

Reconfiguration of the Afro-European Migration System: Perspective Elements

Abstract

Long before the acceleration of migration flows with globalization in the 21st century, African immigration to Europe has taken a central place in the social and political debate in many European countries. At present, this centrality has more to do with future projections of expected flows from Africa, than with the actual number of people migrating from Africa to Europe. In fact, Africa has so far been the main destination for the flows generated in the continent, concentrating half of the total African population residing out of their country of birth. In most European countries, the influx of Africans has been surpassed by other immigrant groups, but African immigrants has remained the main concern in many EU countries. Using data of the UN Global Migration Database “Migration Stock”, population forecasts made by the United Nations, data from the Labour Force Survey compiled by Eurostat for different countries of the European Union and IPUMS census data for the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy and Portugal, this paper: 1) explores the dimensions and characteristics of the African diaspora and explores the place of the European Union in it; 2) Analyse the recent dynamics (demographic and socioeconomic) that shapes the Afro-European migration system; and, 3) Carry out a prospective exercise based on the characteristics of African migrants residing in different European countries and population projections.

Keywords: African diaspora, EU, International migrations, UNGMD, future perspectives.

Introduction

Migration between Africa and Europe has existed for many centuries. But during the first decade of the 21st century, it is presented as a root cause of many socio-economic problems in European countries and the deaths in the Mediterranean Sea of people trying to enter irregularly in Europe to escape poverty and civil wars in their home countries. This instrumentalization of African migration interestingly ignores two factors: first, the Afro-European migration system, through which people, goods, services and information are exchanged, has its roots in the colonial period and economic inequality between receiving and sending regions is its main driving force (Mabogunje, 1970); and second, the majority of migratory movements continue to occur among African countries, as more than half of the total 37.2 million Africans residing outside their country of birth reside

in another African country. According to the United Nations Global Migration Database, in 2017, only 9.2 million African migrants lived outside Africa, in which 26% were in Europe. It shows that, contrary to the popular perception, Europe receives only a quarter of the total African immigrants worldwide. Therefore, what worries most politicians and economists in the EU is the rapid demographic growth of Africa and the future expected arrival of immigrants in the coming decades. According to the medium variant United Nations projection (2018), the African population would double in 2050, reaching 2,528 million inhabitants, while the population of Europe would decrease by 1.8%.

The influx of African immigrants to Europe, which due to geographical proximity is often considered inevitable, can generate new opportunities for both receiving and sending regions in this migration system. From a demographic point of view, the immigration of young people from Africa may help the EU countries to minimize the impact of population decline and aging on their economy and social welfare systems, while for African countries, it may release the demographic pressure, which is mounting on their weak economies and help unemployed youth to have decent jobs outside their country of birth. Regarding the future evolution of the African population and its repercussions on migratory flows, especially to the EU, the discussion has focused on the supposed effects of the demographic imbalance (fertility and the age structure of the population in the two regions, especially with respect to the Mediterranean) and popularised the term “Mediterranean (demographic) failure”, or it has focused on the development of policies that are basically designed to control migration flows with a “Marshall Plan” (Camdessus, 2017), while highlighting the excess of young men who are candidates for migration (Smith, 2019) or the role that women might play (Engelman, 2016). Five elements have emerged as key factors in this debate. First, it is the demographic transition in most African countries, which will lead to the growth of working-age population in absolute and relative numbers, and may provide benefits to these countries in the form of “demographic window of opportunities” or a “demographic dividend” (Bloom et al. 2002). Second, this growth would coincide with a proportional increase in the number of people with higher educational in African countries (Lutz et al., 2014), which would raise the issue of human capital drainage through increased international migration from Africa (Isioma Ukpere, 2012). Third, it will be necessary to take into account the evolution of refugee movements as a result of wars and political conflicts, which even today have special relevance at the regional level (González García et al., 2016). Fourth, the possible impact of the climate change crisis on migrant flows

from Africa owing to global warming and its increasing presence in the media and influence on the design of future policies, an impact that is difficult to be measured with empirical evidences of identifying the subjects of this phenomenon, namely the “climate migrants” (Mayer, 2016). For the moment, regional migration would be the first to occur after the impact of climate change, while forced migration (movements of displaced persons and refugees due to armed conflicts), which is currently declining at the international and regional levels, would increase within African countries (Marchiori et al., 2012). Fifth, the migration policies of Europe that will determine both the nature of future migrations and the conditions of settlement for the African population.

Major Hypothesis:

We start from three main hypotheses:

H1: There is no single migratory system that represents whole Africa, but there are many subsystems that vary substantially from each other;

H2: The study of the level of education is essential to understand the reconfigurations of Afro-European migratory systems, especially in the coming decades, when education will play a very important role in facilitating African emigration.

H3: Although African countries will economically develop in the next 30 years, the influx of people, both in the form of refugees and economic migrants, will continue to knock the borders of the EU.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are:

- 1) Explore the dimensions and characteristics of the African diaspora and the place of the European Union in it.
- 2) Analyse the dynamics (both demographic and socioeconomic) that shapes the Afro-European migration system.
- 3) Perform a prospective exercise based on the characteristics of African migrants residing in different European countries and population projections to the 2050 horizon.

Data Sources and Methodology

We are going to use following data sources:

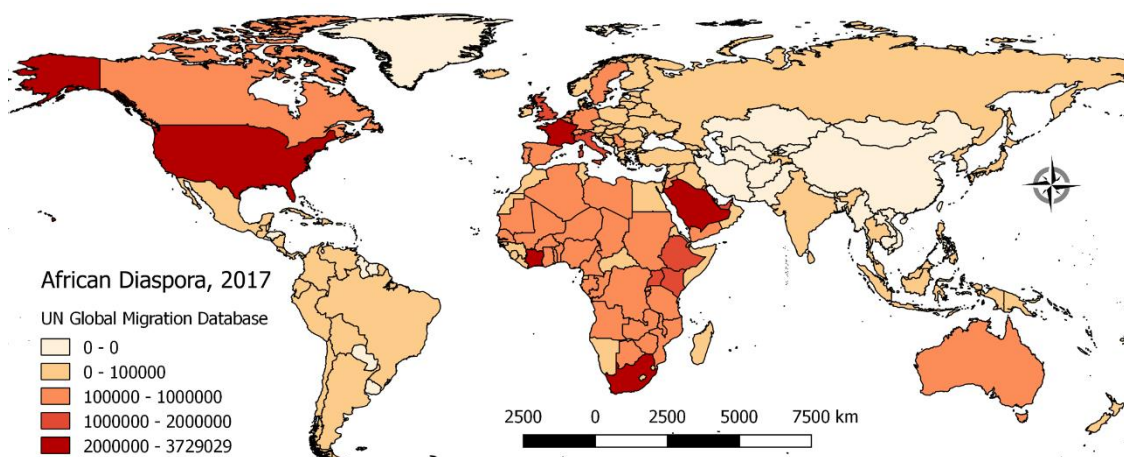
1. United Nations Global migration database.
2. Population forecasts made by the United Nations.

3. Labour Force Survey data collected by Eurostat for different countries of the European Union.
4. Census data from IPUMS for Holland, France, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Preliminary Results:

1. The global African diaspora and Europe: According to the UNGMD, in 2017 (Map 1), the number of Africans living outside their country of birth was 35.3 million, dispersed in 158 countries around the world. More than half of the total emigrants lived in other African countries (52.3%). Europe was the second main destination of the African diaspora, with 25.8% of African migrants, followed by Asia (12,6%) and North America (7.2%). In Africa, there were two poles of attraction for internal migrants: South Africa, which represents 6.2% of total African immigrants, followed by Ivory Coast with 6% leading the Gulf of Guinea region. Further behind is Uganda, with 4.6%, which has a large number of refugees from different military conflict countries and economic migrants from neighbouring countries. In Europe, the distribution is marked by both the colonial legacy and the most recent migrations. Thus, most of the African immigrants live in France (10.2%), the United Kingdom (3.8%), Italy (2.9%) and Spain (2.8%). In North America, the United States of America was the main recipient of the African migrants (5.6%). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia (4.1%) and the United Arab Emirates (3.1%) were the main destinations of African immigrants in Asia.

Map 1: Population Distribution of African immigrants outside their country of birth, 2017

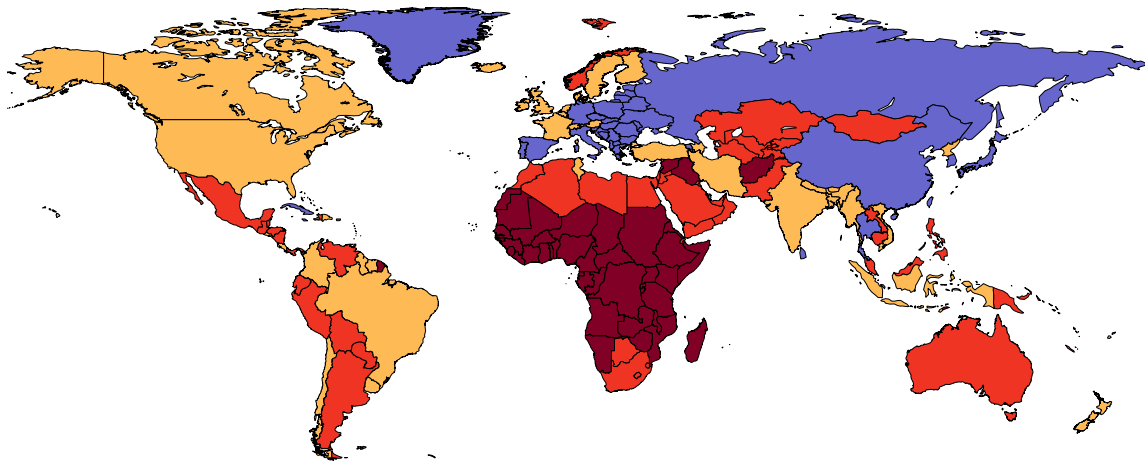


Source: UN Global Migration Database “Migration Stock”, 2017.

2. High population growth and immigration: According to UN projections, in the next 30 years the population of Africa will grow faster than any other continent, doubling

from 1.35 billion inhabitants in 2020 to the 2.52 billion projected in 2050 (Map 2). That volume is still far from the 5.2 billion inhabitants that Asia is estimated to reach, but in relative terms it represents 88% growth in Africa compared to 13.7% in Asia. At the country level, in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria with 410 million inhabitants would surpass the United States by doubling its current population, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (197 million) and Ethiopia (190 million), which are among the fastest growing countries. In relative terms, the most populous countries (and some of the poorest in the world), such as Niger, would almost triple its population until 2050, with a little over 68 million inhabitants. Outside the sub-Saharan region, only Egypt will witness population growth, with 153 million inhabitants.

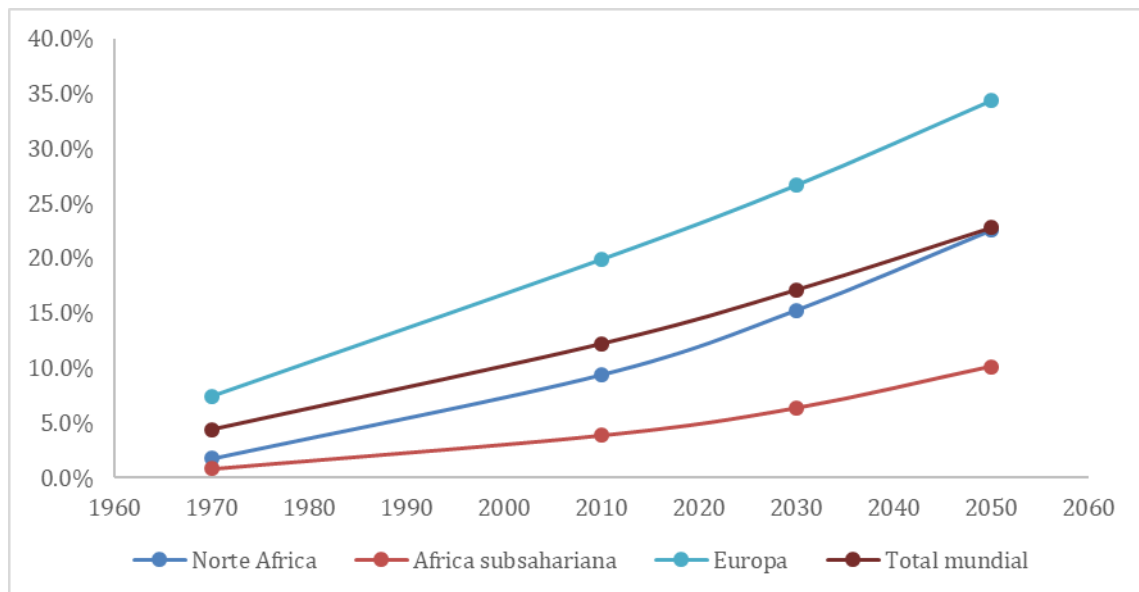
Map 2: Projected population growth between 2020 and 2050.



Source: World Population Prospects, UN, 2017.

3. Expansion of higher education in Africa and migration: According to the projections carried out by the team led by Wolfgang Lutz of IASA, taking a medium scenario, the proportion of the population with university studies will increase globally from 12.2% in 2010 to 22.8% in 2050. For North Africa this proportion will grow from 8% in 2010 to 22% in 2050, reaching the same as the global average, but for sub-Saharan Africa it will grow slowly to reach around 10% in 2050. The rise in the number of highly educated people will be expected to increase the emigration of professionals and highly skilled Africans, which may lead to the brain drain from Africa to the developed world.

Figure 1: Proportion of people with university education 1970-2050.



Source: Lutz, Wolfgang, et al. (2014) *World Population and Human Capital in the twenty-first century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

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