



**Connection Men, Pushers and  
Migrant Trajectories:  
Examining the dynamics of the  
migration industry in Ghana and along  
routes into Europe and the Gulf States**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the inner workings and operational logic of the array of individuals, agencies, state and non-state actors, institutions and social networks that collectively make up the migration industry in Ghana. It sheds light on how actors in the migration industry facilitate and condition migrant mobility, focusing on workers moving from Ghana along two migration corridors towards Europe and the Gulf States for work in the domestic and construction sectors. The study draws on a broad and nuanced conceptualisation of the “migration industry” which goes beyond a narrow focus on actors operating mainly for financial gain. Instead, it focuses on migration not just as a movement from point of departure to arrival, but as a changing journey over both space and time. This allows not only empirical insights into the processes through which people move, but it also provides an analytical lens to better unpack the complexities of migration processes. We extend the analysis of migration industries by incorporating risk theory into the analysis of the migration decision. The decision takes place in a context where migrants’ high level of knowledge about the dangers of migration has not translated into a reduction in migration flows on these two corridors. We analyse migrants’ rationale for choosing to embark on highly risky journeys, even in the face of increasing knowledge about these risks, and to develop appropriate policy responses.

Key words: migration, migration industry, domestic work, construction work, risk theory

## Executive Summary

Migration is increasingly being used by poor households in Ghana as a livelihood strategy to escape poverty and improve the quality of their lives. Recent studies in Asia and Africa indicate that transnational labour migration involving unskilled workers is often mediated by brokers and intermediaries at various levels. In response to strict migration policies that frustrate the aspirations of potential migrants, brokerage services have emerged to facilitate mobility and fill the gaps left by border control policies. However, the migration literature often emphasizes the exploitative aspects of the relationship between migrants and those who facilitate the migration process (Salt and Stein 1997).

Employing a qualitative research approach, the study draws on a broad and nuanced conceptualisation of the “migration industry” to examine the flow of low skilled migrants along two migration corridors from Ghana: towards Libya and Europe, and towards the Gulf States. Migrants along these corridors work in the domestic and construction sectors. It also draws on risk theory perspectives to explain migrants’ perceptions of the risks associated with traveling irregularly through the desert towards Libya or traveling regularly for work in the Gulf region, where there have been reported cases of abuse of migrants.

The findings highlight the experiences of migrants along the two major migration routes from Ghana to Libya and the Gulf region. The study finds that contrary to the perspective of the migrant smuggling and human trafficking discourse, which portrays migrants as playing a passive role in setting their own migratory agenda, many of the domestic and construction workers who travelled from Ghana to the Gulf region and Libya took their own decisions to migrate. They then only sought the assistance of brokers to implement these decisions. Brokers played a key role in helping migrants navigate through restrictive migration regimes and to realize their migration dreams. Placement in the area of destination was especially crucial in mediating risk and risk management strategies of migrants. Choice of a “good” broker and ability to utilise social networks was therefore key to minimising risks and failed migration.

Contrary to earlier assumptions that better information about the risks and dangers of migration would reduce irregular migration flows, our findings indicate that the majority of migrants who travelled along corridor one (Libya/Europe) had prior knowledge of the risks and dangers of the route, but this did not appear to deter their migration aspirations. The need to improve their livelihoods, assurances from connection men, strong religious belief systems and the perceived cost of regular migration influenced migrant risk perception during their travel.

The exploitation and abuses highlighted in the study are partly a result of a weak regulatory framework for managing recruitment practices in Ghana. Although the establishment and regulation of private employment agencies is governed by various legislative instruments, and complemented by administrative measures, in practice the monitoring and enforcement of these regulations is fraught with many challenges.

The paper argues that the current ban on recruitment to the Gulf States in 2017 as part of measures to curb the abuses of domestic workers may be encouraging irregular migration along the Ghana- Gulf routes, in addition to the already existing irregular migration flows along the Libya route.

The study recommends the need for an effective labour migration governance system, characterised by a responsive legislative and regulatory framework which recognises the complexities of the migration industry. This would harness the benefits of labour migration and protect migrants and their families.

# 1. Introduction

Migration is increasingly being used in Ghana by poor households as a livelihood strategy to escape poverty and improve on the quality of their lives. Although much is known about the drivers of migration, migrant experiences upon arrival in the place of destination, as well as migration decision making processes, much less is known about what facilitates and conditions migrant mobility. This has been termed “the middle space” of migration (Lindquist et al. 2012). Recent studies in Asia and Africa indicate that transnational labour migrations, particularly those involving various forms of unskilled labour, are often mediated by brokers and intermediaries at various levels (Lindquist et al. 2012 ; McKeown 2012; Awumbila et al. 2017, 2018). In response to strict migration policies that frustrate the aspirations of potential migrants in developing countries, brokerage services have emerged to facilitate mobility and fill the gaps left by border control policies. Thus, brokers are seen by aspiring migrants as people who are performing key roles that the state is unable to perform. Migration brokers are therefore important players in transnational migration. However, the migration literature often emphasizes the exploitative aspects of the relationship between migrants and those who facilitate the migration process (Salt and Stein 1997). Agents who facilitate the migration of various people are often portrayed as unscrupulous exploiters of migrants for their personal gain (Kyle 2000). This literature also tends to frame migrants using the facilitative services of brokers as passive and having no agency in setting their own migration agendas (Agunias 2009).

We draw on a broad and nuanced conceptualisation of the “migration industry” which goes beyond a narrow focus on actors operating mainly for financial gain (Hernandez-Leon 2005). Instead, we include a larger network of facilitators of migration, such as migrants’ social networks and other state and non-state actors and institutions. From this conceptualisation, we examine the flow of low skilled migrants along two migration corridors – towards Libya and Europe and towards the Gulf States – for work in the domestic and construction sectors. The first migration corridor towards Libya is not new and has been quite well discussed with regards to irregular migration (see De Haas 2007). Given recent political changes in Libya, however, we explore reconfigurations of migration from Ghana through this corridor. The second migration corridor from Ghana to the Gulf countries is relatively new in the Ghanaian migration trajectory and has been at the centre of recent public discussions on the migration industry and exploitation of migrants in Ghana. Until June 2017, when a temporary ban was placed on the recruitment of workers from Ghana to the Gulf States for domestic work, this migration corridor witnessed significant and increasing flows, particularly of women in the last five years, largely as a result of strict visa regimes in North America and Europe (Ghana Labour Department 2017).

We focus on migration not just as a movement from point of departure to arrival, but as a changing journey over both space and time (Cranston et al. 2018). This allows not only empirical insights into the processes through which people move, but it also provides us with an analytical lens to better unpack the complexities of migration processes. Given these nuances, we therefore urge the need for a conceptualisation of the migration industry that enables us to move away from simplistic notions of clearly demarcated and static sub-domains, separating state actors from profit-driven brokering services and non-profit actors. An improved migration industry concept would allow us to follow the dynamics of facilitation and control during mobility processes and enable us gain further insights into how migrant’s mobility processes are impacted in various ways by the different actors of facilitation and control.

Our main point of departure in this paper is linking concepts of risk to the analysis of the migration decision in Ghana. We focus on the migration decision and draw on risk theory perspectives to explain migrants' perceptions of the risks associated with traveling irregularly through the desert towards Libya or traveling regularly for work in the Gulf region where there have been reported cases of abuse of migrants. We argue that it is imperative to interrogate and understand migrants' rationales for choosing to embark on highly risky journeys, even in the face of increasing knowledge about these risks, and to develop appropriate policy responses.

This paper therefore examines the inner workings and operational logic of the individuals and institutions that collectively make up the migration industry in Ghana. The paper starts from the premise that the term migrant includes different kinds of migrant statuses. The paper also recognises the mutually constitutive nature of the migration industry and migration governance and notes that the migration industry is shaped by changes in the policy and governance context which is in turn shaped by the migration industry.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

This paper draws on the migration industry literature and risk theories to explain and analyse the flow of low skilled migrants and their relationships with brokers along the two migration corridors.

### 2.1 Interrogating the Concept of the Migration Industry

The concept of the migration industry was introduced into scholarly literature on international migration in the late 1990s as a means of explaining how migration flows sustained themselves in the face of intensified efforts of states to control movement across their territorial boundaries. However, the exact nature of what constitutes the migration industry has been the subject of much debate and there is no consensus as to its scope and function. Nyberg-Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen (2013, 6–7) define the migration industry as 'the array of non-state actors who provide services that facilitate, constrain or assist international migration'. Although this is a useful starting point (Lindquist 2010; Spaan 1999), cases of collusion between brokers and state representatives facilitating migration flows calls for inclusion of public sector actors in the conceptualisation of the migration industry. Despite this, while states are important in the governance of labour migration, an evolving market for migration services has involved various non-state actors (Spaan and Hillmann 2013). These actors constituting the migration industry often influence the direction, timing and composition of migration flows and thus shape mobility patterns through the services that they offer before the move, during the journey, and after arrival at place of destination (Cranston 2016, Spaan and Hillmann 2013; Glick-Schiller 2009). Together the services offered by migration industries contribute to an intensified transnational character of the facilitation as well as control of migration (Nyberg-Sørensen 2012).

In one of the earliest use of the term, Salt and Stein (1997) argued that organizations that could be called migration "businesses" existed, and that these businesses consisted of "institutionalized networks, agents, and individuals, each of which stands to make a commercial gain" (Salt and Stein 1997:468). Building on this definition, Hernández-León (2008) contended that the migration industry consists of an "ensemble of entrepreneurs, who, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, provide a variety of services facilitating human mobility across international borders" (2008:154). These include

legitimate services as well as some clandestine services, such as smuggling and dispatching of false documents. With regard to the “illegitimate” trafficking component of the migration business, migrants are objectified as “commodities” that are transported in order to be traded (Salt and Steiner, 1997:480). He further argues that even in cases where migration entrepreneurs emerge from the migrant community itself, the fact that they run for-profit businesses produces social distance and asymmetry between them and other community members (Hernández-León, 2008:193). Indeed, Kyle (2000:67) emphasizes that this key feature of operating for financial gain distinguishes the migration industry from the assistance migrants and members of their social networks provide one another, and from any assistance migrants might receive gratis from the state and non-governmental organizations.

However, recent research (Awumbila et al. 2017, 2018; Deshingkar 2018; Deshingkar et al. 2019) has challenged portrayals of the migration industry purely as a “migration business” operating mainly for profit. Instead, it has argued that the migration industry is shaped by a complexity of social relations such as between brokers and migrants which often straddle hazy boundaries between subjugation and empowerment. Spener (2009), for example, argues that characterizations of migrants’ relationship with brokers as purely for economic gain are problematic. They fail to seek an adequate account of how migrants and their families actively seek out the services of migration entrepreneurs as a way of fulfilling their own migratory agendas. He also observes that such analyses do not expressly contemplate the social process through which migrants choose whose services to contract or how they negotiate migration “deals” with the entrepreneurs whose services they contract (Spener 2009:13).

Awumbila et al. (2017, 2018), in their study on migrant domestic workers in Ghana, contend that while recognising that profit making is an important part of the relationship between migrant domestic workers and recruitment agencies and intermediaries, the relationships of trust and reciprocity between domestic workers, their families and brokers play a major role in facilitating migration. Thus, particularly in situations where formal employment exchanges and insurance are absent, trust plays a central role in the migration industry by creating and supporting transactions and ensuring honesty. Conceptualisations of trust and reciprocity therefore extend existing frameworks on brokerage beyond financial gain by highlighting social aspects of brokerage which are critical to understanding the relationship between migrants and brokers. Illustrating this complexity of social relations further, Deshingkar (2018) argues that while migration brokers play a key role in the subjectivation and precarisation of migrant men and women from marginalised classes and ethnicities in the Global South, they also play a key role in mediating migrant strategies for navigating structures of exploitation and inequality. Negotiating precarity may create opportunities for exercising agency. Brokers therefore play a complex role in expanding or constraining migrant agency and thus shaping precarious migrant subjects.

Due to the variety of actors and the different ways in which actors work to facilitate and control migration, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) further argue that the term ‘migration infrastructure’ rather than ‘industry’ is more appropriate to unpack the process of mediation. Infrastructure focuses on migration brokers as not simply selling opportunities for migrating overseas, but also dealing with “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility” (Xiang and Lindquist 2014:133). These include components as diverse as recruitment services, licensing procedures, NGO activities, border control, and migrant networks. Using Xiang and Lindquist’s concept of migration infrastructure therefore requires a move away from a focus on migration as behavior or migrants as the primary subject, to a focus on migration as part of broader societal transformations. While it is important that any conceptual framework on migration should

take social transformation as its central category (Castles et al. 2013), Khan (2019:2) notes that such framing disregards the role of migrants as active agents with social and material resources that interact with the infrastructure. Such agency includes critical human interventions such as decision-making, strategy, transgression and aspiration (Spaan and Naerssen 2018).

Despite this differentiation between the two terms, Cranston et al. (2018) argue that the term “infrastructure” may also be constructed as a component of the migration industry. Infrastructure captures the ways in which the processes of migration become an economy, the production and circulation of knowledge, and the offering of services. Using the concept of the migration industry therefore provides a broader framework for examining the vast array of the labour industries and social networks involved in managing, facilitating and controlling migration (Cranston et al. 2018). Resonating with Cranston et al. (2018), Awumbila et al. (2017, 2018) show that brokers and intermediaries in Ghana recruiting for placement in domestic work, and in the construction sector, offer their services not solely for monetary gain, but also for reasons such as helping migrants settle in urban areas, mediating disputes, negotiating better wages and working conditions, switching jobs and counselling the workers on the wise use of earnings, and in general aiding domestic workers to negotiate better terms and conditions of employment to meet their aspirations for personal development. We therefore contend that the term migration industry provides a better framework for understanding contemporary processes of migration.

Despite the importance of gender as a key factor in the differentiation of the causes, processes and impacts of migration, the literature on brokerage and the migration industry appears generally to take a gender-neutral approach. Migrants leave and enter gender segregated labour markets in origin and destination countries related to gendered social norms. The emergence of a complex migration industry involving various categories of brokers, recruitment agencies and intermediaries, who facilitate the process of migration, can further compound the gendered experiences and impacts of migration. With widely circulated, sensational news stories about exploitation of migrants, women involved in the business are often seen as victims of transnational brokerage. However, recent work by Awumbila et al. (2017) indicate that the migration industry is highly gendered and constructed around patriarchal ideologies of domesticity, which helps to explain the persistence of subordination in domestic work according to both gender, ethnicity, race and nationality. Brokers play a key role in reinforcing these ideologies and stereotypes by creating a docile and subservient workforce and repeating and confirming stereotypes related to ethnic identities (Awumbila et al. 2017). Belanger (2013), referring to local marriage migration industries of rural Vietnam, also shows how these two separate intimate industries are highly gendered, contested and constantly changing.

Drawing on this, Castles et al. (2013) conceptualise the migration industry as a meso-structure mediating between micro-level social networks and the state and international institutions. This meso-structure shapes migration flows through policy and political economy. The migration industry thus occupies the “middle space” between migrants and the state. It acts as an extension of the state, seeking to outsource border controls and colluding with employers to cheapen and commodify migrant labour (Goh, Wee, & Yeoh 2017; McKeown 2012; McCollum and Findlay 2018). However, this structure is not fixed. It may appear to the migrant as rather fluid (Schapendonk 2018). Conceptualising the migration industry in this way is thus instrumental in connecting the rural and urban, local and global, peripheral and central, poor and rich, and sometimes between expectations and reality (Lindquist 2012; Agunias 2013).

## 2.2. Theorising Risk Perception of Migrants

In order to explain migrants' perceptions of the risks associated with traveling irregularly through the desert towards Libya, or traveling regularly for work in the Gulf region, where there have been reported cases of abuse of migrants, we draw on risk theory perspectives. Risk has been defined differently by different researchers. Lowrance (1980) defined it as "a compound measure of the probability and magnitude of adverse effect" (Lowrance 1980:6). This definition resonates with that provided by Yates (1992) who uses the term risk to refer to the prospect of loss. Carter (1995), however, asserts that the idea of risk entails the possibility of both gains and losses. In this paper, we use the term risk to refer to the probability of losses or gains associated with an action (Rundmo & Iverson 2004). Wilde (2002) argues that most people are strategic planners and tend to optimise their risks, so that some level of subjective risk to safety and property may be tolerable, with the concern often being the magnitude of the potential loss.

There is enough evidence to suggest that variations in risk perception are associated with age, gender, occupation, level of education, socio-economic status of the individual, cultural values, and the state of the economy (Bernadi 2002). Risk acceptability and risk-taking are significantly mediated by socio-economic vulnerability, which affects individuals' life options and their evaluation of the acceptability of certain high-risk activities. According to Adams (2001:66), poverty, for instance, "will affect the perception of rewards and dangers and can induce people to take extra risks. Higher risk acceptability among socio-economically vulnerable persons reflects a lack of alternatives or the hope that undertaking certain high-risk activities will bring about much sought-after changes (Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012). According to Hayenhjelm (2006:194), in situations where living conditions are considered unbearable, "refraining from taking any action is also a kind of risk taking." Consequently, it may seem rational to undertake a high-risk action if there is a potential that such actions will solve the current problem.

According to Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012), the hope that a highly risky decision may bring about much needed change means that risk taking can sometimes be interpreted as proactive rather than misinformed action. Debora Lupton (2006:20) argues that risk-taking should be viewed as a mechanism to move out of current difficulties to enhance one's livelihoods. The literature suggests that instead of seeing risk-taking as irrational or naïve, high-risk activities are sometimes consciously undertaken because doing so provides an opportunity to progress in life. The notion that wilful risk-taking may result from a hope for change in life opportunities provides an innovative approach to risk perception (Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012).

In migration decision-making, risk assessment is the process whereby potential migrants weigh the potential benefits of successful migration (e.g. higher incomes and better livelihoods) against the potential losses (e.g. possibility of dying on the way) (Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012). The early research analysing risk perception of irregular migrants was largely conducted among irregular migrants along the United States and Mexico border or those using boats to cross from Africa to Europe (Carling 2007). These early studies have shown that, while irregular migrants are sometimes aware of the dangers of their clandestine entry into other countries, they embark on such journeys because of the belief that they may be successful (Spijkerboer 2007; Fargues and Bonfanti 2014). According to Hernández-Carretero (2012), in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of why migrants continue to embark on dangerous journeys, despite being aware of the potential losses, researchers need to investigate how economic vulnerability and social values contribute to rationalising risky migration decisions.

The application of risk theory for analysing irregular migration through the desert to Libya or regular migration towards Europe is important because, in policy circles, there is a general assumption that the large number of migrants who make extremely dangerous journeys would decline precipitously if only they were properly informed about the risks of injury and potential death. For this reason, many policy actors have been emphasising the need to intensify campaigns on the dangers of the journey. Similarly, in order to discourage people from traveling for work in the Gulf States, some Ghanaian media practitioners and NGOs have, in recent years, been emphasising the abuses that Ghanaian domestic workers suffer in the Gulf States. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that irregular migration flows towards Libya or regular migration flows towards the Gulf States have declined. It is imperative, therefore, to understand migrants' rationales for choosing to embark on highly risky journeys, even in the face of increasing knowledge about risks, and to develop a deeper understanding of their migration perspectives.

### **3. Research Methodology**

A comparative, multi-sited and qualitative research design was adopted to collect data on the inner workings and operational logic of the individuals and institutions that collectively make up the migration industry in Ghana. The study focuses on low-skilled migrants moving from Ghana along two migration corridors towards Europe and towards the Gulf States for work in the domestic and construction sectors. Based on insights from comparative migration research literature, the study was designed to compare the experiences of different *people* (e.g. migrant construction workers vs migrant domestic workers; formal vs informal migration brokers; male migrants vs female migrants). We also compared experiences of migrants in different *places* (e.g. migrants along the Ghana-Libya route vs migrants along the Ghana-Gulf States route; experiences of migrants in Libya vs experiences of migrants in the Middle East). Finally, we compared the nature of the migration industry and relationships between migrants and brokers at different *time periods* (for instance, an historical analysis of how the migration industry changed in relation to economic changes in Ghana and political changes in transit and destination countries).

In Ghana, the study was undertaken in three different locations - two rural locations and one urban location. The two rural locations were Northern Ghana, specifically Bawku and Tamale, and then the Brong Ahafo Region, specifically Nkoranza. The urban location was Accra and its surrounding towns such as Tema and Ashaiman. In addition to these migrant source areas, we conducted phone interviews with current migrants at some transit points and destinations in Libya and the Gulf states.

The research started with literature reviews, scans of media articles and advertisements for migrant workers. In order to identify key issues to be investigated, an analysis of the regulatory and legislative frameworks governing recruitment processes was conducted. Before starting in-depth interviews, a scoping study was first undertaken involving informal group discussions in the research sites with community leaders, migrant representatives, return migrants, returnee associations, officials and NGOs. The scoping study gave a quick sense of the important issues that needed to be incorporated into interviews.

The qualitative research approach, which is effective for getting a deeper understanding of experiences and behaviours of research participants (Teye 2012; Bryman 2012), was employed in this study. In-depth interviews constituted the main data collection method. During the main study, trained research assistants and senior researchers used in-depth interview guides to collect data from various respondents, including aspiring migrants, current migrants, return migrants, brokers (formal recruitment agents/informal intermediaries/connection men) and key informants (government agencies, NGOs, traditional authorities, assembly men/women). Given the lack of an appropriate sampling frame on the various categories of migrants, a snowball sampling strategy was used to select returned, current and aspiring migrants. As a way of dealing with the limitations of the snowball sampling technique, particularly the tendency to only select actors in similar networks (see Bryman 2012), several nodes were used as entry points to select people. The key informants were selected purposively. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of respondents for the 3 Study Areas.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents

Respondents Category	Corridor 1 from Ghana to MENA to Europe	Corridor 1 from Ghana to Gulf States	Total
Aspiring Migrants	2 in Northern Ghana 2 in the Nkoranza area 2 in the Accra area	2 in Northern Ghana 2 in the Nkoranza area 2 in the Accra area	12
Current Migrants	10 current migrants in transit and destination countries (Bawku, Agadez, Sabha, Tripoli, Europe)	5 current migrants in transit and destination countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Qatar)	15
Return Migrants	3 in Northern Ghana 3 in the Nkoranza area 6 in the Accra area	3 in Northern Ghana 3 in the Nkoranza area 6 in the Accra area	24
Brokers/Intermediaries (Formal/Informal)	3 in Northern Ghana 5 in the Nkoranza area 2 in the Accra area	2 in Northern Ghana 2 in the Nkoranza area 6 in the Accra area	20
Key Informants in source or migrant sending communities	1 Northern Ghana 4 in the Nkoranza area 1 in the Accra area	<i>Note: the interviews covered both Corridors</i>	6
Gov't Officials/Policy Makers, Social Partners dealing with regulation migration	1 Northern Ghana 3 in the Nkoranza area 3 in the Accra area	1 Northern Ghana 3 in the Nkoranza area 3 in the Accra area	14
Total number of interviews			91

The issues discussed with each category of respondents differed based on their backgrounds. For instance, interviews with potential, current and return migrants covered migration decision-making processes, knowledge and experience of migration processes, choice and use of recruitment agencies, financing of migration, and return migration plans, etc. Interviews with recruitment agencies focused on their motivations, recruitment practices, charges, and relationships with migrants. The interviews with officials of state organisations responsible for regulating the migration industry focused on enforcement of laws on recruitment, the state's conceptualisation of the migration of men and women for domestic work, and challenges associated with efforts to regulate the migration industry.

Participant observation also occurred throughout the fieldwork. It both informed, and was informed by, the interviews by helping to identify potential interviewees. At the initial stages of the research, the informal discussions were combined with observations at certain migrant recruitment centres. The researchers visited some of the recruitment offices to observe recruitment practices and the relationships between recruiters and potential migrants. These initial observations helped identify major migration routes for low skilled workers from which two major migration corridors were chosen. During the research, participant observations were also undertaken in social spaces, such as popular drinking bars and restaurants, where connection men and potential migrants tend to meet for discussions.

#### **4. Recruitment processes along the two corridors**

Migrants moving to both the Gulf States and Europe through Libya tend to rely heavily on the services of brokers, both formal and informal. Brokers serve as intermediaries in facilitating the migration process, whether through legitimate or illegitimate means. We observed gendered differences in migration flows along the two corridors. A majority of those migrating towards the Gulf States were women. Migration to Libya through the desert is almost an exclusively male route. These gendered dimensions of movement along the routes are products of labour market opportunities and risks associated with migrating. Irregular migration to Libya is relatively cheaper, given that there is no need for passports, visas, plane tickets and other documents. The journey is, however, associated with various forms of risks, such as kidnappings, death and rape, which tend to deter women from moving along that route. Families also tend to discourage their daughters and female relatives from undertaking these journeys, as they are perceived to be risky and dangerous. This is consistent with risk theories. Women have been observed to take less risky decisions than men (Bernadi 2002; Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012)

Additionally, the demand for low skilled migrant female labour is low in Libya. Few Libyans engage African women as domestic workers. While in other migration streams to China and Saudi Arabia women migrate to provide ancillary services, such as preparing food and hairdressing, this is less common among Ghanaians migrating to Libya. Given the lack of job opportunities for migrant women in Libya, many informal brokers who usually facilitate migration to Libya are generally reluctant to

recruit women for Libya. In contrast, migration towards the Gulf States is quite regular and there is less risk on the route as the migrants travel by air. There are also more labour market opportunities for low skilled migrant women in the Gulf States as domestic workers. For instance, in 2016, out of 2,372 Ghanaians formally recruited for job placement in the Gulf States, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Jordan and Kuwait, about 55% were females. In the case of Saudi Arabia, which is the most popular destination for Ghanaians moving towards the Gulf region, 79% of the 1,606 workers recruited in 2016 were women (Labour Department 2017). Similar gendered patterns were observed in 2017. 77% of the 1,145 Ghanaians recruited for work in Saudi Arabia in the first half of 2017 were women. The majority (76%) were recruited for domestic work (Labour Department 2017). On the other hand, more males go to UAE and Qatar where there are more jobs in the construction sector. In 2016, for instance, 96% of those recruited for work in UAE and Qatar were men. These gendered patterns are, therefore, explained by the nature of labour demand in the various destination countries. Knowing the nature of the labour market in both destinations, informal recruiters also followed similar gendered patterns in recruiting for the Gulf States and North Africa.

#### 4.1. Reasons for migration to Gulf States and Libya

All migrants interviewed, along both corridors, reported that the main motivation for their migration was economic. This is consistent with functionalist theories that tend to perceive migration as the result of a cost-benefit analysis carried out by rational actors who are attracted from low-wage but high labour origin communities to high-wage but low labour destinations. Classic economic theories of migration often portray migrants as income maximizers who use migration as a means of enhancing their earnings, ensuring multiple sources of income and minimizing the risk of slippage into poverty during an economic downturn.

Accounts by both current and return migrants to the Gulf States and Libya point to economic hardship in Ghana, and the desire to attain better standards of living, as the main driving force behind such journeys. The case of SUM, who is a 35-year-old male migrant from Bawku in the Upper East of Ghana, explains these circumstances. He has senior high school education and is married with two children. He previously dealt in the sale of cattle and vehicle spare parts in Kumasi (the second biggest city in Ghana). He migrated to Qatar in February 2017 and works with a construction company as a security guard. SUM notes:

*I was working with my elder brother and at the close of the day he will only give me GHC 20. I had rented a room, I pay light bill, I have kids and a wife whom I take care of, so it got to a time that the money my brother was giving to me was not enough to cater for myself and my family, so all that I was doing was working from "hand to mouth", so I decided to migrate out of the country to seek for my own job. I thought if I travel will be better for me. SUM (35 Yr Old Current Migrant-Qatar)*

In another case, MOI, a 29-year-old man from Tamale in the northern region, with a Junior High School qualification and engaged in the sale of bicycles, migrated to Libya in 2015 to work in the construction sector. He returned to his bicycle business in 2017. The struggle to afford three meals in a day was the ultimate reason for MOI making the decision to migrate to Libya. MOI notes:

*...things were hard for me in Ghana because I didn't have a father and I was the one taking care of the family, what even pained me was that, sometimes, we had to sleep in hunger. So, I was worried and wanted to make it by all means, I was working as a loading boy. I worked very hard to save money for the journey, so I will say my family struggles were what motivated me to travel. MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

Another case that is instructive is that of GAO who is a 25-year-old male migrant currently working in a bakery in Libya. He is from a family of 8. He travelled from Bawku, his hometown, to Accra after finishing his Senior High School education in 2013. He worked in Accra to mobilize resources before leaving for Libya in 2015. GAO plans to migrate into Europe through the Mediterranean because of the current security situation in Libya. For GAO, scarce employment opportunities in Ghana, coupled with the high cost of living, drove him to migrate:

*Okay, for me it was because of lack of jobs and economic hardships. The country is hard because the cost of living is high and my siblings were struggling to go to school. So, I decided to travel to Libya to "hustle" to help my family. GAO (25 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya)*

The cases above illustrate how vulnerability, as a result of poor socio-economic conditions, forces people to take risky migration decisions (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012).

## **5. Migration Decision-Making and Risk Taking**

It is often recognized that migration decisions are not individual decisions, but joint decisions taken within the household (de Haas, 2007). In contrast, our findings indicate that the majority of migrants in both migration corridors made migration decisions largely on their own. These decisions were largely based on maximizing their own expected utility, rather than a family decision making process. The interviews indicate that the migrants had a different approach to risk compared to their families, especially their parents, who were more risk averse and reluctant to support the decision. This often meant that some migrants would migrate before informing their relatives of the move.

This was common in both migration corridors. MUI, SUM and MOI all made the decision to migrate personally and only informed their families after their arrival at either a transit point or their final destination. For instance, MUI a 28-year-old Senior High School graduate from Kumasi, who first migrated to Libya and then crossed to Italy where he now lives, reports that it was a whole year after arrival before he finally informed his family about his decision to migrate:

*I didn't inform anyone about my intention to travel. I arrived here before calling to inform my family. It was up to a year before my family heard of me. They were not in support of my intention to travel. I left Ghana because of hardship and also I had a kid to cater for. I had to travel in search of greener pastures. MUI (28 Yr Old Current Migrant Libya to Italy)*

Similar to the case of MUI, MOI, a 29-year-old Junior High School graduate from Tamale, insists the decision to migrate was ultimately made by him. Although, he sought the blessing of his family prior to his migration:

*I took the decision to travel to Libya on my own. Hmmm things were not good for me when I was in Ghana so I discussed with friends about my intention to go to Libya and some of them gave me some tips about the road. I used about two years just to prepare myself for the journey. When I informed my family about it, my mother gave me her blessings but my elder sister who is aware of the dangers on the desert opposed me but, when I insisted, she cautioned me and also gave me some money to help myself. I was then given a contact of a brother who was already in Libya so I called him and he gave me some tips too. MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

As noted already, many of the ongoing efforts to reduce irregular migration from Africa to Europe are based on the assumption that if potential migrants are informed about the risks of embarking on such risky journeys, many of them will not migrate irregularly. Contrary to these earlier assumptions, our findings indicate that the majority of migrants who travelled along corridor one (Libya/Europe) had prior knowledge of the risks and dangers of the route. This knowledge did not appear to deter their migration aspirations. The need to improve on livelihoods, assurances from connection men and the perceived cost of regular migration influenced migrant risk perception during their travel, particularly from Ghana to Libya and onward to Europe. This is highlighted by the case of AAJ, a 32-year-old migrant who crossed from Libya to Germany:

*From Libya to Italy, the connection man told me they had different boat. Some will spend a day or two in the sea whilst the "express" one spends only some few hours.... We were very many on the boat. We were more than 100 passengers and some were seated whilst others were standing. It's a balloon-like boat. The waves according to the operator was favourable, so my tension was reduced. Before then I was very afraid because, hmmm, it was not easy. The water was just open and you can't see the other end. ....Oh yes, I heard from friends and from the news documentaries. I knew that the desert was risky but what can I do when I can't get a genuine visa in Ghana. It would have cost me about GHC 20,000 to do connection and then get a genuine visa to Germany, which I can't afford even if I save for 10 years in Ghana (laughs). So, you see it's the financial situation that compelled some of us to use this route. AAJ (32 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya to Germany)*

ABM, a 24 year old aspiring migrant, was unperturbed about the risks of traveling to Italy through Libya, even though he was well-informed by major international news networks such as al Jazeera, CNN, BBC and other TV stations:

*Yes, I have heard a lot about it that it is risky, but I am willing to take the risk to achieve my dream. I got to know about this risky travel through the desert from people who have returned from Libya and also from news in al Jazeera, CNN, BBC and other TV stations. I have even watched a documentary on that, the documentary showed people who died on the journey. Some were on their way to Libya, and some were on their way to cross the sea from Libya to Italy. Although I know that traveling this road is dangerous, I still want to go. The reason is that, in life if you don't have, you have to take risks and win big. I also want to use the road because I don't have the visa that*

*can take me to the country I want to go and also, I don't need to buy plane tickets.* ABM (24-year Old Aspiring Migrant-Bawku)

These statements by AAJ and ABM indicate that, despite awareness of the potential risks to life on the route, lack of funds for regular migration, which was perceived as expensive, forced them to use dangerous routes. This is consistent with the perspective of risk theories, which suggest that socio-economic vulnerability and poverty can induce people to accept high risks in the hope it will bring about much sought-after improvement in living standards (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). The two cases also highlight how difficulties in the acquisition of visas push people to take risky decisions to realise their migration dreams. AMM's statement that *'in life if you don't have, you have to take risks and win big'* resonates with the argument of Hayenhjelm that in situations where living conditions are considered unbearable "refraining from taking any action is also a kind of risk taking" (2006:194).

Furthermore, many still undertook journeys despite awareness of the risks because they believed they would be protected by God to cross to their destination. Others also believed in destiny arguing that those who die on the desert were destined to die that way. The situation whereby people believe that whatever happened to them is part of destiny highlights the importance of cultural values in risk perception (Bernadi, 2002). One can also argue that age and gender have an influence on risk perception (Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012). Age and gender played a significant role in the risk assessment of the people who travelled across the desert as a majority of them were young males. Religious and cultural belief systems are therefore important for targeted messages on trafficking and irregular migration.

In contrast to the situation whereby many of the migrants along the route to Libya knew of the risks but still went ahead to travel, migrants moving regularly to the Gulf States were largely unaware of the danger on the routes. Some of them explained that they were aware of risks associated with traveling to Libya and that is why they rather travelled to the Gulf States as indicated below:

*I tried travelling through the desert but I was advised and I changed my mind. You can be robbed on your way, even sometime you are given drugs to expel any money you may have swallowed. You can be raped in the desert and beaten. There is a route from Libya to Europe through a village call Lampedusa. I was informed by someone since I wanted to go. You will have to pass through the sea and you can drown easily or get lost if you have a problem with your compass. I tried travelling through the sea but when I heard about the dangers involved, I changed my mind.* MOL (48 Yr Old Return Migrant-Saudi Arabia)

*Yes, please. I'm also aware that you can pass through Libya, or Morocco to get to Europe. I'm very much aware of those routes. But, as I told you, it depends on the individual's choice. I don't think I'll ever use any of those routes to go to Europe. I'm afraid of those routes so I won't feel comfortable using those routes. Like you've to pass through the desert or sit on a boat by the sea to reach Europe. I often hear that the Arabs don't treat us well when we go there. So, because of that, I won't attempt.* CHY (Potential migrant, 26 years, Odomase, BA)

The above statements by MOL and CHY demonstrates that continuous sensitization and awareness raising of the dangers of irregular migration may work but only when the potential migrant see another less risky alternative, in this case migration to the Gulf States.

## 6. Choice of Brokers in Realising Migrant Aspirations

In line with Spener's (2009) argument that migrants usually take their own decisions, and then seek the support of brokers, we found that once the decision to migrate was made, migrants on both corridors sought the services of agents or brokers to enable them realise their migration aspirations. As discussed later, migrants moving along the Ghana-Libya route rely on a chain of agents to facilitate the different segments of the migration. Many of them relied on informal agents (connection men) to help them acquire passports and to be connected to truck drivers and intermediaries at the transit points and destinations. For instance, MOI, who travelled to Libya in 2015, relied on services of connection men and truck drivers to Libya (see section 6).

Comparatively, agents in the migration trajectory to the Gulf States tend to play a different kind of role, partly due to the mode of transportation to the destinations, which is mainly by air, and also the contracting policies of the Gulf states. Under the Kafala system in the Gulf, migrants are unable to make private travel and employment arrangements with employers at the destination without accessing the services of an agent or agents, both at the origin and destination. MAS, a 30-year-old male migrant currently working in Kuwait, described how he accessed the support of a connection man:

*I had friends in Accra who linked me up with several connection men. So, I told my uncle and he called the connection men and they asked me to come to Accra for them to do my passport. So, I went and he did an "express" passport for me. After which my uncle paid off the money for him to start. So, I went back and after one month he called and told my uncle to get me ready because the visa was ready. It was a security job I was going to do for a company in Kuwait. Kuwait was not actually my preferred country but I was told the pay is good. MAS (30 Yr Old Current Migrant-Kuwait)*

The choice of recruitment agent used by aspiring migrants depended on a number of factors. These included the agent's track record of helping others to migrate, how well known the agent was in the community, and the social status of the Broker, such as being an "Alhaji" (a person who has been on a pilgrimage to Mecca). Migrants reported that they selected agents who had previously supported family members and/or friends to migrate. Others made their decision based on the fact that the agent resides in their neighbourhood, is well known in the community and, therefore, could be traced in case anything went wrong. Yet others trusted their choice of agent because of their social status such as being an Alhaji. Central to these factors determining the choice of particular brokers was their ability to mobilise contacts with well-known brokers and smugglers along the route, minimising the risks of failed migration.

Smith and Mazzucato's (2009: 669) and Awumbila et al. (2017) underscore the importance of such trust-based relationships, especially where formal employment exchanges and insurance are absent in the choice of intermediaries. ARA, MAS and VIV's experiences also demonstrate how trust is built and utilised in migrant recruitment processes. ARA, a 35-year-old male return migrant from Saudi Arabia, says he chose a particular agent because his brother linked him to the agent. ARA did not know the agent. He was able to trust him because he was the same person who worked out the "connection" for his brother to travel previously. VIV, a 30-year-old seamstress, and a return domestic worker from Egypt in 2017, shared similar stories:

*It was the agent, same person who helped my friends. I was led to him by the husband of my friend, one of the two ladies already abroad... The reason was the fact that he has already sent people from the same environment before for which we hadn't heard anything bad. I did not really communicate with him until we met him at the airport. Everything was done through the husband of the other lady. (VIV, Return Migrant, Egypt)*

In the case of MAS the status of the broker as an "Alhaji" was an added incentive in building trust and choosing him to do the "connection".

*I knew of some guys in my neighbourhood whom he helped. So, when I realize he was the same person, I and my uncle never doubted him, beside he is an Alhaji, a very respectable person. So, my uncle paid him part payment and according to him this is the reason why my visa didn't delay. He was sincere to my uncle. MAS (30 Yr Old Current Migrant-Kuwait)*

Brokers and recruitment agents thus play a key role in minimizing the risks faced by migrants. They facilitate access to documents and broker contacts with others higher in the chain. Therefore, the choice of a particular agent may be seen as part of the portfolio of strategies taken by aspiring migrants to minimize risks.

## 6.1 Migrant Access to Information and Risk Reduction

Recruitment agents provided a variety of services. These include providing orientation prior to departure, providing useful information about the dangers of the journey for the North Africa corridor migrants, suggesting trusted agents, and advice on how to manage meagre resources such as food, water and money, as well as offering general security and safety services. This was indicated by some "connection men":

*Yes, I tell them about some rules and guidelines that will help them. First, I tell them to manage their food and water well- don't eat or drink unless you are in dire need of food or water. I also teach them how to sit on the Toyota Hilux pickup vehicle. I also inform them about some things in Libya. Things like starring at women in Libya, when you work and Arab man says he won't pay you, just keep quiet and walk away. Don't roam carelessly in Libya, when the Arab children ridicule you don't mind them. Because if you want to react, they will beat you mercilessly or even kill you. NUA (Individual Broker or Connection Man in Bawku)*

The claims of these 'connection men' was corroborated by most migrants:

*Yes, before we were about to take off the connection man told us what to do and what not to do. He told us items that we will need to survive in the desert, he also advised us to be united in the bus because the journey was very risky. MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

In the case of the migration of domestic workers to the Gulf States, due to the use of formal and semi-formal recruitment agents, some form of a pre-departure orientation was provided to most migrants. The orientation largely covered issues of good behavior, good work ethics, appropriate clothes to wear and, above all, the need to be subservient, as highlighted:

*Yes, the connection man told me about how the job was and how the employers don't like laziness... He also advised me to stay focused when I start work and not to misbehave because the Arabs are not easy people to work with. MAS (30 Yr Old Current Migrant-Kuwait)*

*Yes, he told me a lot, he told me about the clothes to wear, their food and almost everything. He described the attire I would be wearing at home to do the house chores and even said they are likely to buy me clothes and other petty things I would need. VID (35 Yr Old Current Int. Migrant, Kuwait)*

As noted in an earlier study by Awumbila et al. (2017), most of the pre-departure training provided by brokers for potential domestic workers was largely done with the aim of moulding them to become an 'ideal domestic worker' that was docile, subservient, obedient, honest and hardworking, as the case of MAS and VID above illustrate.

However, despite the help and support that brokers provided to potential migrants, there were cases where they played significant roles in providing misinformation and deceived migrants into undertaking perilous journeys or into exploitative situations in the Gulf States. This is generally observed in the migration literature (Kyle 2000). As Shah, a return migrant from Morocco recounts:

*He said, "Oh the route is easy....it will take us straight to Libya border then we will just walk some meters and cross the barrier". He was lying to us....I will call it propaganda....he is doing propaganda to suit his illegal business, so that is what he did. SHA (36 Yr Old Return Migrant, Morocco)*

Therefore, as noted by Awumbila et al. (2018) and Deshingkar (2018), brokers play a range of multiple and often contradictory and ambiguous roles that straddle hazy boundaries between exploitation, subjugation and empowerment. Moreover, migrants who crossed the Mediterranean into Europe claimed their agents had very little knowledge about this travel route and therefore often passed on several untruths.

## 6.2 Cost for Services of Recruiters and Contractual Issues

A major risk in migration is the high cost and losing money in the event of a failed migration. In the Gulf corridor, even though the cost of migration is mostly borne by the *Kafeel* or employer, the services of local recruitment agents are charged for. The amounts paid varied depending on the type of recruiter used. Whereas the fully registered and licensed agencies tend to have fixed rates for the cost of their services, unregistered recruiters charge variable and sometimes lower amounts for their services<sup>1</sup>. Formal registered recruitment agencies justified their higher cost by pointing to the cost of obtaining a license (GHC 25,000) and also the fact that they have overhead costs, which is not the case with the individual recruiters or unregistered recruitment agencies.

Some migrants reported very low charges by individual connection men while those who used formal agencies reported significantly higher amounts. The cases of VID, SUM and ARA demonstrate the wide

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<sup>1</sup> See Awumbila et al (2017) for a discussion on the typologies of recruitment agents in Ghana.

variation in amounts paid by aspiring migrants. VID and SUH paid less than GHC 1,000 to their connection men. ARA spent GHC 5,500 on their travels to the same Gulf region:

*"... It was the agent who when I was about leaving asked how much I was going to give to him for all that he had done for me. I told him I would send him some money once I get there and settle down...So when I got there for the first two months my pay delayed so he didn't hear from me. I was there one day when he called and said he was reminding me of the promise I made to him prior to my travel. I was earning thousand Ghana Cedis by then, so out of my free will I gave him a portion because truthfully some agents in Ghana are fraudulent. Coming here I got to realise that it is the sponsor who pays for everything concerning your travel. So, I sent him GHC 500 and this was from my heart...".* VID (35 Yrs Current Int. Migrant, Kuwait)

*The agent fees vary, he can take GH4,000 from one person and GH5,000 from another person or even GH6,000. We didn't sign any contract, he only charged me by word of mouth. He can charge you and even if you don't have money, he will negotiate with you and process you to go and him pay back if you start working. It's not as if we pay for the processes. No. The company that will take care of your visa and plane ticket. The only part the agents play is the connection he will do for you.* SUM (35 Yr Old Current Migrant-Qatar)

*My brother did everything. He was charged about GHC 5,500 by the agent and he paid part and when I arrived, I also paid the rest.* ARA (35 Yr Old Return Migrant-Saudi Arabia)

In the case of Libya, the amounts charged are also variable, even though there are no formal registered recruitment agencies that recruit migrants to or through Libya. This poses a risk as there are no formal systems of accountability. The so-called connection men determine how much to charge depending on one's ability to negotiate a lower deal. As stated already, migrants who are unable to afford the cost upfront are sometimes 'pushed' on credit and such amounts are paid by their networks, mainly family and friends who are already based in Libya. Excerpts from MUI, AAJ and GAO allude to the payment system for the Libya corridor:

*I told the man the truth that I had no money. I had only 500 Ghana Cedis. So, he spoke on my behalf to help me travel.* MUI (28 Yr Old Current Migrant Libya to Italy)

*I paid about 1,500 Ghana Cedis to the connection man to push me into Sabha. I paid him by myself.* GAO (25 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya)

Migrants paid for the cost of migration through a variety of means. Whereas some migrants bore the entire cost of their migration themselves through personal savings, others were funded by their employers and others too sought help from siblings, parents and friends.

*I financed my own travel. I used about 2 years to save money for the travel but when I informed my family of the my intention to travel I was about to undertake, my sister gave me GH500 to assist myself.* MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)

*I did everything by myself. I financed my own travel from Ghana to Libya and from Libya through Italy to Germany. I was doing "susu" with one savings and loans company. My money was over GH3,000 and I withdrew it and did a passport and financed my travel to Libya. My relatives were not even aware I was travelling because I didn't tell anyone apart from my old aged father. He only gave me his blessings and prayed for me AAJ. (32 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya to Germany)*

*The Arabs. They did my passport, my Visa... everything. They did everything... They sent the money to my Mallam and he did everything for me. So, it wasn't his money from his pocket he used...". HSS (23 Yr Old Returned Migrant Saudi Arabia)*

Thus, while all the migrants who went to Libya had to raise money personally or with assistance of friends and relatives, some of those who migrated to the Gulf States indicated that the employer paid for them, which is line with the sponsorship system prevalent in the Gulf States, as stated by HSS above.

Our findings indicate that the likelihood of migrants signing a formal written contract with either a recruitment agent or employer is correlated with the type of recruiter they use. In the case of both migration corridors, all migrants who used the services of formal registered recruitment agencies signed written contracts prior to their departure from Ghana. On the other hand, those who used the services of informal recruiters entered into verbal contracts at best. Many of the migrants who went to Libya, in particular, did not have written contracts as they tended to use informal recruiters. Written contracts, which were mainly used by those who went to the Gulf States, usually outline the terms and conditions of the employment and also provide protection for the migrants' rights and entitlements. IBL and GAO provide two of such opposing cases:

*It was a written contract. And the terms were that I will have free accommodation, transportation, food, health care and end of year benefits. I signed the paper at the time because after reading I understood everything without the help of anyone. At least I have a basic education to understand things on my own. I equally had a copy of the contract. IBL (27 Years Old, Return Migrant, Qatar)*

*I didn't sign any contract agreement with the connection man. I just trusted him. GAO (25 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya)*

The use of formal registered recruitment agents, supervised by the Labour Department, tends to minimise risks as they provide some form of protection for aspiring migrants.

## 7. Migration Trajectories and Experiences along the Ghana – Libya-Europe Route and the Gulf Route

In this section we focus on the migration experiences of migrants along two major corridors to North Africa and the Gulf by detailing the nature of these experiences, interrogating migrant risk perceptions, the manner of travel, livelihoods at the transit points, the dangers on the route, security encounters and the role of brokers on these routes.

The study revealed that multiple trajectories are utilized by migrants, mostly men, to move from Ghana to Libya. While most irregular migrants left Ghana from Bawku and travelled through Burkina Faso and Niger, others went through Nigeria, Togo or Benin to North African countries such as Niger, Morocco, Egypt and Algeria before reaching Libya. Critical towns which served as transit points on these trajectories to Libya included Paga, Bawku and Aflao in Ghana, Bittou in Burkina Faso, and Agadez and Niamey in Niger, with migrants mostly entering Libya through Druku, Sabha, Tripoli or Benghazi among others. The prominence of Bawku and the other points of departure from Ghana stem from their location on Ghana's northern border, ease of connection to other transit points along the corridor and ready availability of connection men and brokers to facilitate the journey. The attractiveness of these exit points may also be due to the porous nature of the borders in these border towns that offers numerous unapproved routes for evading border security checks that may curtail migrants' aspirations. The migrants depend on informal connection men and other actors to facilitate their migration.

As MOI recounts, truck drivers are an integral part of the syndicate of actors that help them to move along this route. They work with local agents at the destination to operate a system that allows migrants who do not necessarily have the full complement of the cost of their journey into Libya to be transported without advance payment. This category of migrants were then locked up in improvised cells until their contacts paid the bill to secure their release. Thus, migrants rely on a broad array of actors along the migration route, with different interests (not always economic) to facilitate migrants journeys. This anchors our broad conceptualization of the migration industry as not just a movement from the point of departure to arrival, but as a changing journey over both space and time (Cranston et al. 2018). The case of MOI who migrated to Libya in 2015 illustrates the diversity and chain of actors who facilitate migration:

*I left Ghana in 2015. My journey started from Aflao (in south eastern Ghana) through Togo to Benin. I spent a day in Togo before proceeding to Benin where I spent another day. I joined an articulated truck from Benin to Agadez. I was nearly deported from Agadez....but fortunately, the articulated truck driver managed to escape with me, giving the reason that I am his driver's mate, so I was allowed to bypass the border to Agadez. In Agadez the articulated driver who knew some connection men introduced me to one of the agents to assist me to continue my journey to Libya through the desert. I spent only six days in Agadez. The connection man had to add me to other immigrants so that we would board the desert buses to Libya. ... I spent 5 days on the desert to Libya. I was arrested and detained in a local cell when I arrived in Libya's first town of Sabha. I had already been informed that I will be arrested when I was still in Ghana, so I had made arrangements with a brother who was already in Libya that when I arrive, he will come and bail me. So, when I was arrested, I spent 4 days in the local cells before I was allowed to call my brother who lives in Libya and he came and paid and bailed me. So, he took me straight to Tripoli. MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

The role of border officials engaged in corrupt practices along the routes was a recurrent theme in migrant trajectories. Many migrant stories highlighted arrests and detention along the routes, with payments being requested from relatives before the release of the migrants both before and after entry into Libya. The nature of these arrests is highlighted by the story of AAA:

*I spent six days on the desert before arriving in Libya. In Sabha we were driven to a ghetto cell. Early in the morning I gave out my brothers contact number and they called him, He spoke with them, so he told them to “push” me to come to Tripoli so on that very day I was “pushed” with other 4 guys to Tripoli. They had a ghetto prison in Tripoli so while we were being taken there, they called my brother again and he told them where they could meet him because he was busy at work. They also called the relatives of the other 3 who also indicated their various locations. So they took us with a pickup, after dropping the first person they collected plenty money from his relative. When we moved a little some police patrol team stopped us and asked the driver where we were going to and he replied that we had stopped him and he picked us. So they released him and arrested us. Some group of black people also came and they arrested them too, they assembled us into a police pickup after some time they consulted each other and later asked us to get down and run. there was a guy among us who was holding a cd player so I ran towards him and approached him to help me I gave him my brothers number and he called him and told him where we were. In 2 days, time my brother then came and took me to his place. AAA (33-year Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

Both migrants and brokers underscored the vital importance of brokers and intermediaries during the migrant’s journey in terms of providing assistance to migrants to minimize arrests, exploitation, and risks along the route. Many of the migrants narrated how different brokers at the different transit points helped them during the dangerous journey:

*The driver who took me to Niger and introduced me to him (broker). He said I was his regular customer. Because of that I gave him my trust and he told me the next day a bus will be going to Libya, so I should get ready. From Libya too, I contacted an agent at the port and he told me everything I need to know as far as I have made my mind to cross the sea. So, I went back and prayed harder towards it. I organize myself and was “pushed” in September 2012. AAJ (32 Yr Old Current Migrant-Libya to Germany)*

The study also found moments when trusted brokers failed to deliver the services promised, leading to severe challenges and stressful moments for migrants during their journeys.

Upon reaching Libya, many of the migrants worked there and saved money. Others used their earnings to pay connection men to smuggle them to Europe. The complexity of migration through Libya to Europe is explained in AAJ’s story. He is a current migrant (32-years-old) who left Ghana in 2011 for Libya. He commenced his journey from Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana. He was a car mechanic at a popular garage. He discussed his intentions to migrate to Libya with a driver who visited his garage. He soon travelled with that driver from Kumasi through Paga to Burkina Faso, and from Burkina Faso to Agadez in Niger. They spent three days on the road to Niger. From Agadez, the driver linked AAJ with a ‘connection man’ to ‘push’ him through to Libya. Prior to his departure, he had contacted a friend in Libya and he received AAJ in Libya. AAJ was driven to Benghazi where another friend who was living there received him. In Benghazi, AAJ worked as a house boy and a gardener for one Alhaji who took him to his house. He worked there for one year before proceeding to Italy. AAJ recounts:

*During my stay in Benghazi I had made contact with one connection guy who was a best friend of my friend. So, he arranged and I crossed the sea into Italy. I left Libya in 2012 September because September was a best period to travel through the sea. I was pushed with an engine boat. We were very many who were pushed that day. Prior to the day we were pushed, we were asked to stave ourselves for a day. We left Libya around 3am. It was a 7-hour journey.*

Before AAJ and his colleagues got to the shores of the sea, they were arrested by armed security and immigration officers and they were sent to a detention camp. However, AAJ had been previously advised by a cousin of his, who was based in Germany, to escape from the camp and go to Germany. So, AAJ successfully escaped from the camp and boarded a train to Germany. He was met by his cousin in Hamburg and he was taken to a mosque for support.

AAJ stayed in the mosque for some months before he got a job through a friend. He used the friend's documents to work for 6 years. AAJ's story further illustrates the diversity of brokers, intermediaries and networks operating along migrant routes at different levels. These often border between those operating for financial gain and those based on social networks and social capital. The three migration trajectories of AAJ, AAA and MOI highlight the fact that despite an awareness of the dangers of migration in terms of arrest, detention, physical abuse, exploitation or even death, many migrants embark on these dangerous journeys because they believe they will be successful.

Compared to the irregular migrants that use the Libya corridor, the typical trajectories of the mostly regular migrants to the Gulf involved flights. These flights went from Ghana through transit countries such as Ethiopia, Egypt, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries to destination countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Approved visas were used for the destination countries. Unlike their irregular counterparts who may be undocumented, depend on shadowy connection men and try to avoid border officials, migrants using the Gulf corridor were documented, mostly used registered agents and border officials and were assured of jobs at the destination. In view of their more legal migration status, the study found that, with the exception of a few cases, most of these migrants experienced few challenges along the migration route.

## **8. The Role of Recruitment Agents in Mediating Migrant Experiences and Risk Perceptions in Destination Areas**

The actual living and working conditions of domestic and construction workers vary significantly depending on the country, nature of jobs, gender of the migrant and the preference of the employer. In Libya many of the migrants were males who work in the construction sector. A few of them were also engaged in domestic work. In the Gulf States, low skilled male migrants tend to work in the construction industry. Low skilled female Ghanaian migrants tend to engage in domestic work. Their experiences in the area of destination was often mediated by the type of broker they had used and the migrants' social networks. In the case of the Gulf Region, the use of formally registered and semi-formal recruitment agents, who connected aspiring migrants to brokers in the Gulf through the Kafala system, could minimise some of the abuses by employers, lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration.

For instance, SUM, a 35-year-old migrant who was still in Qatar during the study, reported that before leaving Ghana, the recruitment agent made him sign a contract which specified the job he was going to do and the salary he would receive:

*“Yes I was aware of the job I was going to do over there. Before I was leaving, he [recruitment agent] made me to sign the contract documents of the company, so I knew how much I am to be paid every month. I signed against it. I read and understood all the terms and condition of the contract before I signed it SUM (35 Yr Old Current Migrant-Qatar)*

There were, however, a few cases whereby female domestic workers, in particular, arrived in the Gulf States before brokers helped them to get jobs. For instance, 32-year-old YAB, who was recruited for placement in Saudi Arabia by an individual ‘connection man’, reported that she was first sent to a female ‘broker’ who then ‘sold’ (gave) her to another women. Her story shows that some ladies stayed with the female broker for months without getting an employer:

*When I arrived [in Kuwait], the woman [broker] came and transported me and other young ladies from the airport and sent us straight to her house. In the house, all the ladies, more than 100 from different Africa countries, were put in a room with a thick dark glass separating us from a big sitting room. In the evening, I saw a lot of whites [natives], mostly females in the sitting room. They were sitting down and talking with the woman who took us from the airport. I later realized that they have come to ‘buy’ us, because it’s like a place where young ladies are ‘sold’. While in the room, we couldn’t see those in the sitting room, but they could see us. Suddenly, 2 ladies came and held me and were like struggling over me. Later, the woman who was housing us congratulated me. She said I was lucky to have gotten an employer just the same day of my arrival, because some of the ladies have spent months at her place.... So, one of the women, about 32 years old, finally got me and brought me to her house..... In that house I was caring for the old blind woman, her husband and 6 of the blind woman’s children including my madam. YAB (32 Yr Od return domestic worker from Saudi Arabia)*

YAB explained further that her madam informed her later that she was selected because of her good looks and the fact that she wore long dresses and did not polish her face. The study also revealed that women who went through individual ‘connection men’ tend to have the bad experience of not getting an employer on arrival and having to depend on brokers there to look for employers. AMV, a 48-year-old woman who also went to Kuwait through a connection man, had a similar experience of waiting for several weeks in a brokers home before being ‘sold’ or given out to an employer:

*We’re there as her [broker’s] property and looking for people to ‘buy’ us. So, if someone was looking for a person to go and serve her and her family, she would come to the ‘white’ lady [native broker] to bargain with her for any of us. Sometimes, the deal took place in the night when we were asleep. The ‘white’ woman would assemble about 3 of us before a woman to make her selection. After making her selection, then our ‘mother’ would give the passport of the lady she has picked to her and would take her away. When the deal takes place in the night it’s risky, because anything can happen to the lady as she’s being carried away in the night to an unknown destination.... She [broker] usually gets angry if no one has come for you [migrant] after a week, because she is only spending on you. AMV (48 Yr Old return domestic worker from Kuwait).*

The narratives of AMV, YAB and other migrants who were ‘traded’ this way suggest that, prior to migration from Ghana, migrants are sometimes deceived by the connection men with promises of pre-arranged jobs on arrival. In the case of AMV, they were promised decent employment in a school with a high salary, equivalent to what policemen or soldiers make in Ghana. Thus, there are clearly

elements of some form of trafficking, deception and exploitation, particularly of female migrants, in line with the literature.

In contrast with the situation in the Gulf region, where many of the migrants did not struggle too much to find work because jobs were pre-arranged, almost all the irregular migrants who went to Libya towards Europe had no pre-arranged jobs, apparently because they did not have immigration documents. On arrival at the destination, some of them were assisted by the 'connection men' or friends and relatives to get jobs. For instance, 29-year-old MOI and 33-year-old AAA reported separately that when they arrived in Libya they had to wait for some months before their brothers, who were already there, helped them to secure jobs in the informal sector. Their statements below demonstrate their frustrations:

*There was no pre-arranged job for me in Libya, it was when I got there that my brother used about 1 month to search a job for me for me. For my 3 years stay in Libya I was doing only Malaga (mason) job because that was a common job for most blacks in Libya. MOI (29 Yr Old Return Migrant-Libya)*

These findings illustrate how restrictive migration policies in Europe contribute to migrants' precarity. The ability of AAJ to navigate his way from Ghana through a strict migration regime travelling through Libya and Italy, before arriving in Germany, shows that despite the risks associated with the movement through the desert, migrants with better social networks and linkages with "good" well connected brokers had more chances of successfully reaching the destination and finding jobs. The findings support claims that networks of social capital can facilitate the flow of migrants (Awumbila et al. 2017; McKenzie and Rapoport 2007) and enhance their access to employment at the destinations (Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Teye and Yebileh 2015), even where there are strict immigration policies and labour market regulations make it difficult for migrants to secure jobs. After several years of struggle through the desert, migrants such as AAJ believed that they had realised their migration dreams of moving to Europe through the assistance of connection men and social networks of friends. Network connections with brokers tend to lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration (Awumbila et al. 2018). As Tilly (2007: 84) noted, networks, not people, are at the centre of the migration process. The findings clearly also show that brokers are integral to migrants' ability to exercise agency. They help navigate through restrictive immigration regimes and with finding jobs at destinations (Awumbila et al 2018). They are, therefore, a central part of migrant strategies for negotiating precarity and for creating opportunities for exercising agency (Deshingkar, 2018).

## **9. Living and Working Conditions and Exploitation of Domestic Workers in Libya and the Gulf States**

Brokers, and especially the formal registered and licensed brokers, play important roles in recruiting migrant workers and connecting them with agents in the Gulf States. However, as a result of the weak regulatory framework discussed in section 10, both brokers in Ghana and the Ghanaian state regulator, the Labour Department, play minimal roles in ensuring the welfare of migrants once they arrive in the Gulf. As shown by the case of YAB, who was assisted to migrate by a connection man discussed in section 9.1, after her arrival in Saudi Arabia, she was sent to a female broker from where

other employers came to “buy” her. YAB was employed as a domestic worker in a house of eight persons. She did not have a bedroom but slept under the stairs which was very uncomfortable for her. YAB reported that the work was tedious with long work hours as recounted below:

*In that house I was caring for the old blind woman, her husband and 6 of the blind woman’s children including my madam .....They made me aware of how long I would be working – from 4 am to 12 midnight daily and they brought me an alarm clock to wake me up.... Frankly, my first 3 days was characterized with sorrow and tears....In fact, the work in the house was very tedious. Each floor has 3 separate toilets and baths. So, I had to scrub 9 toilets and baths daily, which means even the time they gave me wasn’t enough for me to accomplish my daily work. At the initial stages, I encountered terrible stomach ache. When I told my madam to send me to the hospital, she refused because according to her I had already been sent to the hospital and it came out that I don’t have any serious sickness..... Sometimes, I would collapse and fall down, but they would pass by without doing anything to revive me until I managed to regain strength... YAB (Return Migrant from Saudi Arabia)*

Other Ghanaian domestic workers complained of similar situations of long hours of work without rest. Forced isolation was reported by many domestic workers. Their phones and passports were sometimes seized from them and this meant that they had little interaction with family and friends. Others were allowed to make calls only occasionally, as highlighted in the statements below by AMV (48-years-old) who returned from Kuwait:

*I went there with my phone, but the woman thought that I was using it to do international calls. I explained to her that I brought the phone from Ghana and the chip is even from Ghana. She still went ahead to seize the phone from me... Even in some of the houses, when you are working there, they would only allow you to make a call to your family once in two weeks. So imagine you have a husband, children and parents in Ghana and all using different numbers, which of them would you call? So, life there wasn’t an easy one at all. You will only have your freedom when you’ve finished serving for two years. AMV (48 Yr Old, return migrant from Kuwait)*

As reported in the literature, our findings also indicate cases of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and violation of their rights. Many of these emanated from the fact that they were working in people’s homes and also the fact that they were vulnerable migrant women.

In the case of migrant construction workers in Libya, their mainly undocumented status meant they were more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. It also meant that they were neither covered by health insurance certificates nor social security schemes. They were also not able to use the banking system. Jobs were verbally negotiated, without any written contract. The construction workers narrated several instances of labour exploitation. These were mainly to do with employers refusing to pay them agreed amounts on completion of construction work, or sometimes refusing to pay the entire amount, as highlighted by KWO who migrated from the Brong Ahafo region to work in Libya as a mason and was often cheated each time he finished plastering, as well as MOI:

*Sometimes, they would agree whatever I charged them. But at the end of the day, they would pay me less. Sometimes too when the plastering is done and after using my tape to measure how much they would pay me, they would also bring a Libyan man to measure the work. If the measure of the man is less than mine, he would choose to pay me based on the man’s measurement.... Sometimes, if I have done some dressings as part of the plastering contract and we all know that the charge for dressing is different from the normal plastering work. But after all is done, he would pretend that he has forgotten about the charge for the dressing work. Since we don’t have anywhere to report our problems, I would take whatever he would give me. KWO (Returned Migrant from Libya)*

There were also instances where some of them were robbed and kidnapped, especially during the time of political conflicts in Libya, with ransoms being requested from their family members before their release.

The above cases show the everyday lived experiences of precarity in specific contexts (Paret and Gleeson 2016). Factors contributing to their precarity included their undocumented status, especially in the case of workers in Libya, which excludes them from basic labour law protections, and in the case of Gulf states the fact most of these cases of abuse and exploitation occurs mainly within private homes which also function as workplaces., This situation also resonates with the recent scholarship which draws attention to the extreme vulnerability of undocumented migrants and those with precarious legal status (Deshingkar et al. 2019). They also show that highly risky decisions taken with the hope bringing positive change in the lives of migrants may turn out to be misinformed action, as Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012) point out.

### 9.1 Unfulfilled Financial Expectations

The domestic workers reported that they suffered all these exploitations and abuse because of expectations of higher returns. This was based on what the connection men in Ghana promised them. Many were, however, disappointed when they received lower payments. YAB, for instance, noted that she was told in Ghana she would receive 60 dinars but she received only a third of this:

*When we were leaving Ghana, we were told that we will be paid 60 dinars (ie. GHc2,500) monthly, so I calculated that if that's the case, every month, I would send GHc1000 to Ghana for my family's upkeep and save about GHc1,200 and would remain in Kuwait after my 2 years contract is over. But lo and behold, at the end of the first month, I was given only about 20 dinars. I have forgotten the exact amount in dinars, but it would be around GHc600. I cried and confronted my madam, because I thought they have cheated me. But she brought out the agreement paper and what they gave me was boldly written in the contract..... I'm sure the connection man wanted to convince me to go, because really if I had known that I would be paid an amount of GHc600, I would have declined the offer. YAB*

Similarly, AMV (48years-old), who went to Kuwait, also reported that she was disappointed to realise that the money given to her was much smaller than what she was promised. AMV also noted that the intermediary who recruited her from Ghana deceived her by telling her the place was good and that she would earn higher amounts of money:

*He [the connection man] used these exact words "Oh, the place is good. Sister, if you go there, they will pay you 9 million cedis (GHc900) at the end of every month". Truly, I was also facing a lot of financial problems. For instance, at that time I had spent all my money to put up this 'drinking spot', but I didn't have any more money left to buy the drinks to start the business. So, I agreed to go. But when I went there, I realized that all he said were completely false. AMV*

Despite these bad experiences, a few domestic workers reported having very good relationships with their employers. Brokers therefore play a key role in managing workers' financial expectations.

### 9.2. Migrants' Ability to Change Jobs in Libya and Gulf States

Migrants' ability to move freely and change jobs is a right which can go a long way to ensure their wellbeing. Our findings show that despite the various forms of restrictions and exploitation of migrants' rights in Libya, many of the domestic and construction workers were at liberty to change

jobs. Indeed, even those who were domestic workers, such as TIA and AAJ were able to change jobs without any problem. This shows that despite the challenges associated with irregular migration, it gives migrants some form of freedom, which can increase their migration returns.

In contrast with the situation in Libya, many of the migrants who went to the Gulf Region reported that their passports were seized from them, while a few reported that they kept their own passports. It appears that those who kept their own passports were those who were not under the Kafala system and travelled to the Gulf Region through informal connection men. The seizing of passports of domestic workers by employers is a common practice and is linked to the broader Kafala recruitment system existing in the Gulf States which ties workers to their employers who are tasked with maintaining the worker's legal status throughout the contract period. Thus, it delegates responsibility and oversight of workers to private citizens which then facilitates the exploitation and abuse of workers with no repercussions. Some Kafalees (sponsors) seize passports in order to maintain control over the movement of migrant workers. They are sometimes exploited by denying them the right wages and other benefits they are owed.

With regards to the ability to change jobs, a few of the migrants in the Gulf region were able to change jobs but they had to depend on the brokers to do this. This was unlike the situation in Libya, where migrants could independently change jobs. AMV, for instance, was able to change jobs because she was not sponsored by any Kafalee. However, she always had to depend on brokers to do this:

*I was sent to 8 different houses to work within the 7 months I stayed in Kuwait. Because if I went to work in a house with many people like 8 or 9, I would tell them that I alone can't serve them and they would bring me back to the office". But all the changes were done by the broker there. AMV*

On the other hand, a majority of both domestic and construction workers in the Gulf reported that they were not able to change jobs because they were tied to one employer, as per their permits, and any attempt to change jobs would mean that they had to return to Ghana. SUH points this out:

*The Saudi laws will not permit you to change from one job to the other unless the company will do that change for you. If you are going to do without the consent of the company, they will deport you. When I went to Saudi I never changed a job. SUH (34 Yr Old Return Migrant Saudi – Arabia)*

From the quotations above, the migrants feared that any attempt to change jobs or employers would result in their deportation. These findings on the inability of migrants to move freely and or change jobs as a result of the kafala system further creates situations of precarity in the Gulf region. The strict temporary work contracts and permits systems of the Gulf states resonates with what De Genova and Peutz (2010) refer as 'deportation regimes' (De Genova and Peutz 2010 as cited by Deshingkar et al. 2019). Our findings support the argument by some scholars that analyses of precarity and causes of unfree labour must move beyond capital-labour relations in the workplace to recognise the role of actors beyond the workplace, including the role of the state in co-creating precarity (Deshingkar et al. 2019; Buckley et al. 2017).

## 10. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

It is generally acknowledged that an effective labour migration governance system, characterised by responsive legislative and regulatory frameworks, is important for harnessing the benefits of migration and protecting migrants and their families. Recent scholarship has shown that effective labour migration governance entails collaboration among various state institutions, social partners, non-governmental organisations, and international actors. Good governance of labour migration also involves ratification, domestication and implementation of relevant international instruments and strict international cooperation through bilateral/multilateral agreements.

Until April 2016 when Ghana launched a comprehensive national migration policy (Government of Ghana 2016), migration in the country was managed by a number of legislative instruments. Most of these legislative instruments focused on immigration. For example, entry, admission, residence, employment and removal of immigrants are guided by the Immigration Act 2000 (Act 573); Immigration Amendment Act, 2012 (Act 848); Immigration Act 2016 (Act 908); and Immigration Regulations, 2001 (L.I 1691). These legislative instruments provide guidelines for managing immigration and combating migrant smuggling. The Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694) and Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act, 2009 (Act 784) provide a framework for combating human trafficking. The Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) and Labour Regulations, 2007 (L.I 1833) regulates the activities of employment agencies, including those recruiting Ghanaians for employment in other countries.

Whilst it is generally acknowledged that effective labour export agreements with destination countries can go a long way to protect migrants, the government of Ghana does not have any comprehensive bilateral agreement with popular destination countries, such as Libya and the Gulf States. A bilateral agreement between Ghana and Qatar is now being developed with a Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries being signed in December 2018. In the absence of a comprehensive labour agreement, recruitment of Ghanaian workers to some Gulf States for domestic work was managed under the Visa-20 system. This is issued solely to labour migrants seeking to travel to the Gulf States as domestic workers. Many of the migrants interviewed in our study travelled under this system. However, in response to reports of abuse of migrants in the Gulf States, the government of Ghana, since 2017, banned the issuance of visas to Ghanaian domestic workers to work in the Gulf region.

The exploitation and abuse presented in this paper is evidently a result of a weak regulatory framework. The regulation of private recruitment for work abroad has been an issue of great public concern, especially since the year 2000. The procedures for establishing a private employment agency are outlined in Section 7(1-8) of the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), Regulation 3(1-8) of the Labour Regulations, 2007 (L.I 1833) and complemented by administrative measures. These procedures include the requirement of any recruitment agency to register with the Registrar General's Department as a corporate entity, and an application to the Labour Department for a license to operate as a recruitment agency. If the agency satisfies the various conditions, a license is issued for 12 months in the first instance, and thereafter periodic renewals every two years, subject to payment of a renewal fee and the satisfaction of certain conditions. Before operating, a licensed agency authorized to recruit for employment outside Ghana is required to submit to the Chief Labour Officer various documents, including a contract agreement signed between the Principal Employers abroad and the Employment Agency in Ghana, and a Contract Agreement between the Principal Employers and the employees. The recruiting agency in Ghana is also required to apply for an exit permit on behalf of the persons recruited according to the legal requirements.

In practice, there are several challenges with the enforcement of these regulations. One challenge is the fact that the existing regulatory framework focuses only on corporate bodies and criminalizes the activities of informal intermediaries. In the Labour Regulations, 2007 (LI 1833), for instance, the Private Employment Agency is defined as “anybody corporate which acts as an intermediary for the purpose of procuring employment for a worker or recruiting a worker for an employer”. Registered employment agencies are supposed to deposit an amount of GHC 25,000 (5,000 Dollars) before being given the certificate to recruit for job placement abroad. These regulations have discouraged many recruitment agencies from coming forward to register. Of the over 200 recruitment agencies in Ghana, only 43 have been licensed by the Labour Department to recruit for job placement abroad. As shown, many of the recruitment agents recruiting for work in Libya are not registered and yet have been operating for several decades. The capacity to arrest and prosecute the connection men and pushers by state institutions is also low. There are also no strict penal systems to deal with agencies or persons that violate stated rules on recruitment. Another challenge is related to the fact that the state has not ratified the Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), despite the fact that there are many private recruitment agencies in Ghana. Given the fact that there are no registered employment agencies located in rural areas, the state’s criminalisation of connection men is also not practical.

There are also no migrant resource centres, nor effective systems and comprehensive programmes, to educate potential and actual migrants on the consequences of irregular migration and the activities of illegal recruitment agencies. The IOM and GIZ have established two migrant resource centres in Accra and the Brong Ahafo region, but their programmes are currently at a reduced scale given that they were established under specific projects.

Additionally, the Ghana Government’s engagement with host countries to promote decent work for migrants in conditions of freedom, security and human dignity has been quite weak. Ghanaian missions abroad also lack the technical capacity and resources to offer effective protection to emigrants. Indeed, the role of consular authorities regarding services to Ghanaian citizens used to be mostly limited to ensuring the availability of travel and identification documents, –and to providing assistance in the event of their deportation. Despite some improvements, most of the missions still lack labour attachés that can assist migrant workers in the country of employment. Most of the abuses reported in this paper have come to the notice of the government but it has not been able to fully engage the host countries to deal with the violations. The current ban on recruitment to the Gulf States is not solving the problem as many of the migrants are still able to travel to the region through other ECOWAS countries. We argue that the ban has rather worsened the situation as many connection men are able to still operate, while formally registered recruitment agencies who tend to offer better protection are unable to recruit. By placing such a ban, the Ghanaian state may rather be restricting regular migration and encouraging irregular migration along the Ghana - Gulf routes, in addition to the already existing irregular migration flows along the Libya route.

## 11. Conclusions

The paper documents and analyses the experiences of migrants along two major migration routes from Ghana to Libya and the Gulf region. Our findings suggest that contrary to the perspective of the migrant smuggling and human trafficking discourse which portrays migrants as playing a passive role in setting their own migratory agenda, many of the domestic and construction workers who travelled from Ghana to the Gulf region and Libya took their own decisions to migrate and only sought the assistance of brokers to implement these decisions. Although brokers work for financial gain and exploit migrants prior to the travel, during the travel and at the destination, they also provide various kinds of services which can help migrants to navigate through restrictive migration regimes and also help to realize their migration dreams. Brokers played a key role during migrant journeys, placement in area of destination and were especially crucial in mediating risk and risk management strategies of migrants.

Generally, the irregular nature and poor pre-departure preparation of migrants along the Ghana- Libya route made the services of brokers along this route vitally important for successful migration to North Africa. Similarly, although migration to the Gulf region was more structured, brokers played a key role in connecting aspiring migrants to other brokers in the country of destination even in situations where there was no formal job placement before migration as the case of YAB in Saudi Arabia showed. Choosing a “good” broker with the ability to utilise social networks was therefore key to minimising risks and failed migration.

Regular migration which involves registered brokers, the use of official channels and adequate pre-departure orientation is more likely to offer more security to migrants than irregular migration which involves a loose set of connection men, unofficial channels and poor migrant pre departure preparation. However, migrants facing challenges in the Gulf States were more powerless in changing their situation as the Kafala system does not allow them to move freely and change employer. These findings on inability of migrants to move freely and or change jobs as a result of the kafala system demonstrates the role of the Gulf states in co-creating precarity in the Gulf region. Our findings support the argument by some scholars that analyses of precarity and unfree labour must move beyond capital-labour relations in the workplace to recognise the role of actors beyond the workplace including the role of the state in co-creating precarity (Deshingkar et al, 2019; Buckley et al, 2017).

Our findings also show that although most of the aspiring migrants particularly on Ghana- Libya-Europe route were aware of the dangers of irregular migration, this did not appear to deter their migration aspirations, as they still undertook the journey by trying to optimise their risk tolerance levels (Rundmo and Iverson, 2004) through the use of “trustworthy” connection men and social networks to minimise their potential losses. Their acceptance of high risk activities, despite full knowledge of the dangers along the journey shows their vulnerability and their perceptions of a lack of alternative livelihoods. However the hope that undertaking the high risk activity of migrating to Europe through Libya or to the Gulf states would bring about the much sought after changes in their livelihoods was not always met as many of their financial expectations were often unfulfilled as the cases of YAB in Saudi Arabia and AMV in Kuwait show.

Our findings also indicate that the need to improve the family’s standard of living, assurances from connection men and the perceived exorbitant cost of regular migration influenced migrant risk perception and risk-taking during their travel. We argue that despite prior knowledge of the risks and

dangers of the route, taking risks and “winning big” as one aspiring migrant put it, was therefore not irrational or naïve but part of high risk activities consciously and proactively taken to progress in life in the absence of perceived alternatives. We conclude that assumptions held by many Development Agencies and States in the Global North that better information about the risks and dangers of migration would reduce irregular migration flows may not be realistic and may need to be reassessed.

In both destination areas considered, much of the abuse occurs as a result of migrants falling in the hands of unscrupulous employers and the inability of the brokers in Ghana and Ghanaian officials to effectively implement regulatory policies. We argue that the current ban on recruitment to the Gulf States has not solved the problem as many recruitment agencies are able to send migrants to the region irregularly. We also conclude that while informal recruiters play an essential role in facilitating the migration of aspiring migrants who would otherwise be involuntarily immobile, they expose such migrants to greater risks of abuse compared with formal recruiters. The prohibitive amount charged by the Labour Department to obtain a license might be counterproductive as it dissuades informal recruitment agencies from regularizing their operations. We recommend a complete rethink of the management of the activities of actors in the Ghanaian migration industry in order to streamline the governance system of recruitment for external placements.

These findings illustrate the complexities of the migration industry in the migration process. Given these nuances, we therefore conclude that for a holistic understanding of the migration industry, there is the need to broaden the focus to follow the dynamics of facilitation and control during mobility processes and gain further insights into how migrant’s mobility processes are impacted in various ways by the different actors of facilitation and control. This is key to our understanding of the migration industry and to explaining why brokers continue to be popular both among aspiring migrants and employers.

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## About Migrating out of Poverty

**Migrating out of Poverty** research programme consortium is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions – across Asia and Africa. The main goal of **Migrating out of Poverty** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and their countries through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement.

**Migrating out of Poverty** is coordinated by the University of Sussex and led by Research Director Dr Priya Deshingkar and Dr Robert Nurick as Executive Director. Core partners are the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana, and the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia and L'Université Assane Seck Ziguinchor (UASZ) in Senegal. Past partners included the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh, the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya. Please visit the website for more information.

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