

OUR STORY



Lukman, 25

A Returnee from Libya

“Wherever there is peace, is a good place to be!”

Accra-Ghana- The West Africa region has a long history of migration characterized by both intraregional and transcontinental movements often driven by factors including but not limited to seeking greener pastures, the smuggler economy and transnational organized crime as well as recreation/leisure. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that since 2014 over 600000 African migrants arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route and an estimated 120,000 in 2017 despite the perilous journey. In recent times, there has been an unconventional trend of particularly young people migrating to countries such as Libya and Syria in search of greener pastures.

Recognizing the transformational power of peace education in ensuring just, inclusive and peaceful societies in line with the SDG16, WANEP via its Youth, Peace and Security program works to promote a culture of peace within West African communities. The program targets children and youth at formal and informal levels and provides the needed platforms and avenues for increasing knowledge and skills for the prevention and management of emerging and changing peace and security dynamics. Through this program, WANEP over the years facilitated the establishment of peace clubs and peer mediators club, built capacities of young people to inculcate in them a culture of peace and non-violence. In countries such as Mali, Niger and Senegal which are significant transit routes for migration and illegal migrants, WANEP works with youth to build their resilience to push factors of violent extremism, illegal migration and other pertinent issues. The focus on youth is imperative as research has shown that youth when not gainfully occupied can easily be lured into violence and other precarious situations.



ABOUT WANEP

Established in 1998

15 National Offices
Across West Africa

500+ Member
organisations

Strategic
partnerships with
African Union (AU)
and ECOWAS

In this article, we highlight the experiences and challenges of one such youth who was enticed by the trappings of irregular migration. Lukman, a 25-year-old Ghanaian citizen shares his story to throw more light on the problems associated with irregular migration in a bid to sensitize communities and serve as a lesson for other young people like himself who may be planning to tow that line.

Lukman sits in front of his modest provision shop and chats heartily with a couple of his cohorts in his neighbourhood as they watch an American sitcom on the flat screen television he brought along with him from Libya. He is one of four young men who set out to Libya after the crisis broke out with the hope of moving to Europe. He recounts his journey from Accra-Ghana to Tripoli-Libya in 2013. "There was four us that left that day in the company of an agent. Unlike the other stories I had heard, our journey was quite smooth"

"When I left Ghana in 2013, the plan was to go to Libya. If things were as good as expected, I would remain and make a living. If things were not as good and the opportunity came, I would go to Europe. Italy was my preferred destination."

"Before I left for Tripoli in Libya, I was a mason and had done enough research to understand that there were better conditions of service and wages for persons with skills as mine. There, I was more assured of regular gigs than in Ghana where things were 'on and off.' I heard that in Libya, there is always work. You only stop when you are tired. The money is good too. Before I left, I knew there was conflict in Libya, but I was also aware that the conflict was not everywhere. I was told Tripoli was safe."

"I spent two years in Libya. On average, I worked five days per week on contract basis with an average monthly income of up to \$700. Everything there (in Tripoli) was better for me. I had enough money for food and boarding and also to send back home for saving in my bank account in Ghana."

The increasing rate of violence gravely detracted Lukman's plans for a better life. "In 2015, things took a different turn in Tripoli. The banks closed and I could no longer send money back home. After the banks closed, the exchange rate shot up and life got more difficult. We started getting attacked in our camps by rebels who wanted money. This was the last straw for me."

"I returned to Ghana by air via Niger. It's been 5 years since I returned and has been nothing but peace of mind and comfort. I now own a shop, married and started a family. I still work as a mason and feel better about being home. I believe that wherever there is peace, is a good place to be. In Tripoli, I had more money but less peace."

"None of the people I returned with have gone back to Libya. But I know an electrician in my neighbourhood who returned to Sabhā in 2018. He says, it is safe in Sabhā and he is able to take care of his business."- says Lukman. Many returnees feel that government could have done more to help them. Many feel they cannot make it here.