



Labour Migration in Africa

Labour migration: an overview



Globally, there were 34 million international migrants from Africa in 2015. Approximately half of these migrants were women.

As of 2017, there were 14.4 million migrant workers in Africa, an increase from 7.5 million workers in 2008. International migration increased by 91.2%.



Africa's labour force increased to 433.95 million people in 2017. The working age population grew by 3% between 2010 and 2017.

The number of migrant women has increased by 93.4%. 335.6 million women in Africa are of working age, but the continent's labour force has more men than women.



The growth of the working age population has not corresponded with a growth in jobs. This will lead to a surplus in the labour force.

The biggest employers of migrant labour are: agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, transport and warehousing, public administration and construction..



West Africa is home to the largest portion of the continent's labour force, followed by East Africa, Southern Africa, North Africa and Central Africa.



Do continental frameworks protect migrant labour?

Africa has a long history of migratory movements. The movements, both voluntary and forced, have shaped inter-continental relations, economic cultures and cultural dynamics. As migration patterns change due to economic and ecological constraints, an analysis of the different policies and frameworks by Africa's governing bodies is integral in understanding the roles and responsibilities of the different continental bodies and individual countries.

The African Union's (AU) 55 member states work to promote peace and development. Agenda 2063 is the AU's blueprint to catapult the continent into a global powerhouse by 2063. Two of its 15 flagship projects in particular are connected to labour migration. The creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), and the African Union passport with the removal of visa requirements for its holders, would facilitate safe labour migration, provide migrants with legal protections as well as foster inter and intra-regional cooperation. Migrant labour is vital to realising Agenda 2063's vision, and so requires specific provisions and protections.

Another key AU policy is the Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (MPFA). Created in 2018 as a successor to the first Migration Policy Framework for Africa, the 2018 MPFA "provides Member States and RECs with comprehensive policy guidelines and principles to assist them in the formulation and implementation of their own national and regional migration policies in accordance with their priorities and resources."

“**There's a disjuncture between the policy on paper and its implementation.**”

The MPFA's eight areas are Migration Governance, Labour Migration and Education, Diaspora Engagement, Border Governance, Irregular Migration, Forced Displacement, Internal Migration and Migration and Trade. The framework is in line with the Agenda 2063's goal of economic integration.

Another important continental document is the AU's Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Rights of Residence and Right of Establishment. Adopted in 2018 by the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, the protocol's objective is to "facilitate the implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community by providing for the progressive implementation of free movement of persons, right of residence and right of establishment in Africa.

It has 11 provisions specifically for labour migration. These provisions cover the free movement of migrant workers without discrimination, the provision of work permits and legal documentation, right of residence and social security provisions, the facilitation of remittances and the collection of data on labour migration. Right of residence here means "the right of a national of one Member State to reside and seek employment in another Member of State other than their Member of State of origin; in accordance with the national law of the host Member State." The protocol also has provisions for amendments and revisions. Member States can withdraw from the treaty three years after ratification.

There are two important questions that arise. Firstly, why are these policies and frameworks necessary? After all, migratory movements have occurred without official management and processes for centuries. However, in the last decade the trends in migration have changed. There has been an increase in irregular migration: more and more people are using dangerous routes, coupled by an increase in smugglers and human trafficking. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation from recruiters and smugglers.

Furthermore, the increase in irregular migration has also triggered a conversation on curbing the number of migrant entering countries, with all migrants being regarded as a national security concern. These concerns are evident in South Africa, where the proposed Gauteng Township Economic Development Draft Bill would forbid foreign nationals without permanent residence from owning businesses in Gauteng's townships. Given these significant shifts in migration patterns and perceptions, regional and continental frameworks are useful in developing inclusive structures for labour migration. Secondly, do these policies, frameworks and protocols actually work? They look and sound impressive, but do they make a difference for migrant workers?

Ayanda Mthethwa is a South African journalist based in Johannesburg. She works for the online news publication Daily Maverick and is the editor of MavericKids, an insert in the publication's newspaper.

As the instructor of AWiM's Labour Migrations Reporting course 'Labour Migration Policy and Impact', she has researched the state of labour migration policy in Africa. What she found was a system that was good in theory but not in execution. "There's a disjuncture between the policy on paper and its implementation. Africa as a whole is still struggling to manage migration," says Mthethwa. This means that labour migrants do not fully benefit from the protections and benefits outlined in these policies. "People's human rights are violated, regardless of all these policies and frameworks meant to protect them," Mthethwa adds.

With different countries and regions at different stages of development, application and prioritisation of key labour migration policies is not uniform. Potential clashes between national legislation and regional and continental frameworks also present challenges, with international relations and dynamics significantly influencing perceptions of labour migration.

These issues affect the impact of different policies. Carefully drafted and informed by research, these documents can provide structures and procedures for African countries, regional and continental bodies to adopt and implement. Labour migration is an integral part of social, economic and political planning. For millions of Africans who leave their homes every year in search of work, these policies can provide essential protection and support, while ensuring that labour migrants across Africa are actively part of the continent's economic integration.

Regional instruments and labour migration



The East African Community has the Common Market Protocol.



The Treaty Establishing the Economic Community of Central African States covers labour migration.



The Southern African Development Community has the Protocol on Facilitation of the Movement of Persons.



The Intergovernmental Authority on Development has the Regional Migration Policy Framework.



The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa is developing a Cross Regional Programme for Southern Africa.



The Economic Community of West African States has the Free Movement of Persons and Migration Project.

Labour migration and good reporting



The media plays an integral role in general understanding of particular events and processes. From breaking news to longform journalism, investigative stories to opinion pieces, journalists can provide context, key facts, and a human touch to information that can often feel remote and impersonal. The role of journalism is especially important when covering labour migration. It is the work of journalists that highlighted the treatment of migrants trying to get to Europe, the realities of internally displaced persons, the origins of increasing xenophobia across the globe, and the people at the heart of migration.

The ongoing Labour Migrations Reporting Training, run by AWiM in conjunction with the AU, IOM and ILO, focuses on this important journalistic work. 200 African women journalists are undergoing five courses, with each focusing on a particular area. The overall aim is to enhance the capacity and skills of the participants. What does it take to cover labour migration in Africa? For Wemimo Adewuni, it all comes down to the basics of good journalism.

An experienced multimedia journalist currently based in Nigeria, Adewuni is currently part of the Nigeria 99.3 FM Lagos team. She is also the instructor of AWiM's Labour Migrations Reporting course, Labour Migration and Media 101. For her, having a good foundation is crucial for good reporting on labour migration. "A lot of journalists across Africa are not well trained," she says. This gap in skills affects the work that journalists covering labour migration produce. Adewuni's course focuses on closing that gap. "This course [Labour Migration and Media 101] ensures that people learn those critical skills." The course, spread out over 10 modules, covers a range of skills, from research and fact checking, to undercover work and dynamic storytelling.

There's also the need to understand the various contexts and complexities of labour migration. After all, for such a diverse continent, an approach that is suitable for one country or region will not automatically work in another. Adewuni explains that "for different countries, it [reporting] works in different ways."

Her course serves as an introduction for current and aspiring journalists to better understand the different styles of reporting and how best to use skills learned. The emphasis here is on learning and sharpening technical skills, and in lining up with the other courses to provide the 200 women journalists with a comprehensive set of training.

For Ayanda Mthethwa's course on Labour Migration Policy and Impact, it's important for journalists to have a good understanding of the diplomatic relations and continental frameworks that shape migratory patterns. Labour migration does not occur in a social, political or economic vacuum. Researching the different contexts and conditions that influence labour migration makes for more well-rounded reporting. So too does the use of different media to tell different stories.

Journalists can embrace and experiment with different platforms. In doing so, journalists can reach more audiences and present richer stories. In conjunction with this newsletter series, AWiM is producing an audio series dedicated to labour migration. Produced by Andy Mkosi, a multidisciplinary artist who's worked with Newframe, OKAY Africa and Mail and Guardian, each episode focuses on an aspect of labour migration and labour migration reporting. Episode one provides an overview of labour migration in Africa, as well as an interview with a migrant worker in South Africa.





African Women in the Media

African Women in Media is an International NGO with the vision that one-day African women will have equal access to representation and opportunities in media industries and media content.



Visit our [official website](#) to get more information about our work, and how you can get involved.



Join our [Facebook group](#) to become part of a community of African women in media across the world.



Become part of our [Twitter network](#) to find out training programmes, open calls and projects.



[Follow us](#) on Instagram to get your regular dose of AWiM content.



[Click here](#) to subscribe and receive updates on our journalism and support our work.



Subscribe to our [Google Podcast](#) account to listen in to the Labour Migrations audio series.