



AFRICA HUMAN CAPITAL HEADS OF STATE SUMMIT

Africa Human Capital Technical Briefs Series

Harness the Potential of International Migration

July 2023

KEY MESSAGES

- International migration has enormous transformative potential for the migrant, their families back home, and their origin countries and communities.
- But the current level of international migration is the lowest for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) compared to all other regions of the world.
- SSA lags behind other regions on bilateral labor arrangements (BLAs) put in place with destination countries. BLAs are key for safe & regular migration.
- SSA also lacks the skills which would make most of its population a poor match for the labor markets abroad.
- Building frameworks and systems for regular migration and the skills for a global labor market can help SSA capture the enormous potential of its people.

WHY FOCUSING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION MATTERS FOR AFRICA

A large body of credible evidence shows that international migration is one of the most transformative development interventions.¹ Evidence from around the world shows that even low-skilled workers can earn 3-4 times their income by migrating to a richer country. The higher incomes benefit the family left behind as well as the community and country of origin through remittances. The potential gains from international migration dwarf gains from any other classes of development interventions.

This is even more pertinent for SSA because it is increasingly becoming the source of youthful energy in the world. By 2050, one out of three people under 30 in the world will be in SSA!

The demographic bulge in SSA combined with rapid aging in the rest of world presents great opportunities and challenges to SSA. The aging population in richer countries means younger workers will be in short supply to power their economies. In addition, the demand for care workers to tend to the elderly in those countries is set to further increase. SSA can take advantage of this opportunity by supplying the much-needed manpower and reaping the gains from international migration.

However, massive challenges exist before such large gains are materialized. First, the skills of the youth in SSA are low and are not adequate to match the needs of several destination countries. This includes but is not limited to the level and quality of education and training, job readiness, and relevant soft skills. Second, SSA lacks bilateral or multilateral arrangements that provide a framework for and manage large flow of migrants. Together with an utter lack of migration systems, most of the migration from the region is irregular.

Unless SSA invests in overcoming these challenges and facilitate international migration outside the region, the opportunity can quickly translate into a problem. SSA is not generating enough jobs to provide decent economic opportunities to its growing youth population. Consequently, youth unemployment and idleness remain high across the region. Decent job opportunities must come from within and beyond the region to prevent the gloomy job market prospect translating into discontent and conflict.

¹ See (World Bank 2023) for detailed review of the literature and a policy framework. See (Michael A. Clemens, Montenegro, and Pritchett 2019; Michael A. Clemens 2011; Mobarak, Sharif, and Shrestha 2023; Michael A. Clemens and Tiongson 2017; Gibson, McKenzie, and Stillman 2011; Michael Andrew Clemens 2019) for a few of the specific studies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To harness the gains from international migration, SSA needs to act now.

1. Facilitate migration. SSA must actively facilitate international migration both within and, more importantly, outside the region to capture the gains from migration and the opportunity provided by the labor shortages in aging developed countries. Such facilitation can take the form of bilateral labor arrangements (BLAs) or multi-lateral labor arrangements with key destination countries.

2. Build systems for regular migration. Facilitation must be accompanied by building strong managed migration systems to support the entirety of a (potential) migrant's journey: pre-decision information provision, informed decision making, intermediation, pre-departure orientation, migration, and return. Since many countries do not have such systems, learning from the experiences of peers as well as from global best-practices will be key. Such systems are key to promoting regular migration.

3. Build skills for a global labor market. SSA needs to invest in developing skills not just for the region but for the world. There is a critical need to upgrade the skill levels of its youth, particularly in some key sectors facing shortages, so that it can supply the necessary manpower regionally and globally. Such investments, when directed to critical occupations facing acute shortages (such as that of healthcare and care workers), can provide quick returns through domestic, regional, and global mobilization of its workforce.

4. Seek partnerships with key destination countries. Ideally, some of the skills development can be done in partnerships with destination countries, particularly in sectors suffering from labor shortages in origin countries. Since destination countries stand to gain from the contribution of migrants, SSA countries need to enter into mutually beneficial partnerships wherein the destination countries invest in (or provide significant technical assistance and expertise to) the development of skills needed for the country of origin as well as destination labor markets. Global skills partnership is one such model which is gaining popularity in the recent years.

How to Measure Success or Failure: Relevant Data

- By 2050, one out of three people under 30 in the world will be in SSA.
- Migration from SSA is low. About 30 million migrants originate from SSA, which is about 2.6% of the population in SSA. This is much lower than 3.5% of the global population that live outside their country of birth.
- Two thirds of the migrants from SSA move within the region. Only one-thirds migrate outside the region.

Definition

International migration happens when an individual changes their country of habitual residence, either temporarily or permanently. The purpose of such changes could be work, education, family reunification, or safety and security. Such changes of country exclude short-term movement for purposes such as recreation, business, medical treatment, or religious pilgrimage.

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