

‘Barcelona or death’ cry migrants

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Perilous crossing: Crackdowns on illegal crossings of the Mediterranean mean many Senegalese try a more dangerous route — a journey to Spain's Canary Islands, which can take weeks.

Is social media to blame? Thousands of people are risking their lives to reach richer countries. Many have watched TikTok videos promising a better life — but sometimes these promises are empty.

What's happening?

A man speaks to children in a **Senegalese** classroom. “How many of you want to leave for Spain?” he asks. Almost everyone puts up their hand.

He goes on: “Getting in a small boat to go to Europe is no good. You might not have enough petrol to get there. A lot of people have died at sea... many children have lost their fathers.”

One by one, the hands go down.

Find out more

This is a video that tells the truth about the dangers of illegal **migration**. But many clips on the internet tell a much less honest story.

Bargny in Senegal used to be a busy fishing port, but now many young people who live there struggle to earn much money.

Fatou's son, Thierieno, did not want to leave Senegal. But his friends kept sending him videos from **Madrid**, telling him he would have a good life in Spain.

Thierieno set off in a small boat to the **Canary Islands**. From there he travelled to Spain.

The journey to the Canary Islands takes up to six days and is very dangerous. In 2024 at least 9,757 people died attempting it.

A popular online saying is “Barca wala barsakh”, meaning “Barcelona or death”.

It is not only **migrants** that use **social media**. **People traffickers**, who offer to carry people on boats in return for money, also use it. They post ads which make the journeys look easy.

Is social media to blame?

Some say

Yes! There is nothing new about migrants telling stories of riches to their families back home. But social media sites have made it much easier to spread false claims.

Others think

No! It is the gangs that control the boat crossings who are to blame, not social media. Even if no social media existed, they would find ways of making people attempt the journey.

Some people say

“Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of ...our very make-up as a human family.”

Ban Ki-moon (1944 –), South Korean politician

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you have a friend from overseas?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What happens to a country when so many young people leave?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - A poor migrant asks you to help make a happy video to show people back home. Think about what you would say.

5. Express

What do others believe? - What are the best things about the country you live in? Take it in turns to say.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine you are asked to make a video showing migrants what to expect in your country. Write a script for it.

Glossary

Senegalese - From Senegal, a country of 18 million people in West Africa.

Migration - The movement of people or animals over a long distance.

Madrid - Spain's capital city.

Canary Islands - A group of islands off the northwest coast of Africa. They are an autonomous community of Spain.

Migrants - People who are living in a different country to the one they were born in.

Social media - Social media is defined by websites, apps and social games that connect people to each other through the sharing of pictures, thoughts, ideas, articles, and other content.

People traffickers - People who trade in humans – either as slaves or as migrants being transported in horrific conditions.