



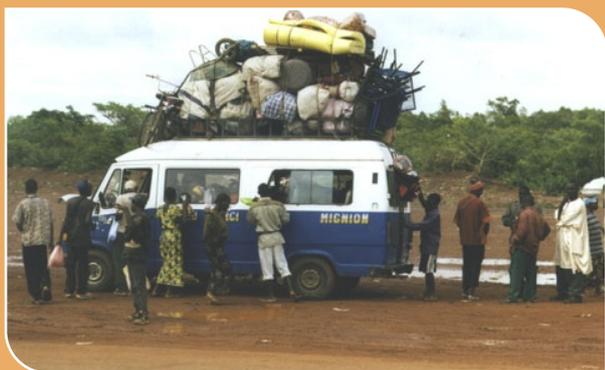
## **DYNAMICS OF MIGRATION IN WEST AFRICA**

West Africa, a sub-region of Sub-Saharan Africa, is a mix of Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone countries. Migration has a long tradition throughout West Africa, rooted in the history and geography of the sub-region. Internal migration is very significant in most West African countries and estimated flows are often around the same or larger in volume than those of international migration. This factsheet, however, focuses on intra-regional migration to illuminate patterns and flows around West Africa.

### **MIGRATION FLOWS AND PATTERNS**

West Africa hosts a mix of immigration, emigration, transit and return migration flows. However, their migration profiles change frequently. For instance, traditional destinations have become sending countries (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire) or transit countries (e.g. Senegal) (Olsen 2011), and almost all are also destinations for growing circular migration routes (Afolayan et al 2008).

Political instability and conflict have caused mass displacement and flows of refugees. However, the majority of West Africans move for 'conventional' reasons (livelihood, employment, education, etc) (Olsen 2011). People adapt their migratory ambitions to conditions and opportunities in different areas (Konseiga 2005). For example, in the late 1960s/early 1970s economic decline in Ghana coincided with Nigeria's oil-led employment boom, leading Ghana to switch from net immigration to net emigration while Nigeria emerged as a major labour migration destination country. But a decade later, Nigeria became a labour exporting country when the oil crisis hit (Adepoju 2005).



Inter-continental emigration is significant: West Africa supplies the largest proportion of Sub-Saharan migrants to Europe (770,000 in 2006) and more to USA (Gnisci & Trémolières 2006). Brazil, China, Malaysia and Dubai are also emerging destinations (Awumbila et al 2011).

However, fewer than 10% of West African migrants travel to Europe/USA. There are significant flows to the continent, in particular Northern, Central and Southern Africa. But the vast majority move within West Africa: at 7.5 million migrants in 2006, intra-regional mobility here is among the highest in the world (Olsen 2011).

### **HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON CONTEMPORARY LABOUR MOVEMENTS**

West Africa has a long history of intra-regional and inter-regional mobility, including the trans-Saharan caravan trade which forged migration paths and strong connections with North Africa (de Haas 2008), and the trans-Atlantic slave trade which multiplied and altered movements of slaves, slave traders and transporters.

The rise and fall of pre-colonial empires, tribal movements and inter-marriage, and important trade routes contributed to West Africa's huge mix of languages and ethnicities which do not conform to the national borders introduced by colonialism and independence, but instead unite different groups of various nationalities across the sub-region. As a result, some ethnic communities view their cross-border migration as being within one socio-cultural space (Afolayan et al 2008), and some like the Brong (Côte d'Ivoire/Ghana), Yoruba (Benin/Nigeria) and Ewe (Ghana/Togo), dismiss the borders as 'abstract and inefficient' (Yeboah 1986).

Colonialism introduced various drivers of population movement. The introduction of forced and recruited labour has had lasting impact on labour movements within the sub-region. For instance, there is long-standing labour migration from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire (Adepoju 2005). It pre-dated colonialism but was re-enforced by Governors of the colonies because Côte d'Ivoire's plantations needed a steady supply of cheap labour to sustain their competitiveness (Konseiga 2005), and continued well after independence.

Contemporary labour migration flows and patterns reflect historical influences as well as economic and political trends and environmental pressures. Virtually all West African countries both send and receive migrants (Awumbila 2009). However, movements in the sub-region are dominated by a north-south flow (Adepoju 2005) from the landlocked countries of the Sahel to the more prosperous plantations, mines and harbours of the coast.

**ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

The environment influences migration in conjunction with other economic/political/social determinants. West Africa has a diverse environment. Many areas suffer from droughts, unstable rainfall, desertification, over-exploitation of natural resources and poor quality land.

Seasonal, circular or temporary out-migration patterns are common where land-dependent residents search for alternative incomes during difficult times. For some, regular movement has become entrenched in their culture and livelihood. Sahelian nomadic pastoralists must cover vast areas to find sufficient food for their cattle. The Soninke (of Mali/ Senegal) and Mossi (of Burkina Faso), among others, view migration as an important part of personal development (Olsen 2011).



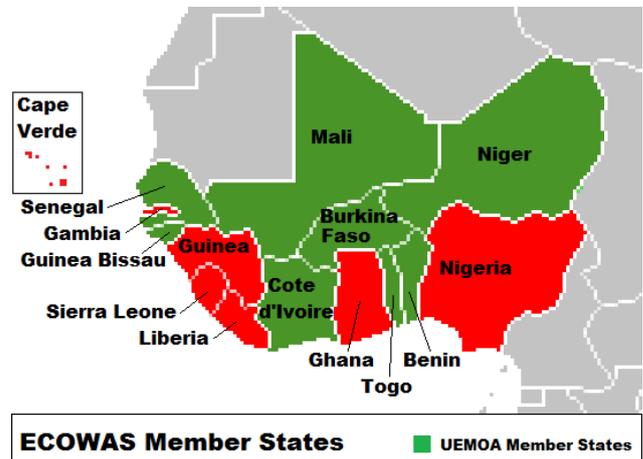
Large-scale farming, harbours, and extraction of natural resources are labour intensive and have attracted labourers by word-of-mouth and active recruitment by agencies for generations. Discovery of valuable resources is often accompanied by a boom in services and other industries, leading to a boom in employment which attracts a diverse population of job seekers and stimulates local and migrant entrepreneurship. The discovery of oil in Ghana has already attracted internal and international migrants, as it did in Nigeria.

**KEY FACTS**

- The vast majority of international migrants in West Africa move within the sub-region.
- Migration flows are highly adaptable to shifts in economic or political conditions in destination countries.
- Migration patterns are shaped by the history, geography, environments and employment opportunities of a region as well as economic, political and social drivers.
- Free movement of people is central to regional integration.

**REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

Two organisations aim for regional integration in West Africa: Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africain (UEMOA) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).



integration requires free movement of goods, services, capital and people/labour. Free movement policies stimulate migration flows by securing rights for all Member State nationals and removing obstacles that directly or indirectly discourage movement. Migrants, in turn, stimulate free movement of goods, services and capital, fostering strong trade and social relations between Member States. The Nigeria-Benin-Togo-Côte d'Ivoire-Dakar-Gambia informal trade network, for instance, is dominated by illiterate, female migrant traders (Gnisci & Trémolières 2006).

Since its creation in 1975, ECOWAS has pushed for free movement to facilitate the development potential of migration, with the long term aim of establishing ECOWAS citizenship. The Protocol on Free Movement was ratified in 1980 guaranteeing ECOWAS nationals visa-free entry into Member States: a first among African regional economic communities.

Economic and political crises in the 1980s-90s halted progress. On-going barriers and delays make achieving genuine free movement difficult. Nonetheless, the ambition remains: the 2008 Common Approach on Migration recognises free movement of persons as the priority of its integration policy.

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