

**Working Paper**

SWP Working Papers are online publications within the purview of the respective Research Division. Unlike SWP Research Papers and SWP Comments they are not reviewed by the Institute.

RESEARCH DIVISION GLOBAL ISSUES | WP NO. 03, DECEMBER 2025

Mapping African Migration

Insights from UN DESA Data on Patterns, Trends, and Misconceptions

Nadine Biehler/ Emma Landmesser/ Rebecca Majewski

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Analysis of Migration Data with a Focus on Africa	1
1.2. Methodological Considerations	2
2. Migration in (and from) Africa	7
2.1. African Migration in a Global Context: Only a Small Piece of the Pie	7
2.2. Key Trends of African Migration	11
2.2.1. Intracontinental movements exceed migration beyond Africa	11
2.2.2. Migration from Africa is growing, albeit at a slower rate	13
2.2.3. Migration to Africa remains low	15
2.3. Trends of Forced Displacement in Africa and Beyond	16
2.4. Where Do African Migrants Come From and Where Do They Go?	22
2.5. Regional Overview	26
2.6. Migration Corridors	28
2.7. Remittances and Their Significance for Development	31
3. Conclusion	34

List of Abbreviations

DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross domestic product
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
LDC	Least developed country
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODA	Official development assistance
PDD	Platform on Disaster Displacement
REC	Regional economic community
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and De- velopment
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refu- gees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

1. Introduction

1.1. Analysis of Migration Data with a Focus on Africa

There is a host of clichés about migration from Africa prevalent in today’s policy debates and public opinion in the Western world. The main assumptions are that African migrants aim for OECD countries, primarily those in Europe; that African migration takes place via dangerous and irregular sea routes; and that African migration and forced displacement are essentially one and the same thing.

However, analyses of migration data have consistently shown that these assumptions are overly simplistic and, at least partly incorrect.¹ The publication of updated global migration estimates by UN DESA in 2024² affords the opportunity to examine comparable global migration data with a particular focus on Africa. These figures are published regularly and are usually analysed by various organisations, think tanks, and policymakers. The best-known analysis is to be found in the biannual IOM World Migration Report.³ As the forthcoming edition is not due until 2026, this working paper seeks to address this gap by analysing the latest version of

the UN DESA International Migrant Stock dataset, supplemented by additional data sources on forced and internal displacement as well as remittances. Its aim is to provide interpretations and explanations, while challenging prevailing narratives and misconceptions about migration from Africa: Although the proportion of migrants leaving the continent has slowly increased, for example, the analysis of UN DESA data shows that most African migrants stay within Africa. In an effort to counter the overemphasis on irregular migration from Africa in European debates and related policymaking, this paper shifts the focus to migration on the African continent itself. In doing so, it provides a foundation for policy debates and approaches that recognise the development potential of migration for Africa – as exemplified by the African Union’s plans for continental free movement – without neglecting the issue of forced displacement and the risks, dangers, and human suffering that accompany it.

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice and the welfare of the African migrant*, Addis Ababa 2024.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division, *International Migrant Stock 2024*, dataset, 2024.

³ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2024*, Geneva 2024.

1.2. Methodological Considerations

The migration estimates produced by UN DESA remain the leading reference point for quantitatively assessing international migration trends and patterns, despite both the United Nations itself and the expert literature in general having repeatedly pointed to significant data gaps and challenges.⁴ As the most geographically comprehensive and harmonised data source on international migration, UN DESA's regularly published International Migrant Stock dataset is indispensable for comparative research and policy development, even if national or regional sources are sometimes more detailed.

According to the statistical definition used by UN DESA, an **international migrant** is a person who has crossed an international border and lived outside their country of origin for at least 12 months.⁵ The primary indicator for determining a person's country of origin is their country of birth. However, in countries where data on the foreign-born population are unavailable (around 20 per cent of countries globally), citizenship is used as a proxy. This applies to 14 (24 per cent) of the 58 African countries and territories included in the UN DESA dataset (see Figure 1 and Annex 1).⁶ Relying on citizenship rather than country of birth introduces distortions in the data, particularly for countries where citizenship is conferred mainly by *ius sanguinis* rather than *ius soli*. In such cases, people who have never migrated may nonetheless be

classified as migrants. For example, a child born in Morocco to Senegalese parents does not acquire Moroccan nationality under that country's domestic law and would be counted as a migrant in UN DESA data for Morocco, which rely on citizenship figures. This inflates the size of the migrant population in countries where nationality law is based primarily on descent.

Conversely, individuals who are living in a country other than the one in which they were born and have acquired citizenship of their country of residence are excluded from migrant stock data when citizenship figures are used to determine migrant status.⁷ This can lead to an underestimation of a country's foreign-born population and may erase the migration experience of naturalised persons from the data, making it more difficult to gain insights into long-term integration processes or second-generation dynamics. In particular, countries with high naturalisation rates will appear to have smaller migrant stocks than those with more restrictive citizenship regimes.

The statistical practices outlined above illustrate how reliance on citizenship data reduces **cross-country comparability**. Thus, migrant stock figures partly reflect differences in nationality laws and naturalisation processes rather than actual migration patterns.

⁴ See, e.g., Ahmad W. Ahmad-Yar and Tuba Bircan, "Anatomy of a Misfit: International Migration Statistics", in *Sustainability*, 13 (2021) 7; UN Statistical Commission, *Migration Statistics: Report of the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2025/10), New York, March 2025, p. 2.

⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *International Migrant Stock 2024: Key facts and figures*, New York, 2024, p. 1.

⁶ The dataset comprises the 54 African UN member states, Western Sahara, and the non-

sovereign or special territories of Mayotte, Réunion, and Saint Helena. The British Indian Ocean Territory and the French Southern Territories, which are classified as part of Africa by the UN Statistics Division's M49 standard country or area codes for statistical use, are not included in the dataset.

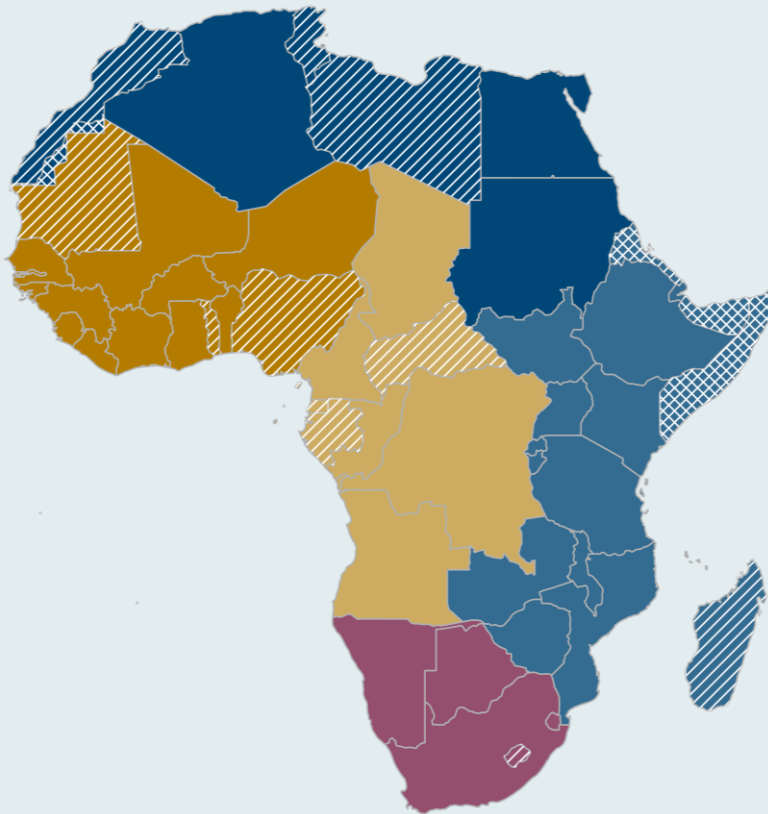
⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *International Migrant Stock 2020: Methodology Report* (POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2020), New York, 2020, p. 4.

Figure 1

UN DESA migrant stock data: geographical coverage and data sources

By subregion classification and data used to determine country of origin

■ Northern Africa
 ■ Eastern Africa
 ■ Western Africa
 ■ Middle Africa
 ■ Southern Africa
 place of birth
 citizenship
 imputed from reference country



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*. The map is provided for purposes of illustration. It does not represent support for any claims asserted under international law. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

Further, it is important to note that UN DESA’s definition of migranhood differs from the broader conceptual frameworks used in some national statistical systems that extend beyond individuals who have migrated. The German concepts of *Migrationshintergrund* (migration background) and the more recently introduced *Einwanderungsgeschichte* (immigration history), for example, capture not only

immigrants themselves but also their descendants.

While *Migrationshintergrund* covers all persons who either did not possess German citizenship at birth or do not have at least one parent who did, the term *Einwanderungsgeschichte* applies only to those persons who themselves have immigrated or whose parents have immigrated –that is, subsequent generations are excluded.⁸

⁸ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2023*, Berlin, January 2025, p. 210.

The UN DESA data presented here are **stock data**,⁹ as opposed to flow data. That is, they provide a snapshot of where people are living at a specific point in time rather than capturing movements over a given period. This distinction is important when analysing migration data. Stock data tell us how many migrants are living in a country, but they do not tell us when they moved, why they moved, or how many moved during a given year. For example, when we say that there were a given number of international migrants in Africa in a given year, the number reflects all those persons living in an African country who were born in a different country or held citizenship of a different country in that year. It does not indicate how many people arrived in Africa in 2024, how many left, or how long migrants have lived there. While comparing stock data from one year to another can show whether the *total* migrant population has grown or declined, it cannot reveal the underlying migration dynamics. Changes in stock data may reflect new arrivals, departures, naturalisations, births to migrant parents, or shifts in data collection. In other words, stock data show where migrants are but do not provide information about the migration processes that brought them there. They describe the *outcome* of past movements, not the flows themselves.

By contrast, data on international **migration flows** capture movements from one country to another over a specific period. For example, it records how many people immigrated to or emigrated from African countries in 2024, thereby contributing to changes in the continent's overall

migrant population. Compared with data on stock, those on migration movements remain much more limited in scope, coverage, and cross-country comparability. UN DESA's migration flow dataset, for example, covers only 45 countries, none of which is African, and has not been updated since 2015.¹⁰

Several factors explain this gap. Many countries record only entries (in-flows) and thus do not include departures (outflows), while some rely on administrative proxies, such as residence permits, rather than direct migration records. Distinguishing between migration and short-term travel (e.g., tourism or business) is difficult, too. Furthermore, collecting flow data requires advanced infrastructure, resources, and ICT systems, which many developing countries lack. In regions with porous or remote borders, such as island states or areas with informal cross-border labour mobility, accurate tracking is even more challenging.¹¹ For these reasons, researchers are increasingly turning to social-media data to generate alternative estimates of migration flows.¹²

Given these different data types, it is important to understand what each entails and to use terminology consistently. For example, the figure of **29.2 million international migrants in Africa** in 2024¹³ includes both the number of people living in an African country who were born in, or have citizenship of, a country outside the continent ("migrants to Africa") and the number of people born in, or holding the citizenship of, one African country who now reside in another African country

⁹ UN DESA reports migration data as mid-year stock figures. This is important to keep in mind when comparing them with sources that use end-of-year data, such as UNHCR statistics on refugees and asylum seekers. For readability, we refer to UN DESA data simply by "year"; and in the case of all other sources, we explicitly state the relevant timeframe (e.g., "at the end of...").

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *International Migration Flows*, dataset, 2015.

¹¹ IOM, *World Migration Report 2024*, Geneva 2024, p. 28f.

¹² See, e.g., Guanghua Chi et al., "Measuring Global Migration Flows Using Online Data", in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 122 (2025) 18, e2409418122.

¹³ UN DESA, *International Migrant Stock 2024*.

(“migrants within Africa”).¹⁴ Conversely, the statement that there were approximately **45.8 million African international migrants** in 2024¹⁵ refers both to African migrants within Africa and to African-born persons or citizens of an African country who have taken up residence outside the continent (“migrants from Africa”).

UN DESA data **do not shed light on the individual drivers of migration or the legal migration status of individuals.**

Specifically, the statistics report aggregate numbers for international migrants and do not disaggregate between different categories of people on the move. As a result, the broad heading of “international migrants” includes diverse groups whose circumstances are very different – for example, labour migrants are grouped together with refugees and asylum seekers¹⁶ who have been forced to flee across international borders because of persecution, conflict, or violence (see Chapter 2.3 for more information). In addition, UN DESA data neither include domestic migration nor cover internally displaced persons (IDPs), that is, those who have been forced to flee their homes but have not crossed an international border.¹⁷ This omission is significant, as IDPs constitute the largest group of forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including in Africa (see Chapter 2.3 for more information).

Data on international migrants by country or area, as provided by UN DESA,

stem primarily from population censuses, supplemented by population registers and national surveys. The dataset’s heavy reliance on census data is problematic, as the reliability of such data varies considerably, depending, among other factors, on the level of funding or institutional support that national statistics offices receive and on the legal requirements governing data collection.¹⁸ Moreover, the variables collected, the definitions applied, and the level of detail recorded differ markedly across countries, further limiting comparability. These inconsistencies impair cross-country analyses and can distort regional or global estimates, especially when data quality is weak. As Figure 1 shows, there are only three African countries that do not provide any migration data whatsoever to UN DESA; as in the 2020 edition of the dataset, they are Eritrea, Somalia, and Western Sahara.¹⁹ For these countries, UN DESA produces model-based estimates derived from reference countries that have comparable statistical properties and/or are located in geographical proximity: While the estimates for Eritrea are modelled based on data from Ethiopia and Sudan and those for Western Sahara on Mauritania and Senegal, the estimates for Somalia are imputed using the geographically more distant Nigeria as a reference country. The exact method and reasoning behind this choice are not explained in the methodology report.²⁰

¹⁴ Note that UN DESA country-level data are not fully consistent with regional or continental aggregates. The latter two may include migrants with unspecified or incomplete information on country of origin that cannot be allocated in bilateral data. This explains why the figures for ‘migrants within Africa’ and ‘migrants to Africa’ in Figure 6 do not add up to the total of 29.2 million migrants residing in Africa.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For exceptions and details with regard to African countries, see Annex 1.

¹⁷ IDP statistics are compiled separately by UNHCR, IOM, and IDMC under the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998).

¹⁸ Kerilyn Schewel and Alix Debray, “Global Trends in South–South Migration”, in Heaven Crawley and Joseph K. Teye (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of South-South migration and inequality*, Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 153–181 (156); Ahmad W. Ahmad Yar and Tuba Bircan, “Challenges with International Migration Data: An Analysis of the Experience of National Statistical Institutions”, in *International Migration Review*, 59 (2025) 3, pp. 1332–1366.

¹⁹ Beyond Africa, the only countries lacking migration data are Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Holy See.

²⁰ See UN DESA, *Methodology Report*, p. 6.

Data availability is much more limited in the case of more recent sources, however. In the latest edition of the UN DESA dataset, for example, 16 per cent of Sub-Saharan countries lack any data source on international migrant stocks after 2010. Disaggregated data are even scarcer: 35 per cent of Sub-Saharan countries do not report migrant stock figures by sex and 24 per cent do not provide data disaggregated by country or area of origin.²¹ The same UN DESA dataset includes updated estimates for 60 countries for which new census or population register data were available, among them five African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Uganda).²² For countries without newly released data, the figures in the 2024 dataset were calculated by taking the estimates from 2020 and projecting (“extrapolating”) them forward to 2024 using demographic trends and modelling techniques.²³

Estimation methods are also employed for other purposes, such as compensating for gaps in the temporal coverage of national data sources or constructing demographic breakdowns, such as by sex²⁴ and age, when countries report only aggregate totals or provide incomplete information.

Moreover, UN DESA data on Africa suffer from further gaps that affect all countries in the dataset, such as the lack of reliable estimates on undocumented migrants.²⁵ Some additional data gaps are highlighted in reports on African migration and by

initiatives to improve migration data in the African context. For example, the number of missing and dead migrants is likely to be underestimated.²⁶ More broadly, a 2021–2022 IOM needs-assessment conducted within the framework of the African Migration Data Network (AMDN) analysed twelve African countries and found that in half of them, domestic population censuses were not the main source of migration statistics. Instead, data were largely drawn from surveys, which often suffered from insufficient sample sizes, while administrative data sources were underutilised. Overall, data on emigration were less frequently available than data on immigration. In addition, demographic and socioeconomic data on migrants are very limited, constraining evidence-based policymaking on migrants’ contributions and access to basic services.²⁷

Despite the gaps in the migration data provided by UN DESA and the challenges associated with the existing data, the limitations do not diminish the overall value of the UN DESA migrant stock figures. Rather, they underscore the need for careful and informed interpretation and for the precise use of terminology, especially when drawing policy conclusions from the data provided. As long as its blind spots are properly acknowledged and addressed through the use of complementary sources and further research, the UN DESA dataset remains a valuable tool for understanding global and regional migration patterns.

²¹ UN DESA, *Key facts and figures*, p. 9.

²² *Id.*, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ UN DESA datasets disaggregate by sex (female/male), not by gender.

²⁵ Douglas S. Massey and Chiara Capoferro, “Measuring Undocumented Migration”, in

International Migration Review, 38 (2004)3, pp. 1075-11-02.

²⁶ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice and the welfare of the African migrant*, Addis Ababa 2024, pp. 143ff.

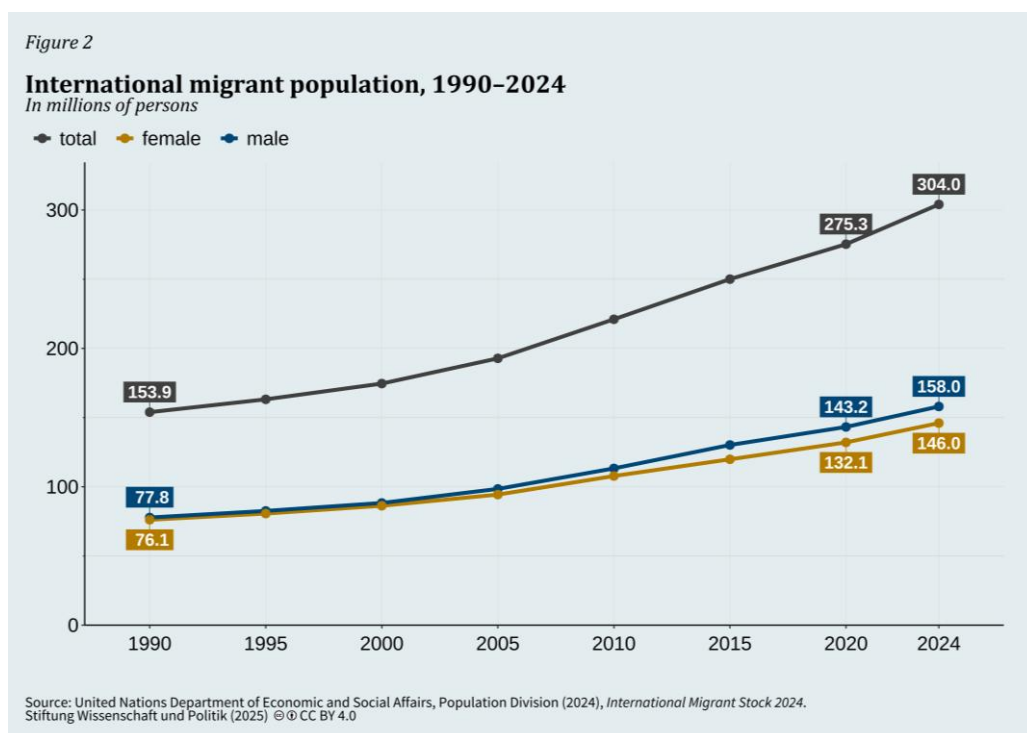
²⁷ *Id.*, pp. 40ff.

2. Migration in (and from) Africa

2.1. African Migration in a Global Context: Only a Small Piece of the Pie

Main takeaways

- **African migration** accounts for only a **small share of global migration**: Africans make up about 15 per cent of the world's migrant population.
- Most migration is voluntary: in 2024, **17 per cent of all international migration** was **driven by conflict or displacement** and only a small fraction of those migrants are from Africa.
- **Official UN statistics** capture **only long-term international migration** and do not reflect other African mobility patterns, such as seasonal labour, pastoral movements, and kinship-based mobility.

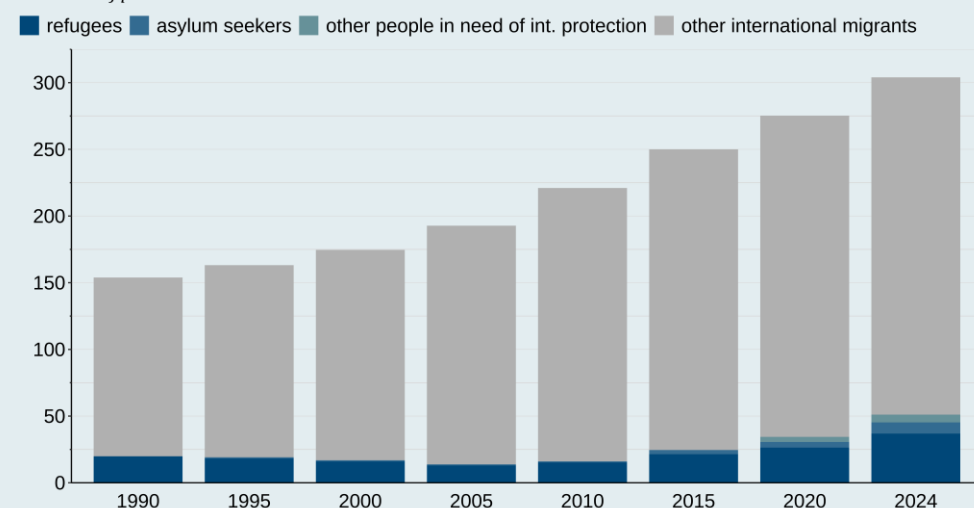


The number of international migrants worldwide has grown continuously since 1990.²⁸ Recent estimates suggest that there were around 304 million international migrants²⁹ in 2024 (see Figure 2), which is an increase of 10.4 per cent compared with 2020, when the total stood at 275.3 million. More than half of this growth – or, more precisely, 58.1 per cent (28.7 million people) – is attributable to forced displacement across borders. These involuntary movements accounted for almost 17.0 per cent of all international migrants in 2024,

equivalent to 51.1 million forcibly displaced persons³⁰ or one in six international migrants.³¹ It is important to note that while this figure is concerning, the vast majority of people crossing borders are not fleeing conflict and violence (see Figure 3). Furthermore, only around one in 25 migrants worldwide is a displaced person from Africa. However, a different picture emerges from forced displacement within borders (for more information see Chapter 2.3).

Figure 3

International migrant population by protection status, 1990–2024 In millions of persons



Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*; UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*.
Note: Also includes Palestine refugees under the mandate of UNRWA.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

²⁸ Although the UN DESA collection of data on international migration predates 1990, this report limits its analysis to the timeframe used in the 2024 UN DESA International Migrant Stock dataset.

²⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all reported numbers are based on own calculations using UN DESA data and the programming software R.

³⁰ Own calculations based on UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*. Note that aggregates presented here may at times deviate from those reported elsewhere, as some publications such as the UNHCR Global Trends Report sum already rounded values, whereas our totals are calculated using exact numbers. The category “other people in need of international protection” was first

introduced in 2022 reporting. It includes people who are outside their country of origin – typically because they have been forcibly displaced across international borders – and who have not been reported under other categories (asylum seekers, refugees, people in refugee-like situations) but who likely need international protection. Venezuelans previously designated as “Venezuelans displaced abroad” belong to this new category. UNHCR includes this group in its global forced displacement total; see <<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/methodology>>.

³¹ Own calculations based on UN DESA, *International Migrant Stock* and UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*.

Parallel to the global increase in migration, the number of migrants from Africa rose from 40 million in 2020 to 45.8 million in 2024 – a 14.5 per cent increase over four years (see Figure 4).

Examining the data disaggregated by sex reveals a consistent disparity between female and male migrants worldwide, including those on the African continent, where more men than women have migrated. In Africa, for example, the number of male migrants exceeded that of female migrants by 20.2 per cent in 2024. While African women generally migrate less often than men, the numbers can vary significantly depending on factors such as the destination and region of migration and the reason for migration. The difference between the number of female and male migrants is less pronounced in the case of

migration within the continent, as compared with migration beyond Africa (see Figure 8). In 2024, intra-African male migrants outnumbered female ones by 9.1 percent, whereas this gender gap nearly quadrupled – to 35.4 per cent – for African migrants residing outside the continent.

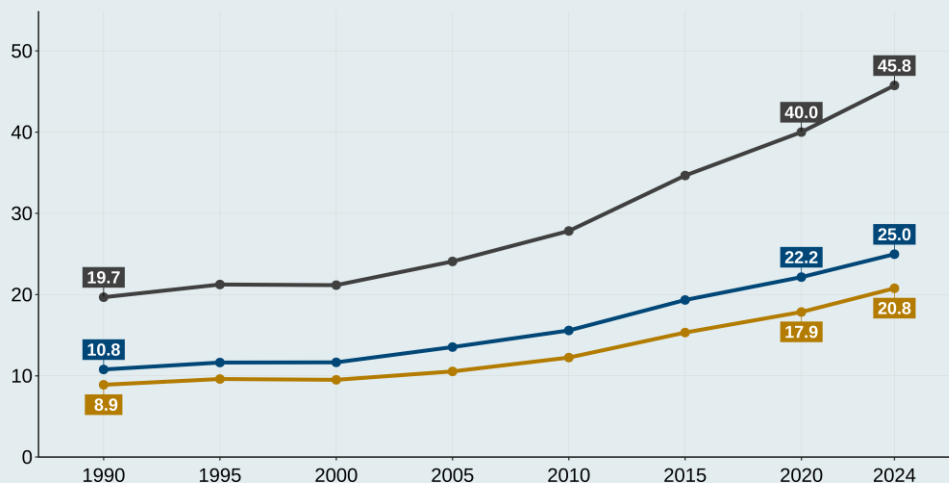
Despite the increase in the absolute number of migrants, the percentage of migrants in the total world population has barely grown over the past 35 years (see Figure 5). In 2024, around 3.7 per cent of the global population (or one in 27 people³² in the world) were migrants; that is just 0.8 per cent higher than in 1990 (2.9 per cent). Thus, it continues to be the case that the vast majority of people do not migrate across borders; rather, they remain in their country of origin.

Figure 4

African migrant population, 1990–2024

In millions of persons

— total — female — male

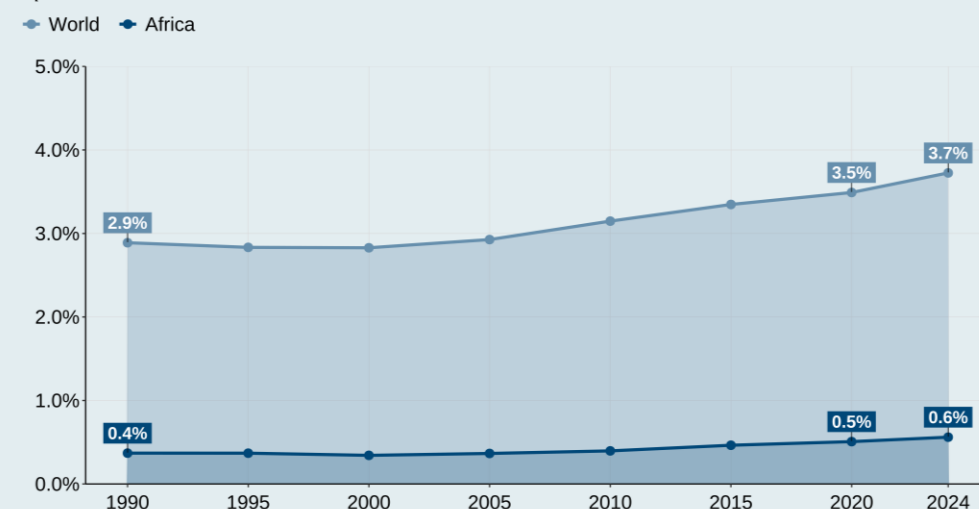


Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
Note: 'African migrants' refers to international migrants with an African country of birth or citizenship, both within Africa and outside the continent.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

³² International Organization for Migration (IOM), *International Migration Population (Stocks)*, 2025.

Figure 5

International and African migrants as a share of the world's population, 1990–2024 In percent



Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *World Population Prospects 2024*.
Note: 'African migrants' refers to international migrants with an African country of birth or citizenship, both within Africa and outside the continent.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

In the same year, about 3 per cent of the African population were international migrants. Africans accounted for around 15 per cent of international migrants in 2024, compared with 40 per cent from Asia and 20 per cent from Europe. In other words, the majority of international migrants are not from Africa. This runs counter to the perception of mass migration from Africa and policies based on the fear of an “African exodus”. Despite an increase in forced displacement, the slow growth of the number of African migrants suggests the situation is not about to change in the near future.

Nevertheless, it should be noted

that UN DESA statistics describe migration only in accordance with official global definitions. These definitions do not apply to all types of African migration. For example, pastoralism, transnational kinship networks, seasonal labour migration, and historical trade routes account for short-term (temporary), local and regional migration, but are not taken into account. Thus, the dataset does not reflect the full diversity of African migration patterns or all important contextual and historical factors, such as the impact of colonial borders having overridden the then existing ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries.³³

³³ Adewale R. Aregbeshola and Ibrahim A. Ad-ekunle, “Demystifying colonialism and

migration: An African perspective”, in *Research in Globalization*, 9 (2024), p. 100262, p. 3.

2.2. Key Trends of African Migration

2.2.1. Intracontinental movements exceed migration beyond Africa

Main takeaways:

- The **majority of African migrants live within Africa** (2024: 25.1 million compared with 20.7 million outside Africa), perpetuating a long-term trend of predominantly intracontinental mobility.
- **Regional integration**, e.g., into regional economic communities (RECs), and **visa liberalisation**, for example, in the Gambia, Benin, and Rwanda, **support free movement**.
- **African Migration to other continents remains difficult and costly** owing to strict visa regimes, high visa rejection rates (up to 45 per cent for Schengen visa applications), and low passport power.

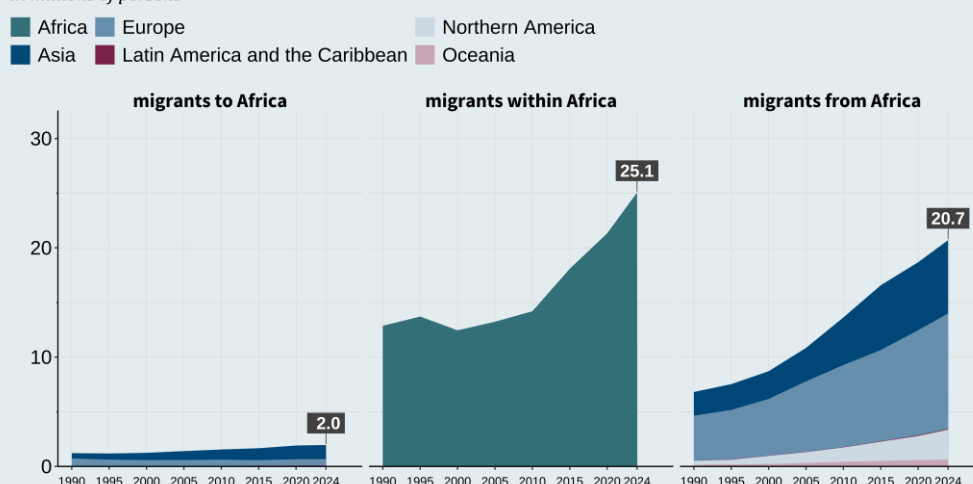
Contrary to common perceptions in the Global North, the majority of African migrants remain on the continent. In 2024, for example, the number of African migrants within the continent was 17.4 per cent higher (25.1 million in total) than the number of Africans leaving the continent for non-African countries (20.7 million). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 64 per cent of migrants

born there were living in a different part of the region in 2024.³⁴ This trend – whereby most African migration takes place within the continent – is not new but apparently has become more pronounced (see Figure 6): while the number of migrants both from and within Africa has grown steadily, intra-African migration has recorded a much steeper growth. By contrast, non-African

Figure 6

International migrants to, within, and from Africa, 1990–2024

In millions of persons



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.

Illustration adapted from IOM (2024), *World Migration Report 2024*, with updated data.

Note: 'Migrants to Africa' refers to migrants residing in Africa who were born in, or hold citizenship of, another world region (e.g., Europe or Asia). 'Migrants within Africa' refers to migrants born in, or holding citizenship of, an African country who reside outside their country of origin but remain within the region. 'Migrants from Africa' refers to people born in, or holding citizenship of, an African country who reside outside the region (e.g., in Europe or Northern America).

Adaptation: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025)

³⁴ UN DESA, *Key facts and figures*, p. 4.

migration to African countries has remained at a very low level. Most migration to the continent originates from Asia and Europe.

The fact that intracontinental movements exceed migration beyond Africa is likely due to several factors. First, visa openness – which is often the first step towards liberalised free movement – has increased in general across the African continent.³⁵ Countries in Western and Eastern Africa, such as the Gambia, Benin, and Rwanda, are at the forefront of introducing liberalised visa policies, including visa-free entry.³⁶ Second, many African regional economic communities (RECs) have agreed on far-reaching measures to allow for the free movement of people, thereby challenging arbitrary colonial borders.³⁷ ECOWAS has some of the most liberal migration governance on the continent, as it grants visa-free travel to nationals of other member states and allows their citizens to travel, reside, and work freely within the region. However, conflicts continue to threaten the progress of free movement in the region; and the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS in January 2025 dealt a further blow to such progress.³⁸ Third, legal barriers to migration beyond the continent remain high for most Africans, while

irregular migration is usually expensive.³⁹ African citizens face many restrictions and discriminatory policies when applying for visas abroad, especially in Europe.⁴⁰ In 2022, the Schengen visa application rejection rate for applicants from Africa was almost 13 per cent higher than the global average of 17.5 percent. With low passport power and higher rejection rates, seven of the 10 countries with the highest Schengen visa rejection rates in 2022 were African; they included Algeria (45.8 per cent), Guinea-Bissau (45.2 per cent), Nigeria (45.1 per cent), Ghana (43.6 per cent), and Senegal (41.6 per cent).⁴¹

Moreover, the increase in forced displacement on the continent owing to both conflicts and climate change is becoming an increasingly relevant factor (see Chapter 2.3 for further information). By September 2025, for example, 25.1 million refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs had been displaced by conflicts in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mozambique, South Sudan, and Sudan, as well as climate-related events in Eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region.⁴²

³⁵ African Development Bank Group, *Africa Visa Openness Report 2024*, Côte d'Ivoire, 2024.

³⁶ Id., p. 16.

³⁷ Eva Dick and Benjamin Schraven, *Towards a borderless Africa? Regional organisations and free movement of persons in West and North-East Africa*, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), 2019.

³⁸ Abraham E. Mink, *On Shifting Sands in Africa's Sahel Region: Tensions between Security and Free Movement*, Migration Policy Institute, 2025.

³⁹ Frontex, *After the money: Prices for people smuggling on Central and Western Mediterranean routes*, 2020.

⁴⁰ Franziska Zanker, *Eine Frage von Standardregelungen? Koloniale Kontinuitäten der afro-europäischen Visaregelungen und Mobilitätspartnerschaften*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2025.

⁴¹ Henley & Partners, *Rejected: The Impact of Visa Bias on Africa-Europe Relations*, 2022.

⁴² UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), *East and Horn of Africa and the Lakes*, 2025.

2.2.2. Migration from Africa is growing, albeit at a slower rate

Main takeaways:

- **Migration from Africa is increasing slowly:** in 2024, there were 20.7 million Africans living outside the continent – 1 million more than in 2020.
- **Historical, cultural, and social ties shape migration patterns** within and from Africa; they include Northern African migration to France and other former colonial powers.
- **Migration beyond Africa remains limited** and is dominated by regular movements and male migrants, with similar but lower trends for female migrants.

The number of Africans migrating from the continent is growing, too, albeit less steeply. In 2024, 20.7 million African migrants were living outside the continent, 1 million more than in 2020 (19.7 million). The majority of these migrants reside in Europe (10.6 million) and Asia (6.7 million), followed by North America (2.7 million), Oceania (0.6 million), and Latin America and the Caribbean (0.06 million). Germany is of little relevance as a destination country for African migrants compared with other former colonial powers such as

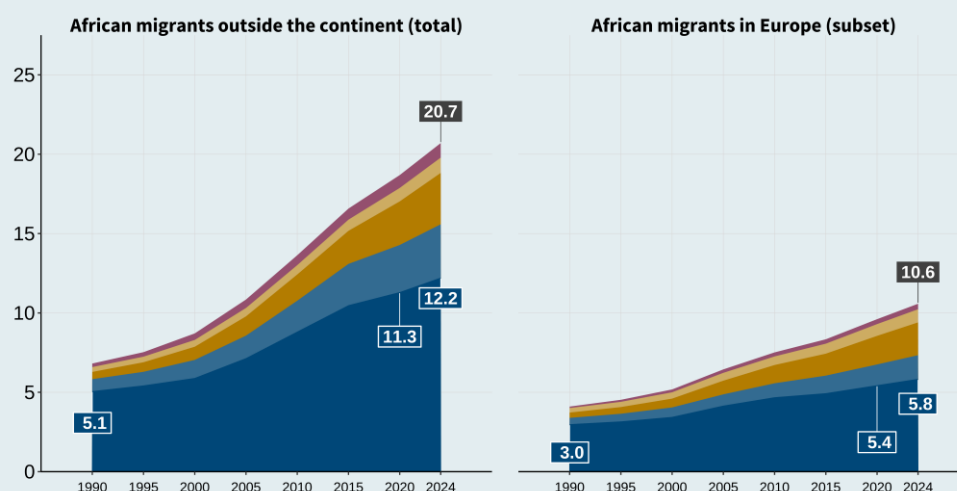
France, Belgium, and the UK. At the end of 2024, there were 0.39 million African nationals holding a temporary residence permit in Germany. The vast majority of those African nationals were granted residence permits for humanitarian (40.1 per cent) and family (30.3 per cent) reasons. At the same time, 12.2 per cent of the permits were for educational purposes and 10 per cent for employment purposes, while 6.5 per cent were granted for special reasons, and national visa (e.g., for the purpose of entering Germany and applying for a resi-

Figure 7

African migrants outside the continent and in Europe, 1990–2024

In millions of persons, by subregion of origin

■ Northern Africa ■ Eastern Africa ■ Western Africa ■ Middle Africa ■ Southern Africa



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

dence permit).⁴³

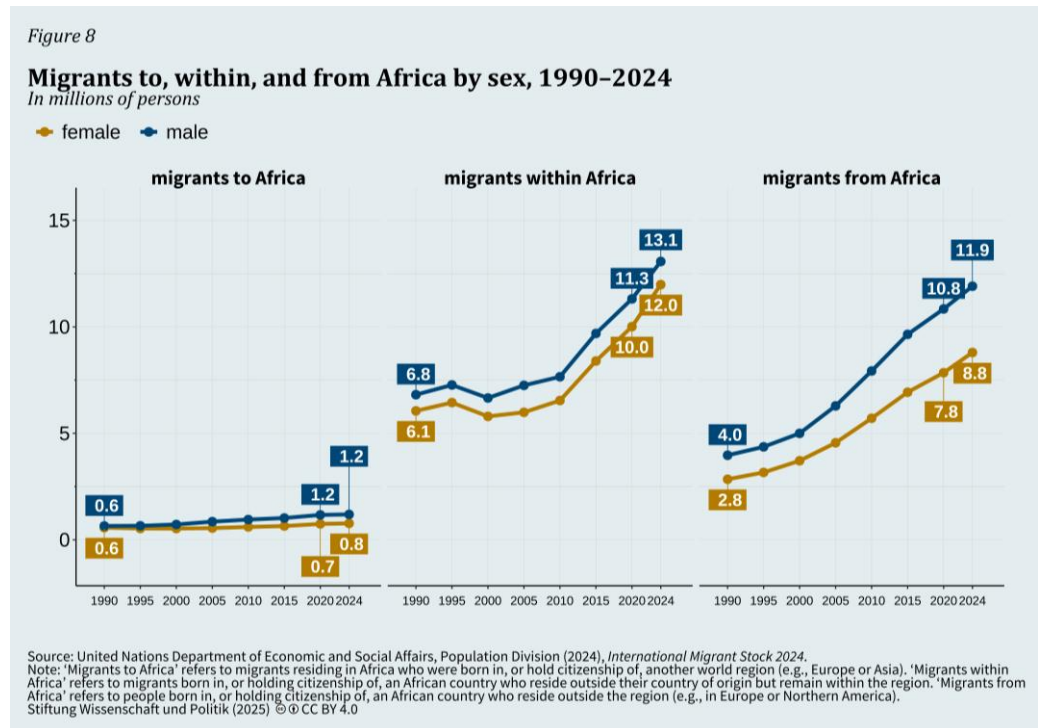
It is also important to consider regional and sub-regional differences. For example, around 55 per cent of African migrants residing in European countries are from Northern Africa (5.8 million – see Figure 7), as are the majority of African migrants living in Asia and around the globe. By contrast, the majority of Africans in North America are from Eastern Africa (0.8 million).

Sex-disaggregated data show that the majority African migrants, both within and from the continent, are male (Figure 8). But trends over time for African female migrants were similar to those for male migrants. The difference in the number of male and female migrants is less pronounced for migration within the continent than for migration from the continent. This may be because the lack of regular path-

ways to other continents means that migration is sometimes channelled into irregular routes, which carry a higher risk of abuse, injury, and death – dangers that are more socially accepted among men.

Various factors influence migration to non-African countries, including economic, historical, cultural, and geographical ones. Social networks (e.g., a large diaspora community) and a shared political history (such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia have with France) can further enhance migratory movements (see Chapter 2.6 for more details on migration corridors).⁴⁴

According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey on migration, in 2024 almost half of the respondents (47 per cent) in a total of 24 African countries said they had “considered” living in another country, including 27 per cent who said they had given migration “a lot” of thought.⁴⁵



⁴³ Own calculations based on Destatis, Ausländer: Deutschland, Stichtag, Geschlecht, Aufenthaltstitel/Ausgewählte Aufenthaltstitel, Ländergruppierungen/Staatsangehörigkeit, 2024.

⁴⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice*

and the welfare of the African migrant, Addis Ababa 2024, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Afrobarometer, *International Migrants Day: Almost half of Africans have considered emigrating, Afrobarometer survey shows*, 15 December 2024.

But surveys that distinguish between intentions, plans, and preparations suggest that interest in migrating or the desire to do so very often does not translate into concrete plans and even more rarely into actual

migration preparation.⁴⁶ This is regularly reflected in surveys, which reveal significant differences between migration intentions and preparations to leave.⁴⁷

2.2.3. Migration to Africa remains low

Main takeaways:

- Owing to limited economic opportunities and instability, overall **migration to the African continent continues to be low** and is growing only very slowly

The number of people migrating to Africa remains low, with most migration to the continent stemming from Asia and Europe. Growth has been very slow over the past 35 years and is unlikely to accelerate. Developing countries usually have lower wages, limited public services and infrastructure, and (in some cases) higher levels of insecurity and political violence, which means

these countries offer fewer opportunities and are thus less attractive destinations for migrants.

In general, African countries record more emigrants than immigrants.⁴⁸ Most people migrating to Africa are from Asia. In 2024, 1.29 million Asian migrants were living in Africa, of whom 0.96 million had migrated from Western Asia.

⁴⁶ Silvia Migali/ Marco Scipioni, *A Global Analysis of Intentions to Migrate*, European Commission, 2018.

⁴⁷ Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny/ Camilla Rocca, *'Updating' the Narrative about African Migration*, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020.

⁴⁸ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice and the welfare of the African migrant*, Addis Ababa 2024, p. 30.

2.3. Trends of Forced Displacement in Africa and Beyond

Main takeaways:

- **Forced displacement is rapidly increasing** – both globally and in Africa – with 123.2 million refugees and IDPs displaced worldwide as of the end of 2024.
- **Most African refugees remain on the continent:** in 2024, almost 87 per cent of African refugees and asylum seekers stayed on the continent (10.6 million) and just 13 per cent sought protection outside Africa (1.6 million).
- A few countries are disproportionately affected by crises: together, **Sudan and the DRC** account for almost **80 per cent of Africa's IDPs**.

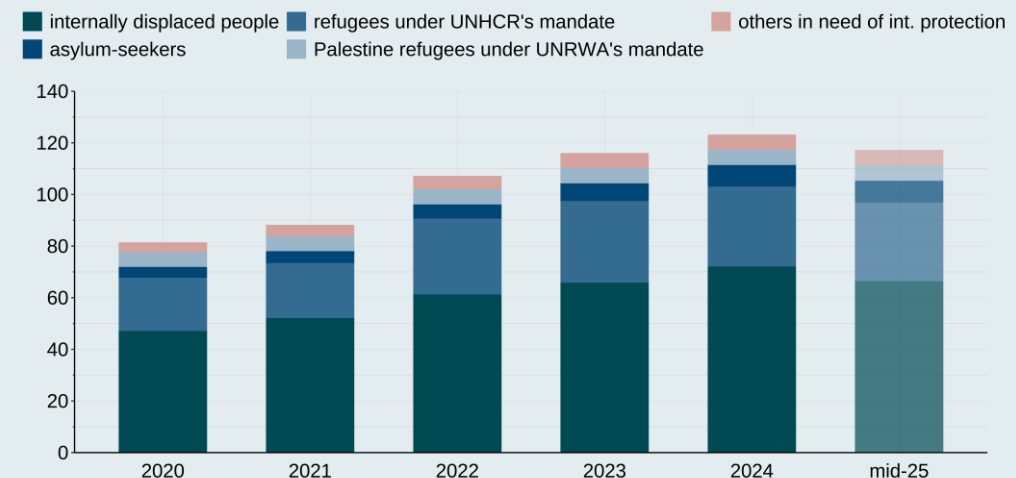
While the number of global labour migrants has grown slowly, albeit steadily over the past few centuries, rising violence and conflicts and the deteriorating effects of climate change are forcing more and more

people to leave their homes. Global displacement has almost doubled over the last decade. According to UNHCR figures,⁴⁹ by the end of 2024 approximately 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly

Figure 9

Forcibly displaced people worldwide, 2020–mid-2025

In millions of persons



Sources: UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*; UNHCR (2025), *Mid-Year Trends 2025*. Illustration adapted from UNHCR (2025), *Mid-Year Trends 2025*.
 Note: Data for 2025 as of June 2025; all other years show end-of-year figures. IDP figures for 2023 to mid-2025 exclude internally displaced refugees under UNRWA's mandate. They are only counted once, under the figure for 'Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate'; see footnote to interactive visualisation at <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trend>.
 Adaptation: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025)

⁴⁹ UNHCR figures encompass refugees under the UNHCR's mandate, Palestine refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's (UNRWA), asylum seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs), and others in need of international protection "as a result of persecution, conflict, violence,

human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order". UNHCR statistics are based on data reported by governments, non-governmental organisations, and other UN agencies. Similar to the data provided by DESA, UNHCR statistics generally refer to stock data, as opposed to flow data.

displaced – an increase of 6 per cent, or 7 million people, compared with the end of 2023.⁵⁰ IDPs continue to constitute the majority (60 per cent) of those people around the world forced to flee, with the number having increased significantly over the past years (see Figure 9). In 2024, there were around 83.4 million IDPs worldwide, which is more than twice the number in 2014 (40.5 million).⁵¹ Of these, 73.5 million (88 per cent) have been displaced as a result of conflict and violence, and 9.8 million due to disasters.⁵² It is important to note that IDPs are not included in UN DESA statistics, as the latter cover only cross-border movements.

As mentioned previously, DESA figures do not take into account the reason for migration and thus include both voluntary migration and forced displacement (with no distinction being made between the two). Therefore, this chapter uses data collected by institutions such as UNHCR and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which are the leaders in the provision of global forced displacement data.

Interestingly, for the first time in more than a decade, as of mid-2025,

UNHCR indicated a decrease in the number of forcibly displaced persons, bringing the total to 117.3 million. This is due to the relatively high number of refugees (almost 2 million) and IDPs (nearly 5 million) returning to their countries or areas of origin in the first half of 2025.⁵³ Additionally, a larger number of displaced persons were naturalised and resettled in 2024⁵⁴ (see Figure 10).

Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the reduction in forced displacement can be sustained; much will depend on the development of major conflicts, such as those in the DRC, Sudan, and Ukraine. Furthermore, severe cuts to humanitarian funding from vital donors such as the US and other OECD countries are undermining efforts to ensure the safe and voluntary return of refugees. Those cuts also risk depriving 11.6 million displaced people of direct assistance in 2025, thereby further worsening protracted displacement situations. In 2024, UNHCR was able to assist almost one third of the 36.4 million people considered to be in such situations by providing education and healthcare or by relocating them to safe areas, among other things.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends 2024*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 6.

⁵¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement*, Geneva 2025, p. vi.

⁵² Id. Note that figures published by UNHCR, which cite 68.1 million IDPs, differ from IDMC estimates, as they are limited to conflict- and violence-induced internal displacement in contexts where UNHCR has a protection or assistance role, see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global*

Trends 2024, Copenhagen 2025, p. 5 and Annex 1.

⁵³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mid-Year Trends 2025*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 5

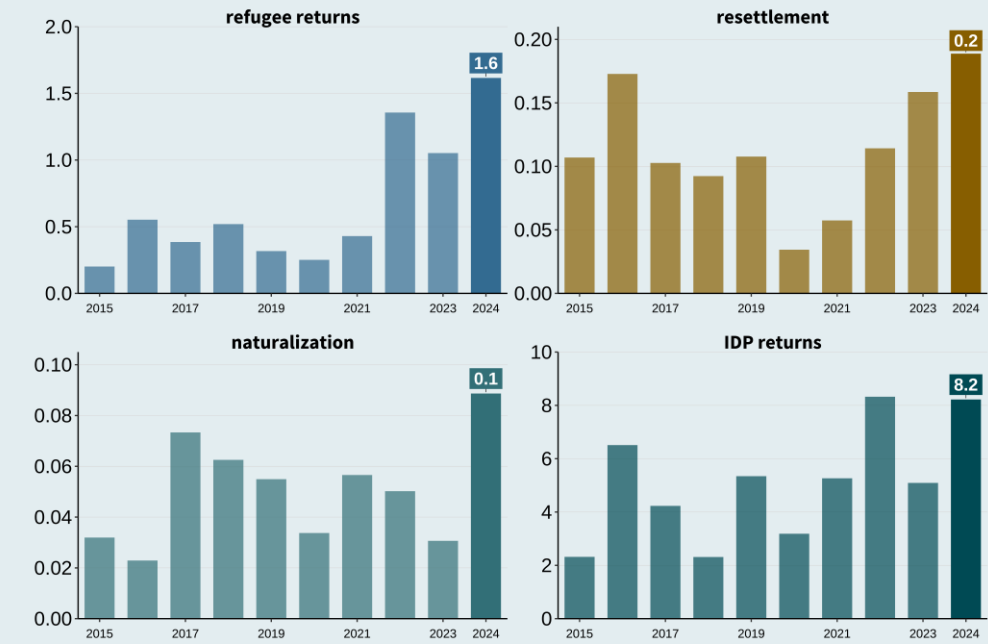
⁵⁴ After reaching a high in 2024, resettlement fell sharply in 2025 owing to the withdrawal of the US from the system and its pivot towards the resettlement of White South Africans claiming to be victims of genocide.

⁵⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *On the brink: The devastating toll of aid cuts on people forced to flee*, 18 July 2025, p. 2.

Figure 10

Returns, resettlement, and naturalization worldwide, 2015–2024

In millions of persons, free scales



UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Solutions Dataset*. Illustration adapted from UNHCR (2025), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024*, with updated data. Refugee returns: Refugees who returned to their country of origin during the reporting year. Resettlement arrivals: Refugees who arrived in their country of resettlement after departing from their former country of asylum; figures are based on government statistics and UNHCR data and include UNHCR-assisted resettlement and other sponsorship schemes. Naturalization: Refugees who acquired citizenship in their host country. Data are available for a limited number of countries only. IDP returns: Internally displaced people who returned to their areas of origin during the reporting year. Note: All figures reflect a combination of mid- and end-year data, depending on availability. Adaptation: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025)

The global trend of the growing number and needs of forcibly displaced persons is also evident on the African continent. By the end of 2024, there were 10.8 million refugees and asylum seekers in Africa (see Figure 11), 10.6 million of them Africans – an increase of around 40 per cent compared with 2020, when there were 7.7 million refugees and asylum seekers across the

continent.⁵⁶ In turn, the 12.2 million African refugees and asylum seekers worldwide account for over 30 per cent of the global refugee and asylum-seeker population (39.3 million). Almost 87 per cent of them remain in Africa.⁵⁷ With just over 2 million refugees each, South Sudan and Sudan continue to number among the main countries of origin of refugees.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Own calculations based on UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*.

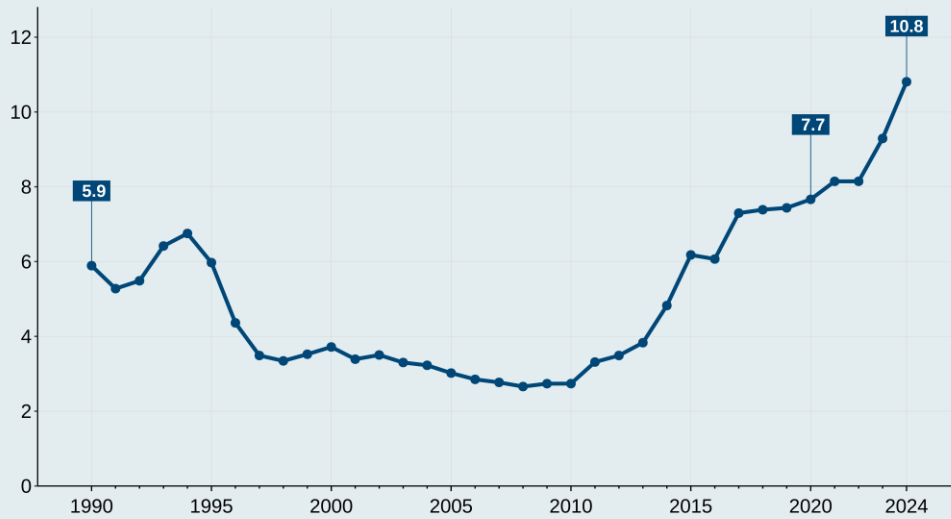
⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends 2024*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 38.

Figure 11

Refugees and asylum seekers in Africa, 1990–2024

In millions of persons



Source: UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*.
Note: Includes refugees, people in refugee-like situations, and asylum-seekers from Africa and other continents whose country of asylum is in Africa.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

As in the case of other regions of the world, the majority of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa seek protection in close proximity to their countries of origin and thus on the African continent. In 2024, for example, seven out of 10 refugees and asylum seekers from the Sahel remained within the region, relying on the support of, and solidarity from, neighbouring countries.⁵⁹ In the same year, the main African countries hosting refugees were Uganda

and Chad⁶⁰, hosting refugees from the violent conflicts in the neighbouring Great Lakes and Sahel regions. African host countries often struggle to provide protection for refugees as they face diverse problems such as conflict and poverty. Therefore, it is not surprising that several African countries are both the origin of, and destination for, refugees and asylum seekers (see Figure 12).

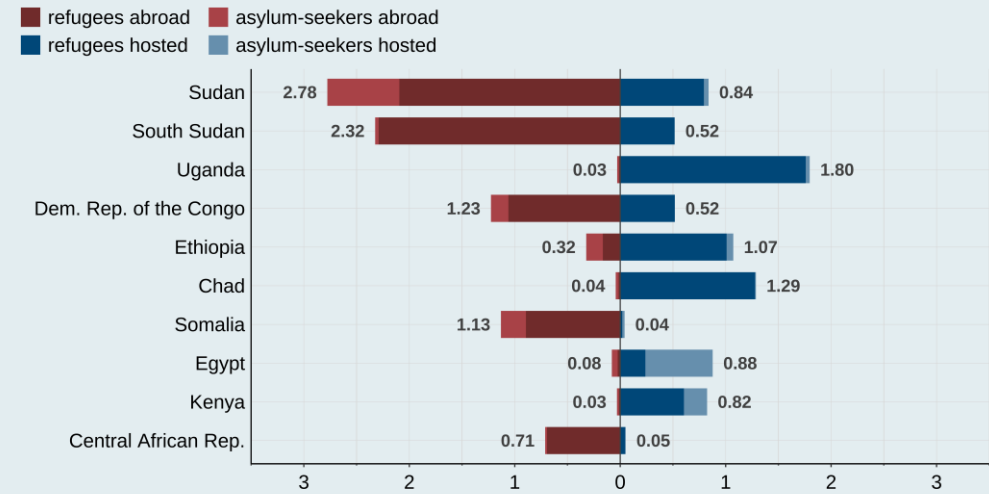
⁵⁹ Id., p. 25.

⁶⁰ Id., p. 39.

Figure 12

Top 10 African countries by total refugees and asylum-seekers, 2024

In millions of persons



Source: UNHCR (2025), *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*. Illustration adapted from IOM (2024), *World Migration Report 2024*, with updated data. Note: 'Hosted' refers to those refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries who are residing in the receiving country (right-hand side of the figure); 'abroad' refers to refugees and asylum-seekers originating from that country who are outside of their origin country. The top 10 countries are calculated by combining the figures for refugees and asylum-seekers. Adaptation: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025)

Contrary to the prevailing assumptions in current policy debates about migration from Africa to Europe, only 1.6 million – or 13 per cent of all African refugees and asylum seekers – were seeking protection outside Africa in 2024.⁶¹

Almost half (46 per cent) of all internal displacements take place within Africa: at the end of 2024, there were 33.2 million Africans⁶² forcibly displaced within

their own country as a result of conflict and violence, compared with 73.5 million IDPs worldwide.⁶³ Almost all African internal displacement occurred in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁴ In 2024, Sudan had the largest number of IDPs fleeing conflict and violence (11.56 million), followed by the DRC (6.21 million), Nigeria (3.35 million), Somalia (3.31 million), and Ethiopia (2.37 million).⁶⁵

⁶¹ Own calculations based on UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder: Forced Displacement Dataset*.

⁶² Own calculations based on IDMC, *Global Internal Displacement Database (GIDD)*.

⁶³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement*, Geneva 2025, p.vi.

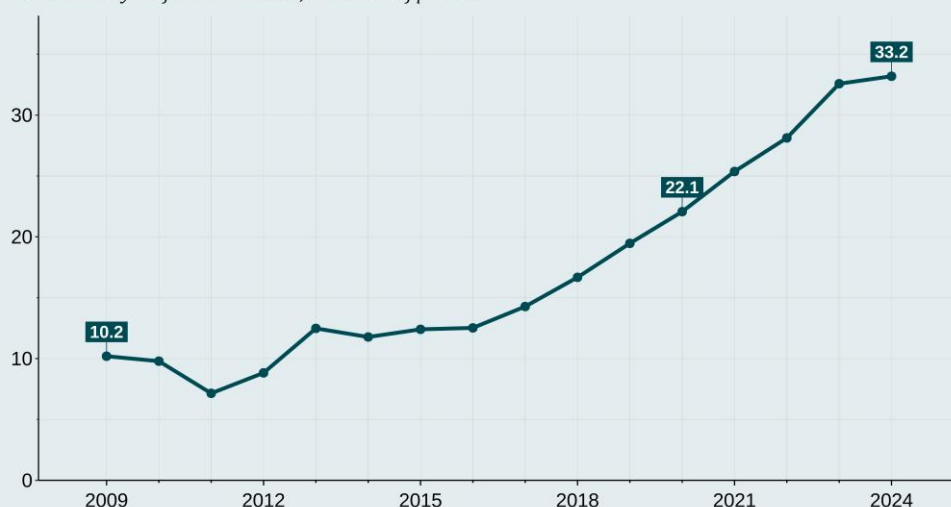
⁶⁴ IDMC data counts Sudan as being part of sub-Saharan Africa. The rest of the paper follows UN DESA's classification of geographic regions and thus, considers Sudan to be part of Northern Africa.

⁶⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement*, Geneva 2025, p. 27f.

Figure 13

Internally displaced people (IDPs) in Africa, 2009–2024

Total numbers by conflict and violence, in millions of persons



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024), *Global Internal Displacement Database (GIDD)*.
 Note: The dataset covers 27 African countries and territories (including Abyei). Figures are end-of-year stock data and represent the total number of people living in situations of internal displacement in Africa at the end of each reporting year.
 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in 2023, forcing 7.26 million Sudanese into displacement within the country as of October 2025. Additionally, 3.46 million Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers were displaced across borders as of December 1st, 2025.⁶⁶ At the same time, renewed violence in the DRC continues to dominate displacement patterns in the region. By the end of

2024, 7.4 million Congolese had been forcibly displaced (many of them repeatedly), with more than 8 in 10 of them remaining within the country.⁶⁷ Together, Sudan and the DRC accounted for almost 80 per cent of the total number of IDPs in Africa in 2024.⁶⁸

Funding cuts have forced several international organisations to pause or downsize support, which has further worsened conditions for displaced persons.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Sudan Situation*, last updated 1. December 2025.

⁶⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends 2024*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement*, Geneva 2025, p. 29.

⁶⁹ United Nations, *Aid cuts leave refugee agency unable to shelter six in 10 fleeing war in Sudan*, 18 July 2025.

2.4. Where Do African Migrants Come From and Where Do They Go?

Main takeaways:

- **Migration patterns** in Africa reflect **regional, historical, and conflict-related dynamics**. Northern African countries topped the list of countries of origin of migrants from Africa, while conflict-affected states contribute significantly to migration patterns, too.
- The **main destination countries of African migrants** in Africa and beyond **remained largely unchanged**; the mixed movements responsible for this are shaped by colonial ties, economic opportunities, and displacement.
- Sex-disaggregated data show that while the overall trends are **voluntary migration dominated by men** and the **roughly equal gender distribution of forced displacement**, there are some exceptions.

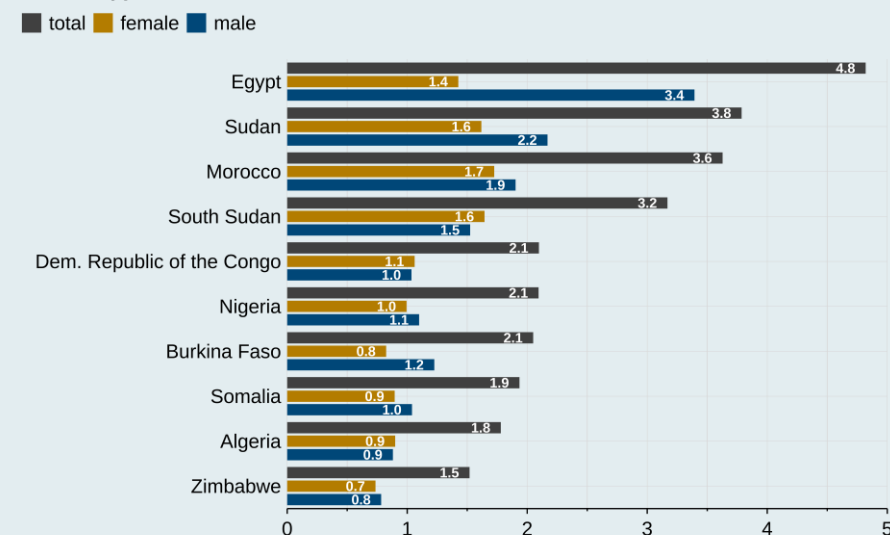
African Migration remains male-dominated, except in refugee-hosting contexts, while overall migration trends have been stable since 2010 amid the slow pace of change in global African migration patterns (see Figure 16). The various and often interconnected drivers of migration to and from Africa are reflected in the list of the main countries of origin and destination of African migrants. Northern African countries

dominate the list of the top 10 countries of origin of Africans migrating from Africa, with Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Algeria all included (Figure 14). In 2024, Egypt was the African country with the largest diaspora (4.8 million people). Several of the countries of origin of African migrants are Arabic-speaking, a factor that facilitates networks beyond the continent and contributes to growing diasporas.

Figure 14

Top 10 countries of origin of African migrants, 2024

In millions of persons



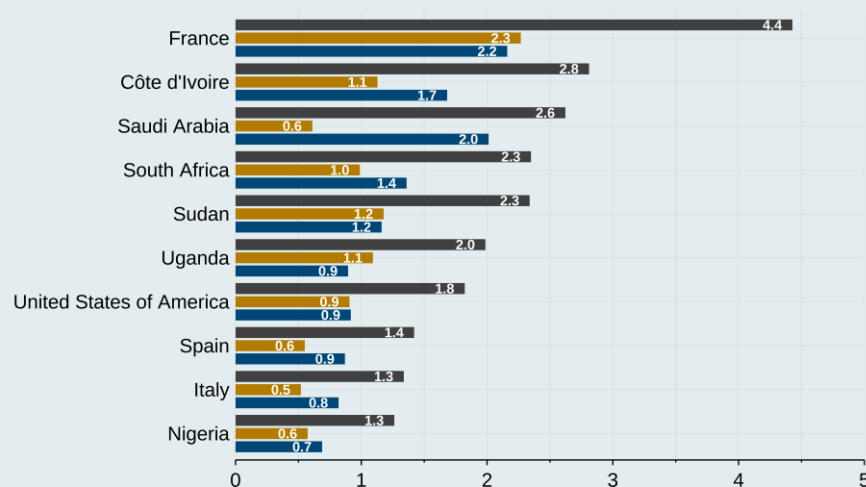
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
 Note: 'African migrants' refers to international migrants with an African country of birth or citizenship, both within Africa and outside the continent.
 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

Figure 15

Top 10 destination countries of African migrants, 2024

In millions of persons

■ total ■ female ■ male



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
 Note: 'African migrants' refers to international migrants with an African country of birth or citizenship, both within Africa and outside the continent.
 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

Moreover, the list of countries of origin is strongly shaped by forced displacement: more than half of the top countries of origin are affected by (protracted) crises and violent conflicts, including Sudan, South Sudan, the DRC, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Somalia.

Another feature these countries have in common is their size – large populations lead to large diasporas in absolute terms. But while the overall population of Egypt is much bigger than that of Germany (114 million vs. 83 million), the diasporas of the two countries are similar in size.

A more complex picture emerges from the sex-disaggregated data, with some significant differences in the number of male and female migrants. For example, there are 2 million more male migrants than female migrants from Egypt, 0.8 million more from Sudan, and 0.4 million more from Burkina Faso. The trend is similar but less pronounced for Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, and Zimbabwe, whereas in South Sudan and the DRC, female migrants slightly

outnumber male migrants and in Algeria, they are roughly equal in number. There is a complex interplay of reasons for the mixed movements from many of these countries, including cultural norms, perceived risks, the drivers of migration (economically motivated migration versus forced displacement), and migration opportunities.

A similar picture emerges for the top 10 destination countries of African migrants (see Figure 15). The migration patterns here are likely influenced by conflict-induced displacement, the search for economic opportunities in destination countries, available migration pathways, and the associated risks of migration routes. Half of the destination countries are African: Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and Nigeria. This can be attributed to mixed movements: all these countries host refugee populations. Uganda is one of the world's major host countries for refugees, while Sudan is both a host country and one

of the main countries of origin for refugees.⁷⁰ As the economic powerhouses on the continent, South Africa and Nigeria attract migrants seeking economic opportunities, as do Saudi Arabia and the US.

Of the former colonial powers, both France and Spain – and, to a lesser extent Italy – still maintain ties with their former colonies. France is the single most important destination country for African migration: 4.4 million African migrants are living there, as a result of the colonial ties and their active use in French foreign policy (see Figure 15). Côte d'Ivoire is the second-most important destination country, with 2.8 million migrants, roughly 1.7 million of whom are from Burkina Faso. Mixed movements between these two countries form the largest migration corridor in Africa.

Similar to the data on countries of origin, sex-disaggregated data on destination countries paint a mixed picture (see Figure 15). In most destination countries, African male migrants outnumber African female migrants, with France, Sudan, and

Uganda being the exceptions. As regards their sizeable refugee populations, the last two are also the exceptions for the same reason. Typically, women and girls account for 50 per cent of refugees, individuals in refugee-like situations, and other people in need of international protection globally.⁷¹

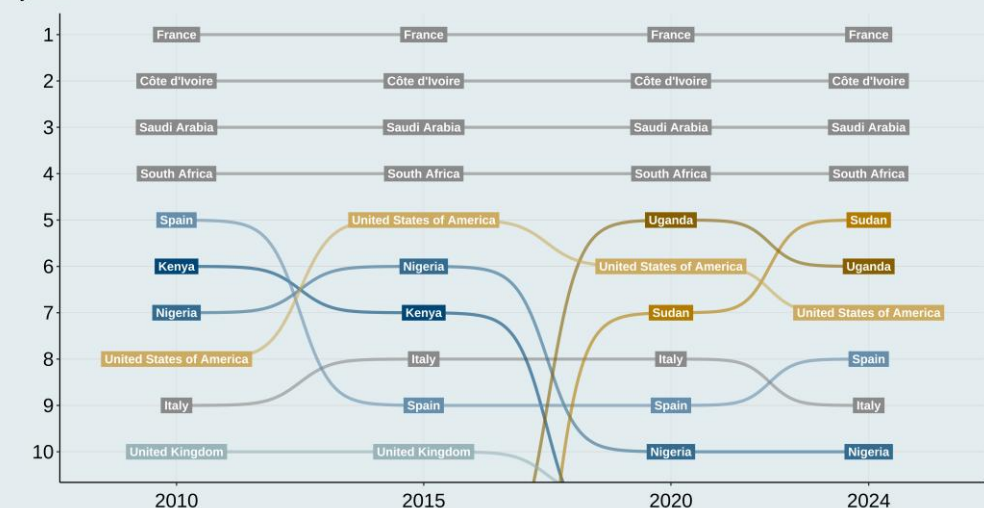
A comparison of the top destination countries of African migrants in 2010, 2015, 2020, and 2024 reveals largely stable trends (see Figure 16). The top four countries – France, Côte d'Ivoire, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa – have remained the same since 2010. Among the lower-ranked countries, there have been a few changes, with some featuring in some years but not in others (e.g., in 2020 and 2024 Kenya and the UK had moved out and Uganda and Sudan were in), but the overall picture is not dynamic. The changes that do take place are due mainly to forced displacement trends (e.g., Sudan ranked fifth in 2024).

In France, the number of migrants from Africa has risen uninterruptedly over the past 15 years (excluding a dip in

Figure 16

Top 10 destination countries of African migrants, 2010–2024

By rank



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
Note: Countries with no net rank change between 2010 and 2024 are shown in grey, those with a net decline in rank in shades of blue, and those with a net improvement in shades of orange.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

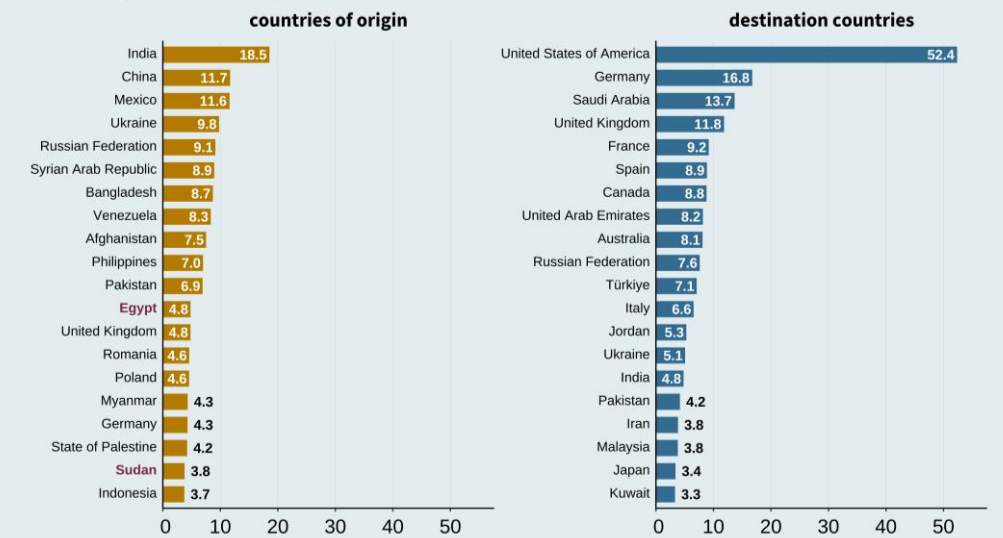
⁷⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends 2024*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 38f.

⁷¹ Id., p. 36.

Figure 17

Top 20 origins and destinations of international migrants, 2024

Number of migrants in millions of persons



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

2020).⁷² By contrast, in the other main destination countries, the size of the African migrant population has not changed significantly. There are two possible explanations for this: a population of labour migrants that is constantly renewing itself, including through circular migration, or obstacles to naturalisation that prevent migrants from becoming citizens for decades – or a combination of both. Saudi Arabia, for example, only recently changed its citizenship policy (previously based on patrilineal descent) to also include children of Saudi mothers. Naturalisation options are very limited and only foreigners with exceptional skills are granted citizenship.⁷³ Thus, the majority of African migrants have no pathway to becoming Saudi citizens.

As a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which enables mobility for the citizens of its member states, South Africa sees a lot of circular and temporary migration.⁷⁴ Given its membership of ECOWAS and established free movement policies, the same is likely true for Côte d'Ivoire.

From the figures for the top 20 countries of origin and destination of migrants worldwide, it is evident that African migration is comparatively small-scale. Egypt and Sudan are the only African countries to be included on the list of the main countries of origin, the list of the top 20 countries of destination does not feature any African country (see Figure 17).

⁷² Chloé Pariset and Pierre Tanneau, *Entre 2006 et 2023, le nombre d'immigrés entrés en France augmente et leur niveau de diplôme s'améliore*, May 2025 (Insee Première, No. 2051), p. 2.

⁷³ Abdulaziz Al and Logan Cochrane, "Residency and citizenship in the Gulf: Recent policy changes

and future implications for the region", in *Comparative Migration Studies*, 12 (2024) 16, pp. 5ff.

⁷⁴ Ottilia A. Maunganidze, *Migration and migration policy in the Southern African Development Community*. Southern Africa, 31 January 2024.

2.5. Regional Overview

Main takeaways:

- **Intraregional migration is the dominant form of mobility on the African continent**, not least owing to free movement agreements, low travel costs, and safer conditions than those for interregional and intercontinental migration.

Intraregional migration⁷⁵ plays a significant role in African migration, largely owing to the regional free movement frameworks established by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Another factor is the lower costs associated with shorter distances to travel.

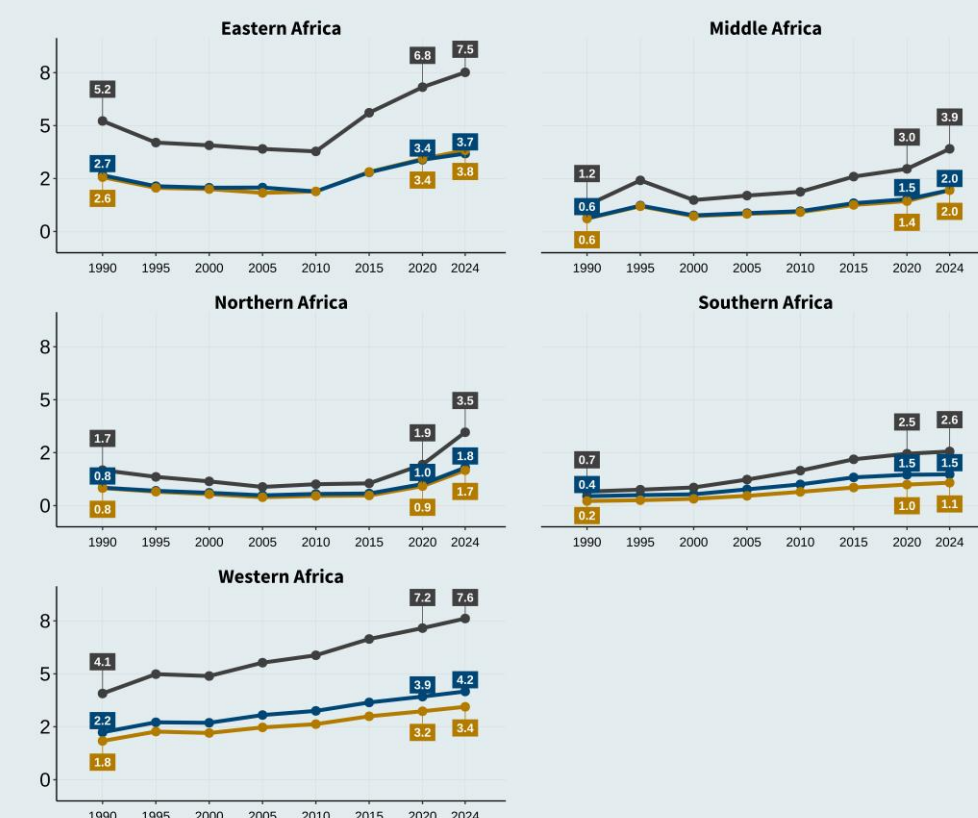
As Figure 18 shows, Eastern and Western Africa stand out in terms of intraregional migration volume. This is not surprising given that their free movement frameworks are comparatively well developed and their implementation is advanced. However, intraregional migration

Figure 18

African migrants within Africa by sex and subregion, 1990–2024

In millions of persons

— total — female — male



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), *International Migrant Stock 2024*.

Note: 'Migrants within Africa' refers to migrants born in, or holding citizenship of, an African country who reside outside their country of origin but remain within the region.

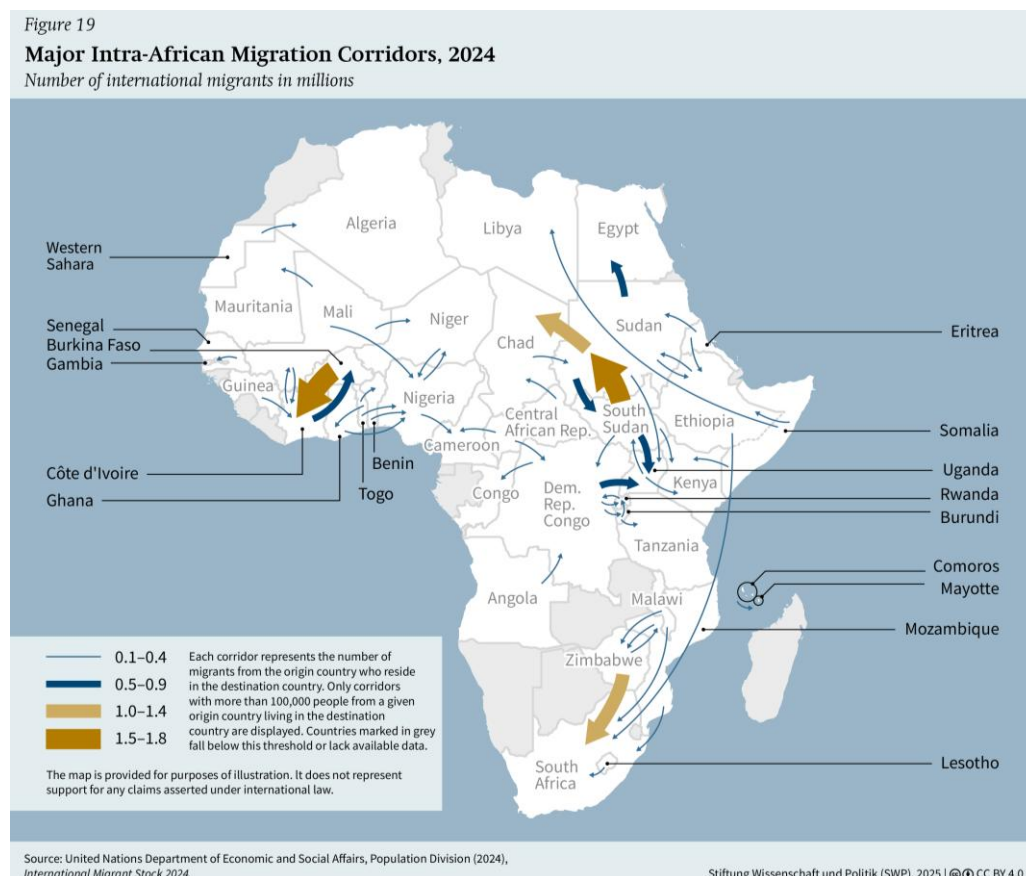
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

⁷⁵ For a map of African regions, please refer to Figure 1.

is also on the rise in other African regions, including Middle Africa.

Trends are similar for men and women, while male migrants are a little more common in all regions except Eastern Africa. Because continental movements – particularly intraregional ones – are more likely to be regular as well as cheaper and safer, they are a more attractive option than irregular, costly, and risk-laden routes to Europe and elsewhere.

When migration movements are displayed on a map (see Figure 19), it becomes clear that popular destination countries such as Nigeria and South Africa also account for a large proportion of intraregional movements. Northern Africa stands out for its lack of significant intraregional movements. Most migrants from this region move to France or the Arab world.



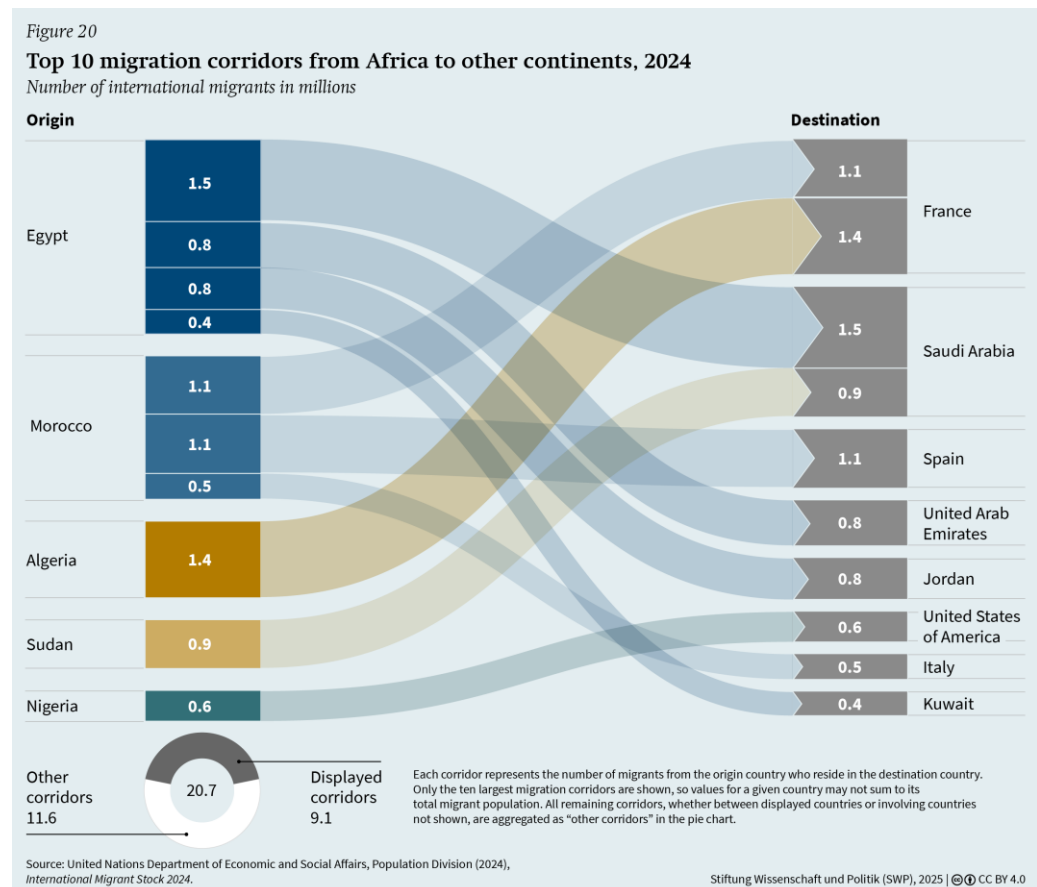
2.6. Migration Corridors⁷⁶

Main takeaways:

- **Intercontinental migration corridors** – such as those from Northern Africa to Europe and the Gulf states – **are shaped by colonial history, linguistic links, and labour opportunities.**
- Most **intra-African corridors connect neighbouring countries**, underscoring that both forced displacement and voluntary migration are largely short distance and regional.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa** is less integrated into **intercontinental migration** networks than are Northern African countries.

Compared with Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan countries play a smaller role in international migration, with most movements

occurring within the continent rather than beyond it. The use of stock data to examine migration corridors between countries,



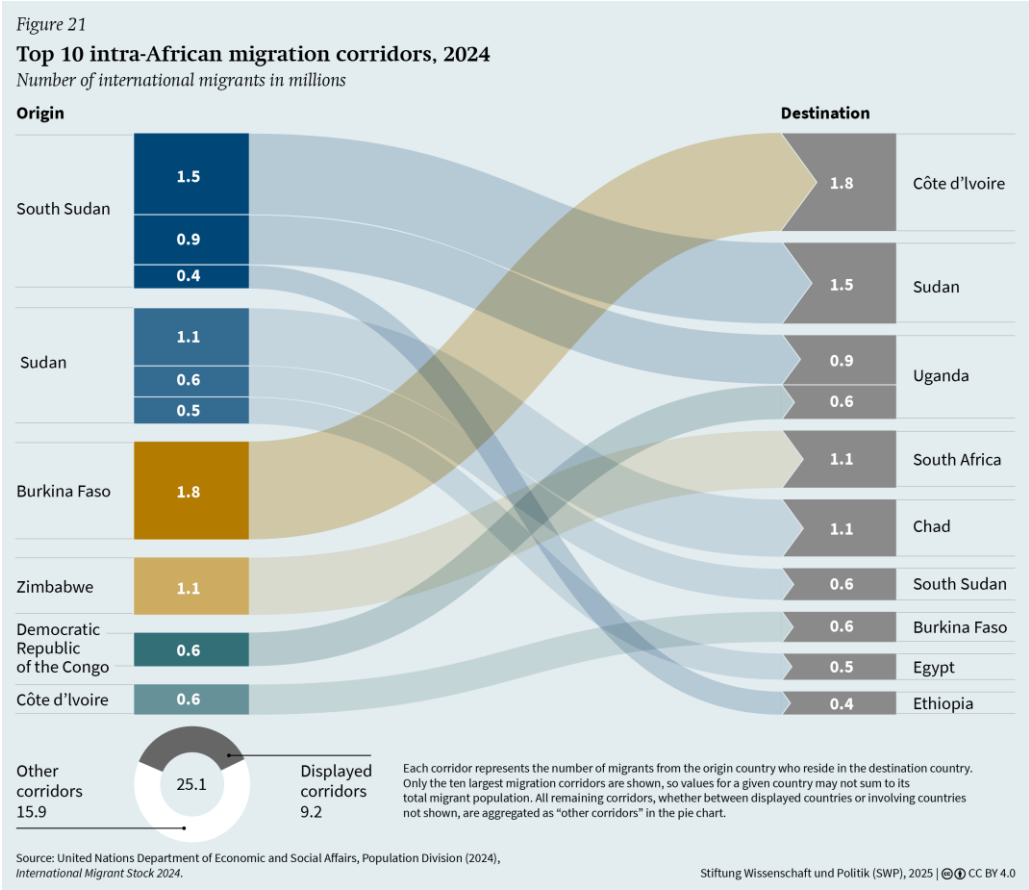
⁷⁶ The IOM describes a migration corridor as an “accumulation of migratory movements over time and provid[ing] a snapshot of how migration patterns have evolved into significant foreign-born populations in specific destination

countries”. The measure is the number of people born in Country A who were residing in Country B at the time of the estimate; see IOM, *World Migration Report 2024*, Geneva 2024, p. 22.

from other continents to Africa, and within the continent paints a more nuanced picture. Once again, the main influencing factors are historical and colonial ties, geographical proximity, and economic opportunities. International migration corridors between countries in Africa and countries on other continents have remained largely unchanged since 2020. In general, the movements are likely to be mixed, but labour migration (for example, to Gulf Cooperation Council countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait) appeared to dominate in 2024. Historical ties (e.g., those that France has with Algeria and Morocco) and linguistic commonalities (between Arabic-speaking countries) are other important factors. The fact that the main corridors involve only Northern African countries as countries of

origin (with the exception of Nigeria) are listed as main countries of origin (see Figure 20) highlights another aspect of African migration: not only does Africa as a continent play a minor role in global migration, but Sub-Saharan African countries participate even less than Northern African ones.

An examination of the main intra-African corridors confirms that migration within the continent is primarily regional and/or short distance. Of the corridors displayed in Figure 21, only the smallest – from South Sudan to Ethiopia – connects countries that do not share a border. The largest intra-African migration corridors link mainly countries that do share borders.⁷⁷ Forced displacement almost certainly plays an important role here: the majority of displaced people are hosted by neighbouring countries. This was the case



⁷⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice*

and the welfare of the African migrant, Addis Ababa 2024, p. 31.

for 67 per cent of refugees and other people around the world in need of international protection in 2024.⁷⁸ Sudan, South Sudan, and the DRC have long been countries of origin for refugees (and, even more so, for IDPs) and have now been joined by Burkina Faso. The last-named has a tradition of labour mobility to Côte d'Ivoire that dates back to the colonial era.⁷⁹

Interestingly, some corridors operate in both directions; for example, there are migrants from Burkina Faso living in Côte d'Ivoire and vice versa (the same applies for South Sudan and Sudan). This suggests temporary or circular movements related to labour migration and forced displacement.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends 2024*, Copenhagen 2025, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Hannah Cross, "The Burkina Faso - Côte d'Ivoire migration corridor", in Tanja Bastia and Ronald Skeldon (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*, London/New York:

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020 (Routledge International Handbooks).

⁸⁰ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Africa Migration Report (Second edition). Connecting the threads: Linking policy, practice and the welfare of the African migrant*, Addis Ababa 2024, p. 31.

2.7. Remittances and Their Significance for Development

Main takeaways:

- **Remittances** are a **key outcome and driver of migration** and significantly support development in migrant origin countries.
- **Financial remittances** remained **stable** even in times of crisis: during the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant remittances continued to increase.
- Several African countries – mainly very small and very poor ones – are **highly dependent on financial remittances**.

Remittances are not covered by the UN DESA figures. Because they are an important driver of (labour) migration and significant for development, the World Bank's Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) has compiled and analysed remittance data up to 2024.⁸¹ They also play a pertinent role for African migration.

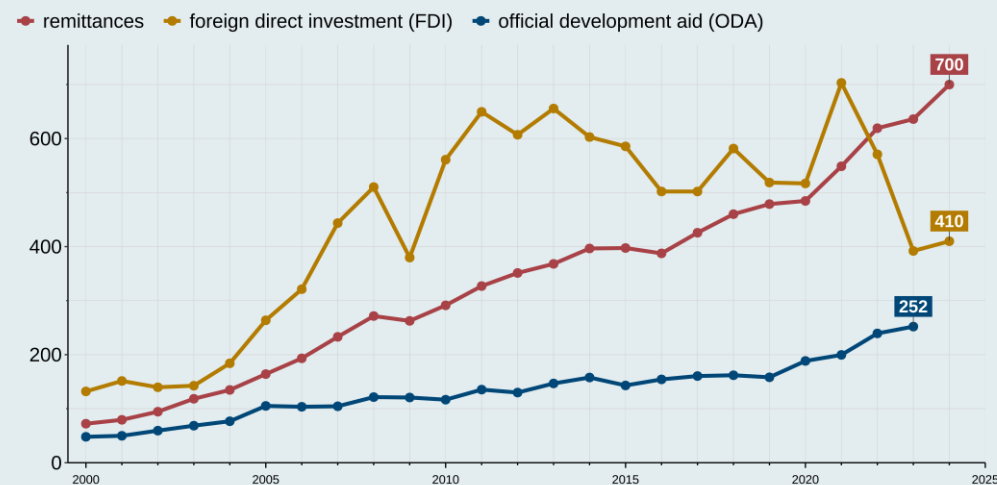
Remittances – which are defined as

the transfer by migrants of money, goods, and knowledge to their country of origin – play an important role in the positive impact of migration and are a main motivating factor for many migrants, particularly in developing countries, including African ones. This is underscored by the data for financial remittances: in low- and middle-income countries, they exceed other major financial inflows – namely, foreign direct

Figure 22

Remittances, FDI, and ODA received by low- and middle-income countries, 2000–2024

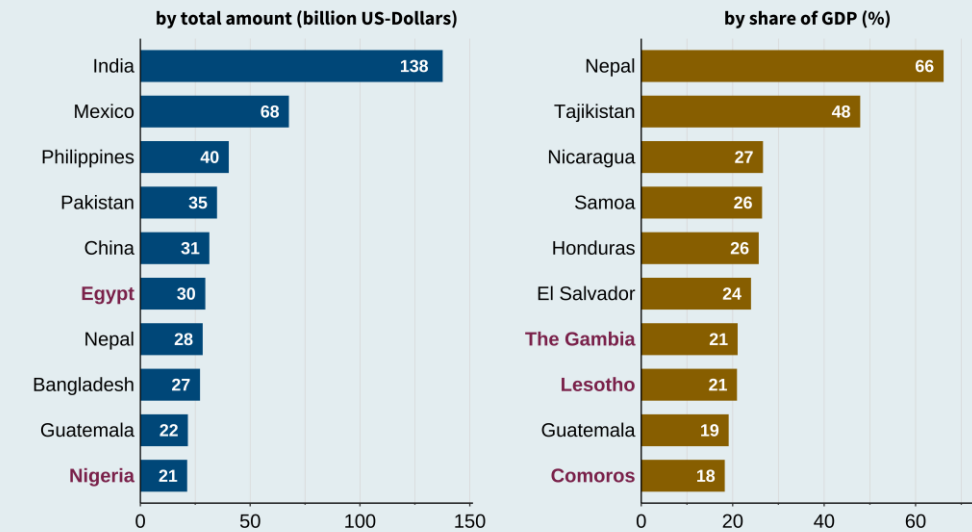
In billion US-Dollars



Source: World Bank (2025), *World Development Indicators Database*. Remittances: Personal remittances received (current US-Dollars); FDI: Foreign direct investment, net inflows (balance of payments, current US-Dollars); ODA: Net official development assistance received (current US-Dollars). Note: GDP = gross domestic product. ODA figures are available only up to 2023. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

⁸¹ World Bank, "Remittances. Brief", Washington D.C., 18 September 2024.

Figure 23

Top 10 recipients of remittances among low- and middle-income countries, 2024

Source: World Bank (2025), *World Development Indicators Database*. Remittances: Personal remittances received (current US-Dollars and % of GDP).
 Note: GDP = gross domestic product.
 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025) © CC BY 4.0

investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA). Moreover, they increased more rapidly than ODA and at a steadier rate than FDI (see Figure 22). In 2023, remittances exceeded FDI and ODA combined.⁸² Populous African countries with larger diasporas – such as Egypt and Nigeria – were among the main remittance recipient countries in 2024. Some countries are more dependent on remittances than others, as a comparison by share of GDP in 2024 shows (see Figure 23): Nepal relied on remittances for about two thirds of its total GDP. For Tajikistan, the figure is almost as high as half its GDP. The Gambia, Lesotho and Comoros are the African countries on the list of the top 10 remittance recipient countries worldwide by share of GDP; for those three remittances account

for around one fifth of GDP.⁸³

As 2023 data show, several African countries depend heavily on remittances, as Figure 24 illustrates. In comparison, humanitarian and development aid played only a negligible role in most of those countries, as did FDI. Remittances made up the biggest share of financial inflows into Lesotho, the Gambia, Comoros, Somalia, and Cape Verde, while in Liberia the share of FDI as percentage of GDP was close to that of remittances. All these countries, which are relatively small, are included on the UN's list of least developed countries, except Cape Verde (which graduated from that status in 2007).⁸⁴ Thus, poverty partly explains the significance of financial inflows and is a driver of labour migration.

⁸² Dilip Ratha et al., *Remittances Slowed in 2023, Expected to Grow Faster in 2024*, Washington D.C., June 2024 (Migration and Development Brief), p. 2.

⁸³ Id.

⁸⁴ UNCTAD, "UN list of least developed countries", Geneva, December 2024.

Figure 24

African countries with the highest financial inflows from remittances, aid, and FDI, 2024
as percentage of GDP

■ remittances ■ net FDI ■ humanitarian aid + ODA

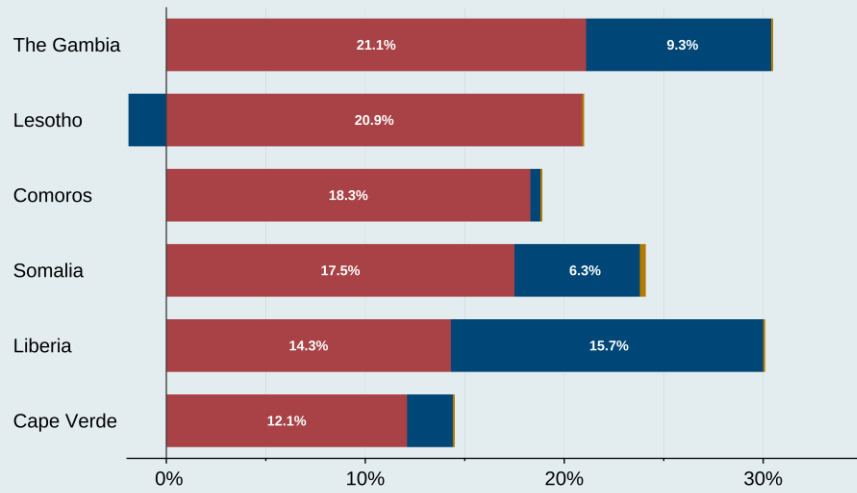


Illustration adapted from Alexander Bossakov et al., *Atlas of Migration - 2025*, Luxembourg, 2025, p. 121. Adaptation: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025)

3. Conclusion

As the updated UN DESA data illustrate, existing African migration trends are persistent and becoming more pronounced over time. Most African migrants lived within the continent, although the share of migrants leaving the continent has been slowly increasing. Nevertheless, mobility beyond the continent remained on a smaller scale than intracontinental mobility. The pattern holds regardless of the primary motivation: that is, both labour migrants and forcibly displaced persons stayed in Africa. There are several reasons for this, including the higher cost of longer journeys and the risks of irregular international migration beyond the African continent – regular regional migration is generally cheaper and safer. A similar picture emerges from the displacement data, which are collected mainly by UNHCR and IDMC: the vast majority of displaced persons remained in their home countries as IDPs. Where they crossed borders, most African refugees and asylum seekers were hosted on the continent in close proximity to their country of origin. As a destination for international migration, Africa continued to play a negligible role only.

These trends are likely to continue in the future. Although the accelerating climate crisis will intensify the drivers of migration and cause more climate-related displacement, these movements are expected to be intraregional. The World Bank's Groundswell report predicts 19 million IDPs in Northern Africa and 86 million in

Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050.⁸⁵ This suggests that fears of large-scale irregular migration from Africa to Europe in the future are exaggerated and have been instrumentalised in policy debates in the Global North.⁸⁶ Forward-looking global migration scenarios are much more likely to focus on competition for labour migrants in the countries of the Global North that are experiencing rapid population decline. Owing to their younger populations and later onset of demographic shifts, it is likely that African countries will turn into countries of origin of larger numbers of labour migrants.

The data presented above reflect the impact of policy decisions to date on African migration patterns – for example, regional free movement frameworks – and have important implications for future policy decisions. Thus, the collection and analysis of such data are crucial for evidence-based migration policymaking. Owing to the large-scale funding cuts by several major donors in 2025 (above all, the US, but also Germany, the UK, and France), data collection has already been down-scaled, which has generated uncertainty about future comparability. UN member states and donors have called for greater interoperability; and those calls are certainly justified. Nevertheless, the fact is that information flows have already been curtailed by a lack of funding for organisations such as IDMC and the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), as well as larger UN organisations

⁸⁵ Viviane Clement et al., *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*, 2021, p. xv.

⁸⁶ Samuel Huckstep and Helen Dempster, *The 'Climate Migration' Narrative Is Inaccurate, Harmful, and Pervasive. We Need an Alternative*, 5 December 2023.

such as IOM and UNHCR. This poses a significant obstacle to evidence-based policy-making, despite the ongoing efforts to

streamline and enhance the interoperability of existing systems.

Nadine Biehler is an Associate in SWP's Global Issues Research Division.

Emma Landmesser is a Research Assistant in the Global Issues Research Division.

Rebecca Majewski is an Information and Data Manager in the Global Issues Research Division.

Emma and Nadine work for the research project "Strategic Refugee and Migration Policy", funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The authors would like to thank Nadine Knapp, Anne Koch, and Daniel Voelsen, among others, for their helpful comments, Jan Cleave for proofreading support, Lisa Voigt for supporting distribution, and Magdalena Michelka for creating Figures 19-21.



This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0

This Working Paper reflects the authors' views.

SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
International and
Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

ANNEX 1

Overview of Data Sources and Availability across African Destination Countries

country	data source type	includes forcibly displaced	imputed data
Algeria	place of birth	yes	no
Angola	place of birth	yes	no
Benin	place of birth	yes	no
Botswana	place of birth	yes	no
Burkina Faso	place of birth	yes	no
Burundi	place of birth	yes	no
Cabo Verde	place of birth	yes	no
Cameroon	place of birth	yes	no
Central African Republic	citizenship	yes	no
Chad	place of birth	yes	no
Comoros	place of birth	no	no
Congo	place of birth	yes	no
Côte d'Ivoire	place of birth	yes	no
Democratic Republic of the Congo	place of birth	yes	no
Djibouti	place of birth	yes	no
Egypt	place of birth	yes	no
Equatorial Guinea	citizenship	no	no
Eritrea	no data available	yes	yes
Eswatini	place of birth	yes	no
Ethiopia	place of birth	yes	no
Gabon	citizenship	yes	no
Gambia	place of birth	yes	no
Ghana	place of birth	yes	no
Guinea	place of birth	yes	no
Guinea-Bissau	place of birth	yes	no
Kenya	place of birth	yes	no
Lesotho	citizenship	yes	no
Liberia	place of birth	yes	no
Libya	citizenship	yes	no

country	data source type	includes forcibly displaced	imputed data
Madagascar	citizenship	yes	no
Malawi	place of birth	yes	no
Mali	place of birth	yes	no
Mauritania	citizenship	yes	no
Mauritius	citizenship	no	no
Mayotte	place of birth	yes	no
Morocco	citizenship	yes	no
Mozambique	place of birth	yes	no
Namibia	place of birth	yes	no
Niger	place of birth	yes	no
Nigeria	citizenship	yes	no
Rwanda	place of birth	yes	no
Réunion	place of birth	no	no
Saint Helena	citizenship	no	no
Sao Tome and Principe	citizenship	no	no
Senegal	place of birth	yes	no
Seychelles	place of birth	no	no
Sierra Leone	place of birth	yes	no
Somalia	no data available	yes	yes
South Africa	place of birth	yes	no
South Sudan	place of birth	yes	no
Sudan	place of birth	yes	no
Togo	citizenship	yes	no
Tunisia	citizenship	yes	no
Uganda	place of birth	yes	no
United Republic of Tanzania	place of birth	yes	no
Western Sahara	no data available	no	yes
Zambia	place of birth	yes	no
Zimbabwe	place of birth	yes	no