

Overcoming Borders with Mobile Technologies: Balkan Route and Survival Strategies of Sub- Saharan African Migrants

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Abstract

Nation-states are increasingly adopting stringent migration policies, with European countries bolstering technology-driven border controls. However, these measures fall short in deterring migrants from crossing borders. Paradoxically, technological advancements both enhance state surveillance capabilities and offer migrants new opportunities. In simple terms, information and communication technologies (ICTs) pave the way for migrants to bypass control mechanisms.

Our study, conducted in Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, focuses on Sub-Saharan African migrants who formerly resided and worked in Turkey, embarking on the Balkan route to reach EU nations. The appeal of this route lies in Turkey's geographical proximity and the accessibility of visas for many Sub-Saharan African nationals. Turkey serves as a crucial steppingstone where funds can be accumulated, despite challenging legal statuses and work conditions. However, this costly and perilous migration path necessitates the mobilization of various resources.

Sub-Saharan African migrants employ diverse strategies as they progress along the Balkan route. They harness ICTs to connect with ethnic communities, transfer financial resources, explore new income-generating methods, establish connections with informal smuggling networks, acquire border crossing information, obtain legal support from human rights organizations, and receive non-food items from NGOs, including vital technological resources like power banks, batteries, sim cards, and Wi-Fi hotspots.



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In our research, we interpret these migrants' actions as survival strategies and scrutinize our findings within the context of migrant agency. We underscore the significance of ICTs in surmounting challenging and hazardous border crossings, financing costly travel, obtaining support from ethnic communities, and engaging with civil initiatives and solidarity groups. Ultimately, our study enriches the ongoing discourse on migrant agency in the realm of ICT-mediated survival strategies, using Sub-Saharan African migrants as a case study.

Keywords: border crossing, clandestine migration, information and communication technologies, migrant agency, survival strategies



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