

**IPATC**  
INSTITUTE FOR PAN-AFRICAN  
THOUGHT AND CONVERSATION



**THE NORDIC  
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NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET

**The University of Johannesburg's (UJ) Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC), South Africa, and The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Sweden.**

**CENTERING THE VOICES OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN  
AFRICA/EUROPEAN UNION (EU) MIGRATION DEBATES**

**Concept Note**

**March 2021**

## **1. Background**

The University of Johannesburg's (UJ) Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) in South Africa, and the Sweden-based Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), have agreed to hold two joint webinars on Friday 26 March and in April 2021. Both events aim to provide a platform to bridge the gap between African and European Union (EU) policymakers and African migrants in light of the first global, holistic, inter-governmental document on migration: the 2018 United Nations (UN) Global Compact for Safe, Regular, and Orderly Migration. African and EU governments were the main players in the negotiations of the Global Compact, and agreed on several controversial issues despite their divergent views on migration. The webinars further aim to consolidate a 100-member Community of Practice (CoP) on implementing the UN Global Compact on Migration, which was formed in 2019 by IPATC. The informal group consists of African and EU government, UN and International Organization for Migration (IOM) officials, EU and African regional bodies, policy experts, scholars, and civil society activists from both continents.

Three key questions will be addressed by the two webinars: first, how can the gaps in the implementation of the UN Global Compact be filled by bringing African and European policymakers and civil society; the UN; and the IOM; and African migrants together in dialogue? Second, given the need for evidence-based policies, how can the experiences of African migrants in the EU influence evidence-based policies on migration? And third, in what ways can African and European policymakers and the general public on both continents learn from the realities of African migrants to alter their negative opinions and foster solidarity towards migrants?

These two webinars on Friday 26 March and in April 2021 will therefore provide a further opportunity for key African and European actors to explore their often divergent perspectives on migration issues and policies, and to gain a deeper understanding of Africa/EU migration. In addition, the meetings will provide a platform for policymakers and migration analysts to hear first-hand the voices of African migrants, which are often silenced in important policy debates or framed in victimhood. The key outputs of the webinar series will be a 6-page policy brief and two newspaper articles which will be widely disseminated among African and European audiences to influence the perspectives of key African, EU, UN and IOM actors, and enhance migration policy development across Africa and Europe.

## **2. Key Challenges**

In 2015, the number of Africans who crossed the Mediterranean Sea - described as one of the deadliest migratory routes in the world - was recorded at over 1 million, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). More recently, as conflict instigated by various militia groups continue in countries such as Mali, Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, West Africans are increasingly moving along the sea route from the coast to the Canary Islands, although in smaller numbers. In 2015, the International Organization for Migration reported a total of 170,100 African migrant and refugee arrivals by sea, as well as 3,149 deaths; in 2020, 33,418 new arrivals were recorded, and 983 deaths. The sudden increase in irregular migration in 2015 and 2016 pushed the EU into rethinking its policies, with some states such as Austria and Italy opting for more restrictions and harsher asylum laws. Yet, migration data from global bodies such as the IOM shows that the number of Africans migrating to the EU is negligible and largely occurs continentally. According to a report released by the IOM, of the 40.2 million African migrants globally in 2020, 26 per cent migrated to the EU, compared to the 53 per cent who migrate within Africa.

Migration is one of the key areas of partnership between the EU and African Union (AU) member states. Reports of violations of international labour law and human rights in Europe are increasingly being reported in the African media, even though the 2018 UN Global Compact for Migration provides the framework under which African and EU states agreed on principles such as non-refoulement - a legal principle which safeguards migrants from being returned to conflict zones. The November 2020 EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which controversially makes no mention of the 2018 UN Global Compact for Migration, has triggered fierce debate across Europe and in African migration policy circles. Many critics have labelled the pact as too conservative, as it prioritises border control over access to asylum-seeking processes. The three-tier framework further pursues the EU's trend towards externalising border management to origin countries. This has implications for broader Africa/EU relations, particularly in the area of EU development funding for Africa. For African governments, migration and mobility are regarded as a developmental issue, and the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) seminal 2019 *Scaling Fences* report - which involved the perspectives of over 1,000 African migrants from 39 African countries in 13 EU countries - is grounded in a human development paradigm. This approach supports the notion that when the nuances of migration are properly scrutinised, the phenomenon is generally beneficial for origin, transit, and destination countries. In order for regulatory frameworks and global statutes to be successfully implemented, the voices of African migrants must therefore be accorded their special place in policymaking.

The role of civil society groups has been instrumental in shifting increasingly racist and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants, both in Africa and within the EU. Recently, the "Black Lives Matter" movement in the United States (US), triggered by the murder of George Floyd by local police in Minneapolis, ignited large nation-wide protests in European countries such as France, Germany, and Belgium in 2020, as well as in African countries such as South Africa and Kenya. In states such as Italy and Germany, issues of race and nationality intersect heavily with immigration, and migrant activists and advocacy groups have been able to draw connections between anti-black racism in the US and anti-immigrant realities in the EU. Often, migrants have been excluded from decision-making that directly shapes their lived experiences.

Human rights are thus central to debates on Africa/EU migration, given the high number of reported cases of abuses reported by migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in Europe. Migrant routes from West, Central, and East Africa to Libya - the major entry point to the Mediterranean - are populated with complex networks of smugglers and traffickers who control access to migration routes, housing, and food along the way. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported a likely increase in migrant smuggling in East Africa in May 2020. In November 2017, the Cable News Network (CNN) aired a video showing black Africans being sold at a modern-day slave auction in the Libyan capital of Tripoli. Some migrants, mostly women, are further exposed to sex-trafficking, rape, and sex slavery during their journeys. On their arrival in Europe, African migrants are often exposed to ill-equipped border officials, systems, and detention camps where overcrowding and inadequate medical services make for an unhealthy and traumatic experience.

### **Webinar on Friday 26 March 2021**

For the first webinar on Friday 26 March 2021 from 14:30 to 16:00 (Standard South African Time; 13:30 to 15:00 Central European Time), two presenters, Mr Joseph Peters, a migrant from Sierra Leone affiliated to the Joel Nafuma Refugee Center (JNRC) in Italy, and Dr Joy Kategekwa, the Strategic Advisor to the Regional Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa in New York, will provide 15-minute presentations to frame the discussions on the

experiences and voices of African migrants in the EU, after which invited African, European, UN and IOM policymakers, scholars, and civil society activists - who are part of the 100-member Community of Practice - will debate the key issues, craft concrete recommendations for policymaking, and seek to shape public opinion and policy agendas on Africa/EU migration governance. The meeting will be chaired by Dr. Adeoye O. Akinola, Senior Researcher at IPATC. The second webinar in April 2021 will also focus on the experiences of African migrants in Europe, within the framework of the EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum.