



ECA POLICY BRIEF

Migration in Africa: statistics and recognition of migrants' skills

Introduction

Migration is a cross-cutting issue in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations and adopted in Marrakech, Morocco in 2018, is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement in this key area of sustainable development.¹ Although Africa has made significant progress in implementing the Compact, multiple crises such as the coronavirus disease pandemic, climate change, demographic pressure and violent conflict have imperiled progress made in terms of decent jobs and migrant safety.²

The current situation in African countries shows that several challenges remain, and intensive efforts are needed to implement the Compact through better mainstreaming of migration in national development plans and the sectoral strategies/programmes of African countries. In this context, better quality data that are disaggregated and produced regularly and the recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications are critical to facilitating migration in Africa and understanding the positive contribution of migration to sustainable development. It is important to strengthen the capacity of African countries to collect, analyze and disseminate migration-related data, to

mainstream migration in public policies, strategies and programmes, and to develop adequate mechanisms for ensuring mutual recognition of the skills and qualifications of African workers.

Information on migration is essential for African countries

The African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018–2030) reflects the recognition that migration data is key to mainstreaming migration into policy and planning frameworks and development initiatives, and essential for developing effective, evidence-based migration policies.

Key facts and challenges

The available data do not reflect the reality of migration in Africa. Nearly 85 per cent of migration in Africa occurs within the continent and does not involve crossing oceans, contrary to the conventional narrative on African migration. Negative stereotypes and misperception of migration in Africa are fed, in part, by a lack of reliable data and information about migration levels and trends; local, national and international drivers of migration; the impact of migration; and the profiles of migrants.

As most countries lack the capacity to collect high-quality and disaggregated data on migration to inform public policies, data on migration in Africa remain insufficient. The lack of disaggregated, reliable and regularly issued data complicates the process of assessing the progress of African countries towards achieving the migration-related Goals of the 2030 Agenda and the Compact.

¹ General Assembly resolution 73/195, annex.

² International Organization for Migration and African Union, Africa Migration Report: Challenging the Narrative (Addis Ababa, 2020).

The collection of data on an irregular basis and by different entities using varying methodologies may compromise the utility of that data to effective decision-making. The majority of African countries report that data on labour migration are collected infrequently. Although most African States collect data on labour migration, it occurs at relatively lengthy and irregular intervals. Just under two thirds (63 per cent) of those States provide data on labour migration statistics.³

The migration of workers provides an important opportunity to address the mismatch between skills available among the local population and those demanded by employers in destination countries. However, the lack of mutual recognition of skills and qualifications of African workers migrating within the continent poses a significant challenge to addressing that mismatch.

Several countries in Africa have begun to prioritize the development and recognition of migrants' skills through the implementation of continental and global initiatives to promote the recognition of skills. Such efforts remain insufficient, however, which demonstrates the need for greater national and regional efforts to better facilitate mutual recognition of the skills and qualifications of migrants.

Examples of policy support

In the Compact, Heads of State and Government and High Representatives called upon regional economic commissions to support States in the review of and follow-up to the implementation of the Compact.⁴ In this context, from 2020 to 2023, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) implemented a programme on migration statistics and skills recognition in Africa,⁵ with funding from the twelfth tranche of the Development Account of the United Nations, to support six countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe) in achieving objectives 1⁶ and 18⁷ of the Compact.

The programme was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the selected countries to collect, analyze and disseminate migration data, and at enhancing mutual recognition of

skills and qualifications of African workers. To promote coordination among stakeholders working on migration issues, a multi-partner national working group mechanism was created in each of the countries.

The programme helped to reinforce national capacity to identify migration data gaps and challenges and empowered the countries in collecting, analyzing and disseminating migration-related data. In addition, a digital platform for migration statistics was developed in Morocco, Mali and Senegal, which served as a tool for using statistics on migrants to inform public policies and design effective strategies.

To better facilitate the recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications, ECA provided technical support and advisory services to five of those countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa) in elaborating and adopting both a national action plan and a road map to enhance the mechanism for recognizing migrants' skills.

An African network of migration experts was also established among the six countries. Comprising 27 national experts, the aim was to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise among the countries in connection with migration statistics and skills recognition.

As part of the programme, capacity-development training was provided to a pool of 303 government officials and 249 other stakeholders to strengthen their ability to develop, use and analyze migration data, facilitate the recognition of migrants' skills, disseminate best practices and share the knowledge acquired with government officials working on migration issues.

Through the programme, partnerships were strengthened among major stakeholders such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal; the Ministry of Home Affairs in Morocco and South Africa; the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare in Zimbabwe; and Statistics South Africa. It also reinforced partnership and south-south cooperation among the African Union, ECA and the International Labour Organization.

³ Ibid.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 73/195, annex, para. 50.

⁵ The programme was implemented by the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa.

⁶ Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based Policies.

⁷ Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences.

Way forward

There is a need to build the capacity of African countries to address data gaps in migration and to better monitor and report on migration-related commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and the Compact. Strengthening national capacity to produce and use migration data and promote the harmonization of methods will improve the quantity and quality of migration data collected. In addition, the effort to overcome barriers to the recognition of education, skills and qualifications across national borders would be advanced by the establishment of a specialized national

mechanism or institution in each country and the adoption of regional and bilateral agreements on the verification of certificates, skills and qualifications, even for uncertified workers.

Increased collaboration among African countries would help to promote the harmonization of migration data across the continent in line with international standards, the adoption of regional and bilateral agreements on the verification of certificates, skills and qualifications, and the harmonization of migration policies.

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This policy brief is prepared under the overall guidance of the Director of the Subregional Office for North Africa, Adam Elhiraika, and under the direct supervision of the Chief of the Sub-Regional Initiatives Section of the Subregional Office for North Africa, Khaled Hussein. It is prepared by Samia Mansour Hamouda, Economic Affairs Officer. The policy brief is based on results of the development account programme on "Migration statistics and skills recognition in Africa for the global compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration (2020-2023)".