

Deviance of survival in a migratory context: The case of migrants who left Daloa (Côte d'Ivoire) for Europe

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze and understand the link between certain social conditions and the emergence of deviant behaviors in the context of irregular migration from Daloa to Europe. In this context, forty-three (43) potential migrants and migration candidates, recruited through snowball sampling, were surveyed. The data collected through documentation and interviews were subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The results obtained from this study highlighted that some migrants, under the pressure of constraints related to the migration project, engage in deviant acts (theft, embezzlement, fraud, etc.) either to survive during transit or to fund their journey. At the end of this study, it should be noted that the "deviant" migrant should not be understood as a criminal but as someone who struggles for survival in a world where they are disconnected from attachment to social ties.

Keywords: Deviance; Financing; Migration; Subsistence; Transit; Vulnerability

1. Introduction: Some theoretical benchmarks

In the era of globalization, international migration has emerged as a complex social phenomenon whose demographic, economic, political, humanitarian, and security implications make it one of the major current issues facing contemporary societies and the scientific debates that permeate them. Far from being simply geographical movements, migration reflects complex processes of reshaping social relations, identities, and territories. Like the rights to life, health, and education, the right to mobility appears as a fundamental right inherent to human existence. For centuries, individuals have moved from one geographical space to another for a multitude of reasons, whether economic, political, familial, cultural, or environmental [1]. The scale of these contemporary mobilities testifies to the structuring nature of this phenomenon on a global scale. Indeed, migratory movements involved 258 million people, or 3.8% of the world's population [2]. Among these flows, Africa ranked third after Asia and Europe, with over nine million migrants. This trend has intensified in recent decades, with the number of international migrants rising from 84 million in 1970 to 272 million in 2019 [3]. These migrations are no longer isolated events but are fully integrated into the structural transformations of contemporary societies [4, 5, 6]. They reflect both the profound economic inequalities between states, geopolitical imbalances, the effects of globalization, and individual aspirations for a more stable and socially valued existence [7, 8].

In sub-Saharan Africa, migration to Europe is of particular importance due to the socio-economic difficulties faced by a large segment of the youth [9]. In this regard, it is noted that unemployment, job insecurity, inadequate career prospects, social inequalities, and collective representations of success all contribute significantly to fueling the desire to leave [10]. In many African contexts, migration is no longer solely an individual strategy for improving living conditions; it is

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now part of collective strategies for social advancement, sometimes supported by family and community expectations. The wealth disparities between countries of origin and Western societies, combined with the (successful) ideals associated with other places, play a decisive role in shaping migration plans [11].

Côte d'Ivoire, although identified as one of the most dynamic economies in West Africa [12], is not immune to these dynamics. In several inland cities, particularly Daloa, many young people see leaving for Europe as a concrete opportunity to improve their living conditions. This aspiration is explained both by objective economic constraints and by symbolic logics linked to the social value placed on migrants perceived as having succeeded abroad. The migrant then appears as someone who has managed to "escape suffering," support their family, and achieve a form of social recognition. However, behind this idealized image lie trajectories frequently marked by uncertainty, violence, and vulnerability. Indeed, the last few decades have been characterized by an intensification of irregular migration between Africa and Europe. Because of the entry and stay procedures they entail, these migrations are attracting increasing media and political attention, fueled by the scale of the flows and the human tragedies that accompany them [13].

Clandestine migration routes expose migrants to multiple forms of vulnerability: economic exploitation, physical violence, criminal networks, humiliation, arbitrary detention, or abandonment in hostile environments [14,15]. The Sahelian and Mediterranean routes thus appear as spaces where survival, domination, the informal economy, and organized crime intersect. This particular migratory condition can be understood as a situation of permanent social disarticulation, in which the individual is absent from their place of origin without being fully integrated into their host country [16]. This weakening of social ties contributes to altering relationships with norms and institutions. In situations of irregular migration, the weakening of traditional mechanisms of social control, combined with uncertainty, precariousness, and exposure to highly vulnerable environments, fosters the emergence of behaviors that deviate from established social and legal norms. It is precisely within this context of vulnerability that the question of deviance in the context of migration arises. While concerns about migrant crime are not new [17], they have occupied a prominent place in public debates for over a century, particularly in the United States and Europe [18,19]. In France, in 2021, foreign nationals represented 24.5% of the prison population, with overrepresentation in several categories of crimes and offenses [20].

However, reducing this reality to a supposed criminal predisposition among migrants would be to ignore the structural constraints that shape their trajectories. In situations of extreme precarity, some migrants are led to adopt behaviors contrary to socio-institutional norms in order to ensure their immediate survival or to pursue their migration project. Deviant behaviors observed in marginalized communities can be interpreted as strategies for economic and social survival [21]. This perspective aligns with the theory of anomie, according to which individuals resort to illegitimate means when legal avenues for achieving socially valued goals are closed to them [22].

In the case of undocumented migrants, the goal of economic success remains highly valued, while the legitimate resources to achieve it remain limited, or even nonexistent. The use of certain deviant practices can then be understood as a strategy for adapting to a situation of structural blockage. This reading echoes analyses of social disorganization [23], social control theory, which emphasizes the protective role of social ties [24], and research on labeling and stigmatization processes [25]. This reflection extends analyses that highlight the tendency of contemporary societies to manage the effects of precarity through security and repressive measures [26]. However, the majority of research on crime in migration has long presented migrants as victims of smugglers, armed groups, coercive institutions, or exploitation networks [27]. While this reality remains undeniable, few recent studies have focused on situations in which migrants themselves become perpetrators of deviant practices during their migration journey. Migrants leaving Daloa for Europe, whether in transit or having reached their destination, are not immune to these dynamics. So, what explains their shift towards deviance and what deviant acts do they commit within the framework of their migration project?

This article does not aim to reduce migrants to criminal figures. Rather, it seeks to understand, from a primarily criminological perspective informed by sociological insights, how certain social conditions produce specific forms of deviance linked to irregular migration. More precisely, it analyzes the links between the sociodemographic characteristics of migrants, the social pressures they face, and their potential recourse to deviant practices. The main hypothesis posits that some migrants leaving Daloa for Europe commit deviant acts in order to mobilize the resources necessary to finance their migration project or to survive in transit spaces.

2. Methodology

2.1. Site of research and participants

The fieldwork on which this research is based was conducted in the city of Daloa as part of doctoral research carried out between August and October 2020, and then again between May and June 2023.

Located in west-central Côte d'Ivoire, Daloa is the capital of the Haut-Sassandra administrative region. According to data from the General Population and Housing Census [28], this urban area has approximately 421,081 inhabitants spread over an area of 13 km². Due to its significant population, economic dynamism, and strategic geographic location, it constitutes one of the main urban and economic centers of western Côte d'Ivoire.

Characterized by a strong socio-cultural diversity, Daloa presents itself as a cosmopolitan space marked by intense human mobility. The city is home to populations of diverse origins, both native and foreign, drawn by the economic opportunities offered by this area with its strong agricultural and commercial focus. This concentration of migratory flows thus contributes to making Daloa a major crossroads for regional and transnational migration.

The choice of this research site is based on several scientific and empirical considerations. Firstly, Daloa is identified as one of the main hubs of irregular migration in Côte d'Ivoire [29]. Its geographical location, its access to major national and sub-regional highways, and the density of the social networks that develop there make it a prime location for observing contemporary migration dynamics. Secondly, this city provides a particularly relevant setting for analyzing the interactions between socio-economic vulnerabilities, migratory aspirations, and deviant behaviors. As a space of departure, transit, and reconfiguration for migration projects, Daloa offers an analytical framework conducive to understanding the social dynamics underlying engagement in irregular migration journeys. Furthermore, the presence of several organizations involved in supporting and assisting migrants constituted a major methodological asset. These institutional and community-based structures facilitated the identification of interviewees, connections with potential and returning migrants, and access to diverse narratives of experience, essential for a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Given Daloa's central role in irregular migration dynamics, it seemed relevant to collect data from actors directly involved in these processes. With this in mind, two categories of participants were interviewed: young people and adults potentially considering migration, on the one hand, and migrants who had returned to their country of origin, on the other. The total number of participants surveyed was forty-three (43).

These participants were chosen based on their direct involvement in the migration phenomenon under study. Whether they had already experienced migration or were considering it, these individuals possessed a privileged understanding of the dynamics, perceptions, and constraints associated with irregular migration. As such, they appeared to be the actors best positioned to provide detailed accounts and relevant information on the social realities underlying migration trajectories.

Given the difficulty of accessing this population and its embeddedness in relatively closed social networks, the sample was constructed using snowball sampling, a technique particularly well-suited to the study of populations that are difficult to reach [30]. This approach involved identifying an initial core group of respondents, particularly individuals with significant social networks, and then progressively expanding the sample to include those with whom we had business, work, friendship, or social connections.

Specifically, we first leveraged contacts within associations established through our previous work on migration issues, notably with the NGO REALIC and the Daloa Municipal Youth Association. These initial contacts then facilitated connections with certain migrants who, in turn, directed us to other individuals meeting the study's criteria, thus enabling the gradual development of the sample.

2.2. Data collection and processing protocol

Data collection relied on a mixed-methods approach, employing documentation, observation, and surveys through interviews and questionnaires. This combination of techniques aimed to facilitate data triangulation, cross-referencing information sources and strengthening the validity of the results. Documentation provided a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding irregular migration dynamics, vulnerabilities associated with migration journeys, and deviant behaviors observed in mobility contexts. Observation facilitated the understanding of social interactions, migrants' living conditions, and the contexts of their migration trajectories.

Regarding the surveys, data were collected using an interview guide and a questionnaire with mixed-response items. These instruments were administered directly to respondents to simultaneously gather quantitative and qualitative data. This approach encouraged respondents to express themselves freely while guaranteeing their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information collected.

The data gathered underwent a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis relied on descriptive statistics presented in tables and figures, highlighting the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, their migration routes, and the nature of the reported deviant behaviors.

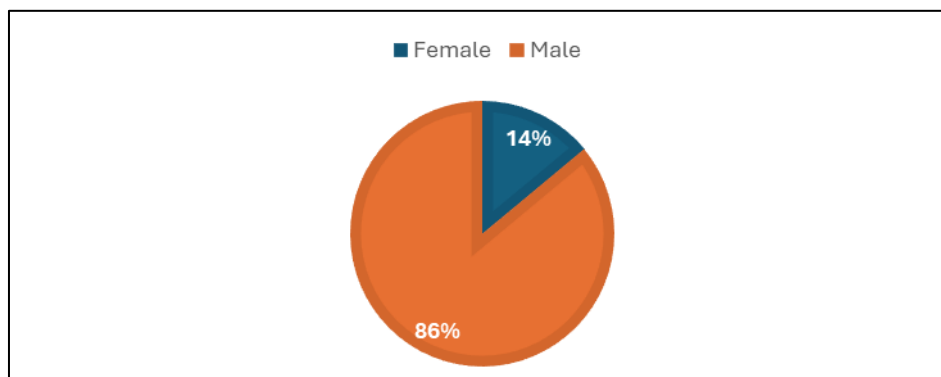
Simultaneously, the qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the respondents' lived experiences, their migration practices, the meanings they ascribe to their experiences, and their perceptions of the phenomenon under study. It also helped to uncover the social, economic, and relational factors underlying their actions. The integration of these two analytical approaches fostered both a descriptive and interpretive understanding of the phenomenon studied.

3. Results

3.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

Analyzing the sociodemographic characteristics of migrants is necessary to establish the link between the influence of sex, age, and birth order, on the one hand, and educational attainment and occupational activities, on the other, on their migration decisions and deviant behaviors within the process.

3.1.1. Sex, age, and birth order of migrants



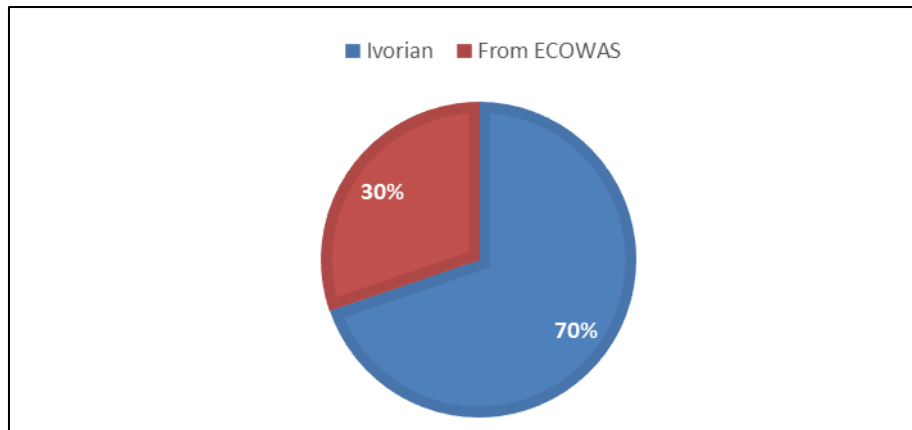
Source: Field data, august-october, 2020.

Figure 1 Distribution of migrants by gender

Figure 1 shows the distribution of migrants by sex. It reveals that the majority of migrants surveyed are men, at 86%, while only 14% of this overall population are women (6 people).

This distribution suggests that men are more inclined to migrate due to their traditional roles as heads of household and breadwinners. The difficulties encountered in fulfilling these responsibilities could be an incentive to migrate to Europe in search of better economic opportunities.

Conversely, women are less represented in migration, which can be attributed to their distinct social roles compared to those of men. Women are most often perceived as being under the protection and responsibility of men, which limits their involvement in seeking financial security and in migration-related matters. This social dynamic contributes to the lower participation of women in migration, where men primarily bear the burden of providing for their families.

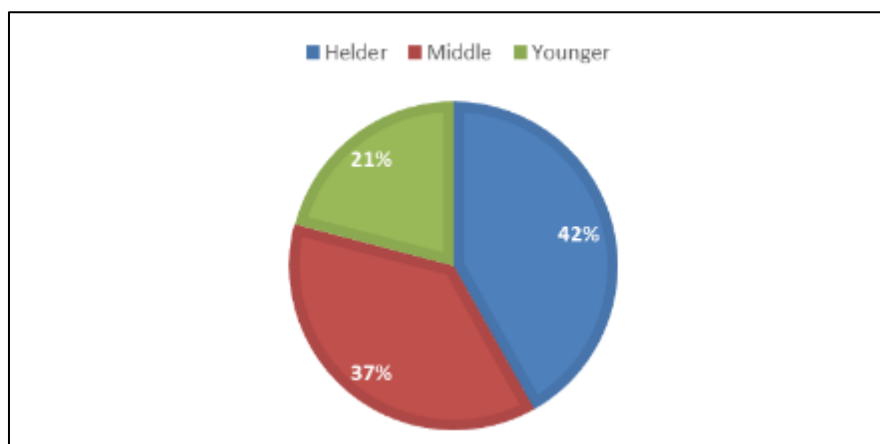


Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 2 Distribution of migrants by origin

Figure 2 reveals that 70% of those attempting irregular migration from Daloa to Europe are of Ivorian origin, while 30% come from ECOWAS member states. This high percentage of migrants of Ivorian origin is primarily due to the fact that the study was conducted within Côte d'Ivoire. It is important to note that migrants from other ECOWAS countries are also well represented, which can be attributed to the economic opportunities offered by Côte d'Ivoire that attract nationals from the sub-region. Based on this observation, it is understood that Côte d'Ivoire is also a transit country for the numerous migrants from the sub-region identified in this research. The testimonies of Inza and Abdoul, foreign nationals encountered in Daloa, who highlight their motivations and lived experiences, enrich the perspective that Côte d'Ivoire is, or has become, a stage, a transit country in their migration project aimed at Europe as their final destination.

Inza states: "I am originally from Mali and I have been living in Côte d'Ivoire for seven years. I came to this country for job opportunities. I worked as a port employee and I also sold fabric at the market in Adjamé. But now that business is no longer good, I decided to go to Europe. That's how a relative who was already in Daloa told me about a network of smugglers who could facilitate my journey." "Abdoul, a Guinean, told us the following: 'It was my brother, who has lived in Ivory Coast for years, who told me about a network that could help people go to France. As this was part of my plans, I went to Daloa. That's where I met people with whom I was able to travel to Europe, specifically to Spain.'"



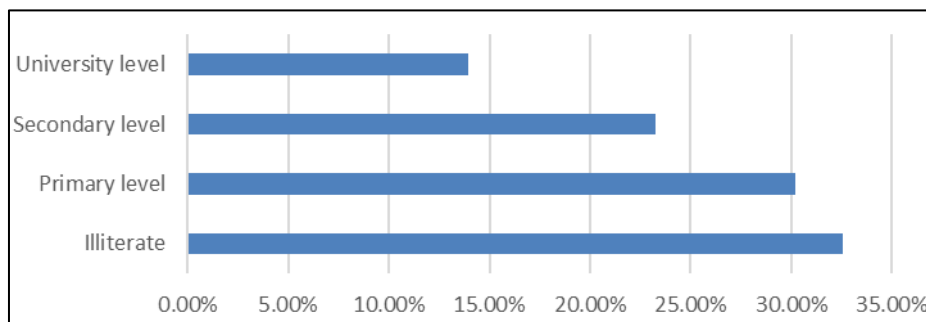
Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 3 Breakdown of migrants by sibling position

Figure 3 shows that the majority of undocumented migrants included in this survey are the eldest (42%), middle (37%), and youngest (21%) members of their families. The qualitative survey reveals that the predominance of eldest and middle children in migration journeys is explained by their moral responsibility to provide for the financial, material, and even psychological needs of their family members. Some even receive encouragement and financial support from their parents and/or other siblings to undertake this migratory journey. These dynamic highlights the weight of family

roles and social expectations on migration decisions. Eldest and middle children often feel a particular responsibility towards their families, which can motivate them to take risks by seeking better economic opportunities abroad. These observations underscore how family structures and intergenerational dynamics influence individuals' migration choices.

3.1.2. Education level and professional activities of migrants



Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 4 Breakdown of migrants by education level

Figure 4 highlights the different levels of education of the migrants surveyed in this study, with a significant representation of illiterates (32.56%). Migrants with only a primary education level follow with a rate of 30.23%. Migrants with secondary and university education levels are the least represented in this overall population with respective rates of 23.26% and 13.95%.

Examining the educational level of migrants raises significant concerns regarding their socio-professional integration. Indeed, a correlation seems to exist between illegal migration and the level of education. More educated individuals tend to opt for legal migration routes, while those with less education often turn to illegal migration. This observation highlights the major impact of educational and professional opportunities on migration choices.

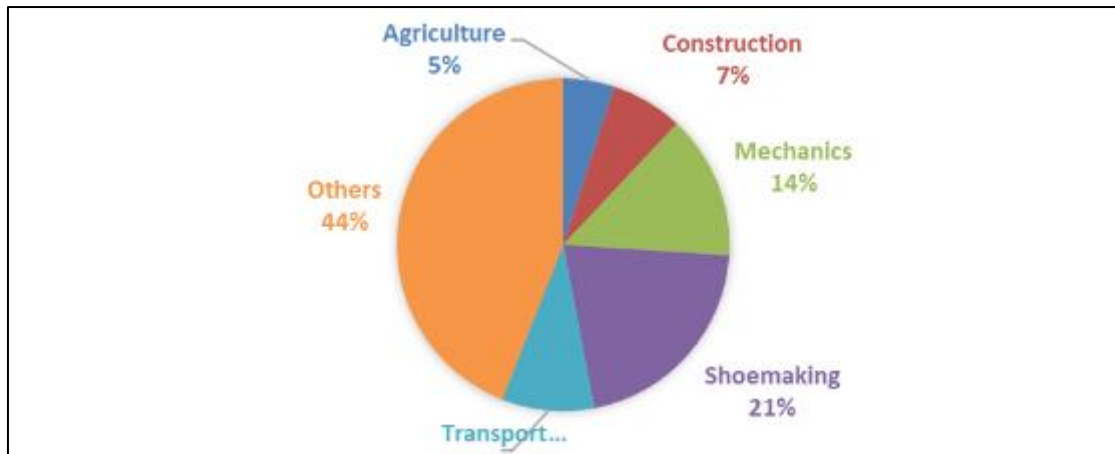
Table 1 Summary of migrants' answers about their work activities before leaving

Professional activity exercises before departure		Frequencies	Percentages (%)	Valid pourcentage	Cumulative pourcentage
Valid	Yes	31	72.1	72.1	72.1
	No	12	27.9	27.9	100.0
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

The data in Table 1 show that 72.1% of the migrants surveyed were employed before their departure, indicating that the majority of potential migrants had income-generating activities.

The following figure details the types of employment these migrants held before their departure.



Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 5 Distribution of migrants according to types of professional activities

Based on this data, we find that migrants who were employed before their departure worked in the informal sector (65%). Those working in the transport sector, such as mechanics (14%) and transporters (9%), constitute the second largest category of employed migrants involved in migration. Construction workers and farmers are the least represented in this breakdown, with respective rates of 7% and 5%.

During discussions with these migrants, it was observed that they have little to no professional experience and live in a situation of economic dependence. In this context of socioeconomic hardship, their formal education and professional skills are particularly precarious. Consequently, these potential migrants have limited access to well-paid jobs that could provide them with sufficient financial resources.

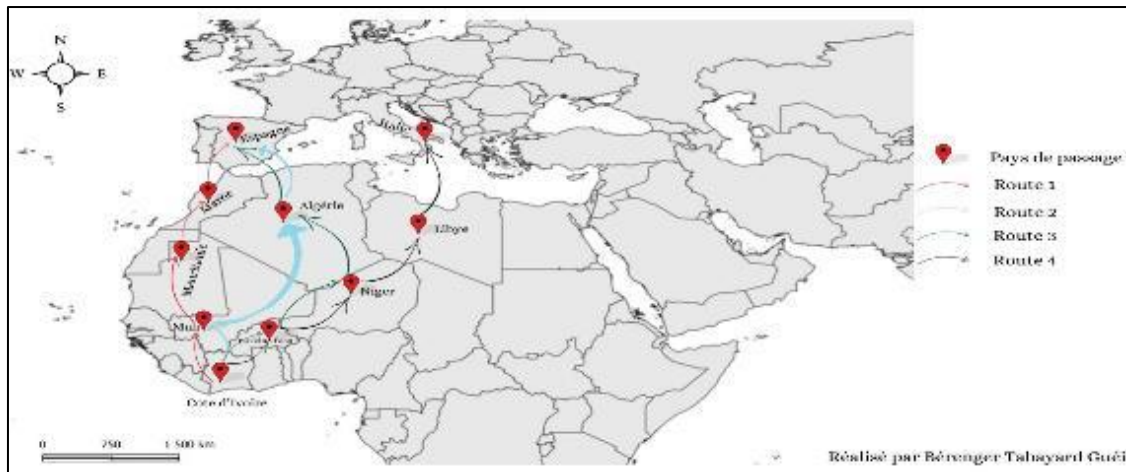
3.2. Migration routes

The investigation revealed that people migrating from Daloa to Europe use several distinct routes, four of which were identified as the main ones. All of these routes originate in the city of Daloa. They are:

- Route 1: This route crosses Burkina Faso, Niger, and Libya before reaching Italy;
- Route 2: This route crosses Burkina Faso, Niger, and Algeria before reaching Spain;
- Route 3: This route crosses Mali and Algeria, also leading to Spain; and
- Route 4: This route crosses Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco before reaching Spain.

These various routes highlight the diverse paths taken by migrants to reach Europe. Each of these migratory journeys presents its own specific challenges and risks.

The map below represents the main migratory routes of people leaving Daloa for Europe. To facilitate understanding of the map, a detailed analysis of each route has been provided, including key transit cities and information on the specific realities of each stage of the journey.



Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 6 Migration routes from the city of Daloa to Europe

This map highlights the city's integration into a transnational migration system structured around several mobility corridors linking West Africa to European areas. The convergence of routes toward recurring transit countries, such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Libya, reveals the existence of consolidated migration networks that guide individual trajectories far beyond national borders. This spatial configuration demonstrates that irregular migration is not a spontaneous movement, but rather a pattern of circulation based on shared information, community solidarity, and informal support mechanisms.

However, these transit spaces are also characterized by particularly unstable geopolitical and sociopolitical contexts. The persistent security crises in the Sahel, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the presence of armed groups, the growth of transnational criminal economies, the weakening of state capacity for territorial control, and the political fragmentation in Libya since 2011, all contribute to making these territories highly vulnerable.

Added to these factors are the tightening of migration policies at the Algerian and Moroccan borders, the increasing militarization of control mechanisms, and the rise in pushback operations, which exacerbate the precarious situation of migrants and complicate their journeys. Under these conditions, transit zones cease to be mere places of passage and become spaces of constant reshaping of migration projects, where migrants, as adaptive actors, develop strategies to circumvent the institutional and security constraints they face. The deviant behaviors observed during migration journeys thus appear less as the expression of an individual predisposition to criminality than as situated responses to contexts marked by uncertainty, resource scarcity, and the disorganization of social regulatory mechanisms. Consequently, this figure highlights a geography of irregular migration in which deviant behaviors constitute, for some migrants, modes of adjustment to the structural constraints imposed by a migratory environment filtered through the lens of power relations, violence, and logics of exclusion.

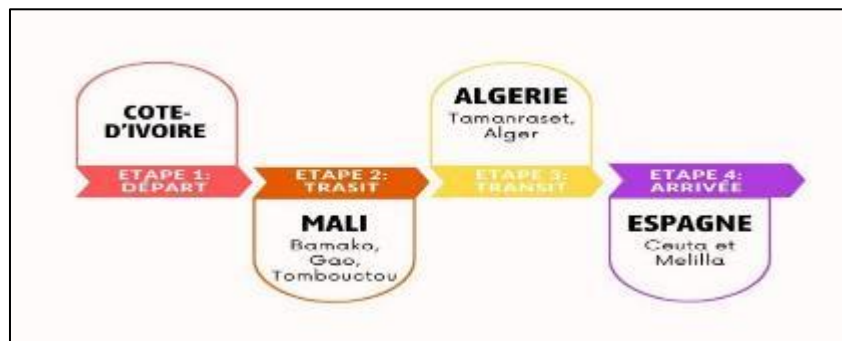


Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 7 Migration Route 1 (From the city of Daloa to Italy)

The testimonies of those interviewed revealed that the route from Daloa to Italy via Burkina Faso, Niger, and Libya is a frequently chosen option despite the associated risks. The military crisis in Libya since 2011 is a major source of concern, but porous borders and the presence of human trafficking networks sometimes facilitate the passage of migrants.

From Daloa, migrants cross several African countries before reaching the central Mediterranean and heading towards Italy. Their route generally includes Burkina Faso, with Ouagadougou being a major transit point mentioned by all those interviewed who passed through this country. In Niger, the cities of Niamey and Agadez are key stops for crossing the desert and reaching Libya. Once in Libya, the main route to Italy is the central Mediterranean, where migrants often board makeshift boats for the crossing. This investigation also reveals that some migrants managed to reach Italy via this route despite the challenges posed by the presence of the coast guard and dangerous weather conditions. However, others were intercepted by the coast guard or perished at sea. All of this highlights the dangers and difficulties these migrants face in their quest for a European adventure.

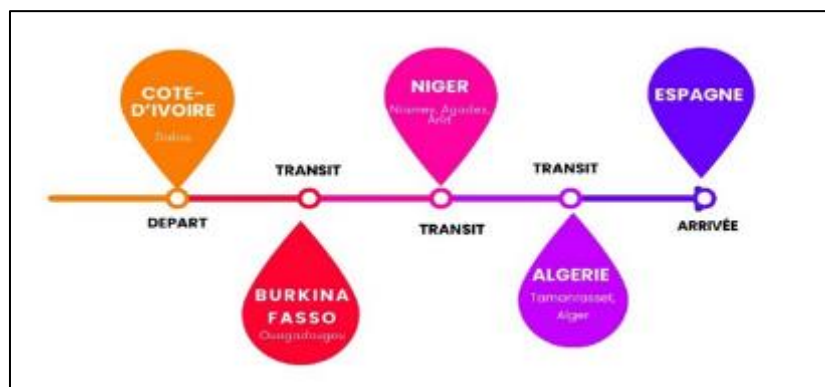


Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 8 Migration Route 2 (From the city of Daloa to Spain)

The route from Daloa to Spain via Mali and Algeria is considered by migrants to be one of the most difficult due to strict controls in Algeria. Despite this, it remains heavily used because it leads to the western Mediterranean, which in turn leads to Spain.

From Daloa, migrants pass through several cities in Mali and Algeria. In Mali, the main stops include Bamako, Gao, and Timbuktu, while in Algeria, Tamanrasset and Algiers are frequent crossing points mentioned by those interviewed. They report that the regular and rigorous presence of Algerian forces complicates their progress. In fact, they cite the reinforced controls and increased surveillance at certain key crossings, particularly along the coast, as making their journey difficult. However, they believe their plan remains achievable despite these obstacles, which motivates them to pursue their goal.

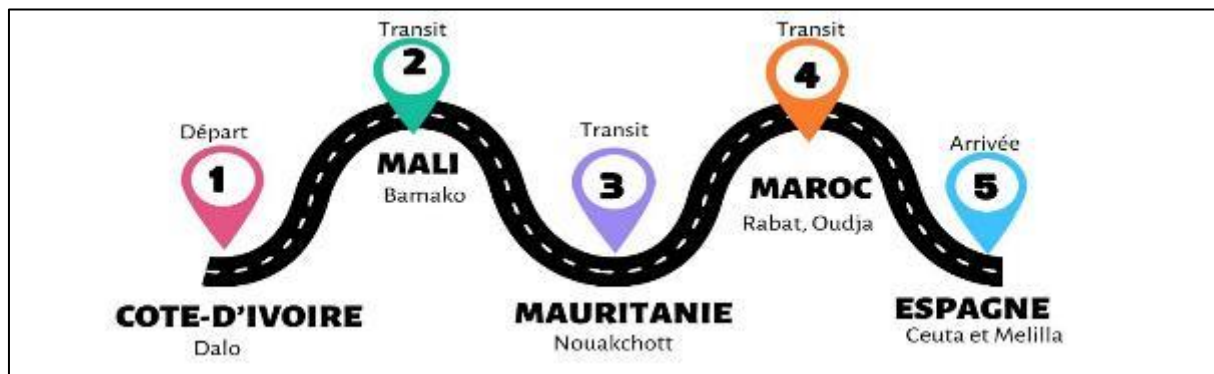


Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 9 Migration route 3 (From the city of Daloa to Spain)

On the route from Daloa to Spain via Burkina Faso, Niger, and Algeria, migrants go through several stages before reaching the Spanish coast via the western Mediterranean. A particular feature of this route is in Niger, especially in Agadez, where a major fork in the road lies. In Agadez, in central Niger, migrants have two options. They can choose to continue north to reach Libya or head west through Arlit to reach Algiers via Tamanrasset. These journeys are often made on foot or in vehicles (pick-up trucks or heavy goods vehicles). During this desert crossing between Niger and Algeria, many migrants have been victims of various forms of aggression perpetrated by armed groups.

These accounts highlight the challenges and dangers that migrants face throughout their journey to Spain along this perilous route, marked by strategic choices and considerable risks linked to the geographical conditions and the insecurity in the region.



Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Figure 10 Migration route 4 (From the city of Daloa to Spain)

The route from Daloa to Spain, passing through Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco, is one of the most arduous and perilous migration routes, according to testimonies gathered during the investigation. From Daloa, migrants head towards Mauritania via Bamako in Mali. They then travel through Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in Mauritania to prepare for crossing Western Sahara into Morocco. Once in Morocco, reaching the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla requires either swimming, using inflatable boats, or scaling the erected walls.

This journey is marked by considerable suffering, as migrants are often victims of violence perpetrated by armed groups during their crossing of Western Sahara. Furthermore, Moroccan security forces enforce strict border controls, thus increasing the security risks for migrants. The walls erected around the Spanish enclaves constitute an additional and difficult obstacle to overcome.

In short, it is important to emphasize that the choice of these routes is deliberate and motivated, not purely accidental. It is based on information and advice from migrants who have already traveled these routes, as well as on the perception of the relative ease of crossing the various locations and the potential employment opportunities in transit.

Through the testimonies of Alain, Inza, and Alice, we can gain a better understanding of the realities associated with these migratory journeys.

Alain reported the following: "One Thursday morning, we left the city of Daloa for Burkina Faso. Once we arrived in Bouaké, people put us in another vehicle with other people to Burkina Faso. In Burkina Faso, the smugglers entrusted us to another group who were to take us to Libya across the desert from Niger. From there, we were supposed to reach Italy." Upon arriving in Libya, people approached us and said they could help us return in exchange for 200,000 CFA francs each. They took us to a place to organize the trip. After that, they disappeared. I had to work for months as a construction assistant to earn enough money to finance my return home."

Alice, for her part, stated: "I went through Agadez because I already had friends there. They tried to leave, but it was difficult for them. But when I arrived there, we finally managed to reach Libya."

Inza, meanwhile, revealed: "Before leaving Daloa, my friend gave me information about what was happening on the roads. That's how I decided to go through Niger to get to Libya. He gave me the names of the towns I had to pass through." Upon arriving in Libya, we were finally able to board a dinghy after four months of searching for a route. More than an

hour after our departure, our dinghy began to sink. Each of us took off our clothes to try and bail out the water. Shortly after, we met a group of fishermen who helped us.

Alice, for her part, maintains this: "It was my sister, who is in Italy, who told me to go through Libya. She gave me details about the towns I should pass through, because she herself had been there. She also had friends there who were going to help me continue my journey. I spent two months there with them before taking my chances."

3.3. Acts of deviance committed by migrants in the migration process

Acts of deviance involving theft, embezzlement, and fraud are illicit means employed by some aspiring migrants to finance their projects and by potential migrants who intend to remain in transit to restart their journey.

The table below presents respondents' opinions on the criminal activity committed by migrants in support of their migration plans.

Table 2 Distribution of migrants' responses about crime committed to fund the migration project

		Responses		Observation percentage
		N	Percentages	
Crime committed to fund the trip	Theft	8	61.5	100.0
	Embezzlement	5	38.5	62.5
Total		13	100.0	162.5

Source: Field data, august-october, 2020

Analysis of this table shows that the migrants surveyed primarily committed two types of offenses to finance their journey: theft (61.5%) and embezzlement (38.5%). These statistics demonstrate that the majority of migrants involved in criminal activity to finance their travels committed theft, while some were guilty of embezzlement. The qualitative survey revealed that the thefts committed by these migrants mainly targeted valuables (motorcycles, cell phones, etc.). The theft of four motorcycles, two cell phones, and two pieces of jewelry was reported. Furthermore, embezzlement occurred within the companies where these migrants were employed. According to the data collected, the amounts embezzled ranged from 100,000 to 800,000 CFA francs. The testimonies of three migrants, Oumar (27 years old), Alex (25 years old), and Eric (19 years old), illustrate this reality.

Oumar testifies as follows: "Before I left, I worked in a garage. My boss would give me money to go shopping in other cities. Even when he was away, I was the one who held onto the garage's money until he arrived. Before leaving, he gave me 700,000 CFA francs for purchases I needed to make in Bouaké. As soon as I received this money, I set off on my journey."

Based on Oumar's testimony, it becomes clear that he had already planned his migration and was simply waiting for the right opportunity to embezzle money to finance it. While this interviewee knew where to find the money for his project, which he had already carefully planned, this was not the case for other would-be migrants who, under pressure to bring money, reportedly resorted to much riskier activities such as theft. This is the case of Alex.

He shared his experience as follows: "...One morning, the man I was dealing with asked me to pay him 200,000 FCFA as an advance for the project. He told me we had to leave in six days and asked me to bring the money very quickly. At that time, I had no money on me. I even asked people for a loan, but I received nothing. That day, the pressure of need led me to steal a motorcycle near a supermarket."

In the same situation as Alex, Eric also stole his neighbor's phone to finance his trip. According to him, "When my friend told me about the trip, I didn't have any money on me. I had to find the money as soon as possible to join him in Mauritania. That's when I stole my neighbor's phone while I was visiting her."

In the context of migration routes between Daloa and Europe, certain situations of vulnerability lead to deviant practices driven by survival instincts and opportunism. Among these is the phenomenon of migrants posing as smugglers to scam other migrants in distress. Indeed, during the journey, many migrants find themselves disoriented, abandoned by their handlers, or without reliable information about the routes to follow. This uncertainty, combined with the pressure to continue their journey at all costs, makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Some migrants, having acquired

knowledge of migration routes, transit points, and strategic crossing points, exploit this information asymmetry. Presenting themselves as intermediaries capable of facilitating crossings or reconnecting migrants to smuggling networks, they inspire trust in their peers. They promise support, introductions, or safe passage in exchange for money. However, once the funds are received, these "migrant smugglers" disappear, leaving their victims in an even more precarious situation than before.

The emergence of these "migrant smugglers" reflects the development of an informal mobility economy in which information, migration experience, and mastery of routes become strategic resources that can be converted into economic capital. In contexts marked by the absence of institutional protection mechanisms and limited access to reliable information, knowledge of routes, crossing points, and border crossing methods acquires considerable market value. The most experienced migrants then occupy an intermediate position that gives them influence over their peers. This information asymmetry fosters the development of social relationships.

4. Discussions

4.1. Socio-demographic characteristics: between structural vulnerabilities and migration projects

The initial findings of this study highlight the role of sociodemographic characteristics in understanding irregular migration trajectories and the deviant behaviors that may be associated with them. The analysis reveals a strong male predominance among the migrants surveyed, with men representing 86% of the sample. This finding aligns with the work of some authors [11] who argue that international migration remains marked by a gendered division of social roles, particularly in African societies where men are invested with economic and symbolic responsibilities linked to their status as providers of resources. Similarly, gender norms strongly influence migration decisions by assigning men the responsibility of meeting family economic expectations [7].

Furthermore, the low representation of women in our sample should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in international mobility, but rather as a reflection of specific social constraints that frame their migration plans. This conclusion is not unfamiliar to the scientific literature, as female migration often remains invisible or takes different forms than male migration, particularly through family reunification or more structured professional migration [31]. The importance of both eldest and younger siblings in migration trajectories also highlights the weight of family solidarity and intergenerational obligations in shaping migration projects. This finding corroborates other analyses [32] which suggest that migration strategies in sub-Saharan Africa are less a matter of individual decisions than of collective family dynamics. Migration thus appears as a response to the family's economic and social needs, with eldest siblings frequently bearing a moral responsibility to provide material support to their younger siblings. The significant presence of migrants from other ECOWAS countries, meanwhile, confirms Côte d'Ivoire's ambivalent role in regional migration dynamics. Historically perceived as a host country due to its economic attractiveness, it is now tending to become a transit zone to Europe. This finding aligns with trends showing that West African migration is organized according to multi-scalar patterns of circulation where the spaces of origin, transit, and destination remain closely intertwined [33].

Regarding educational attainment, our results highlight a high representation of migrants with limited schooling, with 32.56% being illiterate and 30.23% having only a primary school education. These observations support analyses indicating that low levels of education limit access to professional opportunities and legal migration pathways, thus encouraging the use of irregular routes [34]. However, contrary to a deterministic interpretation, the presence of migrants with secondary or university education demonstrates that migration aspirations are also driven by factors of downward social mobility, relative frustration, and the pursuit of social advancement. Furthermore, the fact that 72.1% of respondents were employed before their departure challenges the notion that irregular migration is exclusively the domain of unemployed individuals. This finding aligns with the analyses of other authors who view migration as the product of structural contradictions between individuals' social aspirations and the opportunities offered by their environment [16]. The predominance of activities in the informal sector thus reflects less a lack of work than precarious employment, characterized by income instability, weak social protections, and limited prospects for socioeconomic mobility. Consequently, the deviant behaviors observed in migration trajectories cannot be interpreted solely based on the individual characteristics of migrants. They are embedded within a set of structural constraints that combine low levels of education, job insecurity, family responsibilities, and social pressures related to successful migration. The main contribution of this research lies precisely in highlighting the link between these socio-demographic factors and the deviant behaviors developed to finance the migration project or ensure survival in transit spaces. However, these results must be interpreted with caution. On the one hand, the use of snowball sampling limits the statistical representativeness of the study. On the other hand, the sensitivity of information relating to deviant practices may have influenced the respondents' statements.

4.2. Migration routes through the lens of transit vulnerabilities

The second part of the results of this study shows that migratory routes between Daloa and Europe are organized around structured transnational corridors, linked to recurring transit spaces such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Libya. Far from being improvised, the routes taken are based on circulation strategies fueled by shared information, community solidarity, and the experience of migrants who have already traveled these routes. These observations are consistent with analyses highlighting the central role of social networks in structuring contemporary mobility [35].

The testimonies collected confirm the conclusions of studies on “circulatory territories,” which demonstrate that migrants develop practical skills enabling them to continually adapt their trajectories to the constraints they encounter [36]. Transit cities such as Agadez, Tamanrasset, Gao, Nouadhibou, and Tripoli thus appear as strategic hubs where the conditions for continuing the journey are negotiated.

However, these transit spaces are undergoing profound geopolitical shifts that exacerbate the vulnerability of migrants. Persistent security crises in the Sahel, the political fragmentation of Libya since 2011, the expansion of armed groups, and the growth of illicit cross-border economies are transforming these migration corridors into areas of high insecurity. These findings corroborate the conclusions of other analyses that attribute the reconfiguration of migration routes to the militarization of the Sahel-Saharan borders, although this does not always reduce mobility [37]. Similarly, other research has shown that the tightening of European migration policies contributes to shifting migration routes toward longer, more expensive, and more dangerous itineraries [38].

Furthermore, the accounts of Alain, Inza, and Alice reveal the importance of social capital in choosing routes and managing risks. Decisions regarding the routes taken are largely based on advice from relatives already settled in the transit or destination countries, thus illustrating the role of migration networks in the circulation of information and resources.

One of the main contributions of this research lies in highlighting the links between the geographical configuration of migration routes and the emergence of deviant behavior. The acts observed along these journeys appear less as expressions of individual predispositions to criminality than as responses to contexts marked by normative instability, the scarcity of legal resources, and the weakening of social regulatory mechanisms. This interpretation aligns with analyses that posit that migratory transit spaces constitute exceptional places where relationships to norms, resources, and institutions are reshaped [39].

Finally, these results underscore the value of a socio-criminological approach attentive to the spatial dimensions of irregular migration. They show that migration routes are not merely itineraries of movement, but also social spaces that generate vulnerabilities, within which geopolitical constraints, security apparatuses, and power relations contribute to shaping migrants' behavior.

4.3. From Migration Constraints to Deviant Logics

The third and final part of the results of this study shows that some migrants resort to deviant practices such as theft, embezzlement, or fraud to finance their migration project or to ensure their subsistence in transit spaces. These observations suggest moving beyond essentialist interpretations that systematically link irregular migration and crime to examine the social conditions in which these behaviors emerge.

Indeed, the accounts of Oumar, Alex, and Éric reveal that these acts occur in contexts marked by intense economic pressure, the urgency of departure, and the lack of available legitimate resources. Similarly, analyses reveal that deviant behaviors develop when individuals have limited access to the legitimate means that would allow them to achieve socially valued goals [40]. In this case, access to Europe appears as a promise of economic success and social recognition, while the resources necessary to realize this project remain insufficient.

Furthermore, the nature of the acts committed highlights the role of opportunities offered by the immediate environment. Embezzlement perpetrated in professional settings or thefts targeting easily marketable goods reflect a strategic adaptation to available resources. This observation aligns with other studies [41] which suggest that deviant behaviors are acquired within the social interactions and relational contexts in which individuals operate. Migration networks can thus constitute spaces for the dissemination of alternative norms where certain illicit practices tend to be perceived as acceptable means of pursuing the migration project.

The situations observed in transit spaces also confirm the existence of processes of "vulnerability" that can foster the emergence of opportunistic practices. The figure of the "migrant-smuggler" illustrates the progressive transformation of the migration experience into an economic resource. In contexts characterized by uncertainty, disinformation, and a lack of institutional protection, mastery of routes, relational codes, and border crossing methods becomes a form of capital that can be converted into profit. This dynamic echoes analyses that highlight the link between the weakening of social integration mechanisms and the development of individual survival strategies in contexts marked by precarity [42].

Furthermore, our results highlight the porous boundaries between the statuses of victim and perpetrator of deviant acts. The same individuals can successively experience violence, fraud, or forms of exploitation, and then, in turn, develop similar practices to continue their migratory trajectory. This reversibility of roles aligns with analyses showing that deviant behaviors cannot be dissociated from relations of domination and the social contexts in which they take shape [43].

The main contribution of this research thus lies in highlighting the processual dimension of migratory deviance. The observed acts do not stem from an individual predisposition to criminality, but are embedded in trajectories marked by precariousness, uncertainty, and the weakening of social regulations. This interpretation fits within the framework in which deviance often constitutes an adaptive response to situations of frustration and marginalization [44]. The sensitivity of the information gathered on deviant practices may have led some respondents to minimize or reinterpret their experiences. Furthermore, the diversity of migration routes and transit contexts calls for avoiding any hasty generalizations. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to renewing criminological approaches to irregular migration by showing that deviant behaviors are embedded in relational and structural dynamics closely linked to the constraints of the migration journey.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the migration trajectories of people who left Daloa for Europe highlights a reality often overlooked in public discourse on irregular migration: the deviant behaviors that develop in contexts of survival. The investigations conducted for this study show that some migrants, facing situations of extreme precarity before departure or during their journey, gradually adopt practices contrary to social and legal norms in order to preserve their migration plans or simply to continue surviving. These behaviors take several forms. The most frequently mentioned by respondents involve theft, embezzlement, and certain forms of fraud observed in migratory transit areas. However, it is important to clarify that these acts do not necessarily stem from an initial criminal intent. Rather, they appear as responses developed in situations where individuals feel trapped in an economic and social dead end. Indeed, in several accounts gathered during the investigation, the act of attempting to migrate occurs in a context marked by financial pressure imposed by smugglers, the fear of missing an opportunity to leave, or the sense of urgency linked to the need to join a group already on the migration routes. For some migrants, this pressure becomes so intense that it ultimately undermines their usually internalized moral compass.

The thefts reported by respondents primarily involved goods or valuables that could be easily resold to obtain money. These acts are generally presented by their perpetrators as solutions to the circumstances, sometimes even as acts they would never have considered outside the context of migration. Behind these accounts lies a persistent tension between moral guilt and economic necessity. Similarly, the embezzlements committed by other would-be migrants are portrayed as secondary acts, or even as necessary to finance their departure. These situations primarily reveal how the migration project ultimately restructures individual priorities to the point of justifying, in the migrant's mind, a break with certain moral obligations that are nevertheless highly valued in their social environment.

Furthermore, the conclusions of this study do not simply show that migrants turn to crime by committing reprehensible acts. It also emerges that, beyond theft and hijacking, many migrants are also victims of fraudulent practices developed in certain transit areas by unscrupulous migrants, individuals from these transit regions, or even armed groups. This reality testifies to the emergence of a veritable informal economy of clandestine migration in which information becomes a strategic resource that can be monetized. It also shows that social relations in migratory spaces are not based solely on solidarity among migrants. They can also be permeated by logics of exploitation, domination, and opportunism built around human vulnerability.

In light of the above, this study necessitates moving beyond simplistic interpretations that oppose migrants as "victims" and migrants as "offenders." Migration realities reveal complex trajectories where behaviors are shaped by economic constraints, power dynamics, structural violence, and social exclusion. Indeed, while some migrants prepare financially to ensure their financial security and facilitate their journey, some succeed, while others are swindled or robbed once

they have begun. Still others, poorly informed or unprepared, find themselves in transit territories resorting to illegal acts either to survive or to continue financing their migration. Therefore, the deviant behaviors observed in this study must be analyzed with caution, as the data collected do not allow us to conclude that there is a widespread criminalization of migrants. This is also a reality in which social pressures related to age for those on whom the family depends, and to gender in the traditional conception of men as the pillars of the family, lead some individuals to develop strategies of submersion and/or survival in order to gradually cross the boundaries imposed by social and legal norms. From this perspective, deviance appears less as an intrinsic characteristic of migrants than as the product of a profoundly disorganized migratory environment where economic constraints, structural violence, and social ruptures contribute to redefining individual behaviors.

Ultimately, the value of this study is both scientific and social. Scientifically, it has allowed us to examine the link between migration, marginality, and deviance in a field that is still relatively unexplored in the Ivorian context. The social value of this study lies in the fact that it can contribute to a better understanding of the vulnerabilities experienced by some migrants in order to guide public policies towards approaches more focused on prevention, social support and human protection

Compliance with ethical standards

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No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of Ethical approval

All participants provided free and informed consent.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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