

Gassama's Story...

(Adapted from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32391752>)

I made the crossing from Libya to Sicily last November, after several attempts. I am from The Gambia and had been trying to get to Europe since I left home, originally in 2009. I travelled through Senegal to Mali and on to Libya, working along the way when I could find jobs and trying to save money for the trip. I worked loading trucks and any other jobs I could get.

Once I eventually got to Libya, it was very hard. It was difficult to find work there. I was also arrested three times and taken to five different prisons. I had to pay each time to get out of prison. I also had to pay a few different people to try to get on one of the boats making the crossing to Italy.

After someone I knew helped me to raise the money, I eventually managed to get on another boat after paying 1,200 Libyan dinar (\$870, £585).

There were far too many people on the boat, and it wasn't safe. After a difficult journey across the Mediterranean, I managed to make it to Sicily.

From there, I eventually ended up in Milan. It's not easy here, with harassment and other problems, but I am so happy to have got across.

I have since set up a **Facebook group** to try to educate people who are trying to make the journey through Libya to Europe about just how difficult it is. I have spoken to many people who have contacted me directly through my Facebook page and have so far got a good response.



I have tried to tell them not to come through Libya as it is too dangerous, and I will continue to do so. They have every right to try to come to Europe, just like I did, but travelling through Libya is just too hazardous.

It is a desperate situation and has now become too dangerous. There are people who will try to rob you and take your money just to get you on to these boats, which are overcrowded and not safe.

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How I was smuggled into Europe -- and why it was worth it By Moutassem Yazbek (<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/23/opinions/smuggled-syrian-migrant/>)

I would have done anything to get to Europe. It was worth the risk, the bad treatment and the fear, hard as that may be to believe. Simply put, I have a better life now than I did before.

But my journey across the Mediterranean, like those of thousands of other migrants, wasn't easy. Here's my story...

It all started late last year when I lost my job in Dubai. My work visa had expired, and I had nowhere else to go. I'm Syrian, and returning to Syria wasn't an option -- going back means you either have to kill or be killed.

I discovered many Facebook pages about illegal smuggling from Turkey to Italy by sea. All of them mentioned that Mersin, a port city on the southern border, was the jump off point, so I made my way there.



I met a Syrian guy in a hotel in Mersin who had already paid money to one smuggler and was planning to depart within a few days. He told me his smuggler was a decent man with a great reputation. We spoke about terms of payment and agreed on a fee of \$6,500.

On the first attempt we sailed for eight hours before the boat's engine broke down. There were around 300 of us on board, we were deported back to Turkey.

I'd already lost everything. My family didn't know what I was doing, but I dreamed of being a human being who is treated like one. I wasn't going to stop.

It took five days to get everyone on board the ship -- 391 of us in total, refugees from cities all over Syria. And for the first time, I began to feel like I was in jail, trapped in conditions no human should ever suffer. We lived in the hold. There were no mattresses or sheets, but we found some wooden planks to put our stuff on to keep it from getting wet.

For five days we had no food and little water. But at least it meant not having to make frequent trips to the "toilet," if you could call it that, which was an old car tire covered with a piece of cloth. Huge waves crashed against the ship from all angles and water leaked in from the ceiling as we slept on the cold metal floor of the ship, the smell of urine emanating from the corner.

On the eleventh day, 200 miles off the coast of southern Italy our guides began to alert Italian authorities to our presence. Twelve days after it began, our journey to Europe was over. I spent two days in Sicily before making my way first to Milan with two Syrian guys who had become friends. We decided to go to Germany and went to Paris first and ended up in a city called Saarbrücken.