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## **International Migration Statistics in the ECA Region \***

Prepared by

Omar Sarr  
African Centre of Statistics  
UN ECA

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## 1. BACKGROUND

The development of transportation and communication sectors combined with the need to improve living conditions has increased the international migration flows. People have always been moving within regions or from one region to another in order to improve their well-being.

Currently nearly 200 million people, about three per cent of the world's population, live outside their country of birth and the number of international migrants is set to increase in the years to come. Between 1965 and 1990, the number of international migrants had increased by 45 million per year while the current annual growth rate is about 2.1 per cent<sup>1</sup>. The migrants provide about 233 billion USD per year in remittances worldwide.

Discourses on migration involve many controversies and perspectives; it is not necessary to point out the strong link between migration and policy in many areas, including the economic, social, labor, health, cultural, and security domains. Africa is one of the regions that are really affected by this phenomenon as the youth attempts to move across European coasts in search of better living conditions.

It is more and more recognized that migration is an essential and inevitable component of the economic and social life of every State. Migration can be beneficial for both the individuals and the societies when it is orderly and properly managed. It remains positive for the countries of emigration but it creates problems for the immigration countries. For the sending-countries the resources coming from the emigrants constitute an important source of transfers of currencies that contribute largely to the reduction of poverty. On the other hand, for the receiving-countries, the arrival of the immigrants creates lack of jobs for their citizens that, in turn, causes sociopolitical problems.

For several countries, managing both legal and illegal migration represents a big challenge. Illegal migration has become one of the major concerns of our time.

## 2. DIMENSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

The analysis of international migration involves multiple and complex dimensions. Some of the issues are outlined hereafter.

- a) Labor migration: migration provides a cheaper work force to the developed countries while skilled manpower is lacking in the sending countries;
- b) Migration and security: the world faces insecurity as the result of international terrorism. This fact has complicated the principle of free movement of people even among countries who share the same organizations or the same values;
- c) Combating illegal migration: the need for emigration has increased so that the migrants do not wait until they obtain visa. They always look for persons who get them over to the borders of developed countries in an illegal way.
- d) Migration and development: the emigrants contribute largely to the reduction of the poverty. Most of them come from the poorest population and they usually send remittances to their families back home.

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<sup>1</sup> Source : OIM.

- e) Demographic aspects : in the developed countries, the current annual rate of population growth is less than 0.3 per cent, while in the rest of the world the population is growing almost six times as fast. Thus, while developed countries face with the problem of ageing population, youngsters, due to the demographic pressure, come from underdeveloped countries to solve the problem of scarcity of manpower in the richest countries.
- f) Economic liberalization: in the developed countries, employers have the opportunity to get migrant workers as part of their cost minimization strategies.

### 3. CURRENT AFRICAN MIGRATION FLOWS STATUS

The main causes of migration in Africa are conflicts, poverty and environmental degradation. In recent years, it has been observed that many African youngsters flee towards European coasts, sometimes with fatal consequences. The main flows of migration usually observed are:

- i. West Africa towards Central and, now, Southern Africa since the sub-region is opened and peace comes back;
- ii. West Africa towards Europe and Northern America;
- iii. Central Africa towards West African countries as transit towards Europe;
- iv. Central and Western Africa towards Northern Africa as transit towards Europe;
- v. Northern Africa towards Europe all time;
- vi. Eastern Africa towards Middle East and Western Asia and Southern Europe.

### 4. MIGRANTS AND CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Most of the migrants are highly skilled persons like researchers, engineers, computer specialists, medical doctors, etc. Africa is losing its highly skilled manpower that has taken it many years to train. Currently the brains benefit the richest countries while Africa is faced with shortage of skilled manpower.

The reasons for migration are numerous, among them:

#### For the intellectuals:

- i. Lack of good governance in the countries: in the underdeveloped countries, people do not benefit from democracy, equity and do not also get adequate welfare;
- ii. Repression against opponents: as there is lack of freedom, the governments repress their citizens and many of them flee from this repression;
- iii. Political, social or ethnic conflicts: for political, social or ethnic reasons, part of the population may not be allowed to participate in the national decision making process;
- iv. Unemployment: seeking employment or high living standards motivates some of the migrants;
- v. Poverty or low income levels;
- vi. Education.

#### For the non intellectuals:

- i. Impoverishment of the rural areas due to climate change: irregular rain patterns, less and less land to cultivate, desertification, loss of animals due to droughts and diseases, etc;

- ii. Social exclusion.

Both flee due to:

- i. Poverty and hunger;
- ii. Environmental degradation;
- iii. Conflicts;
- iv. Political reasons.

## **5. STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

Statistical data concerning migration are not compiled on a regular basis. And yet, many forms are filled both at the entry and exit points of all the countries in Africa when people go across boundaries or when they apply for visas. The information from administrative records is seldom compiled in a centralized and coordinated manner. Thus the main sources of the rare statistics on migration in Africa are censuses and surveys.

## **6. THE AFRICAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

The African statistical systems are weak due to the lack of human and financial resources. The existing resources are mainly allocated to the production of relevant economic statistics as required by the international financial institutions, and recently to the social statistics related to the measurement of the living conditions that provide data for the design of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and to the follow-up of the MDGs. The migration statistics are mainly obtained through the Population and Housing Censuses or often by surveys. Therefore, this status demands for more assistance to the statistical systems of African countries in order to produce consistent and timely migration statistics.

## **7. CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENT**

A person who goes across international boundary is called an international migrant. The new Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses define the resident as a person who spends at least 6 months in his household.

## **8. SOURCES**

As mentioned above, the main source of international migration information must be the Migration Department in Home Affairs who usually issues the visa. This institution is the only one that gathers the day-to-day information coming from the boundaries. But this information is never published or never even been compiled.

## **9. MIGRATION POLICIES**

Most of the African countries do not have policies concerning migration in spite of the forms that are filled at the entry and exit points. In reality boundaries in Africa are porous that lead to clandestine and illegal migration.

For both the citizens and foreigners the forms to be filled at the entry are mostly identical to the forms to be filled during exit.

In a few countries, citizens need to apply for exit visa before leaving their countries. However, in most of the countries it is not necessary for the citizens re-register for going abroad.

Most of the countries do not allow dual or multiple nationality and they have never evaluated the cost and benefit, or the consequences of immigration and emigration.

## **10. DATA EXCHANGE**

As data are not available or are not well managed, there is nothing to share. More efforts must be provided to harmonize policies and to motivate countries to have relevant policies on international migration.

## **11. STRATEGIES**

In order to improve the relevance and use of migration statistics in policies at national and international levels, the guidelines of the strategy must be:

- i. Given the weaknesses of the National Statistical System in the countries, the international community has to support the countries on how to develop country-owned migration statistics. With respect to country specific tourism data development, the international community must design a form with common information for all countries;
- ii. To launch a strong and sustainable advocacy for migration statistics;
- iii. To insure the involvement of all stakeholders such as Home Affairs, Statistical Offices, Airport and Port and Railways Offices, Tourism institutions (Hotels), etc. in order to produce and publish reliable migration statistics;
- iv. To centralize all forms in statistical offices which usually have the capacity for compiling and publishing the data; and
- v. To enhance the human resource capacities of the institutions which are involved in the process.

## **12. ROLE OF ECA**

Since its reorganization at the division level during the second-half of 2006, the African Centre for Statistics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa aims to boost its assistance to the African Statistical Systems. In collaboration with other partners, the main role of the ACS will be:

- i. The development of advocacy among African countries to better take account of migration statistics;
- ii. Organization of workshops for better implementation of the Principles and Recommendations on Migration Statistics made by the international community, on the one hand, and to share experiences among African countries, on the other hand;
- iii. Gathering of regional migration data in its database in order to compile and produce a publication at the regional level.