

## Enabling African Youth to Up-skill and Move

A Side-Event at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### REPORT

#### Introduction

On 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021, the side-event Enabling African Youth to Upskill and Move at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) brought together experts focused on migration and skills to discuss the following questions:

- Why, how, and where do young people in Africa want to move?
- What contributions will they make to their countries of origin and their countries of destination?
- How can major countries of destination open legal migration pathways to allow them to migrate safely, regularly, and orderly, maximising the potential of migration?

#### Key messages

***A youth focus on African labour migration is urgent, but the migration of African youth is not a crisis.*** Africa's youth population is booming, but only a minority of them actually move. Constructive policy narratives should look beyond the blunt numbers to focus on who moves and the opportunities and conditions which shape their outcomes. Doing so provides a better starting point for leveraging youth migration for development in home and host countries.

***Skilling and migrating are inter-related processes.*** Skills training can enable people to migrate, but should also develop over time and be of benefit for both origin and destination societies. Enabling young migrants to learn and acquire skills throughout their migration experiences can drive a positive circulation of competences and resources between origins and destinations. But to achieve this, migration and development strategies need a longer-term perspective on future demand and supply of skills to enable both home and host countries to benefit.

***Action can be taken at international, national, and local levels.*** Opportunities for gaining skills and migrating can be created and shaped at all levels, from international free movement protocols to bilateral agreements, national government initiatives, and local and sectoral development plans. Regional and bilateral dialogues can help foster a win-win environment for both sending and receiving countries. Partnerships between countries of origin and destination can ensure that mobility contributes to the goals of national and local development plans.

#### Background

Migration within Africa and between Africa and the European Union (EU) has taken on renewed significance in recent years. The Migration Policy Framework for Africa and its Plan of Action (2018 – 2030) has ushered in a new era of migration and development thinking. Moreover, the ambitious and ground-breaking 2018 African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will require a better mobility framework on the continent. Africa-European Union migration has become particularly salient given the recent negotiations on a post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement, as well as the EU's Joint Communication Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa and New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which includes the concept of Talent Partnerships.

A focus on youth is key when discussing migration and development in Africa. Africa's population will nearly double between 2020 and 2050. In many countries the youth population is currently booming, and millions of young people are soon to enter the labour market. On the other hand, the youth population in high-income countries is declining, with potential to create large and persistent skills gaps. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic poses grave risks to young people completing their education and entering the labour market. According to the ILO, the pandemic has had a particularly severe impact on young people's education and employment prospects.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the shift towards more selective immigration systems has come at the cost of younger migrants, and has accelerated with the current pandemic.

### Session 1: Why, how, and where do young people in Africa want to move?

The world's youth population has never been bigger. In 2019, there were 1.8 billion people in the global population aged between 15 and 29. Africa in particular has the youngest and fastest growing youth population of all regions of the world; over two-thirds (68%) of the continent's population is aged under 29 years. And [research from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre](#) shows that those young people are more likely to express a desire to migrate to another country than people who are older. Whereas 22% of the global population expresses an intention to migrate, this rises to 32% of those aged between 15 and 29 years old. In Africa 37% of the youth population states that they wish to migrate.

But for the majority of young people in Africa migration remains an exception rather than a norm. Less than 2% of those aged between 15 and 29 in Africa actually prepares to make a move. Those who do move, internally or internationally, tend to go to cities and generally have at least a primary school-level of education. They mainly move due to lack of appropriate opportunities in their place of origin, as those available do not match their skills. Training programmes are often at odds with local demand for skills. Tackling the digital divide in Africa can, however, foster a better integration of youth in local and international labour markets by enabling job-seekers to access more opportunities without leaving.

The discussion included reflections by UNICEF, ICMC and UMCOR on:

- How to reframe narratives around migration. Migration presents an opportunity for development benefits but there is a worsening economic crisis. Mobility is under threat, especially by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Youth entrepreneurship, for example a study on Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Zambia on Youth, Employment and Migration in Eastern and Southern Africa (YEMESA) shows that young people on the move are very interested in entrepreneurship but cannot access that market due to restrictions (environment non conducive to start a business/requirements are too high) and financial limitations among others
- The opportunities posed by digitalisation, especially during the pandemic. Young people may be able to work remotely and so connect with distant labour markets without moving. This could mitigate the impact of the pandemic on borders and labour migration schemes and is an opportunity to be harnessed during the implementation of the AfCTA that was initiated in January 2021;
- The extent to which young people might be particularly susceptible to trafficking;
- Brain-drain and the impact on economies in countries of origin (CoO). The risks of points-based migration systems that reduce individuals to their skills. Available studies suggest that people who move when they are young tend to migrate again throughout their lives which could facilitate the circulation and return of skills and resources over a broader life trajectory. The impact COVID 19 has also challenged global perceptions of low skilled labour which proved to be essential during the pandemic but which have been excluded from many points-based immigration systems.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information: <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/campaign/COVID19-survey>

## Session 2: What skills, experience, and income gains will young migrants acquire by moving abroad? What contributions will they make to their countries of origin and their countries of destination?

Migration and development are mutually reinforcing, through commercial and diasporic links as well as financial and social remittances. Nevertheless, migration rarely figures in development strategies and even less so with a youth lens. To leverage the benefits of migration and the young demographic in Africa, the links between youth and migration need to be integrated into development strategies— how does a younger migrating demographic affect the link between migration and development? This implies building the right skills for the future, plugging skills gaps, leveraging remittances and diaspora investments, and keeping up with shifting mentality and innovation.

Opening legal pathways can facilitate development impacts in both countries of origin and destination. Experiences of skills and mobility partnerships over the last ten years show that both countries of origin and destination need to systematically link up education, training, digital technologies, and the needs of all parties involved in a long-term perspective that goes beyond the immediate needs of the local labour market. Countries need to act and leverage the contribution that migration can bring to different sectors, and ensure that all relevant parties are included to promote movement, along different skills-set and skills-levels.

The discussion included questions from the Global Coalition on Migration, Irish Aid and the IOM and it focused on the need for:

- government perceptions and legal pathways and strategies to shift perspectives, on skilling throughout the migration cycle and not only for migration as well as on jobs that do not require specific qualification/training.
- skilling along the migration cycle is an added-value for all parties involved. The earlier youth migrate, the more willing they are to return to their country of origin, with emphasis on circular migration.
- actors to ensure a comprehensive migration approach in development strategies, including a focus on education and training needs in both countries of origin and destination, to leverage the best out of the flows. Development strategies are meant to be for the future, and thus need to embed an understanding and projection of the future of work and skills.
- upskilling at all stages of migration and for all jobs. Legal channels are essential to reducing the incentives for irregular migration, attracting talents, upskilling individuals who will contribute to the development of both countries of origin and destination, and enabling admissions to be tailored to the needs of the labour market.

## Session 3: How can major countries of destination open legal migration pathways to allow them to migrate safely, regularly and orderly, maximizing the potential of migration?

To ensure that migration is able to happen in a safe, regular, and orderly way, countries of origin and destination need to invest in three activities: skilling potential migrants in skills needed in the labour market, connecting these migrants to job opportunities abroad, and creating new legal pathways to enable them to move.

By doing this, both countries of origin and destination can ensure that mobility contributes to economic development, linking to the goals of national and local development plans. For example, Ethiopia is assessing how best to ensure their youth population is connected to jobs abroad by looking at which markets and opportunities are available at different skill levels and in different sectors. In this context, Ethiopia has embarked on intensive dialogues with specific destination markets to open up relevant legal migration pathways.

These conversations require concrete models—examples of how to promote economic development and meet labour market needs through increased migration. One such example is the [Global Skill Partnership](#) (GSP), developed by the Center for Global Development (CGD) in 2012. This model identifies labour market needs common in countries of origin and destination (normally mid-skill professions such as ICT and healthcare) and up-skills candidates for roles in both labour markets.

The GSP model has been put in practice by Belgium and Morocco since 2019. The [PALIM project](#), implemented by Enabel, the Belgian development agency, in cooperation with Belgian and Moroccan public and private actors, is focused on skilling young Moroccans in ICT. The project has a number of key lessons including:

- Staying flexible in the implementation of the partnership;
- Involving the private sector in the early stages of partnership design;
- Adapting the partnership as much as possible to shifting private sector requirements;
- Ensuring that the profiles of candidates needed in origin and destination markets are similar;
- Re-assuring short to medium-term skilling programmes are sufficient; and
- Keeping a strong focus on economic development in the country of origin.

## Further details

### *Speakers*

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