

review



A makeshift guesthouse in Shirikat, close to the South Sudanese capital Juba, where many migrants stay. Photo Antony Loewenstein; Photo illustration by Mathew Kurian / The National

Shadow lives

African migrants have fled Israel, beaten by racism and oppression. [Antony Loewenstein](#) reports from South Sudan, where many have ended up, barely surviving and still determined to make the perilous sea crossing to Europe

The squalid guest house sits alongside a main road in South Sudan. Every night migrants arrive but few of them stay very long. They're mostly men from Eritrea or Ethiopia who have fled racism and imprisonment in Israel looking for a better future. They stay in single rooms with a dirty mattress, searching for people smugglers for overland passage to Sudan and then Libya. Europe is the ultimate destination. They know the risks, from ISIL militants to corrupt police officers, but feel they have nothing left to lose.

Less than 30 minutes from Juba, the South Sudanese capital, the area of Shirikat is

their unofficial home. The day before I visit, eight men arrive late at night and depart early in the morning for Khartoum, one step closer to taking a boat across the Mediterranean.

South Sudan has become one of the most unlikely sources of migrants, likely to be in the thousands, who are dying in unprecedented numbers this year in rickety boats heading for Italy or Greece. According to the International Organisation for Migration, more than a fifth of the 26,200 migrants who crossed the sea to reach Italy from January to April this year were originally from Eritrea.

In Shirikat, barefoot children run through muddy puddles while Indian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Sudanese men sit around all day looking for any way to make money. It's usually manual labour from washing dishes to lifting concrete on a building site. The heat is debilitating. Goats wander the dirty pavement and look for food. Migrants smoke shisha and play cards in a small motel behind a timber yard. For US20 cents, people can rent a small, tin shower block and wash themselves.

Africans, continued on 6 →