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Shock (Im)mobilities Special Section: African Migrants in the Ukraine War

Curated by Mengnjo Tardzenyuy Thomas

6. Space of inter-governmental negotiation amidst shock mobility

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Abstract

This entry outlines the different approaches taken by African governments to help nationals flee the war in Ukraine. Through these initiatives, which involved inter-governmental negotiation, a number of African migrants returned home.

Theme

Shock (Im)mobilities

Keywords

African migrants, home governments, evacuation

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Following the Russian military invasion on 24 February 2022, most African governments decided to evacuate nationals stranded in Ukraine.² This entry looks at how evacuations were carried out. Shock mobility is by definition unpredictable. People flee without clear plans or destinations in mind, have to change routes constantly, and may end up in places with which they have no connection and about which they know nothing. It is difficult for embassies to trace or assist those in shock mobility. The challenge has been especially acute for African states without a consulate in Ukraine. To evacuate citizens, these governments must engage in intensive, multilateral negotiations, and with NGOs and the migrants themselves.

African governments which had diplomatic ties with countries neighbouring Ukraine negotiated with them to allow safe passage for their citizens. When the invasion began, for example, Zimbabwe dispatched its envoy to Poland to ensure that its nationals, mostly students, were safe. To do so, it began by advising nationals in Ukraine to flee by any means possible to any third country, and especially Poland, Romania, Hungary, Moldova and Slovakia. According to Nick Mangwana, Zimbabwe's Permanent Secretary for Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, the government was prepared to pay hotel bills and flights for any nationals who had fled Ukraine to one of the third countries above.³ This diplomatic endeavour paid off. First, the Zimbabwean Embassy in Berlin was able to register 256 nationals in Ukraine; and secondly, the Zimbabwean embassies in Moscow and Berlin managed the evacuation of 118 students to safety in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland.⁴ Evacuation was provided to nationals who wanted to go back home, while accommodation and the provision of other basic needs was given to those who preferred to stay in neighbouring countries.

Through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Kenyan government also negotiated with third countries to ensure easy entry for nationals fleeing Ukraine. Kenyan Minister of Foreign Affairs Raychelle Omamo said that "[t]he government negotiated for unrestricted entry of Kenyans into the neighbouring EU states, a request that was honoured by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania that Kenyans cross their borders via simplified procedure."⁵ Based on these initiatives, 74 Kenyan students were able to enter Poland, two into Romania, two into Hungary, and one returned home to Kenya.⁶

The Ghanaian government was able to negotiate with officials from Ukraine and Russia in Belarus on 28 February 2022. This enabled Ghanaian students to travel to and be received by third countries, including Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, where Ghana's diplomatic missions, honorary consuls and representatives of the ministry of foreign affairs were on standby to receive them.⁷ The Ghanaian government also provided transportation, accommodation,

² Parker, Claire. 2022. What counts as an 'invasion,' or as 'lethal aid'? Here's what some terms from the Russia-Ukraine crisis really mean. *The Washington Post*. 23 February 2022. Available online at: <https://archive.today/2022.02.23-204700/https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/23/key-terms-russia-ukraine/>. Last accessed 20 November 2022.

³ The Herald. Zim to evacuate 256 citizens from Ukraine. Available online at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/zim-to-evacuate-256-citizens-from-ukraine/>. Last accessed 21 November 2022.

⁴ University World News. 2022. Africa-Ukraine: Evacuation of Africa's students from Ukraine continues. Available online at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220303061012858>. Last accessed 17 December 2022.

⁵ The East African. 2022. Ukraine: Kenya secures 'safe passage' for stranded nationals. Available online at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ukraine-kenya-citizens-3733578>. Last accessed 20 November 2022.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kokutse, Francis. 2022. Ghana puts measures in place to help students exit Ukraine. *University World News – Africa Edition*. Available online at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220228133206689>. Last accessed 20 November 2022.

food and medical support. As Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey said, "the collaborative efforts have led to 220 of our compatriots exiting Ukraine and [they] should be with us in Ghana soon. We are earnestly facilitating the safe return of a lot more."⁸

In conjunction with its missions abroad, the Nigerian foreign ministry set up procedures for nationals to go to safe border points. From there, they were transported to airports in neighbouring countries, including Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and even Russia.⁹ During the negotiations, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Aduda underlined that "[f]or now, movement to the Hungarian Zahony border and Romanian Suceava, Tulcea, Satu Mare County, and Maramures borders is advised, as they have approved visa-free access to all Nigerians coming from Ukraine."¹⁰ The arrangements allowed 256 Nigerians to evacuate to Romania, Hungary and Poland on 27 February 2022.¹¹ They were camped in well-organised facilities, and provided with food, clothing and medical assistance.¹² 415 Nigerians, mostly students, were eventually evacuated back to Nigeria.¹³

Nigeria was not the only African government to enter into negotiations with Russia to protect its nationals. The Tanzanian government's negotiations with Russia enabled the evacuation of students stranded in Sumy in northeastern Ukraine to Sudzha, where they were granted safe passage by Russian troops out of the country. Before that, the stranded students had been sheltered in five hostels in northeastern Ukraine.¹⁴ Whilst fleeing, the Tanzanian students were to carry the Tanzanian flag and raise it to identify themselves when they encountered Russian troops or arrived at Sudzha. Through this safe passage, 38 students made it to Poland. Four of them willingly returned to Tanzania.¹⁵

The Kenyan government was one of those to coordinate the evacuation of nationals via their diplomatic representatives in Ukraine.¹⁶ The Honorary Consul in Kiev coordinated the evacuation of nationals – 201 people prior to the Russian invasion – by providing a telephone contact and an email address to those still stranded in Ukraine.

African governments which did not have diplomatic representatives in Ukraine embarked on diplomatic talks with friendly African counterparts who had diplomatic representation there. The Gambian government, for example, negotiated with diplomatic representatives from Morocco and Nigeria.¹⁷ Through its embassy in Brussels, it had already contacted the executive of Gambian

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Onochie, Bridget Chiedu, and Adamu Abu, John Akubo, Oludare Richards, (Abuja), Ngozi Egenuka (Lagos), Ayodele Afolabi (Ado Ekiti), with Agency Report. 2022. Evacuation of Nigerians in Ukraine begins tomorrow. *The Guardian*. Available online at: <https://guardian.ng/news/evacuation-of-nigerians-in-ukraine-begins-tomorrow/>. Last accessed 19 November 2022.

¹⁰ African News. 2022. Russia-Ukraine conflict: 256 Nigerian nationals evacuated from Ukraine.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ezezi, Dennis. 2022. Nigeria says 256 citizens received from Ukraine in Romania, Hungary, Poland. Available online at: <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria-receives-256-citizens-from-ukraine-in-romania-hungary-poland/>. Last accessed 21 November 2022.

¹³ France24. 2022. More than 400 Nigerians who fled Ukraine return home. Available online at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220304-more-than-400-nigerians-who-fled-ukraine-return-home>. Last accessed 21 November 2022.

¹⁴ The East African. 2022. Relief as stranded Tanzanian students get a way out of Ukraine. Available online at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzanian-students-evacuate-ukraine-3739412>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ University World News. 2022. Evacuation of Africa's students from Ukraine continues. Available online at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220303061012858>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

¹⁷ The Point. 2022. Gov't on diplomacy to evacuate Gambians in Ukraine. Available online at: <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/govt-on-diplomacy-to-evacuate-gambians-in-ukraine>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

Students Association in Ukraine and found out that there was about 48 Gambian nationals there.¹⁸ The cooperation saw the evacuation of Gambians to Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary.¹⁹

Some African governments advised stranded nationals to seek safety through their respective embassies. The Ugandan government, for example, instructed its missions in Berlin, Hungary and Moscow to keep in constant contact with nationals in Ukraine.²⁰ Its embassy in Moscow, which also oversaw Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, advised nationals stranded by the conflict to check into the embassy for their safety. In its press release on 25 February 2022, the Ugandan embassy in Moscow stated that “[t]he Ugandan community is urged to notify the embassy immediately about their safety, whereabouts and the situation as it prevails.”²¹ This initiative saw 12 Ugandans displaced by the conflict check in.²²

Other African governments provided logistical support to enable nationals to flee, and for those stranded in neighbouring countries to return home. The scheme was coordinated for stranded migrants who were willing to be evacuated to their home countries. Ghana became the first African country to fly home students home, evacuating 17 of its 500 students from Ukraine on 1 March 2022.²³ The Nigerian government stationed buses at border points, enabling the evacuation of its citizens and coordinating their flights back home. The initiative saw the evacuation of 415 Nigerians, mostly students, by 4 March 2022.²⁴ In a similar manner, together with the pharmaceutical company Aspen, the South African government evacuated 25 students stranded in Poland, Romania and Hungary.²⁵

This entry has outlined the different approaches taken by African governments to help nationals flee the war in Ukraine. Through these initiatives, which involved inter-governmental negotiation, a number of African migrants evacuated to neighbouring countries, including Poland, Hungary and even Russia. Those willing to go back home were repatriated.

¹⁸ Makasuba, Adama. 2022. Government launches evacuation bid for Gambian students stranded in Ukraine. *Gambiana*. Available online at: <https://gambiana.com/government-launches-evacuation-bid-for-gambian-students-stranded-in-ukraine/>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

¹⁹ PenaPress. 2022. Gambia evacuates 32 citizens from Ukraine to neighbouring countries. Available online at: https://www.panapress.com/Gambia-evacuates-32-citizens-fro-a-630716118-lang2-free_news.html. Last accessed 21 November 2022.

²⁰ University World News. 2022. Evacuation of Africa’s students from Ukraine continues. Available online at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220303061012858>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/CapitalFMUganda>. Last accessed 12 December 2022.

²² Musisi, Frederic. 2022. Ugandans in Ukraine ask govt for evacuation plan. *Monitor*. Available online at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ugandans-in-ukraine-ask-govt-for-evacuation-plan-3735606>. Last accessed 12 November 2022.

²³ Mensah, Kent. 2022. Ghana Welcomes First Citizens Evacuated From Ukraine. *VOA News*. 1 March 2022. Available online at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/ghana-welcomes-first-citizens-evacuated-from-ukraine/6464744.html>. Last accessed 14 December 2022.

²⁴ France24. 2022. More than 400 Nigerians who fled Ukraine return home. 4 March 2022. Available online at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220304-more-than-400-nigerians-who-fled-ukraine-return-home>. Last accessed 21 October 2022.

²⁵ African News. 2022. South African students arrive home after leaving Ukraine. 10 March 2022. Available online at: <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/10/south-african-students-arrive-home-after-leaving-ukraine/>. Last accessed 20 November 2022.