



**Reconsidering West African Migration  
Changing focus from European immigration  
to intra-regional flows**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research on West African migration has tended to focus on specific ‘crisis migration’ issues, such as trafficking, international refugee flows or irregular migration to Europe. This reflects rather Eurocentric policy priorities, since these forms of West African migration are actually relatively small in comparison with intra-regional migration.

Indeed, for every 20 migrants who board trains and buses to West African destinations, only one will try to get on a boat to Europe. Therefore, the paper will focus on the migration from poorer to richer zones within the sub-region, specifically the composition of flows as well as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) policy measures for mobility facilitation. Furthermore, the paper outlines future challenges and possibilities for West African migration, with West African nation states having experienced a demographic shock, high unemployment, and thus increased mobility pressures (both intra- and extra-regional). The analysis leads to a conclusion of why the European Union – based on a developmental perspective – should also be concerned with ‘conventional’ intra-regional migration in West Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

Increased migration flows have become a global trend (Castles 2009). Research suggests that today there are also more people moving into and within the African continent. The trajectories are less straightforward – with former colonial and linguistic divides being revisited – and with an increased variety of actors (e.g. married skilled women) involved in African migration, moving to a larger range of destinations from new places of departure (Jonsson 2009).

Traditional receiving countries have become sending countries (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire) or transit countries (e.g. Senegal), while transit countries have become destination countries (e.g. Morocco), and most importantly – almost all African countries are today also immigration destinations. Many movements have remained bipolar (from one location to another), but all countries have recorded a growing prevalence of temporary and circular migration (Afolayan et al. 2009).

International organizations have been focusing on the refugee streams within West Africa, due to the numerous civil wars in what has been termed “the riskiest region in Africa” (Edi 2006: 7). While wars have led to large displacements of people, most people move for ‘conventional’ reasons including trade, marriage, education, pilgrimage and status. The absolute majority of West African migrants travel to neighbouring countries or within ECOWAS (gathering Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo). With more than 7.5 million people circulating (3 percent of the regional population), sub-regional migration in West Africa is additionally six times more prolific than intra-European mobility (with a mere 0.5 percent of the Eu-

ropean population living as expatriates within the EU) (OECD/SWAC 2006a).

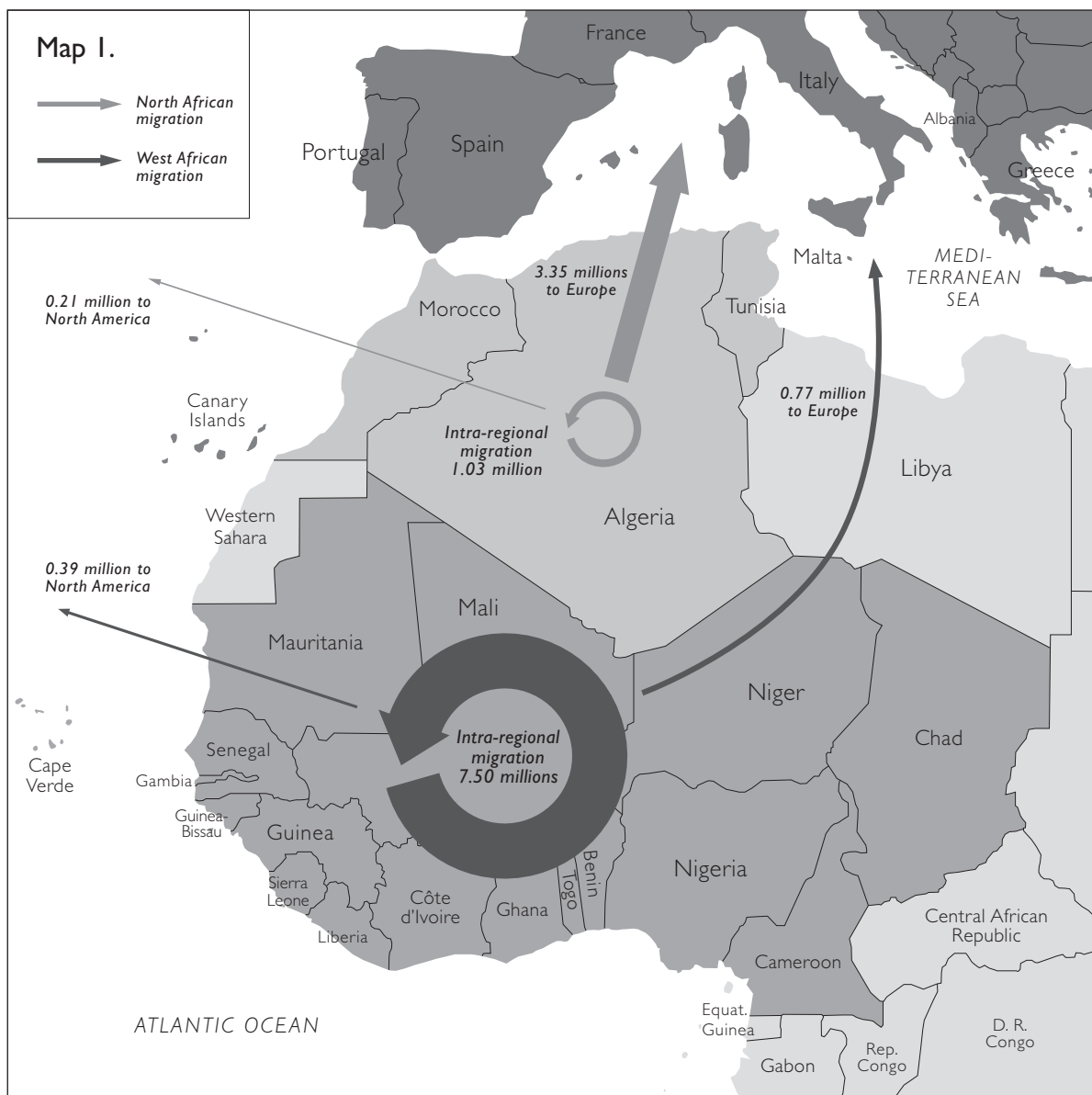
West Africans are among the most mobile people on earth (with the average African mobility being at 2 percent of the population) (OECD/SWAC 2006a), and the sub-region also provides the largest number of Sub-Saharan migrants to Europe (770,000 migrants in 2006) (OECD/SWAC 2006a). Much international attention has been brought to international (irregular boat) migration of West Africans, especially since the Ceuta crisis in September 2005 when hundreds of migrants tried to enter the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in an attempt to reach Europe. International migration has indeed risen throughout recent decades, with increasing numbers of migrants leaving for Europe and the US, but also for new destinations in South America and Asia, especially China, Malaysia and Dubai (Awumbila et al. 2009). *Ouestafs* (colloquial for West Africans) are also known to occupy several neighbourhoods or trade activities in the francophone Central African states (Awumbila et al. 2009). Indeed, only 1 percent of people originating from Sub-Saharan Africa migrate to Europe, and a mere 9.2 percent of all West African migrants travel to Europe and the US (OECD/SWAC 2006a). Those who go to OECD countries mainly enter legally (Haas 2008a). Therefore, for every 20 migrants who board trains and buses to West African destinations, only one will try to get on a boat to Europe. The protectionist EU focus on the increasing African immigration is thus to be considered in relative terms, and Hein de Haas has come to term the reasons for further European securitization and closing of borders as based on a pure “Myth of Invasion” (Haas 2008b). This paper will not analyze the European Union securitization of migration<sup>1</sup>, but

<sup>1</sup> See Huysmans 2002.

rather look at the pressing issues of intra-regional migration that might become, from a mainly developmental perspective, a European concern in the future.

88.4 percent of West African migrants still go to other ECOWAS destinations (OECD/SWAC 2006a). This paper will therefore mainly focus on the large majority of intra-regional migrants; where they go and why, and what their trajectories might be in the

future. More specifically, the analysis will outline existing ECOWAS policies and, through a migrant perspective, underline the pressing developmental issues caused by ‘conventional’ migration within the sub-region. Put in another way, the paper will stress why European policy makers should indeed care about the composition and development of sub-regional flows, and introduce migration as a regional development issue in West Africa.



Source: Atlas on Regional Integration in West Africa; ECOWAS/SWAC

## WEST AFRICAN MOBILITY PATTERNS

The following chapter will outline where the migrants go and why, and establish an overview of the main contemporary West African mobility patterns, the largest being intra-regional ‘conventional’ migration, while also describing forced migration patterns and international migration.

### Intra-regional migration

Historically, West Africa was a sub-region of free movement, with the French joint administrative unit of Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) gathering the sub-region from 1895 till 1958. Independence altered the traditionally borderless mobility configurations, with more than 15,000 km of internal borders now separating the 15 ECOWAS countries (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

With borders came indigenization measures restricting the participation of ‘non-nationals’ in economic or political activities. These borders nonetheless often cross large border-spanning ethnic communities that perceive their movements as being within one socio-cultural space rather than between two nations (Afolayan et al. 2009). These include the 30 million Haussa (of Niger and Nigeria) and 15 million Mandé (across West Africa), while ethnic groups such as the Soninké (of Mauritania, Mali and Senegal), the Mossi (Burkina Faso) and the Dogons (Mali) have traditionally seen short-term migration as a rite of passage, or as an important part of personal development. Additionally, the *ik-lans* (or slaves) in the Touareg society also still practice traditional circular migration between the Niger river in the Bankilaré zone and Abidjan (Boyer 2005). Furthermore, Y.F. Yeboah described certain trans-fron-

tier ethnic groups such as the Brong (Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana), the Yoruba (Benin and Nigeria), or the Ewe (Ghana and Togo) as part of groups that consider borders as both “abstract and inefficient” (Yeboah 1986). Migrants thus consider the West African sub-region as a single cultural and socio-economic unit within which trade and service are intertwined across countries, and where border crossing is a main part of people’s lives and livelihoods.

Migration in West Africa is strongly influenced by poverty due to economic and socio-political crises, and continues to be associated with the search for wealth, and thus trade (IED 2005). While specific commercial migration in the sub-region is female-dominated (such as in the case of the illiterate female traders who dominate the Nigeria-Benin-Togo-Côte d’Ivoire-Dakar-Gambia ‘informal’ trade network) (OECD/SWAC 2006b), general intra-regional migration remains essentially short-term and male-dominated (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

Three commercial West African sub-spaces exist that are progressively becoming interconnected:

- 1) East (with Nigeria as the centre, including Benin, Cameroun, Niger and Chad), mainly connected through traditional cross-border merchant networks led by the Haussa, Ibo and Yoruba ethnic groups.
- 2) Centre (poles formed by the economies of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, stretching until Burkina Faso and the east of Mali). This sub-space is structured around cattle commerce and migration of populations.
- 3) West (from Guinea to Mauritania, with Senegal at its epicenter) with Islam as a common cultural base and rice commerce connecting the sub-space, organized by the three main networks led by the Dioula,

Peulh and Maure (as well as the Wolof). The Atlantic coast countries are the least integrated group of the sub-region, with markets turned mainly towards Europe.

The railway lines connecting, respectively, Bamako-Dakar and Niger-Abidjan today also correspond to the main migration trajectories in West Africa. In this regard, Nelly Robin divided intra-regional migration into a hexagon (with Senegal at the centre and including Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Mali), as well as a polygon that represents the most intense (circular) migration in West Africa (including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) (Robin 1992). The latter has remained the most dominant migration pattern, and in spite of small modifications, West Africa is still largely marked by the main contrast between two zones:

- 1) The coastal area with large port cities, mainly in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, historically constituting the job-creating area. This subset represents 80 percent of regional GNP, with Nigeria alone accounting for 50 percent of the total (Robin 1992). This is therefore the heart of the regional economy and the zone of prosperity in West Africa due to its mineral and agricultural resources. The forest zone gathers the main poles of urban growth in the coastal areas (and the immediate hinterland) and has known the largest economic and demographic growth of the sub-region, with historic high numbers of immigrants.
- 2) The hinterland, corresponding to the traditional labour-exporting area, mainly Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and northern Guinea. Both the Sahelian and Saharan zones of the hinterland have experienced large net emigration rates, mainly due to the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, but

present hope for future oil findings and new agro-pastoral systems.

One therefore observes the continued existence of these two West Africas in migration terms, albeit with new destinations emerging.

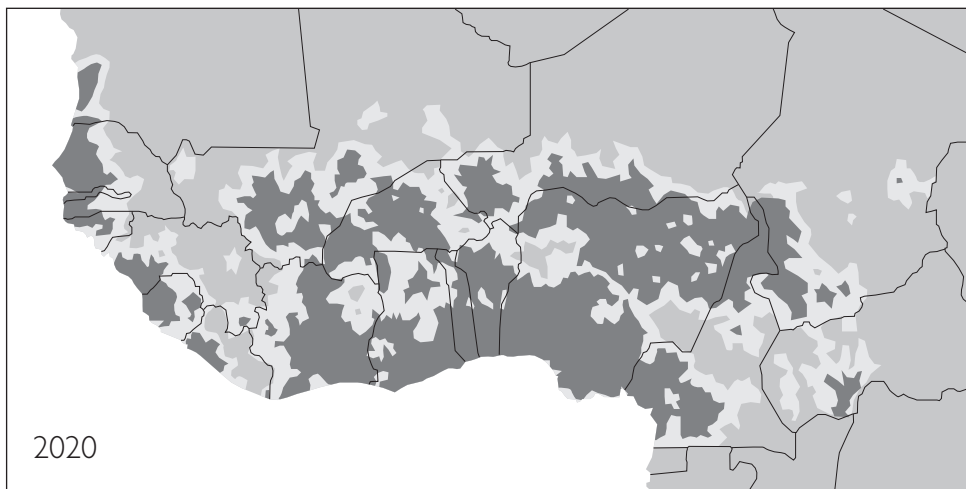
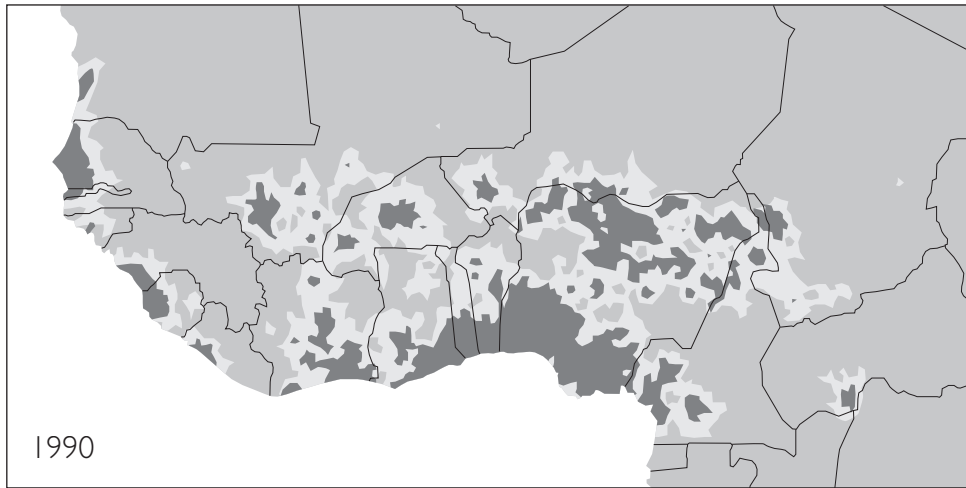
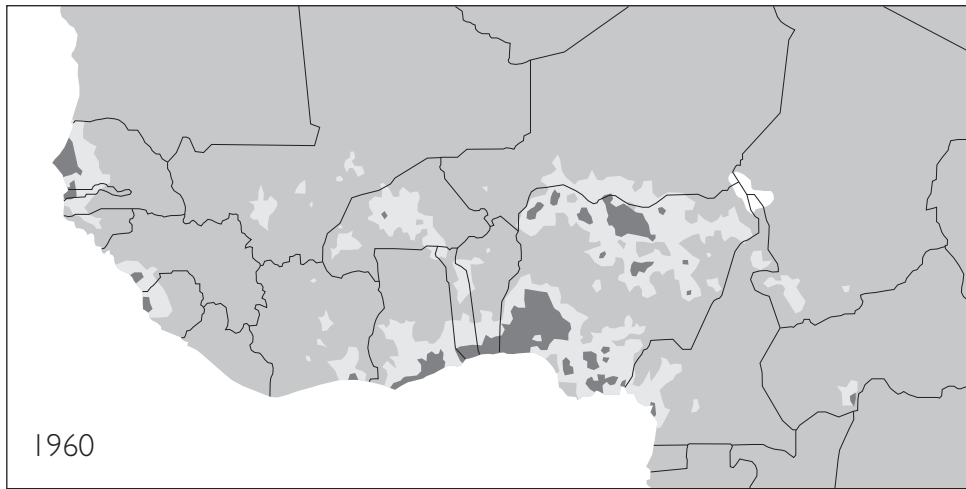
### **New intra-regional destinations emerging**

Urbanization, or rural-urban migration, has been a key factor in intra-regional West African mobility patterns since decolonization. In 1962, when René Dumont wrote his famous book 'L'Afrique noire est mal partie', he described the sub-region as a series of isolated 'archipelagos' of high economic intensity, and the rest as vast empty spaces that were both unpopulated and uncultivated. In 2001, R. Portier, on the contrary, termed the sub-region a 'full space'. A large number of today's economic poles were previously empty spaces; such as the groundnut producing zone in Senegal, the 'office' in Niger and Mali, the irrigated perimeters in the valley of Senegal, the cotton and cereal producing areas of the Sudanese-Sahelian zone, the cocoa- and coffee producing areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, and the two industrial zones in Nigeria and Porto Novo in Côte d'Ivoire (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

In the north of the coastal countries and south of the Sahel one finds the Sudanese savannas, where millions of hectares have been made available through programmes fighting river blindness (CICRED 1999). As illustrated on the map, this zone is experiencing a high growth of secondary cities, which might be the beginning of a reversal of the last decade's trend of net emigration. Urban border cities between the Sahelian and coastal countries in fact already existed in 1960, with approximately ten cities with more than 50,000



Map 2. Expansion of Areas Attracting Urban Markets



Source: WALTPS

inhabitants (for example Ibadan and Kano) along the traditional Hausa and Yoruba commerce routes (Fourchard 2004). Now, an interconnected network of around 50 cities is blooming, with more to come.

While the total number of West African inhabitants has more than tripled, the urban population has increased by a factor of 10 (OECD/SWAC 2006a)<sup>2</sup>. More than 80 million West Africans have thus migrated from the countryside to the city during the last 50 years, and urbanization now stands at almost 50 percent<sup>3</sup>. Rural-urban migration in West Africa is nonetheless in decline, since urban growth is now mainly due to births in urban areas.

The young migrants are more connected to the rest of the world (for example via the ongoing development of mobile phone networks, and its role in migration (Robin and Ndiaye 2010)), while less in touch with the colonial past and former migration patterns. Labour migration has thus already taken on more complex shapes and patterns, including the Marabouts of the Sahelian region moving towards big cities such as Abidjan, Accra, Dakar or Freetown etc. The economic crises of port cities in West Africa have furthermore already extended former migration patterns of, for example, the Wodaabe (from Niger) who earlier migrated to Accra or Abidjan, but today continue to Dakar, passing by Freetown (Boesen 2005). In spite of Guinea's small population size – with its financial and political problems – it represents the most diversified migratory patterns within ECOWAS, with migrants present in most countries (Robin 1992). Increasingly, migrants thus

travel larger distances within the ECOWAS space, and to new destination cities.

New industries in the sub-region might start attracting skilled labour, such as tourism and ICT (information and communications technology). Tourism has increased in Gambia and Senegal, while 'adventure tourism' in the region still remains low (OECD/SWAC 2006b). Another trend is long-distance services, or what one might refer to as cheap outsourced back-office support, with ICT services or 'hot lines' already existing in Senegal and Cape Verde (this has been an increasing phenomenon in North Africa for European companies during several years) (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

It is likely that some migration patterns will remain the same: While a further industrialization of the region is probable, one part of the population will remain rural and poor, and periods of drought and locust attacks will continue to produce migrants from the northern Sahel area, as well as other environmental migrants such as for example fishermen from Cape Verde or Casamance in Senegal (Robin and Ndiaye 2010). Cotton, coffee and cocoa will plausibly still be among the major agriculture activities. Petroleum exports should, however, increasingly attract migrants to destinations such as Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and (possibly) Burkina Faso.

### Forced migration patterns

Africa holds the largest number of refugees in the world; 2.7 million. With ongoing conflicts in the West African sub-region (or what almost became a regional conflict in the 1990s), it is the second largest region of asylum in Africa (after central Africa) with 725,000 refugees in 2004 (OECD/SWAC 2006a).

Most refugees flee to neighbouring countries (OECD/SWAC 2006a). During the

<sup>2</sup> From 88 million to 290 million inhabitants in 45 years (multiplied by 3.3) – and from 13 million in regards to urban population to 128 million (multiplied by 10).

<sup>3</sup> The FAO estimates that the non-agricultural population in West Africa has fallen from 80 percent of the population in 1961 to merely 51 percent in 2001. (OECD/SWAC 2006b)

1990s, Guinea had a very large amount of refugees, first from Liberia (where 70 percent of the population was displaced) then Sierra Leone (Kotoudi 2004). In fact, conflicts in the sub-region have been endemic and highly contagious, spreading from Liberia in 1989 to Sierra Leone, and through Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire since 2002. Among the main refugee-creating situations have been: The Biafra war in Nigeria 1967-1970, the political isolation of opponents to the Sékou Touré regime in Guinea, the liberation war in Guinea Bissau 1963-1973, border tensions between Mauritania and Senegal in 1989, the Chadian crisis 1982-1990 (note that refugees also arrive from outside the sub-region), the Touareg conflict in Mali and Niger from 1990 till 1997, Mano-river conflicts 1989-2000 (Liberia and Sierra Leone etc.), Côte d'Ivoire from 2002 and, recently, Sudan<sup>4</sup>. Today's refugee-producing crises of West Africa are mainly in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Togo, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Mauritania and Senegal.

In the future, other possible conflicts may surge based on root causes such as access to water, land<sup>5</sup>, ecological degradation, natural resources, culture/identity or ethnicity, socio-economic factors, migratory pressures, border disputes or political and military crises (Kotoudi 2004).

Trafficking both to intra-regional and extra-regional destinations is another issue of forced migration that is gaining more policy attention, particularly in EU-Africa cooperation<sup>6</sup>. The plantations of Côte d'Ivoire are

destinations for numerous trafficked children from Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Women and girls are also being trafficked to European destinations from, amongst others, what has been called the 'triangle of shame' on the Niger/Chad/Nigeria border (Robin and Ndiaye 2010).

### International migration

Although there is a continuity of established migratory patterns, such as pilgrimage trajectories to the Arabian Peninsula and traditional trans-Saharan mobility, there is an overall increase in distances travelled (Bakewell and Haas 2007). Several migration theories (such as theories on new economic labour and transnationalism) have shown that former colonial push-pull models cannot grasp the complexity of the current focus on communities, households and migrant's agency. Trends are changing in terms of migrants' profiles, routes taken and destinations chosen.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the West African sub-region provides the largest amount of migrants for Europe. Since 2000, West Africans have become the largest category of irregular boat migrants from Northern Africa (Haas 2008a), and these migrants have had much media and political attention. However, in fact the majority of migration is done and will continue to be done by students and workers who enter legally (albeit who might overstay their residency rights) (Haas 2008a). Student migration is not only directed towards other continents, particularly Europe and the US, but also increasingly within the African continent, to South Africa and Morocco for example.

There are new types of intercontinental migrants emerging, not only increasingly female (e.g. nurses from Ghana) and better-educated (e.g. professors from Nigeria, Senegal and

<sup>4</sup> See an exhaustive listing of conflicts and refugee flows in "Les migrations forcées en Afrique de l'Ouest". (Kotoudi 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See Bossard 2003, on the importance of land ownership and migration management for peace in the sub-region.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/partnerships/irregular-migration#a>

Gambia), but also including a larger number of ethnic groups from various countries going to different destinations (OECD/SWAC 2006b). The commercial sector migration which was previously dominated by groups from small territories such as Benin, Gambia and Togo today includes merchants from Senegal, Mali and Sierra Leone that attempt to enter the North African, European, American and, recently, the Asian markets (mainly Dubai and China)<sup>7</sup>. Within the African continent, traders are increasingly turning to destinations such as Cameroun, Angola, Congo, DRC and South Africa. These are (mostly male commercial) migrants from the Sahel (and Senegal) trading products such as grains, cola and yams, but also herbal medicine, in Central Africa amongst others (Awumbila et al. 2009).

New routes (such as through Turkey) and new destinations (such as Argentina) are also continuously emerging. While Libya has been a traditional labour-receiving country (Haas 2008a), Morocco has also transformed into a destination (and not only transit) country; the cities of Fes and Oujda have become the receivers of a significant number of Sub-Saharan Africans (Wender 2004). Fes is also a traditional pilgrimage destination for the Tijani brotherhood of Senegal, where one of their principal saints is buried. Furthermore, Fes has historically been linked to commercial exchanges with Sub-Saharan Africa (Berriane and Aberghal 2009). Simultaneously, Tammanrassat in southern Algeria grew from 3,000 inhabitants in 1966 to 65,000 inhabitants in the late 1990s, of whom 50 percent are Sub-Saharan Africans (Lahlou 2004). Nouadhibou in Mauritania, on the border to Western Sahara and close to the Canary Is-

<sup>7</sup> Conversely, it is notable that Cuban doctors have been delivering services in towns in Ghana since the 1980s, and that investors from China, India, Korea and Pakistan are becoming increasingly visible in Africa (Jonsson 2009).

lands, was until late 2006 a key transit-point for West Africans on their way to Europe (Choplin and Lombard 2008). The city grew into a melting-pot of 'transitters', a trend which is nonetheless radically on decline.

In regards to destinations, francophone West Africans such as Ivorians, Senegalese and Guineans are now among the main regional migrants moving to the US (Fall 2007), while Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana remain the main emigrating countries to Europe (Haas 2008a). European destinations have tended to change, with increasing West African presence in Spain and Italy, and a diversification of the former colonial ties with France, Great Britain and Portugal. Nonetheless, while in Germany you can find migrants from most West African countries, most of the sub-region's migrants in Portugal are from former colonies Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, and the biggest Soninke village in the world is still in the Parisian neighbourhood of Montreuil (Fall 2007). Cape Verdeans have also followed Portuguese migratory patterns since the 1990s, for example to Luxembourg (Robin 1992). In fact, one might add that Cape Verde is a unique case, where the diaspora today outnumbers the resident population (Carling 2002).

One can assume that extra-regional migration will further increase radically if the sub-region does not successfully manage the current and future challenges of intra-regional integration and development, which is to a large extent determined by ECOWAS policy.

## **'FREE' MOBILITY WITHIN ECOWAS**

The Economic Community of West African States was created on May 28 1975. The preamble to the treaty outlined the key objective of removing obstacles to the movement of

goods, capital and people in the sub-region. Regional integration is today the key strategy for spurring West African economic development. This has subsequently led to bloc-to-bloc negotiations with the EU for an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)<sup>8</sup>. So far, two ECOWAS member states, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, initialled bilateral "stepping stones (or 'interim') EPAs" with the EU at the end of 2007. ECOWAS and the EU are currently negotiating a more comprehensive EPA that will eventually replace the interim EPAs. However, even with an ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration in place since 2008, the agreements between ECOWAS countries and the members of the EU are still of a mainly bilateral character in terms of migration and development matters. It should also be noted that the EU policy discussions with ECOWAS do not focus on intra-regional migration and the specific developmental issues caused by or related to this matter<sup>9</sup>. One can therefore conclude that in regard to West African regional integration there is a both a lack of integration of migration into development projects of the European Union, while also of the introduction of development into European politics of migration<sup>10</sup>.

The 1979 protocol on free movement of persons (ratified 1980), the right of residence (ratified 1986) and of establishment (not yet ratified) further underlined the free mobility of labour, and was an attempt to recreate a borderless sub-region (ECOWAS 2006). Member states can nonetheless refuse admis-

sion of so-called inadmissible immigrants, and countries have on several occasions – both before and after ratifications of protocols – expelled large numbers of immigrants in irregular situations.

In the 1950s and 1960s the cocoa boom led to high levels of immigration to Ghana, mainly originating from Togo, Burkina Faso (Haute Volta at the time) and Nigeria, but also Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Mali, Senegal and Liberia. From the 1960s, regulations were tightened massively, and from 1969 it is estimated that up to a million migrants left Ghana (Bredeloup 1995). Simultaneously, Nigeria began its petrol boom, reinforced by the second petrol crisis in 1979, which led to heavy immigration. In 1983, 2.5 million West Africans were registered in Nigeria (OECD/SWAC 2006a). The economic crisis of the 1980s led to the consequent expulsion of a million undocumented workers in 1983, then 700,000 in 1985 (Afolayan 1988). Among them were many Ghanaians (approximately two million Ghanaians left for Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire between 1974-1975 and in 1981), but also migrants from Togo, Benin, Cameroun and Burkina Faso (Tabatabai 1988). In 1983, Côte d'Ivoire – in what was then called the Ivorian miracle – had become the main receiving country of the sub-region. Traditional Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire migration increased from the mid-1970s to the 1990s; in 1975, 74 percent of Burkinabè migrants went to Côte d'Ivoire, while 12 percent went to Ghana. In 1985, this amount had risen to 83.9 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively (Robin 1992). While Côte d'Ivoire was housing four million 'foreigners' of a population of 16 million in 1998, a resurgence of 'Ivoirité'<sup>11</sup>, xenophobia

<sup>8</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sierra\\_leone/eu\\_sierra\\_leone/political\\_relations/eu\\_ecowas/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sierra_leone/eu_sierra_leone/political_relations/eu_ecowas/index_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=1729&lang=en> (14<sup>th</sup> ECOWAS-EU Ministerial Troika, Ouagadougou, 23.10.2008)

<sup>10</sup> The implementation gap between the 'global approach on the question of migration' (e.g. the projects under EU-UN Migration4development) and 'The European pact on immigration and Asylum'.

<sup>11</sup> The concept of Ivoirité is presented as all the elements: socio-historic, geographic and linguistic that permit an individual to say that he/she is a citizen of Côte d'Ivoire (Bossard 2003).

and expulsions have since nonetheless led to a diversification of migratory patterns of the Burkinabè and many others (OECD/SWAC 2006a).

Due to the poor state of civil registration in Africa, undocumented migration within the continent is hard to number and map. In most cases it is only when the respective states undertake expulsions that one might start gathering statistics on this issue<sup>12</sup>. The largest expulsions have been from Côte d'Ivoire in 1964, from Ghana in 1969, Nigeria in 1983 and 1985, Mauritania and Senegal in 1989, Benin 1998 as well as the massive fleeing of threatened foreign populations in Côte d'Ivoire since 1999.

One of the most important aspects that led to the formation of ECOWAS was the existing 'undocumented' migration across borders and within the sub-region, including migration of cross-border workers, commuters, professionals, female traders, clandestine workers and refugees (Afolayan et al. 2009). The Protocol on Free Movement guaranteed community citizens visa-free entry into Member States for 90 days. This was a first among regional economic communities in Africa. Currency convertibility and common currency arrangements are furthermore being negotiated in order to facilitate transactions. This is for example a key concern for the illiterate female traders that dominate the Nigeria-Benin-Togo-Côte d'Ivoire-Dakar-Gambia trade network (OECD/SWAC 2006b). The West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), formed in 2000, is a group of five countries within ECOWAS that do not use the CFA Franc (Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). They plan to introduce a common currency, the Eco, by the year 2015. However,

several of the WAMZ countries currently suffer from weak currencies and chronic budget deficits, and it would seem that their attempts to close this economic gap by printing more currency have further encouraged inflation.

Additionally, the Secretariat but also the officials implementing ECOWAS protocols, such as customs, immigration or security officials are in need of capacity building for an improved management of migratory flows. Currently, very few countries have adequate data to compile national migration profiles, and census of populations are not undertaken regularly. It has been suggested that a West African Advisory Board on Migration Management should be created, since there is an urgent need for a mechanism to monitor the implementation of national laws and ECOWAS decisions related to migration (Adepujo 2009).

As was shown in the case of expulsions, national political demands often supersede community interests. Progress on Protocol ratification and implementation has varied within ECOWAS due to wavering political support, political instability and inter-state border disputes and conflicts (ECOWAS 2006). In comparison, The West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/UEMOA) – comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo – is a smaller, more coherent group of countries, with a common currency, colonial history and the French language. It has been easier to implement joint programmes in this setting, whereas during the first 25 years of ECOWAS' existence, its activities were largely based on state-to-state relations, with an ineffective secretariat (Page and Bilal 2001).

In conclusion, the abolition of visa requirements, of mandatory residence permits, as well as the introduction of brown cards/travel certificates/ECOWAS passports and

<sup>12</sup> For example, Zambia expelled several hundred Senegalese, Malians, Ghanaians and Guineans in 1992 (Robin 1992).

the elimination of further formalities or border controls have aimed at facilitating the intra-regional movement of people (ECOWAS 2000), and thereby attempting to stimulate regional integration. This has however been done with lacking means to implement comprehensive migration management schemes.

### **Making migration the ‘poor parent of regional integration’**

Since 2008, the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration has recognized the free movement of persons as the fundamental priority of its integration policy. It takes into account the benefits of legal migration to the sub-region’s development (migration and development action plans)<sup>13</sup>, or what one of the key West African researchers on migration, Papa Demba Fall, has described as making migration “the poor parent of regional integration” (Fall 2007: 11). Fall thus refers to the economic prospects of regional integration, while underlining the minimal resources put into sub-regional migration management.

If migration is today the ‘poor parent’ of regional integration, the future holds enormous challenges for the rapidly increasing number of West African children, with greater pressures towards mobility to a larger amount of destinations.

No region in the world has ever experienced demographic growth of the kind that West Africa has, increasing from 40 million inhabitants in 1940 to almost 300 million today (OECD/SWAC 2006b). Today, 29 percent of the Sub-Saharan African population lives in West Africa, with only 14 percent of the continents’ GNP being produced by ECOWAS

<sup>13</sup> The Common Approach on Migration also recognizes the need to harmonize migration policies and combat human trafficking, the gender dimension of migration, and the protection of the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

countries (IED 2005). According to UN projections, Niger will count 50 million inhabitants in 2050 against the 12 million in 2004. The population of both Mali and Burkina Faso will respectively be around 40 million in 2050, against the 13 million in 2004, and Côte d’Ivoire’s population will rise from 18 million to 34 million (OECD/SWAC 2006b). While the population will further increase to an estimated half billion people in 2040 – of whom a large part will be young – nothing indicates that the economy will grow at the same pace<sup>14</sup> (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

Worldwide, it is projected that the proportion of young people under 15 will fall from 28 percent to 20 percent from 2005 till 2050 (OECD/SWAC 2006b). In West Africa, it is estimated that the proportion of young people will on the contrary increase to 29 percent of the population in 2050, or 200 million young people in 2020 (equivalent to the entire West African population in 1990) (OECD/SWAC 2006b). Subsequently, the mobility patterns of the region have and will change radically. The West African population will mainly be a non-agricultural population, with up to 60 percent urbanization in 2020/25 and secondary cities will thus become increasingly bigger (OECD/SWAC 2006b).

The protocol has, in fact, stimulated the movement of people between neighbouring countries and other ECOWAS countries. When looking at border towns such as Aflao, Elubo and Sampa in Ghana, one can also

<sup>14</sup> In a country such as Mali, where the population will rise by 40 percent, the Millennium Development Goals will be difficult to achieve. In order to reach the MDGs in 2015, regional growth should be at 7 percent annually, while it currently only amounts to 4 percent. West Africa additionally only accounts for 0.3 percent of the total foreign direct investment (FDI), and accounts for less than 1 percent of the total world trade. Public development aid remains modest in the region, at only 5 percent of regional GNP in 2001. However, the dependency on world markets is very elevated compared to other regions, at 40 percent of regional GNP. (OECD/SWAC 2006b)

conclude that the protocol has fuelled cross-border activities, including trade (Awumbila et al. 2009). However, a further harmonization of policies interlinking trade, investment, transport and movement of persons is needed for the daily implementation of ECOWAS policies. For example, at the meeting of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja in 2000, it was recognized that the inadequate and poorly-maintained transport and communications facilities constituted major hindrances to cross-border trade, economic activities and movement of labour and goods (ECOWAS 2000). Transport networks, such as railways, are poorly-integrated and have different rules and regulations that change across borders.

At the same time, many West Africans are unaware of the existence of the ECOWAS green card, and even fewer know of the forthcoming ECOWAS passport (Adepoju 2009). Mali and Senegal have therefore set up government services and mechanisms for providing their citizens with information on conditions in receiving countries (Adepoju 2009). While education will become a key concern for the future young generations, both in home countries but also increasingly in foreign destinations, ECOWAS has not yet set up a regional student exchange program for the increasing number of intra-regional student migrants. Furthermore, while all countries have removed fees relating to leaving the national territories, protocols neither prescribe nor proscribe fees for issuance of residence permits (Fall 2007). All ECOWAS states levy such annual fees varying from around USD 10 to USD 500 (Adepoju 2009). These charges might impede 'free' movement given the rate of poverty in the sub-region.

The management of human settlement, including accompanying migrants, elaborating equitable land-ownership rules and develop-

ing destination zones will be crucial to West Africa's future. The development of secondary cities and urban trans-border networks is among the key challenges for preparing for the future in West Africa. This would include elaborating social protection laws for migrants, especially in order to protect women and children (who will inevitably represent a growing proportion of migrants) during migration flows of the future. Mechanisms for granting rights of residence and establishment to refugees from ECOWAS countries is also a key concern, and currently not developed in any of the ECOWAS treaties or protocols.

With regards to the high number of intra-regional refugee flows, the Protocol relating to the Mechanism on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security signed in 1999 was also a first for regional organizations in Africa. Emphasis is placed on early warning and prevention, while subsequently on addressing root causes of conflict and building peace. The ECOWAS treaty is nonetheless not a refugee instrument, and this problem was underlined in the Common Approach on Migration from 2008 by encouraging Member States to "put in place mechanisms for granting rights of residence and establishment to refugees from ECOWAS countries" (ECOWAS 2008).

ECOWAS, having been a frontrunner for Africa in terms of facilitating mobility as well as implementing migration and development action plans, has not yet taken the lead in making integration a priority. While there is a large research gap on the process of integration of migrants in Africa, it is certain that with some countries using ethnicity and religion to re-classify long-standing residents as non-nationals (migration was for example part of the root causes to the Ivorian crisis (Kotoudi 2004)), social pressures related to migration will increase.



Today, the liberty of movement not only restrains social and demographic pressures in the departure zones. For example, had Burkina Faso not experienced a large net migration since the 1960s, it would have counted 15 million rural people instead of the current 6 million (OECD/SWAC 2006). It also “restricts migrants in establishing themselves in recipient areas”<sup>15</sup>(Ouedraogo 2002). For those who do stay, the Senegalese mosque in Conakry is a classic example of the integration of a Diaspora group in Guinea, and in their preservation of their identity as a group (Fall 2007). However, increased xenophobia and inter-communitarian tensions have led migrants to apply new trans-ethnic strategies, such as ‘sponsors’ or what one might describe as an ‘adoptive mother/father’ from the local community (Fall 2007). Senegalese migrants in Cameroun increasingly use other integration strategies than living in the traditional ‘foyers’ (migrants originating from connected villages sharing housing) (Ba 1995). One study, undertaken by Meier in 2005, shows that migrants fear making friends with fellow migrants from the same ethnic background, and instead choose friends “from amongst completely unrelated groups, preferably those from different ethnic backgrounds” (Meier 2005: 68).

It can therefore be concluded that intra-regional migration (and thus regional integration and development) remains a subject that will need policy focus in terms of transport networks, social protection and integration, territorial planning and much more. This will present excessive amounts of development and management efforts which cannot be effectively handled by the few resources allocated to the ECOWAS secretariat alone.

<sup>15</sup> “limite la propension des migrants à s’implanter définitivement dans les zones d’accueil».

## CONCLUSION

From past and future scenarios to the current situation, it can be concluded that intra- and inter-country movement continues to be a central feature of (West) African life. West African ‘regionality’ indeed has a natural character, considering ancient migratory traditions.

We have seen that border crossing is a main part of people’s lives and livelihoods in ECOWAS, and that ECOWAS protocols and treaties throughout the years have aimed at facilitating intra-regional integration through measures for free mobility. While new destination cities are rapidly emerging – especially in the area of the Sudanese Savannas – there is a continued existence of the two West Africas of respectively the coastal area destinations and the hinterland that exports labour. In a future best case scenario with increased agricultural and industrial development and largely improved human development, motivations for migrating will be at least as strong as today. Some migration patterns will remain the same, but the already high level of unemployment will be a key mobility factor for the rapidly-growing young population. This will cause substantial development issues for the region, at the same time as migration to extra-regional destinations is also likely to increase.

Many studies attempt to explain migration phenomena *post factum* (Jonsson 2009). Nonetheless, guiding the hopeful young West Africans in their migration projects, and facilitating household strategies based on mobility will be among the key challenges of the region in the future.

Migration is thus indeed the ‘poor parent’ of a regional integration process in ECOWAS demanding much more than mere harmonization of policies that interlink trade, investment, transport, and movement of persons.

Internal disorder, a mismanaged economy and rural degradation are factors that ensure that migration pressures are pervasive in the sub-region. Furthermore, minimal public participation in the political process, widespread illiteracy and poverty are critical shortcomings not only for development and good governance, but also for peace and stability in the sub-region.

Beyond crisis and conflict prevention thus also lays the need for services related to 'conventional' migration within the sub-region. There is an increased need for education both in the home country and abroad, and student exchange programmes would facilitate much of the intra-regional youth migration. There is also a high demand for work, and increasing youth unemployment is leading to emigration, this subsequently demands comprehensive housing plans, territorial planning and structural legal changes, such as possibilities of land ownership for migrants. The spread of AIDS via migration has been studied by scholars for decades (FAO 1997), but also regular health care systems and practices must be developed for the migrants, not to mention more general social protection laws (both for female/male and child/adult migrants and refugees). Furthermore, integration efforts are also lacking.

Moving focus from European immigration to the developmental issues raised by the large intra-regional migration flows should also be a priority for European development policy. Migration and development is not only a trans-Mediterranean matter, with focus on Diasporas in Europe and the benefits of migration to Africa, it can also assume a much more local character, in this case the possibilities and challenges presented by the large number of intra-regional migrants. Framing comprehensive West African migration management schemes for current and future

challenges is thus most urgent, and migration should be integrated as a development topic in projects of the European Union.

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