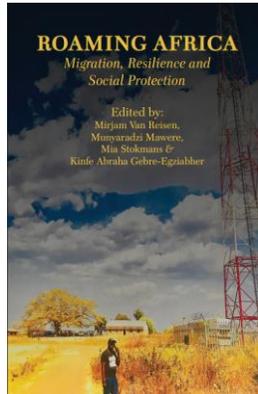


‘Europe is not Worth Dying For’: The Dilemma facing Somalis in Europe

Melissa Phillips & Mingo Heiduk

Chapter in: Roaming Africa: Migration, Resilience and Social Protection

**From the book Series:
Connected and Mobile: Migration and Human Trafficking in
Africa**



Cite as: Phillips, M. & Heiduk, M. (2019). ‘Europe is not worth dying for’: The dilemma facing Somalis in Europe. In: Van Reisen, M., Mawere, M., Stokmans, M., & Gebre-Egziabher, K. A. (eds), *Roaming Africa: Migration, Resilience and Social Protection*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, pp. 203–224. Book URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336956357_Roaming_Africa_Migration_Resilience_and_Social_Protection

ISBN: 9789956551019

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‘Europe is not Worth Dying For’: The Dilemma facing Somalis in Europe

Melissa Phillips & Mingo Heiduk

Introduction

“The road to Europe is harder than before”, shared a young female Danish-Somali citizen (aged 29), reflecting the changing attitudes in the Somali diaspora community in Denmark. This chapter investigates these changing attitudes towards Somali migrants and refugees coming to Europe in an irregularised situation (asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking and migrants without the required travel documents). It is based on empirical research conducted by the Danish Refugee Council’s Diaspora Programme and the Mixed Migration Centre between 2016 and 2017, as part of a wider study on the relationships between diasporas and migrants coming to Europe irregularly, involving both Somali and Afghan diasporas (Nimkar & Frouws, 2018).¹

Diaspora communities in Europe are often perceived as facilitators of migration. But, this study found that, contrary to what is generally believed, their views of newcomers to Europe range from ambivalence to resentment. These perceptions are influenced by the negative migration climate in host countries and by their own status, which is often insecure. The perception of their own situation is affecting how they advise people back home who are considering migrating. Often their advice to potential migrants is that they should refrain from migrating. But, this advice is not always viewed as legitimate.

¹ The full study included focus group discussions and an online survey. However, this chapter focuses on the focus group discussions data only.

The objective of this research was to investigate diaspora responses to fellow nationals moving in an irregularised situation and bring these findings to existing discussions about the diaspora's wider role in supporting their fellow nationals. The main research question is: *What is the attitude of Somalis in the diaspora on irregularised migration by their countrymen and women?* While diasporas are often assumed to be 'facilitators' of the journeys of migrants in an irregularised situation (through the financial support they provide to their fellow country nationals) or seen by groups such as politicians as potential 'blockers' of migration policies (because they act as key sources of information), this chapter presents a more complex interplay, drawing out the multiple roles played by diasporas and the inter-relationship between diasporas and their co-nationals moving in an irregularised situation (Frouws, Phillips, Hassan, & Twigt, 2016). It highlights a range of attitudes towards newcomers, which include ambivalence and resentment, and widens understanding of the impacts of migrants in an irregularised situation on diasporas in their country of destination. It also examines the policy perspective of diasporas towards irregularised migration.

The authors of this chapter have chosen to use the term 'irregularised migration' to highlight the social and political processes that place people in this situation (De Genova, 2002). The term 'irregular migrant' will not be used, because it labels the person as irregular rather than the travel method. Migrants may be fleeing war, political unrest or persecution. Some are victims of human trafficking or smuggling. Some are seeking a better life for themselves and their loved ones. Their situation is referred to as 'irregularised' because they do not have the necessary documents or authorisation required by the destination (and transit) countries.

The research on which this chapter is based was carried out from 2016 to 2017 in the context of the high level of attention on the number of migrants in an irregularised situation, including those originating from the Horn of Africa, seeking protection (as in the case of refugees) or better opportunities (as in the case of migrants) in Europe. People originating from Somalia have been known to use

both the Central Mediterranean Route through Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean Route through Turkey to reach Europe (UNHCR, 2018). In 2015, 12,433 Somalis reached Italy and 4,301 reached Greece through the above-mentioned sea routes. This number dropped to 7,281 across both routes in 2016, with a small number also reaching Spain from Morocco through the Western Mediterranean Route (UNHCR, 2018). This was due to an overall reduction in people using the Eastern Mediterranean Route after the European Union (EU) and Turkey signed a Statement of Cooperation in March 2016 to control the number of people leaving Turkey for Greece by sea. At the same time there was a shift in the profile of people using the Central Mediterranean Route towards West Africa. Despite this reduction, Somalis still comprise a significant proportion of new asylum seekers in Europe, with 11,890 people originating from Somalia submitting asylum claims in the EU in 2017 and the first quarter of 2018 (Eurostat, 2018).

New arrivals join sizeable Somali diaspora communities in Europe. Such communities have been the subject of studies on remittance sending practices (see, for example, Horst, 2008) and contribute to development in their home country in multiple ways (Sinatti & Horst, 2015). In the context of Denmark, the exact profile of Somali communities will be discussed later, however, they have been subject to increasing restrictions with a large number of Somalis with residence permits having their status reassessed by the Danish authorities with a view to potential revocation for people on subsidiary protection. There has been less attention paid to the relationship between diasporas and migrants in an irregularised situation, with the exception of some early research on diasporas and their impact on asylum flows (Crisp, 1999) and some mention in research on migrants in an irregularised situation (McAuliffe, 2013; Richardson, 2010). This is despite the evidence that people on the move maintain social connections with communities abroad while in transit (Frouws *et al.*, 2016). By investigating the relationship and attitudes of diasporas towards irregularised migration and people arriving in Europe in an irregularised situation, this empirical research seeks to fill a gap in our knowledge about diasporas and migrants in

an irregularised situation, as well as propose future ways in which collaboration between diasporas, international organisations and governments can be established to assist in this critical area. A review of the existing literature on diasporas is detailed next.

Defining diasporas

Diasporas are comprised of migrants and refugees who live outside their country of origin in a new country of settlement, but have “taken active steps to preserve their identity as a distinctive community and have an ongoing orientation towards the homeland” (Jones, 2016, cited in Holliday, 2016). Diasporas can be in nearby neighbouring countries, which is commonly known as the ‘near diaspora’, or further away in the ‘wider diaspora’ (Van Hear, 2002, cited in Koser & Van Hear, 2003). Oliver Bakewell of Oxford University’s International Migration Institute asserts that there are four criteria that must be met for a group of people to constitute a diaspora, namely:

(i) movement from an original homeland to more than one country, either through dispersal (forced) or expansion (voluntary) in search of improved livelihoods; (ii) a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home; (iii) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time, based on a shared history, culture and religion; and (iv) a sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries of settlement. (Bakewell, 2009, p. 2)

It is important to note that being a member of a diaspora is voluntary and not all people who move to another country consider themselves part of a diaspora or join formal diaspora organisations. Furthermore, former migrants and refugees may choose to maintain links with their country of origin without ascribing to diaspora membership.

As a country, Somalia has long been affected by conflict and violence, which has caused the internal displacement of 825,000 people, with 388,000 new displacements in 2017 due to conflict and violence and a further 899,000 due to disasters. In addition, there are approximately 500,000 Somali refugees living in neighbouring countries, Kenya and Ethiopia (Internal Displacement Monitoring

Centre, 2018). The prevailing conditions in Somalia and repeated efforts by the Kenyan government to close Dadaab camp in Kenya has influenced many Somalis to consider onward migration. Somalis undertake a form of secondary movement known as *tabriib*, which is the emigration of young Somali men and some women mainly from Somaliland and Puntland in search of better opportunities (Ali, 2016). Somalis have long been featured as one of the main groups attempting to move irregularly through Libya, with their numbers on the rise since 2012, although, as noted above, their numbers have been in decline in recent years (Eurostat, 2018).

Somalis are also among the main nationalities seeking asylum in Denmark. Since 2011, asylum application figures for Somalis have declined by approximately 73% (between 2012 and 2016). During 2016, asylum rates in Denmark declined from 21,000 applications in 2015 to 5,959 in 2016, mainly due to increased border controls (Statistics Denmark, 2018). Nevertheless, due to the cumulative growth in Denmark's migrant and refugee communities, including through family reunification, Denmark's Somali diaspora is now estimated to comprise approximately 20,000 people (Statistics Denmark, 2018). There are also Somali diasporas in other European countries, the United States and Canada. Notably, Somalia's 2016 Foreign Policy made explicit reference to Somalia's estimated two million diaspora members and the Somali Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an Office of Diaspora Affairs (Obsiye & Hussein, 2016).

Diasporas make multiple economic, social, cultural and political contributions to their countries of origin, including remittances, economic investments, the transfer of skills, and other philanthropic ventures, as well as playing a role in politics. For example, the ninth President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, was a member of the Somali diaspora in the United States (Cismaan, 2017). Remittances to Somalia are estimated to be around USD 1.4 billion annually, representing 23% of Somalia's GDP (World Bank, 2016).

Social connectedness is one feature of the transnational ties that diasporas actively foster through global networks, which are based on

social, cultural, class, linguistic and ethnic links (Carling, 2008). Increasingly, these global networks are maintained through social media and information and communication technology (ICT), which allow for links to be developed and maintained across multiple sites, including places of origin, sites of exile and transit, and destination countries (Vertovec, 2004). Through such networks, a range of information can be shared, including information that is increasingly understood to influence decision-making about migration (Frouws *et al.*, 2016). It has been asserted that diaspora, family and community members are generally more trusted sources of information than migration agents, brokers, smugglers and governments (Crisp, 1999; Ambrosini, 2016). Other research has shown that this trust continues when migrants and refugees arrive in destination countries, with diasporas and ethnic networks serving as an important source of assistance for settlement support and employment, as well as representing powerful examples of success (and failure) to others in their country of origin (Bloch & McKay, 2014).

Beyond the general attributes of diasporas summarised here, few studies have explored in detail other attributes of diasporas, including their collective memory and shared consciousness, which are also key attributes of diasporas (Bakewell, 2009). This is important when focusing on the specific relationship between diasporas and migrants, as well as refugees moving in an irregularised situation. Diaspora are living in a host country and, by their very definition, have experiences in other economic, cultural and political situations. This may influence their attitudes towards those who are migrating or moving to seek asylum.

The literature has highlighted the social connectedness of migrants and refugees moving along irregularised routes, including the high use of ICT, which connects them with the diaspora in their preferred country of destination (Frouws *et al.*, 2016; Van Reisen *et al.*, 2017; Van Reisen & Mawere, 2017) and how former refugees may offer information and organisational infrastructure to support irregularised migration (Crisp, 1999) and even pay ransoms for migrants and refugees held by smugglers and traffickers (Van Reisen, Estefanos &

Rijken, 2012, 2014; Jacobsen, Robinson, & Lijnders, 2013; Van Reisen & Rijken, 2015). Moreover, research on decision making among people moving to seek asylum, including those planning to move irregularly or those who have moved already, has highlighted links with trusted communities. However, such research notes that the information they receive from family and friends often does not contain granular details (Richardson, 2010); it also notes that the support provided is more generally linked to decision making (McAuliffe, 2013).

Most of the research conducted so far has been from the perspective of people on the move, drawing on data collected from their experiences, with secondary information drawn from diasporas in some cases. These studies have reinforced a widely-held assumption that members of diasporas have a uniquely close relationship with people moving irregularly or are key influencers of migrants in an irregularised situation. In addition, research about smugglers indicates that they comprise a wide range of individuals (for instance, brokers, recruiters, guides, guards, drivers and hotel owners), and may also include migrants and refugees or former migrants and refugees (Tinti & Westcott, 2016), which supports this assumption.

The assumption that diasporas influence co-nationals who may be seeking to migrate may be based on labour migration research, in which there has long been a focus on ‘intermediaries’ (brokers, agents, members of social networks etc.), who help migrants navigate the complex web of immigration policies and procedures including employer sponsorship (see, for example, Fernandez, 2013). Individuals, associations and organisations, together referred to as ‘migrant institutions’, have in other contexts been shown to play a role in facilitating migration (Goss & Lindquist, 1995). Utilising the concept, but adopting a broader frame of reference, Maurizio Ambrosini, proposes that intermediaries can also be found supporting migrants during their irregularised migration journeys and settlement in destination countries, offering connections and providing services and help (Ambrosini, 2016). Ethnic networks and diasporas can be included in this broad definition of intermediaries,

although Ambrosini suggests that diasporas and ethnic networks are mainly involved at the destination country level. Others have shown smuggling and trafficking to be far more regionally interconnected (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2017; Van Reisen & Mawere, 2017). The social connectedness of diasporas with people in their countries of origin, as described above, suggests that members of the diaspora can act as intermediaries at all stages of migration journeys.

However, this view neglects other aspects of the social bond between diasporas and (irregular) migrants, such as the attitudes and perceptions of diasporas about people moving in an irregularised situation, the full extent of links diasporas have with migrants and refugees travelling in irregularised ways, as well as the potential role diasporas play, especially with regard to supporting policy development and programmatic responses in transit and destination countries that ensure protection and informed decision making and minimise the risks involved in these journeys. These aspects of diaspora involvement are discussed later in the chapter. The next section details the research methods used.

Research methods

The main research methods used for this study were a literature review and focus group discussions. As this was a preliminary study, the research was modest in size and the findings have limitations as to their generalisability. According to Danish government statistics, there are approximately 21,000 people residing in Denmark claiming Somali ancestry, of which around 11,700 are immigrants and the remainder, some 9,500 people, are their descendants (Statistics Denmark, 2018). The Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme works with Somali diasporas as a priority group and has access to some 800 members of Somali communities living in Denmark.² Research participants were accessed for this study through the Diaspora Programme and a snowball sampling approach used to reach other community members. In addition, advertisements

² For more on the Diaspora Programme see <https://drc.ngo/relief-work/diaspora-programme>.

in English, Somali and Danish were placed on the Diaspora Programme's Facebook page inviting people to participate in the focus group discussions. Two members of the Danish-Somali community who were employees of the Danish Refugee Council carried out the focus group discussions, which took place in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense between 16 December 2016 and 20 January 2017. Focus group discussions were convened for women, youth and asylum seekers. Participants were asked a range of open-ended questions regarding their general perceptions and expectations about irregularised migration, connections with people on the move, any knowledge of trafficking and the dangers and risks people faced, modes of information sharing, support for integration provided on arrival, and their opinion about European migration and asylum policies. Focus group discussions generally lasted for 60–90 minutes and all focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed.

In total, 27 Somali diaspora members (15 female; 12 male) took part in 6 focus group discussions. Given that this was an initial study with limited funding, targeting both the Danish-Somali and Danish Afghan diasporas, it was decided to purposively keep a small sample size to test the research tools. A further reason for maintaining a small pilot was the fact that, as noted above, there were Danish government actions ongoing at the time to review the status of subsidiary protection for Somalis, which had resulted in a level of stress and concern among the Somalia diaspora in Denmark.

Importantly, all participants were advised that their anonymity would be protected and that participation in the study was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Some participants expressed an eagerness to have the study findings made public in reports and articles so that a wider group of stakeholders could read about the challenges they faced, demonstrating that this research met the principles of action-research (Collie, Liu, Podsiadlowski, & Kindon, 2010). The specific results of the study will be discussed next.

Results

This chapter focuses on four components of the research findings, namely, general perceptions and expectations towards people moving irregularly from Somalia, connections to people on the move including information exchanges, the dilemma facing members of the diaspora community, and policy perspectives. The data cited below follows this structure and comes from the focus group discussions.

General perceptions of people moving irregularly

In general, most focus group discussion participants made a distinction between Somalis who arrived during early displacements, for example, during the 1990s, and those coming more recently. They characterised the profile of people leaving the country now as young people who have grown up during the civil war and are seeking better opportunities due to poverty. One male Danish-Somali respondent explained:

I want to describe the new refugees and migrants as those who flee for their personal ambition and dreams instead of necessity, as those in the 90s did. Those who are fleeing now are not forced to flee, and they know there is a chance of them not reaching Europe given all the risks involved during their journey, and the images they have been told of Europe are completely different from the reality. They see it as the 'Promised Land'. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 35 years)

In addition to outlining a profile of youth who are not seeing a future in Somalia, respondents also described a sense of urgency among people arriving more recently, as one female Danish-Somali citizen respondent explained:

They want to finish their education quickly, get a job quickly and contribute right away. In a nutshell, they want to do all the things that we Somalis have managed to do over a time span of 20 years in just 3–5 years, and that is not possible. (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years)

Some respondents recognised that the Somali diaspora may have encouraged this movement through the investments they have made back in Somalia in businesses or by building houses in their home town, which may have sent a positive message about the lifestyle on offer in Europe. They also felt that new arrivals were drawn to Europe for specific things such as education, as compared to earlier groups, who were more likely to be focused on family reunification, for instance. During the focus group discussions some people were adamant that most people leaving Somalia are just looking to reach a safe place, rather than having a specific destination in mind. Others expressed resentment that new arrivals seemed selfish and impatient and were only interested in bettering their own lives, even to the point of ignoring the advice given by members of the diaspora. Reflecting that there was perhaps a lack of knowledge on the part of newly-arrived Somalis about the challenges faced in Europe, compared to those in Somalia, one female Danish-Somali citizen pointed out that: “Peace also means not worrying about getting a job, or applying for asylum and being moved around in various detention or asylum centres across Europe” (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years).

These results suggest that members of the diaspora have a very different domain of knowledge and rely on other experiences regarding settlement in the host country than newly-arrived migrants. These experiences and knowledge are part of the integration process of Somalis in Danish society. As those who have newly arrived do not share this mindset, it can affect the image of the Somali diaspora, as was reflected in the antagonism evident during focus group discussions. The renewed focus on migrants in an irregularised situation impacted on the image of more established members of the Somali diaspora, especially in the media, such that one male Danish-Somali citizen said:

We who were refugees in the 90s have to start all over again with the process of establishing a good picture of Somalis, and that is even though we have Danish citizenship and passport. All the good stories and initiatives that we have

accomplished are flushed down the toilet, and we have to start all over again. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 35 years)

As well as the fact that newly-arrived community members have different perceptions and knowledge about Danish opportunities than established members of the diaspora, the Somali diaspora has different perceptions about potential Somali migrants, especially regarding their willingness to take risks. The risks of irregular migration are often a topic on social media. Hearing about the risks people take led one female Danish-Somali citizen to state:

I would never sacrifice my body and soul for the possibility of maybe reaching Europe. I also have a friend who lost three of his toes due to the cold weather [walking in the snow in Turkey]. I can't fathom how traumatising it is. (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years)

Connections between diaspora and family members are maintained through the Internet, Facebook and WhatsApp. Being so close to the situation of people moving irregularly and witnessing the consequences seems to have led this respondent to develop strong feelings against the practice, with many other respondents reinforcing the sentiment that they did not condone irregularised migration.

In addition, if a migrant is captured by traffickers during the migration journey, members of the diaspora can be asked to pay a ransom for his/her release. In one case a focus group discussion respondent observed a shift in his brother's social media behaviour while he was studying in Uganda. After a certain point he realised that his brother had left Uganda to try to reach Europe by moving irregularly through Sudan and Egypt with a group of 25 other people, of which only 8, including his brother, survived. While the respondent did not report having to pay money to help his brother, other participants did mention paying ransoms to traffickers or smugglers or assisting financially to ensure the migrant's survival when family members in Somalia were no longer able to help. In one case, having to pay a ransom reaffirmed a male Danish-Somali citizen's belief that:

There is no potential positive outcome of them fleeing. It has economic and psychological risks when they flee, and we don't know if all of them end up reaching Europe, because many die or are captured on their journeys. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 30 years)

Many participants did not feel comfortable sending money to smugglers, but did so because it was often a case of life or death. One male Danish-Somali citizen added: “We don’t want to be responsible for them risking their lives to reach Europe – that is too much of a risk and too much of a burden to have on your shoulders” (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 30 years). Another male Danish-Somali citizen added: “In my view they are better to use the money on their farm or just invest the money in some other means, rather than risking their life trying to cross the sea” (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 45 years).

The precarious situation of many within the Danish-Somali diaspora, whose status is also in jeopardy or who were unemployed, meant that their ability to help was limited. Describing the process of collecting money to pay ransom, one female Danish-Somali citizen said: “Every pocket was searched, every outstanding debt with different individuals was recollected, I mean it is a big project to collect that amount of money” (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years).

Interestingly, advice given by members of the diaspora to potential migrants prior to departure not to migrate is often not heeded. Advice to remain in the country of origin given by someone who is perceived as having achieved through migration what the potential migrant seeks does not carry a lot of weight.

[...] That is, when we tell them that there is nothing in what they are seeking to find in Europe. They are reluctant and will not listen to what we have to say before they have experienced it on their own. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 51 years)

Such advice is given from the perspective of the diaspora, reflecting their knowledge, experiences and objectives.

Connections with people on the move

Reaffirming findings from other research, newly-arrived migrants and refugees were observed to be highly networked transnational people. People on the move remained connected throughout their journeys. This is both an individual and a global factor, as one male Danish-Somali citizen explained:

Globalization has contributed a lot to this refugee crisis in Europe. The Internet is easy to access nowadays. If some of their friends have migrated to Scandinavian countries, they are quick to send back pictures of their situations, and these pictures in my opinion are a false truth. Globalization has contributed to the world being quicker and, through communicating via social media, made the distance between each other smaller. The routes they take also depend on this quick communication.
(Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years)

These networks are formed through the connections migrants have with diaspora communities and through the numerous links they develop in preparation for, and during, their journey. As one female Danish-Somali citizen remarked:

The network these refugees and migrants require through their journeys is huge. We ourselves don't even have so many connections. I personally know a handful of migrants, and they actually know, more than you, which countries have which requirements. (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years)

Regarding the direct contact members of the diaspora have with newly-arrived Somalis, one male Danish-Somali citizen explained:

I have been in contact, and can still get in contact, with refugees or migrants through some of my friends who are newcomers or others who have met them. I've also been in contact with extended family who have arrived in Europe, but also through my organisational activities, which are voluntary. I've given them advice numerous times

on the rules and regulations in Denmark and how to integrate into Danish society etc. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 30 years)

This direct engagement with family members, community members and others highlights the close interactions between newly-arrived Somalis and diaspora communities and, in some cases, suggests the trusted role members of the diaspora play as sources of information. The respondent above added that he felt he needed to give them ‘realistic advice’ as to what is possible during their early settlement period in Europe, perhaps countering information given by smugglers or other community members. It is worth noting that respondents were also in contact with diaspora communities in other countries such as Canada and Australia and maintained contact with family, friends and previous colleagues, among others. A distinction was made by one respondent about the contact he had with Somalis during their journeys and on arrival in Europe. He described the contacts he had during journeys as being “very informal and indirect. In extreme cases they get our phone numbers and contact us directly or by social media” (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 30 years). Whereas contact on arrival is through networks and can be made in person rather than over the phone or via social media.

The dilemma faced by diasporas

As illustrated earlier in this section, diaspora members are trying to manage their lives in their new host country and may regard irregularised migration as a bad choice. This puts members of the diaspora in a dilemma: although they regard irregular migration as a bad choice, due to their social bonds, they feel obliged to help their family members on the dangerous journey. This dilemma was pointed out in the focus group discussions. In one case when a person heard of another community member considering borrowing money to help family members pay smugglers to reach Europe, he argued with him and tried to discourage him. This was due to the level of debt he would be taking on, as well as the integration challenges facing new migrants in Denmark. However, another male Danish-Somali citizen made a distinction between paying for migrants in an irregularised

situation and supporting fellow nationals in need (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 35 years). To this end, he explained how the diaspora invited people for social gatherings and ran programmes that encouraged active participation in sports, for example. Another female Danish-Somali citizen added that “we as Somalis help each other in every way we can, [...]. I know I’m fortunate with the outcome of my life, so I don’t mind helping others” (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years). Another male Danish-Somali citizen explained:

Our initial standpoint as diasporas here in Denmark is that we don’t want them [other Somalis] to migrate to Europe and potentially risk their lives. We don’t want any bad things to happen to them. On the other hand, to be frank, they don’t have other opportunities in Somalia or Africa, and that is why they are looking towards Europe. The only thing we as a diaspora community can contribute with is information sharing. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 29 years)

Through their direct engagement, diaspora members can offer people considering irregular migration advice, due to their position as trusted members of the community. However many people still in their country of origin or in transit will not accept such advice and prefer to make their own decision based on other information sources.

Policy perspectives

Respondents were aware of the wider policy debates taking place in Europe at the time the research was conducted, including the externalisation of asylum procedures.³ Many were opposed in

³ Externalisation policies describe extraterritorial state action to prevent migrants, including asylum seekers, from entering the legal jurisdictions or territories of destination countries or regions or to make them legally inadmissible without individually considering the merits of their protection claims. In Europe, the idea to externalise asylum procedures was first introduced in 2003, when British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s cabinet and Home Office circulated a policy paper called ‘A New Vision for Refugees’, which proposed that the European Union establish Regional Protection Areas (RPAs) near refugee-producing countries to contain refugees in countries of first arrival and to serve as places to which asylum seekers who had arrived in Europe could be deported (Noll, 2005). This proposal was withdrawn the same year due to lack of support, but the New Vision has

principle to irregularised migration for a number of reasons, but supportive of alternatives, including offering labour migration and visas for skilled people. A male Danish-Somali citizen suggested that the system should be:

[...] more like the American system where you have quotas, because a person from Somalia can get into the US with a green card. [...] I think the same system should come to Denmark. [...] then everybody gets a fair chance. (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 45 years)

Another male Danish-Somali citizen respondent added that the money people get when they are repatriated could be used to realise opportunities in Somalia or other parts of Africa (Focus group discussion, male Danish-Somali citizen, aged 45 years). Overall, there was quite a lot of debate generated between those who supported helping people wishing to start a new life in Denmark and others who were opposed to the practice of irregularised migration. Some saw the challenges Somalis faced with integration and questioned the benefits of supporting people to come to Europe, either financially or emotionally. Notably, several diaspora members suggested they could play a role in helping with integration.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter looked at the attitudes of Somalis in the diaspora on irregularised migration by their countrymen and women. The findings of the research show that the Somali diaspora in Denmark is not a homogenous group and is comprised of new arrivals, long-term residents and citizens, as well as being differentiated by age, gender and region of origin. A further distinction is generational: Danish-born people of Somali heritage and older Danish citizens who were born in Somalia. It is important to keep in mind these distinctions when studying diasporas. However, the criteria mentioned by Bakewell (2009, p. 2) that diaspora have a collective memory and

persisted through the years and is echoed loudly in the 2016 EU-Turkey Action Plan for stemming the irregularised flow of migrants and asylum seekers into the European Union (Frelick, Kysel & Podkul, 2016, p. 206).

shared consciousness is also important to keep in mind. In this research, members of the diaspora expressed a plurality of opinions, among which some trends can be identified, despite the limitations of sample size. These trends are discussed in this section.

Firstly, diasporas were able to observe first-hand the changing profile of new arrivals reaching Europe by irregularised means. In particular, they saw the most recent group of Somalis arriving by boat to Europe as young and primarily seeking better opportunities due to conditions in Somalia. Respondents were reticent to characterise them as not deserving of protection, noting the risky journeys they had made and the hardships they had suffer both on route and in Somalia. However, diaspora responses were moderated by the policy changes taking place at the time, which were impacting on the more-established community, which faced review and possible withdrawal of their complementary protection status. This has led to concerns that newcomers were influencing Danish policy changes affecting established communities. One female Danish-Somali citizen shared that: “it feels like we always have to justify the newcomers’ actions. That we are the ‘go to guys’ whenever there is a negative story in the news. Of course we feel that” (Focus group discussion, female Danish-Somali citizen, aged 24 years).

Secondly, like many other diaspora communities, Danish Somalis are transnationally connected to family, friends and communities in many parts of the world. Similarly, diaspora respondents reported that Somalis on the move were in touch throughout their journeys to share information, seek help and obtain advice. In this way diasporas can and do play a role as guides, both through family connections and through the formal associations of which they are a part. A consequence of being connected that left many people with conflicted feelings was being asked to pay ransom to smugglers for the release of migrants who were being held hostage. Respondents recognised the urgent life or death situation their compatriots were in and felt compelled to act. At the same time, they saw the sums of money being paid and believed it could be better spent in Somalia or the near region. A further issue was that many diaspora members

were in need themselves, often unemployed or, as noted above, at risk of return, and the sums of money being demanded are very high. Despite these reservations, diasporas remain a trusted source of information for people on the move, which continues after arrival in Denmark, and are regularly contacted on social media for assistance – although with the above-mentioned caveat: that advice given by diasporas that potential migrants should refrain from migrating is often not viewed as legitimate by potential migrants.

Finally, based on their relationships with people on the move, members of the diaspora expressed attitudes towards policies and programmes, which could be better harnessed in a more organised manner. This included ideas about regularising migration and voluntary return programmes. Diasporas also help with integration into Danish society and other aspects of social integration for asylum seekers and other newcomers in times of need. This formal support is often done in a voluntary capacity without judgement as to how people have arrived, but instead based on need. These findings, based on a pilot study with a limited number of respondents, during a time when domestic policy towards Somalis seeking asylum in Denmark was in flux, indicate the need for more robust and substantive research in this area, which places the voices and opinions of diaspora communities at the centre. It also shows that diaspora communities can be a rich source of information on this topic.

In an era where attention on people moving in an irregularised situation is at an all-time high, with policymakers seeking to find ways to address this phenomenon and other stakeholders trying to reduce risks and ensure protection for people on the move, this research highlights the unique relationships that diaspora communities in destination countries have with their fellow nationals, which extends to those moving in an irregularised manner. This study shows that diaspora communities have deep and contextualised knowledge about migrants and refugees based on their own experience and the close relationship they have with their fellow nationals as transnational socially-connected individuals. As a result, members of the diaspora hold opinions and expectations about irregularised migration and

people moving irregularly, while at the same time often maintaining links with them on route. Diaspora communities can contribute to policies in this area, including by suggesting alternatives to irregularised migration. Hence, diaspora communities should be considered an important stakeholder in future policy discussions about migration, in addition to their already growing role as supporters of integration, humanitarian and development assistance, and peace-building in many countries around the world.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Danish Refugee Council and the Mixed Migration Centre for access to data on the relationships between diasporas and migrants coming to Europe irregularly.

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