MONITORING OF DEPARTURES AREAS | THE GAMBIA MOVEMENTS TO THE CANARY ISLANDS

International Organization for Migration (IOM) The UN Migration Agency

Dashboard: October – November 2022
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For almost a few years an increasing number of people have taken the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR). This migratory route, which had been particularly active in 2006, has once again become a route frequently taken by sub-Saharan migrants. Thus in **2019,** reference year for this report, **2,687** migrants arrived in the Canary Islands (Spain). Year after year, the number of migrants arriving irregularly in the Canary Islands continues to increase.

Between **January 1 to November 30, 2022**, no less than **15,082** migrants arrived on the Canary Islands compared to 2021 when for the same period there were **19,865** migrants, a decrease of **24.1 percent.**

Migrants generally leave the coasts of Morocco or Mauritania which are closer to the Canary Islands. However, departures are often prepared from the coasts of Gambia and the trip to the Canary Islands often includes several intermediate stages. Since **August 2022**, IOM The Gambia has been monitoring the main departure points for boats bound for the Canary Islands. This report presents the main data collected, the methodology used, and the other events identified by the investigators along the Gambian coast.

Source: https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/es/prensa/balances-e-informes/index.html

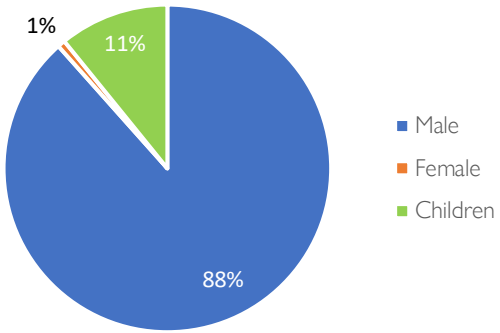
DEPARTURES FROM THE GAMBIA – PROFILE OF MIGRANTS

Nationalities

Main nationalities of migrants embarking from the coasts of The Gambia

- The Gambia
- Senegal
- Guinea

Demographic profile



Boat construction site in Barra, The Gambia © IOM-2022

METHODOLOGY

The departure tracking tool monitors events related to migratory movements from the coasts of The Gambia to the Spanish Canary Islands (which, most often, pass through several intermediate stages), with the aim of documenting the mobility along the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR). The methodology combines three tools: tracking departure locations, mapping departure locations and counting.

This report presents the data collected by the **departure tracking tool** between **1st October and 30th November 2022** at the main departure points along the Gambian coast. Information is provided to IOM Community Focal Points (CFPs) by several Key Informants who collect information on notable events observed in departure areas used by migrants on their way to Mauritania, Morocco and the Canary Islands. When Community Focal Points obtain relevant information, they enter it into the database using the data collection form. As part of its activities to monitor departures from the Gambian coast, IOM does not collaborate in any way with migrant smuggling and facilitation networks.

DATA SOURCES AND NOTES:

There are some limitations to the data provided by the CFPs on the movements that take place on the coast as part of maritime migration in The Gambia. Available data is sparse and rarely contains information on the exact date of the trip or the list of migrants boarding the boats. In addition, there is no perfectly harmonized data with the Spanish government on arrivals to the Canary Islands (Spain) from The Gambia.

COLLECTION PHASES

- Design and deployment of a data collection form
- Evaluation conducted with CFP by phone
- 8 — Total number of CFPs working on this project
- CFPs monitoring departures from the locations of Brufut, Gunjur, Juffureh and Barra

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DTM IOM DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX

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7

Number of events identified by Community Focal Points (CFPs) regarding possible departures or preparations for departures from the coasts of The Gambia between **1st October and 30th November 2022.**

This page presents data collected between 1st October and 30th November 2022 by Community Focal Points (CFPs) along the Gambian coast. The data collected concerns all types of boat movements from The Gambia to Mauritania or the Canary Islands (Spain) identified as irregular migration.

EVENT DETAILS

3 boats departed the shores of The Gambia between 1st October and 30th November 2022. **This is a 200 per cent increase in the number of departures reported between August and September 2022.**

535 migrants departed on boats from the shores of The Gambia between October and November 2022, **a 168 per cent increased in the number of departed migrants compared to the pervious period, August to September 2022.**

Most boats departing from The Gambia head directly to the Canary Islands, while some headed first to Mauritania before proceeding on their journey to the Canary Islands.

3 migrant recruitment campaigns were reported between October and November 2022, a 57 per cent decrease compared to the 7 recruitment campaigns reported between August and September 2022.

1 boat construction incident was report by CFPs during the reporting period. This is the same number of incidences reported in the previous period.

Potential risks:

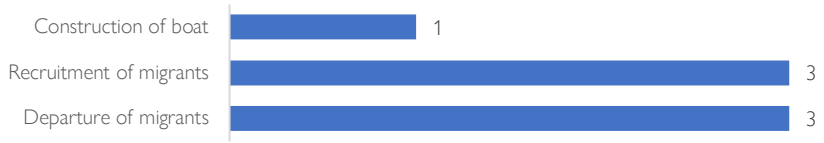
- Overloaded boats and increased risk of sinking and disappearance of boats at sea following the upsurge in registered candidates
- Poor quality of boats increasing the risk of sinking
- Abuse, extortion and exploitation of migrants due to the isolation of areas of departure, the vulnerability of would-be migrants and the imbalance of power

Departure areas (October – November 2022) :

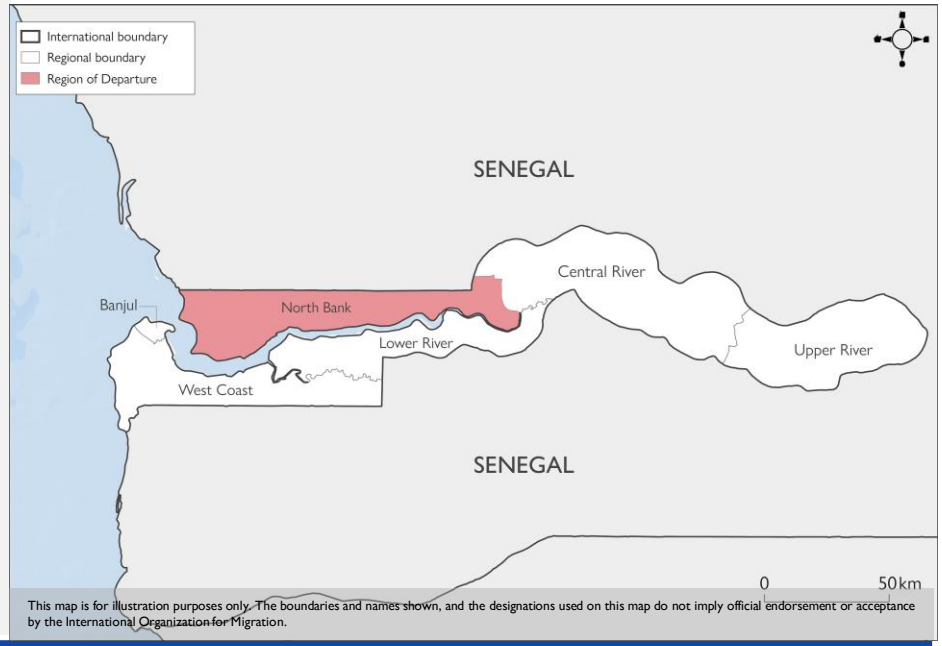
- Coast of Essau, Toubakolong and Bakam - North Bank Region

Between **1st October and 30th November 2022**, **7** events were reported by the CFPs: **3** events **(43 percent)** represent the **recruitment of migrants** for planned departures, **3** events **(43 percent)** was related to **boat departures** from the Gambian coast and **1** event **(14 percent)** is linked to the **construction of boat** for the purpose of migration to the Canary Islands.

Fig.1 - Types of events identified (October – November 2022)



Map 1 – Departure regions of canoes from The Gambia (October — November 2022)



This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

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DETAILS OF EVENTS RECORDED BY COMMUNITY FOCAL POINTS (CFPs)

3

Three (3) boat departures were reported by Community Focal Points (CFPs) during the reporting period. This marks a 200 per cent increase compared to the August – September reporting period.

Three (3) boat departures from The Gambia were reported by Comuunity Focal Points from October to November 2022 with a combined estimate of 535 migrants on board, up by 168 per cent compared to the 200 reported to be onbaord crafts in the previous period. The reports indicate Gambians, Senegalese and Guinean nationals as the primary nationalities onboard the departed crafts. While 88 per cent of those onboard these boats are reported to be adult male, 11 per cent were children and 1 per cent adult female. As in the previous period, all the departures were observed from the North Bank Region (NBR) of The Gambia and from the specific localities of Essau, Toubakolong and Bakam.

The number of departures has intensified compared to the previous period with departures following months of meticulous planning to evade in control of the Immigration authorities. While some of the departures were observed from remote inland locations (swanmpy mangrove areas), others were launched from well-known hotspots. One of the departures happened on the day of the Muslim celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday, locally knows as "Gamo", an event that departures have historically been planned around.

It is important to note that security officers (The Gambia Immigration and The Gambia Police) have played an important role in reducing or disrupting the number of boat departures. Due to their intervention, the organization of some boat departures were either aborted or delayed.

3

Three (3) migrant recruitment campaigns were reported by Community Focal Points (CFPs) during this data collection period, October to November 2022.. This figure is down by 57 per cent compared to the 7 recruitment campaigns reported between August and September 2022.

Between October and November 2022, Community Focal Points (CFPs) reported 3 migrant recruitment campaigns with a desired objective of 525 migrants. This is half the 1,052 desired objective of migrants targeted in the recruitment campaigns reported in the previous period. All of the recruitment campaigns were opened in October 2022 with an expected departure in December 2022. At the time of reporting, some recruitment campaigns were more than halfway from their target while others were newly opened following successful departures. Even though recruitment for migrants are done simultaneously at several locations across the country, they are all noted to be organized mainly from Barra and its surroundings in the North Bank Region (NBR) of The Gambia. While information on some recruitments were closely-guarded, others were easily available with agents desperately seeking would-be-migrants in order to close their lists before authorities get a tipoff.

The significant number of campaigns to recruit would-be migrants also reflects the new migratory dynamics towards Europe from West and Central Africa and the growing importance of the Atlantic route to reach Europe. An average of one hundred and seventy fifty migrants were reported to be the target across the three recruitment campaigns. with amounts varyings.

1

The construction of a boat for the purpose of migration to the Canary Island was reported by Community Focal Points (CFPs) during the reporting period. This figure remains unchanged from the previous period, August to October 2022.

A boat construction was reported by Community Focal Points in the village of Barra, a renowned location for construction of boats embarking on the migration journey through the WAAR to the Canary Islands. The construction was reported to be in advanced stage and expected to be used for departure in. While some boats are contructed in secrecy at remote locations, this particular boat in reported to be constructed in a well-known location and in plain sight.

The boat construction reported in the previous period is reported to have successfully departed from The Gambia to the Canary Islands.

A study by the Mixed Migration Center (MMC) of February 2022 reports the growing attraction for the Atlantic route; 68 percent of the migrants surveyed expressed the wish to take this route to reach Europe. According to the MMC study, the reasons behind the growth in interest in the Atlantic route are manifold and include first of all the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, pushing many people into extreme poverty and encouraging them to migrate at all costs. In addition, border closures following the COVID-19 crisis and increased border controls have forced migrants to take the more dangerous sea route than the land route. Finally, the Atlantic route is also the 'shortest' route to Europe.