

M I G R A T I O N
R E S E A R C H P A P E R

MIF JOINT RESEARCH PAPER

'UPDATA-ING'
THE NARRATIVE
ABOUT AFRICAN
MIGRATION

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Mo Ibrahim
FOUNDATION



'UPDATA-ING' THE NARRATIVE ABOUT AFRICAN MIGRATION

Migration has become a staple of the news in many countries, filled with images of desperate Africans fleeing an impoverished continent, poised to descend on the West. These reports are not necessarily false, and they can be valuable in highlighting the human stories of migration but they are not a good basis for helpful action.

Politicians push myths and half-truths to score points but policymakers interested in addressing the complex issues around migration need data that can help them understand who, where, and why and therefore what an appropriate and targeted response might look like. Surely migration is not the same in Malawi and Morocco?

In addition to official figures, one source of useful data is ordinary Africans – the source, after all, of all African migration. In its Round 7 public-attitude surveys (2016/2018), the research network Afrobarometer asked more than 45,000 Africans in 34 countries how they see and think about migration.

Engaging with the data and scratching beneath the surface of existing narratives are essential if we are to move beyond 'stronger borders' and other simplistic, one-size-fits-all 'solutions'. While statistical data help to reposition the discussion on migration and to cool down debates about 'mass migration', perception data contribute to understanding intentions and motivations. Together they form a strong basis for informing areas for policy action.

This co-authored research paper showcases the main findings of Afrobarometer research and the latest facts and figures of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation report "Africa's youth: jobs or migration?"*

The scale of potential out-migration is massive...

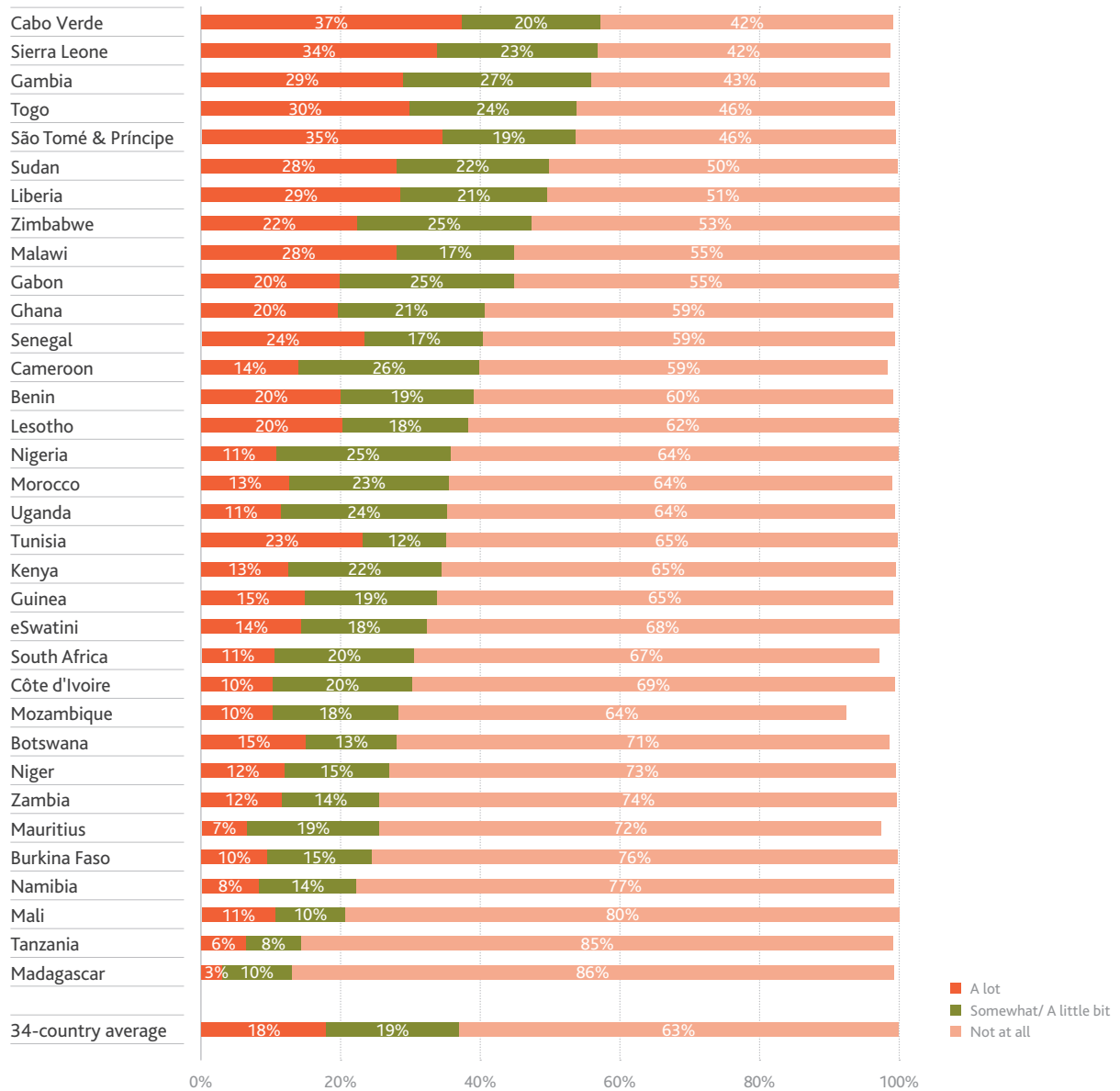
On average, more than one-third of Africans (37%) have at least considered emigrating to another country, including nearly one in five (18%) who have given it "a lot" of thought.

Far fewer are actually making plans to leave, of course. But even at just 3% of the population, the number of Africans who say they are seriously engaged in planning and making preparations to leave, such as getting a visa, is overwhelming. Another 11% of the population say they plan to move in the next year or two, though they are not currently making preparations.

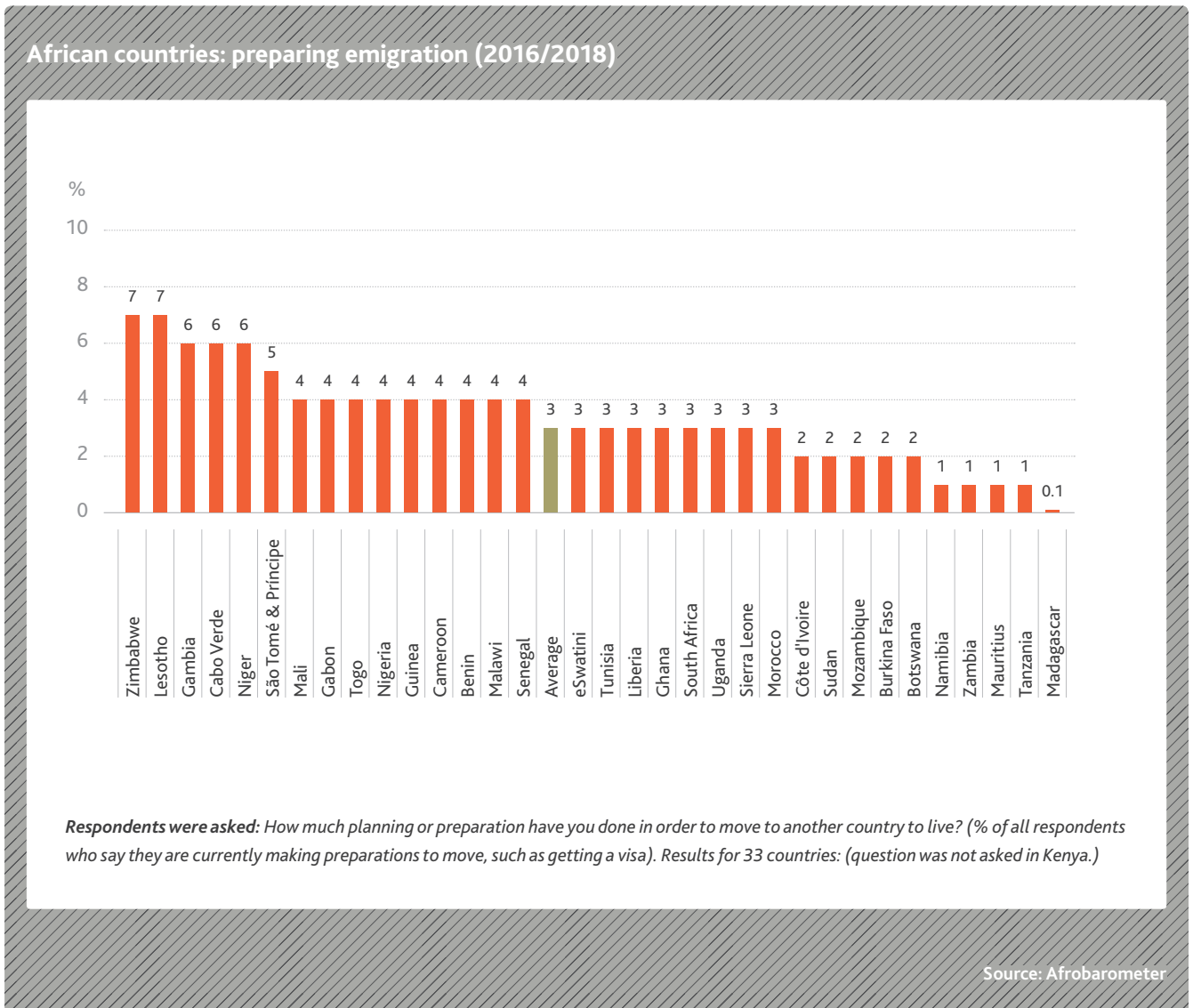
According to research from Gallup, if all those who wish to leave the continent were to do so, 40 countries would experience large losses in their youth population. For example, Sierra Leone would lose 78.0% of its youth population, Liberia 70.0% and Nigeria 57.0%.

* Due to data being taken from different sources, the number of decimal points used may differ within the text.

African countries: considering emigration (2016/2018)



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? ("Don't know/Refused" responses are not shown.) Results for 34 countries

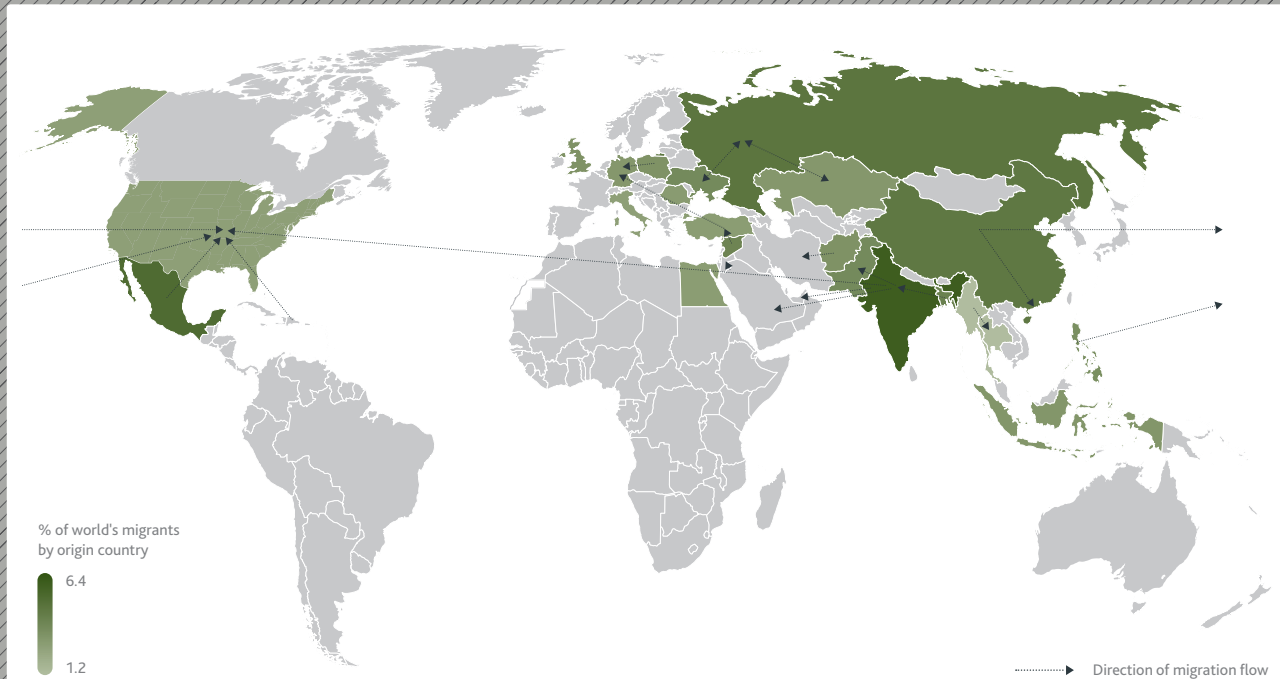


...but Africa is not a continent of massive exodus

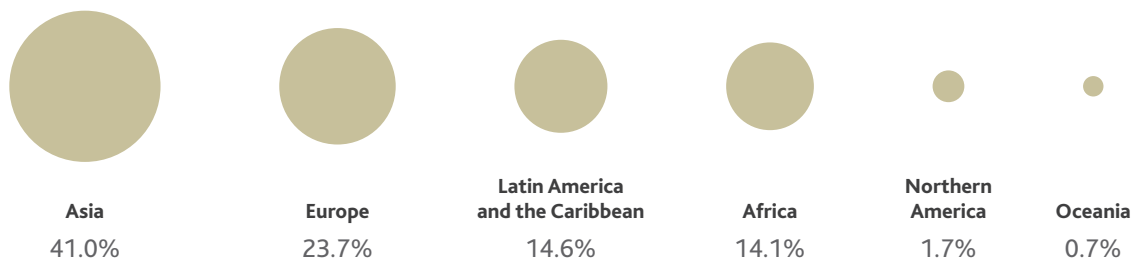
Data from the United Nations Population Division show that migration has become more popular over time. Linked to the continent's demographic growth rate, the total number of migrants from Africa has increased by almost 80.0% since 1990. However, at the same time, the proportion of migrants over the continent's total population has decreased from 3.2% in 1990 to 2.9% in 2017.

Many Africans are considering and planning to migrate yet the reality is far from the image of a mass exodus. In 2017, only 14.1% of the world's migrants were from Africa, much less than Asia's (41.0%) and Europe's (23.7%) shares.

World countries: 21 largest shares of migrants by origin country & top migration flows (2017)



World regions: % of global emigrant population by origin region (2017)

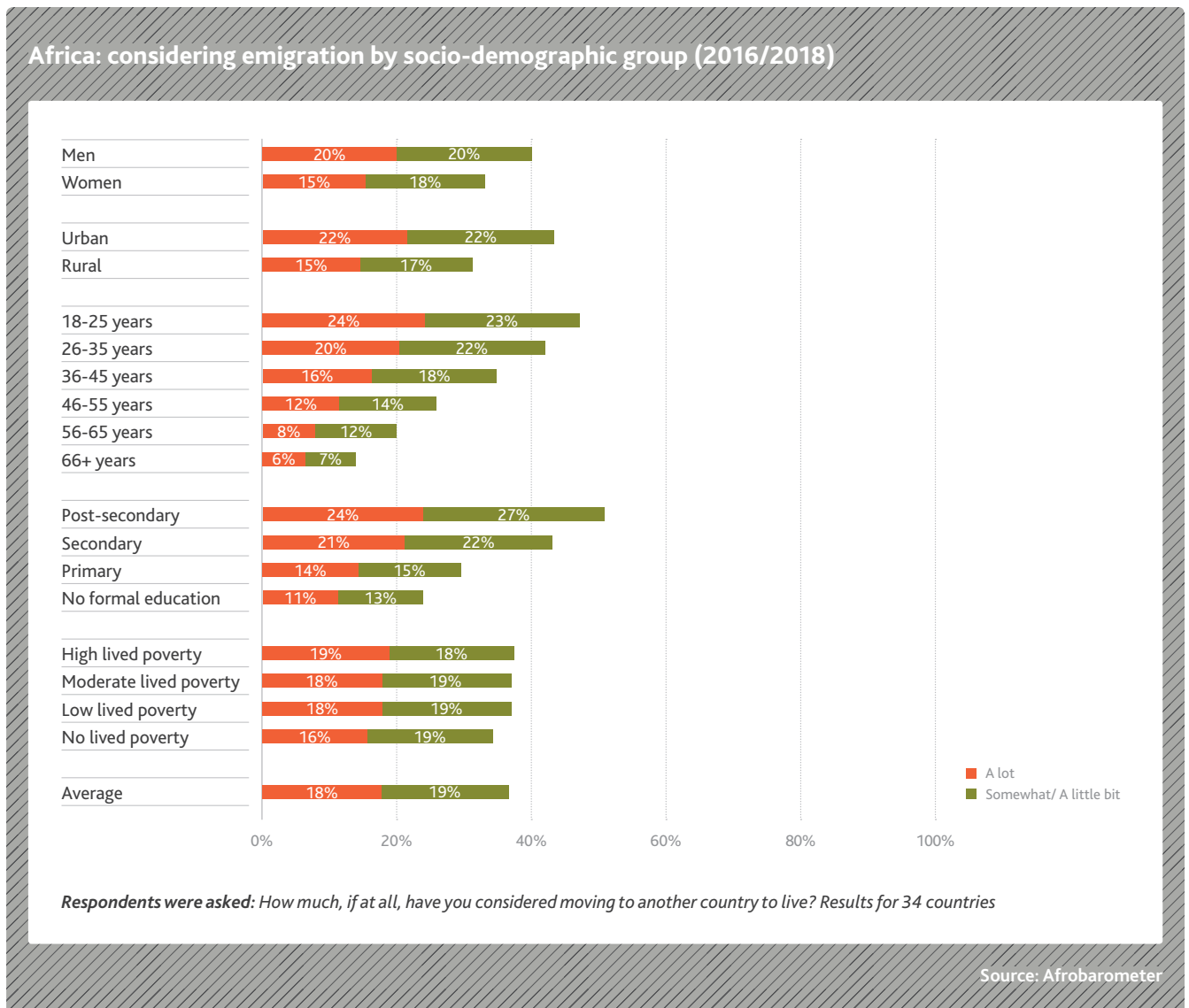


Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation based on UNDESA

Africa itself hosts a growing part of the global migrant population. In 2017, Africa hosted 9.6% of the world migrant stock (24.7 million), less than Asia (30.9%), Europe (30.2%) and Northern America (22.4%). However, it has become a growing destination continent for African and international migrants, being the region with the highest increase in the number of received migrants since 2000: +66.6%.

African migrants are not the poorest but the youngest and best-educated

One common misperception is that migrants are simply a country's most impoverished citizens. In fact, youth and education are far more strongly linked to interest in emigration than poverty. On average, more than half (51%) of all Afrobarometer respondents with post-secondary educational qualifications say they have thought about emigrating, including one in four (24%) who have considered it "a lot". Similarly, almost half (47%) of the youngest respondents (aged 18-25 years) report having considered leaving – double or triple the proportions in cohorts above age 45. This pattern of younger and better-educated potential emigrants is the same in almost all surveyed countries.



This represents a clear threat to countries of origin, at risk of losing the productivity and creativity of their young, highly motivated citizens. But it also highlights some of the potential benefits of emigration that are often overlooked in anti-immigrant rhetoric in Europe and the United States. Many industrial countries need immigrants to work in sectors such as information technology, health services, agriculture, manufacturing and construction, and migrants play an important role in fostering innovation, enabling entrepreneurship and stimulating job growth.

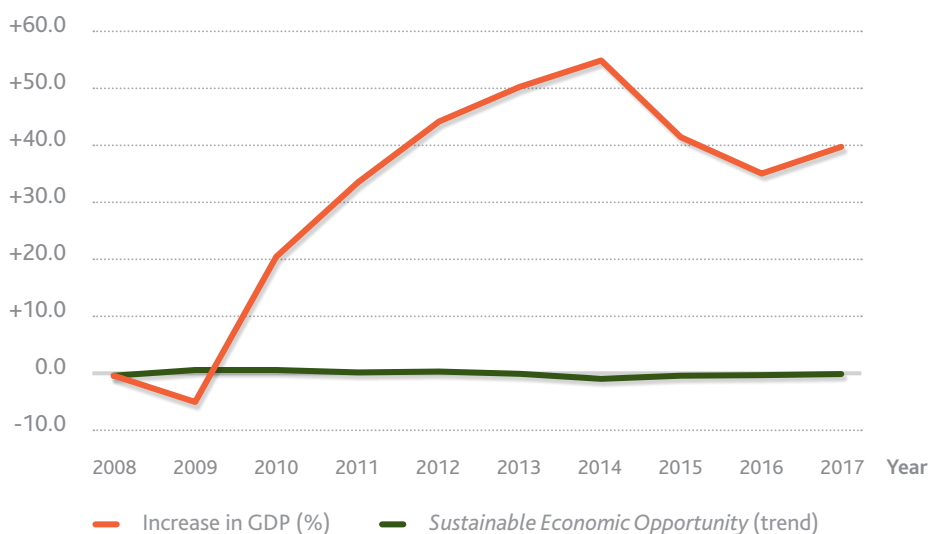
Countries of origin, meanwhile, benefit from remittances, which make up about three times the amount of foreign aid they receive. In 2018, remittances to sub-Saharan Africa increased by about 10%, to \$46 billion. Afrobarometer data show that one-fifth (21%) of Africans in surveyed countries rely on such monies from abroad. These facts may not point to an easy solution, but they are surely relevant to any policy designed to work for both origin and destination countries.

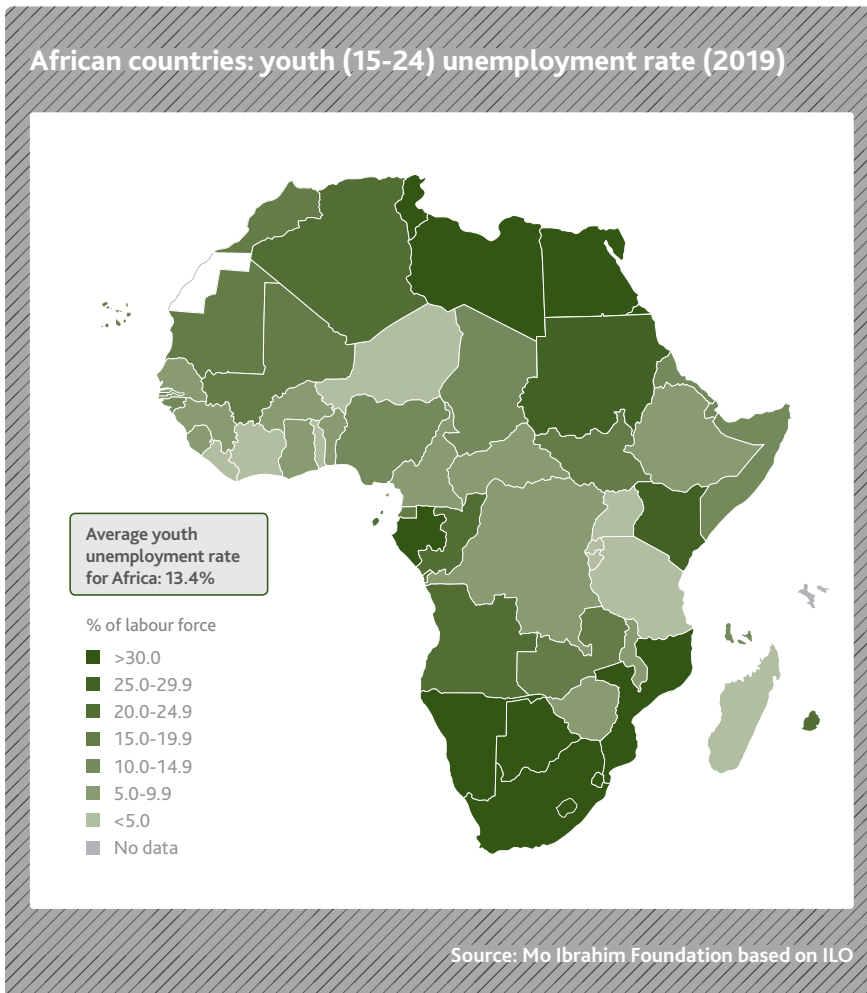
African migrations are mainly about jobs

The main reasons Africans consider leaving their country are to find a job (44%) and to escape poverty (29%), with another 6% who want to pursue their education. In a word, for opportunity that they can't find at home. These reasons are consistent across all countries.

The findings are not surprising. Despite strong macroeconomic growth on the continent, the 2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) report reveals that this did not translate into progress in *Sustainable Economic Opportunity*, which remains the lowest scoring of the four Index categories. Nor has it boosted employment. Between 2000 and 2014, employment in Africa expanded by less than 1.8% a year, far below the nearly 3% annual growth of the labour force.

Africa: *Sustainable Economic Opportunity* average trend & percent increase in continental GDP (2008/2017)





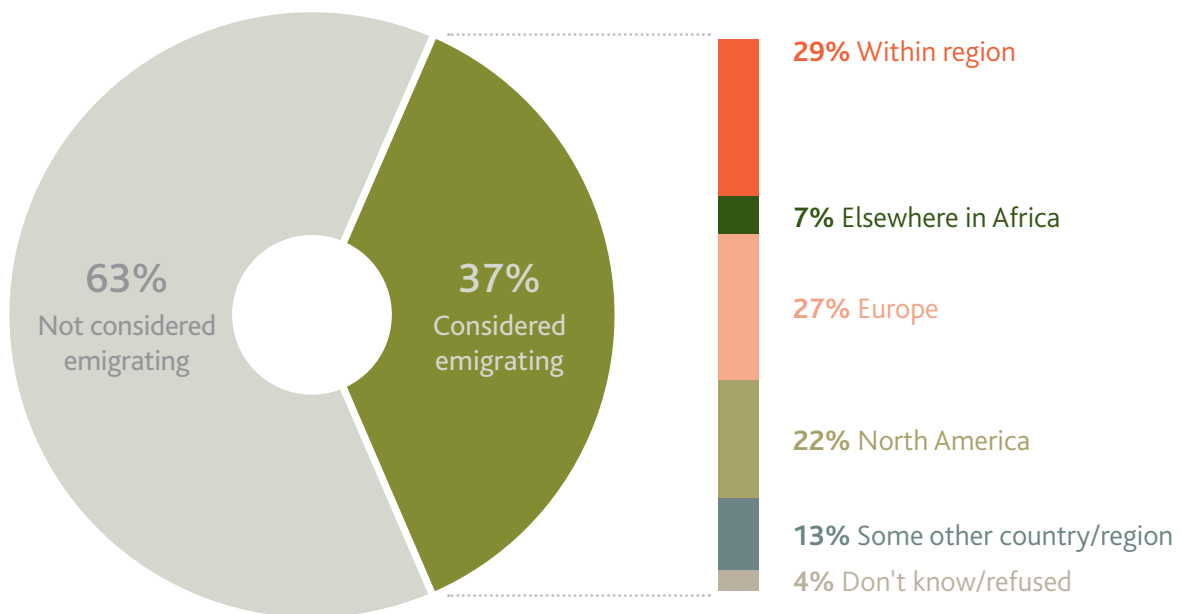
It is predominantly the continent's expanding youth population that feels the impact. In 2019, the unemployment rate among 15- to 24-year-olds in Africa is 13.4%, more than twice as high as for those older than 25 (6.1%). In some countries, such as South Africa, Libya, Mozambique and Namibia, youth unemployment rates are above 40.0%. Even higher education does not appear to offer better job prospects, and unemployment rates tend to be higher among young people with advanced levels of education as compared to those with basic education.

In Afrobarometer surveys, Africans consistently rank unemployment at the top of their "most important problems", while job creation is an issue on which citizens consistently give their governments some of their poorest performance ratings. It is therefore clear that policies to stimulate employment must be high on governments' agendas. Taking into account that the youngest (18-25) consider this an even more pressing issue and that the IIAG indicator *Socio-economic Integration of Youth* has deteriorated across the continent between 2008 and 2017, policies targeting Africa's youth should be a priority.

African migrants' most preferred destination is neither Europe nor America

While potential African emigrants are clearly motivated by the search for opportunity, they don't all see that opportunity in Europe or America. In fact, a plurality of potential emigrants would prefer to stay closer to home: 29% cite another country within their region as their most preferred destination, while 7% look elsewhere on the continent. However, it is worth noting that Africa is followed closely by Europe (27%) and North America (22%) as the most popular destinations.

Africa: preferred destination for potential emigrants (2016/2018)



Excluding those who said they had "not at all" considered emigration, respondents were asked: If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go? Results based on 34 countries

Source: Afrobarometer

When it comes to actual migrants, even for those who dream of distant lands, a less-distant destination may be more realistic: in 2017, 53.4% of African migrants did not leave the continent, while 25.7% travelled to Europe and 12.2% to Asia. 70.3% of sub-Saharan African migrants moved within the continent, while the overwhelming majority (almost 90.0%) of North African migrants moved to Europe or Asia.

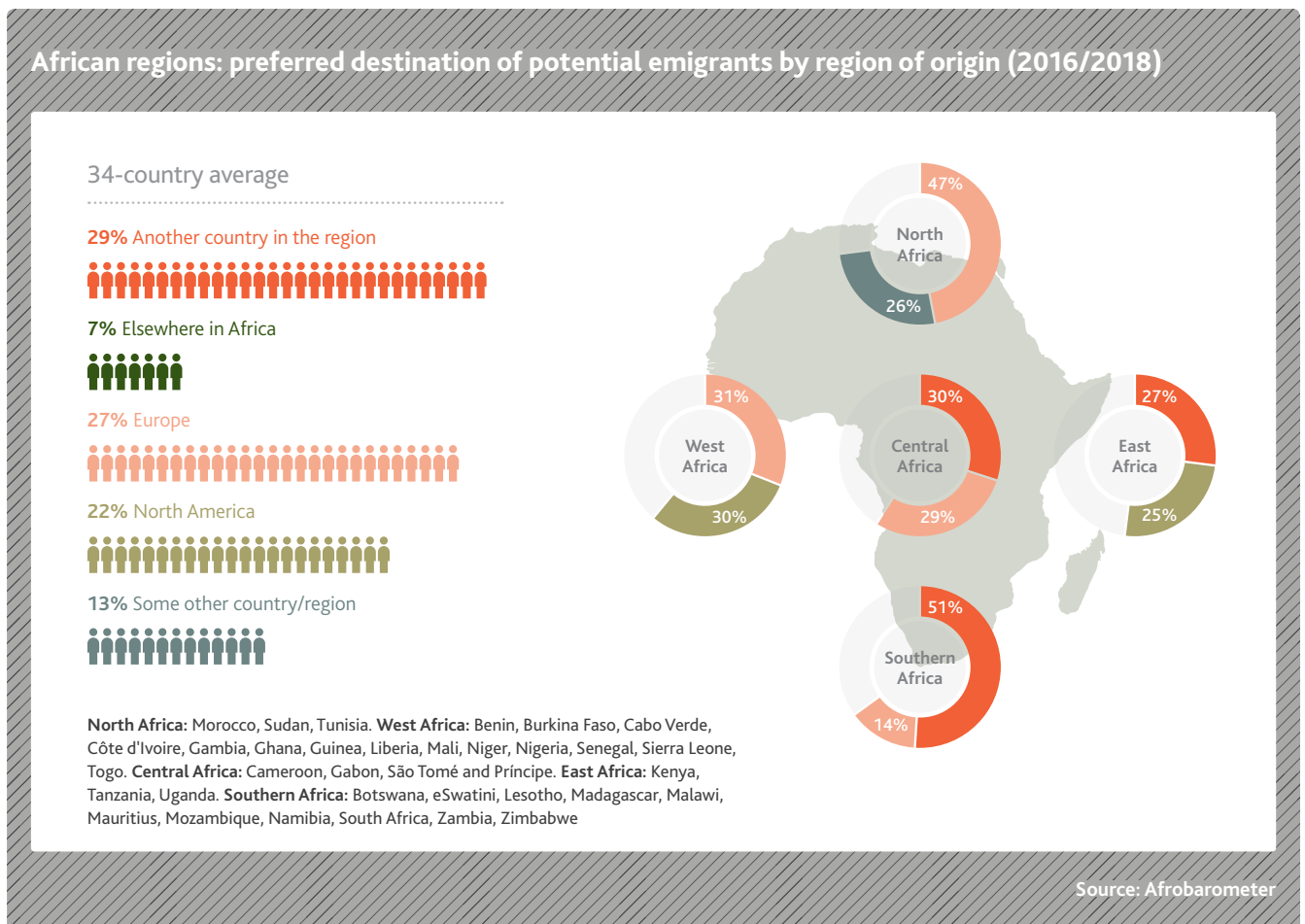
Not that intra-regional migration in Africa is easy: while a majority (56%) of Africans favour free cross-border movement within their region, the same majority say in fact it is "difficult" or "very difficult" to traverse borders to work or trade. Data from the 2018 African Visa Openness Index underline this, showing that African citizens need visas to travel to more than half of other African countries. With free movement of labour being included in only a few sub-regional agreements and limited or weak frameworks in place for the recognition and compatibility of skills and qualifications across borders, intra-African migrants are facing challenges when it comes to entering or effectively engaging in continental labour markets. It is possible in the coming decade that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCTFA) may facilitate enhanced intra-continental mobility. However, participating governments will need to fully commit to the implementation of the agreement if Africa wants to prevent brain drain and nurture the benefits of migration.

Migration is not the same in Malawi and Morocco

Averages across 34 African countries often hide important differences between regions or countries. The scale of potential out-migration, for example, is not the same everywhere. In Cabo Verde, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Togo, and São Tomé and Príncipe, more than half the population have considered emigrating, compared to fewer than one in four in Namibia, Mali, Tanzania and Madagascar. Central and West Africans are considerably more likely to be thinking about emigration than Southern and East Africans.

In Zimbabwe and Lesotho, fully 7% of the respondents say they are actually making plans to leave, more than three times as many as in 10 other countries.

And while eight out of 10 potential emigrants in Malawi would stay in the region (71%) or elsewhere in Africa, only one in 100 potential emigrants in Morocco would stay on the continent.



Authors:

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny is the Afrobarometer regional communications coordinator for anglophone West Africa, based at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana).

Email: jappiah@afrobarometer.org

Camilla Rocca is Head of Research and **Ines Schultes** is Junior Researcher at the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (MIF).

Email: research@moibrahimfoundation.org