



MoLab Inventory of Mobilities and Socioeconomic Changes, June 2023

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

Curated by Mengnjo Tardzenyuy Thomas

7. *Black Women for Black Lives: Civil society in shock mobility*

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Abstract

African migrants trapped in Ukraine have received tremendous support from individuals and civil society groups who have organised information, accommodation, emergency currency exchange services, as well as transport and funding to provide a passage to safety.

Theme

Shock (Im)mobilities

Keywords

African migrants, civil society

To be quoted as:

Mfobujong, Manka'a Afanwi. 2023. *Black Women for Black Lives: Civil society in shock mobility. MoLab Inventory of Mobilities and Socioeconomic Changes*. Department 'Anthropology of Economic Experimentation'. Halle/Saale: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. <https://doi.org/10.48509/MoLab.4407>

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In as much as shock (im)mobility is stressful and destructive, it can equally be generative in the sense that social resources can be mobilised individually and collectively to build solidarity. At the collective level, the role played by people like Korine Sky, Patricia Daley and Tokunbo Koiki cannot be ignored.

Korrine Sky, a second-year Zimbabwean-British medical student who fled Ukraine on 25 February 2022, played an instrumental role in helping African migrants trapped in Ukraine.² Although now in Leicester in the United Kingdom, Sky's journey from Ukraine was not as straightforward as that of other African and Black migrants. Before the Russian invasion, Sky lived with her fiancé in Dnipro. When Dnipro was hit by Russian airstrikes, they decided to flee to Lviv in their car. This journey, which would normally take 10 hours, took about 24 hours due to numerous controls by armed police. At Lviv, and due to social media reports about racial discrimination against Blacks and Africans, they decided to head towards the Romanian border instead. At the border, they had to spend three days in long queues under deplorable conditions: "There was no toilet, no food, nothing. I had started my period, and I didn't have anything with me."³ In Romania, they were well received in a refugee camp and provided with SIM cards, medication, blankets and other basics. From there, Sky was able to board a plane to London before going on to Leicester.⁴ Having successfully fled, Sky decided to devote her time to helping the thousands of students still trapped in the war. With this aim, she began to collect funds to help African students struggling to flee.⁵ This she made known on her Instagram account as follows: "We still have a large student population in Sumy and Kyiv who we are struggling to get transport to. This will be my priority and anyone who can help us do that it would be greatly appreciated."⁶

Sky's experiences and work caught the attention of barrister Patricia Daley and social worker Tokunbo Koiki, both of whom were in England. Through a series of tweet exchanges, Daley, Koiki and Sky devised a plan to help ensure the safety of African and black migrants. Although out of Ukraine, Sky had on-the-ground intelligence and acted as organiser, while the U.K.-based Daley and Koiki rallied for relief support.⁷

Using social media, the trio created a non-profit organisation called *Black Women for Black Lives* with the goal of assisting Black people displaced by the crisis in Ukraine.⁸ Although Daley and Koiki met virtually, Daley said that as soon as they realised that police were discriminating against Black and brown people along the borders, they decided to create an organisation to support them.⁹ Through the

² <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/korrine-sky>. Last accessed 26 December 2022.

³ Sky, Korrine. 2022. Student Doctor Korrine Sky Relives Her Experience Of Racism At Ukraine Border. *Elle*. Available online at: <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/elle-voices/a39570999/her-ukraine-korrine-sky-medical-student-racism-experience/>. Last accessed 12 February 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Shivers, Kaia Niambi. 2022. Three Black women coordinate transportation, food and housing for Black students stuck in Ukraine. *Ark Republic*. Available online at: <https://www.arkrepublic.com/2022/03/24/three-black-women-coordinate-transportation-food-and-housing-for-black-students-stuck-in-ukraine/>. Last accessed 23 December 2022.

⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/korrinesky>. Last accessed 23 December 2022.

Shivers 2022.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hargett-Robinson, Adisa. 2022. How 2 strangers came together to help African students in Ukraine amid the Russian invasion. *ABC News*. Available online at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/strangers-african-students-ukraine-amid-russian-invasion/story?id=83301114>. Last accessed 20 December 2022.

⁹ Thorbecke, Catherine. 2022. 'We come for our own': How Black volunteers rallied online to help African students in Ukraine. *CNN*. Available online at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/18/tech/african-students-ukraine-social-media/index.html>. Last accessed 23 December 2022.

organisation, they raised over £325,000 on *GoFundMe*, created a Telegram group for Africans in Ukraine,¹⁰ and helped hundreds of Africans and Caribbean students flee the country safely. The organisation provided Africans and Caribbeans with information on the safest routes to take to avoid racial discrimination.¹¹ Just five weeks after its creation, the group summarised its achievements on Twitter as follows: “When the world turned its back on Black folks fleeing a war, Black women came together & filled a gap. In 5 short weeks, w/ your support, we’ve raised +£326,500 & helped +2000 folks w/funds for transport, housing & food; as well as resources as they fled, relocated & rebuild ...”¹²

Black Women for Black Lives is far from the only example of transnational solidarity in the middle of crisis and shock (im)mobility. At the individual level, some Africans also took upon themselves the task of organising information services, accommodation arrangements and emergency currency exchange facilities for peers caught in the conflict. The relevance of information, especially real-time information about the constantly changing situation is vital, as is transport. The displaced migrants needed constant and close networks and coordination across Ukrainian borders. A commendable case is that of two young Nigerians, Akintunde Akinsanya and Tolulope Osho, whose interventions in these areas ensured the security of African migrants.

Following the outbreak of the war Akintunde Akinsanya, a 32-year-old Nigerian living in Ternopil in western Ukraine, was able to help many Africans. “I have friends ... if by leaving my valuables, I can save more lives, then I’m doing it. Life is more important.”¹³ Through his transport business, Phoenix Transport Service, Akinsanya transported many Africans, especially Nigerians, to the Polish border at lower rates: “If the regular taxi is charging 200 dollars to the border, I charge 70 dollars.”¹⁴ He also helped migrants stuck sheltering in underground bunkers, driving some to borders and providing money through a fundraiser to some in dire need.¹⁵

Another Nigerian in Ternopil, 31-year-old master’s degree holder Tolulope Osho, also helped African migrants by providing information about the situation in Ukraine on his Instagram account. The account was used to assist Africans, especially Nigerians, to find safe routes and areas that they could travel to. As he noted, “I have been uploading on my page; people write to me saying they are stuck in Summy, how do I get out of here? I usually direct them to a website but because it is written in Ukrainian, they do not know how to use it. So I help them search for where they are and where they are going to and notify them of available transportation around them.”¹⁶ Aside from playing an informative role, Osho also sheltered Nigerians displaced from Kharkov, and provided emergency currency exchange services to the migrants. Together, the two men were able to assist about 200 people.¹⁷

¹⁰ #AfricansinUkraine. Telegram group. <https://t.me/+uWT2k3edSfgzNjE0>

¹¹ Thorbecke, Catherine. 2022. ‘We come for our own’: How Black volunteers rallied online to help African students in Ukraine. *CNN*. Available online at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/18/tech/african-students-ukraine-social-media/index.html>. Last accessed 23 December 2022.

¹² https://twitter.com/BW4BL_official. Last accessed 23 November 2022.

¹³ Okafor, Chiamaka. 2022. Helping the Trapped: How two young Nigerians help others fleeing Ukraine war. *Premium Times*. Available online at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/514152-helping-the-trapped-how-two-young-nigerians-help-others-fleeing-ukraine-war.html?tztc=1>. Last accessed 23 December 2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Adams, Char. 2022. How African students in Ukraine are leading their own rescue efforts. *NBC News*. Available online at: <https://www.How%20African%20students%20in%20Ukraine%20are%20leading%20their%20own%20rescue%20efforts.htm>. Last accessed 20 November 2022.

¹⁶ Okafor 2022.

¹⁷ Adams 2022.

As this piece has shown, civil society has played an important role in ensuring that African migrants were safe in the wake of the Russian invasion. These efforts were carried out at the individual and collective levels. Both individuals and non-governmental groups and organisations have been able to mobilise and organise information, accommodation, emergency currency exchange services, funding and transport to help ensure the safe passage of Africans out of Ukraine.