

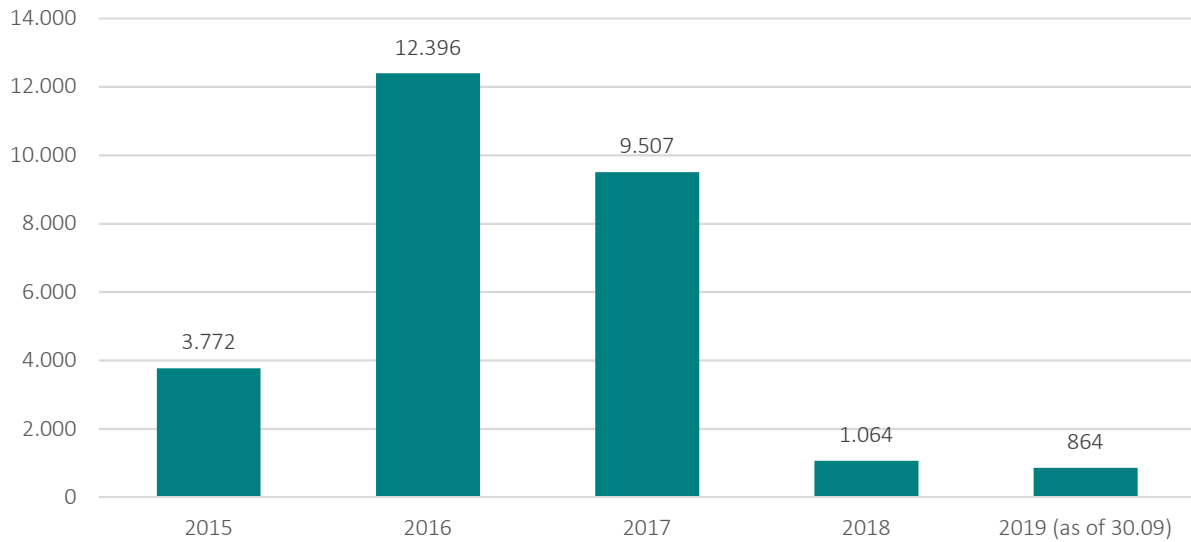
Victims of trafficking in the central Mediterranean route: focus on women from Côte d'Ivoire, from the trafficking in Tunisia to the risk of re-trafficking in Italy.

During the three-year period 2017-2019, IOM has implemented – under the Aditus project – direct assistance and protection activities for migrants arriving by sea in the context of mixed flows. It was a privileged position that allowed IOM staff, deployed at the landing points and in first reception centres, to collect important information about the routes, the risks and the vulnerabilities of the migrants of different nationalities arriving by sea.

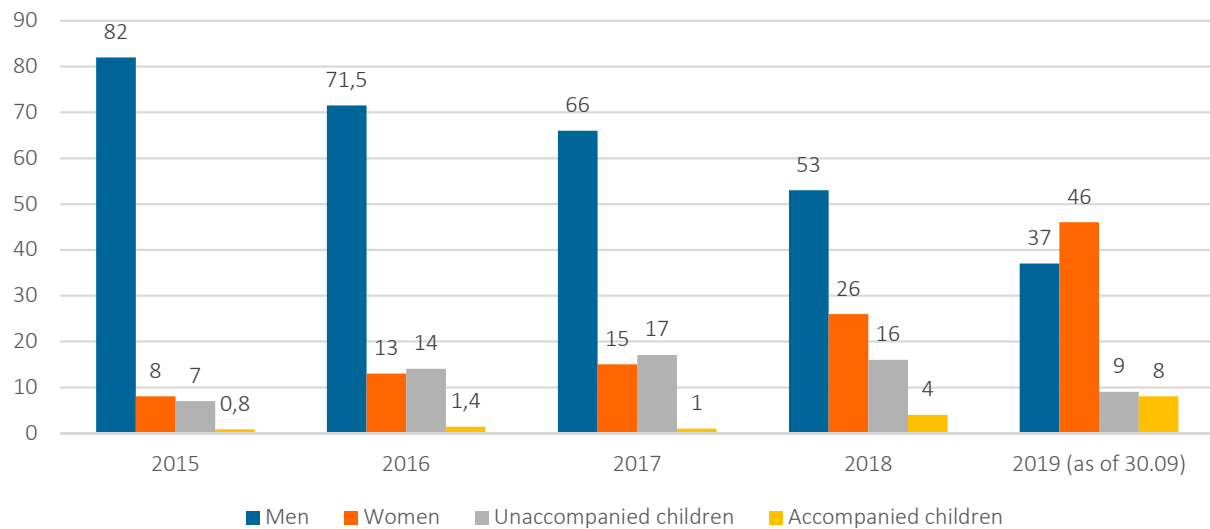
Among these nationalities, the Côte d'Ivoire is represented as follows in terms of nationalities declared by people arriving by sea:

- 2015: tot. 3.772 arrivals, of which 82% are men, 8% are women, 7% are unaccompanied children (UASC), 0,8% are accompanied children;
- 2016: tot. 12,396 arrivals, of which 71,5% are men, 13% are women, 14% are unaccompanied children, 1,4% are accompanied children;
- 2017: tot. 9,507 arrivals, of which 66% are men, 15% are women, 1% are accompanied children, 17% are unaccompanied children. In this period, the Ivorian nationality is the third most represented;
- 2018: tot. 1,064 arrivals, of which 53% are men, 26% are women, 4% are accompanied children, 16% are unaccompanied children. In this year, the Ivorian nationality is the eight-largest nationality declared on arrival;
- 2019 (as of 30 September): tot. 864 arrivals, of which 37% are men, about 46% are women, 9% are unaccompanied children, 8% are accompanied children.

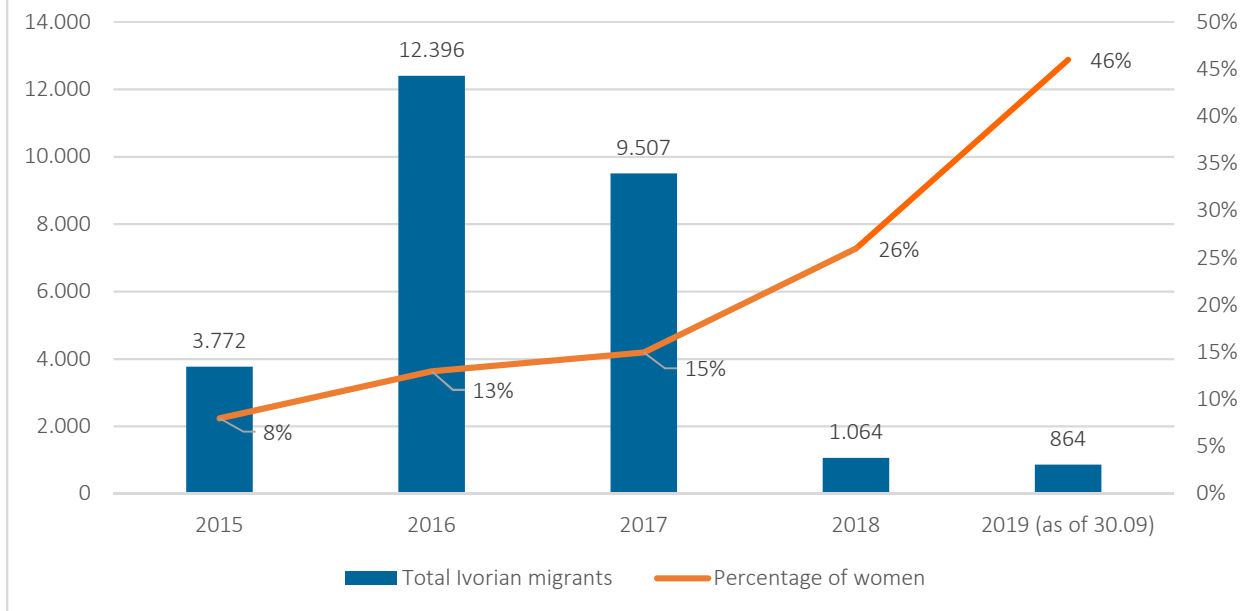
Migrants of Ivorian nationality arriving by sea in Italy in the period
01.01.2015 - 30.09.2019.



Percentage of men, women, UASC and accompanied children in
the total number of Ivorian migrants arriving by sea in Italy from
01.01.2015 to 30.09.2019 (percentage values).



Variation in the proportion of women in the total number of Ivorian migrants arriving by sea in Italy from 2015 to 2019 (Data updated to 30.09.2019).



According to the testimonies collected by IOM staff at the landing sites and reception centres, the reasons that explain the departure of Ivorian women and girls are not exclusively economic but are also related to gender-based violence suffered in the country of origin: female genital mutilations, forced marriage, domestic violence. Moreover, in order to better understand the reasons and the modalities of the migration of the women encountered, it is necessary to consider their socio-economic and educational background.

In fact, the Ivorian migrants met by IOM staff at landing points in Italy are mainly people of average age between 20 and 35 years, with little access to economic and educational opportunities - they attended primary classes at most. The women ran small businesses such as selling vegetables and fruit in their home country. In this framework is rooted the practice according to which, for example, families promise to marry their daughters from an early age in exchange for the advance payment of a portion of the dowry that, in certain traditional contexts, is paid from the future husband to the bride's family.

In the stories collected by the IOM staff the Côte d'Ivoire often appears as a complex context of social, cultural and economic fragility, from which trafficking victims destined to **labour, domestic and sexual exploitation are often trafficked both in Tunisia and in Libya**. If men are more exposed to labour exploitation in agricultural activities, often with the promise of profitable jobs or to enter the world of professional football, women are more frequently victims of trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude and, in some cases, sexual exploitation.

The **recruitment** is carried out by members of the victim's network such as friends, relatives, people who attend their family or randomly met. Social media can also be used as a tool to entice potential victims of trafficking.

With reference to the transportation, it takes place most often by air, with the direct route Abidjan-Tunis. **In this regard the existence of visa free policy for Ivorian citizens to Tunisia should be noted.** Recruiting agents, mostly compatriots part of a transnational network that includes also Tunisian agents, sponsor the trip from the beginning, covering the costs for the release of the passport and for the air ticket, and facilitating the stipulation of a fake contract of employment as a hairdresser or maid for a salary ranging between 500 and 700 euros per month.

Alternatively, and in less frequent but certainly alarming cases, especially considering the innumerable risk factors of the journey by land - such as the expulsions from Algeria towards the Niger desert and the abductions in Libya - the journey is made in a fragmentary manner through the following routes:

- Ivory Coast, Mali (Bamako, Gao), Algeria (Temanrasset, Debdeb), Tunisia (Tunis, Sfax)
- Ivory Coast, Mali, Algeria, Libya
- Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Libya, Tunisia with crossing the Libyan-Tunisian border in the direction of Rabat in an attempt to escape the violence and abuse suffered in Libya.



With reference to the recruitment, it takes place as follows: organization of all or part of the journey, promise of a work contract, in some cases even housing guarantee. IOM staff was able to note that when the route is traveled over land the recruitment of victims of trafficking can take place in the country of origin or in transit countries. It is, in fact, possible that the victim exhausts

the financial resources to continue the journey - started for economic or other reasons - and that she/he is forced to rely on a recruiting agent for lack of economic resources and profit alternatives to continue the journey. The main destination of the journey thus becomes Tunisia, where the real phase of exploitation begins, or in some cases Libya, where the exposure to the already considerable risk of violence consistently increases due to the instability of the country. At this stage, Europe is not the final destination: it will become it with the intention of escaping exploitation and abuse.

The following paragraph focuses precisely on the trafficking of Ivorian girls and women destined to exploitation in Tunisia. Indeed, there are many testimonies collected by IOM in the two-year period 2018-2019.

Given the existence of a network of fellow recruiters connected to a transnational criminal network of traffickers, the women interviewed arrive in Tunisia via the air route - sometimes having previously paid the agent, sometimes having agreed to pay after entering the Tunisian national territory. Once arrived in Tunis, the victims are taken by a local agent who puts them in contact with the so-called employer. If the victim has not paid before the trip the "service" provided by the agent, upon arrival at the airport she must pay immediately, and in cash. Often the victims discover at that moment that the organization of the trip has cost more than expected: in addition to the payment of what has already been established, they say that they will therefore have to work from two to five months to refund the agent for the "unexpected" expenses incurred. The intermediary, at this point, delivers the victim to the exploiter, disappearing after having stolen documents, mobile phones and any valuables.

According to this scheme, the victim works for six to eight months without receiving any salary, normally with wealthy families in the Tunis and Sfax area. The exploitation takes place in the form of domestic slavery in unsustainable conditions: prolonged working hours with very few hours to rest, degrading housing conditions, mistreatment. Very often the women, in addition to exploitation, suffer sexual abuses by their exploiters, arriving then in Italy in a state of pregnancy or with small children.

In the light of the information gathered, in almost all the cases encountered constituent elements of trafficking are present: recruitment, transport, hospitality, the use of coercive methods such as deception and threat, the promise of economic advantages, the exploitation of the victim's vulnerable situation, the purpose of exploitation in its various forms.

Avoiding kidnapping is not easy for the victims: most of the time they wait for a moment of carelessness of the exploiter or to be able to leave the house - for example after being commissioned by the patron to make the necessary expenses for the good management of domestic life - to escape from the situation of exploitation. There are no cases in which IOM has collected testimonies from women who have relied on local associations or other civil society actors to avoid trafficking. Rather, after staying for a few months in Tunisia, being in a situation of

precariousness and lack of prospects, the victims in some cases succeed in escaping from the hands of their captors finding refuge among the members of the Ivorian community, with whom they share experiences, language and culture - however, with a high risk of being trafficked again. The victims are in fact without a passport and a regular position in the country: they are subject to the national law on entry and residence and therefore exposed to the risk of expulsion and fines. The latter are calculated in proportion to the length of the irregular stay, on a weekly basis: in the absence of the economic means to pay the penalties, the *sans papiers* are unable to regularize their position or leave the country through official borders without incurring serious sanctions¹. It is at this point that, to escape exploitation and the risks associated with irregular stay, Europe or Libya - in residual cases - become an option. In the absence of job opportunities, starting from Tunisia to another destination becomes a challenge.

The women met by IOM often report having paid the cost of the last part of the journey to Europe through financial support from friends or acquaintances to whom they must not return the money received. It is recurrent in their stories the figure of a benefactor who, as a favor, paid the sum useful for the crossing. Once arrived in Italy, they declare that they are no longer in contact with those who helped them to face the journey and that they do not have a reference person in the area. In other cases, Ivorian women disembark accompanied by alleged husbands or family members with whom, later, they sometimes deny having relationships.

The story of J.

Josephine is a woman from Côte d'Ivoire, she is 28 years old and she disembarked in Pozzallo in 2018. She met IOM staff in a reception centre in Sicily and she shared her story.

Born in Daloa (Côte d'Ivoire) in a poor family, she lost both her parents during the civil war. Raised by the paternal family, she works as a street vendor to satisfy her primary needs. In February 2017 she is informed by her family of her next excision in prelude of her future marriage with a man she has never seen.

After her refusal, she is brutally tortured by her family, who feels dishonored by her behavior, and for this reason she decides to escape, helped by a friend of her dead mother. She goes to Abidjan, where she finds work as a waitress in exchange for food and accommodation and without pay.

Josephine confides in a client of the restaurant where she works, to whom she tells her fears about facing a future of her own and the persecution of her family. She welcomes his proposal to go to Tunisia to work as a maid. The man provides her with a passport, pays the travel expenses and asks her for the sum of 700,000 FCFA to be returned to him once she starts working in the destination country.

¹ For further details: http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_tns_subsaharan_migration_in_tunisia_report_october_2018.pdf.

Josephine arrives by plane in Tunis and then is taken to Sfax where she meets her alleged employer, owner of a luxurious house. At this point the woman is abducted and deprived of her passport and forced to work as a maid without pay and without any contact with the outside, every day from 4 am to 11 pm, sexually abused, poorly housed and malnourished. After 8 months, she is forced to have an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy resulted from repeated sexual violence by her exploiter. Upon returning from the hospital, while the man stops along the way, Josephine manages to escape.

Unable to go back to her country of origin, alone and scared, the woman manages to get in touch with one of her fellow countrymen who promises her protection and help to pay the costs for the crossing of the Mediterranean that will take her to Italy. Josephine tells of having been forced to trust this man of whom, once arrived in Italy, she claims to be a wife.

After a few months from her arrival Josephine, having being informed by IOM about the risks related to trafficking , decides to ask for help and asks to be separated from her alleged husband, after he had offered her to leave the reception centre to reach France.



**IOM Coordination Office for the Mediterranean
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