

# African migration to Europe: How can adequate data help improve evidence-based policymaking and reduce possible misconceptions?

## Key findings

- Migration from Africa continues to be largely misconstrued and misrepresented, both in relation to its core dynamics and its implications for European economies and societies. This may also be due to the limited availability and public dissemination of adequate data.
- Despite what is commonly assumed, more than 80 per cent of African migration occurs within the Continent. In 2015, there were an estimated 21 million migrants in Africa, of which 18 million were from African countries, and the rest mostly from Europe, Asia and North America. Africa also hosts more than a quarter of the world's refugees.
- While emigration from Africa has increased substantially over the past decade in absolute terms, the proportion of emigrants relative to Africa's total population is one of the lowest in the world, based on available figures. Numbers of African nationals arriving irregularly by sea to Italy in 2016 represented a very small share of the total population in those countries (the highest share was 0.6%, for Gambia).
- Aside from increased irregular migration flows to Italy in 2015, the levels of regular migration from Africa to Europe have far exceeded numbers of irregular arrivals and remained fairly stable over the past few years. The total regular migration inflows from Africa to Europe, proxied by numbers of first residence permits issued to African nationals, increased by about 15 per cent between 2014 and 2016.
- More data on migrants' socioeconomic profiles and labour gaps in Europe are needed to enable the transition towards increased access to regular migration pathways. More data on the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations in temporary accommodation facilities in some European states are also needed to ensure adequate protection of migrants.

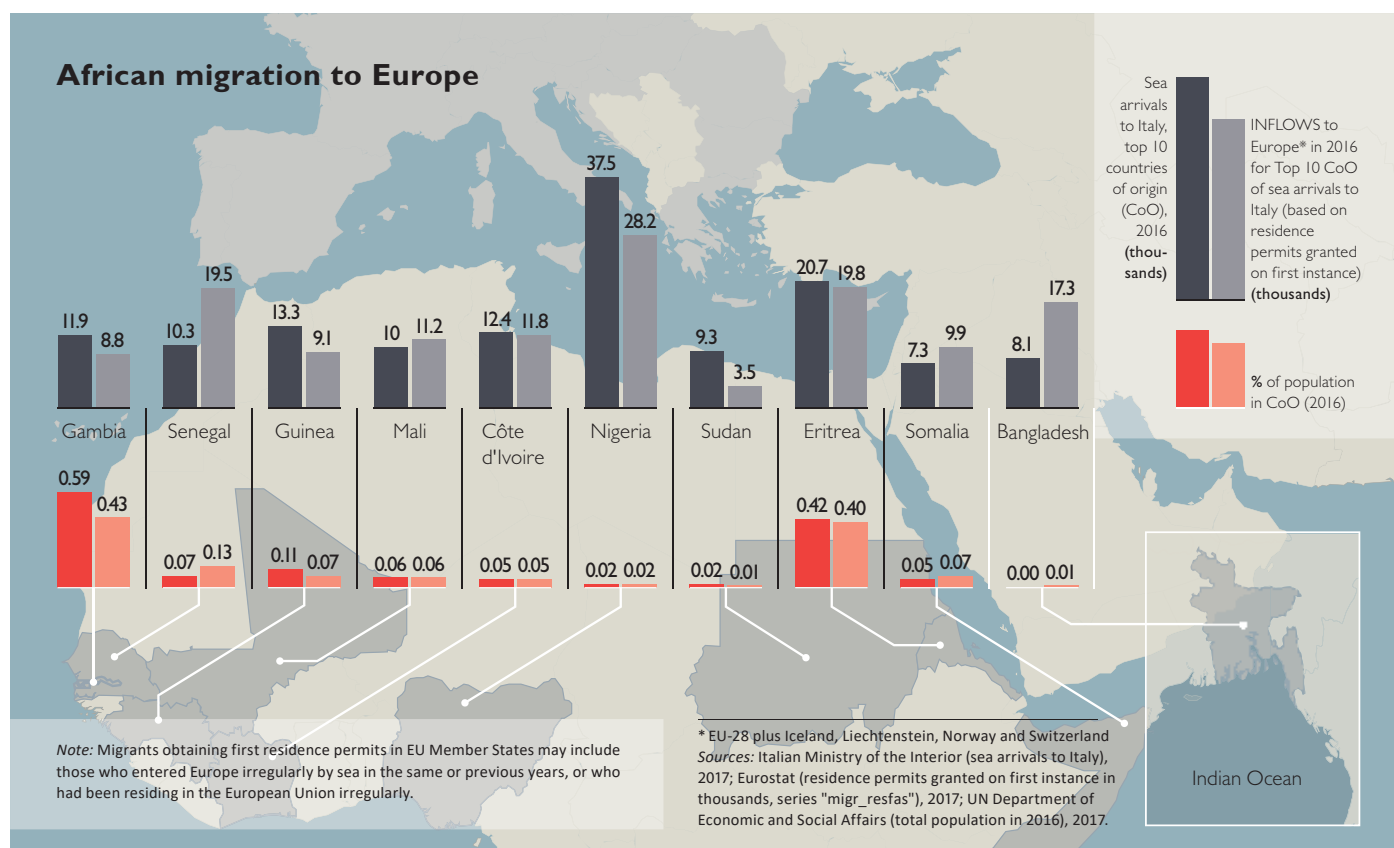
Migration from Africa to Europe has received increased attention as from the outbreak of the so-called migrant/refugee crisis in 2015. Today, it continues to be portrayed, more often than not, as a mass and largely uncontrolled phenomenon involving mostly economic migrants in an irregular situation who have the potential of threatening Europe's fragile national economies, if not European countries' national security.

According to the regular Eurobarometer surveys, immigration – followed by terrorism – remains at the top of the list of concerns expressed by European Union citizens. On the other hand, the same surveys also show that the vast majority of European Union citizens believe that it is “important to help people in developing countries”, and that “tackling poverty in developing countries is in the EU's own interest”, as well as a “moral

obligation” that can have a “positive impact on EU citizens” (European Commission, 2017c).

Migration from Africa therefore continues to be largely misconstrued or misrepresented, both as regards its structure and core dynamics and its implications for European economies and societies. As Flauhaux and de Haas wrote in 2016, “Africa is often seen as a continent of mass migration and displacement caused by poverty, violent conflict and environmental stress. Yet such perceptions are based on stereotypes rather than theoretically informed empirical research” (Flauhaux and de Haas, 2016).

The availability and dissemination of adequate data, both within non-specialist segments of the population and possibly among key policymakers themselves, is perhaps not unconnected with the above state of play.



So, what do available figures exactly say about the realities of African migration to Europe, and how is data today able to inform new policy initiatives and help monitor the success and possible challenges of recent European Union interventions in this field? Are there any critical data gaps that can impede the formation of new evidence-based and effective policies to better manage irregular migration and enhance the opportunities and benefits of legal migration from Africa to Europe?

The first point that needs to be stressed as a preamble to this short overview is that, despite commonly held assumptions, more than 80 per cent of African migration today occurs within Africa itself, either intraregionally (particularly within the West, East and Southern African regions) or interregionally (from West Africa to Southern Africa, from East/Horn of Africa to Southern Africa and from Central Africa to Southern Africa and West Africa).<sup>1</sup> In 2015, there were an estimated 21 million migrants in Africa, of which 18 million originated from Africa, and

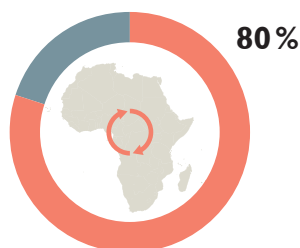
the rest mostly from Europe, Asia and North America (*ibid.*). As crucially, Africa also hosts more than a quarter of the world's refugees. African countries that are in the top 10 refugee-hosting countries in the world (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) accounted for 21 per cent of the world's refugees in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Finally, while emigration from Africa has increased substantially over the past decade in absolute terms, the proportion of emigrants relative to Africa's total population is currently one of the lowest in the world (African Union, 2017).

African migration to Europe must therefore be approached in the light of the above trends, which have oftentimes been overlooked. Furthermore, not accounting for "crisis"-induced flows since 2015, available data today suggests that the levels of legal African migration to Europe, which have far exceeded the levels of irregular flows, have remained relatively stable over the past few years. For example, the evolution of the stock of African migrants in key European host

1 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International migrant stock 2015 (2016), available from [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml)

2 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (2017), available from [www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/](http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/)

80% of African migration occurs within Africa itself



Source: UN DESA, 2016.

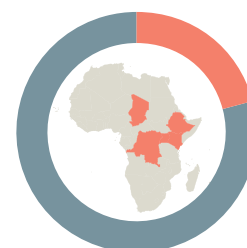
An estimated 21 million migrants in Africa in 2015



of which 18 million originated from Africa and the rest mostly from Europe, Asia and North America.

Source: UN DESA, 2016.

Africa hosts more than a quarter of world's refugees



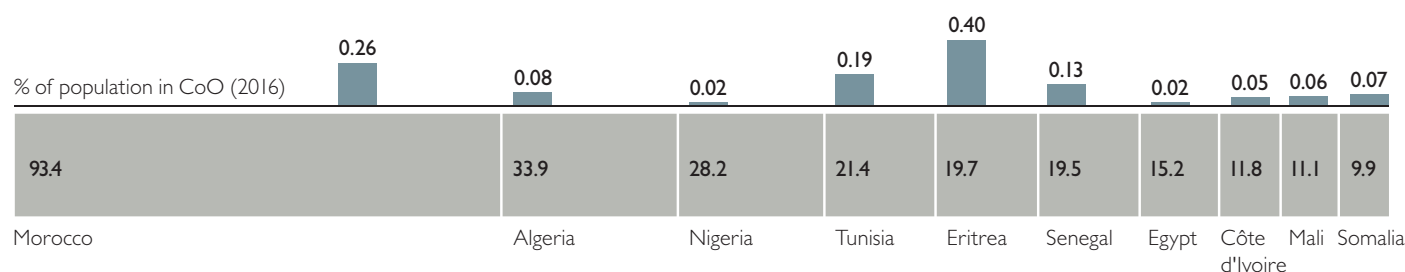
**Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda** together host 21% of the world's refugees.

Source: UNHCR, 2017.

countries such as Spain (972,424 in 2015 compared with 1,042,395 in 2009), Italy (1,099,666 in 2016 compared with 1,056,931 in 2009) and Belgium (476,408 in 2016 compared with 361,765 in 2009) does not show too significant a variation. On the other hand, the total inflows from Africa to Europe, proxied by numbers of residence permits issued to African nationals in Europe on first instance, have increased by about 15 per cent in two years, from 276,737 in 2014 to 320,529 in 2016.<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that the remittances flow from Europe to Africa has reached a record high of EUR 21.1 billion (USD 25 billion) in 2015. Remittances, together with direct foreign investment, are today at least on a par with the total official development assistance of the European Union institutions and Member States in Africa (European Commission, 2017d).

The analysis of the benefits and challenges of current data becomes even more relevant in relation to irregular migration trends. Although fully reliable and comprehensive data sets are of course in short supply, data provided by the European Commission suggests that apprehended irregular migrants in Europe are predominantly from sub-Saharan African countries. For example, the top 10 nationalities of irregular migrants disembarked in Italy in 2016 were Nigerian (21%), Eritrean (11%), Guinean (7%), Ivorian (7%), Gambian (7%), Senegalese (6%), Malian (6%), Sudanese (5%), Bangladeshi (4%) and Somali (4%) (European Commission, 2017b; Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2017). According to the European Commission, "although migration has always taken place, there appears to be a structural movement from Sub-Saharan Africa and there is no indication these trends could change until the economic and political/security situation in the countries of origin improves" (European Commission, 2017b).

### INFLOWS to Europe\* in 2016 – Top 10 African countries of origin (based on residence permits granted on first instance, in thousands)



\* EU-28 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

Sources: Eurostat (residence permits granted on first instance, series "migr\_resfas"), 2017; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (total population in 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2017), available from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed November 2017).

A similarly critical figure relating to recent irregular migration from Africa points to a notable increase in the number of migrants in vulnerable situations, especially women and minors. For example, among the 181,000 migrants who arrived in Italy in 2016, around 24,000 (13% – almost half of them from Nigeria) were women, and around 28,000 (15%) were minors, of whom the vast majority (91%) were unaccompanied. This represents an increased share of 10 per cent from 2015, with a growing proportion of unaccompanied minors (+75%). The top five nationalities of unaccompanied minors were Eritrean (15%), Gambian (13%), Nigerian (12%), Egyptian (10%) and Guinean (10%) (Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2017).

Also worthy of notice is a recent European Commission Communication on the Africa–European Union Partnership, which suggests that the outbreak of famine in South Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia – coupled with growing insecurity, climate change and water shortages – has had a direct incidence on increased irregular migration, first and foremost within Africa, as well as towards Europe (European Commission, 2017a).

On the other hand, despite the almost inexhaustible flow of often alarmist reports in the media and beyond, it is worth recording that the number of migrants and refugees who entered Europe by sea during the first seven months of 2017 has actually dropped by 55 per cent relative to the number of arrivals during the same period in 2016 (114,287 compared with 256,828) (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017). While the number of migrant fatalities has remained dramatically high over the past four years, there appears to be a gradual reversal of trend in the number of Mediterranean migrant arrivals since the beginning of this year. According to the European Union Regional Director of IOM, Eugenio Ambrosi, this may be “the result of several factors, from better information for those planning to migrate to deals with Niger on fighting people smuggling” (Barigazzi, 2017).

Based on this extremely succinct overview of key trends in African migration to Europe, what can therefore be said about the quality and policy relevance of existing data?

First, it is important to note that migration data, particularly on African migration to Europe, has become increasingly charged politically. A recent reflection of this are the recurrent disagreements about the exact numbers of irregular migrants entering Europe through

the Central Mediterranean, let alone the largely unsubstantiated projections on future flows expected in the coming years; or the recent contention, largely unsupported by relevant data and counter-factual analysis, about the possible pull-factor effects of search-and-rescue operations, and therefore about the need to establish a code of conduct for non-governmental organizations operating in the Mediterranean Sea.

But then, if data relating to African migration has become so receptive to diverse political interpretations, is it not also because it has not always proved to be sufficiently solid and refined to enable the establishment of indisputable views on the exact nature and impacts of the migratory flows, and therefore to facilitate the design of far-ranging and fully consensual policy initiatives?

In the case of African migration to Europe, there are a number of important areas where improved and more solid data sets would likely benefit the formation of effective policies.

The first of these relates to the production of adequate data on migrant smuggling. Despite this being the main channel used by the vast majority of African migrants to enter the European Union’s southern borders, and despite the growing number of European Union initiatives to step up the policing of smugglers’ activity, there is still remarkably little data to inform the full particulars of this burgeoning business. As Frank Laczko of IOM stressed in an interview in June 2017, while the smuggling trade is assumed to be very significant, possibly worth at least USD 10 billion (EUR 8.9 billion) a year,

*... Many countries do not even publish official statistics about the scale of migrant smuggling and the number of smugglers. And because it is a clandestine criminal activity, it is difficult to measure. (Kaminsky, 2017)*

Laczko points, in particular, to the lack of comprehensive data on the numbers of migrants who are exploited or abused on their journeys, the numbers who are diverted into sexual slavery and forced labour, and of course the numbers who may have died en route to Libya or during their boat crossings to Europe.

A second area needing major data improvements is connected with the long-stated objective of facilitating new channels for legal migration to Europe, most notably from Africa, particularly as the global compact

for migration is now in its final stages of negotiation. While there is near-unanimous consensus on the need to establish legal migration pathways in order to reduce the perils and adverse effects of irregular migration, there is still remarkably limited data enabling the translation of such plans into actionable legislation and policy. This is particularly so as regards the migrants' profiles, the economic sectors, the types of employer and the geographic locations in Europe that would and should benefit most from such policies. In this respect, it is worth noting that the European Commission has launched, in September 2017, a major study to explore the potential for the establishment of a European Union-wide private sponsorship scheme that would aim to create a complementary legal pathway for the admission of selected categories of third-country nationals, beyond the existing European Union resettlement and relocation schemes.

Another area requiring major data improvements relates to the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of European Union and other donors' emergency interventions on the continent's southern external borders. While an external evaluation is currently underway in Greece, there is still insufficient information and data to inform the interim results of the well-resourced humanitarian programmes that have been deployed in 2015–2017 in Greece, Italy and Spain. This relates in particular to the quality and standards of temporary accommodation facilities and to the design and implementation of adequate health, educational, legal counselling and social protection programmes. Lack of sufficiently solid data in such a critical area, particularly in view of the levels of financial resources invested in some of these operations, is potentially hindering the further expansion and replication of similar European Union and UN humanitarian programmes in the future.

A subjacent area relates to the production of adequate data on the treatment of vulnerable groups, particularly unaccompanied minors, in temporary accommodation facilities in the European Union's southern Member States. As Fili Andrian and Xythali Virginia of the University of Oxford have pointed out in relation to Greece, while it is estimated that unaccompanied minors accounted for approximately 35 per cent of the total population that crossed from Turkey to Greece in 2015, there is still no central authority responsible for tracking children in need of protection. This has led to the publication of often contradictory official statements and to double counts (Andrian and Xythali, 2017).

Finally, there would be considerable merit in increasing the dissemination of the growing set of data informing the initial outputs of the European Union Migration Partnership Framework that was adopted in June 2016 and that aims to involve key African countries of origin and transit in the prevention of illegal migration to Europe through tailor-made financial support and technical assistance packages. While the latest Progress Report on the Partnership Framework,<sup>4</sup> published in September 2017, has provided a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data on the number of smugglers apprehended, the number of returns and a range of other capacity-building elements in the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia, wider dissemination and accessibility of the Framework's achievements to date, including data on the observance and monitoring of the fundamental rights standards applied by the Partnership Framework, would no doubt contribute to reducing the barrage of criticism that this major European Union initiative has received since its launch in 2016.

The aforementioned are only a selection of some of the priority areas where increased investments in the production of adequate data would serve better policymaking. At least, the need to establish more systematic data collection and analysis resources in the field of migration, particularly migration from Africa, has now been fully recognized by all key institutional actors. The establishment of IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC)<sup>5</sup> and the European Union's Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD)<sup>6</sup> is of course a major reflection of this.

Improved data on migration from Africa could contribute not only to shaping and refining adequate migration policies, especially through more systematic monitoring and evaluation processes that appropriate data systems could support. It would also, as crucially, contribute to reducing growing misconceptions in such a sensitive, increasingly political and highly mediatized area as African migration among a range of often ill-informed segments of the European population. However, for improved data systems to become fully effective and operational, the importance of developing widely accessible and creative dissemination tools cannot

4 See [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/31673/fifth-progress-report-partnership-framework-third-countries-under-european-agenda-migration\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/31673/fifth-progress-report-partnership-framework-third-countries-under-european-agenda-migration_en)

5 See <http://gmdac.iom.int/>

6 See <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/migration-and-demography>



be stressed enough. This also includes, in the first place, sharing, and to the extent possible, harmonizing adequate data and information among both national and international policymakers. As recognized during an informal thematic session on the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2017, States should indeed be encouraged to share evidence with each other that allows for the production and joint analysis of adequate data on migration (UN, 2017).

Finally, the development of more refined data on African migration to Europe need not focus only on security and humanitarian concerns. It should address, with a similar dedication, a range of more long-term and mutually beneficial traits of the Africa–Europe migration reality. This includes not only the economic benefits of selective labour migration to Europe, but also the emerging and still relatively unexplored trend towards increased economic migration from Europe to Africa, most notably by well-educated second- and third-generation African migrants in Europe who – in increasing numbers – set out to develop their professional and business careers in Africa.

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## About

### GMDAC

In response to growing calls for better data on migration, and better use and presentation of migration data, IOM has created a Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). Located in the heart of Berlin, Germany, the Centre aims to provide authoritative and timely analysis of data on global migration issues as a global hub for data and statistics on migration.

### Data Briefing Series

The GMDAC Data Briefing Series aims to explain what lies behind the numbers and the data used in migration policy and public debates. The Briefings explain what “the numbers” indicate about movements of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, on a range of topics for policy across the globe.

The way data are presented has an important influence on public perceptions of migration in Europe and the development of policy. The series will serve to clarify, explain and exchange specialist knowledge in an accessible format for wider public and policy audiences, for capacity-building and evidence for policy. Briefings will be of interest to expert, as well as lay audiences, including journalists, students, local authority and city planners and lawyers.

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