

Policy brief

The right to mobility

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1. Executive Summary

West Africa is characterized - among other things - by rapid population growth and increasing urbanization. These factors affect migration patterns and require policy responses from states. In recent years, African countries have shown a growing interest and willingness to address the challenges of migration and to better exploit its potential for development.

In January 2008, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a Common Approach on Migration (Common Approach). This is a non-binding document that serves as a general framework on migration issues. While it addresses some of the key aspects of migration (intra-regional mobility, management of regular migration, combating irregular migration, and gender mainstreaming in migration policies), the stated objective of the text is to establish links between migration and development.

OPPORTUNITIES organized a political debate in Dakar in February 2023 on the necessary implementation of the Common Approach and its refinement because in Senegal, at this stage, there is no policy coordination process in the area of migration at the national level. The national migration policy needs to be developed to fill this gap. An analysis of the institutional mechanism for dealing with migration issues reveals a multiplicity of actors, without there being any coherence between the initiatives developed. Given this situation, the participants of the debate agreed the need to map the actors and programs/projects related to migration for a better visibility; to create a functional national structure for inclusive governance of migration; to set up a consultation framework bringing together all the stakeholders; to strengthen synergies for the implementation of the national migration policy.

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The debate concluded with a clear call : the right to mobility must be reinstated because it is necessary, on the one hand, to prevent the human catastrophe caused by irregular migration and, on the other, to promote the development of all continents.

2. Context

In January 2008, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a Common Approach on Migration (Common Approach). This is a non-binding document that serves as a general framework on migration issues. While it addresses some of the key aspects of migration (intra-regional mobility, management of regular migration, combating irregular migration, and gender mainstreaming in migration policies), the stated objective of the text is to establish links between migration and development.

The Common Approach is based on six principles:

- The free movement of people within the ECOWAS region is a fundamental priority of the integration policy of ECOWAS member states.
- Legal migration to other regions of the world contributes to the development of ECOWAS Member States. The text explicitly calls on member states to cooperate in the area of migration management and thus enable their citizens to access labour markets outside West Africa.
- The fight against human trafficking is a moral and humanitarian imperative.
- Policy harmonization at multiple levels is essential. The Common Approach identifies three levels of policy coherence:
 - the regional level, i.e., between bilateral agreements concluded by member states and ECOWAS texts and protocols;
 - the international level, i.e., between the economic, trade and development aid policies of northern countries and the migration policies of the same countries;
 - and the national level, i.e., between national migration management policies and sectoral development policies.
- The rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees must be protected.
- The gender dimension of migration must be taken into account. States are required to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data on migrant profiles and to ensure that the gender dimension is taken into account in their migration policies.

The Common Approach is accompanied by action plans on migration and development that include a range of initiatives to operationalize the above principles. These initiatives include the creation of a regional fund to finance cross-border cooperation to promote regional mobility and the development by the ECOWAS Commission of a regional land-use planning strategy to serve as a springboard for organic development within the region by upgrading uninhabited and/or undeveloped areas due to inadequate infrastructure.

This Common Approach must be implemented in the Senegalese context. Implementation requires a coherent framework and the restoration of the right to mobility.

3. Conclusions

In Senegal, at this stage, there is no policy coordination process in the area of migration at the national level. The national migration policy needs to be developed to fill this gap.

An analysis of the institutional mechanism for dealing with migration issues reveals a multiplicity of actors, without there being any coherence between the initiatives developed. Given this situation, the participants of the debate agreed the need to map the actors and programs/projects related to migration for a better visibility; to create a functional national structure for inclusive governance of migration; to set up a consultation framework bringing together all the stakeholders; to strengthen synergies for the implementation of the national migration policy.

To date, aware of the significant flows of irregular migration, Senegal has put in place a strategic framework to combat irregular migration. The objective is to combat irregular migration through integrated border management in order to contribute to economic and social development.

This general objective is broken down into five (5) specific objectives: better prevention of irregular migration by addressing its root causes; improved legal, institutional and organizational framework for the fight against irregular migration; a modernized integrated border management system; enhanced assistance and protection of vulnerable migrants; and better promotion of reception, orientation and monitoring of returning migrants. These objectives must now be implemented.

- Migration policies can have important consequences for migrants, host communities and international relations. A restrictive immigration policy can lead to a decrease in migration flows, but can also create human rights and discrimination problems. An open immigration policy can contribute to cultural diversity and social enrichment, but can also lead to social and economic tensions.
- Migration policies should not be limited to legislation related to the entry and exit of populations, but should also address the root causes of migration. For this reason, the effects of climate change and difficulties in the fisheries sector should be taken into account when designing migration policies.
- Climate change has significant impacts on migration patterns in Senegal and Africa. Changes in climatic conditions, such as prolonged droughts, floods, storms, and heat waves, make some areas inhospitable to residents, which can lead to displacement.
- Climate change impacts also affect food security, health, and the availability of natural resources, which contributes to migration. For example, water scarcity or reduced agricultural yields cause people to seek better opportunities in other regions.



- As for fishing challenges, changes in water temperature, changes in ocean currents, declining fish stocks, and extreme weather events make fishing more difficult and less profitable. In Saint-Louis and other coastal areas of Senegal, these factors are leading to the migration of fishing communities that depend on the sea for their livelihoods and economy. Coastal communities are forced to migrate to more viable fishing areas, or even to leave the fishing profession and seek alternative livelihoods.

On the international level, the right to mobility must be reinstated because it is necessary, on the one hand, to prevent the human catastrophe caused by irregular migration and, on the other, to promote the development of all continents.



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