



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM THE GAMBIA TO THE
EU: MOTIVATIONS, DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES**

Master's Thesis

Amadou Bamba Jaiteh

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

July 2024



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Abstract

This research paper aimed to investigate the complex nature of irregular migration from the Gambia to the EU, focusing on why people would like to immigrate. The research analyzes how socio-economic, political, and environmental factors push Gambians into embarking on deadly journeys called “BackWay” to Europe, often through irregular means. The study examines conditions behind causes, motives, and patterns that drive young people into illegal migration from the Gambia to Europe such as socio-economic dysfunctionalities, political instability, and other push factors that propel the migration phenomenon. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of data to identify key actors, networks, and routes involved in this migratory process, highlighting the complex interplay between human smuggling networks, migrant decision-making, and EU border control measures. Additionally, it assesses challenges faced by both migrants and their host countries. Finally, the paper concludes with an in-depth understanding of irregular migration from The Gambia to the EU, and offers recommendations for addressing its root causes, fostering bilateral cooperation, and enhancing migrant rights protection. As such, the findings extend broader discussions on migration studies, international relations, and administrative policies that affect different parties.

Keywords: Irregular migration, EU-Gambia, Bilateral relationship, migration governance, Migration trends

ÖZET

Bu araştırma makalesi, insanların neden göç ettiklerine odaklanarak Gambiya'dan Avrupa Birliği'ne (AB) düzensiz göçün karmaşık yapısını araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Araştırma; sosyo-ekonomik, politik ve çevresel faktörlerin Gambiyalıları, çoğunlukla düzensiz yollardan Avrupa'ya "Back Way" adı verilen ölümcül yolculuklara çıkmaya nasıl ittiğini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, ayrıca; gençleri Gambiya'dan Avrupa'ya yasa dışı göçe sürükleyen sosyo-ekonomik işlevsizlikler, siyasi istikrarsızlık ve göç olayını tetikleyen diğer faktörleri inceleyerek ilişkili göç nedenleri, amaçları ve kalıpların ardındaki koşulları incelemektedir. Çalışma, bu göç sürecine dâhil olan kilit aktörleri, ağları ve rotaları belirlemek için kapsamlı bir veri analizi sunarak insan kaçakçılığı ağları, göçmen karar alma süreçleri ve AB sınır kontrol önlemleri arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, hem göçmenlerin hem de onlara ev sahipliği yapan ülkelerin karşılaştığı zorlukları değerlendirmektedir. Son olarak, Gambiya'dan AB'ye düzensiz göç konusunu derinlemesine ele alarak sorunun temel nedenlerinin çözümü, ikili işbirliğinin geliştirilmesi ve göçmen haklarının korunması için öneri sunmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, araştırmanın bulguları; göç çalışmaları, uluslararası ilişkiler ve farklı tarafları etkileyen idari politikalar hakkındaki daha geniş tartışmaları kapsamaktadır. .

Anahtar Kelimeler: Düzensiz göç, AB-Gambiya, İkili ilişki, göç yönetişim, Göç eğilimleri

Thesis Acceptance Page

Acknowledgment

Abstract

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ECOWASE	Economic Community of West African States of West African States
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GID	GAMBIA IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT
GPF	Gambia Police Force
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MIGRATION
MIDWA	Migration Dialogue from West Africa
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
RCP	Regional Consultative process
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2013) defines irregular migration as “a sedentary movement of people outside their place of origin, and transit to other countries”. A migrant is seen as irregular when he or she does not meet the immigration laws requirements upon entering, residing, or working in the transit or the host country. Recent years have witnessed conflicts, insecurity, economic recession, climate, and environmental degradation; War, stifling economics, and conflicts have significantly contributed to exacerbating migration trajectory across Africa particularly the Gambia. This development counts as one of the primary reasons responsible for people’s movement within countries or across borders. As reported by the United Nations (UN) in 2020, more than 281 million individuals were international migrants, and over 59 million were internally displaced, accounting for approximately 3.6% of the world's population.

Furthermore, the Sub-Saharan region is characterized as the hotspot of immigration, Therefore, it serves as one of the primary sources of irregular migration from Africa to Europe (EU Border & Coast Agency). On the other hand, Libya is the most significant transit hub for many West African migrants as cited (Luda di Cortemiglia, 2018 et al., Castillejo Clare, 2019). However, it is important to highlight that two main factors cause irregular migration: the push and pull factor that is theoretically applied in the context of West African migrants (Caslillejo 2019). The Gambia, despite its small size, has a significant track record of mobility in and out of Africa. Although Gambians have been migrating to European countries since the 1950s, a significant increase in their migration occurred starting in 2010. The majority of these migrants arrived in Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route, due to the limited availability of visas (Gaibazzi, 2014). Overall, this situation underpins how young Gambians try to escape from harsh socioeconomic challenges and feelings of sense of helplessness many of them encountered in their country simply because a chunk of them were dispossessed into existential stuckness that has a profound impact not only economically but also deeply physiologically and culturally. Henceforth, it is high time for the country to have a clear roadmap through collective action to find the way out of this situation. Yet, the status quo will continue as far as hopelessness and despair continue to exist in a society where opportunities are scarce.

Notwithstanding, migration can have tremendous social implications. This importance is

multifaceted and varies in different aspects including capital flow. Migrants have the potential to fill the gap in the labor market by providing a workforce to industries facing a shortage because migrants often take jobs that local people may not be willing to do. On top of that, it is an important element for revenue generation through remittances where emigrants often send money to their home countries thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of their home countries. Imperatively, remittances are also a crucial source of income for households as well as the government; creating more foreign reserves for the import and export of goods and services to facilitate or preserve economic and political stability.

Against this background, this study will be guided by neoclassical economic theory, migrant network theory, new economic migration theory, and conflict theory of migration. Therefore, Migration theories are categorized based on their focus level. Micro-level theories concentrate on individual migration decisions, while macro-level theories analyze aggregate migration trends and provide macro-level explanations. Meso-level theories, situated between the macro and micro levels, focus on how communities and households sustain migration patterns. The objective of this study is to have a holistic understanding of irregular migration patterns in the Gambia and give an ontological explanation of why young people of the Gambia embark on irregular means to migrate to Europe despite knowing the fraught and dangers of the journey as well as the negative implications it can cause to them. Consequently, the study will also dwell on how the irregular migration phenomenon impacted the already existing bilateral relationship between the Gambia and the European Union member countries, especially those accommodating a large number of Gambian migrants in Europe, such as Italy and Germany.

The Gambia and the European Union have enjoyed a long-standing cordial and friendly relationship for the past three decades. This relationship encompasses various areas varying from agriculture, tourism, trade, budget support, capacity-building, etc. The Gambia is considered among the 10 most irregular migrant-sending countries in Europe. European Union has embarked on some policy assessments determining the external policy responses required to govern their external or bilateral migration governance framework.

In early 2021, the EU-Africa strategic policy adopted a commitment to enhance cooperation on immigration. The strategy's theme focuses on a balanced, coherent, and comprehensive approach to reducing irregular migration, based on principles of solidarity, strong partnership, and shared responsibility, while adhering to international law and respecting human rights. This shift in EU cooperation aims to expand and strengthen the existing trust with migrant-sending countries, delivering mutual benefits to sub-Saharan African nations. The EU migration policy

emphasizes both restrictive and preventive measures. The restrictive measures involve collaboration on border control and combating smugglers, while the preventive measures promote inclusive economic development and initiatives to address the root causes of irregular migration. In the context of The Gambia, this strategy aims to foster deeper cooperation and development to mitigate irregular migration. the most common preventive measure is to help equip the youth through learning skills to enhance and create many job opportunities.

1.1 Problem Statement

The main focus of this research is to investigate how a combination of severe economic stagnation, political instability, unemployment, climate change, social pressure, and extreme poverty has driven numerous Gambian youths to risk their lives migrating to European countries via the Mediterranean Sea, despite the associated dangers. The routes they take are perilous and the journey itself is treacherous. The routes they take are too rough and the journey they take almost always results in loss of lives. They also became or fell victims of traffickers, smugglers, Bandits, and even armed groups. When they make it to the final destination (within Europe) they would become homeless and paperless, with many of them living through crime and eventually held in long prison sentences.

In addition, this study will examine how the bilateral relationship that had existed happily for a long time between the EU and the Gambia has become affected or traumatized by the irregular migration and what comprehensive mechanisms there are to normalize this relationship. The partnership between The Gambia and the European Union is based on principles and objectives of mutual cooperation in political, economic, trade, transport, agriculture, and development sectors. This collaboration was established under the well-known Cotonou Agreement, which regulates the relationship between the European Union and African states. Between 2014 and 2016, The Gambia was designated as the third biggest source of irregular migration to Europe. Europe was receiving up to 16,000 Gambians per year.

The Gambia qualified for the EU Emergency Trust Fund aimed at promoting stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa. Since the Valletta Summit, The Gambia has received a total of €14.9 million, to provide economic opportunities and jobs to strengthen youth capacity. Additionally, The Gambia was set to receive €11 million to enhance job opportunities for young people. However, despite these efforts, the issue persists. This study seeks to examine what strategies were effective and which were not. **The research questions** were trying to find what are the primary motivations driving irregular migration from

the Gambia to the EU, and how do the socio-political dynamics and challenges faced during the migration process influence the decision-making and experiences of Gambian migrants. Also, the question tends to find fundamental areas and principles that guide the EU- Gambia bilateral relations within the framework of irregular migration and also to what extent does this affects the EU-Gambia migration cooperation benefit Gambian migrants in terms of their **resettlement in Europe, repatriation** when they have to be sent back home and **their re-integration** to be able to live happily or peacefully in their home country? These questions guide this research as we give thematic explanations to the questions in our subsequent analysis and discussion below.

1.2 Thesis Justification

The main research question is central to the thesis as it seeks to uncover the foundational elements of the migration cooperation framework between The Gambia and the EU. Understanding these fundamental areas is crucial for several reasons: it helps to identify the key components of the cooperation framework, and the thesis can critically analyze the policies and agreements in place. This analysis can reveal strengths and weaknesses in the current approach, providing a basis for recommendations for improvement. Also, Understanding the fundamental areas of cooperation allows for a detailed examination of how these policies are implemented on the ground. This can include looking at the roles of various stakeholders, the flow of resources, and the mechanisms of coordination between The Gambia and the EU. On the other hand, it provides a holistic view of the bilateral relationship, encompassing legal, economic, social, and political dimensions. This comprehensive understanding is essential for assessing the overall effectiveness of the cooperation framework.

This sub-question adds depth to the primary question by focusing on the human aspect of migration cooperation. Its relevance lies in It shifts the focus from policy and framework analysis to the lived experiences of migrants. This is crucial for understanding the real-world impact of cooperation on individuals. By examining the benefits to Gambian migrants, the thesis can assess the success of the cooperation framework in achieving its intended outcomes. This includes evaluating support for resettlement, the effectiveness of repatriation processes, and the sustainability of reintegration efforts. However, insights gained from this sub-question can inform policymakers about the needs and challenges migrants face. This can lead to more targeted and effective interventions, improving the overall efficacy of the cooperation framework.

Original Contribution of the research, this thesis aims to make several original contributions to the understanding of The Gambia-EU bilateral relationship within the framework of irregular

migration: By dissecting the fundamental areas of the cooperation framework, the thesis provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of the policies, agreements, and operational mechanisms in place. This can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in the field. Through fieldwork, interviews, and case studies, the thesis gathers empirical evidence on the experiences of Gambian migrants. This evidence contributes to a more human-centered and policy evaluation of the cooperation framework, highlighting areas that require improvement. Based on the findings, the thesis also offers practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the migration cooperation framework. These recommendations are grounded in both theoretical analysis and empirical data, making them robust and actionable for better policy-oriented solutions to the irregular migration issue.

Importantly by situating the Gambia-EU cooperation within the broader context of West African migration trends and regional dynamics, the thesis provides a comparative perspective that can help to identify unique aspects of the Gambia-EU relationship and draw lessons applicable to other bilateral or multilateral migration cooperation efforts. Additionally, the thesis will contribute to the academic discourse on migration governance, particularly in the context of bilateral relationships between developing countries and regional entities. Thus, it explores theoretical frameworks related to migration management, international cooperation, and human rights, enriching the existing literature. Therefore, by addressing these research questions and making these original contributions, the thesis will advance the understanding of migration cooperation between The Gambia and the EU, offering insights that can enhance policy and practice in this critical area of intervention to halt the irregular migration phenomenon.

1.3 General Overview of Migration in the Gambia

The Gambia, with a population of 2.3 million, stands as one of Africa's smallest nations in mainland Africa. Migration holds significant importance in Gambian society, with overseas remittances from approximately 118,000 Gambians living abroad constituting more than 20 percent of the country's GDP in previous reports. Concurrently, rural-to-urban migration has contributed to the growing trend of urbanization. In recent years, the pursuit of socioeconomic progress, particularly among the youth, has motivated a considerable number to engage in irregular migration. Between 2014 and 2018, over 35,000 Gambians took illegal routes to reach Europe, while others within Africa, followed the Central Mediterranean Route ((*Overview / IOM the Gambia*, n.d.)). The tiny West African nation has a long history of migration, due to its strategic location. Its unique geographical position has attracted international trade, conflicts, and conquests throughout history, shaping it primarily as a transit and emigration hub. Despite this, the country also serves as a destination for immigrants and refugees seeking refuge from

conflicts and political instability in neighboring countries, such as Senegal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Migranti e Rifugiati, 2023). The Senegambian region served as one of the major transit hubs, which resulted in the forced migration of approximately 12 million slaves from Africa to the Americas. Senegambia, once a hub of the trans-Saharan trade route, became a crucial area in the Atlantic slave trade, with thousands of people thought to be enslaved each year throughout the sixteenth century (Barry, 1998).

In the past, the entire West African region was seen as a unified economic entity where the exchange of goods and services and the movement of people occurred seamlessly for various purposes, including trade, escaping conflicts, and seeking new territories (Adepoju 2003). This coincides with the introduction of colonization by the Portuguese, British, and French, the slave trade, and the cultivation of cash crops of peanut introduced novel political and economic frameworks that were influenced by the established culture of regional migration (Colvin 1981). In principle, migration was distinguished by the West Africans as a way of life (Adepoju, 2002 et al 2007). This phenomenon arises from the historical migration patterns of the people driven by demographic, political, and economic factors across generations, thus mobility is not new in Africa (Agyei & Clottey, 2007). Up until today, emigration has continued to advance dramatically in the larger part of West Africa. Following independence, particularly in the 1980s, Africa has had a significant rise in intercontinental migration both in terms of quantity and societal significance. However, it's important to note that the majority of cross-border movements still involve mobility within the region (Altrogge & Zanker, 2019). The creation of ECOWAS and the implementation of the free movement of persons protocol have contributed to the resurgence of a borderless West Africa, reminiscent of the era before colonial rule (Agyei & Clottey, 2007). Despite a significant increase in population movement over the past two and a half decades since the protocol's inception, the borderless nature has been maintained. In May 1979, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol gave liberty to the Free Movement of Persons, and the Right of Residence, and the Establishment clearly emphasized the unrestricted mobility of labor (Adepoju, 2002). This is in line with the vision of the founding fathers of the organization to nurture intra-regional integration anticipating that it could serve as a milestone stride toward the collective integration of the subregion into the global economy.

In the beginning, emigration was an exclusive opportunity for a select few, and intercontinental emigration swiftly evolved into the most promising strategy for dealing not just with the political uncertainty but also the economic limitations imposed by poor governance and dictatorships

(Kebbeh, 2013). Therefore, in any research of migration studies, it will be imperative to look at the genesis and historical context of the phenomenon to have a clear picture of migration trajectories from the past to the present day.

Since the Gambia gained its independence from Britain in 1965, financial turmoil has been a significant driver of the outflow of migration. Also, in the 1950s, there was a gradual increase in international migration from The Gambia to various destinations around the world. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that emigration became a significant concern as part of a broader issue affecting young people (Gaibazzi, 2023). From 1993 to 2012, the Urban population increased from about 37 percent to 58 percent. Largely the young Gambians migrate to cities in search of employment opportunities. The Gambia is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, with a gross domestic product of a national income of less than US\$772.2 per capita (World Bank, 2021). In such a situation, so many people cannot acquire their needs and rights in terms of food, shelter, and easy access to healthcare facilities and education. Extreme poverty leaves half of the population living under 2\$ dollars a day, inflation rate has doubled from 7% to 11% which causes serious economic turmoil in the financial space of the country. The unemployment rate is over half of the population with even higher among the younger demographic (UNDP, 2016, MGSOG, 2017 et al 2019). There are limited employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, and numerous households are dependent on inefficient substantial family farms that cannot meet their needs. Aside from agriculture, the Gambia relies heavily on tourism and remittances, with the latter continuing 20% of the country's Gross domestic product GDP (IFAD 2016:22 as cited in Suso 2019). On the other hand, those who are fortunate enough to secure formal employment still struggle because income rates are so low it's practically impossible to make household ends meet. In addition, the failure of the government of the Gambia to bring about economic stability, including addressing the high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, has led to an increase in emigration across all demographic groups

The Gambian social fabric is predominantly extended family where the head of the house or compound is responsible for feeding the entire family, escalating the dependency ratio and it is almost impossible for many families to sustain this condition in the long run. Eventually, households send their sons and daughters to Europe through irregular routes locally known as “back way” perceived as the only alternative, in the hope that it could bring financial stability to the family. There is a notable proportion of the Gambian populace residing abroad with an estimation ranging from 5% to 7% of the total population (*The Gambia - Migration and the Externalization of the European Border Regime*, n.d.). However, serious unpromising

economic growth, food insecurity, and limited job opportunities are all contributing factors to a significant rise in irregular migration (World Bank 2018)

Gambia's agricultural economy developed rapidly through circular labor migration based on wages, mostly in neighboring countries, during the British colonial era. Typically, it was the norm for farmers to work in Agricultural fields during the rainy season, while the rest of the year they moved abroad in search of work. The colonial rules on the cash crop system and monocultural model gradually decreased the land allocated for subsistence agriculture, leading to the country's chronic reliance on imported goods. In addition to the peanut basin problem in the Sahel, IMF structural adjustment measures, and further forms of expropriation by former president Yahya Jammeh exacerbated poverty and structural unemployment in the country (Castellano, 2023). Therefore, Migration became an important strategy in dealing with the severe economic conditions, particularly towards the Global North and oil-rich nations such as Libya. (Castellano, 2023, Ceesay, 2016). Until the 1990s, traveling to Europe or the UK was difficult but possible for Gambian nationals, as it was for many other countries in the Global South, particularly in West Africa. However, this has been further impeded by the stringent visa regulations imposed by nations in the Global North (Castellano, 2023, Gaibazzi, 2014).

1.4 Background

The Gambia, located in West Africa, is the smallest country on the African mainland. It is bordered by Senegal on all sides except for its western coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. Covering an area of 10,689 square kilometers (4,127 square miles), The Gambia had a population of 1,857,181 according to the April 2013 Housing and Population Census (GBoS The Gambia, 2018). Banjul, the capital city, serves as the seat of government and houses key state institutions. The Gambia gained independence from British colonial rule in 1965, with Sir Dawda Jawara becoming its first head of state. Jawara's 30-year tenure ended on July 22, 1994, following a military coup led by Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh. Jammeh remained in power for 22 years until he was defeated in the 2016 presidential election by the current President, Adama Barrow (GBoS The Gambia, 2018). Economically, The Gambia has an open economy with limited natural resources and is classified as one of the least developed countries globally. In 2013, the country's per capita income was estimated at US\$318 (2004 constant prices), and it was ranked 172 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) for that year. The primary economic drivers are the agricultural and service sectors. Agriculture contributed 23.0 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013, compared to 15.0 percent from the industrial sector and 62.0 percent

from the services sector (GBoS TheGambia, 2018).

The Gambia is divided into seven administrative regions, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming, including rice cultivation, backyard gardening, fishing, and petty trading. Despite its strategic location, fertile land, and a river deemed one of the most navigable in Africa, The Gambia remains economically impoverished. The lack of economic opportunities such as employment, capacity building, and skill development for the youth is a significant driving force behind migration. Large-scale Gambian migration to Europe began in the early 2000s, exacerbated by severe economic stagnation and an authoritarian regime.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized into six principal chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction, offering an overview of the migration trajectory in The Gambia and contextualizing the research background. Chapter Two encompasses the theoretical framework and literature review, drawing on existing research pertinent to the topic. This chapter selects and discusses theories essential to understanding the rational choice behind irregular migration in The Gambia. Additionally, it outlines the research design, methods, and methodology, including data collection processes, challenges, and limitations. Chapter Three examines the migration trajectory within The Gambia, focusing on governance and the root causes of irregular migration. It also addresses the impact of migration, the cooperation between The Gambia and the European Union on repatriation and reintegration, and the challenges and effects on migrants. Chapter Four presents the findings, employing relevant theories to analyze the motivations behind migration and proposing solutions to mitigate irregular migration. Chapter Five offers a detailed analysis of the data, enhancing our understanding of the research and providing policy recommendations for improved governance of irregular migration. Chapter Six concludes the thesis, summarizing the research findings and implications.

In conclusion, chapter One delves into the historical background of migration trajectories in Africa, with a specific focus on The Gambia, the center of this research. The chapter explores immigration patterns from the colonial era to the post-colonial period. It identifies push factors such as poverty, economic difficulties, conflict, insecurity, and climate change as exacerbating the phenomenon. Over the last decade, The Gambia has witnessed a significant increase in migration, with many youths arriving in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. As economic conditions continue to deteriorate, it is likely that more young people will embark on irregular migration.

This chapter aims to understand migration patterns in The Gambia and their impact on bilateral relations with the EU. It provides a general overview of migration and offers background information on The Gambia, aiming to give readers insight into the motivations behind migration and the scope of this research.



CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Over the past three decades, immigration has grown substantially worldwide. This research aims to improve our knowledge of the importance of human mobility as an integral component of larger processes of societal change. To that end, we will develop an aspiration-capability framework. To ascertain a more

fruitful understanding of the structure and agency of the migratory process. This conceptual framework perceives migration as an aspiration, ability, or desire to move within a specific geographical area, (Hein de Haas 2021). However, for many years, the migration theory has proven ineffective in social sciences (see Arango 2000; de Haas 2010a; Massey et al. 1993; Massey 2019; Skeldon 2012 et al de Hass 2021). Conversely, Migration studies continue to be a relatively under-theorized area of social research to get through this stalemate and improve our comprehension of migratory dynamics as integral components of larger processes of social change and development. This research intends to employ a theoretical framework that conceptualizes migration as a result of people's capacities and ambitions to migrate within certain sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures. Conversely, the tremendous growth in the quantity of migration-related empirical research starkly contrasts this situation of theoretical underdevelopment. Lack of systematic theorizing makes it difficult for us to grasp how macro-structural elements affect migratory processes and to effectively interpret empirical facts as well as to clarify the extreme variability in migration experiences among various ethnic, gender, skill, and class groups (Massey et al. (1993) (. Big-picture migration theory-making has largely been abandoned, especially with the development of "postmodern" social science in the 1970s and 1980s (Massey et al. (1993). Since the late nineteenth century, several ideas have evolved in a variety of social scientific fields with the common goal of comprehending migration-related processes. By only employing one discipline's tools or concentrating on one level of analysis, it is almost impossible to fully comprehend modern migration processes.

Ultimately, several theoretical models have been developed to explain why international migration begins; however, while they all ultimately strive to explain the same phenomena, they use drastically different notions, assumptions, and frames of reference. In this regard our

study will adopt four main theoretical themes to guide our discussion: Neo-Classical economic theory, New economic theory, Migration Network theory, and conflict theory.

Migration holds numerous meanings and evokes complex understandings; it is too intricate to be explained by a single theory (Massey et al., 1993). This research, however, adopts the neoclassical economic, New economic, Network, and conflict theory perspective to guide the thesis discussion. The basic model of the neoclassical theory of migration suggests that migration results from interregional wage differentials, the distance between the origin and destination, and labor market conditions. One significant factor influencing irregular migration is the unprecedented rise in unemployment rates. This research will examine how irregular migration and remittances impact socio-economic development in The Gambia by discussing the existence of wage differentials and the perception that wage conditions in The Gambia are so poor that many Gambians are willing to undertake risky journeys to Europe, where wages are perceived to be significantly better.

Theoretically, foundational works by Lewis (1954), Ranis and Fei (1961), Harris and Todaro (1970), and Todaro (1976) have demonstrated the importance of labor migration in the economic development process. These theories highlight how labor migration is driven by wage differentials and other economic factors, underscoring the significance of understanding these dynamics in the context of The Gambia.

2.1 Neoclassical Microeconomic Theory

The neoclassical economic theory posits that international migration is driven by geographic disparities in wealth distribution and labor supply and demand. Proponents of this theory argue that migration is likely to cease once these wage differentials are eliminated. According to neoclassical theorists, the primary mechanism prompting the international movement of labor is the labor market itself. I think this argument is not concert enough to give us a compelling explanation of the phenomenon because migration is continuing despite the improvement in wealth and distribution in many third-world countries. We have seen people quitting their jobs and professions seeking refuge in Europe and North America. The idea of achieving your dreams in the West predominantly absorbs the mindset of the youth, thinking if you do not migrate elsewhere, you can make it. The status quo has not yet changed in the Gambia mass influx will continue as long as the mindset of the society has not changed towards the migration.

On the other hand, neoclassical theorists also contend that if governments aim to control migration flows, they must regulate labor market dynamics in both sending and receiving countries. The neoclassical microeconomic perspective on international migration has significantly shaped public opinion, offering a comprehensive intellectual framework for understanding the implications of immigration and general propositions about migration.

The earliest and most well-known theory of global migration was initially developed to elucidate labor movement during economic development (Massey et al. (1993). However, neoclassical economics emphasizes differences in wages and employment conditions between nations as well as the costs of migration; it typically views movement as a personal decision aimed at maximizing income (Massey et al. (1993). Paradoxically, the sending countries are incapacitated to the extent they cannot regulate the labor market to create more job opportunities as a preventive measure to curb “Backway syndrome” as defined locally which is irregular migration. In other words, one can argue that labor imbalance between developed and developing countries is very crucial as a push factor in the Gambia but not necessarily always because the unfolding scenario in the Gambian context has taken a different direction where many people migrate not because the conditions triggered them to do so rather the society tend to approve it and give the go-ahead to youths to embark on even if it is going cost them their lives.

In neoclassical migration theory, migration is attributed as a result of geographical differences in demand and supply in the labor force. This results in the movement of people from capital-labour countries to capital-rich countries (Massey et al. (1993), in addition to that, neoclassical economic theorist emphasizes differences in employment and wage conditions between nations as well as the cost of migration; it typically views movement as a rational choice of individuals aimed to maximize their income.

This particular theory is one the first and most dominant theories to explain the cause and genesis of migration. Thus, this theoretical concept stimulates what motivates people to migrate which is contemplated or anticipated by rational economic consideration having calculated cost and benefits, either fiscal or monetary expectation (Toderro 2011, Famara Fofana 2019). This ascribes to the view that considering moving and staying is a complementary manifestation of migratory agency where human mobility can be defined as the instinct desire of the people to choose where to live or stay.

Individuals are considered rational actors who choose to migrate based on a cost-benefit analysis, expecting a positive net return, often monetary, which influences their decision to move. International migration is conceptually viewed as an investment in human capital, with

many people migrating to places where they believe they can be more productive and enhance their skills. However, to achieve higher wages, migrants must invest in various aspects, including the material costs of migration, the expenses of relocating, job searching, learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, and integrating into a foreign labor market, all while severing ties with their country of origin.

In the contemporary age of migration, potential migrants carefully calculate the costs and benefits of moving to various international destinations as an alternative to relocation where the expected material status could be multiplied to the satisfaction. (Borisjas, 1990 et al Massey 1993). If you look at the spectrum of migration in the Gambia is categorically clear that many young people embark on irregular journeys after a series of assessments with the help of migrant networks, thus, facilitating the viable info at their disposal to ease the escudos for potential migrants, however, migrant networks connect them with smugglers, paying them huge amount of money that can be better stat up capital to start a small business, yet, people prefer to travel despite knowing the danger of the journey.

In conclusion, the neoclassical economic theory is particularly relevant in the context of Gambian migration due to the significant wage disparities between The Gambia and European countries. These considerable wage differences create a strong conviction among young Gambians that desirable economic incentives cannot be achieved without undertaking an irregular migration pathway. This clearly demonstrates that economic motivations propel young Gambians to migrate irregularly to Europe. The lack of sufficient employment opportunities in the Gambia pushes individuals to seek better prospects elsewhere. This aligns with the neoclassical economic theory's argument on wage differences and the capital flow motivating migration. Despite the high risks associated with irregular migration young Gambians view the potential economic gains to justify their decision as rational choice as posited by neoclassical theory. Thus, the neoclassical economic theory provides a framework to understand the migration decision-making process of young Gambians who are motivated by economic prospects, the scarcity of employment opportunities, and the significance of migration in Gambian society.

2.2 New Economy theory of migration

The new economic theory of migration also gives us other assumptions or other factors that determine the pattern of migration. They draw our attention to the other level of analysis that affects the decision to migrate from home origin to a new destination as cited by (Stark and Bloom, 1985). The new economic theory of migration emerged to challenge most of the

neoclassical essential arguments. A key approach to this theory argues that the decision to migrate is not made by individuals, but by a larger group of people either families or related people aimed to maximize the expected income of their households and minimize the risks that attach to this decision (Stark and Levhari, 1982) in addition to that, the decision to migrate is affected by many factors: including the economic condition in the country of origin. Yet, these decisions are not affected only by wage differences or individual rational choice to migrate but can also be attributed to other related factors or variables for instance relative deprivation which is illustrated on social networks. In other words, relative deprivation argues that if households are deprived of maximizing their income or their economic well-being is not performing into desirable satisfaction or even worse than that, other households in the community will undoubtedly send a member of the household abroad to fill the economic gap that is lacking and avert of risking to minimize the household's income.

In parallel, the New Economic Theory of Migration applies to the context of The Gambia. The decision to migrate is frequently made collectively by households rather than individuals. Gambian households invest in migration as a strategy to diversify their income sources and enhance their overall utility. This decision is often influenced by the observable financial stability of returnees and the perceived success of those who have migrated. Consequently, families compare their social and economic status with that of others within their communities. This phenomenon fosters a motivation among households to emulate these successful examples, aspiring to achieve similar financial and economic success and social status through remittances from abroad

2.3 Migration Network Theory

This thesis aims to discuss the functional and structural roles played by migration networks in the context of migrant association clubs in facilitating mobility work, and study opportunities abroad. In doing so this research gives a brief overview of the internalization of mobility processes in Europe by migrant networks and its impact. On embedding migratory processes particularly irregular migration.

Migrant network theory gives us a broad understanding of the factors and the reasons that affect international migration, especially emigration towards Europe. The migration network theory sheds light on the reasons that drive African migrants to take this dangerous journey to Europe. The theory elaborates on why migration persists in time and space even when wage differentials and recruitment policies are eliminated (Massy Douglass, 1993, et al 2019).

Scholars in migration studies express the importance of migrant networks and its important influence on the decision of potential migrants and their invaluable contribution to easing exodus to their destination of preference as well, as other influences such as recommendations from family, friends, and education advisers in choosing a destination for abroad studies or work (Wilkins et al. 2012: 418). Yet, many studies on migrations agreed on the important role played by networks in migration dynamics. As a result, there is a fact that networks, especially those based on kin, friendships, and community relations serve as a link between the sending and receiving destinations of migrants. This is because these networks are regarded as structural frameworks that aid migrations. However, there haven't been many studies on how these networks operate, and whether there exists any variation in ethnic and policy context. And what are their effects on migrants and migration systems (T.Gurak and Fe Caces, 2010:151). Meanwhile, some studies by scholars such as that of Mabogunje (1970) outlined that migration dynamics are seen with the simultaneous interaction between the sending and receiving destinations. He further outlined that knowledge of the form and function of migration networks would enhance a better understanding of migration systems. Furthermore, studies identify a series of functional roles played by migration networks. This includes roles such as offering relief from the high cost and disruptions of migration. Other functional roles include networks serving as a major link between sending and receiving societies. These networks are also influential in the determination of potential migrants, selection of destinations as well as conditioning of the integration of migrants into the destination societies. In addition to these functional roles, networks serve as a source of information and resources for migrants (T.Gurak and Fe Caces, 2010:153-155). Besides, Migrant networks are also seen as normative structures that influence the size and momentum of migrations. As a result, the functional roles played by these networks are classified as follows, (1). Networks and adaptation and (2). Networks and selectivity (T.Gurak and Fe Caces, 2010:153-155). Networks and Adaptation are explained as the general processes involved in the adjustment to challenging temporary conditions in the short term, as well as the integration into the destination society in the long term. Research on migration, however, in most cases tends to focus on the roles played by networks in providing short-term adaptive support such as housing and financial needs. As well as general and strategic information about the destination society. This information includes information about employment and general survival strategies. In addition to these roles, migration networks are also seen to serve as a major emotional support mechanism to migrants (T.Gurak and Fe Caces, 2010:153). Other studies such as that of Massey (1988) further explain this support mechanism provided by the migration network. In this study, he outlined that

networks serve as a mechanism that reduces the cost of migration by making information and other resources available to an ever-growing circle of potential migrants. He further outlined that these mechanisms have some far-reaching implications for the evolution of migration systems (Massey, 1988). On the second classification of migration, networks, and selectivity, Gurak (2010) outlined that migration networks serve as linking and resource transmission mechanisms for migrants, to a higher extent and they influence the selection of who migrates and when. He further outlined that networks are essential determinants of the maintenance of the channeling between origin and destination societies. However, networks are not the major initial factors in the creation of a particular flow between origin and destination societies (T.Gurak and Fe Caces, 2010:155-158).

In serving as a link between the host country and home countries, migration networks serve as important information resources for their members, this includes information on immigration regulations, education, and career opportunities as well as information about access to health facilities to its members through various mediums of communication. Including Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. These networks and associations also organize various extracurricular activities and programs to provide information to the host country about their native country's socio-economic and cultural life as well as important developments on political issues. Aiming to ease resettlement once new migrants arrive in their societies. Furthermore, migration networks are seen to provide informal loan schemes to their members who are having financial problems to support their education, health care, and other social functions like the funeral service of their members. Thereby serving as a buffer that reduces the economic cost of migration. In addition to informal economic support, migrant networks provide the structural environment that helps in the adjustment to the new cultures for its members both in the short and the long term. Migration networks also influence the conditioning of potential migrants as new members tend to select and travel to a particular destination based on the information gained from these associations through friends or family members who are already active. From the above functional and structural roles played by international migration networks, we can argue that migration associations and networks can be recognized for the vital role they play in facilitating smooth travel for incoming and potential migrants. However, as highlighted in the literature the limitation to studies on migration networks remains as there haven't been many studies on how these networks operate, and also whether there exists any variation about ethnic and policy context. And what are their effects on migrants and migration systems (T.Gurak and fe Cases, 2010:151). In summary, Migration Network Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Gambian migration patterns. The networks of support,

information, and resources they create are pivotal in facilitating migration, reducing risks, and ensuring the economic and social well-being of migrants and their families. These networks highlight the interconnected nature of migration and the importance of considering social ties in migration policy and practice.

Gambians often rely on established networks of family, friends, and community members who have already migrated. These networks offer practical assistance such as information about routes, employment opportunities, and living conditions in the destination countries. This support reduces the uncertainty and risks associated with migration. Many Gambians migrate in search of better economic opportunities. Networks play a critical role in securing jobs, often in sectors where previous migrants have established themselves. This can lead to chain migration, where new migrants follow the paths of earlier ones to the same destinations, typically in Europe.

2.4 Conflict theory of migration

Global migration and population displacement have been exacerbated by conflicts and other interrelated causes, including famine, extreme poverty, climate-related disasters, and historical political oppression of autocratic regimes. The majority of the migrants who are seeking refuge in Europe have created friction in the European Union. Mostly, the common reason for the refugee and immigration crisis in the European Union is that refugees and irregular migrants flee the brutal ravages of civil war, extreme poverty, and political oppression particularly from Africa and Asia. The issue of migration and conflict has been inextricably intertwined for centuries, but it has become increasingly complicated in recent years. Leading to a global influx of irregular migration mainly from Africa and Asia to the global South. The topicality of the subject matter is determined by the state's readiness to confront challenges caused by migration processes as part of long-term socio-economic and political reforms (Metelev, 2016).

Therefore, security and sustainable development were closely intertwined as a threshold for human security. These issues have been consensually considered by the UN member states in the 1992 and 1997 conferences respectively, as well as in the 2002 and 2012 World Summits simultaneously, highlighting the importance of balance development categorized into three important components: Society, economy, and nature (Metelev, 2016). At this juncture, human security cannot be underestimated as an important component in migration patterns. To have a succinct understanding of the concept of Human Security, it is paramount to first ask the question why Human security? What must have changed and why a need for such a paradigm

shift? Before delving into the definitional issues of the subject matter, it is important to note that the whole thing about Human Security is trying to put a Humanistic face to security. In other words, Human security is centered on putting humanity in the context of security or putting humanity as the centerpiece of security-related issues. The debate on the definition of human is anywhere close to an end, and it doesn't seem that there is ever going to be a consensus on the definition of the subject matter. For Japanese scholars' Human security involves addressing all threats to the survival, daily lives, and dignity of individuals (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p. 29). For Canadians, this concept encompasses protection from both violent and non-violent threats (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p. 30). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) expands on this idea, defining human security as "freedom from fear and freedom from want" (UNDP, 2020). This definition implies that human security involves safeguarding against chronic threats like hunger, disease, and repression, as well as protecting against sudden and harmful disruptions to daily life—whether at home, work, or in communities (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p. 24). The UNDP's comprehensive definition identifies seven dimensions of human security: economic, health, personal, political, food, environmental, and community. Essentially, human security focuses on preserving human dignity by protecting people and communities, ensuring their well-being and dignity. Issues such as poverty pose significant threats to human security and dignity, potentially leading to conflict and forcing people to migrate in search of peace and survival. Consequently, thus, the primary concern of the states often involves security. Meanwhile, state sovereignty connotes that States are complete and that they have absolute control over everything within their territory (Krasner, 2009, p. 90). In that it has legitimate authority over its inhabitants and that no other sovereign authority presides over it. State sovereignty also connotes that a particular State has absolute independence from other States and that they do not dictate what it does or doesn't do (Herzog, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, when an individual enters a sovereign state without following due process, it raises a question of state sovereignty (Bello, 2017). One can argue that there is a connection between security issues and irregular migration. Certainly, a considerable segment of people in European society in particular those who share the idea of populist, nationalist, and right-wing ideology, regard migrants as traitors and invaders. According to a theory, Negative attitudes towards Immigration by host societies often perceive immigrants to pose an economic burden and cultural threat to individuals and the society at large (Geddes, 2022). In my opinion, the case might be different if not everyone who entered Europe illegally were not traitor rather the conditions forced the majority of them to migrate hoping to have a better and meaningful life for themselves and their families, meanwhile, those claims from anti-immigrant groups are

based on faulty assumptions, not logical reasoning.

In the same vein, Transnational mobility with the notion of conflict can be attributed to human insecurity (Sirkeci, 2009). In conditions where people are forced to relocate either by the unstable nature of the political atmosphere of the home country or the stifled economic conditions or conflict. In this segment of the research, our conceptualization argued that conflict is the core dynamic of force determining transnational mobility elsewhere. Sirkeci also argued that it is undue to categorize migrants into groups. For instance, forced versus voluntary as well as economic versus political which in his view theoretically would not help us to understand migration behavior. However, the issue of migration will remain the world's most pressing political challenge in the 21st century. Similarly, public attitudes toward immigration increasingly determine policymakers' responses to these challenges and opportunities to act pragmatically to address this issue domestically and in the global sphere (Geddes, 2022). Thus, it's very essential and of Scientific interest to understand what factors explain attitudes toward migration.

In Summary, each theory provided in this research gave us distinct insight into the motivations and dynamics of the irregular migration in the Gambia. In light of this neoclassical economic theory explains the motives of the young Gambians to illegally migrate to Europe due to the wage differences. This perception pushes individuals to seek better financial prospects in Europe. This understanding however is not limited to an individual's financial expectations but is largely influenced by potential higher income and better livelihood abroad. This reminds us of the importance of the migrant networks and their role in providing vital information about route job opportunities and settlement. These selected theories ascribe the Gambian migration patterns given a contextual explanation of how insecurity, wage differences, households, and migrant networks influence the decision of migrants and potential migrants to undertake the journey hoping to maximize their wealth and diversify their sources of income in their respective communities to earn respect and dignity of their desire. In principle, all the aforementioned theories in this research are highly pertinent to the Gambian context.

Furthermore, the literature shows the humanitarian Catastrophe in West Africa. The Gambia most specifically amassed the scholars of social sciences and migration studies to accustom new approaches in their research agenda in regards to migration, particularly irregular migration. However, there are huge questions and gaps in migration literature, previously in literature, approaches to migration focused largely on socioeconomic and political deprivation deemed as the driving factor of movement. This frame of reference or perspective continues to

adhere to the public discourse.

It is argued that there is an imperative need for the literature to be complemented historically and culturally, sensitive accounts shedding light on the genesis and repercussions of the migratory pattern (Graw, Schielke 2012:9 as cited Suso, 2019) currently, the Gambian nationals are the second largest diaspora as a share of the home country population (UNHCR 2016; World Bank as cited Suso, 2019). Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of the driving forces or motives behind Gambians who are moving or who want to move, would be a significant contribution to the literature of migration studies. This study will explain the importance of the young Gambians undertaking irregular routes to migrate commonly known as “Backway” and describe the complexity of the migration aspiration in the country. Establishing a better comprehension of what inspires youths to this dangerous journey will help policy and decision makers and NGOs double their efforts in regard to migration management mechanisms. Also, understand the motives within the context of youth endeavor to leave the country.

Migration has a long history complex in the tradition and cultural importance in West Africa, this phenomenon spans nearly 20th Centuries (Kebbeh 2013) Historically, its geographic location has heavily influenced and attracted international trade and human mobility. From the early 1990s towards the 2000s, Gambians most often embarked to reach Europe through the Mediterranean Sea through the Canary Islands. This opened in 2006, when approximately 30,000 migrants from Africa arrived in Canaries Island, 12% of whom were Gambian citizens (Suso2019). However, in 2008 many migrants found alternative routes passing by Libya via the Mediterranean to Lampedusa Island. In the Mid- 2000’s the most common “Backway” route to Europe was from the Gambiathrough Senegal, Mali, and Niger into Libya from there the journey continues to the coast of Italy and the rest of Europe (as cited in Embiricos 2016; Zanker & Altrogge 2017:4). In early 2010, migration from the Gambia to Europe dramatically increased due to economic turmoil and political uncertainty the Gambia is facing under dictator Jammeh as citedin (Hustin et al 2017: 537) while in the 70s most of the Gambian migrants went as far as Senegal. From early 2009 to 2010 many scholars and obverse were ringing alarming bells regarding the rise of the illegal migration “Backway” human trafficking of migrants gained a rare momentum in the Gambia and West Africa at large, the phenomenon is on the rise as the young Gambians are tremendously involved, risking their lives to secure safe entry to Europeanoffshore (Adepoju 2003).

The journey is tremendously expensive, and forces many families to sell their lands and

other valuable properties to send a family member to take part in this dangerous journey, where smugglers and human traffickers are involved (Strand Jagne 2014 et al Suso, 2019). In other words, Europe hasn't seen such an influx of migration tsunami for decades. However, this compelling situation has impetus the European nations to revise their policies on migration, taking tougher action to restrict the inflows of migrants especially those of economic migrants from Africa. Notwithstanding, the number has dramatically risen, and the large portion of migrants cross by Sea through Italy the number nearly quadrupled from 2013 to 2014, reaching about 170, 100. The Gambia is identified as a large contributor to migration per capita (Washington Post, 2015 Suso,2019). The recent data indicate that irregular migration from the Gambia composes a significant proportion of those embarking on traveling to Europe are young Gambians. The Gambia is ranked as the fourth country of origin in other researchers' third.

Furthermore, migration is as old as human history, therefore, human mobility is an integral part of human nature, people widely migrate today to acclimatize to break the challenge of being mobile, and undertake risks and opportunities that prevail in their way. In light of that, unskilled migrants from West Africa are considered to be a huge socio-economic burden to the West that ought to be banned entry to European soil and the West at large as cited by (Jones in 2008, Parkes 2017 et al Suso 2019). Aspiration to migrate is not only about material well-being but also to conform peer group aspiration is also important (Suso, 2019b). A promising future that could only be achieved elsewhere has become firm in the thinking and imagination of the youths (Suso,2019).

The desire to travel among youths in Africa also emanates from a lack of self-realization at home, the situation forces them to look for alternative ways to find greener pastures elsewhere (Gaibazzi,2010: et al Suso 2019). In this case, the Gambia is an important country in sending migrants. Despite being the smallest country in mainland Africa, it immensely contributes to a large number of irregular migrations who embark on an exodus across the Mediterranean Sea (Suso 2019). According to Gaibazzi many Gambians heavily invested in migration because they thought it brought hope and opportunities, in the late 80s Gambians emigrated to the West either to work or to pursue higher education.

In general, mobility in the West African context is, as opposed to the European context, not generally considered a politicized issue nor a political priority. On the contrary, mobility and migration represent a common element of life in many West African societies (Janssen et al., 2020). Some countries in West Africa such as Nigeria and Senegal enshrine the right to migrate in their constitution (Janssen et al., 2020). Equally the Gambia in particular emigration

has a huge socio-economic and cultural importance making it almost impossible to go anywhere in four corners of the country to avoid the subject of emigration, thus, the majority of the households' fishmoney came through remittance. In the same way, migrants work to support their relatives financially back home to uplift their material status. Many people branded migration in the Gambia to be purely a way forward to grant financial stability for households. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) set forth and, to some extent, put into effect the rights of movement, residence, and establishment. Most of the mobility in West Africa is intra-regional (Adepojo, 2009).

The Gambia has a high percentage of visa rejections for Western countries, and visa applications for EU countries must be handled via embassies in neighboring Senegal (Castellano, 2023). Arguably, I think these difficulties in attaining the visa made so many frustrated young people who have no hope in the political and socio-economic system of the country look for an alternative route. This severe decline in geographical mobility, particularly aggravated by the strained relationships between Jammeh and Euro-American countries, was followed by an increasingly tricky internal social mobility for young Gambians in the neoliberal era. Due to the difficulties of farming to create adequate cash to ensure families sustain their well-being, a condition worsened by climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources by foreign firms, many young people relocated to the country's urban coastal region to find work. However, once they are in an urban area, they encounter difficulties securing jobs due to limited opportunities, a lack of political connections, and insufficient skills relevant to the job market (Castellano, 2023). This economic turmoil and an unending trend of de-ruralisation left many young people in a vulnerable position, making the transition to adulthood extremely difficult and socially contentious, like in many other African countries (Altrogge and Zanker 2019; Gaibazzi, 2014; Conrad Suso, 2020, Castellano, 2023). Attributes of Manhood such as economic freedom, marriage, and parenting are becoming increasingly unachievable by most young people in Africa grappling with poverty, unemployment, and sustainable livelihoods (Castellano, 2023, Ceesay, 2016). In such circumstances, envisioning a future in Europe serves as both a means of seeking escape and redemption from the marginalization and stigmatization faced by young men and women due to factors such as unemployment, and the delayed onset of adulthood (Castellano, 2023, Ceesay, 2016; Conrad Suso, 2019). Europe is always foreseen as an escape zone or solution to materialize individual well-being due to the huge gap between the Euro and Dalasi that can allow them to save more money.

In regards to research Gaps, the study found that there is huge Policy Effectiveness that

causes here limited empirical data on the long-term effectiveness of current bilateral agreements and policies between The Gambia and the EU. Future studies could evaluate the impact of these policies on reducing irregular migration and improving the socio-economic conditions of returnees. Also, Socio-economic Impacts: The socio-economic impacts of irregular migration on both the source and destination countries are not well-documented. Further research is needed to understand how migration affects local communities in The Gambia, including the economic and social integration of returnees. Another important aspect is Human Rights Concerns, However, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on the human rights implications of migration control measures implemented under the Gambia-EU agreements. Future studies should focus on the treatment of migrants, both during their journey and upon return, to ensure that policies adhere to international human rights standards. In addition, there is limited research done on migration networks in the Gambia, and the role of these networks in facilitating or hindering irregular migration from The Gambia to the EU is not fully understood. More research is needed to explore how these networks operate and their influence on migration decisions. Another, interesting area also is Climate Change and Migration and the interplay between climate change and migration in The Gambia is an emerging area that requires further investigation. Understanding how environmental factors drive migration could inform more holistic policy responses.

In this section, we will firmly explain the methodology that will be undertaken to guide our study. The research will focus on three themes, using research components, such as research methodology, data collection with samples, as well as the study limitation.

2.5. Research Methodology:

Gaining a better grasp of mobility in West and Central Africa is essential for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to establish programs, and policies, and make informed decisions. That's why IOM has been gathering data since 2016 at crucial transit points throughout the area to observe intra- and inter-regional mobility trends.

We will collect the data through two stages: a direct interview with migrants in the community which are the places of origin, transit, or destination of migratory flows), and interviewing Key Informants (such as national and local authorities), in individual surveys.

The study utilized qualitative research by conducting interviews with three key institutions in The Gambia responsible for migration issues. Furthermore, questionnaires were distributed to migrants from various backgrounds in randomly selected communities both in The Gambia and

abroad. These tools were used to gather information on the positive or negative impacts of irregular migration, identify challenges migrants face during their journey to Europe via irregular means, assess affordability, and explore the relevance of issues surrounding this migration to their destinations. This methodology was chosen because it allows participants to provide in-depth insights into their situations regarding the research topic without external influence, prejudice, or bias. It is considered the most reliable way to collect firsthand information from the target population, in contrast to secondary data sources, which can sometimes be misleading or misrepresentative. Additionally, the researcher will review several scholarly articles and previous studies that align with the focus of this study to provide extra context and understanding of migration patterns in The Gambia.

Moreover, the study will investigate the policy mechanisms in place to address the inherent challenges faced by individuals in socio-economically deprived societies, with a particular focus on The Gambia.

2.6 Research Sample and Data Collection Technique

The data collection process commenced on March 25th and finished on May 5th. A total of two (2) institutions were delegated for this study across the Gambia. These are The Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation, and the Gambian Abroad (MOFA). The Gambia National Youth Council (NYC). and also, the Migrants themselves both in the Gambia and Europe. In other words, fifteen (17) respondents will randomly take part in this research. from this research, migrants will be taking fifteen (15), and the other Two (2) will be distributed to the other institutions. This includes men and women across different demographics and backgrounds, migrants/potential migrants' and authorities. The respondents will be aged 18 and above.

The researcher will employ two sets of data collection techniques for the study. A one-on-one interview was the first research instrument to be used with the relevant authorities of aforementioned institutions as a way of understanding the state of earth preparedness of this massive social problem and substance strategies to mitigate its impact, particularly development projects and employability of the young Gambians to fit the job market. Among other issues, the semi-structured interviews with them sought to assess the relevance of their motivation to migrate and the Impact it sought to have on the lives and livelihoods of the young people and their families, more importantly, whether these institutions that are now the most dominant actors in Gambia migration issue do even take concert steps to revive policies that concern future of the youths.

In research methods, Interviewing has long remained an important aspect of social

science research. (Dörnyei, 2007, as cited in Alshenqeet, 2014 et al Famara Fofana 2022) argues that interviewing is a natural and socially acceptable method of gathering data as it can be used in different settings, covering a variety of subjects. Other scholars notably (Bell, 1987; Kvale, 1996; Berg, 2007 as cited by Alshenqeet, 2014 et al Famara Fofana 2022) recommend that interviews should be implemented as a tool for social research as they facilitate the collection of unhindered accounts of people's activities through broad and comprehensive verbal interactions.

The importance of interviewing is that it doesn't only paint a complete picture of a particular situation, discusses words, and takes stock of detailed views from respondents, it also enables the interviewees to express their own opinions and perceptions (Berg, 2007, as cited by Alshenqeet, 2014 et al Famara Fofana).

In addition to semi-structured interviews, another way in which the researcher wanted to collect data for this research was by administering questionnaires to the research participants themselves. It mainly investigated the question of access, information on migration, and the relevance of the issue, especially, the good thing about the two data collection approaches is that the responses from the research participants in the Gambia will help us to know the root cause and to make some policy recommendations. The question format will contain mainly open-ended, open-ended questions, among the migrants and institutions responsible for immigration issues.

As part of my research design, I will use the following:

- a. Use a semi-structured interview which is of Open-ended Questionnaire (targeting current returnees and would-be or potential migrants)
- b. Desk research (IOM Gambia publications, EU Banjul Office and Gambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Gambia Central Bureau of Statistics, etc.)
- c. Why these methodologies? These methodologies will be adopted because this approach can adequately investigate the question under research. In doing so, I will be analyzing other research studies, reports, newsletters, magazines, newspapers, academic journals, articles, etc.

2.7 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to assess the repercussions of the influx of illegal migrants into Europe and to know how this phenomenon impacts the Gambia- European Union bilateral relations. The research will further assess the factors that drive the young Gambians to embark

on illegal migration activities and the challenges they face through their “back way” journey, we also intend to highlight some of the socioeconomic benefits migration can implore in the development of the country if it is properly managed through proper policy guidelines in place to thoroughly govern migration in the Gambia.

Main Research Questions

What are the primary motivations driving irregular migration from the Gambia to the EU, and how do the socio-political dynamics and challenges faced during the migration process influence the decision-making and experiences of Gambian migrants?

What are **the fundamental areas or ingredients** that underline the migration **cooperation framework** between The Gambia and the European Union (EU)?

Sub-questions

To what extent does the EU-Gambia migration cooperation benefit Gambian migrants in terms of their **resettlement** in Europe, **repatriation** when they have to be sent back home and their **re-integration** to be able to live happily or peacefully in their home country?

2.8 Scope and the Limitation

Despite the difficulties encountered, the research led to some valuable findings, However, I encountered several challenges. Firstly, my laptop malfunctioned, causing me to lose all my work without any means to retrieve or back it up, significantly affecting the entire process within a limited time frame. Secondly, expert interviews with relevant institutions did not materialize, likely due to reluctance to share thoughts and expert views on a critical issue that should concern policymakers. Some responses indicated that interviews could not be granted due to the sensitivity of the topic. Despite tireless efforts to secure interviews with institutions, our requests were either ignored or denied and bureaucratic procedures delayed responses. Additionally, regarding data collection, many migrants declined our interview requests, fearing that participation might jeopardize their stay and lead to deportation.

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE GAMBIA IN THE PAST AND TODAY

Migration has been an integral part of The Gambia's history, shaping its social, economic, and political landscape over centuries. As one of the smallest countries in mainland Africa, The Gambia has experienced various forms of migration, driven by numerous factors including economic opportunities, environmental changes, and socio-political circumstances. This chapter delves into the historical migration trends in The Gambia, providing a comprehensive overview from pre-colonial times to the present day.

The Gambia's strategic location along the West African coast and the Gambia River has historically made it a hub for trade and migration. During the pre-colonial era, the region was part of various West African empires, such as the Mali and Songhai Empires, facilitating extensive trade networks and movements of people. The advent of the transatlantic slave trade marked a significant and tragic period of forced migration, which had profound and lasting impacts on the population and the region's socio-economic fabric. In the colonial period, The Gambia's integration into the British Empire introduced new migration dynamics, including labor migration within and outside of the Gambia driven by colonial economic policies. Post-independence, the country witnessed significant internal and international migration flows as Gambians sought better economic opportunities abroad due to limited prospects at home. The economic downturns, coupled with political instability in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, further spurred migration, particularly to Europe and North America.

Today, The Gambia continues to experience significant migration flows, characterized by both voluntary and irregular migration. The contemporary migration trends are influenced by global economic conditions, local socio-economic and political challenges, and increasingly, the effects of climate change. The Gambia's bilateral relationships, especially with the European Union, play a crucial role in shaping migration policies and trends, as both regions seek to manage and address the complexities of irregular migration.

This chapter aims to provide a detailed historical context to these migration trends, exploring the continuities and changes over time. By understanding the historical background of migration in The Gambia, as well as migration governance to the root cause of migration and the methods used by immigrants. Yet, it also highlights the migration trend in West Africa, and touches upon EU- bilateral relations and migration cooperation between the Gambia and the EU.

3.1 Migration Governance and Management in the Gambia

Migration governance is defined as mobility and nationality in a country governed by traditions and institutions, including the government's ability to formulate and implement sound and effective policies (Africa, 2018). The 2030 agenda of the African Union Obligated all member states to adhere to effective migration governance within the framework of sustainable development goal (SDG). Which earnestly urges African States to adequately reduce poverty and inequality within and among states by ensuring the safe, orderly regular responsible migration mobility of the people within and out of the continent, through well-planned migration policies. Ultimately, the IOM 2016 migration governance framework outlines the blueprint for a framework that will contribute immensely to benefit migrants and society (IOM,2023)

Historically, human mobility has played a significant role in defining the economic and social profile of the Gambia River valley. Traveling, working, and trading abroad have long been embedded in the history and culture of the Gambia. Especially among the youth, aiming to ensure personal and family status to flourish in society ((Meillassoux, 1981 et al Gaibazzi, 2023). However, Gambians have been emigrating internationally steadily since the 1950s, mainly to Africa and other destinations around the globe, this trend has been going up since the 1980s when the issue became a public discussion as an important element of the youth question (Gaibazzi, 2018). This was a rise in youth unemployment among the urban educated class. International migration has the momentum to become a generational aspiration in the Gambia not only to acquire material well-being but to leave the country where corrupted political leaders and their local associates disrupt the hope and break the aspiration of the younger generation to emancipate from the colonial legacy into to more economic salvation and self-actualization.

In the early 2000s, the state responded to youth questions by externalizing its border against boat migration from the North-West African coast to the Canary Islands of Spanish offshore. In addition to that Spanish government signed an agreement with the Gambia on repatriation (2006) as well as strengthening the patrol in coastal areas of the Gambia, Spain also invest in skill development and vocational training programs as key dominant in the development agenda of the Gambia to prevent irregular migration.

In this regard, The Gambia is one of the signatory parties and an active member of the migration dialogue from West Africa (MIDWA) this body is a regional consultative process (RCP) that was established in 2001 aimed to encourage (ECOWAS) member states to galvanize on dialog and discuss common migration issues concerning the region. The Gambia is also a

member of Euro-Africa on migration development (Rabat Process) this pact was established in 2006 aiming to bring stakeholders of the ECOWAS, EUROPEAN COMMISSION, and also countries from North West and central African republics to deal with migration issues (IOM,2021). Simultaneously, in 2006, the government of the Gambia signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Kingdom of Spain to fight and control the inflow of irregular migrants, similarly, in 2010 Italy also signed bilateral security cooperation with the Gambia on illegal migration-related issues, human trafficking and it also includes rendering training to the Gambia Immigration Department (GID) personals to strengthening the border control and management. In the same vein, the Gambia government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Senegal to prevent and stop human trafficking and also agreed on preferred entry and stay (IOM,2021).

Furthermore, the country signed another bilateral labor agreement with the state of Qatar in 2010 on the migration of Gambian labor migrants in Qatar, covering recruitment. However, in the later part after the change of the government, the government of the Gambia also established a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to initiate national migration policy, a strategy put in place to respond to the impact of immigration, particularly illegal migration. These include public institutions to address these phenomena through the multi-perspective approach to tackle migration.

In regards to border control and protection, the government of the Gambia is committed to ensuring that migration in and out of the country takes place in a safe, orderly, and regular manner, within this framework the Gambia immigration department (GID) under the auspices of the of Interior Ministry and the Gambia police force (GPF) has the Solid responsibilities for border control and security.

In light of the migration governance in the Gambia, (2007) act of trafficking in persons prohibits human trafficking in the Gambia, puts forward serious retribution for crimes related to trafficking, and outlines provisions that protect the victims, it enhances the establishment of the national agency against trafficking in person under the Ministry of Justice. Nonetheless, all these efforts were made in the past two decades to tackle the migration, in reality, most of these efforts did not avail anything on the ground or translate into meaningful impact in ongoing efforts to fight illegal migration and human trafficking in the Gambia. However, in the African context, the subject matter of migration was not a top priority for many African states until recently, when the issue gained paramount weight at the domestic and regional levels. Therefore, in Africa, migration was a subject of low-key priority for many states; it has not

gained traction as a key policy area for the continent over the past two decades (Pietropolli,2021). Certainly, many African governments realized that migration is a driver of development and it must be addressed more comprehensively. Moreover, this cognizance emanates from growing European Union (EU) investment incentives in migration-related projects in Africa since 2015 by the European Union Trust Fund in Africa (EUTF). As a result, many African countries mainstreaming migration into their national development scheme and strategies, also absorbed it across many policy domains (Pietropolli,2021). Perhaps, more significantly in countries such as the Gambia, Mali, and Morocco where it can potentially influence the electoral process.

In this framework migration governance requires solid plan actions to curb the issue, and well managed in a manner that can bring development to the countries tremendously affected by migration. Arguably, numerous challenges made it difficult for the government of the Gambia to take drastic measures from policy design to implantation due to the lack of proper availability of migration data. Yet, limited resources and capacity made it barely impossible to mitigate the issue of irregular migration due to the complexity of the subject matter, and obstacles beyond the reasonable doubt overwhelmed the relevant authorities to deal with this serious national issue, for instance, porous borders we share with Senegal are prone to penetration by human traffickers and their enablers from security and other relevant agencies that are responsible for border and migration control in the Country. No to mention the sensitivity of the migration in the Gambia's political, social, and political discourse. Contrary to the recent efforts, the former regime under Yahya Jammeh has turned a blind eye to migration without putting adequate and comprehensive mechanisms to anticipate the country's migration policy program. Subsequently, after the 2016 electoral defeat the new government in collaboration with the European Union (EU) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched a national migration policy in 2020, However, many argued that these policies have not made any meaningful impact on migration patterns. Equally, in my own opinion current administration did some quite remarkable work regarding migration, although is not satisfied because of ambiguity surrounding the implementation of the policies of reintegration of returnees which should be on top of the government's number one priority in order to minimize the so-called brain drain that is escalating the countries development aspirations. Yet still, despite the tremendous efforts that have been made by the government and its agencies youths are still embarking on so so-called “Backway” exodus to Europe in larger numbers, I think the failure to create more employment opportunities for young Gambians has undermined the path and efforts to combat the illegal migration trends in the Gambia.

In recent years, since the new political dispensation assumed power in 2016, the emigration dilemma in the Gambia dramatically began to decline, with the hope that the so-called “Nerve syndrome” which means local obsession to travel abroad even is going to cause you to lose your life will be manageable somehow in the Gambia. Conversely, it is widely believed that demographic growth in the African continent will undoubtedly result in an exodus or emigration to Europe (Pietropolli, 2021). Meanwhile, migration is a pressing issue that has gained prominence on the national and international stage, this evolution has brooded migration agenda into a huge policy concern for many African countries, and as a result, these led many states in West Africa to integrate migration as top priority of their policymaking. For the fact that migration cannot be ignored, rather it should be well managed in order to serve the greater interest of both migrants sending and receiving countries to pursue a common development agenda. In other words, if the regular migration avenue was promoted and collectively well managed the lives and livelihoods of several households could dramatically change and serve as leverage to mitigate the root cause of the problem and encourage the legal avenues to travel abroad.

As of the case many African governments, like anywhere else comport a fragmented approach towards migration, Notwithstanding, the then government of the Gambia under Yahya Jammeh neglected the issue as a significant policy concern resulting in a coherence policy vacuum in the Gambia at the time. This pattern changed after the new government came to power in 2016 under the Barrow administration, the authorities observed that the need arose to commence a national migration policy as an important component in the migration dynamic as a better tool to foresee the development aspiration also help the government to respond to human trafficking and migrant protection issues. Unfortunately, the desirable success in the migration question has not yet been achieved.

This initiative is in line with the African Union’s 2018 migration policy framework. Which explicitly emphasizes and recommends that governments and all relevant stakeholders should engage their ministries, and civil society organizations (CSOs) in formulating migration policy (Africa, 2018). As of now many newcomers including the Gambia eventually have a national migration policy as a road map to deal with the issue.

Finally, migration is a multifaceted issue that a single entity cannot deal with. Therefore, it needs and multisectoral approaches, to improve migration governance in the Gambia imply or require strengthening the role of stakeholders at the regional and sub-national level, it is imperative to involve civil society, non-state actors, and local communities to play a meaningful role in

formulation, execution, and implementation of policies. While this issue overwhelms states at the domestic level, is essential to engage regional blocks to initiate a common action plan to strengthen regional cooperation and coordination with regional information-sharing mechanisms among institutions and agencies for better policy coherence to manage and mitigate the inflow of irregular migration. However, the regional block of (ECOWASE) has been hampered in having an integrated migration policy framework to support and protect the movement and integration of migrants (Pietropolli, 2021).

3.2 The Trend of Irregular Migration in West Africa

West Africa is one of the regions in sub-Saharan Africa with a long history of human movement, which was especially improved during the colonial era (Konseiga, 2005). The region is one of the polarized regions in Africa. It has lots of challenges due to so many reasons including instability, economic turmoil, climate change, and also irregular migration. Continued recurrent economic crises have prompted the host nation to enact stringent immigration laws and to deport immigrants, which has led the latter to simply alter their migration plans and relocate to nearby nations (Konseiga, 2005). Migration from West Africa to Europe has been greatly influenced by economic crises and political conflicts. Subsequently, various migrants with special skill levels, including both highly and unskilled individuals, persist in migrating to Europe through regular or irregular means (Teye, 2022). This is the result of the increasingly volatile nature of the region and global migration system coupled with significant economic factors that influence the migration policies, including expulsion and restive measures adopted by both developed and so-called developing countries (Konseiga, 2005). The majority of tribes and ethnic groups in the West African region are believed to have migrated southward to their current locations in pursuit of improved ecological conditions and a secure arable environment for their cattle and crops. These early migrations often involved trade, herdsmen, and farming to acquire land to settle (Yaro, 2008). The contemporary migration pattern is rooted and driven by the influence of globalization, reshaping economic conditions across the globe. Since many countries are facing Socio-economic decline in the global South and increased poverty levels also triggered various forms of migration across the region. Additionally, macroeconomic policy adjustment and a significant rise in the labor force exacerbate employability, leading to the continued exodus of the youths to Europe. In this regard, a lot of pressing issues such as extreme poverty, education, health, and welfare services. In some countries like Mali and Nigeria, instability posed by the presence of terrorist groups and organized crime forces many people to move within the region or elsewhere.

While many attributed the push factor of contemporary migration from West Africa. Current reality contradicts that because of the recent migration trend driven by social transformation where Social Networks and Social Media platforms set new migratory patterns for the youths, thinking that by migrating to Europe all their dreams will come true. In addition, people in West Africa tend to be mobile due to the societal and cultural importance attached to moving abroad. Overall, International mobility is often regarded in many societies in West Africa as a prestigious achievement as well as a symbol of manhood, coupled with both current migrants and those who return home for vacation receiving maximum respect within many African societies. Migration serves as an indicator of both a family's economic and social position, influencing the significance attributed by the community to attending weddings, naming ceremonies, etc. As a result, individuals occasionally migrate with the sole aim of boosting their family's social standing. Finally, these factors are also another important push factor for youths to migrate to attain that social status which gives considerable respect to the families whose economic condition is somehow stable in the communities.

3.3 Roots Cause of Irregular Migration in the Gambia

We cannot explain the root cause of the migration in the Gambia without touching upon migration in West Africa. Therefore, migration is an integral part of the African socio-political and economic dynamics, particularly, in West Africa. Migratory desire is woven into many societal fabrics of the region (Suso, 2019). According to Riccio (2005) and Barbali (2008) culture of migration is deeply regarded as a sense or form of masculinity. In contrast, the inability to emigrate is perceived as a threat to masculinity (Gaibazzi, 2010). So, migration is well embedded in African culture. Ultimately, the motive to emigrate is pretty much based on economic opportunities migrants presume to have elsewhere (Suso, 2019; Kandel and Massy (2022). However, migration has recently become a pressing subject in the international sphere (Barbali, 2009). Therefore, there is no consensus singular recognized definition of “root causes” hence the term is sometimes synonymously used with other words such as “Drivers”, and “Determinant” referring to migration (Audrey, 2018). However, these concepts are interchangeable to distinguish between the terms, root causes of migration, drivers, and determinants. Carlings and Tallers define root causes of migration as situations of a state, communities, and individuals that are desperately yearning for change which as a result trigger migration aspiration.

The Gambia is one of the poorest countries in the World. The majority of the people live on less than 2 dollars a day. The country is ranked 174 out of 194 countries in the UN Human

Development Report (UN,2022). In light of the topic, mobility has always been an important component in the life of West African inhabitants. Before the colonial era, the movement of the people was mostly linked to internecine war, natural disasters, environmental degradation, or the search for cultivable land for crops (Adepoju,1998). Colonialism has disproportionately impacted all aspects of life in Africa, including mobility patterns, which cannot be overestimated (McKeon,2020), over a while after the abolition of slavery colonial administrators a new form of labor, which eventually promoted forced movement to provide manpower purposely for cash crop for their agricultural farms and constructing railways.

In the meantime, economic desperation, extreme poverty, unemployment, and accessibility of quality education. Considerably, emigration is an investment for many households to uplift family social and material well-being in the Gambia and the region at large. However, The Gambia faces a significant challenge with high rates of irregular migration, which complicates the state's ability to manage the issue effectively. Migrants traveling to Europe encounter severe problems, such as becoming victims of human trafficking or smuggling, and are often abducted by kidnappers who demand ransom or enslave them, as numerous reports from Libya have indicated. Even those who successfully reach Europe face difficulties, including integration challenges and securing asylum to obtain the necessary documents for legal residency.

The outflow of migration from the Gambia is not only deeply cantered only in economic problems the country is facing. On top of that, environmental-related issues also hinder the matter, such as climate change, and deforestation somehow disproportionately affects the agricultural sector which is the main productive sector of the country's economy. Besides, another outstanding factor of internal and external migration, political instability forced many youths to leave the country in search of greener pastures in Europe and elsewhere.

According to the migrants and Refugees Report 2019 alone, the Gambia had almost 118,483 emigrants which account for 5.05% of the total population. Furthermore, the majority of the immigrants are mainly men which are 65.81% at the age range of 20-24, the main destination countries were Gambian migrants in 2019 are the United States of America (USA) 21.11%, Spain 15.05%, Italy 12.29% Germany and United Kingdom (UK) (Migration & Refugees, 2023). Typically, the majority of immigrants are low-medium-skilled. On the contrary, in recent years the number of highly skilled educated Gambians significantly increased by almost 40% (Migrants & Refugees, 2023).

3.4 Routes and Methods of Migration

Europe is the destination of a larger subset of African migrants. Ultimately, some African migrants arrived in Europe legally for numerous reasons such as education, employment, and family reunifications. In 2019, the estimated death rate of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean was about 1283 individuals (IOM, 2020). Aside from regular migration routes many African youths endeavor to reach Europe through irregular channels where the vast majority of them seek asylum upon arrival. According to Frontex, the central Mediterranean remains the most active crossing point accounting for half of the irregular migration into the European Union (EU). So far, as of the first eight months of 2023, national authorities in (the EU) reported that nearly 114,300 detections were recorded this accounted for the highest number for this period since 2016 (Frontex, 2023). In addition to that, from 2014 to 2019, European Union border coast authorities apprehended roughly 748,000 African migrants who were attempting to enter Europe by Land or Sea (Bolter, 2022b).

In general, migrants use numerous ways to reach safely to their destinations either by sea, land, or air. Even though alternative routes exist, most migrants enter the Maghrebi region overland from Agadez in Niger to Libya and Algeria. Historically, Agadez is situated as an important intersection of trade lines that today reach deep into West and Central Africa. Migration routes from Agadez bifurcate to the Sabha, Oasis in Libya to Tamanrasset in Southern Algeria (De Has, 2021). Meanwhile, in regards to methods used by migrants with the help of human traffickers. Furthermore, irregular migrants often move from southern Libya to Tripoli using coastal lines to reach Tunisia. Thus, Tripoli and Tunisia are common destinations for migrants. Migrants traveled by boat from the Mediterranean Sea to Malta, Lampedusa, and Pantalleria to Sicily in Italy (De Haas, 2021).

West and Central African migrants primarily use three main routes to reach Europe through North Africa. The central Mediterranean route goes from Niger, passing through Libya to reach the Italian offshore. The Western Mediterranean route passes through Mali and Algeria, where migrants may diverge towards either Tunisia or Morocco to reach the Spanish coastline. The third route, the West African route, connects The Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania, and Morocco to the Canary Islands of Spain (Bruni et al., 2017). Additionally, a small number of migrants use regular routes, which will be discussed in detail, including the developments and changes associated with them. The dynamic of migration paths and methods constantly keeps changing and evolving. Routes are prone to change due to the conditions in countries of origin, transit, and destination, this corresponds to current realities on the ground. West African

migrants, particularly the Gambians which our study will focus on, indicate that migrants start their journey taking different routes leading them to either use the legal routes from the Gambia to Latin America and then proceed to the United States (US) through Nigrargua since Europe has cracked down on immigration in general. African migrants and asylum seekers en route to the United States are utilizing Nicaragua as an entry point to circumvent the perilous Darien Gap, a densely forested isthmus linking Panama and Colombia. Numerous migrants reported learning about the alternative route through social connections and intermediaries involved in human trafficking (Diaz&Bott, 2023). According to The New York Times, hundreds of African migrants have been observed traveling via Columbia International Airport daily. These migrants often engage with traffickers, paying them an amount not less than 10,000 dollars for flight arrangements aiming to reach the United States of America (US). Interestingly, an investigation by the prominent online Media Fatu Network revealed the involvement of the political party leader of Gambia Action Party leader (GAP) in the traffic of young Gambians as he called empowering youths to travel which is contrary to the law of the Gambia that prohibited human trafficking. Even though they are legally traveling up to Columbia. However, many of these migrants are from West Africa. In addition to that New York Times report further highlighted that over 56 thousand people from Africa transited through Columbia only in 2023.

Meanwhile, these alternative routes for migrants to the US mean an influx of African migration will continue to exist as long as the global distribution of wealth, employment, and trade is only flourishing in the global North while the global South is still suffering in economic crisis and political upheaval. The African immigrants will be bound to look for alternatives hence we know irregular migration is a lucrative business for smugglers in origin and transit to the host country. Therefore, mitigating the surge of irregular migrants, in the long run, needs both the government, civil society, and community leaders to enlighten the populist the dangers of this journey and its negative impact on the country's future. On the other hand, some argue it has benefitted lots of households to boost their material status to better than it has before so in this lens migration regardless of whether been regular or irregular transformed societies in West Africa particularly Gambia where migrants contribute significantly in the economic activities of the country pumping huge remittances and stabling our foreign currency reserve.

3.5 EU- Gambia Bilateral relations

The Gambia and the European Union have enjoyed a long-standing cordial and friendly relationship for the past three decades. This relationship encompasses various areas varying; Agriculture, tourism, trade, budget support, capacity-building, etc. The Gambia is considered among the 10 most irregular migrant-sending countries in Europe. The European Union has embarked on some policy assessment that determines the external policy responses required to govern their external or bilateral migration governance framework. This commitment was adopted in the EU-Africa strategic policy in early 2021. The theme of this strategy is to strengthen the cooperation on immigration which would be shaped by a balanced, coherent, and comprehensive approach to mitigate irregular migration, guided by principles of solidarity, strong partnership, and commitment to share responsibilities within the framework of international law and respect for human rights. This paradigm shift in regards to EU cooperation and partnership pact with countries is to broaden and consolidate the already existing trust to deliver mutual benefits with sub-Saharan African Regional countries. The EU migration policy also centered on restrictive and preventive measures. The restrictive measures cover cooperation on border control, and fighting smugglers. The preventive measures include inclusive economic development and the offer of projects aimed at tackling the root cause of irregular migration. In the Gambia, the most common preventive measure is to help equip the youth through learning skills for enhanced job opportunities.

The EU's partnership with The Gambia dates back to 1976 and includes both developmental assistance and political dialogue. The objective is to help in poverty reduction and enhance the quality of life for the people of The Gambia (Abdou Rahman Sallah). Following two decades characterized by authoritarian leadership, the relations with the EU have deteriorated due to the continued gross violation of human rights and democratic backsliding of the Yahya Jammeh regime. However, by virtue of its position as a world power, the European Union is keen on fostering a close relationship with Africa and the Gambia in particular especially in areas of economic, trade, and migration. Yet, the cooperation between the EU and The Gambia extends beyond developmental aid. Annually, hundreds of thousands of European tourists experience the warmth of hospitality in The Gambia, known as the "Smiling Coast" of Africa. They significantly contribute to the economy by spending money, generating employment opportunities, and sustaining the livelihoods of numerous Gambian families (European Union External Services, 2019). Starting from August 2018, The Gambia has been

part of the European Partnership Agreement, granting Gambian products entry into a market comprising over 500 million consumers. Additionally, this agreement enables The Gambia to gradually open up to 85% of its market over 20 years (European Union External Services, 2019). this is another push factor of migration one can argue that such agreements force European importers upon the domestic markets of the African “partners” thereby damaging local production, especially in the Gambia.

The Gambia experienced a halt in involvement with international organizations during Yaya Jammeh's administration. However, the rise of President Barrow in 2016 led to a notable upsurge in aid and international support for the country from international organizations such as the EU (Ayeni & Drammeh, 2021). During Jawara's leadership, The Gambia adopted a pro-Western foreign policy, which resulted in substantial financial assistance from Western nations. Following the 1994 coup and subsequent sanctions imposed by Western powers, in addition, During Jammeh's regime, financial assistance to The Gambia dropped significantly due to his history of gross human rights abuses, besides his inclination to withdraw from international organizations, and expulsion of diplomats, which led to the estrangement of donors (Maclean & Jammeh, 2022). The Gambia pursued a notably assertive foreign policy strategy and succeeded in obtaining funding from alternative Western sources (Saine, 2000). In the same vein, after the unprecedented regime change, Barrow Government and the EU conducted a high-level political discussion based on ex-article 8 of the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) - EU Partnership (Cotonou) Agreement in Banjul, The Gambia, on January 10th, 2023, The EU and The Gambia reaffirmed their dedication to enhancing their political cooperation and continuing collaborative endeavors to fully implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of upholding the rules-based international order and promoting effective multilateralism with the United Nations at its core. Both parties recognized the necessity of enhancing monitoring mechanisms to ensure transparency and foster trust in the implementation of shared projects (Balajo, 2023, Point News, 2023). In 2019, after the Gambia government put a moratorium on the repatriation of her citizens from Germany, The Gambia continued to hold its position on not agreeing to receive deportees. Therefore, the EU began to put diplomatic pressure and also engaged in serious negotiations with the government of the Gambia. During this, the EU threatened to impose visa sanctions on the Gambia if it did not lift the moratorium. Consequently, the EU engaged in serious negotiations with the Gambia government. As anticipated, The Gambia government bowed down to the pressure and announced the lifting of the moratorium, but it did so without agreeing to accept any flights from the EU aimed at repatriation of migrants (Balajo, 2020).

Eventually, the EU put visa restrictions on Gambian officials as well as its citizens to make it even more impossible to enter the EU countries on top of that the visa fee skyrocketed from 80£ to 120£ processing time jumped from 15 working days to 3 months. The Gambia is one of 13 countries facing strict visa sanctions from the European Union due to their refusal to cooperate in repatriating citizens who have overstayed their visas in Europe. These sanctions entail raising the fees for Schengen visas and extending or removing the 15-day limit for processing visa applications to longer durations. The focus of these new restrictions is on government officials seeking to travel to Europe for business, medical treatment, or tourism (Sanna Camara, 2021). The Gambia is the only country that, the EU has imposed visa sanctions, which were established through an amendment to the EU Visa Code in 2019. Starting from 2021, Gambian nationals have experienced a longer processing time for Schengen visas, and as of 2022, they are required to pay a higher charge. The EU implemented these sanctions in response to widespread demonstrations in The Gambia, which led the government to impose a temporary ban on accepting deportations.

3.6 Migration Cooperation between the Gambia and the EU

The topic of migration and immigration remains a contentious discussion on the global stage and within European Union (EU) member nations. It stands out as one of the most urgent challenges prompting the European Union Commission to address the matter by developing regulations for member countries, aiming to establish effective and efficient immigration management (S Danso, I Soeparua 2020). Concurrently, Spain has entered into several migratory agreements with numerous nations, either to manage migration patterns or to enforce border control. The initial bilateral agreement regarding the repatriation of non-citizens was established with Morocco in 1992. Subsequently, Spain has entered into agreements with the following countries such as The Gambia, Algeria, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Niger, and Cabo Verde (*Venice Commission: Council of Europe*, n.d.). The agreement was effective in 2006, under the notion of the so-called "Plan Africa" which was implemented to regulate the southern border of the country. The protocol was signed in 2006 and 2007 with Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Cabo Verde are a direct outcome of this novel policy. These agreements share a consistent structure in terms of their contents, which encompass the acceptance of migrant workers, voluntary repatriation, integration of residents, migration and development, cooperation in combating irregular migration and human trafficking, and the readmission of individuals (*Venice Commission: Council of Europe*, n.d.).

The following countries are located in Africa: Algeria, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania,

Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Niger, and Cabo Verde. In the past ten years, the Gambia became the beacon of international migration in West Africa which gained international and European attention to take necessary action to address the situation. Yet, Migration issues commonly arise in both countries of origin and countries of destination for migrants. The issue of irregular immigration has sparked intense controversy along the whole Societal and political spectrum (H. Jelen, 2013).

Furthermore, the European Union (EU) is set to enhance its collaborative efforts with The Gambia in the realm of migration. The focus will be on strengthening both migration and border management cooperation, aligning with the principles outlined in the EU's "New Pact on Migration and Asylum." This collaboration is contingent upon The Gambia fulfilling its international commitments and agreements with the EU, particularly concerning the repatriation of Gambian nationals. Within the context of the migration partnership, there will be an emphasis on amplifying support for economic opportunities and addressing the underlying factors of irregular migration. This includes initiatives such as job creation within specific sectors (European Commission, 2021). This partnership will additionally promote collaboration and enhance the capacity to repatriate Gambian nationals returning from abroad. It will also persist in supporting reintegration efforts to ensure the long-term viability of these returns, aligning with the European Union's strategy on voluntary repatriation and reintegration. The collaboration will extend to actively involve the Gambian diaspora, focusing on areas such as investments, knowledge, and skills transfer, and efforts to minimize the expenses associated with remittances. Additionally, there will be a concerted effort to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking effectively. In addition to providing protection and help to migrants and those seeking asylum. Consistent with the updated EU action plan targeting migrant smuggling spanning from 2021 to 2025, there is a possibility of establishing Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnerships. The objective would be to enhance legal, policy, operational, and strategic frameworks within the country. Policy discussions with The Gambia will incorporate legal channels and mobility initiatives like Erasmus+. The goal is to establish mutually beneficial migration partnerships, implementing initiatives funded at national, regional, and global levels. Besides development cooperation through NDICI, other European Commission tools, EU member states, and EU agencies may enhance the migration partnership. This proposal suggests that EU member states establish bilateral mobility agreements with developing nations as a proactive measure to address migration challenges. These bilateral mobility partnerships will enable countries to regulate immigration policies based on their security and labor needs, fostering international collaboration and reducing irregular migration (U Do, T Huddleston

2009).

The Council has decided to temporarily suspend certain visa code clauses for individuals from The Gambia due to the nation's non-compliance with repatriating third-country nationals residing in the EU without proper authorization (European Council, 2021). The European Council and its members have emphasized the need for significant progress on return and readmission, advocating for the use of all necessary leverage, including visa policy.

Aleš Hojs, Minister for the Interior of Slovenia, stated, “No migration policy can function without the effective return of people who don't have the right to stay. All countries have a commitment under international law to the readmission of their nationals, and we expect this obligation to be honored. Today’s decision, the first implementation of the new framework, is a clear sign of our firm determination to use all necessary mechanisms to strengthen cooperation on readmission.”

The first Commission evaluation under the new mechanism was adopted on 10 February 2021. Based on this evaluation and subsequent consultation with third countries, in July 2021 the Commission proposed temporary visa rules for The Gambia, Bangladesh, and Iraq. The measures for Bangladesh and Iraq are currently under debate within the Council (Balajo, 2021). In 2019, the EU revised the visa code and added a mechanism to use visa processing as leverage in cooperation with third countries on readmission. Under this mechanism, the Commission routinely assesses third countries’ cooperation on readmission. If a state is not cooperating, the Commission proposes that the Council implement restrictive visa measures (European Council, 2021).

In 2019, The Gambia announced a ban on all deportation flights from the EU. Although West African governments are generally reluctant to assist with forced returns, such a moratorium was unprecedented and caused significant controversy within European diplomatic circles (Altrogge & Zanker, 2019). The Gambian government adopted the moratorium to prevent political disruption during a transition from a long dictatorship. The moratorium aimed to protect deportees from violent removal methods and served the broader interests of the Gambian community, where deportation is highly unpopular (Altrogge & Zanker, 2019). Achiume (2019) argued that economic migration should be accepted to address historical injustices and ongoing neo-colonial governance that led to extractive practices in Africa by European colonies. Under the former autocratic regime of Jammeh, non-cooperation on migration was justified by the neocolonial resistance frame through the lens of identity (Cham & Adam, 2023).

Overall, Cooperation between Europe and West Africa on migration is unlikely to benefit both sides. The disparity between European migration programs and local reality has led to unforeseen consequences for projects. The disparity between European migration programs and the actual circumstances on the ground has frequently led to projects yielding negative and unintended consequences. In Niger, as an example, the enforcement of the 2015 anti-smuggling law, backed by the EU, caused a disruption in the political and economic dynamics in the northern part of the country. This outcome resulted not only in immediate economic setbacks for individuals engaged in migrant transportation but also had adverse economic repercussions on the broader northern economy, raising apprehensions about regional stability (Molenaar et al., 2017). Moreover, these policies have resulted in migrants being compelled to take perilous routes and facing greater extortion at border crossings. Consequently, this has established an environment where safeguarding migrants and upholding their rights becomes increasingly challenging (OCHR, 2018). The adverse impacts of certain EU actions have huge negative consequences in the region and also have put a challenge on regional integration, a crucial factor that drives economic development in West Africa.

Arguably, one of the most instrumental tools of the EU to fight irregular migration is to establish bilateral agreements with migrant-sending countries. Most often these deals are mainly bilateral between one state or multi-lateral bringing multiple entities into the charter under the EU flagship. In the context of the former, various European states have made multiple bilateral arrangements with countries in West Africa and North Africa (Schapendonk, 2021). The case of the Gambia- Spain, Morocco and Spain, Libya- Italy, Nigeria, Italy and Mali- France. This agreement has become a crucial criterion for obtaining development aid. In fact, it is a sort of investment to tighten border control and push the readmission agenda in exchange for larger funding for development. These sought to be an informal approach for EU nations to attain some policy goals (Schapendonk, 2021).

The EU has prioritized both the security aspect and the preventive component to combat irregular migration through various collaboration structures. The preventive aspect carries a significant developmental implication. The rationale behind this preventive strategy is based on the idea that by enhancing aid and development in a specific geographic location, individuals are less likely to embark on exodus, often referred to as the root causes of migration. This underscores the enduring sedentary principles inherent in development theory, and this connection is not limited solely to migration agendas (Schapendonk, 2021 et al Backwell, 2007). Therefore, development is viewed as a key policy domain to hamper irregular migration. This premise, however, is extensively disputed by migration-development theorists arguing that

increased development does not necessarily lead to less migration.

The Gambia has suffered authoritarian rule under the leadership of Yahya Jammeh. The former has been ousted from power by the coalition government causing serious political logjam in the country, and Yahya relinquished power after ECOWAS intervention led by Nigeria. Concurrently, in this timeframe, irregular migration from this petite West African nation through the Sahara and the Mediterranean saw a significant increase, reaching its zenith with 8,400 arrivals in 2017 (IOM, 2017). Surprisingly, shortly after the political crisis with the dictator Yahya Jammeh going into exile in January 2017 European authorities opened up new paths of migration management for the Gambia (Schapendonk, 2021). In 2010 the Italian government signed a security cooperation agreement with The Gambia to fight illegal migration and human trafficking (Point, 2010). At the same time, in January 2021 the Gambia government and Switzerland signed a Cooperation Agreement on migration issues in the city of Berne. The signed Cooperation Agreement is aimed to combat irregular migration and provide adequate protection of the rights of Gambian people who are migrants in Switzerland. The Agreement will further promote cordial relationships between the Governments in identifying opportunities, coordinating, and managing difficulties attached to illegal migration. Also, the two states believe strengthening and deepening cooperation will further enhance the proper management of migration, dealing with unemployment, and creating greater prospects for women and youth in The Gambia. The authorities further reached an agreement for all undocumented Gambian migrants in Switzerland to be trained in livelihood skills to ease their integration into Swiss society (Council, n.d., Point, 2021).

3.7 Impacts and Effects of Irregular Migration

Immigration has tremendous economic benefits for households, especially in home countries. Astonishingly migrants start sending money once they arrive at their destination which brings lucrative economic progress for families. In general emigration at the individual level brings economic independence but the effect is not limited to that because it provides an interlink to supply labor and also closes the labor shortage for both receiving countries and provides job opportunities for sending countries in that sense migration impacts positively in global economy. The skill composition of labor in the country from which migrants originate and the degree to which labor may be effectively replaced are crucial factors that impact income and productivity (Katseli et al., 2006). In some circumstances, countries have transformed economically through skilled and technological transfer by migrants through the structural adjustment to advance mechanization in agriculture and also to incorporate new technical skills

in their home origins. Additionally, remittances significantly impact economic growth, and development as well as elevating communities from poverty line and inequality dilemma. Arguably, the demand and scale of migration could potentially have negative economic implications depending on the size of the economy particularly in countries experiencing population decline due to mass migration may encounter severe economic shrinkage. On the other hand, regions receiving an influx through migration may thrive rapidly, leading to increased output, employment, and income generation (Ozgen et al., 2010). Both the movement of labor and capital will reduce the disparity in capital intensities between the regions of origin and destination. This process may factor in mobility and contribute to the convergence of income between regions (Ozgen et al., 2010).

In the same vein, migration also has negative impacts on sending countries contrary to the positive impacts host countries have in terms of acquiring new skills and employing them in the labour market. Thus, these skilled workers will also be sending remittances to their home countries. In this lens, migration can be a win-win if it is properly managed by the parties involved in the phenomena. However, many developing countries are getting a great amount of the revenue in remittance sent by their diaspora, the Gambia and many West African countries are no exception to this discourse. Simultaneously, the region is losing many of its intellects in a so-called brain drain for many decades. Equally, if we invest in these young stars could help us to develop our countries. And further, to prevent a mass influx of youths and skills out of the country, we can only achieve that by creating more industries to create more employment opportunities and reviving our economic system to more of a production-based economy.

The Gambia is the smallest country in mainland Africa, with an estimated population of 2.4 million. yet, is one of the most significant contributors to irregular migration per capita (Suso, 2019). The Gambia is the tiniest landlocked country in Africa. With an estimated population of 2.4 million people. Yet, it is ranked as the third largest contributor to irregular migration its citizens are commonly known for undertaking irregular routes for exodus locally called “Backway” via the central Mediterranean Sea to Europe. This phenomenon is not new in the Gambia. However, irregular migration has been soaring tremendously during the last five years of Yahya Jammeh’s regime. Mobility is a key component of the Gambian society more to our economy. In recent reports, migrants remit a high amount of foreign currency to our economy almost 60 percent of the country’s GDP is from remittances (“Gambia Among Highest Recipients of Remittance,” 2023).

The intensification of migratory patterns, especially those of irregular and undocumented

migrants as well as trafficking migrants can be ascribed to extreme poverty and human deprivation, deteriorating social and economic conditions, also employment situations. The rapid growth of the population and unemployment significantly strained the development process in the region creating a conducive atmosphere for irregular migration. Notwithstanding, rapid socioeconomic conditions have left the young people's futures at stake, and have stimulated emigration. In these prevailing circumstances, poverty is a push factor, outflow is compelling many Africans to pull out of their respective countries to the global North to enhance their financial status and boost living conditions to their desires (Adepoju 1995b et al Vertovec 2009).

3.8 Repatriation and reintegration of migrants

Migration stands as a significant and contentious societal concern in the Gambia, which is vividly seen in the country's political landscape (Altrogge & Zanker, 2019). At the time, the political situation in Gambia remained highly unstable. Over the past decade, numerous Gambians departed the country primarily in pursuit of employment and educational prospects in Europe. Despite an unprecedented shift in political dynamics in the country, this trend persists. As the challenges of migrating to and settling in Europe intensify, the return of irregular migrants has become unavoidable. As cited in (Danso & Soeparna, 2022). Many young people from the Gambia embarked on journeys to European countries across the Mediterranean Sea in search of better opportunities. Unfortunately, some of these individuals lost their lives in the process, while others successfully reached their intended destinations. Nevertheless, the overall count of asylum applications in 2013 reached 434,160, marking a significant rise of approximately 100,000 applicants compared to the preceding year (Danso & Soeparna, 2022). According to (Frontex, 2019). Between 2009 and 2018, over 45,000 Gambians utilized irregular channels to reach the European Union, constituting more than 2% of the entire population of their home country. Among EU member states, Italy and Germany have emerged as the primary destinations for Gambian migrants since 2012, as indicated by Eurostat 2019a. Conversely, the number of Gambians in Great Britain remained relatively stable, and in Spain, there was even a slight decrease.

It has been argued in many researches the issue of migration has been highly politicized particularly, the repatriation of unwanted migrants who are illegally residing in Europe and America (Altrogge & Zanker, 2019). During the peak years of the Mediterranean migration crisis, between 2014 and 2017, a small proportion of the 40,000 Gambians arrived in Europe by sea, many of whom were granted refugee status (Hunt, 2020 et al Joof, 2022) due to the

dictatorship nature of Yaya Jammeh's government. Additionally, many European countries have been strengthening their asylum regulations, viewing The Gambia's transition to democracy as a chance to enhance repatriations. The pace of returns from Germany increased following the Gambian government's agreement to enhance collaboration with the EU on repatriations through a non-binding agreement termed a "good practice" accord reached in May 2018 (Standard, 2018). Consequently, Thousands of additional Gambians face the possibility of being repatriated from various other European countries, although deportations from Italy and Spain have been minimal (Hunt, 2020). According to the European Stability Initiative report (2019). In Germany alone, about an estimated 2,600 Gambians are facing immediate deportation, with an additional 6,000 estimated to be at risk of return. Overall, around 10,000 Gambians residing in Germany could potentially be subject to repatriation if their asylum claim has not been approved. However, Gambia has been the at forefront of cooperating in the readmission of its citizens from Germany than any other state in West Africa. In a year 144 Gambians return which is the highest number of deportees from Germany to Africa (European Stability Initiative, 2019). The primary reason why migrant-sending states might be reluctant to cooperate on return and readmission is the high costs involved and the lack of appropriate incentives. However, this issue is often sensitive for political leaders in these countries. Cooperation, which is normally perceived by pupils as submission, thus, is likely not beneficial either for the country's economic interests, as it disrupts the flow of remittances, or political interests, as it may alienate the electorate.

Interestingly, accepting returning individuals may be viewed as an imminent threat to a security concern. For example, taking back disillusioned young men, who are sometimes stereotyped as unsuccessful migrants and criminals, may be considered risky by leaders in fragile states. While the extent to which deportees pose a threat to the state varies, in some cases, these concerns may be valid particularly in the Gambian context, as we see the rise in burglary, and robbery by disgruntled young men who are jobless and most often are under the influence of the drug. A viable example of that is the case of a deported migrant who is somehow mentally unstable and killed his father in Brikama has spiked concerns about the country's preparedness to accommodate the returnees of her citizens from European countries.

Hence, undocumented migrants are vulnerable because they lack sufficient legal, social, and Media representation, and thus their voice is muted. As a result, there is biased and unfavorable coverage of their lives and actions by the media, particularly mainstream media outlets. This combination of media continuous criticism and retributive government measures contributes to the marginalization of refugees and causes them to be subject to social

segregation in host countries. This reflects the challenges faced by Gambian migrants who have endured dehumanizing treatment prior to their deportation to The Gambia. Being apprehended at their places of work or study and subsequently imprisoned without due process is unlawful. Authorities persistently infringe upon their human rights by forcibly chaining their hands and legs for deportation, yet such occurrences are seldom reported by the media, which often align with the authorities' agenda and policies (Onifade & Kebbeh, 2024). The mainstream media has mostly ignored the efforts of undocumented asylum seekers and supportive organizations leading anti-deportation campaigns. This lack of coverage contributes to the negative labeling and profiling of undocumented migrants by citizens and legal residents of their host countries. Media attention toward deportation campaigns tends to be more favorable compared to anti-deportation efforts, perpetuating the negative portrayal of undocumented migrants and often leading to unfounded accusations of criminal behavior against them (Onifade & Kebbeh, 2024 et al Patler & Gonzales, 2015). Undocumented immigrants encountered various obstacles that endangered both themselves and their families. The difficulties they faced in navigating immigration procedures to obtain documentation, along with societal discrimination and poverty, contributed to their mental health struggles. The psychological well-being of immigrants is often overlooked by the public and the media due to the adverse impact of interpersonal, racial, and political trauma they experience. Many immigrants who were unable to effectively manage the circumstances subsequently experienced a state of mental disorder. If the matter is not addressed it will create lots of societal problems which inevitably jeopardize peace and security of the country in the long run. Therefore, it is imperative for the government of the Gambia and all state agencies to cooperate and put tangible strategies to help the successful reintegration of migrants back home. The million-dollar question is will the Gambia be willing to do alone such a big project which needs a huge chunk of funding despite struggling with economic turmoil since Yaya Jammeh left the country after the 2016 election defeat. However, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other development partners' intervention was significant and timely in helping the government of the Gambia in their efforts to migration governance, and even initiating policies to guide these efforts are commendable but not sufficient enough to completely address the problem. Many people criticized the durability and efficiency of the project because it did not make any significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of the returnees nor did the scope of the program satisfy the financial independence of the migrants. Additionally, some migrants who want to voluntarily return home are beginning to be reluctant to make such a decision in the absence of a clear roadmap to meet their financial and employment expectations in the Gambia. Similarly, after the post-Jammeh regime, many

young Gambians anticipate that the so-called new Gambia will be a haven for youths with lots of hope causing a significant drop in irregular migration phenomenon. This reality never materialized and pushed young people to embark massively on irregular migration using different routes and methods to enter Europe at any cost.

In the current situation of the European refugee political environment, irregular migrants from West Africa are often considered the least prioritized group, sometimes labeled as economically motivated migrants seeking to ameliorate their living standards (Embiricos, 2016). In general, we could anticipate Political authorities in the Gambia and other West African countries employ security framing or conditions as a basis for their refusal to cooperate on deportation (Cham & Adam, 2023). Another tangible reason the government can argue for non-cooperation is considering the significance of a youthful and energetic workforce for a country's progress, labor arguments might be employed to support decisions regarding cooperation or non-cooperation on deportations. This might be done by emphasizing the necessity to maintain the labor requirements of the country of origin and to prevent the loss of skilled workers (Cham & Adam, 2023). Furthermore, according to Cham & Adam 2023, et al. 2020), a political interest or election frame is likely to emerge as logical reasoning not to cooperate, in addition to economic, security, and labor-related issues. In this context we can contemplate the government of the Gambia's initial non-cooperation on the deportation of her citizens in 2019 and put a moratorium because of the public outrage on the issue, the political actors decided to uphold the deportation process to maintain political balance at the week of an election. In the end, the matter is more of safeguarding the political interest, maintaining the status quo to win neither to lose the election nor even popular support in the political sphere of the country (Cham & Adam, 2023). Ultimately, the new administration under the leadership of Adama Barrow was willing to position itself as a trustworthy and lawful country aimed to gain EU and international support by committing to upholding the democratic values and rule of law following the recent transition. Notwithstanding one can argue that the deportation exists due to the financial pledges by European partners. Additionally, A significant number of Gambian nationals residing in Europe are presently experiencing an unparalleled state of apprehension, causing panic, skepticism, and ambiguity regarding the immediate threat of deportation. This sentiment is fueled by the demands of senior government officials within the European Union and other regions urging for the prompt expulsion of undocumented migrants (Point, 2023). This came along after the Minister of Foreign Affairs debunked his government's agreement with the EU on the repatriation of Gambian nationals. In contrast, the Swiss government announced signing a bilateral agreement with the Gambia on operational cooperation to repatriate Gambian

nationals who are living in Switzerland illegally. In a statement by the Federal Council of the Swiss government “During the official visit to Bern by a delegation from the Republic of The Gambia, led by Vice President Isatou Touray, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis and Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter signed two cooperation agreements on civil aviation and migration on 12 January. The migration pact enables Switzerland and The Gambia to enhance their efforts in combating irregular migration”. Furthermore, recently, the talk on the lips of everyone is centered on the problem of repatriation of Gambians from the European continent, notably Germany. Many people are anxious about it and have voiced their concern on several occasions (Standard, 2019).

To an extent, some people claim that the authorities of The Gambia have made a deal with the European countries to bring her citizens back home. On the other hand, the government denied the accusation that they had not made any agreements concerning deportation. The primary reason for concern is, of course, the current state of security situation in the Gambia. As the prevalence of unemployment is very high, especially among young people, a large group of migrants returning home, most of whom are young, could worsen the situation and make the country less safe. Besides, it's also true that European governments are currently submerged under more and more pressure to remedy the ongoing issue of migration, in which their people express their dissatisfaction with how the phenomenon costs them jobs and makes them less safe. In my view, I think to ascertain progress, both the government of The Gambia and European authorities need to engage in open and transparent discussions to resolve issues concerning both sides without compromising or undermining the peace and stability of any nation. The European Union and other international organizations seek peace and tranquility for The Gambia and the entire African nation; this could only be achieved if the parties work closely to mitigate the phenomena in a manner that will safeguard the interests of African States, the EU as well as migrants.

Meanwhile, IOM defines assisted voluntary return and reintegration as the provision of administrative, logistical, and financial assistance to migrants who are unable or unwilling to stay in the host country and voluntarily choose to go back to their countries of origin. This support may also include reintegration assistance (UNHCR, 2022). However, the contentiousness of debts by returning migrants is crucial for building a more inclusive and stronger society in The Gambia. Being in a state of indebtedness can greatly affect the capacity of migrants to reintegrate effectively into their original communities (IOM, 2022). According to IOM over 4955 Gambians benefitted from the reintegration program from 2017 to 2022. Return and reintegration support initiatives in The Gambia faced considerable obstacles but also

accomplished significant triumphs. During a period of significant political change in a nation, governmental entities and international allies effectively worked together to handle the repatriation of migrants and support their reintegration. This cooperation between the government and international partners allows for the quick mobilization of necessary resources to address the challenges posed by returning migrants and their reintegration process (Zani, 2022). In 2017, a Joint initiative worth 3.9€ million Euros signed by the government of the Gambia, IOM, and EU aimed for the protection and reintegration of return migrants, a three-year initiative supported by the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa of the European Union seeks to assist 1,500 migrants returning to The Gambia with their reintegration. The project seeks to tackle the difficulties experienced by migrants from The Gambia and help them successfully reintegrate into their home communities. Through offering tailored assistance and support, the goal is to support the government of Gambia and strengthen its ability to address the needs of vulnerable migrants effectively (Balajo, 2019). Upon their return to their home country, migrants may face various obstacles that can affect their reintegration into society and have a ripple effect on other community members. These difficulties may encompass limited employment prospects, particularly for those who have gained specialized skills or work experience abroad (Dampha, 2020). However, a reintegration program designed to create befitting economic, and employment opportunities for youths, this structural adjustment aimed to empower youths through a project called (YEP) youth empowerment project equipping the women and youths with skills to enhance their financial capabilities in building productive markets for more job opportunities for young Gambians. Additionally, IOM provides training programs aimed at offering financial support to returnees, mainly for micro businesses which was seen as a better option by 84% of the beneficiaries of the project (IOM, 2022 to be referenced). Delays in providing support for reintegrating into society can present considerable hurdles to the successful reintegration of returning individuals. Those who have been sent back or chosen to return to their home countries often encounter various barriers and hardships as they work to reconstruct their lives (Laura ZANI, 2022, Atnafu & Adamek, 2018). This may involve challenges in securing employment, accessing healthcare and education services, finding suitable housing, or reuniting with family members. These difficulties are further compounded by delays in receiving reintegration assistance.

In the Gambia, returnees are mostly seen as unsuccessful people in their communities; they are predominantly stigmatized for returning empty-handed. Migrants return to a harsh environment, in which they encounter severe financial, social, and psycho-social hurdles. These difficulties vary by the expectations that society places and represent the prevalent gender roles.

Moreover, the reintegration of individuals returning to their home country is a multifaceted and intricate process that demands involvement and assistance from various stakeholders, such as governments, communities, and families (Sins, 2023). Ultimately, the main drivers of migration in the Gambia are extreme poverty and economic opportunities which may impede several youths from sustaining in families they belong to.

The necessity of securing employment is not solely driven by the need for survival but also serves as a demonstration of returnees' practical value (Paolo Leotti, 2022 needs to be referenced). Another important factor contributing to the integration program is the economic strife most of the returnees face in their home origin not to mention the societal views and attitudes toward returnees profiling them as failures as well as treating them as strangers that sentiment gives them physiological trauma and sense of feeling being an outsider within their communities.

Furthermore, the mental health of returning individuals is a challenging aspect of their process of reintegrating. Issues related to psychological well-being, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, can significantly impact their ability to find employment opportunities. As well as starting a new beginning, and reconnecting with loved ones (Migrant Reintegration: A Journey of Challenges and Hope in the Gambia, n.d.). The number one challenge problem of joblessness among individuals returning to The Gambia presents the difficulty that requires attention. Even after enduring the dangers and difficulties of migration, many returnees struggle to secure employment upon their arrival in The Gambia. This hinders their ability to reintegrate into society and reconstruct their livelihoods.

In summary, this chapter highlights the migration governance in the Gambia and the government's efforts to combat irregular migration through agreements with individual European countries and regional bodies. The chapter emphasizes the importance of strengthening Gambia-EU bilateral relations to ensure mutual benefits, particularly in migration cooperation, to address challenges and create safe, legal migration avenues for Gambians. Migration in West Africa, including the Gambia, has historically not been a top agenda item for regional countries until the recent surge in migration patterns made it a regional and international issue. Migration is deeply embedded in the West African cultural fabric, particularly in the Gambia.

This chapter examines the root causes and methods of irregular migration in the Gambia, as well as its economic and social impacts. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the socio-economic, political, and psychological impacts of deportation on returnees and the potential

security challenges for the Gambia if the issue is not properly managed with appropriate policy guidance. The government's efforts and international cooperation are crucial in addressing these complex dynamics and ensuring sustainable migration governance.



CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Through systematic in-depth interviews and questionnaires, our research identified several common themes regarding the motivations driving Gambian youth to undertake perilous journeys to Europe. The predominant factors identified include unemployment, poverty, peer influence, and wage disparities. These factors, though manifested in various ways, collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind these young individuals embarking on such dangerous ventures.

This section presents the outcomes of our study, supplemented by insights from existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Given the substantial amount of data collected, we have structured our findings into two key sections to effectively present and analyze the most pertinent themes. First, we explore and analyze the "push factors" behind the phenomenon of youth illegal migration, known locally as "Backway," to understand the motivations and impacts on the youths and the nation. Second, we investigate mechanisms to mitigate the Backway syndrome in The Gambia. Finally, we offer perspectives and recommendations on the role of The Gambia in discouraging youth migration and highlighting the dangers of such journeys, emphasizing employment as a cornerstone for youth empowerment and preventing brain drain. The findings are as follows:

4.1 Motivation and Push Factors

When asked about the main driving forces for young people to migrate to Europe, the majority of respondents highlighted that the primary motivation behind youth irregular migration is unbearable economic and financial hardship. Many young people feel an obligation to elevate their families from poverty to a state of peace, prosperity, and respect within their communities. Social pressure also plays a significant role, as families often financially support their young members' migration efforts. A sense of moral obligation to support their families was a recurring theme among respondents. "The testimony, (respondent 1, male 25) mentioned that his decision to migrate was driven by observed familial divisions and inequality. Despite his efforts to contribute, he felt undervalued compared to his siblings in Europe." Equally, "(Respondent 6 Male, 22) cited extreme poverty and the lack of assistance for his family as the impetus for his risky journey". Peer influence was also noted, with one interviewee stating that "seeing childhood friends successfully support their families from abroad motivated him to seek similar respect and

treatment. Others felt immense pressure and a moral obligation to fulfill their family's expectations" according to (respondent 3 male, 18). "The primary reason is the economy. Young people in the Gambia face limited opportunities. They struggle to find employment and earn a living. How are they supposed to survive? This drives them to take significant risks and migrate..." (Respondent 14, Male, 27). "I believe young people don't necessarily want to go to Europe, but they feel compelled to due to the economic difficulties..." (Respondent 2, Female, 27) also emphasized. Also sense of responsibility is considered a motivative factor "I could support myself in one way or another. But what about my family? My mother and my siblings? They expect me to provide for them. I have a responsibility to support them..." (Respondent 11, Male, 28)

Routes, Processes, and Cost Items of Migration

When asked the participant to explain the route you took to migrate and the challenges you faced during your journey. Respondents unanimously described the journey as fraught with danger, though individual experiences varied slightly. (Respondent 4, Male, 20) says began their journey from "Baraa" near Banjul and faced fewer challenges compared to those traveling overland through Senegal, Mali, and beyond. Others described extensive bribery and financial exploitation by security officers in transit countries, with francophone citizens receiving preferential treatment over anglophone migrants emphasizing his dismay at the level of segregation at the crossing points. Meanwhile, this indicates that ECOWASE protocol for free movement of people is not fully implemented practically by the member states.

In the same vein, "(Respondent 5, Male, 19) shared harrowing experiences of starvation, being stranded without resources, and navigating dangerous territories controlled by rebel and armed groups both in Mali and Libya has left him with trauma that cannot be repaired he emphasis that he never experienced that in his home country". However, (respondent 6, Male, 21) "recounted months of hiding from police surveillance in Algeria and Tunisia amid anti-emigrant rhetoric, while another spoke of spending days at sea in an overcrowded boat without food or water"

Upon asking How much money did the journey cost you? Can you provide a breakdown of the main cost items, The journey's cost is prohibitively high for an average Gambian. One interviewee estimated spending around 2000 euros, transiting through multiple countries. Others, who traveled directly from the Gambian coast, spent approximately 1000 euros. Some respondents faced higher expenses due to being scammed by traffickers or having to pay bribes, with costs reaching up to 5000 euros.

Difficulties and Experiences

Upon asking, were you working before embarking on the journey? If yes, what sort of job were you doing and were your earnings sufficient, most respondents were either students or unemployed. A few were engaged in petty trading, seasonal farming, or family businesses. For instance, one interviewee worked as a manager in a family business and expressed regret over his decision to migrate, citing societal pressures. Others were seasonal farmers earning insufficient incomes, which pushed them to migrate.

When asking Since you arrived in Europe, have you been working? What is your current job, Responses varied, with some interviewees working in agricultural farms in Italy. One interviewee worked in tourism and rescue services. However, many respondents were living in refugee camps, learning languages, and awaiting asylum decisions.

Expectations and Recommendations

Upon asking them if they will be willing to recommend this journey to your fellow young Gambians? If yes, why, Unanimously, respondents advised against undertaking the journey. One interviewee expressed regret, having spent years in a refugee camp with multiple asylum rejections. “I would not recommend the journey even to my enemy” (respondent 12, Male 20). highlighting the disrespect and trauma faced by those who return home without success. “Backway is the enemy and obstacle to the progress of the Gambia and many of my age mates lost their lives in the process therefore I cannot not recommend it to anyone and in fact, I am now a vocal person and migrant activist advocating and discouraging youths for youths to stay at home” (Respondent 1, Male 25)

Solutions

When asking in your opinion, what can curb migration and how can it be done, Respondents unanimously agreed that creating employment opportunities is crucial. (Respondent,10, Male 24) says “Suggested building industries with reasonable wages to mitigate the migration phenomenon”. While emphasized government intervention to address the root causes of migration, and save the brain drain is essential for long-term economic development in the Gambia according to (Respondent 6, Male, 18) while another advocated for “significant investment in youth empowerment and viable projects to discourage irregular migration pattern in the Gambian youths thinking” according to (Respondent, 13, Male, 29).

Skepticism

When asked if they entered Europe legally or illegally? “I thought I was here not illegally because I left my country to be able to attain financial independence do not think taking the journey is illegal” (Respondent 15, Male 26) However, all respondents admitted entering Europe illegally, expressing frustration over the difficulties of legal entry. (Respondent 1, Male, 25) attributes this to “extreme visa restrictions and the high rejection rate of visas for Africans. He describes how these barriers make it nearly impossible to migrate to Europe legally, leading many young Africans to resort to the "Backway." He argues that since Europe colonized and extorted African resources to build their economies, it's now time for Africans to benefit from what their forefathers built with their sweat”

Summary

The research revealed that economic difficulties, unemployment, and poverty are the primary drivers of emigration from The Gambia to Europe. The sense of responsibility towards one's family is a significant push factor, aligned with the neoclassical theory of migration. Peer influence and traditional expectations also play crucial roles. The journey is dangerous, commercialized by various actors, and costly, necessitating significant financial support from families. Most migrants, despite reaching Europe, remain unemployed or face significant challenges integrating into their new environment. None of the respondents would recommend the journey, emphasizing the need for substantial industrialization and youth employment initiatives in The Gambia to curb irregular migration.

In conclusion, addressing the root causes of migration through comprehensive socio-economic development strategies is essential to mitigate the Backway phenomenon and ensure the well-being and prosperity of Gambian youth.

Our research highlights the complex and multifaceted motivations driving young Gambians to embark on perilous journeys to Europe. Through in-depth interviews, we identified economic and financial hardships as the primary catalysts for migration, compounded by social pressures and a deep-seated sense of moral obligation to support families. The journeys themselves are fraught with challenges, including extortion, dangerous sea crossings, and prolonged stays in transit countries under harsh conditions. The financial burden of these journeys

is significant, often requiring substantial support from families and friends.

The employment status of migrants before their departure varies, with most being students or unemployed, while a few were engaged in small-scale business or farming activities. The desperation stemming from limited opportunities in the Gambia drives many to seek better prospects abroad, often through illegal means due to the perceived barriers to legal entry. Once in Europe, the experiences of migrants differ, with some finding employment and stability, while others endure long periods in refugee camps awaiting asylum. Despite the varied outcomes, there is a unanimous regret among respondents regarding the dangers and difficulties faced during their journeys. This sentiment leads them to advise against such migration and highlights the urgent need for alternative solutions. To address the root causes of irregular migration, our respondents overwhelmingly suggest the creation of more employment opportunities within the Gambia. They advocate for government investment in youth empowerment projects, fair salary scales, and the establishment of industries to provide viable alternatives to migration. These measures are seen as crucial to curbing the "Backway" phenomenon and preventing the associated risks and brain drain.

In conclusion, our findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to improve economic conditions and create sustainable opportunities for young people in the Gambia. By addressing these issues at their source, it is possible to mitigate the factors driving irregular migration and offer young Gambians hope for a better future within their own country. The Gambian government and international stakeholders must prioritize youth-centric policies and programs that address the underlying socio-economic issues prompting migration. Collaborative efforts are needed to enhance educational opportunities, vocational training, and job creation initiatives tailored to the specific needs and skills of Gambian youth. Furthermore, fostering a supportive environment for entrepreneurship and small businesses can empower young people to create their own opportunities and reduce the allure of migration.

Additionally, it is crucial to raise awareness about the dangers of irregular migration and provide accurate information about the risks involved. Community engagement and education campaigns can help shift perceptions and encourage young Gambians to pursue viable alternatives within their own country.

Strengthening regional cooperation and partnerships with neighboring countries can also play a pivotal role in managing migration flows and ensuring the safety and well-being of migrants. Enhanced border security measures, along with fair and humane treatment of migrants, are essential to prevent exploitation and abuse during their journeys.

Finally, addressing corruption and improving governance are fundamental to creating an

environment where young people feel they have a future in the Gambia. Transparent and accountable leadership, combined with robust anti-corruption measures, can restore trust in government institutions and encourage investment in the country's development.

By implementing these strategies, the Gambia can create a brighter future for its youth, reducing the need for dangerous migration routes and fostering a prosperous and stable society. The collective effort of the government, communities, and international partners is vital to achieving these goals and ensuring that young Gambians can thrive within their homeland.



CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research aims to understand the impact of irregular migration on existing EU-Gambia relations and its effects on migrants. The study deemed it very important to examine and contribute to the existing literature on what are the fundamental causes of the Gambian undertaking irregular migration locally known as “Backway”. Furthermore, the study selected the semi-structured research method to interview and collect primary data. After carefully transcribing the data. In this study, I selected four suitable theories that complement our efforts to analyze the data we acquired in our case study. Notwithstanding, the theories cover motivation, expectation, and the decision to undertake the Backway, possible inputs that can mitigate or keep its continuation.

The primary data of our research has shown that in many instances financial and economic hardship stimulate the decision of the young stars to embark on a migration journey. However, the decision defers to an individual or at the family level depending on the circumstance unfolding. Most often, the decision warrants some families to liquidate their assets or to make some of their properties collateral to sponsor the journey of their selected household members. It's common in the Gambia for households to send their sons and daughters abroad anticipating securing and guaranteeing financial security this practice is considered a form of investment and surety to households as explained in new economic theory. However, this theory does not perceive migration as the only tool for income security or generation but rather a leverage to diversify income. On the other hand, migrants and experts all affirmed that households persuaded that investing in migration brings more remittances and boosts income generated revenue that they will not make in the Gambia.

Furthermore, the acquired data also indicate that migrants and their enablers meticulously calculate the cost-benefit before deciding to migrate to Europe. Simultaneously, the decision to undertake “Backway” was mostly influenced by a peer, and social pressure as well as the family, in contrast, the decision is predominately an individual choice aiming to maximize their income as a rational choice explained by neo-classical theory.

In the same vein, migrant networks also play a vital role in influencing potential migrants' decision-making and invaluable contribute to easing their journey to their destination

of preference. Network theory further illustrates that migrants migrate to the destination where they have social ties because this network serves as a structural framework to aid the migration process smoothly. Through our interviews, our data shows that these networks facilitate and pave the way for potential migrants loading them with necessary information about the routes the cost of the journey, deviation of security points, and mitigation of obstacles. Also, provide them with the contacts of the smugglers. Sometimes they even assist either by cash or kind according to the interviewees. In the Gambia, people hold high regard and respect for those who live in Europe because they are seen as defector drivers of the economy and social welfare of their families and communities respectively. Nonetheless, emigrants do not only remit money but also uplift and improve households' social status and upgrade their reputation and influence as new economic theories argued. As a result, those who are hesitant to migrate and remain home are always sitting in a hot pot due to family, social, and peer pressure, thus, this behavior continues to be marginalized and stigmatize young men forcing them to undertake a “Backway” journey against their own will. In certain communities, your social status is determined by your wealth or the number of household members living abroad to earn high-- regard social status.

Importantly, a large portion of the Gambian society's household income depends on remittances nowadays, it is almost impossible to see a house without a so-called “Semester” referring to those living in the West. Additionally, remittances are a pathway to usher development and effectively provide comfort and a dream lifestyle for households to build their compound and live in dignity and respect. Remittances also serve as capital for startups and businesses for many families to maintain financial stability.

Despite the scope of the research being small and we cannot incorporate all the data in the findings I found it deemed important to systematize in themes interestingly I found out that my primary findings tally with the secondary data that most of the Gambian primarily emigrate for an economic reason because the environment is not favorable for young Gambians to strive. However, the push factors for Gambians to emigrate are unbearable economic conditions, extreme poverty, and unemployment. Therefore, “Backway” is an alternative to Excel from a desperate situation and moved to Europe where they believed wages were better as explained by neoclassical economic theory. In my findings, I understood some of these migrants tried legal routes and failed due to strict visa policies and high rejection. Another important finding is that EU- Gambia bilateral relations were recently affected after a long halt in the relationship

in the previous regime but it has improved after 2016 in the democratic dispensation of the Barrow governments.

Furthermore, data shows that most immigrants are unemployed or students drop out of school due to financial constrain. in parallel, in my primary data participants unanimously agreed that irregular migration patterns can be curbed in the Gambia in a sense that if more industries are created complemented with the attractive salary scale this argument is confirmed by the neoclassical economic theory argument people migrate where they belief wages are good and can meet their needs. Arguably, if the unemployment problem is solved many young men and women would have to stay without risking their lives to take this expensive and perilous journey. In the same vein, in our research, none of our respondents are willing to recommend this journey to anyone because is dangerous and difficult so many people died in the process some even end up having mental disorders, and trauma some are even homeless even after arriving in Europe. Many of them are jobless because they do not have the necessary skill set to settle that will qualify them to fit in the labor market of European society.

Importantly, data and analysis will enhance our efforts in making informed steps in crafting policies that are responsive to current migration trends and challenges in the Gambia and suggest possible solution mechanisms in the form of policy recommendations on how to tackle the irregular migration phenomenon in the Gambia. In this regard, the Gambia is a small country with lots of potential if the government reorganizes and engages in institutional sector reform especially sectors that pomp lots of revenue in our economy. Importantly, we will give some policy recommendations that can help the country to strategize policies that can transform the country's development, and economic aspiration into desirable ways in that the welfare of the citizens will thrive to prevent more brain drain and irregular migration in the Gambia. The researcher recommends as follows:

- 1- The Government should create a youth investment fund to encourage them to venture into entrepreneurship, Agribusiness, and live and animal husbandry across the five regions of the Gambia. Additionally, strengthening professional sectors with the necessary skill sets that could guarantee lifelong careers and improve productivity can effectively address illegal migration and uphold the economic aspiration of the citizens.
- 2- Agriculture is one of the vital sectors of the country's economy, therefore, we should shift from traditional substantial farming to modern and mechanized applying technology to increase production. Also, the government should create the Agricultural

Investment Bank to support farmers with loans, credits, and fertilizers to guarantee food security.

- 3- Effective communication between the government and the citizens listening to their concerns and engaging them on issues of national concerns like irregular migration can be addressed if enough media coverage is dedicated to the phenomena in the form of civic education radio, and television programs to sensitize the public on the issue that will help to discourage potential migrants.
- 4- The Gambia and the EU should work firmly to grant migrants not eligible for asylum to make bilateral arrangements to grant temporal asylum to stay where the EU will ensure to train and equip them with the necessary skill set before any deportation process. This will help to make the reintegration process back home smooth and productive.

The research also recommended the establishment of a task force dedicated to information sharing is crucial for enhancing collaboration between The Gambia and the EU. This task force should periodically review and discuss irregular migration issues to ensure a well-coordinated response. Additionally, regular dialogue and consultations between relevant stakeholders from The Gambia and the European Commission are recommended to ensure effective communication and policy alignment.

It is also important to provide comprehensive training programs for Gambian immigration personnel and other law enforcement agencies. These training packages should focus on enhancing operational capabilities in managing migration, border control, and combating human trafficking. Moreover, both parties should work on providing technical assistance and mobilizing necessary resources to improve the operational efficiency of The Gambia's immigration management system. This includes implementing biometric data systems, upgrading border security infrastructure, and developing advanced border management tools.

Simultaneously, reinforcing legal migration pathways is essential to promote and increase legal migration to the EU. Initiatives such as seasonal worker programs, work permits, and student visas can offer safe and regulated alternatives to irregular migration. Additionally, expediting the visa application process for Gambians by opening visa application centers in The Gambia can ensure accessibility without compromising transparency and standard procedures.

The research underscores that migration is multifaceted and cannot be managed by a single entity alone. Irregular migration is a transnational issue that requires collaborative

efforts between origin, transit, and destination countries. Strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships between the EU and The Gambia, as well as between the EU and regional countries, is imperative. Lessons learned from this research highlight the need for comprehensive, cooperative, and multi-dimensional approaches to effectively address irregular migration. It is essential for countries to cooperate to better manage migration flows and mitigate the challenges associated with irregular migration.

The prospects for The Gambia-EU bilateral relationship within the framework of irregular migration are promising, provided that both parties adopt a comprehensive and cooperative approach. By focusing on economic development, legal migration pathways, regional cooperation, and community-based initiatives, The Gambia and the EU can effectively manage migration flows and address the underlying causes of irregular migration. This partnership holds the potential to not only curb irregular migration but also to promote sustainable development and prosperity in The Gambia.

This research aims to elucidate the effects of irregular migration on the EU-Gambia relationship and its impact on migrants. By examining and contributing to existing literature, the study investigates the fundamental causes of irregular migration from The Gambia, locally referred to as "Backway." The research employs a semi-structured interview methodology to collect primary data, which is meticulously transcribed and analyzed. Four theories were selected to complement our efforts in understanding the motivations, expectations, and decisions underlying the Backway phenomenon, as well as potential strategies to mitigate its continuation.

Financial and Economic Hardships as Drivers of Migration

Primary data reveals that financial and economic hardships are significant factors motivating young Gambians to embark on migration journeys. The decision to migrate often varies at individual and family levels, depending on specific circumstances. Many families liquidate assets or use properties as collateral to sponsor a household member's journey. This practice is seen as an investment, aligning with the new economic theory, which posits that migration serves as a means to diversify income rather than solely as a tool for income security. Migrants and experts affirm that families perceive migration as a pathway to increased remittances, which substantially boost household income, an assertion supported by new economic theories.

Cost-Benefit Analysis and Peer Influence

Data indicates that potential migrants and their enablers perform meticulous cost-benefit analyses before deciding to migrate to Europe. Decisions to undertake the Backway are influenced by peers, social pressure, and family expectations. However, these decisions are primarily individual choices aimed at maximizing income, as explained by neoclassical economic theory. Migrant networks also play a crucial role in influencing potential migrants, providing essential information, contacts of smugglers, and even financial or material support. Network theory illustrates that migrants prefer destinations where they have social ties, facilitating a smoother migration process.

Social Status and Remittances

In Gambian society, high regard and respect are accorded to individuals living in Europe, who are seen as key drivers of their families' economic and social welfare. Remittances uplift household social status, enhance reputations, and provide capital for startups and businesses. Despite the dangers of the journey, the socio-economic benefits of remittances make migration a desirable option for many households.

Economic Conditions and Migration Trends

The primary findings align with secondary data, indicating that economic conditions are a primary driver of Gambian migration. Severe economic hardship, extreme poverty, and high unemployment rates make the Backway an appealing alternative for young Gambians seeking better opportunities in Europe, where wages are perceived to be higher, as supported by neoclassical economic theory. Legal migration attempts often fail due to strict visa policies and high rejection rates.

EU-Gambia Relations and Policy Recommendations

The EU-Gambia bilateral relationship has improved since the democratic transition in 2016, following a period of strained relations. Most migrants are unemployed or have dropped out of school due to financial constraints. Participants agree that creating more industries with attractive salaries could curb irregular migration. Addressing unemployment could deter young men and women from risking their lives on perilous journeys.

None of the respondents recommend the Backway journey due to its dangers, including death, mental health issues, and homelessness. Many migrants struggle to find employment in Europe due to a lack of necessary skills.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Youth Investment Fund:** The government should establish a youth investment fund to encourage entrepreneurship, agribusiness, and livestock husbandry. Strengthening professional sectors with necessary skill sets can enhance productivity and address illegal migration.
2. **Modernizing Agriculture:** Transitioning from traditional to mechanized farming with technological advancements can increase production. An Agricultural Investment Bank should be established to support farmers with loans, credits, and fertilizers.
3. **Effective Communication:** The government should engage citizens on national issues, including irregular migration, through media coverage, civic education, and sensitization programs.
4. **Bilateral Arrangements:** The Gambia and the EU should make bilateral arrangements to grant temporary asylum to migrants not eligible for permanent asylum, equipping them with skills before any deportation process to ensure smooth reintegration.
5. **Task Force for Information Sharing:** Establish a task force dedicated to information sharing to enhance collaboration between The Gambia and the EU, ensuring a well-coordinated response to migration issues.
6. **Training Programs:** Comprehensive training programs for Gambian immigration personnel and law enforcement agencies should be implemented to enhance operational capabilities in managing migration, border control, and combating human trafficking.
7. **Legal Migration Pathways:** Reinforcing legal migration pathways, such as seasonal worker programs, work permits, and student visas, can offer safe and regulated alternatives to irregular migration. Expediting the visa application process for Gambians by opening visa application centers in The Gambia can improve accessibility.

Conclusion

Migration is a multifaceted issue that demands collaborative efforts among origin, transit, and destination countries. To address the complexities of migration effectively, it is essential to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships between the European Union (EU), The Gambia, and other regional countries. The prospects for the EU-Gambia bilateral relationship within the framework of irregular migration are promising, provided that both parties adopt comprehensive and cooperative approaches.

A key aspect of managing migration flows is focusing on economic development. By investing in The Gambia's economy, the EU can help create job opportunities and improve living standards, thereby reducing the economic incentives for irregular migration. This could involve supporting local industries, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing educational and vocational training programs. Economic stability and growth in The Gambia would contribute significantly to deterring irregular migration by providing viable alternatives to potential migrants.

Legal migration pathways also play a crucial role in managing migration effectively. By establishing and expanding legal avenues for migration, the EU and The Gambia can offer safe and structured opportunities for Gambians to work, study, or reunite with family members in Europe. This would not only reduce the reliance on irregular and often dangerous migration routes but also help meet the labor market needs of EU countries. Implementing clear and accessible legal migration policies can strengthen the overall relationship between the EU and The Gambia and promote mutual benefits. Regional cooperation is another vital component of managing migration. The Gambia, as part of the West African region, shares migration challenges with its neighbors. Therefore, fostering regional cooperation and dialogue is essential. The EU can support regional initiatives aimed at enhancing border management, combating human trafficking, and facilitating the reintegration of returnees. Collaborative efforts with regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can lead to more effective and coordinated migration management strategies.

Community-based initiatives are crucial in addressing the root causes of irregular migration. Engaging local communities in The Gambia through awareness campaigns, capacity-building programs, and community development projects can empower individuals and create a sense of ownership over migration issues. By involving communities in the design and implementation of migration-related policies and projects, both the EU and The Gambia can ensure that interventions are context-specific and sustainable. Community-based initiatives can also foster social cohesion and resilience, reducing the push factors that drive irregular migration.

In conclusion, the partnership between The Gambia and the EU holds significant potential to curb irregular migration and promote sustainable development and prosperity in The Gambia. By focusing on economic development, legal migration pathways, regional cooperation, and community-based initiatives, both parties can effectively manage migration flows and address the underlying causes of irregular migration. A collaborative and comprehensive approach will not only benefit The Gambia and its citizens but also contribute to the broader goals of stability and development in the region.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

As we mentioned earlier research intent was to examine the Gambia-EU bilateral relationship within the framework of irregular migration. Immigration has become a major issue in Africa causing significant challenges and impacts that warrant cooperation.

The bilateral relationship between The Gambia and the European Union within the framework of irregular migration is multifaceted and evolving. This study has established that significant strides have been made in addressing irregular migration phenomena through various bilateral agreements and initiatives. yet, many considerable challenges require efforts to adjust policies. The EU's financial and technical assistance has undoubtedly strengthened The Gambia's capacity to manage migration flows and improve border security but is not yet enough due to the nature of our porous borders and (ECOWASE) protocol of free movement of people and goods. However, these measures alone are insufficient to address the root causes of irregular migration, such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability. The analysis underlines the importance of incorporating and integrating development aid, capacity building, and sustainable economic opportunities for Gambians. The findings also emphasized greater consideration of human rights and the socio-economic implications of deportation on local communities and households. The unintended consequences of EU policies, such as increased vulnerabilities for migrants, highlight the need for more humane and comprehensive strategies.

Furthermore, future bilateral efforts should center on creating legal pathways for migration, enhancing local governance, and fostering socio-economic resilience in The Gambia. By adopting a more balanced and partnership-oriented approach, the EU and The Gambia can better manage irregular migration and contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region. This research concludes that sustainable solutions to irregular migration will only be achieved through collaborative efforts that address immediate migration management needs in short medium and long-term developmental goals. That can encourage youths to stay and work in the country without undermining the Gambia's efforts to widen and strengthen its international relations.

The findings of the research underscore the significance of migrants' concerns regarding their familial responsibilities. In the Gambian context, it is common for young men and women to feel an obligation to alleviate their families' financial difficulties, which aligns with economic burdens being one of the primary motivators for migration in search of better opportunities. The high cost of living for the average Gambian household necessitates solutions to these economic pressures, often leading to migration through irregular means. However, irregular migration does not resolve economic difficulties; instead, it exacerbates the problem. Many youths who undertake this journey remain jobless and undocumented in Europe, with only a few managing to provide financial support to their families.

Addressing the root causes of irregular migration involves creating jobs through industrialization and fostering an environment conducive to foreign and private investment. The research highlights that poverty, unemployment, and economic difficulties are pervasive, with a majority of citizens living from hand to mouth. The critical danger lies in the potential loss of many skilled citizens to Europe, which could result in a workforce predominantly composed of unskilled individuals, thereby hindering the nation's developmental aspirations. Conversely, some view migration as a means to acquire the necessary skill sets that The Gambia needs. Additionally, the economic benefits of migration, such as remittances from successful migrants, contribute significantly to the country's foreign currency reserves, aiding in import-export activities.

Overall, migration in The Gambia presents both positive and negative effects. It is imperative for the government and stakeholders to address this issue seriously. Effective management of migration could yield substantial benefits for The Gambia while neglecting the issue without proper policy mechanisms could jeopardize the country's socio-economic fabric. The deportation of migrants poses another threat to social cohesion, as it may lead to the loss of breadwinners who provide essential financial support to their families. Given that many Gambian families rely on remittances from emigrants, cutting off this source of income through deportation could create chaotic situations within the country as it happened in 2019 after the deportation Saga demonstrations have happened to condemn the government's compliance to EU pressures on the matter. Additionally, current reintegration programs for deported migrants are ineffective in addressing the root causes of migration. Most beneficiaries of these programs fail to achieve the anticipated success, indicating a need for more robust and targeted reintegration strategies.

In this academic research, it was found that years of policy negligence have hindered the migration process, leading to a state of disarray. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct extensive academic research to propose compelling policy mechanisms that can guide and regulate migration governance in The Gambia and Europe. Furthermore, the study advocates for more research on migration to explore its potential and shortcomings, aiming to develop approaches that can curb irregular movements effectively. It is imperative to foster broader migration cooperation between the EU and The Gambia to ensure safe and regulated migration. This can be achieved by implementing stringent measures against human trafficking, addressing youth unemployment issues, and enhancing border control through the introduction of biometric information systems to collect data. Such initiatives are expected to address the problem in both the medium and long term. Overall, migration trends have experienced a significant decline following the change of government in The Gambia. However, this decline could not be sustained due to various disappointments in the new government's efforts to create resilient, sustainable economic and socio-political development for the youth. Pertaining to our findings, the study highlighted the importance of industrialization and mechanization of the agricultural sector with attractive wages as a viable way forward to create jobs for the youth and address the long-standing unemployment issue in The Gambia.

In summary, after conducting the study and reviewing the literature, the intention is to identify the problems that have stalled bilateral relations with the EU and the impacts of irregular migration on potential transit and migrants residing in European countries. The study also suggests policy recommendations to tackle the issue and address the demands of the youth regarding financial and employment stability. This would enable them to stay in the country and contribute to its socio-economic development, aligning with our findings. Addressing this critical issue is imperative, as it not only overwhelms the EU but also significantly impacts the entire West African region, particularly The Gambia. Despite its small size, The Gambia is a major source of irregular migrants to Europe. Concurrently, it functions as both an emigration and immigration country. A crucial aspect to consider is the substantial benefit The Gambia derives from remittances sent by its diaspora. It can be asserted that migrants are a vital source of foreign reserves, providing the hard currency necessary to sustain The Gambia's import and export activities.

However, Cooperation between European and West African states is essential to address these challenges comprehensively. Such cooperation should encompass multiple areas to ensure that the interests of both parties are met effectively. In the conclusion of this thesis, four theoretical approaches guided the analysis: Neoclassical Economic Theory, New Economic

Theory of Migration, Network Theory, and Conflict Theory. The findings from the Gambia indicate that individuals make rational decisions to migrate to Europe, driven by the expectation of securing employment and achieving financial stability and economic freedom, as posited by Neoclassical Economic Theory.

Furthermore, Gambian households are fully cognizant of the dangers associated with irregular migration, commonly known as the "Backway." Despite this awareness, they strategically invest in migration as a means of diversifying their sources of income, particularly through remittances sent back by family members abroad. This strategy serves as a form of insurance against economic difficulties and the rising cost of living in the Gambia, aligning with the New Economic Theory of Migration. Moreover, potential migrants and those already en route heavily rely on migrant networks, both in transit and in Europe, to obtain crucial information for a safer and smoother journey with minimal risk. These networks function as bridges and facilitators, reducing the costs and risks associated with irregular migration. They provide vital assistance in navigating the challenges and dangers encountered during migration, a concept that resonates with Network Theory. Thus, the findings of this thesis largely correspond with the explanations provided by Neoclassical Economic Theory, the New Economic Theory of Migration, and Network Theory regarding the patterns of irregular migration from the Gambia to the EU. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that the causes of irregular migration as advanced by Conflict Theory significantly influenced recent migration patterns from the Gambia, particularly following the 2016 electoral defeat of the Yahya Jammeh regime. The country's return to political stability in its democratic dispensation seems to have mitigated the impact of conflict as a driving factor.

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APPENDIX- 1

Research Questionnaire

Hello Greetings Sir/Madam, first and foremost thank you for agreeing to give some portion of your valuable time to talk to me. My name is Amadou Bamba Jaiteh I am a master's student at the Social Sciences University of Ankara. I am conducting research purposely for the thesis project. Your participation will enormously help to serve the study's objective, which aims to investigate how irregular migration affects the Gambia-EU bilateral relations within their regular migration framework. Additionally, it asks how this phenomenon affects youths in the Gambia.

In this regard, there are no material benefits concerning your participation in the research other than voluntarily contributing to the study. Thus, your participation will be highly appreciated.

However, If you agree to participate, rest assured that any information obtained in this research will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for academic purposes. Furthermore, the interview will be recorded and kept locked in private, I will be the only one to have access to it. In any further publication your identity and information will not be shared they will be kept anonymous.

Meanwhile, you may choose not to answer any of the questions or withdraw your consent to participate at any moment.

Recording: With your permission, I would like to voice-record this interview in order not to miss any information provided by you. The recording will be kept strictly confidential, will not be shared by any 3rd party, and will be destroyed once the study comes to an end.

Do you agree to start the interview?

1- Sex

2- Occupation

3- Were you working before embarking on the journey?

If yes, what sort of job were you doing and are your earnings sustaining you?

4- Place of origin in the Gambia

5- Educational background

6- your Age

7- Why did you migrate?

8- Tell me the story of your journey.

9- What do you think is why young people migrate from the Gambia to Europe?

10- Are there any specific challenges you face during your journey?

11- Can you give me a general breakdown of cost items?

12- Did you enter into Europe legally or illegally?

13- Can you Explain what motivates you to embark on migration?

14- Since you arrived in Europe have you been working?

15- If so, what is your current job?

16- Now that you have migrated are you happy with the decision or do you have any regrets?

17- Will you recommend this journey to your fellow young Gambians? Why or why not?

18- Do you think the current state of migration from the Gambia to Europe is healthy or beneficial for the Gambia and Gambians?

Interview Questions for the government and non-governmental institutions chosen for this research

1- What is the name of the institution you are working?

2- What position do you hold at the institution?

3- Can you evaluate the effects of irregular migration in the Gambia for the past 10 years?

- 4- What impact does irregular migration have on EU-Gambia relations?
- 5- Do you think migration will stop or continue? why and why not?
- 7- What are the major consequences of irregular/undocumented migration in the Gambia?
- 8- Do you think migration is a challenge?
- 9- What are the EU attitudes and policies towards the Gambia regarding irregular migration?

Thank you so much for your kind participation in our research! your contribution is highly appreciated

