



# MIGRANT SEA

A multimedia documentary

[migrantsea.com](http://migrantsea.com)

password: marenostrum



MIGRANT SEA Trailer (2023)

<https://t.ly/rx3fx>

## GENERAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*MIGRANT SEA* is a multimedia documentary about the voices, stories and realities of African migrants who have survived the harrowing journeys from their home countries to reach Europe. It combines intimate, collaboratively created migrant-led mini-documentaries, migrant-led essays, creative multimedia content and explainer articles into an emotionally driven interactive exploration of the voices, history and realities of Sub-Saharan migration today.

Different documentary styles, formats and storytelling allow audiences to explore the same story in different iterations, with diverse media, length, details and platforms each offering a unique experience and wide accessibility. Above all, *MIGRANT SEA* was created inclusively and collaboratively - *with* migrants and refugees narrating and controlling their own stories, so that their voices can be finally, truly heard.

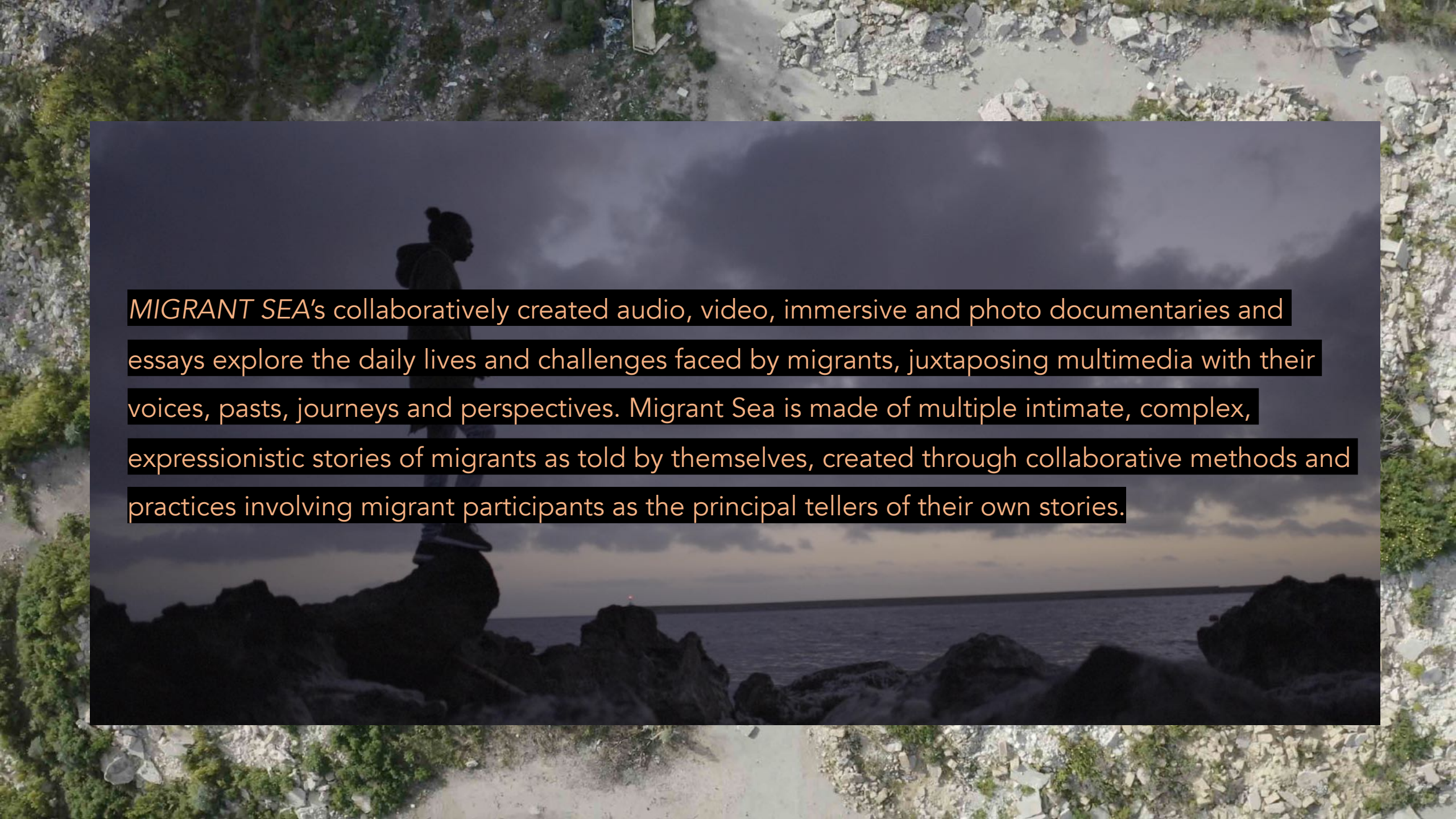
## PROJECT STATEMENT

*MIGRANT SEA* is a response to a broken narrative.

A narrative that has failed migrants by neglecting their voices, views and stories.

A narrative that has failed its audience by portraying migrants as anonymous, suffering victims suddenly appearing off the coasts of Europe, and not human beings.

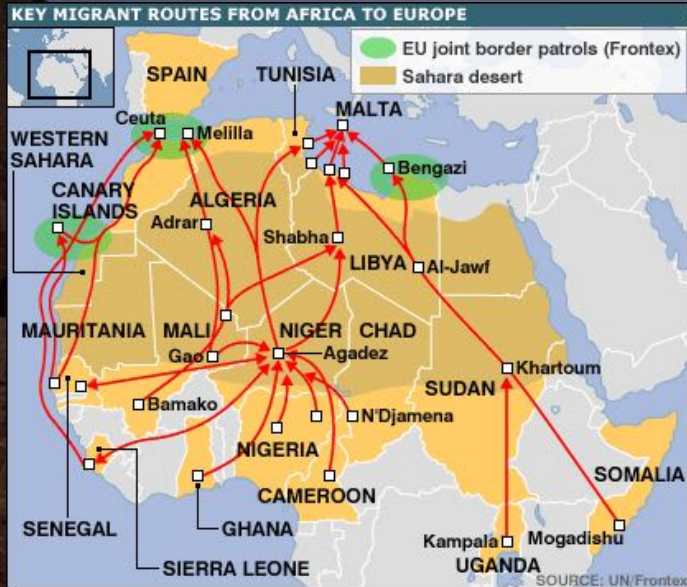
Through 2015 and to this day, most migrant stories have either revolved around dramatic arrivals or impoverished suffering in refugee camps. Without authentic portrayals, a variety of voices and a variety of stories, audiences have found themselves fatigued and jaded. The stories of migrants have largely fallen out of the news cycle, ignoring the realities of millions already in Europe.

A person is silhouetted against a cloudy sky, standing on a rocky shore. The person is looking out over a body of water towards the horizon. The foreground is filled with dark, jagged rocks, and the background shows a vast expanse of water meeting a sky with scattered clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*MIGRANT SEA's* collaboratively created audio, video, immersive and photo documentaries and essays explore the daily lives and challenges faced by migrants, juxtaposing multimedia with their voices, pasts, journeys and perspectives. Migrant Sea is made of multiple intimate, complex, expressionistic stories of migrants as told by themselves, created through collaborative methods and practices involving migrant participants as the principal tellers of their own stories.



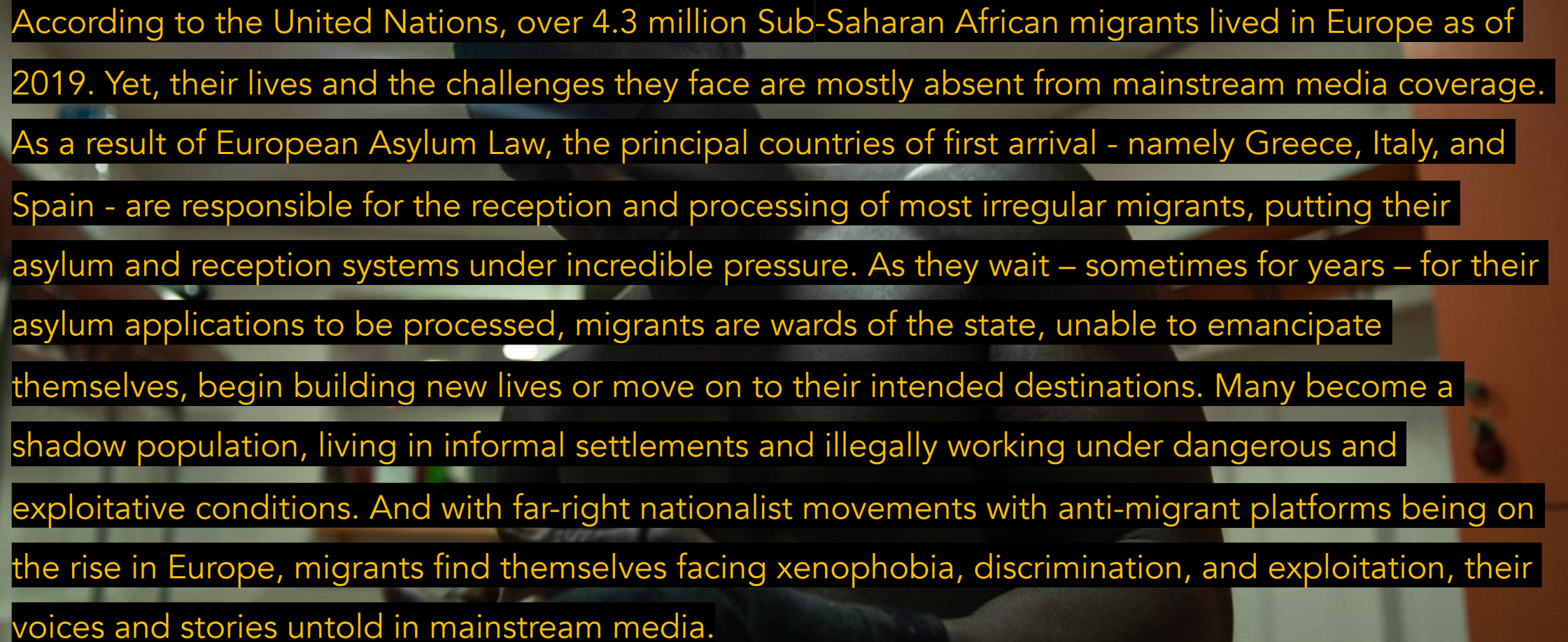
## SUB-SAHARAN MIGRATION TO EUROPE



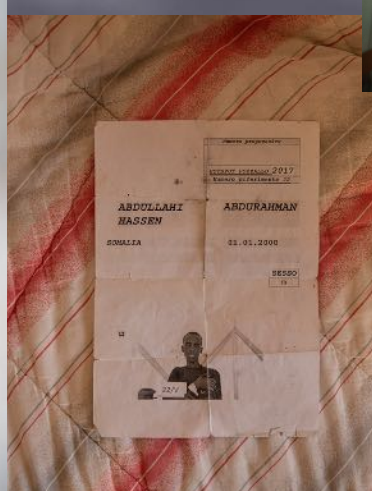
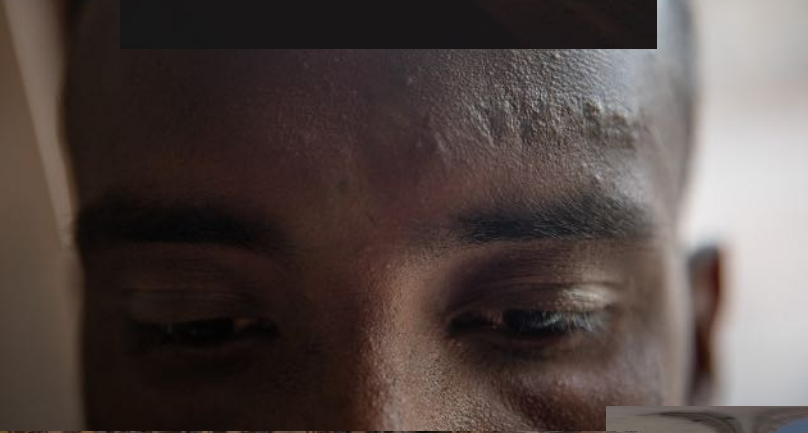
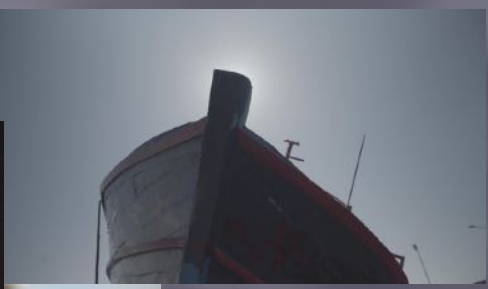
Sub-Saharan migration to Europe principally originates from sixteen African nations located in Western Africa and the Horn of Africa. Broadly speaking there are four routes: along the West African coast and onto Spain via Morocco; through the Western Sahara and onto Italy or Spain via Algeria and Libya; through the Central Sahara and onto Italy via Libya; and through the Eastern Sahara onto Italy via Sudan and Libya.

Each country of origin has its history, various cultures, systems of government, geopolitical relations and challenges, with migrants leaving their home countries due to a complex set of interacting factors; no one leaves for a single reason, and each person has their own, but all search for a better, more stable and sustainable life.

Regardless of the route, trans-Saharan journeys are expensive (on average costing thousands), long (up to several years), violent, and deadly. Inestimable numbers of migrants die in the desert every year due to inhumane treatment at smugglers' hands, attacks by militant groups, or simply happenstance. North Africa – and especially Algeria and Libya – has become a particularly dangerous region for migrants in recent years. Many spend years there earning money to continue their journeys, during which they are routinely oppressed, exploited, imprisoned, brutalized, ransomed, enslaved and often killed. Migrants must then resort to trans-Mediterranean smugglers that tow them in unsafe and dangerously overcrowded boats into international waters where they hope to be rescued by European ships. Poor weather conditions, engine failure, or the rupture of a boat's delicate air chamber can all lead to the deaths of hundreds. Over 19,000 migrants have been reported dead or missing in the Mediterranean since 2013.

A person with dark skin and short hair, wearing a dark jacket, is shown from the chest up, looking down. The background is a dimly lit room with a circular light fixture on the ceiling and some blurred objects in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the image in a yellow font with a black background.

According to the United Nations, over 4.3 million Sub-Saharan African migrants lived in Europe as of 2019. Yet, their lives and the challenges they face are mostly absent from mainstream media coverage. As a result of European Asylum Law, the principal countries of first arrival - namely Greece, Italy, and Spain - are responsible for the reception and processing of most irregular migrants, putting their asylum and reception systems under incredible pressure. As they wait – sometimes for years – for their asylum applications to be processed, migrants are wards of the state, unable to emancipate themselves, begin building new lives or move on to their intended destinations. Many become a shadow population, living in informal settlements and illegally working under dangerous and exploitative conditions. And with far-right nationalist movements with anti-migrant platforms being on the rise in Europe, migrants find themselves facing xenophobia, discrimination, and exploitation, their voices and stories untold in mainstream media.



## MIGRANT SEA'S STORIES

Though Migrant Sea is updated periodically with stories currently in post-production, the current iteration of the project contains several completed documentaries:

1. A video documentary with Jenni Traoré, a cultural mediator from Mali and Libya living in Palermo.
2. A photo documentary, collaboratively written first-person essay and interactive map with Fidèle Deholo, a software engineering student from Mali living in Messina.
3. A photo documentary and collaboratively written first-person essay with Abdirahman Abdulahi Hasan, from Somalia.
4. A video documentary with Larry Scotty, a community leader and preacher from Nigeria.
5. 8. An immersive VR documentary on the lives of Falilu Diallo and Mouctar Sall at the Casa Federica group home in Palermo, Sicily.
6. An audio documentary and collaboratively written first-person essay with A, from The Gambia.



7. A collaboratively written first-person essay with M, from Nigeria.

8. A collaboratively written first-person essay with Clarisse Zohorii, from Côte d'Ivoire.

9. A series of three contextualizing "explainer" articles focused on Migration, Asylum and media bias.

10. A music video filmed with Ismaheel Ibraheem for his original song "This Journey" filmed outside the CARA di Mineo reception center where he lived at the time.

11. A series of migrant drawings captioned by their teenage creators, a collaboration with Save the Children Catania – an example of more User-Generated Content that I hope to introduce to the project.

12. A VR and photo essay on an isolated plot at a Palermo cemetery where migrants who drowned at sea have been buried – an example of free-form artist-led multimedia essays that I hope to integrate into the project.

## CASA FEDERICA: A VR Documentary

Falilu and Mouctar both arrived in Italy in 2016. Now 19, they live alongside Italian and African teens in the Casa Federica group home in Palermo, Sicily, run by a group of volunteers. This VR film immerses us in the lives of this assembled, multicultural family, following Mouctar and Falilu as they go to school and search for work, preparing themselves for the uncertain transition into adulthood.

*“Casa Federica is a place where many people live. Some are from Guinea Conakry, some are from the Ivory Coast and, like me, I’m from the Gambia. And some of them are Italian. Casa Federica is just like a family to everybody.”*

- Falilu

*“If the Italian kids leave here one day and hear someone talk about us who came from outside [Italy], they’ll remember our time together here. Maybe they can explain something to the other Italians. »*

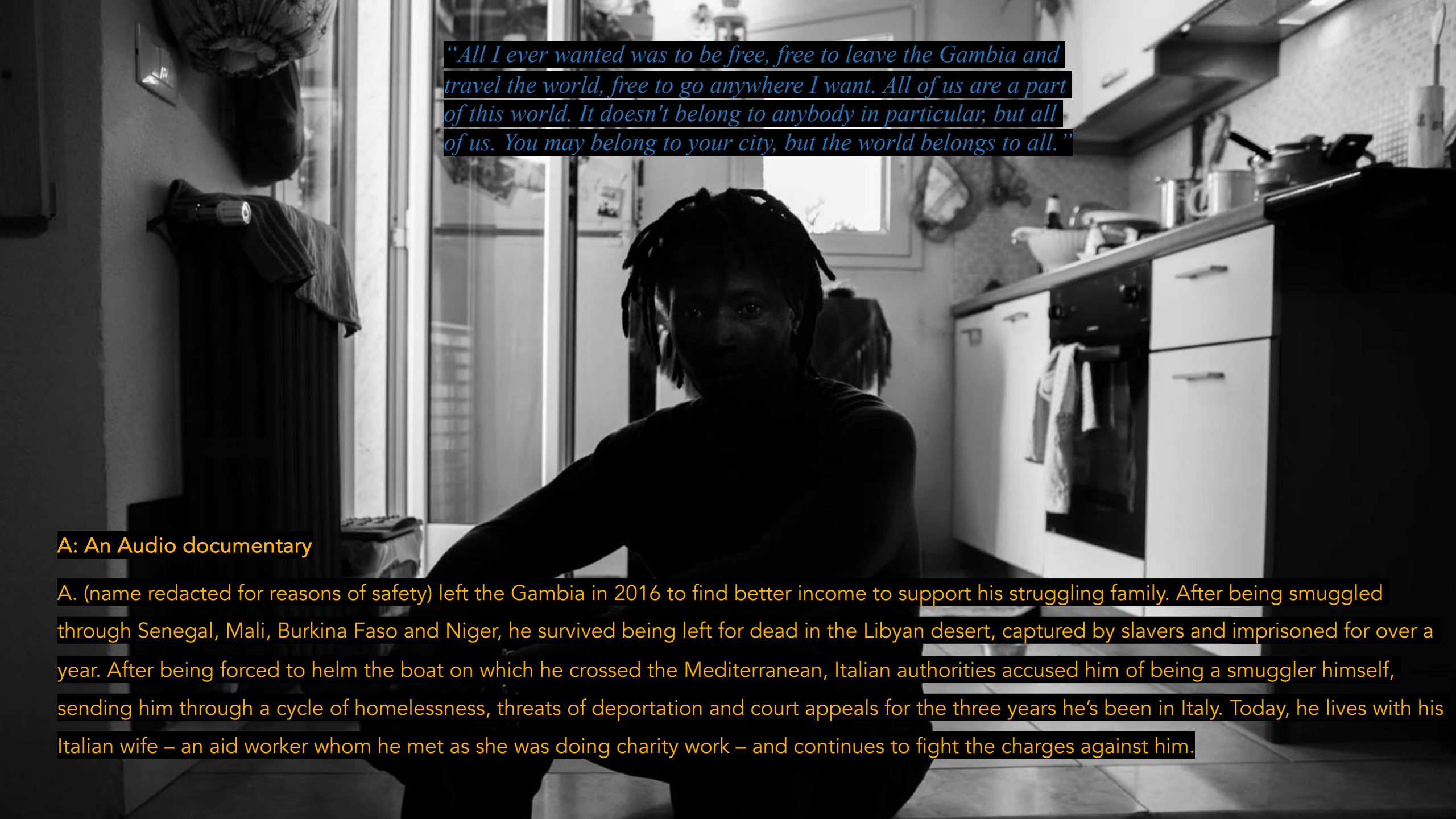
- Mouctar

A low-angle, close-up shot of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a white shirt, looking upwards. A person in a white coat is examining his head with a stethoscope. A bright, horizontal light fixture is visible above them, casting a strong light. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## JENNI: A documentary film

Born in Libya to Malian parents, **Jenni Traoré** studied accounting and worked in construction until he was forced to leave Libya by the country's brutal civil war. After years in Palermo, Jenni has built a new life for himself; adopted by an elderly Italian couple, he now works as a cultural mediator at reception centres, helping newly arrived migrants obtain their documents and adapt to life in Italy..

*"I defeated death to get here."*



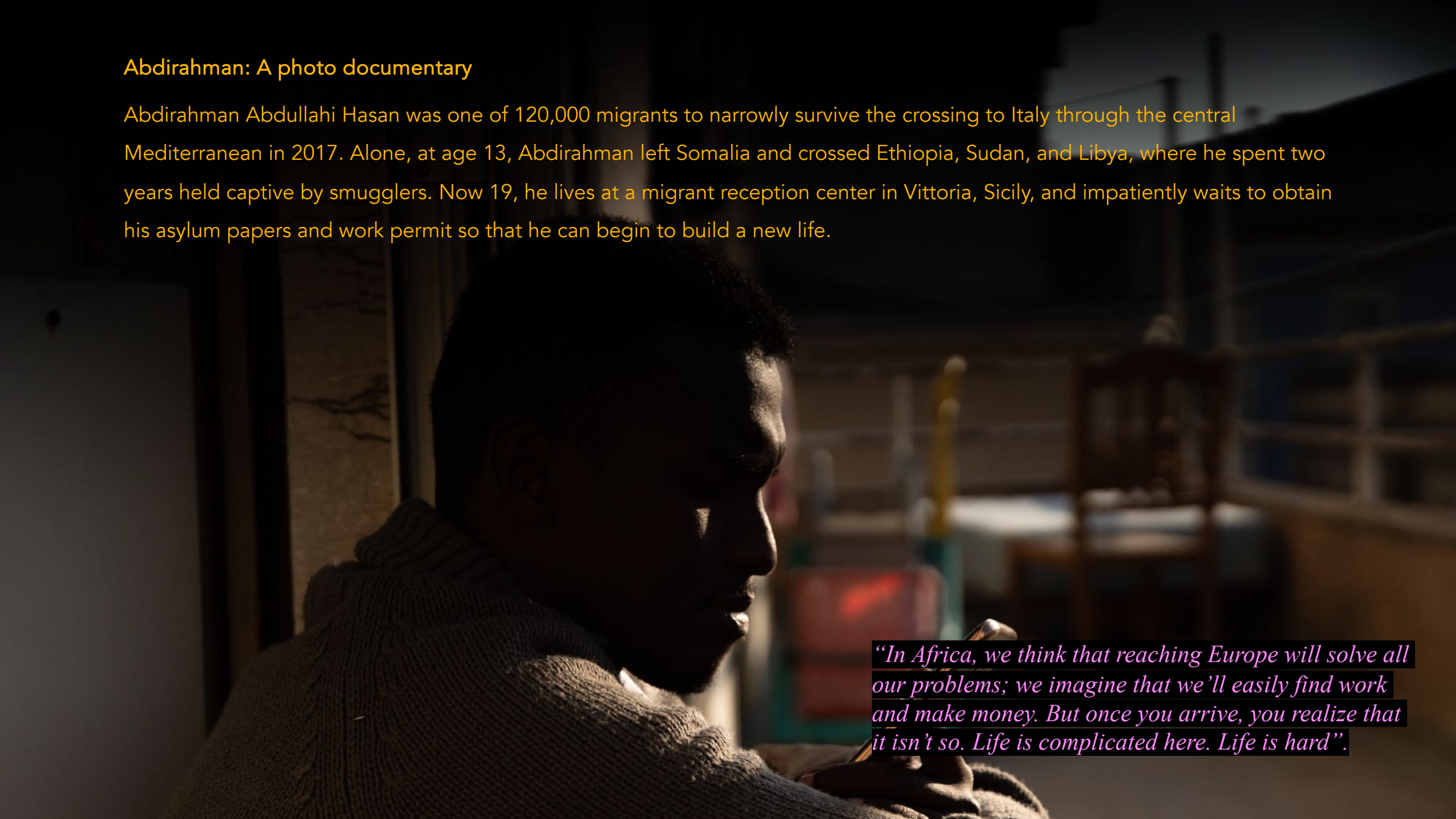
*“All I ever wanted was to be free, free to leave the Gambia and travel the world, free to go anywhere I want. All of us are a part of this world. It doesn't belong to anybody in particular, but all of us. You may belong to your city, but the world belongs to all.”*

**A: An Audio documentary**

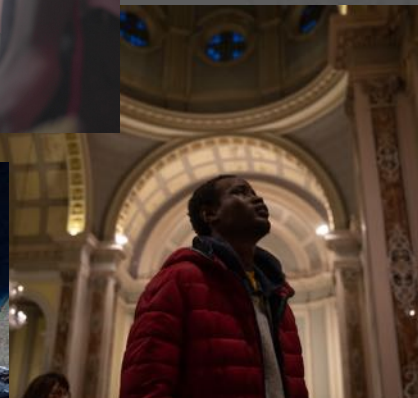
A. (name redacted for reasons of safety) left the Gambia in 2016 to find better income to support his struggling family. After being smuggled through Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, he survived being left for dead in the Libyan desert, captured by slavers and imprisoned for over a year. After being forced to helm the boat on which he crossed the Mediterranean, Italian authorities accused him of being a smuggler himself, sending him through a cycle of homelessness, threats of deportation and court appeals for the three years he's been in Italy. Today, he lives with his Italian wife – an aid worker whom he met as she was doing charity work – and continues to fight the charges against him.

## Abdirahman: A photo documentary

Abdirahman Abdullahi Hasan was one of 120,000 migrants to narrowly survive the crossing to Italy through the central Mediterranean in 2017. Alone, at age 13, Abdirahman left Somalia and crossed Ethiopia, Sudan, and Libya, where he spent two years held captive by smugglers. Now 19, he lives at a migrant reception center in Vittoria, Sicily, and impatiently waits to obtain his asylum papers and work permit so that he can begin to build a new life.

A young man with dark skin and short hair is shown in profile, looking down and to the right. He is wearing a dark, textured sweater. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with some furniture and a window. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of his face and the texture of his sweater.

*“In Africa, we think that reaching Europe will solve all our problems; we imagine that we’ll easily find work and make money. But once you arrive, you realize that it isn’t so. Life is complicated here. Life is hard”.*



A person with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is sitting on the floor in a room. In the background, there are metal bunk beds with blue and white bedding. The room has a window with light coming through. The text is overlaid on the image in a semi-transparent grey box.

**VIDEO DOCUMENTARIES** are 10-15-minute documentaries narrated by and following migrant participants.

**IMMERSIVE VR DOCUMENTARIES** are 10-15-minute documentaries narrated by and following migrant participants, sometimes occurring in Migrant Reception Centers.

**PHOTO DOCUMENTARIES** are multimedia slideshows featuring photos, captions, and looped video showing the lives of individual migrants.

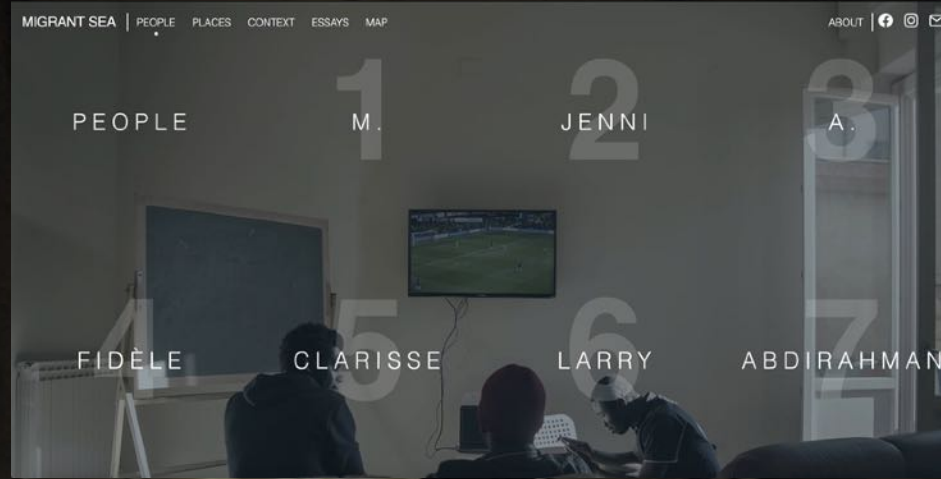
**AUDIO DOCUMENTARIES** are 10-20-minute episodic audio interviews with migrants, discussing their journeys and lives.

**FIRST-PERSON ESSAYS** are translated and edited multimedia essays based on extensive interviews where migrants describe their countries of origin, journeys, and lives in Italy.

**INTERACTIVE MAPS** use Google Earth, Street View, captions, hyperlinks, and video to take the audience on migrant journeys through Africa and across the Mediterranean.

**ARTICLES** and **INTERVIEWS** provide context about Sub-Saharan migration as a global issue.

**ESSAYS** provide a Migrant-Generated-Content and more abstract explorations of the issues.



A. is a 34-year-old man who left his home in the Gambia to support his family.

After being forced to helm the boat that brought him across the Mediterranean, he was charged as a smuggler by Italian authorities upon arrival.

As the results of his trial are still pending, he must remain anonymous.

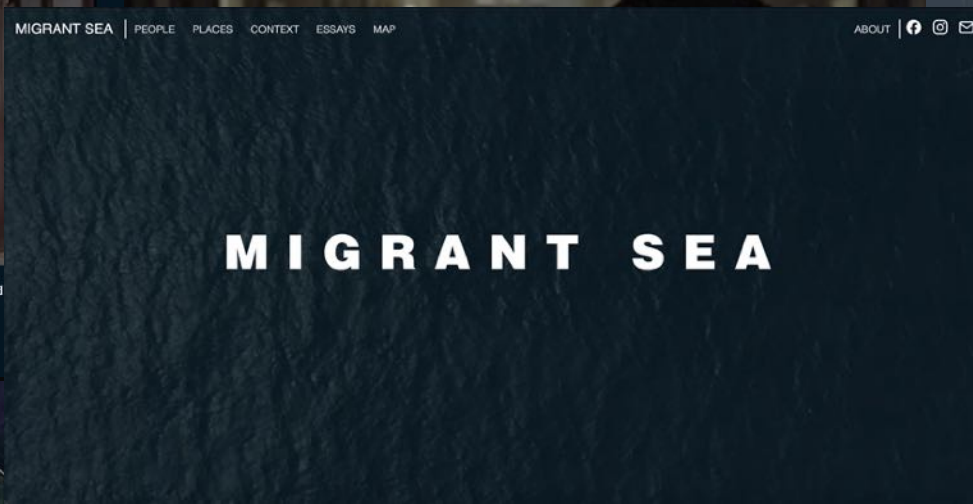
**READ A.'S STORY**

[READ](#)



Casa Federica is a group home in Palermo where seven Italian and migrant teenagers live and work together to build stable, and futures.

This immersive film is a glimpse into their lives, as told by Mouctar and Fallu.



**HOME**

[CLOSE](#)

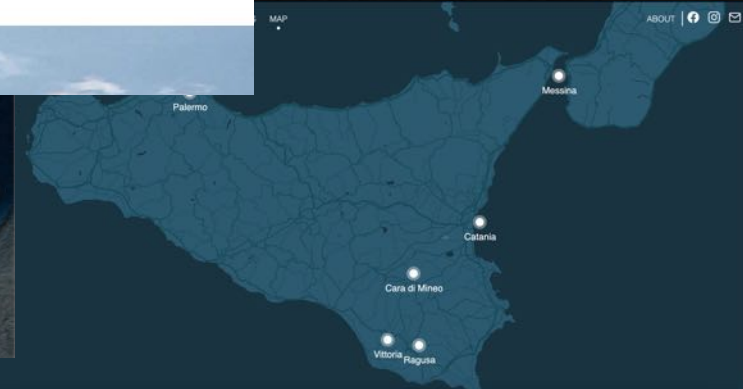
*Editor's note: The following story is based on conversations with Clarisse from February 2019. It reflects her life and views at the time, much of which has changed since. The text was edited and collaboratively re-written for clarity with her approval. Most importantly, this remains her story, told in her words.*

I'm Clarisse Zohou. I'm 45 years old and I was born in Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast. Abidjan is a beautiful city, with lots of people of different nationalities: French, Italian, Angolenses and Ivorians. I myself speak four languages: Guiné and Bété and Fricadi.

I lived in the Yopougon district, which is also where I went to elementary school. French system, so we were taught a bit of everything, mathematics, geography, Coire.



NAME UNKNOWN No. 23  
 Found by the vessel "L.E. NIAMH"  
 from the shipwreck on August 5, 2015



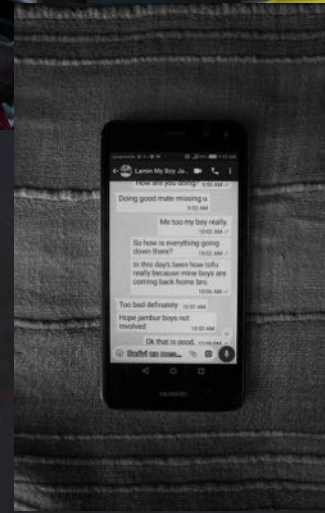


**VIDEO DOCUMENTARIES**





PHOTO DOCUMENTARIES





**IMMERSIVE  
DOCUMENTARIES**



## AUDIENCE JOURNEY

Migrant Sea takes audiences on a journey of migration, following migrants from their home countries and accompanying them as they struggle to build new lives in Europe. Above all their voices, thoughts, and perspectives inhabit the project, to deepen our understanding of the social issues and realities that lie behind the headlines.

As a multimedia exhibit integrating diverse, accessible documentaries, Migrant Sea will immerse audiences in the intimate lives of African migrants in Italy in ways rarely seen before. The combination of in-person photography, VR, film, and interactivity will allow the audience to experience the project in whatever medium, sequence, and detail they choose. Our hope is that this multiplicity and interactivity will re-engage audiences, providing the audience with unique, personal and complex ways of exploring (and experiencing) the narrative of migration.

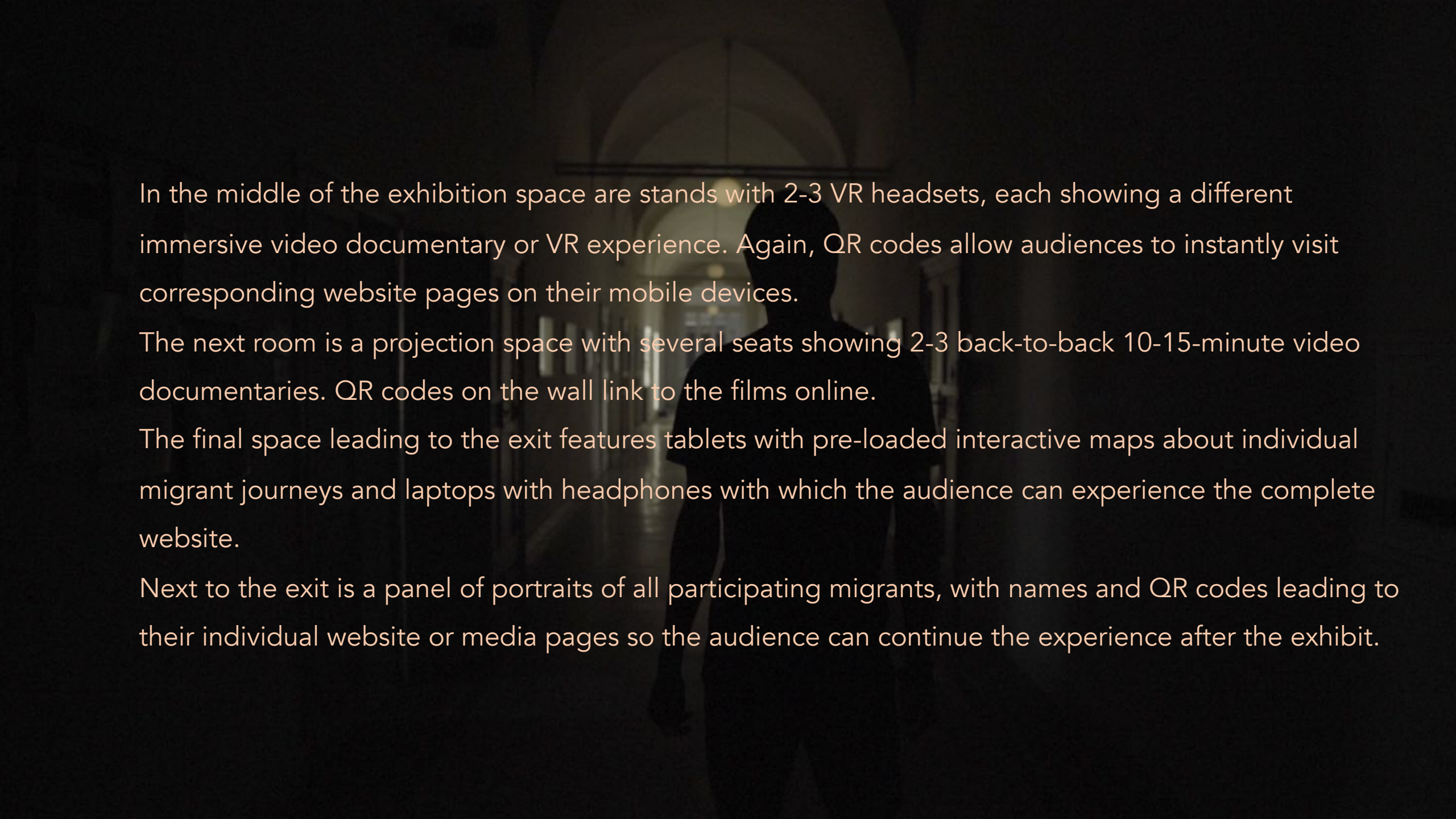


## EXHIBITION: AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

Before entering the exhibition space, a short paragraph printed on a wall introduces the audience to Sub-Saharan migration and the Migrant Sea project. It concludes with the bold words:

*“Follow their journeys.”*

The audience first enters an exhibition space where a selection of images from different photo documentaries – each with detailed captions – show the lives of different migrants living in Italy. Each photo is also accompanied by a quote, a QR code leading to the migrant’s page on the website, and a tablet where the audience can scroll through the person’s full interactive photo documentary slideshow.



In the middle of the exhibition space are stands with 2-3 VR headsets, each showing a different immersive video documentary or VR experience. Again, QR codes allow audiences to instantly visit corresponding website pages on their mobile devices.

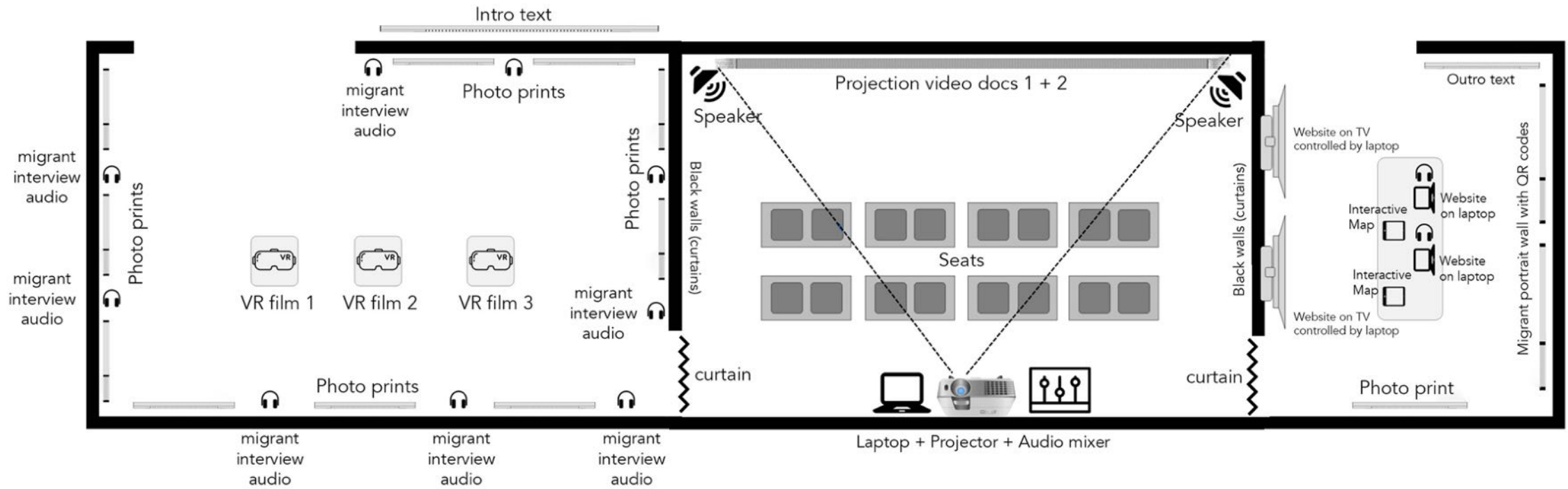
The next room is a projection space with several seats showing 2-3 back-to-back 10-15-minute video documentaries. QR codes on the wall link to the films online.

The final space leading to the exit features tablets with pre-loaded interactive maps about individual migrant journeys and laptops with headphones with which the audience can experience the complete website.

Next to the exit is a panel of portraits of all participating migrants, with names and QR codes leading to their individual website or media pages so the audience can continue the experience after the exhibit.

# MIGRANT SEA

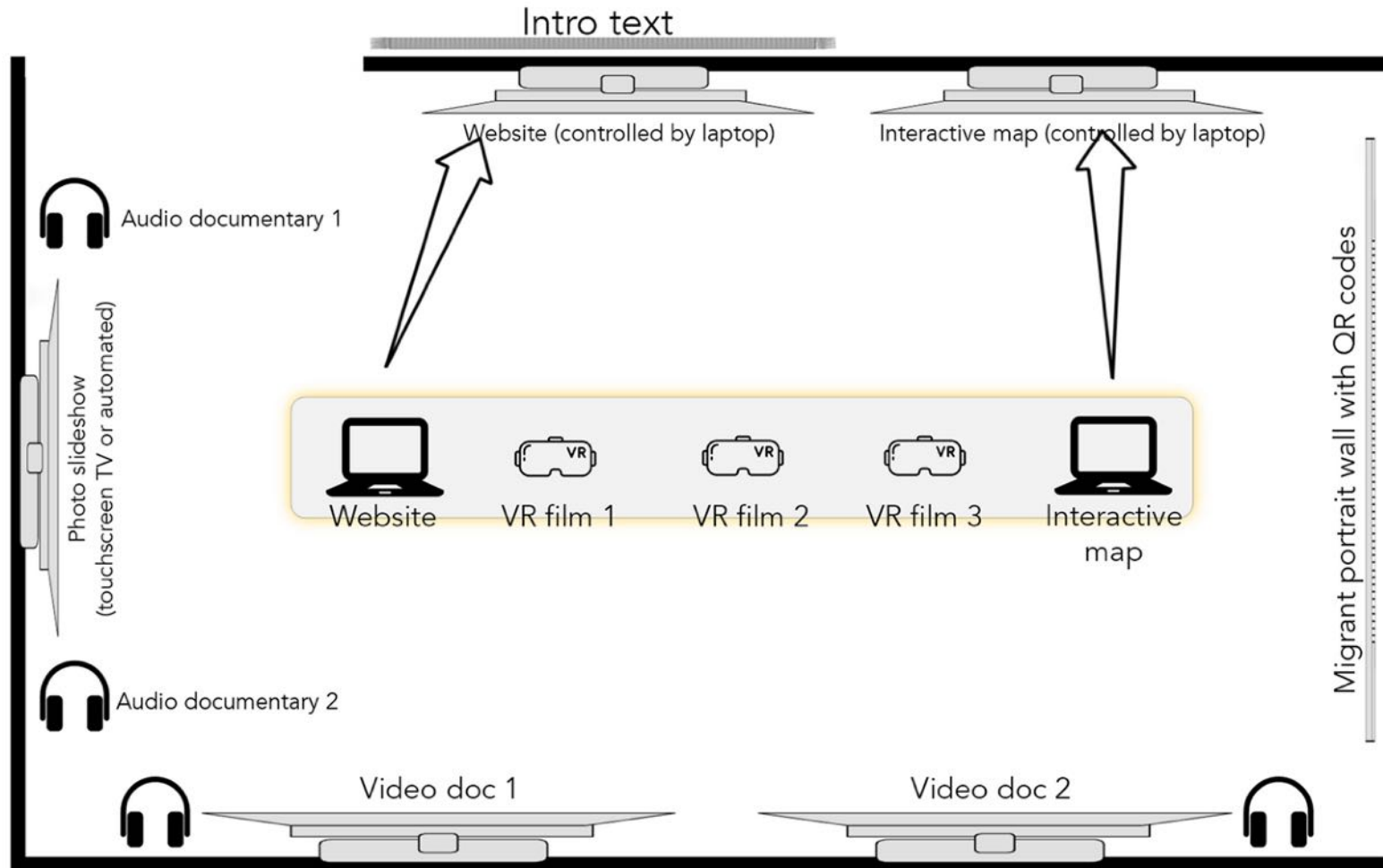
floorplan example 1: 3 rooms



Note: The layouts presented here are for illustrative purposes only.  
The modular / multimedia nature of the project will allow it to adapt to any scale or space provided.

# MIGRANT SEA

floorplan example 2: 1 room



Note: The layouts presented here are for illustrative purposes only.  
The modular / multimedia nature of the project will allow it to adapt to any scale or space provided.

## RESOURCES NEEDED for EXHIBITION

Being that Migrant Sea is a multimedia documentary consisting of modular mini-docs, it is easily scalable to adapt to available space and resources. For Sundance, only a selection of documentaries will be exhibited. In the case that space is limited, films and photos can be transposed to VR, tablet, or computer devices to accommodate any space.

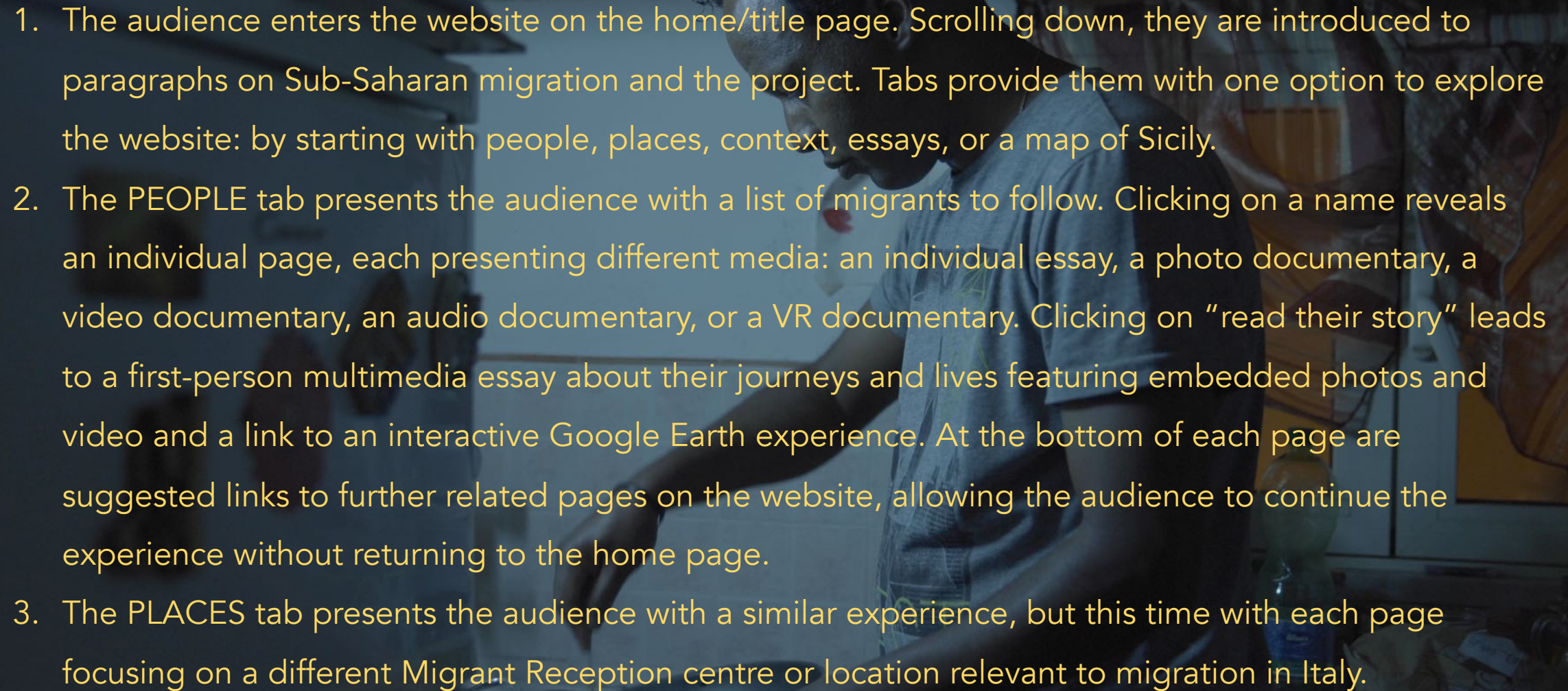
However, here are the resources needed for a full-scale exhibition of the project:


- 3 x exhibition rooms: one for VR and photo, one for video documentary screenings, and one for interactive laptop and tablet exploration of the website.
- 2-3 x VR headsets with headphones for VR documentaries, 2-3 x platforms, 2-3 security locks. These can be affordable phone-based headsets, if needed.
- 2-3 x tablets for photo documentary slideshow browsing, tablet mount for the wall.

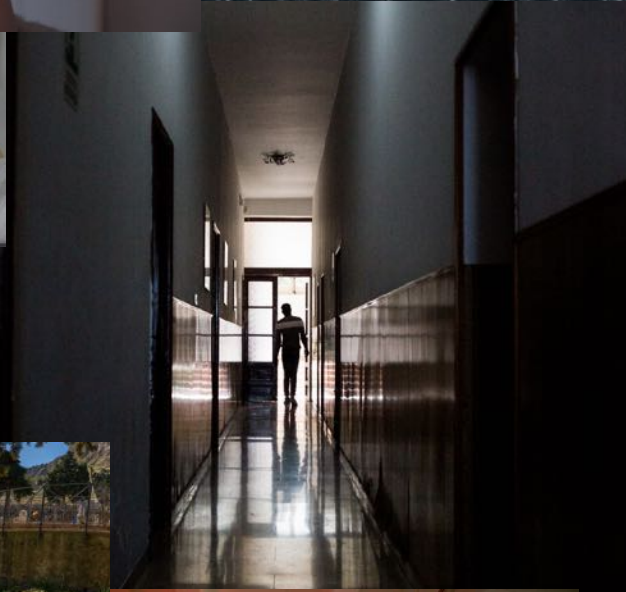
- 1 x FHD or 4K projector, source laptop, 2 x large speakers, 1 x mixer / amplifier. 1 x projection screen (or white wall), benches or chairs for seating.
- 1-2 x tablets for interactive map experience, 1-2 platforms, 1-2 security locks.
- 1-2 laptops for interactive website experience, 1-2 platforms, 1-2 security locks.
- High-speed internet connectivity
- Assistance and tools for installation of entry text, photo prints, caption texts, and photo slide tablets.
- Assistance and tools for installation of VR headsets.
- Assistance and tools for installation of projector and screen.
- Assistance and tools for installation of tablets and laptops.

## WEBSITE: AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

The website has two navigation options, allowing users to browse pages focused on PEOPLE, PLACES, CONTEXT, and ESSAYS. PEOPLE and PLACES focus on the migrant experience, with pages featuring a selection of first-person essays, interactive maps, and video, immersive, photo, and audio documentaries created with migrant participants. At the bottom of each page are links leading the audience to further, related stories. CONTEXT features multimedia articles explaining migration, asylum, and the project. ESSAYS features Migrant-Created works and more abstract explorations of migration.

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- A man with dark curly hair, wearing a light-colored t-shirt, is cooking in a kitchen. He is standing at a stove, stirring a pan of food. The kitchen has wooden beams on the ceiling and various items on the counter, including a water bottle and some papers. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall tone is warm and focused on the man's activity.
1. The audience enters the website on the home/title page. Scrolling down, they are introduced to paragraphs on Sub-Saharan migration and the project. Tabs provide them with one option to explore the website: by starting with people, places, context, essays, or a map of Sicily.
  2. The PEOPLE tab presents the audience with a list of migrants to follow. Clicking on a name reveals an individual page, each presenting different media: an individual essay, a photo documentary, a video documentary, an audio documentary, or a VR documentary. Clicking on “read their story” leads to a first-person multimedia essay about their journeys and lives featuring embedded photos and video and a link to an interactive Google Earth experience. At the bottom of each page are suggested links to further related pages on the website, allowing the audience to continue the experience without returning to the home page.
  3. The PLACES tab presents the audience with a similar experience, but this time with each page focusing on a different Migrant Reception centre or location relevant to migration in Italy.

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- A photograph of a room with a checkered floor, a whiteboard on a stand, three white chairs, and a window with a view of the outdoors. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window on the right. The text is overlaid on the image in a yellow font.
4. The CONTEXT tab leads to multimedia articles about the project, Italian Asylum system, Sub-Saharan migration, and interviews with experts involved with migrant reception in Italy.
  5. ESSAYS leads to a variety of Migrant-Created Content – such as a music video or drawings – and more abstract multimedia explorations of migrant realities, such as a cemetery with unnamed migrant graves.
  6. The MAP tab features an alternative navigation option based on a map of Sicily. It allows audiences to navigate stories by location.





## PROJECT TIMELINE

**SEPT. 2017 - APRIL 2018** Creation and development of Migration Sea as a multimedia creation project for an M.A. in Digital Journalism at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

**APRIL 2018 - NOV. 2018** Research and development for the production: in-depth research of migrant journeys and issues, contacting local NGOs and non-profits, interviews with human rights experts, pre-interviews with potential participants, pre-planning upcoming shoot in 2019.

**DEC. 2018 - FEB. 2019** Pre-Production for the documentary shoot planned for March and April: securing equipment, planning logistics and transportation, booking cinematographer (Roland Cody Larocque) and line producer (Lorenzo Signoretti).

**MARCH 2019 - APRIL 2019** Production of 21 migrant stories throughout Sicily, namely in the cities of Palermo, Mazzara del Vallo, Ragusa, Catania, and Messina.

**APRIL 2019** - Filming in Northern Italy in the states of Imperia and Piemonte: meeting non-profit staff and migrants and visiting migrant centres and the migrant border crossings at in Ventimiglia and Oulx, in the Italian Alps.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

JUNE 2019 - DEC. 2019 Website research and design.

JAN. 2020 - DEC. 2020 De-rushing and organisation of over 200 hours of footage and VR material and 15000 photos.  
Transcription and translation of 50 hours of interviews.

APRIL. 2020 - APRIL 2021 Writing of accompanying M.A. Thesis and assembly of rough M.A. version of the Migrant Sea website.

DEC. 2020 - APRIL 2021 Editing of rough cuts of selected migrant documentaries and website integration for M.A. Thesis.

APRIL 2021 - JUNE 2021 Website revisions and further content integration.

APRIL 2021 - PRESENT Continued post-production: editing video, audio and VR documentaries, transcription and translation of interviews, titling, writing articles, editing of photo documentaries - and more.

Though filmed in 2019, Migrant Sea has been a long, independent work in progress. Several migrant stories are still in post-production today and will be added to the website as they are completed.



**SAMPLE MEDIA**



Jenni // VIDEO DOCUMENTARY  
[https://youtu.be/C\\_KbvTrUoOk](https://youtu.be/C_KbvTrUoOk)



Larry // VIDEO DOCUMENTARY  
<https://youtu.be/gtRihf6WKCo>



Fidèle // PHOTO DOCUMENTARY  
<https://migrantsea.com/people/fidele/>



Casa Federica // Immersive Documentary  
<https://youtu.be/DntzavDBwF4>



A. // AUDIO DOCUMENTARY  
<https://migrantsea.com/people/a/>



Abdirahman // PHOTO DOCUMENTARY  
<https://migrantsea.com/people/abdirahman/>



Clarisse // Essay  
<https://migrantsea.com/people/clarisse/>



M. // Interactive Map  
<https://shorturl.at/fhAKT>



Names Unknown // Multimedia Essay  
<https://migrantsea.com/other/names-unknown-1/>



The Journey // MUSIC VIDEO  
<https://migrantsea.com/other/this-journey/>



#### **AN INTRODUCTION TO SUB-SAHARAN MIGRATION TO EUROPE**

Irregular Sub-Saharan migration to Europe isn't a recent phenomenon. Often conflated with the mass migration of Syrian refugees fleeing civil war in 2015-2016 as the "Mediterranean Migrant Crisis", trans-Mediterranean Sub-Saharan migration to Europe has been occurring for over two decades, and has been thoroughly understudied and

Migration Primer // ARTICLE  
<https://migrantsea.com/context/migration-primer/>