stressed their inability to provide support because of their socio-economic condition, even if they were asked for help by someone. Socio-economic profiles of diaspora members interviewed illustrate their marginalised situation in the country.
- **While diaspora members reportedly did not provide recently arrived refugees and migrants with legal support, the majority of them reportedly knew organisations they could refer individuals who were seeking advice to,** with variations by nationality. The Eritrean diaspora emerged as the best-informed group.

Contrary to the widespread belief that the diaspora in Europe has a strong role in providing information to prospective refugees and migrants, providing them with information on life in Europe and how to get there, the qualitative data collected through this research points to a more complex picture for the three nationalities studied. **The assessment highlights a disconnect between refugees and migrants recently arrived via the CMR and diaspora members in Europe for the three case studies explored: Malian, Bangladeshi and Eritrean nationals.** Contact between the two groups was reported in only one case as a direct reason for migration. At the same time, while most respondents had reportedly not intended to reach Europe when they left home, those who had, reported having been influenced by a positive image of Europe related to wealth and safety. In this context, the diaspora's presence in Europe was found to act as an indirect driver in facilitating migration and shaping the idea that one can 'make it' in Europe. Such influence has to be read in the context of multiple other drivers of migration which are different for each nationality and require more in-depth, targeted investigation.

The following information gaps have been identified as part of this study:

- **Diaspora members in Europe as migration risk messengers:** Diaspora members in Europe have acted for some time- through both informal and increasingly organised channels- as information providers for prospective refugees and migrants. However, this study shows that the level of interaction and the diaspora's influence on the decision-making process of prospective people on the move is much more complex than previously assumed. This points to the necessity of unpacking much more which population groups may profit from information campaigns about migration involving the diaspora, including in what form. As such, the question arises to what extent potential messengers' nationality, socio-economic profiles and personal networks play a role in information sharing, including in the weight that is given to the information by prospective refugees and migrants.

⁸⁴ UNHCR/IMPACT, [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of East African refugees and migrants in Libya](#), April 2019.

- **Structural, in particular, socio-cultural drivers of migration in West Africa:** Among Malian respondents in particular it emerged that many originated from communities in which migration was described as 'part of life', particularly for young men on the verge to adulthood. Migration, with a focus on international migration, was seen as a necessary part of becoming an adult and gaining a position of respect within the community of origin. In this context, the question arises what the socio-cultural dynamics are which underlie migration decision-making in certain regions of West Africa, which see particularly high emigration towards Europe, and what role information on the risks of the journey can play there.
- **Exploring how migration drivers and conflicting information sources interplay in shaping the final migration decision:** while migration drivers remain a frequent topic of investigation in research on (irregular) migration along the CMR, the extent to which different migration drivers interplay, how some may be more dominant in some contexts and for certain groups of individuals, but less so in others, remains poorly understood. This is equally the case for information sources, as one individual may have access to a variety of information sources and conflicting information, and yet, which is taken on board and which is disregarded often remains unclear. Context-specific information may support a more nuanced understanding of such dynamics.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Recently arrived refugees and migrants individual interview questionnaire

Annex 2: Diaspora members individual interview questionnaire

Annex 1: Individual Interview tool - recently arrived refugees and migrants

Exploring the role of Malian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi diasporas in Italy in shaping migration decision making and exposure to risk along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route

May-June 2019

Introductory text (10 minutes)

Hello, my name is ___ and I'm a part of the REACH Assessment Team. We are conducting a study on the relationship between diaspora communities in Italy and recently arrived refugees and migrants; specifically, we want to understand the role of diasporas in Italy in shaping migration decision making and exposure to risk along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route. The aim of this research is to inform an improved response to mixed migration flows along the Central Mediterranean Route, and we believe that the best way to understand the situation is to hear your point of view, as you are the only ones who can tell us how things actually are.

Please note that:

- **The interview is completely anonymous:** this means that we will not note your name or any other information that could link the answers you give back to you. We are interested to hear all your opinions, both positive and negative and we will not mention names or who said what;
- **Taking part in the interview is voluntary:** You can decide whether you want to take part in the discussion or not and you can choose to answer any or all of my questions. If there are some questions you do not want to answer, we move on to the next, and you can stop the interview at any time;
- **Your participation in the study will not affect your legal status:** please note that you will not receive any direct benefit if you answer my questions, and there will be no consequences if you decide not to answer them; If you choose not to take part or to skip any questions, it will have no negative impact whatsoever on your ability to access services from any agency or on your asylum application;
- **You can ask any question at any time now, during and after the interview;**
- The interview will last around 40 minutes. With your permission, I will be recording your answers in writing on this notebook. Is that okay? We can have a look together so you can see what I write down as we move along. Do you have any questions for me at this point?

Do you agree to take part in this discussion?

Date: _____

Start time: _____

Enumerator name: _____

City: _____

Location: _____

Introductory questions

# Q	Questions	Answers
1.	Where are you from?	
2.	Gender	
3.	How old are you?	
4.	What is the highest level of education you have completed and where? - Primary school, Middle school, High school, University	
5.	When did you arrive in Italy?	
6.	Did you apply for asylum? (What is your legal status?)	
7.	Which (physical) route did you take to come to Italy?	

8.	When did you leave your country of origin?	
9.	What are your main activities here at the moment? How do you keep yourself busy? - Study? Work? Volunteer? What kind of job/activity?	
10.	Where do you live in Italy?	

Migration decision-making

# Q	Questions	Answers
11.	<p>When you were still in your country of origin, did you hear stories of people from your country living in Europe?</p> <p>- Who were they? From where did you hear such stories? Other people? Internet? - What did they do in Italy/ Europe? - What were they saying?</p>	
12.	<p>What did you think about these stories?</p> <p>- To what extent did these stories contribute to your decision to leave?</p>	
13.	<p>When you were still in your country of origin, were you in contact with members of your community who were already in Italy or Europe?</p> <p>- Who were they? Family? Friends? How well did you know them? Were they in Europe since a long time?</p> <p>-Were they supporting you back home with money/job etc.? If they were sending money, how frequently? How were you in contact with them? Phone, Facebook, else...? How often? (1) weekly. How many times per week? (2) monthly. How many times per month? (3) yearly. How many times per year? (4) less than once per year</p>	
14.	<p>When you decided to leave your country of origin, where did you plan to go? What destination(s) did you have in mind?</p> <p>- Why? Who did you know that was already there?</p>	

15.	<p>Can you tell us about every location in which you stopped, after leaving your country?</p> <p>-How did you reach Location 1? For how long did you stay in Location 1? -Weeks. How many? -Months. How many? -Years. How many? -Why did you stop in Location 1 for X duration? -Which country/ies did you cross in order to reach Location 2? -For how long did you stay in Location 2? Why did you stop in Location 2 for X duration? Etc.</p>	
16.	<p>At what point of your journey did you decide to travel to Italy/ Europe?</p> <p>- What triggered your decision to leave Tunisia/Libya and cross the Mediterranean? What were your main motivations?</p>	
17.	<p>Once you had decided to leave for Italy/ Europe, what were your expectations towards those destination(s)?</p> <p>- Where did you get this idea from?</p>	
18.	<p>Who did you inform about the decision to travel to Italy/Europe?</p>	
19.	<p>To what extent did your family and friends in the country of origin/destination, support your decision to leave your country first, and to embark to Italy later?</p> <p>- Did someone not agree with your decision: (1) to leave your country; (2) to embark to Italy? Who? For which reasons? Who was supporting you the most?</p>	
20.	<p>What means of migrating to Europe did you know about?</p> <p>-Legal migration: study/work visa, family reunification, humanitarian protection; -Irregular travel: by boat, overstay after visa expiration</p>	
21.	<p>Which routes had you considered to take to travel to Europe?</p> <p>- Did you consider regular ways of travelling, including asking for a visa?</p>	
22.	<p>Were people from your home country already in Italy/Europe willing or able to support you in attempting regular routes?</p> <p>- Who? How?</p>	
23.	<p>Why did you decide to travel irregularly by boat?</p>	

24.	<p>Did someone from Mali/Eritrea/Bangladesh living in Italy/Europe help you to start your journey?</p> <p>- How? What kind of support did they provide? Money? Contacts? Psychological (did they support your decision)?</p>	
25.	<p>Were you or people travelling with you in contact with someone already in Italy/Europe, during the different stages of the journey?</p> <p>- Who? Had they also made a similar journey?</p>	
26.	<p>Did members of your community in Italy/Europe help you with financing part(s) of the journey?</p> <p>- If yes, which part(s) of the journey? How did they transfer the money?</p>	
27.	<p>Did members of your community in Italy/Europe provide any information regarding specific places to move to, while you were in transit?</p> <p>- What kind of information? Job opportunities? Connections? Travel tips? Accommodation?</p> <p>- Did they advise specific locations? Which ones?</p> <p>- At what point of the journey?</p> <p>- How did they communicate this information?</p>	
28.	<p>How has the information shared by Malian/Eritrean/Bangladeshis already in Italy/Europe influenced your trajectory, during each stage of the journey?</p> <p>- Did you actually move to certain locations rather than others because of the information you received from them?</p>	
29.	<p>While travelling, did you notice if migrants from some nationalities had stronger personal network than others?</p>	
30.	<p>What kind of financial/logistic/social support did you receive during the journey, from people other than any contacts you (maybe) had in Italy/Europe?</p> <p>- How did they help? Money, job, contacts, housing...? Please specify.</p> <p>- Who helped you? Other refugees and migrants? From your country or other countries? Locals? Friends/family in the country of origin?</p>	

Protection risks *en route*

# Q	Questions	Answers
31.	<p>Were you aware of the risks that travelling irregularly along the Central Mediterranean Sea route would entail?</p> <p>- Which risks did you know of?</p>	
32.	<p>Did anyone explain to you the risks of the journey before you left?</p> <p>- Who? Family/friends in the country of origin? At destination? Migrants en route? Friends? Acquaintances? - What did they say?</p>	
33.	<p>While you were en route to Europe, what kind of advice regarding safety measures to take during the journey did you receive from people in Italy/Europe, if any?</p> <p>- i.e. safer routes to take, tips regarding who to contact, how to handle situations...? Please specify the kind of advice you received. - Did you follow such advice? If yes, how did it go? If not, why didn't you?</p>	
34.	<p>What kind of help, if any, did you receive from members of your community in Italy/Europe, while you were en route to Europe?</p> <p>- Money, contacts, psychological support,...? If none, do you think you would have needed help? What kind of help?</p>	
35.	<p>Did you feel in danger at some point during the journey and asked for help?</p> <p>- Do you feel like telling us what happened?</p>	
36.	<p>Did you contact someone in Italy/Europe to ask for help when you felt in danger during the journey?</p> <p>- If yes, who? What did they do? If not, why didn't you? Who did you contact instead?</p>	
37.	<p>Looking back at your experience now, what could have made your journey safer?</p> <p>- (e.g. chance to come regularly, more money, contacts,...)</p>	
38.	<p>What, in your opinion, your community in Italy/Europe could do in order to reduce risks for migrants along the Central Mediterranean Sea route?</p>	
39.	<p>Would you recommend making the trip to other friends and family members?</p>	
40.	<p>Do you think that your experience in travelling by boat would have been different had you travelled a few years ago?</p> <p>- If so, why? Did someone who travelled before you make you think so? How different was their experience compared to yours?</p>	
41.	<p>How dangerous is the journey today, compared to a couple of years ago?</p> <p>- Which part of the journey has become more dangerous than before? How did it change?</p>	

42.	Looking back at your experience now, did any information you received either before leaving or during the journey prove wrong? - If yes, what information? Who gave it to you? How did this impact your journey?	
43.	Overall, to what extent did the information you received in transit make your journey easier/safer? - Can you refer to any particular occasion during which a specific information has helped improving your situation? (e.g. knowing someone, knowing where to go, ...)	
44.	How do you share, among migrants, up-to-date information regarding changes in journey's details (e.g. embarkation points, timetables for departures,...) while in transit? - Internet? If through the internet, how (Facebook, specific forums,...)? Phone? Word of mouth?	
45.	Do you know if routes and embarkation points were different a couple of years ago? - If yes, how did they change? Why do you think did they change?	
46.	Do you think people from your country of origin in Italy/Europe have updated information on the journey? - What makes you think so?	
47.	Have you heard about recent changes in migration policies (e.g. EU/ Italy-Libya agreements and the recent Italian security decree)? - How have things changed for R&M travelling irregularly like you, after these agreements? Did such changes influence your decision to embark on the journey?	

Protection risks upon arrival

# Q	Questions	Answers
48.	Who do you know from your country who is also in Italy? - Family? Friends? Did you contact them? -Where exactly are they? In which town? -If not in Italy, where are they?	
49.	Do you know any migrant associations or groups of Malians/Eritreans/Bangladeshi in Italy/Europe that you can go to if you need help? - Who? Where are they? How do you know them? Word of mouth, internet,... - Did you contact them? Are you going to contact them?	
50.	Are you receiving any help with the Italian language since you arrived? - Who is helping you? Diaspora community, other migrants, Italian authorities, civil society, volunteers, others?	

51.	<p>To what extent have you been informed on your rights in Italy?</p> <p>-What kind of information did you receive? -Who provided you with such information? Diaspora community members, other migrants, Italian authorities, civil society, volunteers, others?</p>	
52.	<p>What kind of help, if any, with legal assistance are you receiving?</p> <p>- Who is helping you with that? How? Are they giving you information, contact with lawyers? -If none, what are you planning to do? Ask someone? Who? Try to stay in Italy irregularly?</p>	
53.	<p>If you have a question regarding legal support, who do you go to for advice, and why?</p> <p>- Diaspora community, other migrants, Italian authorities, civil society, volunteers, others?</p>	
54.	<p>What kind of financial support are you receiving, if any?</p> <p>- Who is helping you? Diaspora community, other migrants, Italian authorities, civil society, volunteers, others? - Are they lending you money? Are they helping you finding a job?</p>	
55.	<p>Are you receiving any other type of support with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - housing - medical assistance - psychological support - advisory services? Specify - other? Specify <p>- If so, who is providing such support? Diaspora community, other migrants, Italian authorities, civil society, volunteers?</p>	
56.	<p>What do you have to do in order to get such support?</p> <p>- i.e. Is it free/do you have to pay for it? Do you have to become member of some association?</p>	
57.	<p>Is there any member of your community here in Italy that could help you continuing your journey to other European countries?</p> <p>- Where would you want to go? How could they help you (money, contacts,...) ?</p>	

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your time and attention in answering all these questions. Your contribution is really important and will help organizations to better understand the situation.

- Do you have anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any question for me?

End time: _____

Annex 2: Individual Interview tool – diaspora members

Exploring the role of Malian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi diasporas in Italy in shaping migration decision making and exposure to risk along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route

May – June 2019

Introductory text (10 minutes)

Hello, my name is ___ and I am a part of the REACH Assessment Team. We are conducting a study on the relationship between diaspora communities in Italy and recently arrived refugees and migrants; specifically, we want to understand the role of diasporas in Italy in shaping migration decision making and exposure to risk along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route. The aim of this research is to inform an improved response to mixed migration flows along the Central Mediterranean Route, and we believe that the best way to understand the situation is to hear your point of view, as you are the only ones who can tell us how things actually are.

Please note that:

- **The interview is completely anonymous:** this means that we will not note your name or any other information that could link the answers you give back to you. We are interested to hear all your opinions, both positive and negative and we will not mention names or who said what;
- **Taking part in the interview is voluntary:** You can decide whether you want to take part in the discussion or not and you can choose to answer any or all of my questions. If there are some questions you do not want to answer, we move on to the next, and you can stop the interview at any time;
- **Your participation in the study will not affect your legal status:** please note that you will not receive any direct benefit if you answer my questions, and there will be no consequences if you decide not to answer them; If you choose not to take part or to skip any questions, it will have no negative impact whatsoever on your ability to access services from any agency or on your asylum application;
- **You can ask any question at any time now, during and after the interview;**
- The interview will last around 40 minutes. With your permission, I will be recording your answers in writing on this notebook. Is that okay? We can have a look together so you can see what I write down as we move along. Do you have any questions for me at this point?

Do you agree to take part in this discussion?

Date: _____

Start time: _____

Enumerator name: _____

City: _____

Location: _____

Introductory Questions

# Q	Questions	Answers
1.	Where are you from?	
2.	Gender	
3.	How old are you?	
4.	Highest level of education completed - Primary school, Middle school, High school, University	
5.	When did you arrive in Italy?	
6.	How did you arrive in Italy? - Legally? How? Visa? What kind of visa? - Irregularly? Through which route?	
7.	What is your current legal status?	

8.	What do you do in Italy? - Study? Work? What kind of job? - Formal employment (contract) or informal (black market)?	
9.	Where do you live in Italy?	
10.	Role within the diaspora (if any) - Are you active within the Malian/Eritrean/Bangladeshi community? If yes, what is your role?	

Migration decision-making

# Q	Questions	Answers
11.	Are you in contact with people in Mali/Eritrea/Bangladesh? - Who are they? Family? Friends? - How are you in contact with them? Phone, Facebook, Skype, else? - How often do you hear from them and/ or see them? (1) weekly. How many times per week? (2) monthly. How many times per month? (3) yearly. How many times per year? (4) less than once per year - Do you send money back to Mali/Eritrea/Bangladesh? If yes, how frequently? What proportion of your salary?	
12.	Do you feel tied to your home country? - How? Do you meet with people from your community here? Do you sometimes travel back home or would you like to?	
13.	How is the Malian/Eritrean/Bangladeshi community organised here? - Are there formal diaspora associations? What kind of associations (political, religious,...)? Do you often organise events together? Do you often gather together?	
14.	Are you yourself part of a Malian/Eritrean/Bangladeshi association? - If yes, what kind of association? Political, religious, cultural,...?	
15.	Do you talk to people in your home country about life here? - What do you tell them?	
16.	Is there a particular idea/ image about Europe in your home country? If so, what is the main idea about life in Italy/Europe, in your home country? - Where do such ideas come from? (e.g. Internet, people's stories,...) - Do you agree with such image?	
17.	Who are, in your opinion, the people from your country most likely to decide to migrate via the CMR? - Can you attempt to give us a profile? - gender - age - level of education - single/with family in home country/destination country - area of origin in home country - other relevant info - Has this profile changed over the years? How?	

18.	<p>Has anyone from your home country/village/city in the past approached you asking you about life in Europe, as they were considering to move there?</p> <p>- What did you tell them? What were their expectations? Did you think their expectations were realistic?</p>	
19.	<p>Do you think that people in your country believe you what you tell them?</p> <p>- if not, why do you think so? Who do you think they would be more inclined to believe?</p>	
20.	<p>Has anyone with the intention to migrate ever asked you about the route to take and other journey's details?</p> <p>- When that happened, did you give them any information? What kind of information? What did you recommend them to do? -Did they eventually attempt the journey?</p>	
21.	<p>Has anyone already on their way to Europe ever asked you about the route to take and other details about the trip?</p> <p>-When that happened, did you give them any information? What kind of information? What did you recommend them to do? -Did they eventually come?</p>	
22.	<p>Have you ever tried to help refugees and migrants to arrive here legally? (through, e.g. family reunification, tourist visa etc?)</p> <p>- If yes, what did you do? How did it go? If not, do you think you could do it?</p>	
23.	<p>Did anyone ever ask for your support in order to start their journey?</p> <p>- Who? What kind of support were you asked to provide? Money? Contacts? Psychological (did you support their decision)? -What did you do?</p>	
24.	<p>Did you ever pay for someone else's journey or part of the journey?</p> <p>- If yes, for who? For which part of the journey? How did you transfer the money? -If not, were you ever asked to do so? By who? Under what circumstances?</p>	
25.	<p>Did you ever provide refugees and migrants in transit with advice regarding stopover places?</p> <p>- e.g. contacts? Info regarding job opportunities there, lifestyle, ...? -Where did you advise them to stop and why?</p>	

Protection risks en route

# Q	Questions	Answers
26.	<p>What do you believe are the main risks on this journey?</p>	
27.	<p>What would you warn someone who wants to embark on the journey against?</p> <p>- Did you ever give such advice? - Do you think they would believe you if you did?</p>	

	- Whom (if any) do you think they would be more inclined to believe?	
28.	Do you know if your community here provides refugees and migrants with information regarding the risks and challenges that travelling irregularly entails? - If yes, how do they provide such information? Internet (Facebook, online forums), other?	
29.	Have you ever provided any advice regarding safety measures to take during the journey? - What kind of advice? Safer routes to take, tips regarding who to contact, how to handle specific situations,...? Specify the type of advice. Who did you advice? At what point of the journey?	
30.	Did you ever receive a request for help from a refugee/migrant in danger while en route to Europe? - If yes, what did you do? What kind of risk was it? Where did it happen?	
31.	Have you noticed any changes in the dynamics of irregular migration along the CMR, possibly resulting from the implementation of the changes in migration policies, particularly from 2017 onwards (EU/Italy-Libya agreements and the recent Italian security decree)? - What has changed?	
32.	Do you think there have been changes in the journey, during the last couple of years? - Can you tell if it has become more or less dangerous? How so? - Did anyone who arrived recently make you think so? What did they say that made you think that today is more (or less) dangerous?	
33.	Do you keep yourself informed on routes and the details of the journey? - Do you know which routes are feasible today in order to come to Italy/Europe from Mali/Eritrea/Bangladesh? - Do you know if routes and embarkation points were different a couple of years ago? If yes, how did they change? Why do you think they changed? - How do you keep yourself informed?	

Protection risk upon arrival

#Q	Questions	Answers
34.	Do you personally know anyone who has recently arrived via the CMR? - Who? Were you in contact with them while they were still in Mali/Eritrea/Bangladesh? Are you in contact with them now?	

35.	<p>If yes, do you help them settling in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, how? - legal assistance - language - help them in dealing with authorities - other? Specify 	
36.	<p>Do you keep yourself informed on migration policies here in Italy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you know what the latest Italian "security decree" ("Salvini decree") entails? 	
37.	<p>Do you help, or did you help in the past, recent arrivals with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - financial help (lending money?) - finding a job (how? Through contacts? What kind of contacts? A formal job (contract) or informal (black market)? - housing (how? Through contacts? What kind of contacts? With contract or informally?) - medical assistance - psychological support - advisory services? Specify - other? Specify 	
38.	<p>Do you know of any migrant associations (political, religious,) which provide such support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you know how this normally works? Have you ever sent a recently arrived refugee or migrant there in order to receive assistance? 	
39.	<p>Do you know of any other group or association, outside of your community, which provides such types of support to recently arrived refugees and migrants?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which one? What do they do? Have you ever sent a recently arrived refugee or migrant there in order to receive assistance? 	

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your time and attention in answering all these questions. Your contribution is really important and will help organizations to better understand the situation.

- Do you have anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any question for me?

End time: _____