



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



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**African Regional Consultative Meeting on the Global  
Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**  
Addis Ababa, 26 and 27 October 2017

*Draft report<sup>1</sup>*

**Situation analysis**

*Patterns, levels and trends of African migration*

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<sup>1</sup> This document has been drafted by Hein de Haas, and incorporates insights from the subregional reports prepared by Papa Demba Fall, Pierre Kamdem, Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, David Gakere Ndegwa and Ayman Zohry.

## 1. Introduction

1. More than migration in other world regions, African migration is commonly portrayed as a phenomenon driven by poverty, violence and other forms of human misery. Media images and political narratives routinely portray African migrants as victims, who easily fall prey to “unscrupulous” smugglers and human traffickers who “ruthlessly” exploit their desperation to reach the European “Eldorado”. Images of rickety boats packed with African migrants and refugees arriving on European shores and the increasing death toll this involves add to the image of an increasing “migration crisis”. In the media, in policy and in some academic circles, a dominant narrative is that fast population growth and persistent poverty and conflict in Africa combined with environmental degradation and climate change threaten to lead to a possibly uncontrollable increase in the number of young Africans desiring to cross towards Europe and other overseas destinations (see Collier 2013). Such ideas of an African exodus tap into deep-rooted fears of an impending “migration invasion” that may well spiral out of control and that therefore needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

2. The most common “solutions” for the perceived migration crisis proposed by Governments and international organizations typically consist of a blend of:

(a) *Preventing unauthorized migration* by [sic] “fighting” and “combating”<sup>2</sup> smuggling and trafficking (through intensified border patrolling and policing in transit countries);

(b) *Deportation* or pressuring unauthorized migrants and rejected asylum seekers into “voluntary return” or “soft deportation” (Boersema, Leerkes and van Os 2014; Pian 2010) (through readmission agreements with origin and transit countries such as Libya, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey);

(c) *Addressing the root causes of migration* by reducing poverty and increasing employment in African countries (particularly through aid (Böhning and Schloeter-Paredes 1994), which has increasingly become conditional on collaboration with readmission of unauthorized migrants);

(d) *Informing and sensitizing prospective migrants* about the dangers of (unauthorized) migration and the arduous circumstances in Europe (through media campaigns, artistic events, and other activities (see Pelican 2012));

3. Such narratives tend, however, to be based on a number of questionable assumptions about the nature and drivers of African migration, in particular, and migration from and towards developing countries more generally. In the case of Africa, the very idea that the situation to be faced is a rapidly increasing “migration crisis” driven by a growing number of young men and women desperately trying to enter Europe denies the basic facts that:

- The vast majority of Africans move *within* the continent.
- Africa is the least migratory region in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> While such belligerent terminology seems wholly inappropriate when talking about migrants, such terms have become common usage in policy and media narratives about unauthorized migration. These terms have been consciously avoided in the present text, mainly because their usage should be rejected on moral grounds, but also because of their empirical fallacy – smuggling is essentially a service (mostly commercial, sometimes voluntary) delivered to migrants in order to avoid apprehension, violence or extortion by police, border agents or criminals.

- Most Africans move for reasons of work, study and family.
- Most Africans living abroad are not from the poorest sections of their societies of origin.
- Unauthorized overland and maritime journeys represent a minority of all moves.
- Only a very small fraction of unauthorized migration can be characterized as “trafficking” (see Kihato 2017).

4. Such basic facts also make it clear that African migration is not necessarily different in its essence from migration in and from other world regions. The whole idea that African migration is somehow “exceptional” seems – largely unconsciously – to tap into European stereotypes and colonial ideologies about Africa as a continent of general disorder, violence and poverty, which partly served to justify colonial occupation, with Europeans intervening to impose order, peace and prosperity (see Davidson 1992). Such stereotypes perpetuate the idea that African countries somehow need to be “helped” to foster development and manage migration – which in practice often amounts to “externalizing” European political agendas aimed at an increased policing of African borders and the overall criminalization of migration and smuggling (Brachet 2005; Kihato 2017). That, in turn, often clashes with the desire of African Governments to liberalize internal movement and to proceed to the full implementation of the various treaties signed on the protection of migrants and refugees.

5. Furthermore, the idea that African prospective migrants need to be informed about the dangers of the journey, that they need to be “rescued” from the hands of smugglers and traffickers and that they would be better off if they had stayed at home, is based on the paternalistic assumption that most African migrants do not know what is in their own best interest. Many African (and other) migrants must deal with exploitative recruiters and employers and although many migrants’ expectations of life at their destination will remain unfulfilled, and notwithstanding the fact that thousands of migrants have died while crossing borders in recent decades (see Crawley and others 2016b; Perkowski 2016), the idea is, nevertheless, deeply problematic that African migration is a largely desperate and generally irrational response to poverty, violence and human misery at home. First, it reduces (poor, African) migrants to victims and denies their capability (their “agency”) to make reasoned and rational decisions for themselves. Second, it taps into stereotypes about Africa as a region of poverty, violence and general disorder in which a deepening humanitarian crisis is causing an increasing exodus of desperate young people from the continent. Such stereotypes about African “misery migration” continue to be fuelled by media images about the phenomenon of trans-Mediterranean “boat migration” and political narratives about an impending migration invasion.

6. Third, it misinterprets the nature and causes of African migration as essentially different and exceptional compared to migration elsewhere. This does not of course mean that poverty and violence are irrelevant for understanding African migration, but that there is a risk of “pathologizing” African migration as a largely desperate “flight from misery” and a response to destitution and population pressures.

7. Fourth, and most crucially, such representations of migration as the antithesis of development are based on flawed assumptions of the fundamental causes of this migration. In particular, they ignore increasingly robust scientific evidence that, particularly in low-income countries, processes of economic and human development tend to *increase* internal and international “outmigration” (Clemens 2014; de Haas 2010b; Skeldon 1997; Zelinsky 1971),

essentially because these transformation processes tend to expand people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2014a; de Haas 2009).

8. Such evidence upsets popular but misleading push-pull models, which predict that most migration should occur from the poorest communities and societies. This illustrates the need for a fundamental rethinking of the nature and causes of human migration. That is particularly relevant in the context of African migration, which is still predominantly cast in essentialist portrayals driven by sensationalist media images and political crisis narratives. To contribute to such an effort, this situation analysis aims to achieve an evidence-based understanding of the nature and drivers of African migration over the post-Second World War period.

9. The present report will start by reviewing the main patterns and trends of African migration over the past decades. While focusing on international migration, the analysis will not artificially ignore internal migration, based on the understanding that movement within and across borders are intrinsically interlinked (King and Skeldon 2010) and that they stem from the same processes of social transformation and development (de Haas 2010b).

10. The analysis will draw mainly on, first: our own analysis of available migrant population ("stock") and migrant flow data, such as that obtained from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Determinants of International Migration project; second: it will draw on available empirical studies from African countries and also on the subregional reports that have been prepared for the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in concordance with this regional report (Fall 2017; Kamdem 2017; Kihato 2017; Ndegwa 2017; Zohry 2017). Where appropriate, however, this analysis will occasionally draw on evidence gathered in other developing regions or global analyses in order to assess the extent to which African experiences resemble – or differ from – more general evidence on the characteristics, patterns and drivers of human migration as well as the role that policies play in affecting these.

## **2. Patterns and trends of African migration**

### **Intra-African migration**

11. Although political narratives and media images focus on the purported "exodus" of Africans to Europe, the bulk of African migrants move within the continent (Fall 2017; Kamdem 2017; Kihato 2017; Ndegwa 2017; Zohry 2017). In fact, Africans are underrepresented in the world migrant population and Africa has the lowest intercontinental outmigration rates of all world regions (Flahaux and De Haas 2016). Contemporary African migration has been shaped by colonial practices in a number of ways. The nineteenth and early twentieth century division of Africa into administrative entities often imposed arbitrary borders and sometimes divided established nations (Davidson 1992). As a result, members of a single ethnic group could become citizens of two or more states and, as a consequence, many African countries have a high degree of ethnic diversity. The colonial period also brought European administrators, farmers and other settlers throughout Africa, as well as Syro-Lebanese merchants to West Africa (see Leichtman 2005), and merchants and labourers from the Indian subcontinent to East and Southern Africa. In the post-independence period, these populations generally became privileged, but also vulnerable, minorities, often with a key role in trade (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014).

12. In order to provide labour for European-owned plantations, industry, infrastructure works and mines, colonial powers were concerned with control of mobility (Bakewell 2008a; Cohen 1987). Although they welcomed the low-cost labour, such colonial labour was often based on

temporary migration, since permanent settlement of rural migrants was often seen as undesirable<sup>3</sup> and a potential threat to order. Yet colonial administrators could not prevent permanent settlement. In fact, colonialism and capitalist economic growth set in motion processes of urbanization and concomitant rural-to-urban migration that continue today.

13. We therefore need to start our account of African migration from the bottom up, that is, from the fundamental transformations that have affected African societies and economies since the colonial era. These have on the one hand led first to the sedentarization (settling down) of formerly nomadic and semi-nomadic populations and their partial conversion into peasants (Bencherifa 1996; de Bruijn and van Dijk 2003; Fratkin and Roth 2006; Waithanji 2008), and, second, to a gradual but fundamental shift from agrarian to urban livelihoods, coinciding with an increasing transfer of populations and economic activities from rural to urban areas.

14. Since the mid-twentieth century and after decolonization, this tendency towards urbanization continued, which led to increasing migration to towns and cities. This has led to a fundamental reconfiguration of pre-modern migration patterns and the emergence of new migration systems centred on fast-growing urban clusters, often located in or close to urban areas, capital cities or mining regions. Important regional migration systems have evolved in recent decades, centring on areas of economic growth such as Libya in the north; Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in the west; Gabon, the Congo and Equatorial Guinea in the centre, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique in the east, and Angola, Botswana and South Africa in the south (Bakewell and de Haas 2007: 96; Fall 2017; Kamdem 2017; Kihato 2017; Ndegwa 2017; Zohry 2017).

15. Most African migration within and across borders has been coast-bound. For instance, intra-regional (international) migration in West Africa is dominated by a movement from landlocked countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger) to the relatively more prosperous agricultural areas, mines and cities of coastal West Africa (predominantly Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Senegal) (Arthur 1991; Findley 2004; Kress 2006). Migration within North Africa has been dominated by a predominantly north-bound movement to cities prominently located on or near to the Mediterranean or (in the case of Morocco) Atlantic coast or (in the case of Egypt) lowland delta areas (Miller 2005).

16. There has also been considerable transversal international migration *within* the coastal zone of mostly seasonal workers to the relatively wealthy economies of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana (before the 1970s, and in more recent decades) and Nigeria (in the 1970s). Such coast-bound international migration patterns have often been reproduced *inside* African countries, with internal migrants moving from arid and marginal inland zones to the more humid and prosperous agricultural and urbanized zones, generally located in coastal areas. Some inland cities such as Kano in Nigeria or the new centrally located capitals of Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire) and Abuja (Nigeria) have also become migration destinations. In addition, mining areas, such as the goldmines of the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg in South Africa, the Copperbelt in Zambia, the southern Katanga province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the diamond mines of Sierra Leone have attracted settlers and migrants from distant places (see Bakewell and de Haas 2007). In the same vein, the oil-rich countries of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Congo (Kamdem 2017), Angola and Libya (Zohry 2017) have become important African migration destinations.

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<sup>3</sup> This shows the extent to which more recent policies and discourses around “guest workers” and “temporary” and “circular” migration are rooted in colonial discourses and practices.

17. Many countries in Africa seem to show trends towards an increasing diversity of destinations and origins alongside an increasing geographical reach of migration systems: While the relative share of intra-African migration compared to extra-continental emigration has decreased, the analyses of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs migrant stock data show that the share of migration between African subregions as compared to migration within the subregions has increased (Fall 2017; Kamdem 2017; Kihato 2017; Ndegwa 2017; Zohry 2017). Consequently, while relative volumes of migration have remained rather stable, the geographical reach of African migration is increasing.

18. This reflects the fact that an increasing number of African countries are developing into important destinations. While countries such as Nigeria, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and South Africa have historically attracted large numbers of migrants, several new migration poles such as Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda, have emerged more recently. North African countries too have witnessed modest albeit rising transit and settlement migration (Berriane 2015; Berriane and de Haas 2012), for instance of students, traders and workers from West Africa (see Pian 2005; Zohry 2017).

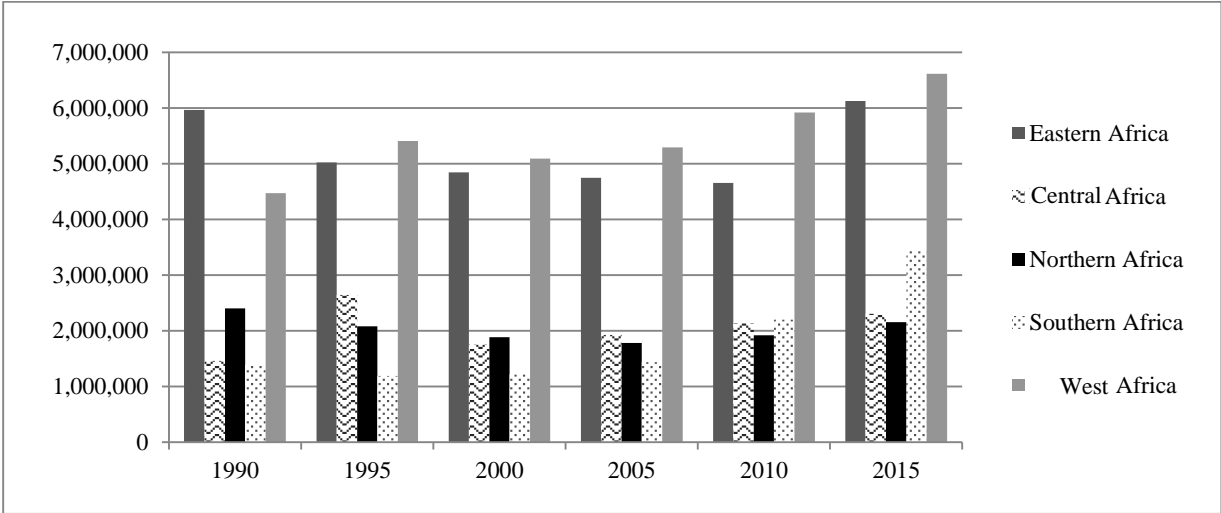
19. Figures I and II show that Eastern and West Africa host the largest immigrant populations. While immigrant populations in Eastern Africa, which comprise a relatively high number of refugees, have been relatively stagnant, numbers of migrants in West Africa have been rising over the 1990-2015 period. Immigrant populations in North Africa have been stagnant (although it is likely that these numbers will severely undercount immigration into Libya and undocumented migration into other North African countries) whereas those in Central and Southern Africa have been increasing. Expressed as a share of total population, however, the relative size of immigrant populations has been decreasing in all African regions to levels below 2 per cent, with the exception of Southern Africa, where estimated immigrant rates<sup>4</sup> have soared from around 2.5 per cent in 2005 to 5.5 per cent in 2015, which is well above the world average of 3.3 per cent. This mainly reflects the evolution of South Africa into a major destination for African migrants in the post-apartheid era, particularly from Eastern and Central Africa, but also to some extent from West Africa.

20. Figure III exemplifies South Africa's position as the main African migration destination, followed by Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria in coastal West Africa. Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan form a third cluster, with a relatively high proportion of refugee migration, and Libya (although real numbers are certainly much higher) as a fourth cluster; and the oil-rich economies of Central Africa (particularly Equatorial Guinea and Gabon). When the number of immigrants is expressed as a percentage of the total population of countries, a somewhat different picture emerges. While Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Libya (together with Equatorial Guinea, a prosperous oil economy and a migration pole for Central and West African migrants) boast the highest immigrant rates of African states of above 10 per cent, in relative terms immigration into populous countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria, turns out to be very low.

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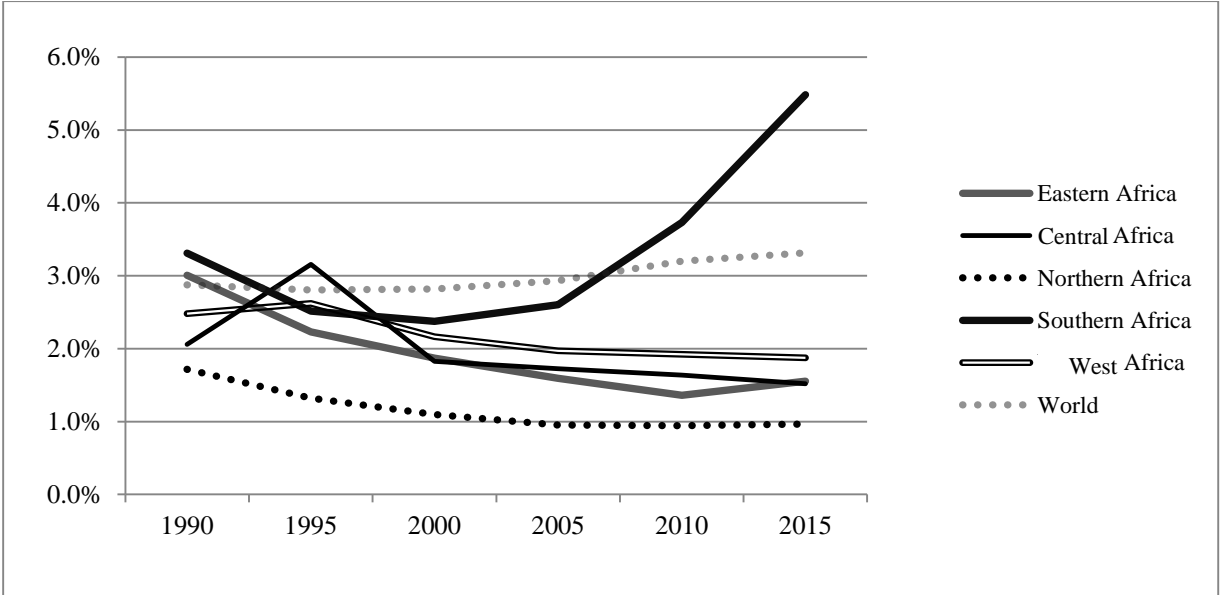
<sup>4</sup> Immigrant and emigrant rates are the total size of immigrant and emigrant populations ("stocks") as a percentage of the population.

**Figure I**  
**Immigrants, by region**



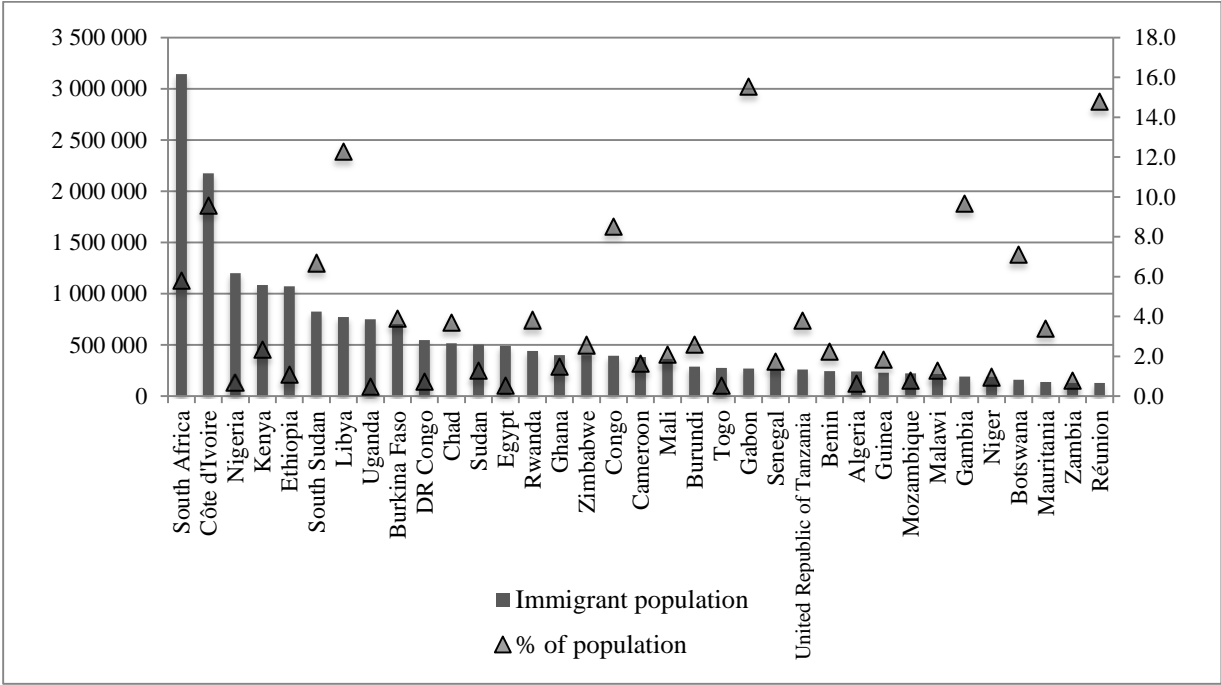
*Data source:* United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2015) Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.

**Figure II**  
**Immigrants (percentage of total population)**



*Data source:* UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.

Figure III  
**Absolute and relative size of registered immigrant populations, 2015**



Data source: UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.

**Refugee migration**

21. While capitalist economic development and urbanization were entangled with large-scale rural-to-urban migration within and across national boundaries, colonial and postcolonial conflict created significant refugee movements. During the period of colonial liberation, millions of people fled brutal conflicts with colonial powers reluctant to relinquish control (for example in Algeria, the Congo and Kenya) or with white settler groups determined to cling to their privileges (for example, South Africa and Zimbabwe). After decolonization, the establishment of independent States often did not mean a return to peaceful conditions. Political and economic pressures, arms supplied by international allies (such as the United States of America and the former United Soviet Socialist Republic, often in the context of the Cold War), mercenaries and direct military intervention were factors contributing to new conflicts or the continuation of old ones (Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1989). Struggles for domination in Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique led to massive external involvement, with great human costs for local populations (see Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014).

22. The Horn of Africa has been a particular area of turbulence, with protracted and repeated armed struggles concerning Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Large numbers of Somalis have fled to Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen, and to countries in Europe and as far as North America and remittances have become crucial to the survival of many of them (Horst 2006; Lindley 2009; Ndegwa 2017). Furthermore, the Great Lakes Region has also been subject to particular violence: long-drawn-out civil wars in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda have led to millions of deaths and large-scale displacement. The Sudan has lived through over 30 years of warfare and massive internal and international conflict.

23. The worsening of the political and economic situation in West Africa over the 1980s also led to significant conflict and displacement. This trend was reinforced by civil wars in Sierra



Leone (1991-2001), Liberia (1989-1996 and 1999-2003), Guinea (1999-2000) and Côte d'Ivoire since 2002, resulting in the loss of up to a quarter of a million lives and at least 1.1 million people living as refugees or internally displaced persons (Drumtra 2006). Since the turn of the century, overall levels of violent conflicts went down, although new conflicts broke out in Mali, Nigeria and South Sudan (Fall 2017), while political repression in Eritrea also generated significant refugee migration (Ndegwa 2017).

24. Based on data supplied by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees and “people in refugee-like situations” represented 4 million or 19 per cent of international migrants in Africa in 2015, up from about 2.4 million or 14 per cent in 2010 (see figure IV). Although this is a higher proportion than in most other world regions, this nonetheless means that an estimated 81 per cent of international migration within Africa is *not* primarily related to conflict. In fact, the relative importance of refugee migration – compared to forms of migration that can be seen as voluntary – has shown a decreasing trend over the past decades. In 1990, for instance, the number of refugees in Africa was estimated at levels of around 5.7 million or 36 per cent of the total number of migrants in Africa. This evidence defies the stereotype of an African migration crisis that is rapidly growing out of control.

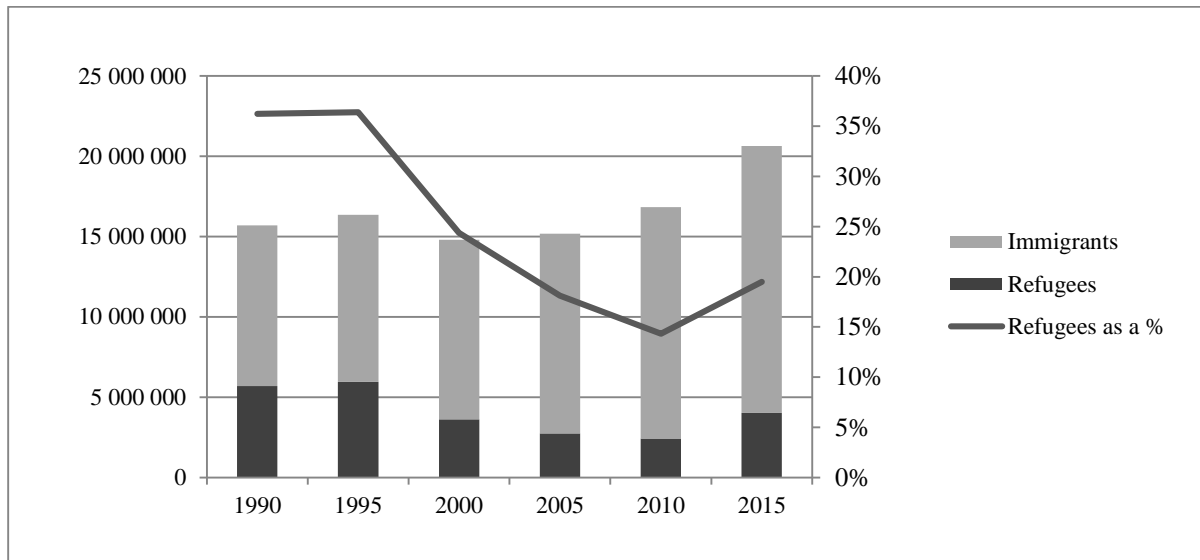
25. The large majority of African refugees stay within the region. Many African countries have received refugees, often in the middle of their own conflicts: for instance, Uganda has admitted nationals of Burundi, Rwanda and the Sudan; Kenya and Ethiopia have hosted numerous nationals of Somalia, while nationals of Uganda have gone to the Sudan and nationals of Burundi, the Congo, Rwanda and Somalia have gone to the United Republic of Tanzania (Ndegwa 2017). There have also, however, been significant conflict-related long-distance movements of refugees, such as from the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia) to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and to Europe and North America, while significant numbers of refugees from Somalia and the Sudan have been moving to Egypt (Ahmed 2003; Al-Sharmani 2003; Grabska 2005; Zohry 2017).

26. As figure VI shows, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda are the most important refugee-hosting countries in Africa. Relative to population size, refugee populations are particularly large in Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania. These data also show that between 2015 and 2018 numbers of refugees in Africa have rebounded again, particularly because of conflict in the Central African Republic, Nigeria and South Sudan, and political oppression in Eritrea. According to UNHCR data,<sup>5</sup> in June 2017, 1.4 million people from South Sudan were living outside the country as refugees. In the same period, Ethiopia and Uganda were estimated to host the largest number of refugees accounting for 791,600 and 940,800 refugees, respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa currently hosts more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population. Including internally displaced persons, over 18 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are of concern to UNHCR.

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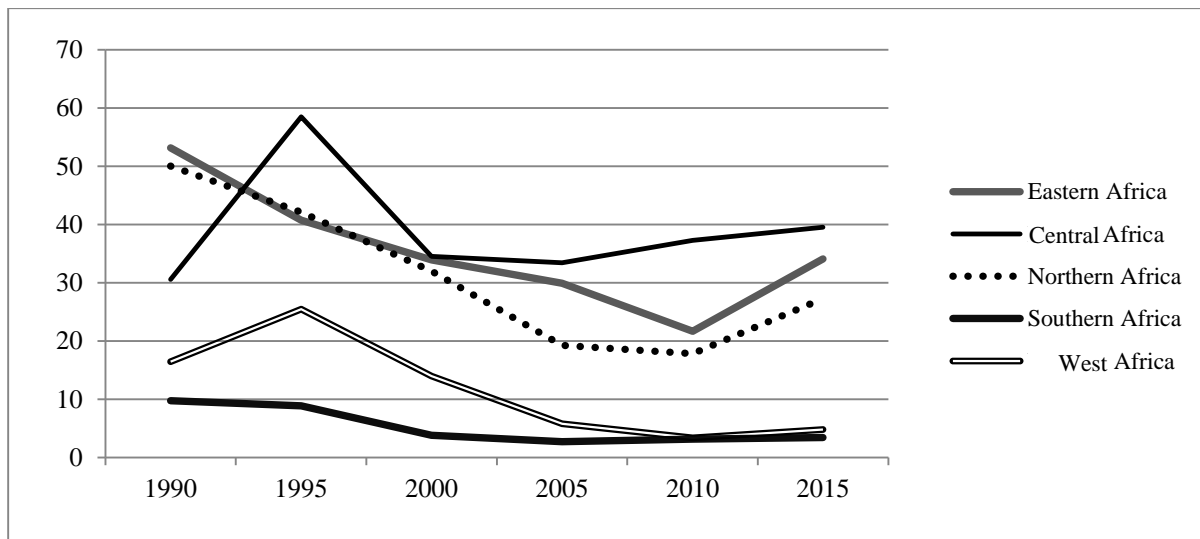
<sup>5</sup> Accessed 27 June 2017 on [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

**Figure IV**  
**Immigrants and refugees in African countries**



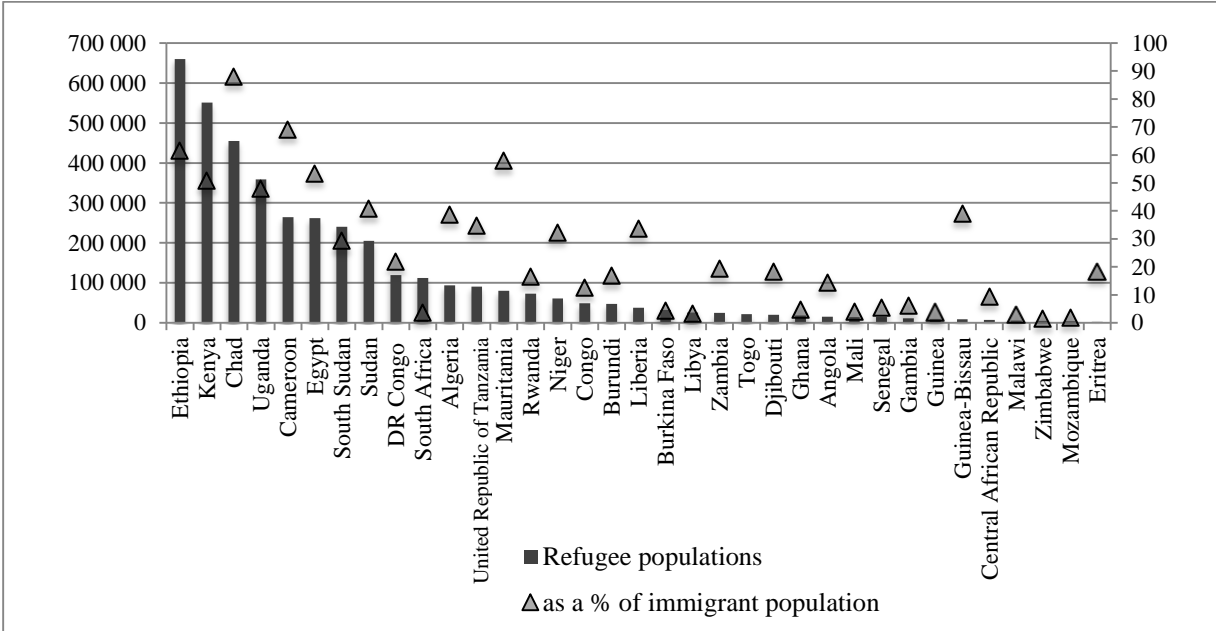
*Data source: UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.*

**Figure V**  
**Refugees, percentage of total immigrant population**



*Data source: UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.*

Figure VI  
**Registered refugee populations, 2015**



Data source: UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.

**Migration from Africa to Europe and North America**

27. Before the 1990s, African migration towards Europe and North American countries was heavily dominated by labour and family migration from the Maghreb and, to a lesser extent, refugee migration, such as from Ethiopia and Somalia to Europe and North America. From the 1960s, Europe evolved into a main destination of “guest workers” from the Maghreb and, to a lesser extent, from some recruitment areas in Senegal and Mali (to France). Movements from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia to Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and France and, since the 1980s, to Italy and Spain, have dominated this labour migration. Against expectations, after the 1973 oil crisis and the subsequent recessions and rising unemployment in Europe, migration continued, mainly as a consequence of family migration, itself encouraged by migration restrictions, which interrupted circular migration and encouraged permanent settlement of workers. At the same time, increasing labour demand in the formal and informal sectors of Spain and Italy prompted a surge in Moroccan and Tunisian labour migration to Southern Europe. As a consequence, Europe now has at least 4 million Maghreb-born migrants (Fargues 2005; Natter 2014).

28. While most international migrants from sub-Saharan countries remained within the continent, since the 1990s overseas migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, the Middle East, North America, Australia, New Zealand and also China increased. Resurgence of economic growth in (Southern) Europe in the 1990s led to increasing labour migration to Europe. At the same time, immigration restrictions and the introduction of visa requirements for North Africans in 1991 by Spain and Italy interrupted circular flows and pushed migrants into permanent settlement.

29. Visa requirements and intensified border controls prompted North African and, increasingly, sub-Saharan migrants to cross borders illegally and to seek the help of smugglers in order to do so. Consequently, the European closure of open borders created a demand for

smuggling services and heralded the start of trans-Mediterranean “boat migration”, which has continued until the present day. This unauthorized boat migration was initially mainly a North African affair, dominated by Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians trying to find work or join family in Southern Europe. Over the 1990s and 2000s, however, increasing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers from West African and other sub-Saharan countries joined North Africans on these journeys. This also led to an increasing use of trans-Saharan migration routes through the Niger, Mali, Algeria and Libya, and a revival of historical trans-Saharan connections (Barros and others 2002; Brachet 2005; Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Scheele 2012).

Figure VII  
**Emigration from Africa to major OECD destination countries,<sup>6</sup> by region of origin, 1975-2010**

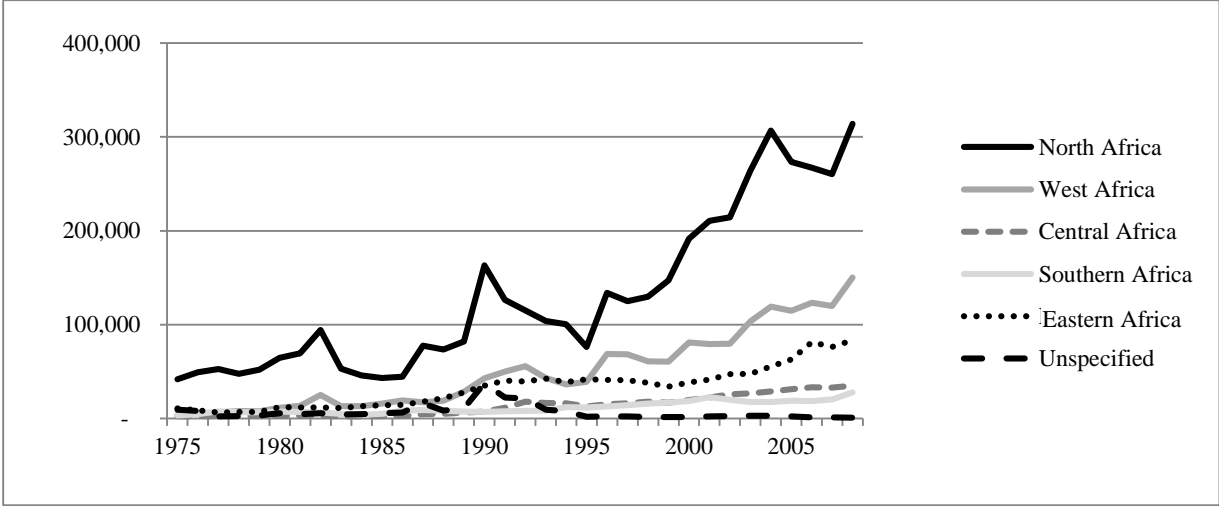
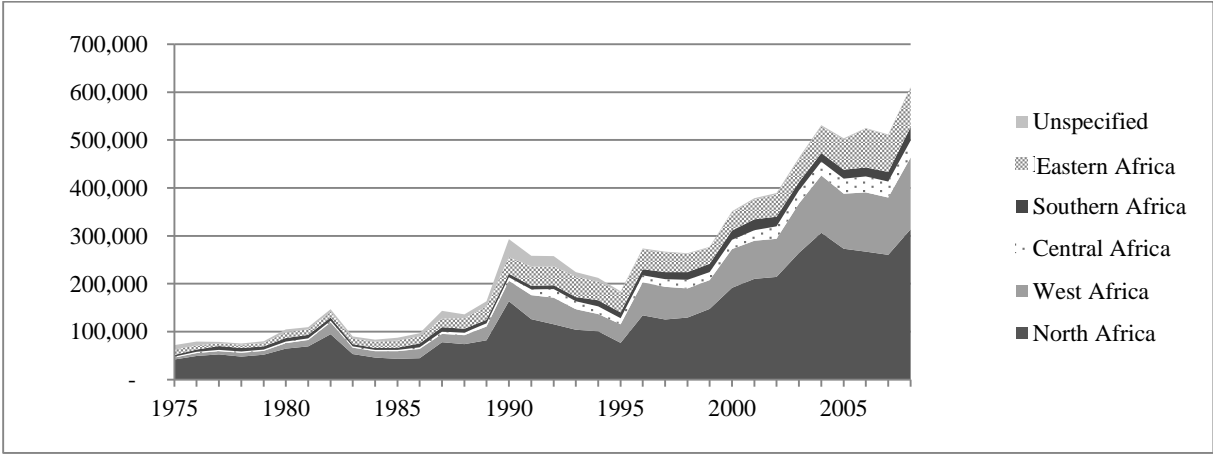


Figure VIII  
**Emigration from Africa to major OECD destination countries<sup>7</sup>, by region of origin, cumulative, 1975-2010**



Source: Flahaux and De Haas 2016, based on DEMIG C2C flow data.

<sup>6</sup> Countries for which statistics were available are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

<sup>7</sup> Countries for which statistics were available are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada.

30. In contrast to North African emigration of low-skilled workers, and with the main exception of some refugee movements such as from Somalia, most overseas migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and North America previously used to be predominantly an elite affair. For example, in the United States, Africans possess the highest average level of education of any immigrant group (Capps, McCabe and Fix 2012). The main explanation of this phenomenon seems to be that long-distance international migration entails significant costs, which are generally out of reach for poorer groups.

31. Since the 1990s, however, an increasing number of sub-Saharan migrants and refugees and non-elite migrants have started to participate in migration to Europe and beyond. This changing profile of migration is partly linked to the migration of sub-Saharans looking for work in Libya and elsewhere in North Africa, or who wish to move on to Europe from there (de Haas 2008). Moreover, African migration to the United States has recently been diversifying, with increasing migration from poorer and non-English speaking African countries, which can be partly explained by increases in Diversity Visa migration, refugee migration and family migration (see Thomas 2011).

32. Figures IX and X show trends in African overseas emigration flows. Although flow data for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Gulf region are not available, the available data clearly confirm that there has been a steady increase in migration out of the continent. Total registered African migration to major destinations among countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (except for the United Kingdom) increased from 70-80,000 in the mid-1970s to peak at 610,000 in 2008. Based on 2015 migrant stock data, we can estimate that the countries included in these flow data capture about 86.5 per cent (or 9,943,551) of all African-born migrants in Europe and North America (estimated at 11,474,546), with the United Kingdom accounting for almost 12.8 per cent (1,444,457) and other countries for 0.8 per cent. From this, a tentative estimate can be made that real registered (legal) outflows to Europe and North America countries would be approximately 15 per cent higher, or around 700,000 in 2008. More recent flow data are not yet available, but there are strong indications that, in line with overall trends in OECD immigration (see BBC/Multidimensional Poverty Index 2010; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014), emigration initially decreased because of the economic crisis and rising unemployment in OECD countries, but has rebounded again in recent years as a consequence of resumed growth and employment in various European countries (OECD 2011; OECD 2014).

Figure IX  
**Destination regions of African overseas migration**

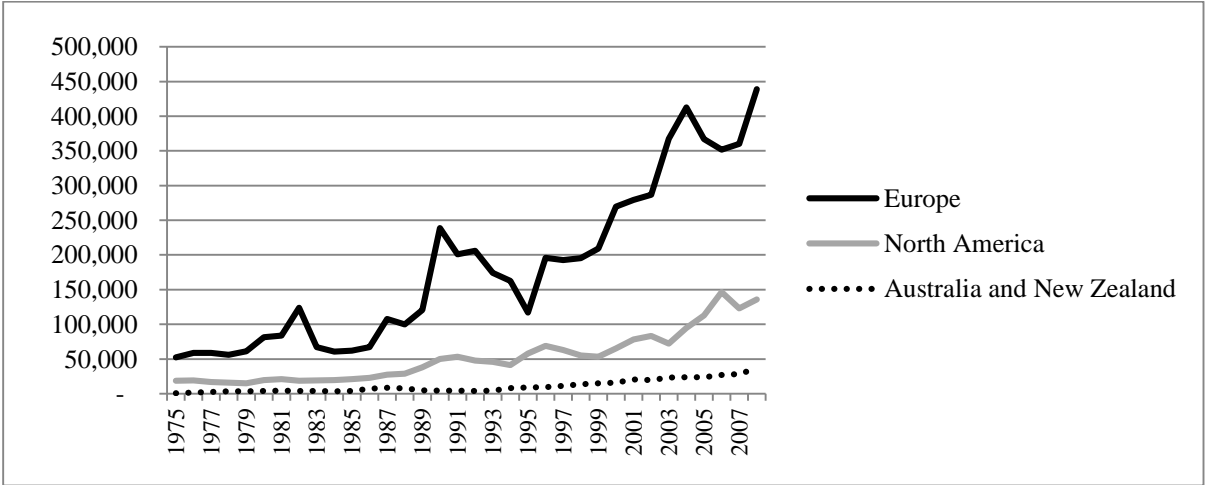
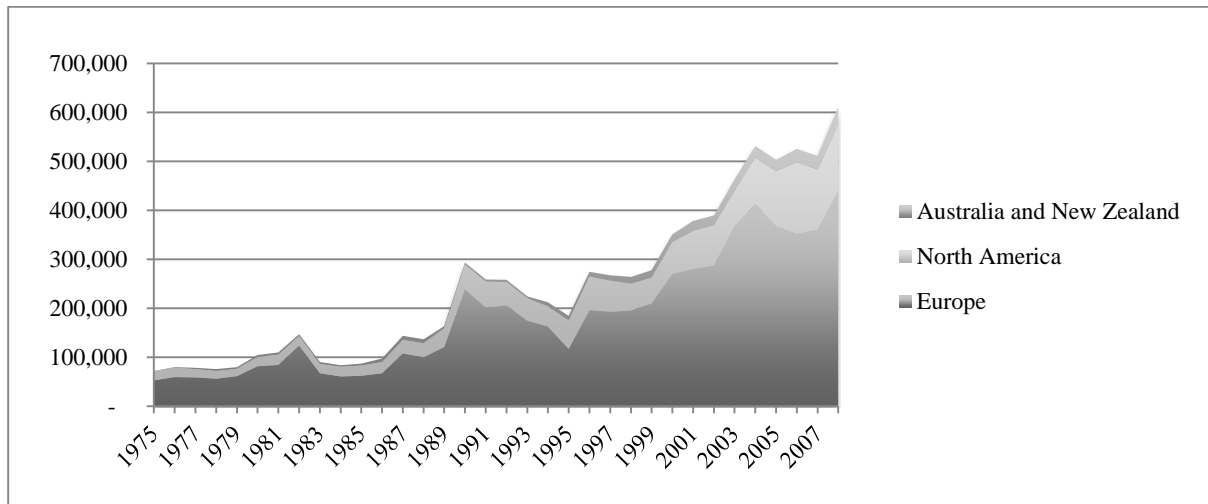


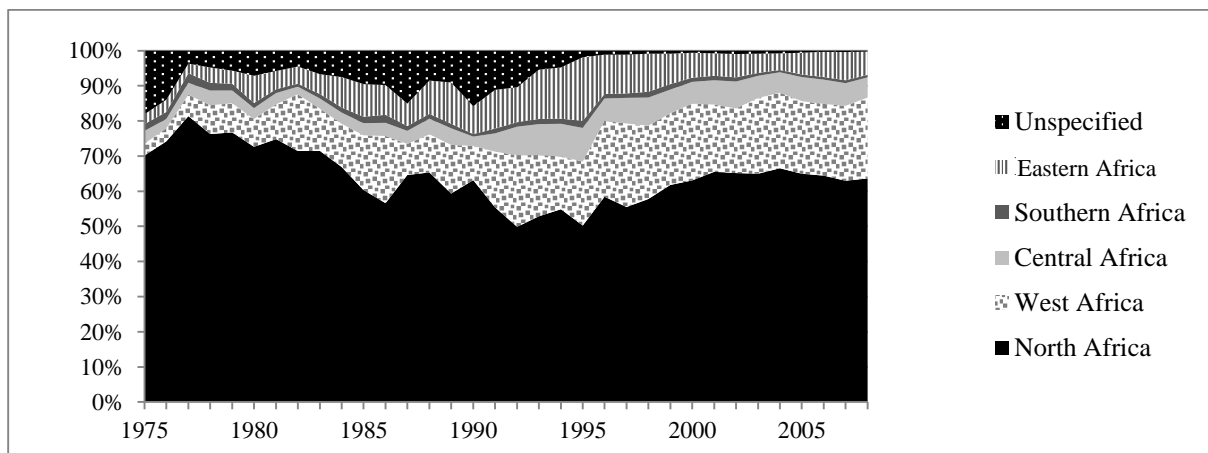
Figure X  
**Destination regions of African overseas migration, cumulative**



Source: Flahaux and De Haas 2016, based on DEMIG C2C flow data.

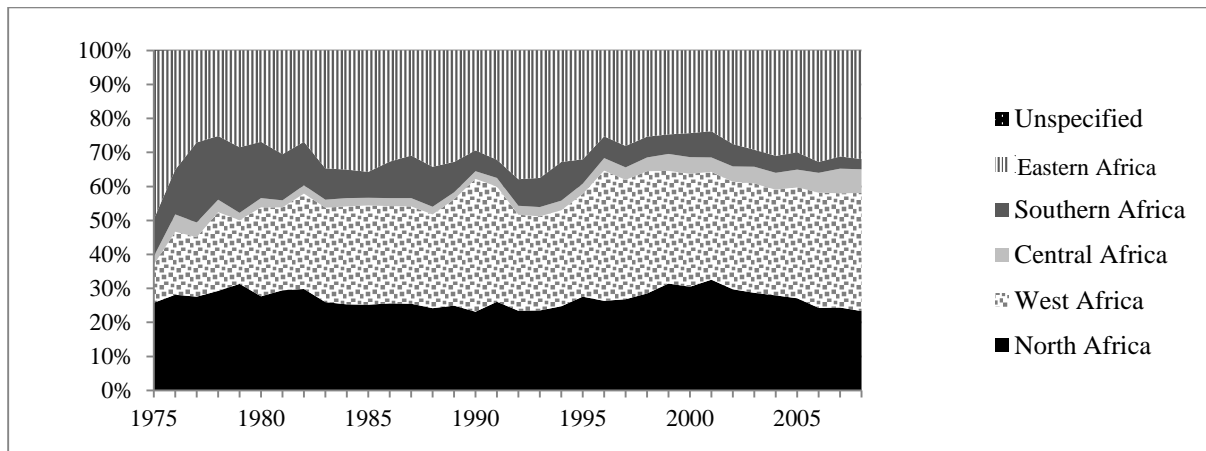
33. While African emigration to OECD countries is still dominated by the Maghreb countries, the number of sub-Saharan African overseas migrants has been increasing since the 1990s. This primarily reflects increasing West African migration to Europe (see Fall 2017; Toma and Castagnone 2015). Figures IX and X show that while most African overseas migration to OECD countries is directed at European countries, emigration to North America and Australia has been increasing as well (see Ndegwa 2017). Figures XI-XIII show the regional origins of African migration to Europe, North America and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand). These figures confirm that migration to Europe is primarily a North African and, to some extent, West African affair. Migration to the United States and Canada is more evenly spread in terms of regional origins, which partly reflect the more high-skilled nature of this migration as well as the role of the diversity lottery, but is dominated by West and Eastern Africa, while Southern and Central Africa are underrepresented.

Figure XI  
**Regional origin of African migration to Europe**



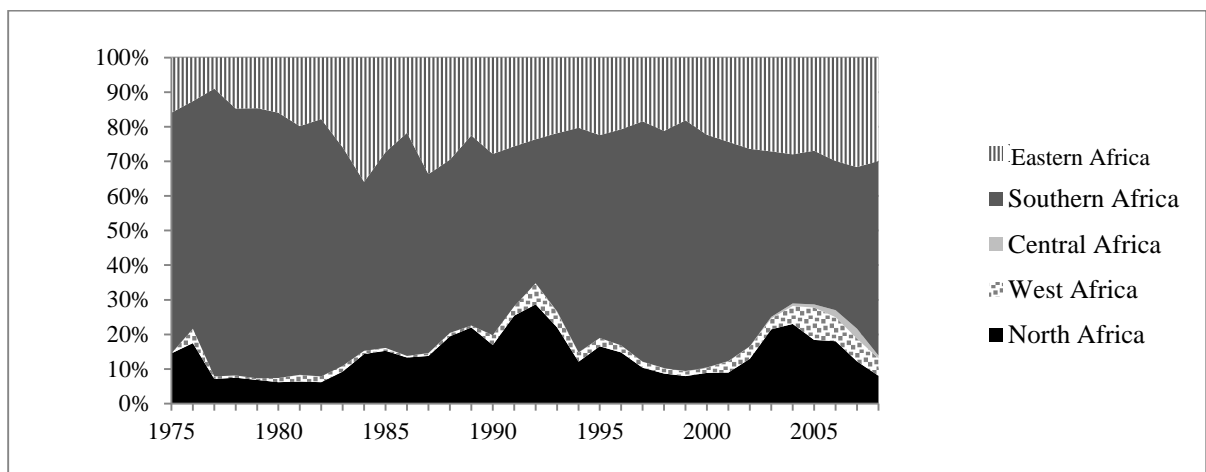
Source: Flahaux and De Haas 2016, based on DEMIG C2C flow data.

Figure XII  
Regional origin of African migration to North America



Source: Flahaux and De Haas 2016, based on DEMIG C2C flow data.

Figure XIII  
Regional origin of African migration to Oceania



Source: Flahaux and De Haas 2016, based on DEMIG C2C flow data.

34. Migration to Australia and New Zealand is dominated by South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, the Sudan and Zimbabwe. This relatively intense migration from Southern and Eastern Africa seems to be linked by pre-existing linguistic, colonial and social ties created in the former British Empire and the concomitant movement of diasporas of those of British and Indian heritage between countries such as Australia, Mauritius, South Africa and Zimbabwe (see Naujoks 2009). While emigration from Africa is still dominated by South Africa, workers from North Africa and a select group of West African countries, this emigration is diversifying in terms of origins, and is also marked by an increasing participation of women migrating independently as workers or students (see Reynolds 2006 for the case of professional women from Nigeria).

### Migration to the Gulf and beyond

35. Through Western eyes, 1973 was the year of the oil crisis, however, for citizens of Gulf countries it was the year of the oil boom. The sudden rise in the price of oil generated financial

resources to undertake major construction and infrastructure projects, requiring the hiring of thousands of foreign workers. This facilitated the rapid development of the Gulf into a new global migration pole (Sell 1988). The booming Gulf economies initially attracted migrants from Egypt and the Sudan and, to a lesser extent, from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. In parallel, a subregional migration system evolved in North Africa around oil-rich Libya, particularly after Gaddafi started to encourage sub-Saharan guest worker migration as part of his pan-African policies in the 1990s (Pliez 2002; Pliez 2005).

36. In recent years, the number of sub-Saharan migrants to Gulf countries has risen, including an increasing share of women – particularly from Ethiopia – migrating as domestic workers to the Gulf and also Yemen (see De Regt 2010; Fernandez 2010), although in recent years, many Ethiopian female workers have been repatriated from Saudi Arabia (Ndegwa 2017). The relative ease of getting visas for the Gulf countries adds to their attraction as destinations for people from non-elite backgrounds, who lack the degrees and money to qualify for a visa and work permit in OECD countries, which have made immigration of low-skilled Africans more difficult in recent decades.

37. African migrants are also increasingly attracted to fast-growing economies beyond the traditional destinations in Europe, where economic stagnation, restrictive immigration policies and racism may deter migrants. Some Africans have gone as far afield as Russia, Turkey, Japan, India and China and even Brazil and Argentina (Andres Henao 2009) in search of work, education and business opportunities. Migration from Africa to China has been growing (Haugen 2012). China's emergence as a global economic superpower and the relative ease of getting temporary visas has also made it a desired destination for African migrants (Ghosh 2010). Initially, most African migrants to China were students (see Hashim 2003; Sullivan 1994), which was later encouraged by Chinese recruitment policies to increase soft power and generate income (Haugen 2013). Since 2000 growing numbers of West African (particularly Nigerian and Ghanaian) traders have been reported in China (Bakewell and Jónsson 2011; Bodomo 2010).

38. Although most came with no intention of staying, an increasing number seem to be settling and significant African immigrant communities have emerged in China. Moreover, a number of Africans who initially came as students are engaging in trade and thus contributing to the fast-growing export of Chinese products to Africa (Cissé 2013; Haugen 2013). Although there are no official statistics, about 200,000 Africans were believed to be living in China in the late 2000s, particularly in Guangzhou, a prosperous province in southern China (Bodomo 2010; Ghosh 2010). Most African immigrants in China originate from Nigeria, although other origin countries include Senegal, the Congo, the Gambia, Somalia, South Africa, Cameroon, the Niger and Liberia. According to estimates, 77 per cent of undocumented foreigners in the Guangdong province in 2009 were Africans (Ghosh 2010).

### **Migration to Africa**

39. In recent years, Africa has also grown in importance as a destination region for African as well as non-African immigrants. While in colonial times Africa saw significant settlement of Europeans and other groups (see above), after the 1960s the numbers of immigrants decreased as many European settlers left while Indian heritage populations were expelled from Uganda under the Idi Amin regime (Binaisa 2011). Starting in the 1990s, this trend reversed and Africa has re-emerged as a migration destination, which is linked to the increasing economic opportunities offered in several African countries as well as a liberalization of economic policies which has facilitated foreign direct investment. From the late 2000s several



fast-growing African national economies attract migrants from crisis-hit European countries, such as Portuguese to Angola and Spanish to Morocco (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). At the same time, North African countries such as Tunisia and, in particular, Morocco have seen increasing settlement of Europeans retirees, investors and other middle class people seeking more relaxed and exotic lifestyles (see Berriane and others 2010).

40. Perhaps the most striking trend – and a clear break with postcolonial migration patterns – has been increasing Chinese migration to Africa, which is still small, but growing fast. Many Chinese come to Africa as entrepreneurs or as employees of Chinese state-owned enterprises and Chinese companies involved in road, hydropower and urban construction and are expected to return after the completion of two- or three-year contracts (Jung Park 2009; Tan-Mullins, Urban and Mang 2017). It is often the case, however, that a proportion of them stay to start a business, while increasing numbers of independent Chinese migrants also come to operate as petty traders or to start other small businesses across the continent (Mohan and Tan-Mullins 2016; Warmerdam and Van Dijk 2016). Tens of thousands of Chinese migrants are settling in rural and urban areas in Africa and are involved in agriculture, construction and trade. Total estimates range from 580,000 to over 800,000 Chinese on the African continent in the late 2000s. By far the largest number of Chinese (between 200,000 and 400,000) live in South Africa, followed by Nigeria, while other countries, such as Algeria, Angola, Mauritius, the Sudan and Uganda also host significant Chinese populations (Jung Park 2009).

41. A study on Chinese entrepreneurs in the agri-food business in Ethiopia and Ghana highlighted that, instead of being a “silent army” promoting Chinese state objectives, most Chinese entrepreneurs tend to operate independently (Cook and others 2016). While this defies popular media stereotypes of empire building and land grabbing and Chinese government narratives of South–South cooperation, the local, albeit modest, impacts of such investment seem to be positive in the sense that they are creating economic opportunities for themselves and local populations (Cook and others 2016). Another study from Equatorial Guinea highlighted that while economically privileged classes have benefited most from the growing Chinese presence, a minor group of small entrepreneurs may perceive this as competition (Esteban 2010). The presence of Chinese sex workers in countries such as Cameroon (Ndjio 2009) highlights the diversity of Chinese immigration. Furthermore, Chinese non-governmental organizations for development are increasingly active in Africa (Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016).

### **3. Unauthorized migration, smuggling and trafficking**

#### **Unauthorized migration and smuggling**

42. Notwithstanding the extensive media attention to “boat migration”, unauthorized migration is a relatively small source of African emigration. This report estimated that about 700,000 Africans possessing the correct paperwork migrate legally to OECD countries every year while an unknown but significant number (that must run into hundreds of thousands) of Africans move to Gulf countries on temporary labour contracts. By comparison, the numbers of African migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean or the Red Sea illegally are relatively small. For instance, in 2007, the number of Africans crossing the Mediterranean illegally was estimated at several “tens of thousands” per year, peaking at 60,000 in 2006 (de Haas 2007). After a slowdown, numbers increased again in the wake of the uprising in Tunisia and after another decline since 2015 as a partial consequence of Syrian refugee migration and new conflicts in Africa. For 2016, a record number of about 100,000 unauthorized arrivals of African nationals in Europe were detected, mainly as a result of increased crossings from Libya

to Italy. Most of these migrants and refugees were from the Gambia (11,929); Guinea (13,342), Côte d'Ivoire (12,396); Nigeria (37,551) and Eritrea (20,718)<sup>8</sup> (IOM 2017).

43. These are significant and worrying numbers, particularly because this migration involved significant human suffering and an increasing death toll (Last and others 2017). Nevertheless, even the high number for 2016 was still only about 1/7 of *legal* African emigration to OECD countries (see below). The erroneous idea that African migration to Europe is essentially about unauthorized (boat) migration is also sustained by the common conflation of unauthorized *entry* with unauthorized *stay*. The majority of unauthorized migrants living in Europe have entered legally and subsequently overstayed their visas and Africans seem to follow that pattern (Flahaux and De Haas 2016; Hearing and Erf 2001). Although exact numbers are not available, subregional reports have shown that unauthorized border crossing and overstaying are also common for intra-African migration, presumably resulting in serious underreporting of migration between African countries. Such unauthorized migration is the direct consequence of the lack of legal migration facilities. While unauthorized stay is often tolerated by Governments that either lack the capacity or willingness to implement regulations, it often leaves migrants at the mercy of exploitation, abuse and extortion by employers, police and officials (Kihato 2017).

### **Human trafficking**

44. The debate on human trafficking is haunted by the almost casual conflation between smuggling and trafficking in the media and political discourses about migration. While smuggling is essentially a form of service delivery in which migrants and refugees pay an intermediary in exchange for undetected border crossing, trafficking involves a certain degree of coercion, deceit and exploitation. While exploitation of unauthorized migrants is widespread, most researchers agree that actual trafficking is not very common. As Kihato (2017) observed in relation to Southern Africa, although it is the focus of considerable debate and policy attention, there is little evidence that cross-border human trafficking is a significant issue in numerical terms:

While there are many people (men, women, and children) working under exploitative labour conditions – including factory, farm, construction, domestic, and sex work – these conditions are due to a combination of legal status (i.e., being undocumented), limited structures to protect workers and migrant rights and generalized patterns of labour exploitation. As noted above, various forms of quasi-indentured labour practices are particularly evident in South Africa's agricultural sector and for domestic workers across the region (Kihato 2017: 22).

45. As Kihato (2017) also argues, the nature and extent of trafficking, including the numbers cited, is highly contested within Southern Africa, with the debate being dominated by two highly politicized positions. The first position argues that human trafficking – particularly of women and children – is rife in the region with tens of thousands (if not more) of people being entrapped in what amounts to modern-day slavery. The second position proposes the counterargument that there is little evidence to support the widespread claims of trafficking and that the desire to raise awareness has meant that organizations and individuals have essentially

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<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps coincidental that these are all countries with no established migration tradition to Europe. Although more research is needed to confirm this, it may be explained by the absence of large migrant networks, which usually facilitate migration along legal routes (such as through marriage) or through safer illegal ways than “boat migration”.

fabricated figures supported only by anecdotal illustration. Kihato (2017) also argues that much of the problem has to do with the conflation of categories: that child labour and forms of prostitution are simply counted as trafficking.

46. Indeed, her own work and that of others suggests that human trafficking – particularly to the sex industry – has few victims across the region – a position which seems to be confirmed by the low levels of actual numbers relating to forced labour that are often reported. There are undoubtedly many forms of labour exploitation throughout the region and migrants are also particularly vulnerable to exploitative work, but these should not be automatically equated with trafficking. While such cases reflect a real problem, they are not of the scope often reported by the International Organization for Migration and other organizations (Gould 2014; Gould and Fick 2008; Kihato 2017). The weak evidence base for underlying claims that human trafficking is a major driver of African migration is also sustained by evidence from other African regions. Based on his fieldwork on the migration of West African children, Ndao (2012) criticized the automatic labelling of such migration as trafficking, which contrasted the much more mixed – and regularly rather positive – experiences of the children involved.

47. Sometimes, the reliance of migrants on smugglers can create situations of dependency and indebtedness that evolve into situations that can be classified as trafficking. But even in those cases, migrant workers may have a certain level of agency and consent in the process, which make it difficult to find “easy” policy solutions. The case of trafficking of female Nigerian sex workers to Italy and other European countries, which has been relatively well researched (Carling 2006), illustrates this. When Nigerians began migrating to Italy in the 1980s as a response to its high demand for low-skilled labour in agriculture and services, these women were only one of many groups that migrated. The first prostitutes tended to work independently, but in the early 1990s, immigration restrictions made prospective emigrants increasingly dependent on large loans to pay for their journey, which provided an opportunity for traffickers (Carling, 2006).

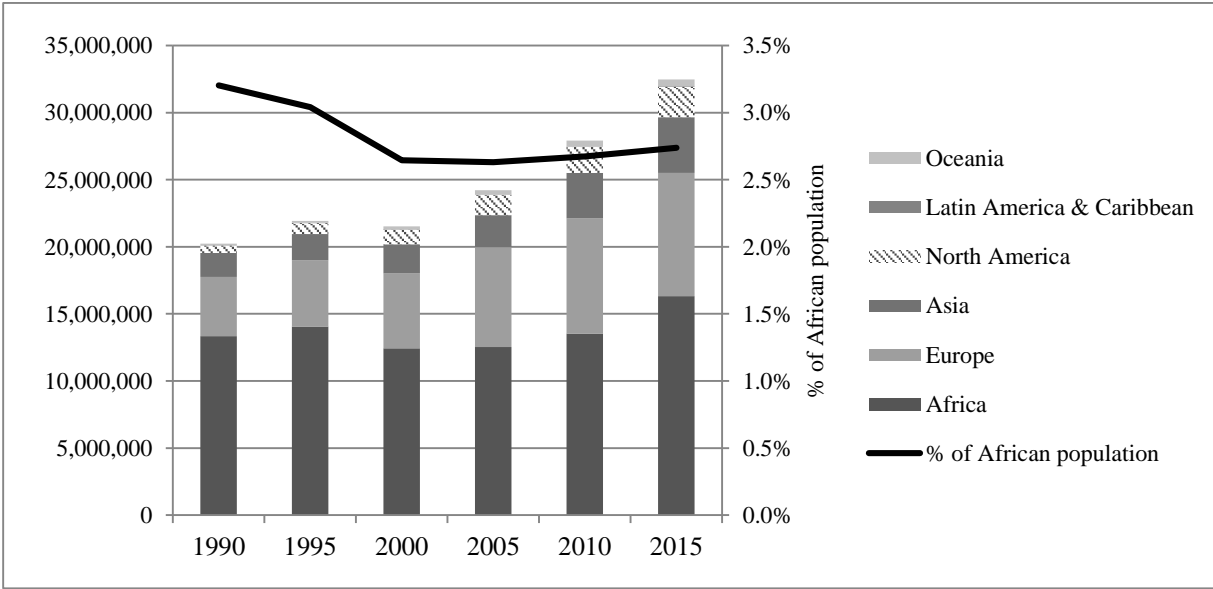
48. A potential prostitute’s initial contact with traffickers is often made through a relative, friend, or other familiar person, who puts her in contact with a “madam” who organizes and finances the journey. The costs may range from \$40,000 to \$100,000. The migrants and the madam conclude a “pact”, religiously sealed by a traditional priest, which obliges debt repayment in exchange for a safe passage to Europe. In Europe, the women are under the control of another madam, a counterpart of the madam in Nigeria. Most women realize that they are going to work as prostitutes, but do not necessarily know about the arduous conditions under which (street) prostitutes have to work, or the size of their debt (Carling, 2006). Nonetheless, arduous working conditions notwithstanding, this work does offer some “career” prospects. After repaying their migration debt in one to three years, these women are essentially free and it is fairly common for them to become a supervisor of other prostitutes and, eventually, a madam themselves. Carling (2006) stresses that this prospect of upward mobility is an incentive to comply with the pact and that the strong element of reciprocity between traffickers and trafficked women makes it difficult to reduce this form of trafficking. This also explains that many women who are “saved” and sent back home migrate back as soon as they can. The reinforcement of border controls has increased the reliance of migrants and refugees on smugglers in order to cross borders, and presumably also the scope for traffickers to enter into abusive relationships with migrant workers, although more research is needed to ascertain this. A key insight to retain, however, is that smuggling as well as trafficking are not so much a cause of migration as a reaction to immigration restrictions and border controls.

#### 4. African diasporas, remittances and development

49. Figure XIV shows that the total number of international migrants living on African soil grew over the past few decades from an estimated 20.3 million in 1990 to an estimated 32.5 million in 2015. Expressed as a percentage of the total African population, however, this represents a *decrease* from 3.2 to 2.7 per cent. Over the same period, the share of African-born people living outside of the continent showed a slight increase from 1.1 to 1.4 per cent. This indeed defies the idea of a rapidly accelerating African migration. In fact, African migrant rates are below the global average, which is currently around 3.1-3.2 per cent (Czaika and de Haas 2014).

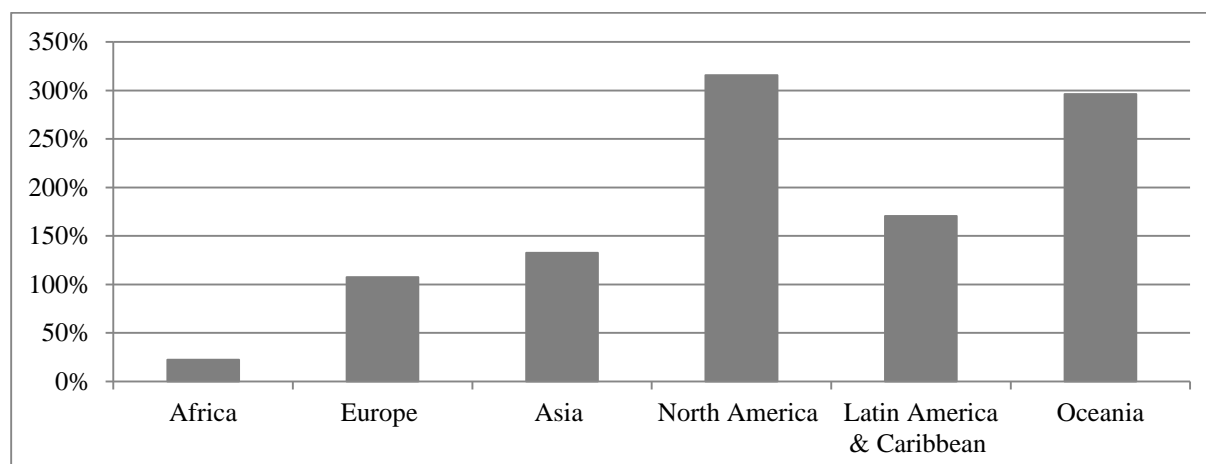
50. Most African international migrants live in other African countries and Europe, although the growth rate of African emigrant populations between 1990 and 2015 has been highest in North America (316 per cent), Australia and New Zealand (296 per cent) and Latin America (171 per cent) (see figure XV). While migration from North and Eastern Africa to the Gulf is significant (particularly from Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa), this predominantly represents temporary migration, which explains the relatively low size of the African emigrant population in Asia (including the Middle East), although the true size of the African migrant population in those countries may also be significantly underreported.

Figure XIV  
**Registered African emigrant population, by destination, 2015**



Data source: UN DESA: Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 revision.

Figure XV  
**Growth of African emigrant population 1990-2015**

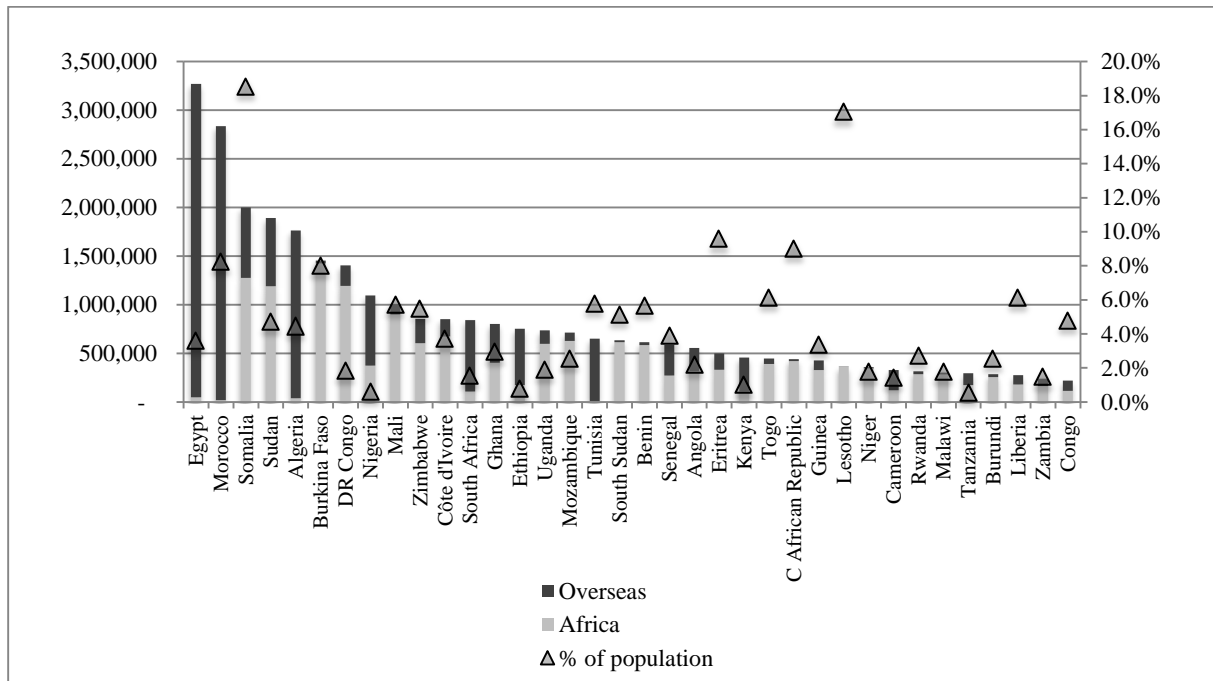


51. Figure XVI shows the most important African emigration countries, while distinguishing the share of emigrant populations living in other African countries or overseas. It also depicts the size of the total emigrant population as a share of origin country populations. In absolute terms, Egypt and Morocco are the most important African emigration countries, with their migration predominantly oriented towards Europe and the Gulf, respectively (Zohry 2017). Somalia and the Sudan stand in third and fourth place, respectively, with mixed outflows of refugees and other migrants to countries within and outside the continent. Other important emigration countries are Algeria and Tunisia (almost exclusively to Europe), the Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (mainly within Africa), as well as Nigeria (to other African countries, Europe and North America). In relative terms, however, the countries with the most intense emigration are small countries such as Cabo Verde or Lesotho, conflict-affected or “failed” states such as Eritrea and Somalia, and “labour frontier” (Skeldon 1997) countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia (to Europe), Burkina Faso and Mali (mainly to Côte d’Ivoire). Relative to their population, emigration from populous countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa is therefore rather low.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is partly a statistical artefact. Small countries without large cities contain less mobility within their borders, while large, populous countries with several prime cities absorb more mobility within their borders. This explains why large countries tend to have lower emigration rates than small countries, something which has been confirmed by statistical analyses which found a highly significant effect of population size on emigrant rates (see de Haas 2010). In concrete terms, this means that in a large and populous country such as Nigeria the bulk of rural-urban movements find a place within the country, while such movements easily spill over borders in small countries such as Lesotho, particularly if they lack big cities.

Figure XVI  
**Absolute and relative size of registered emigrant populations, 2015**



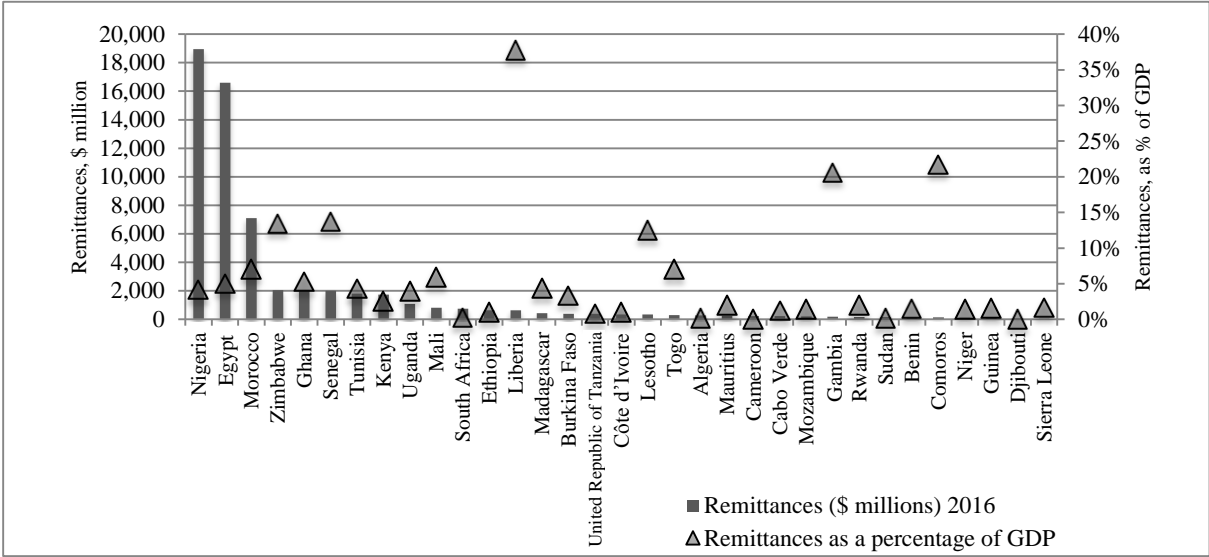
Data source: UN DESA Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.

Figure XVII  
**Countries of settlement of African migrants**



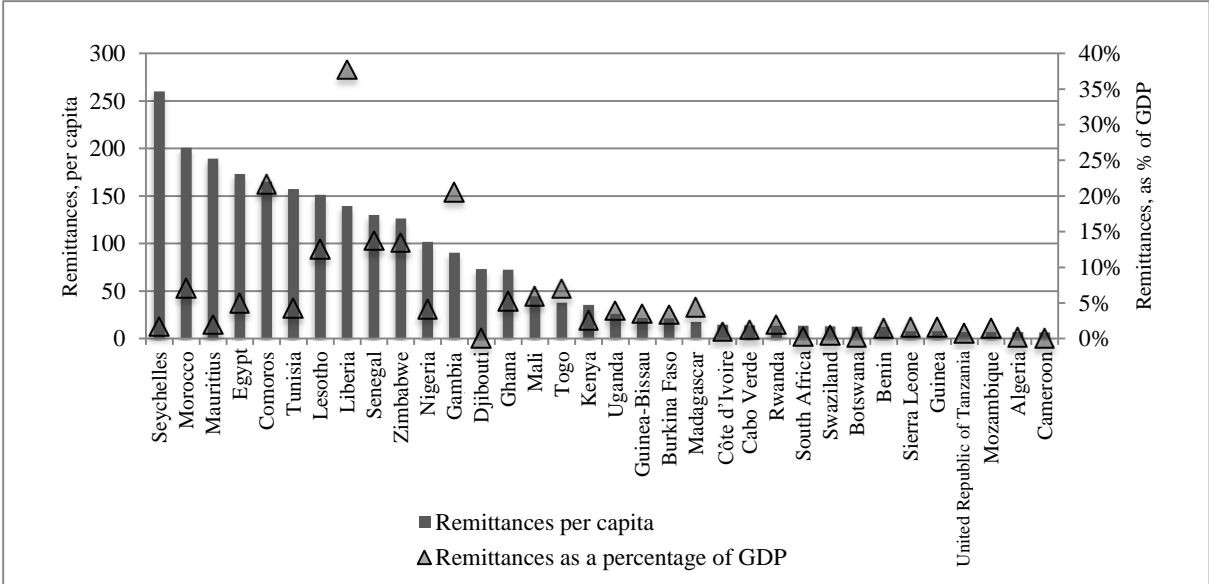
52. Although African emigrant *rates* are still relatively low by international standards, these figures show that the size of the African emigrant population is growing and that the share of Africans of the global migrant population, although still relatively small, is definitely increasing. Nevertheless, this primarily reflects an increasing trend in legal, registered migration rather than a rising, disorderly and potentially uncontrollable tide of Africans crossing into Europe on rickety boats which often dominate popular images about African migration generated by media images and political rhetoric. On the other hand, a significant – but unknown – part of intra-African migration goes unregistered. This has been the case in South Africa, for instance, where the highly controlled immigration apparatus from the Apartheid era has given way to a rise in more spontaneous entries (Kihato 2017).

Figure XVIII  
**Remittance receipts, absolute and as percentage of GDP, 2016**



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2016 data.

Figure XIX  
**Remittance receipts, per capita and as percentage of GDP, 2016**



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2016 data.

53. For households in origin communities, remittances play an important role in improving living conditions and, potentially, in enabling investments. Figure XVIII shows that Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Senegal, Tunisia and Kenya are the most important remittance-receiving countries. Expressed as a percentage of GDP, remittances are relatively important in countries such as Zimbabwe, Senegal, Liberia, Lesotho, the Gambia and the Comoros, where they count for over 10 or 20 per cent of GDP. Expressed in per capita terms, remittances are highest in the Seychelles, Morocco, Mauritius, Egypt, and the Comoros (see figure XIX).

54. Remittances are often ascribed an important poverty-reducing function. Surveys generally indicate that remittances are often spent on daily household expenses, but also expenditure on health and education (see Zohry 2017) and remittances allow relatively poor people to achieve significant improvement in their living conditions (de Haas 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to realize that most remittances flow neither to the poorest countries nor to the poorest members of societies and communities. This is because long-distance migration is often not affordable for the poorest members of society. These “selection effects” become even stronger for overseas migration, which generally entails much higher costs and risks. For instance, a survey conducted in the Central Plateau region of Burkina Faso found that comparatively poor households embark on continental migration (for instance, to Mali) primarily for the purpose of income diversification, whereas overseas migration (to Europe) is only accessible for comparatively wealthy households, allowing them to accumulate more wealth through remittances (Wouterse and Taylor 2008; Wouterse and Van den Berg 2011).

55. This should also mitigate naive expectations that migration and remittances can make a major contribution to reducing inequality and poverty in origin societies. In fact, if costly international migration is mainly accessible to the relatively better-off because of the costs involved in migrating and the qualifications needed to obtain a visa, it may actually *increase* inequality. Internal rural-to-urban migration or short-distance international migration to neighbouring countries may often be seen as less attractive or even undesirable by policymakers, but is generally more accessible to the relatively poor, is much greater in volume, and its cumulative contribution to enhancing well-being and living standards should, therefore, not be underestimated (de Brauw, Mueller and Woldehanna 2013; Oucho 1996).

## **Conclusion**

56. The preceding analysis highlights interesting figures and trends on African migration. Although political narratives and media images focus on the purported “exodus” of Africans to Europe, the bulk of African migrants move within the continent. However, the overall intensity of intra-African international migration has remained stable in recent years. This stagnation of migration intensities seems to be related to the imposition of migration barriers which reduce unrestricted migration. Given the dominance of intra-African migration, it is appropriate that the migration discourse, policy responses and research interests should focus more on this form of migration.

57. The idea that African migration is somehow “exceptional” seems to tap into stereotypes. African migration is not necessarily essentially different from migration in and from other world regions. In fact, Africans are underrepresented in the world migrant population and Africa has the lowest intercontinental outmigration rates of all world regions. Africa has also re-emerged as a migration destination, particularly for Chinese workers and merchants as well as European skilled workers, retirees and other “expats”. The absolute number of international migrants living on African soil has grown from an estimated 20.3 million in 1990 to an estimated 32.5 million in 2015.

58. The share of African-born people living outside of the continent has shown a slight increase – from 1.1 per cent in 1990 to 1.4 in 2015. This increase is high and rising in absolute terms – although still relatively small in terms of the proportion of Africans in the global migrant population. This increase has, however, been largely due to legal, registered and thus “orderly” migration rather than to a rising, disorderly and potentially uncontrollable tide of



Africans crossing into Europe on rickety boats which often dominate popular images about African migration generated by media images and political rhetoric.

59. Although more research is needed to corroborate this hypothesis, the increasing policy focus on selection of skilled migrants by OECD countries has facilitated the emigration of educated and relatively well-off Africans, but visa requirements and border controls have decreased access of relatively poor Africans to legal migration opportunities, particularly to Europe. On the one hand, this seems to have increased their reliance on smuggling and unauthorized border crossings – the unauthorized status of migrants increases the risks of labour exploitation, discrimination, violence and other forms of abuse, which can sometimes evolve in situations of trafficking.

60. On the other hand, the limited opportunities for legal migration to OECD countries for lower-skilled workers seem to have partly stimulated the partial geographical reorientation and diversification of African migration to countries in the Gulf, China and elsewhere. Other explanatory factors behind this geographical diversification of African emigration may include the waning influence of (post-) colonial ties to Europe and the growing politico-economic and cultural influence of China and the Gulf countries in Africa as well as the more liberal entry regimes in the new destination countries.

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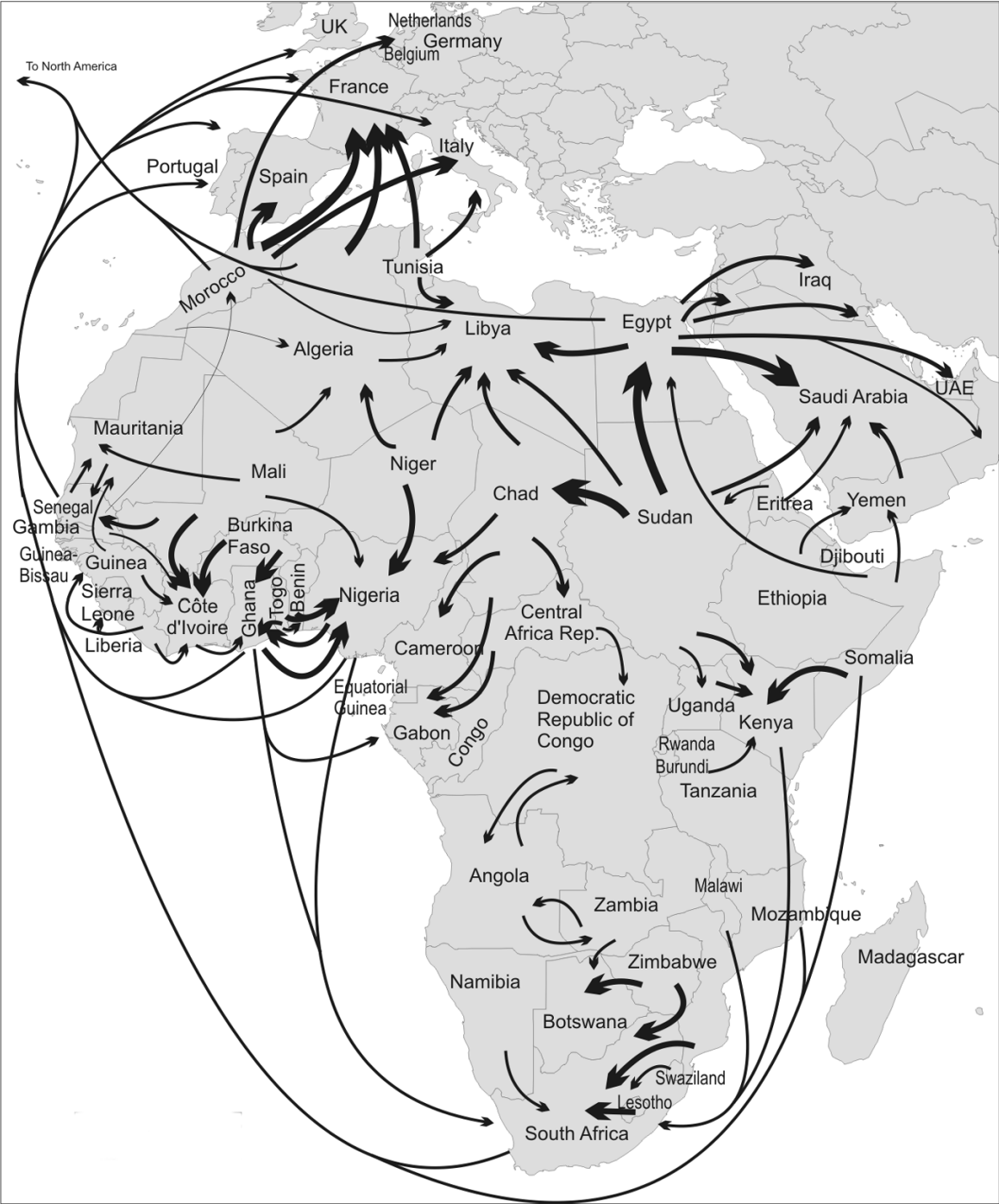
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*Note:* The arrow dimensions give an approximate indication of the volume of flows based on available migrant stock data and studies. Exact figures are generally unavailable.