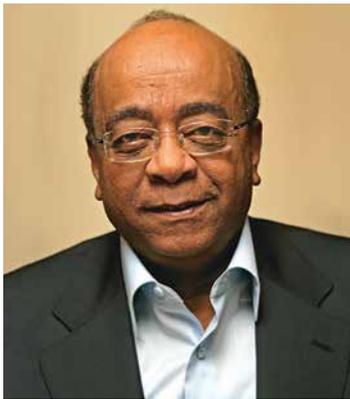


Getting the Facts Right...



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The debate around migration has always triggered emotional and political reactions. At any domestic level, migration policies are highly sensitive, because they are dealing either with your own people who want to leave, or people ‘from outside’ who want to enter.

The global COVID-19 crisis is an aggravating factor. Economies have been brought to a deadly standstill, with many people having already lost their jobs, businesses destroyed and prospects currently looking gloomy. The ‘fear of the other’ fuelled by the pandemic, as the ‘be safe – keep your social distance’ motto, coupled with the

economic downfall and job losses does not indeed encourage to open any borders.

In these troubled, uncertain times, leaders owe the truth to their citizens, and we need to stick to reality. Misperceptions based on incomplete or partially presented data are harmful, and distorted data lead to inadequate policies. Policy-making, and explaining, will only be successful if it is based on reliable facts and on a full understanding of the drivers and impacts of the challenges to be addressed. Allow me then to review the most relevant facts and figures available on this topic.

First, migration is not a new 21st century crisis. It is a key dynamic of human history that has shaped most nations in their building and development. There is no recent ‘critical hike’, whatsoever, in migration numbers. Since 1990, the number of migrants worldwide increased only marginally in relation to the world population – from 2.9 percent to 3.4 percent in 2017. African migrants as a share of Africa’s total population even decreased – from 3.2 percent in 1990 to 2.9 percent in 2017.

Second, Africa is not ‘a continent of massive exodus’ and African migrants are not ‘overwhelming’ European shores. In fact, the 36.3 million African migrants accounted only for 14 percent of the world’s total migrant population in 2017, far less so than those from Asia (41 percent) or Europe (24 percent).

In fact, African migrations predominantly take place within the African continent. As of 2017, more than 70 percent of Sub-Saharan migrants had left their home country for another African country, while less than a fourth left for Europe. Indeed, Africa itself hosts a growing part of the global migrant population: since 2000 the number of migrants within Africa increased by 66.6 percent.

Third, African migrations are mainly about aspirations, not desperation. Insecurity is far from being the major trigger: refugees account for only around 20 percent of African migrants and most of these refugees are hosted by African countries.

Fourth, as assessed by facts and figures, migration has positive impacts for both origin and destination countries, as they present a valuable resource by filling labour shortages. We should rather pay attention to the brain drain and heavy toll it represents for their countries of origin. Many of the medical staff so key during the COVID-19 crisis originate from African countries. Those who leave stand above average when it comes to education and health levels. There is also no evidence that higher migration flows result in higher poverty levels in countries of destination.

The key challenge of Africa today is its youth. 65 percent of Africa's population is currently under the age of 25, and by the end of this century, Africa's youth alone will be equivalent to twice Europe's total population. Better educated than their parents, this young generation is also less employed. Africa's

economic growth since 2000, mainly driven by raw-commodities exports, has been mainly jobless, fuelling the drive to migrate to find better prospects. The deeply concerning economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Africa, which is bound to enter its first recession in 25 years, is drying out further any prospects.

A lot can be done. Demographic and migration data as well as labour-market analysis and forecasting can be improved to support evidence-based policies. Job creation in Africa can be boosted by scaling up investments and upgrading the value chain in key sectors with high potential such as agriculture and intracontinental transports. Educational and training curricula must rise adequately to job market prospects. Continental integration must be boosted in order to strengthen physical and professional mobility within the continent. Additional legal safe channels for labour migrations from Africa to Europe must be devised to crowd out the growing place taken by smugglers.

Africa's youth can be either a fantastic potential or a ticking bomb. We will share the consequences in both cases. If we prove unable to present this youth with acceptable economic and social prospects, in the best of case, this will fuel further the drive towards migration; in the worse, it will enhance the appeal of criminal or terrorist networks. Hence, implementing a sound migration policy is not a question of charity, nor of moral duty, but a matter of well-assessed and shared interests. ✖

**...to create a
sound migration policy**

