Africa's contemporary migration patterns and dynamics

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Introduction

- Africa's migration, an ancient phenomenon. Millions of Africans moving within (intra-African migration) and out of the continent (extra-continental migration).

- More than 41 million Africa's international migrants in 2017, according to calculations by UNCTAD based on UNDESA estimates (UNCTAD 2017).

- In 2019, total international migrant stock of the sub-Saharan African region: around 26.5 million, approximately 53% male and 47% female (UNDESA 2019).

- In 2019, total international migrant stock of the Northern African region: around 3 million, around 57% male and 43% female (UNDESA 2019).

- Increasing feminization of African migration: stock of female international migrants rising from 7 million in 2000 to 12.5 million in 2019 and the number of male international migrants rising from 8 million to 14 million over the same period) (UNDESA 2019).

Introduction

- Focus on migration of Africans outside the African continent by most policymakers and international media.

- However, prominence of intra-African migration when considering the total volume of African migration. However, there is a need to deepen understanding of the impact of conflicts and civil wars, barriers to free movement, and antimigrant sentiment in some parts of Africa on the extent and magnitude of intra-African migration.

- Restrictive migration policies and rising xenophobia and anti-migrants also likely affecting the volume of extra-continental African migration.

- In 2017, only 17 million Africans lived outside Africa and less than 5 million emigrating from other regions of the world to Africa in 2017, according to UNCTAD calculations based on UN DESA estimates (UNCTAD 2017).

African migration: brief overview of causes

- Increasing migration pressures due to persisting unfavorable structural conditions and globalization, progress in transportation and communication, and unfavorable macroeconomic policies.

- African migration driven by a combination of various interrelated factors (micro, mezzo, and macro levels): educational, professional, family reunification, socioeconomic motives, transnational social networks, pathway for regular migration, skills shortages, feelings of despair, especially among youth, economic crisis, unemployment, inequality, poverty, and conflicts, political instability, food insecurity, among many other factors.

- Increasing forced displacement due to various factors such as protracted conflicts, violence, violent extremism, and poverty, along with climate change and environmental degradation, weak governance, and other development challenges.

African migration: brief overview of causes

- Migration also entrenched in the social fabric: nomadic culture, migration as a symbol of individual and social maturation.

- Africa's migration is not only driven by a state of lack, conflict, and negativity: migration also for study, work, and family motives.

- Many African countries are both origin, transit, and destination countries for migration to, within, and from Africa.

- Push and pull factors mode can explain the internal and external factors leading to Africa's inward and outward migration.

- However, the push and pull factors models can lead to a simplistic, narrow, and essentialist vision of Africa's migration, overlooking its complexity (For on overview of the shortcomings of the push and pull factor model, see for instance: Portes and Rumbaut 2014, van Hear, Blackwell, and Long 2018, Willamson 2015).

African migration's patterns and trends

Selectivity of international migration (e.g., Van Dalen et al. 2007), especially extra-continental migration: due to the high cost of migration, not all would-be migrants can afford to move notwithstanding their aspiration to migrate.

Thus, need to delineate the willingness and capability to migrate: unequal access to "capital mobility".

Neighboring countries representing the main hosts of refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. South Sudan refugees being hosted primarily in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, some of the most significant host countries of refugees on the African continent (IOM 2020: 59-60).

In 2019, Internal displacement in Sub-Saharan Africa primarily driven by natural disasters and conflicts (IDMC 2020).

African migration's patterns and trends

- Sets of consequences underlying forced displacement in Africa affecting displaced persons as well as host communities.

- Europe is currently the main destination for extracontinental African migration (OECD 2019).

- Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain, increasingly attracting African migrants in addition to more traditional destination countries such as France and the United Kingdom (OECD 2019).

- However, reduced opportunities for regular (labor) mobility results in the exploration of other regions of the world such as in the Northern American region (USA, Canada); Asia (China, Turkey), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, among other regions (UNDESA 2017).

African migration's patterns and trends

- In the coming decades, according to forecasts, increasing migration driven by demographic growth, environmental and climate change – from rapid-onset flooding, humanitarian, development, and governance-related challenges. These challenges are likely to affect the volume of internal and international migration (UNDESA, 2020, Dia 2020).

- Increasing Africa's international migration to the Gulf region (notably to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar), Asia (notably to China and Türkiye), and Latin and Central America (notably to Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico), and a diversification of migration corridors, both traditional and new (IOM 2020, Dia 2020).

- Stringent visa and migration policies in destination countries, especially in the global North, and reduced regular labor migration opportunities as some of the causes of increasing irregular migration (Adepoju 2000).

- The international media coverage of irregular migration across the deserts and seas and the underlying risks, sufferings, and tragic circumstances has led to misperceptions about an invasion of the poor of the world, fueling xenophobia, racism, and discrimination.

African migration's patterns and trends

- Migration from other regions to Africa: often overlooked in studies and debates about African migration.
- Migration to Africa includes, among other patterns:

Migration from Europe, the Indian subcontinent, Asia, and Latin and Central America to Africa.

❖Migration of Europeans, Australians, Americans, Canadians (nationals from the Global North) commonly called "expatriates' migration.

❖Increasing Chinese migration to Africa.

❖Significant presence of Lebanese migrants and diasporas, especially in trade and business.

❖Return of people of African descent (e.g., African American diaspora, Afro-Brazilian diaspora).

African migration's patterns and drivers

- Accelerating demographic trends and urbanization in the foreseeable future (UNDESA 2019): several implications on Africa's internal and international migration, including:

❖ Growing internal migration (rural–urban migration, rural-to-rural migration, and migration from cities to cities) and its underlying challenges, but overlooked in migration and development policies (Dia 2020).

❖ Migrants often facing precarious conditions (precarious slums or precarious suburbs with limited access to basic services, social protection and decent employment opportunities, thus impeding their livelihoods, health, and well-being (Dia 2020).

- Some of the theoretical and methodological problems hindering a better understanding of Africa's migration include statistics and data collection, lack of in-depth and comparative studies among African countries, biases in theoretical and methodological approaches, often based on Western and Asian migration narratives; African migration research driven by donor-agenda, among other factors.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

African migration governance challenges

Lack of poor implementation of continental, regional, and international migration-related instruments.

Lack of domestication of international instruments into national instruments.

Governance gaps impede the potential of migration to contribute to inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development in Africa.

Various policy instruments such as the African Union Migration Policy Framework advocate for strengthening African migration governance to maximize the opportunities and reduce the challenges related to migration.

 Gaps in statistics and data collection on labor migration, lack of access to social protection for labor migrants, especially low and unskilled migrant workers in the informal economy, vulnerability to exploitation, poor working and remuneration conditions, lack of portability of social security benefits, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and credentials, lack of ratification or implementation of international instruments related to migration: exemplifying gaps in labor migration governance.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Internal migration

• Internal migration driven by various factors, including crisis of the agricultural sector, conflicts, forced eviction, failure of rural/local development policies, climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, concentration of main economic activities in the capital city, food insecurity, study and family reasons, to name a few.

• Internal migration has various forms: rural-to-urban migration, inter-rural migration, urban-to-rural migration, and inter-urban migration. Significant impacts of internal migration on population distribution and urbanization.

• Internal migrants contribute to the livelihoods of families left behind through financial remittances as well as transfer of goods. Internal migration as a coping strategy faced with unemployment and poverty. Internal migrants largely operating in the informal economy, especially in urban areas.

• However, internal migrants can have various setbacks such as a reduced workforce in the agricultural sector in rural areas, increasing pressures on urban public services, and increasing survival strategies in the informal economy often characterized by lack of social protection, difficult working conditions, and low wages.

• Need to take greater consideration of Africa's internal migration in migration policies and development policies, especially rural-to-urban migration.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Forced displacement

- Increasing number of forcibly displaced persons (refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs)) in Africa.

- Forced displacement affects both the forcibly displaced and host communities.

- Forced displacement has humanitarian, development, peace, and protection challenges.

- Addressing the humanitarian and development challenges underlying forced displacement requires a multipronged approach, including strengthening host countries' capacities, public-private partnerships, and international cooperation.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Environmental and climate migration

- Environmental and climate change-induced migration accentuated by rapid-onset flooding and the slow-onset hazards of desertification along with sea-level rise.

- Economic, political, environmental, and security factors increase the vulnerability to environmental degradation and climate change.

- Environmental degradation and climate change affect food security, health, and water resources, among others.

- Migration considered a coping strategy to minimize the impacts of these natural disasters, and the underlying socioeconomic shocks.

- Resilience of communities faced with environmental degradation and natural disasters affected by poverty, unemployment, bad governance, conflicts, and other unfavorable structural conditions.

- Lack of social and economic capital weakens the resilience of communities confronting environmental degradation and natural disasters.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Irregular migration, trafficking, and smuggling

- Increasing irregular migration in Africa and use of irregular migration corridors (through the seas and deserts).

- Increasing irregular migration fueled by restrictive visa regimes and reduced opportunities for legal labor migration precarious living conditions, poverty, unemployment, feelings of despair, longing for upward social and professional mobility, climate change, and environmental degradation, among other factors.

- irregular migration has increased notwithstanding enhanced border controls, increasing criminalization and securitization of international migration, and restrictive visa and migration policies.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

- African irregular migrants facing suffering, violence, exploitation, atrocities, human rights violations, inhumane conditions, and even and tragic circumstances in the irregular migration corridors (through the Mediterranean and Red Sea, and the deserts) and subject to hardships once in the host countries.

- Rise of anti-migrant sentiment, xenophobia, and discrimination, as a result of the misperception of the invasion of irregular migrants, especially from Africa. Irregular migrants accused by some media and political groups (especially right-wing political parties and movements) as threatening host countries' social cohesion, welfare, economy, and national identity.

- African irregular migrants confronting violence, sufferings, atrocities, exploitation, and inhumane conditions, and even tragic circumstances.

- Irregular migrants vulnerable to human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

- Trafficking of human beings and smuggling of migrants facilitated by local and transnational criminal networks.

- Devastating social, economic, and psychological effects on victims of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, negatively impacting their livelihoods and those of their communities.

- Victims of trafficking and smuggling often subject to abuses, violence, exploitation, human rights violations, mental, health, and physical problems, loss of self-esteem and confidence, feelings of despair.

- Gaps in combating human trafficking, failure or limited outcomes in prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships measures aimed at addressing the challenges of trafficking.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Migration and development

Positive impacts:

- African migrants' activities such as terms of financial remittances, opportunities for investment, trade, business, tourism, return migration, and development, human capital development, knowledge transfer, diaspora knowledge networks, social remittances, contribution to peace and democratization, employment creation can contribute to peace, and development processes (e.g., Ionescu, Dia, and Guisse 2009, Dia 2004).

- Remittances: a significant part of the GDP of many African countries. Remittances are more important than official development assistance (ODA).

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Negative impacts:

- Dependance on remittance transfer, gaps between regions receiving and those not receiving remittances, internationalization of conflicts and instability by some migrants and diaspora groups, skills workforce shortage, brain drain, and brain waste, to name a few.

- Due to a lack of a conducive environment and strong political will to optimize the development potential of migration, it's difficult for many African governments to maximize the benefits underlying migration and minimize its negatives.

- Policies to foster migrants and diasporas' engagement in homeland development, especially in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Some thematic areas related to African migration

Skilled migration and the brain drain and brain waste problems

- Persisting concerns about the brain drain and brain waste and its negative impacts on the development of African countries.

- Skilled African international migration can have negative impacts on the already health system in crisis in many African countries, especially countries faced with poor governance of the health systems, skilled workforce shortage, and scarce human resources.

- Skilled international migration can hinder achieving SDGs in Africa if it leads to a brain drain, accentuating skills shortages and hindering critical sectors such as education and, the health system.

Some thematic areas related to African migration

- Skilled migration can contribute to the development process in Africa if there are conducive environment to maximize the benefits underlying such a migration (brain gain) and minimize its negatives (brain drain and brain waste). Turning brain drain and brain waste into brain gain.

- Strong enthusiasm to contribute to homeland development. Transnational activities carried out by African skilled migrants in terms of knowledge transfer, financial remittances, social remittances, temporary return to strengthen the capacities of national and local institutions, intellectual exchanges, mentoring, supervision, training, trade and investment opportunities, social and humanitarian activities, including building schools and health centers (Ionesco, Dia, and Guisse 2009).

- However, preponderance of individual initiatives in comparison to collective initiatives directed to homeland development. Besides, various constraints (administrative, political, bureaucratic, financial, technical, etc.) hinder the development potential of activities carried out by African skilled migrants (Ionesco, Dia, and Guisse 2009).

- More attention to the link between African student migration and skilled migration, and the intra-continental African skilled migration.

Conclusion

- Commonly, African migration's causes are described, referring to poverty, socioeconomic inequalities, unemployment, economic crisis, climate change, and environmental degradation, among many other factors. Besides these macro-structural factors, African migration is also driven by micro and mezzo-related factors, such as family, study, professional, and business motives.

- African migration driven both by progress and challenges in socioeconomic development.

- Prominence of intra-African migration when compared to African extra-continental migration.

- With the stringent visa and migration policies in traditional destination countries, reduced regular labor migration opportunities, and rising anti-migrant sentiment and discrimination, diversification of African migrants' destination countries, with the exploration of new destination countries.

Conclusion

- Pessimistic standpoint influenced by structuralist and Marxist theory (dependency school) view migration as a reproduction of neocolonial order, hampering the development process, and further marginalizing Africa in the international economic and political arena by dispossessing Africa its best and brightest talents who contribute to strengthening the economic, scientific, and technological advancement of destination countries, especially in the West.

- Migration viewed as a brain drain, brain waste, contributing to the development of "underdevelopment" and the reproduction of socioeconomic and spatial inequalities. Negative impacts underlying African migration such as brain drain, brain waste, skills shortage, extroversion of the economy.

- From an optimistic standpoint influenced by neoliberal theories, African migration can contribute to the national development process in terms of financial remittances, transfer of knowledge and know-how, social remittances, and trade and investment opportunities.

- Migration viewed as brain gain, a virtuous circle.

- Need for in-depth research on African migration to assess whether the losses outdo the benefits, by considering various levels (national, local, regional, and continental levels).

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