

West Africa

West Africa has been characterised by a long history of population mobility, and West African countries are today countries of both emigration and immigration, while intra-regional mobility still represents the most significant feature of migration in the region. As recently as 2015, 67% of West African emigrants moved within the region.¹

Regional migration trends and challenges

Migration in West Africa has been fostered by a multiplicity of factors. Precarious economic prospects, strong population growth and consequent high pressure on the labour markets of frequently small and struggling economies are all elements that have significantly contributed to **West African cross-border mobility**. Nevertheless, the growth and development experienced by West African countries in the last decades have equipped their growing young populations (in 2015, the median age of the West African population was 18 years, and 117 million people were aged between 15 and 34 years old) with more resources and increasing aspirations to move elsewhere. In doing so, West African youth has been looking for better opportunities and been driven in some cases to longer migration movements towards developed countries outside the region.

Forced migration has also contributed to increase the number of people crossing the borders of West African countries. Several conflicts in the region in the last three decades, for example those of Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and more recently Mali and Nigeria, have forcibly displaced important numbers of people who have frequently sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Moreover, many areas of West Africa are also particularly prone to natural disasters and **intense environmental degradation processes**, due both to climate change and intensive natural resource exploitation, driven by

¹ Data on West Africa covers calculations based on statistics of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division, *International Migrant Stock, The 2017 Revision*, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>, and *World Population Prospects 2017*, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>.



the necessity to feed the growing population of the region. Unable to rely on agriculture for their livelihood, an increasing number of people in West Africa have left their rural communities, often to relocate to poor urban areas. Not infrequently, these movements have followed trans-national routes.

Mobility in the region has also been fostered by regional integration under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has contributed to **freedom of movement** and residence within the Community. No longer facing visa and entry requirements for stays of less than 90 days, citizens of ECOWAS Member States can today move freely across ECOWAS internal borders, also thanks to a common ECOWAS passport.

Today, migration in West Africa represents both a **challenge and an opportunity**. On the one hand, mobility from West African countries can take the form of irregular migration movements, where violations of migrant rights and threats to their lives can frequently become a common reality. On the other hand, migration contributes to the development of West African countries, for instance in Liberia, where remittances reached 26% of the national GDP in 2016.²

Currently, **enhancing migration governance** is at the top of the political agenda of West African countries, a priority at regional level and one of the core objectives of cooperation between the European Union (EU) and West Africa. At regional level, in 2008 the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration outlined the overarching framework for migration in the region. At national level, according to the latest edition of a survey jointly published by

² World Bank, *Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>

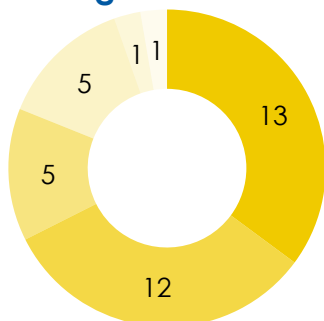
the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2016, the majority of West African countries were planning to develop or were already in the process of developing comprehensive national migration policies. At trans-regional level, the EU-Africa Valletta Summit in November 2015, together with its Action Plan, has been promoting better migration governance through enhanced cooperation between the EU and African countries.

MIEUX in West Africa

Since 2009, MIEUX has implemented 52 Actions in Africa, 27 of them in West Africa. In addition to ECOWAS, 14 out of 16 West African countries have requested to work with MIEUX.

MIEUX's strong presence in the region witnesses both the willingness of West African countries and ECOWAS to strengthen their migration governance frameworks and capacities, and their consideration of MIEUX as a reliable partner in order to achieve their objectives.³

MIEUX Actions in West Africa according to thematic areas



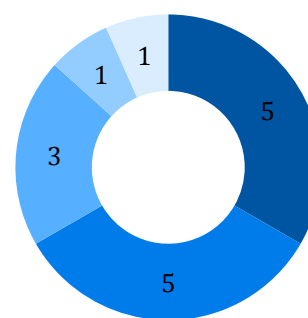
- Migration Legislation/Policy/Strategy Development
- Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings
- Labour Migration
- Migration and Development
- Migration and Environment
- Migrant Integration at the Local Level

³ An Action can cover multiple themes. Therefore the sum of Actions and thematic areas in both graphs is higher than the total actual number of Actions cited above (27).

Migration policy development

The majority of the MIEUX Actions in West Africa have focused on the development of migration policies, legislation, strategies and action plans in different fields of migration. MIEUX's approach has been based on a flexible and adaptable mix of different steps that form institutional processes combining: preliminary fact-finding missions; capacity building activities in various forms; support to the establishment of multi-stakeholder coordinating structures; data collection; drafting sessions and workshops; provision of remote expert support; and organisation of validation events. Thanks to the ownership and involvement of partner countries, MIEUX has acquired extensive experience and contributed to the establishment and maintenance of various institutional processes.

Thematic areas within policy development



- General Migration
- Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings
- Migration and Development
- International Protection and Asylum
- Migrant integration at local level

Policies and coordinating structures by country in which MIEUX has worked

The following laws, policies and strategies, as well as their respective action plans, have been created through MIEUX Actions since 2009, and have been coordinated and drafted by Committees, Task Forces or Working Groups in each country. In Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, multi-stakeholder structures were created with support from MIEUX.

Cabo Verde

<i>National Immigration Strategy (2013)</i>	Multi-stakeholder Working Group and Unit for Coordination of Immigration Policy
<i>Draft revised Laws on Foreigners and on Asylum (2013)</i>	Unit for Coordination of Immigration Policy
<i>Municipal Action Plan for Migrant Integration at Local Level (ongoing)</i>	Multi-stakeholder Working Group including NGOs and Municipalities

Côte d'Ivoire

<i>National Strategy to Counter Trafficking in Human Beings and National Action Plan (2015)</i>	Technical Working Group including major stakeholders working on trafficking in human beings
<i>National Migration and Development Strategy (2017)</i>	One of the suggestions of the Strategy: to create a national migration and development coordinating structure

Niger

<i>National Strategy to Fight Irregular Migration (2017)</i>	Inter-Ministerial Committee
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Senegal

<i>National Border Management Strategy and National Action Plan (2013)</i>	Inter-Departmental Committee within the Ministry of Interior for drafting Inter-Ministerial Committee for validation
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Sierra Leone

<i>National Migration Policy (2017)</i>	Task Force within the Immigration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs
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Togo

<i>National Migration and Development Strategy. National Action Plan (2017)</i>	Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration and Development issues
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Migration policies in West-Africa: the way forward

Fostering a coordinated regional approach to migration governance

Indeed, intra-regional migration still represents the main feature of migration in West Africa. As a mainly regional phenomenon, migration in West Africa demands to be addressed through a regional approach. In this sense, the objective of free movement of persons within ECOWAS Member States, and the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration, have shown the importance paid to regional governance of migration.

Further developing national holistic migration policies and sectoral strategies supported by realistic action plans in order to foster good migration governance

In West Africa, many countries have shown a strong willingness to proceed in this direction. On the one hand, it is increasingly recognised that migration, as a complex and cross-cutting issue covering many sectors and involving a multiplicity of actors, needs to be steered through a comprehensive and holistic approach by developing and implementing overall migration policies. On the other hand, it has also become clear that different migration areas, for example labour migration, trafficking in human beings, migration and development, etc., need to be addressed through specific sectoral strategies. Such instruments should always be accompanied by action plans in which a roadmap for their implementation, stakeholders to be involved and

the responsible institutions for each step are clearly defined.

Ensuring reliable and regular migration data collection, management and analysis

For migration policies to be based on evidence, they need timely, reliable, accessible and comparable data. In recent years, many efforts have been made in West Africa to improve the quality of migration data collection and processing. Between 2010 and 2012, MIEUX supported The Gambia in finalising and disseminating the 2009 National Migration and Urbanisation Survey, also in order to enhance national policy-making capacities in the field of migration.

Guaranteeing horizontal and vertical cooperation and coordination among relevant actors, with special attention to diaspora organisations and local authorities

In order to ensure effective migration governance, migration policies need to be based on a participatory and multi-stakeholder approach. In this sense, coordination shall be ensured in two directions: a) horizontally, i.e. including all types of relevant actors (governmental institutions and agencies, NGOs, academia, private sector organisations, etc.), with special attention to diaspora organisations; and b) vertically, i.e. involving all levels, and especially local authorities.

In the first case, the MIEUX Action in Côte d'Ivoire on migration and development involved relevant diaspora organisations in the development of the national Migration and Development Strategy, which seeks to harness the contribution of both immigrant and emigrant communities to the development of Côte d'Ivoire. In the second case, a MIEUX Action in Cabo Verde is currently focusing on supporting the drafting of a Municipal Action Plan for Immigrant Integration.

Addressing environmental migration in cross-sectoral policies and strategies

Several countries in West Africa have developed specific policies and strategies to address environmental degradation and climate change, but the link with migration and mobility remains frequently unaddressed. Mainstreaming environmental migration into migration policies and/or developing

specific and focused strategies that go beyond the traditional dynamics (e.g. urban planning, agricultural practices, internal mobility) would redress this gap. Coordination by several Ministries, Departments and Agencies in prevention and post-crisis management, needed to implement these changes, could be taken forward by cross-ministerial coordination bodies. Bangladesh's example could provide a model for West Africa States.

Furthermore, even though frequently a cross-border phenomenon, trans-national cooperation on environmental migration is still embryonic and could therefore be further enhanced. In this regard, MIEUX is currently implementing a sub-regional Action in West Africa in cooperation with the Governments of Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Togo about the link between migration, environmental degradation and climate change.

Make full use of international cooperation mechanisms

To further "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies" (Sustainable Development Goal 10.7), applying a human rights-based approach is now a global priority. International cooperation can be highly relevant in supporting countries to achieve this objective.

Among other initiatives, the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (the Rabat Process) and the Valletta Summit and its Action Plan have shown to be highly relevant mechanisms of international dialogue and cooperation on migration for better migration governance and migrant rights' protection.

Meanwhile, for almost a decade, the **MIEUX Initiative** has been supporting enhanced migration management in accordance with international human rights standards through peer-to-peer exchange and capacity development actions between West African countries and EU Member States.

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