

Deepening Labor Migration Governance at a Time of Immobility

Lessons from Ghana and Senegal

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically curtailed migration opportunities in West Africa, as it has around the world. In 2019, 10.1 million West African migrants lived in other countries in the region or further afield for work, family unification, study, or other purposes. But more than a year into the pandemic, ongoing border closures and travel restrictions coupled with new public-health measures have limited migration opportunities for many West Africans for the foreseeable future. At the time of writing, this brief's two country case studies, Ghana and Senegal, had opened to air travel but some land borders remained closed.

Migration and its corollaries, such as remittances and knowledge transfers from the diaspora, have been an important vehicle for supporting socioeconomic development in the two case study countries and the broader region. But continued uncertainty about when migration will more fully restart—and at what scale—threatens this progress. It also risks delaying national and regional efforts to strengthen migration governance, such as the development or implementation of comprehensive migration policy frameworks at country level and the lifting of barriers to mobility under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement.

In the case of Ghana and Senegal, efforts to improve migration governance are rooted in common priorities, including expanding safe and legal migration opportunities for their nationals, reducing the exploitation of migrant workers, and engaging the diaspora. But even prior to the pandemic, translating these policy goals into practice was proving challenging. Some of the sticking points include: how to build mutually beneficial ties between origin countries and their diasporas; how to balance governments' commitments to better regulate worker recruitment despite limited resources to enforce new rules; and how to move the needle on issues such as promoting freedom of movement within ECOWAS while protecting local workers and businesses.

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The pandemic has upended political priorities, including on migration governance, but it has also offered a compelling case for more support from donors and development actors in this area, as well as deeper cooperation on these migration issues. Bilateral or regional cooperation can help minimize disruptions resulting from national actions such as border closures or travel restrictions and enable

governments to develop common standards and approaches that can lay the groundwork for restarting mobility. In a scenario where immigration to high-income countries outside the region remains suppressed due to lower demand for workers or difficult-to-meet public-health requirements for entry (such as required proof of vaccination), regional mobility may also grow in salience in the short to medium term.

Looking ahead, West African governments should think carefully about how they can leverage existing partnerships and work together to restart mobility, as well as use development cooperation to advance their agenda. Countries such as Ghana and Senegal will also need to reassess their short- to medium-term priorities for labor migration in the wake of the pandemic. For example, new public-health measures at borders may reinvigorate efforts to improve the collection and sharing of migration data and necessitate additional outreach to recruiters to ensure they understand and implement these new public-health rules. The challenges of supporting migrants stranded abroad by travel restrictions or other pandemic-related factors may also incentivize deeper investments in consular services and bilateral relationships with destination countries. Finally, the economic downturn triggered by the pandemic, coupled with migration's potential for knowledge transfer in critical areas such as health care, may add new urgency to diaspora engagement efforts. Donors, development actors, and international organizations can play an important role in supporting these initiatives, through technical assistance projects, by helping with diaspora engagement, and by assisting with the establishment and operation of public-health measures at international borders.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended labor migration around the globe, and with it, an important avenue for supporting socioeconomic development in low- and middle-income countries. In West Africa, for example, significant movements for work and family unification to countries both within and outside the region contribute to development at home through remittances and diaspora contributions. In 2019, there were 10.1 million West African migrants living in other countries, of whom about two-thirds lived in other West African countries.¹ The onset of the pandemic brought most of these movements to a halt. While most airports have since reopened (albeit with new health requirements in place), a number of countries have maintained land border closures even within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movement area, curbing cross-border trade and mobility.² At the same time, opportunities to migrate to high-income countries (for example, in Europe or the Gulf states) have been curtailed both by ongoing travel restrictions and a freeze on the recruitment of migrant workers in many sectors. Prospective migrants face considerable uncertainty about when (and under what conditions) they will be able to access these livelihood opportunities once more, while projections suggest that the pandemic's economic impacts may lead to sustained drops in remittance flows.³

The slowdown of migration may in turn have significant consequences for development, especially if the reopening of mobility channels is not well managed during the recovery. Before the COVID-19 crisis took hold, a number of low- and middle-income countries, including Ghana and Senegal, were taking concrete steps to improve their governance of

international migration, embarking on the process of drafting or implementing migration policy frameworks for the first time. For example, Ghana adopted a national migration policy framework in 2016 and launched a more detailed labor migration policy in 2020, while Senegal is working towards the finalization of its first national migration policy framework. Both countries have also made commitments to implementing the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment, which enables citizens of the region to move, reside, and work in other Member States provided they meet certain conditions.⁴ Senegal is also part of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), a group of West African states working toward creating a customs and currency union.⁵

COVID-19 has thus created new challenges for migration management while also presenting new incentives for deeper cooperation on migration issues.

But since March 2020, many efforts to improve migration governance have been put on ice. The vast needs associated with the COVID-19 response, coupled with the uncertainty that surrounds the future of mobility, mean that the timeline for introducing further reforms—and mustering the resources necessary to support them—is unclear. For now, efforts to develop common public-health standards and restart labor mobility are happening at the bilateral or regional level, complicating efforts to restart interregional travel (for example, from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe or the Middle East) and potentially creating incentives for greater intraregional and South-South migration and for irregular migration in the interim.

COVID-19 has thus created new challenges for migration management while also presenting new incentives for deeper cooperation on migration issues. This policy brief explores how governments and other stakeholders can promote better labor migration governance in low- and middle-income countries, and how these efforts are being shaped by the pandemic. It focuses on the experiences of Ghana and Senegal—two countries that were in the process of strengthening the governance of their migration policies before the pandemic began—and examines how governments and their partners can support migration and achieve better outcomes for migrants and for countries of origin and destination.

2 A Snapshot of Labor Migration Trends in Ghana and Senegal

Every year, significant numbers of Ghanaian and Senegalese nationals migrate in search of work or for other reasons, such as trade, access to services, and social ties. Both countries are also destinations for migrants moving for similar reasons. Official data sources almost certainly underestimate the number of people on the move in West Africa, due to porous borders that allow some to cross without using formal points of entry as well as broader data collection issues (see Box 1).⁶ Most labor migration happens with little or no government involvement, with migrants identifying job opportunities through their social networks, using private (and often informal) recruiters, or by searching for work upon arrival in another ECOWAS Member State.⁷ Regional integration is thus a key factor that shapes migration to and from Ghana and Senegal (and other Member States).

BOX 1**Estimating the Scale of Labor Migration and Efforts to Address Data Gaps**

Capturing labor migration trends is a challenging exercise, especially for low- and middle-income countries. Some countries lack the capacity to systematically collect data on immigration, including accurately measuring entries and exits. Adding to the challenge is the number of people using informal border crossings and who are therefore not registered in official data sources. The quality of data on migrant populations also ranges widely. In some countries, the only data available are through population censuses and household surveys, which may include only basic details about migrants, while in other countries, there are surveys of current immigrant populations that capture more details about their demographic and socioeconomic traits. For the African Union's 2020 report on labor migration statistics, fewer than 30 countries had data on migrant workers in the labor force, and fewer still could provide more granular details; for example, only eight AU Member States were able to share data about employed migrant workers. The result is an incomplete picture of the scale and profile of labor migration, especially when it happens between two countries that share similar data limitations. In the case of West Africa, for example, data on migration to some high-income countries (for example, in Europe or North America) can be more robust because of destination-country data collection capacity than data on migration between neighboring countries.

Ghana and Senegal have acknowledged these limitations in their respective migration policy documents and are seeking to improve data collection on migration and other relevant topics, such as labor market needs and demand for skills. At the national level, Ghana has created a National Migration Data Management Strategy to improve the collection and analysis of migration data from different agencies (such as the Ghana Immigration Service), and it is implementing a Labour Market Information System that will include a platform where employers can post jobs and jobseekers can search for opportunities in Ghana or overseas. However, further investments are needed to improve migration data collection and to connect information on labor market needs with migration opportunities. In its National Migration Policy, Senegal refers to the need for an effective system to collect migration data and analyze it in real time to inform policymakers. The Senegalese government has also regularly tried to organize surveys of its diaspora communities abroad, through online registration, consular registries, and membership to diaspora organizations.

Sources: African Union and Joint Labour Migration Programme, *Report on Labour Migration Statistics in Africa*, 2nd ed. (2017) (Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, 2020); Objective 1 of United Nations, "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration," July 13, 2018 (to "[c]ollect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies."); Government of Ghana, "National Labour Migration Policy" (unpublished policy document, 2020); Ghanaian Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, "Ghana Labour Market Information System," accessed June 21, 2021; International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Migration in Ghana: A Country Profile 2019* (Geneva: IOM, 2020); Lanfia Diané, "COVID-19 et migration" (interview by Gnagna Koné, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, May 13, 2020); Sorona Toma, *Policy and Institutional Frameworks—Senegal Country Report* (Florence, Italy: European University Institute, 2014).

Ghana and Senegal are both countries of net emigration, with sizeable diasporas spread between Africa (almost all within the ECOWAS region), Europe, and in the case of Ghana, North America. In 2019, 970,600 Ghanaians were recorded as living outside of Ghana.⁸ The top destination countries for Ghanaian emigrants are Nigeria, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Côte d'Ivoire. The same year, more than 640,000 Senegalese were recorded as living abroad.⁹ The top destination countries for Senegalese emigrants are The Gambia, France, Italy, and

Spain.¹⁰ A lack of comprehensive data makes it hard to track which sectors members of the Ghanaian and Senegalese diasporas work in, although studies of different destination countries or regions can provide some indications. For example, research points to the prevalence of Ghanaian migrants working in low-skilled roles in the construction and domestic work sectors in the Gulf region.¹¹ Studies also suggest that there is significant emigration from these two countries of skilled workers in sectors such as health care.¹²

As for many other low- and middle-income countries, remittances are an important source of income for both Ghana and Senegal. In 2020, Senegal received an estimated U.S. \$2.3 billion in remittances (equivalent to around 9.4 percent of the country's gross domestic product [GDP]), while Ghana received an estimated U.S. \$3.2 billion in remittances (around 4.8 percent of its GDP).¹³ The true volume of remittances is likely much higher, as these data do not capture informal money transfers, although COVID-19-related travel restrictions and lockdowns appear to be channeling more remittances through formal channels.¹⁴ Data from 2017 suggest that for Ghana, the main source countries for remittances are the United States, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom, while for Senegal, the main sources are France, Italy, Spain, and The Gambia.¹⁵

Both countries also have their own immigrant populations, with most coming from other ECOWAS Member States. In 2019, Ghana recorded 466,800 international migrants, accounting for about 1.5 percent of the country's population.¹⁶ Almost all (98.4 percent) of these immigrants came from sub-Saharan Africa, with the vast majority (83.6 percent) coming from other ECOWAS Member States such as Togo, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso.¹⁷ Family reunification is a key driver of immigration, followed by work; however, there is a significant gender divide, with a 2015 survey finding that 74.5 percent of female migrants cited family reasons for migrating to Ghana, while 53.8 percent of male migrants cited work as their reason for migrating.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Senegal had more than 275,000 international migrants as of 2019,¹⁹ accounting for 1.7 percent of its population. Most of these immigrants (87.8 percent) came from sub-Saharan Africa, with those from other ECOWAS Member States accounting for 55.9 percent, although Senegal also has smaller immigrant populations from France, North Africa (Algeria and Morocco), the Middle East (Saudi Arabia and Lebanon), and elsewhere.²⁰

In both Ghana and Senegal, immigrants tend to work in low-skilled roles in the informal economy, in sectors such as agriculture, retail and trade, manufacturing, and mining.²¹ A smaller share also works in high-skilled roles, for example with multinational companies.²² Data from Ghana suggest that as of 2015, female migrants in the country were employed primarily in wholesale and retail trade, followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing, and manufacturing, whereas male migrants were employed primarily in agriculture and in forestry and fishing, followed by wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing.²³ Migrants of different nationalities are sometimes concentrated in particular industries. For example, in Ghana, studies and interviews indicate that Nigerians tend to work in finance, insurance, mining, oil, and petty trading, while the relatively small number of Chinese nationals in the country tend to work in gold mining.²⁴ In Senegal, surveys and interviews point to Guineans working in transport and the trade of fruit and vegetables, Malians in crafts, and Chinese and Indian nationals in construction.²⁵

The pandemic has upended many of these migration trends. ECOWAS Member States moved unilaterally to close their borders, in the process stranding many citizens of other ECOWAS countries (for example, if they crossed without an identity document).²⁶ Many of these restrictions lasted months, and some remain in place, especially at land borders. Senegal, which closed all of its borders in March 2020, has since reopened air travel for citizens, residents and special exemptions, while most land borders remain closed.²⁷ Ghana also closed its borders in March 2020 and only reopened to air travel in September 2020.²⁸ Throughout West and Central Africa, IOM recorded more than 24,000 migrants stranded by pandemic-related measures in May 2020, and up to 30,000 a month later.²⁹ These border closures have also impeded usually lively cross-border trade, such as between Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo and between Senegal and The Gambia, with dire consequences for border communities whose livelihoods rely on these exchanges.³⁰

3 Top Ghanaian and Senegalese Policy Priorities Related to Labor Migration

Prior to the pandemic, Ghana's and Senegal's migration policy priorities primarily reflected their identities as countries of net emigration. Discussions of labor migration cover both immigration and emigration policies, but with a focus on issues such as expanding legal migration opportunities for their nationals, diaspora engagement, and promoting the rights of their nationals working abroad. While the Ghanaian and Senegalese policy agendas have been oriented toward migration to high-income destination countries, regional integration has also been an important facet, with both countries committed to implementing the ECOWAS Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment. In fact, discussions on how to improve migration governance within the bloc informed some of these countries' efforts to articulate comprehensive migration policies, as did talks in various forums about better harnessing the benefits of migration for development (including those during the negotiations of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration).

The two countries have been working toward adopting or rolling out new migration policy frameworks, even though the COVID-19 crisis has delayed some of these political processes. These efforts to set out comprehensive, cross-sectoral migration strategies have been supported by development agencies and international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), especially following the 2015–16 migration and refugee crisis in Europe, which drew increased attention to migration governance issues among European donors.³¹

In 2016, Ghana introduced its National Migration Policy, which sets out a strategy for managing migration (both internal and international) and boosting its development benefits.³² Implementation was delayed partly because of national elections and a change of government in 2016, and it is still ongoing, with the government working on establishing a National Commission on Migration to coordinate across different government agencies.³³ While the National Migration Policy covers a wide range of migration-related issues, the government launched a separate National Labour Migration Policy in 2020 and is reviewing a draft diaspora engagement policy framework, which set out more detailed objectives and strategies for these policy areas.³⁴

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Senegal has also developed a comprehensive National Migration Policy that outlines priorities and seeks to coordinate activities across different agencies, including on diaspora engagement and migration management.³⁵ The policy was drafted by thematic working groups coordinated by the Ministry of Economy and Planning (with support from IOM), drawing on consultations with ministries, sub-national authorities, international organizations, and civil society. But while the document was finalized in 2018, it has yet to receive final political sign-off from Senegal's government.³⁶ The government is currently considering an update, with the objective of reflecting new policy developments such as the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum.³⁷

As members of ECOWAS, Ghana and Senegal are also responsible for implementing the Free Movement Protocol, with implications for immigration and emigration within the region. Most immigrants entering Ghana or Senegal come from other ECOWAS countries and can thus enter without a visa. To stay beyond 90 days and work, ECOWAS citizens are required to register for a residence permit, although as will be discussed in Section 4.B., this can present a number of hurdles in practice. Citizens of other countries must apply for an entry visa (either before or upon arrival) and then register for work and residence permits once they arrive. Work permits are typically linked to a single employer and are renewable. Ghana offers permanent residence to immigrants after they have been in the country for five years. In Senegal, the legislation on residence dates from 1971 and does not offer permanent residency to most foreigners.³⁸ However, this legislation is likely to be revised as part of the ongoing process of updating and implementing its National Migration Strategy.³⁹

These recently introduced and draft policy frameworks reflect a number of priorities on labor migration that are shared by Ghana and Senegal, including:

▶ **Boosting diaspora engagement.**

Maximizing the development benefits of migration is a top priority for both governments, and diaspora engagement has long formed an important tool for pursuing this aim. The two countries have set up ministries or government departments dedicated to diaspora engagement and pursued policies to tap the resources of their diasporas. For example, both countries have sought to boost remittances through formal channels, including through diaspora bonds, and aimed to incentivize diaspora members to invest in the private sector at home. These countries have also encouraged their diaspora members to return on a temporary

or longer-term basis and put their skills to use. Ghana's draft diaspora engagement strategy sets out a framework that builds on the National Migration Policy and includes a focus on building the capacity and structures to effectively engage the Ghanaian diaspora, promoting the rights of diaspora members, and boosting their contributions to Ghana.⁴⁰ As for Senegal's draft National Migration Policy, it foresees the creation of a mechanism to promote skills and knowledge transfers from the diaspora.⁴¹

▶ **Promoting ethical recruitment.** Another aim shared by both countries is enforcing ethical recruitment of migrant workers and cracking down on exploitative recruitment practices.⁴² Informal agencies are increasingly prevalent in international recruitment, despite concerns about potential ties to human trafficking, and their informal nature makes it challenging for governments to monitor and regulate their activities.⁴³ Ghana and Senegal have different approaches to managing recruitment by private employment agencies. Ghana's Labour Department (under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations) is responsible for registering and issuing licenses to private recruiters.⁴⁴ However, as will be discussed in Section 5.A., enforcement remains limited. Senegal, by contrast, currently does not have laws in place to regulate private employment agencies beyond registration with the Chamber of Commerce, as with other businesses.⁴⁵ Senegal's draft National Migration Policy identifies regulating recruitment as a priority, but it does not include specific measures for private agencies.⁴⁶ Both countries have yet to ratify some of the major international conventions on recruitment and labor migration, although both have plans to ratify relevant ILO conventions in this area.⁴⁷

- ▶ **Tackling human trafficking.** A third common objective is tackling human trafficking and protecting migrants' rights. Human trafficking, particularly of women and children, is a significant concern within the region, with studies suggesting that many victims of trafficking end up in forced labor.⁴⁸ Trafficking currently happens from, within, and to Ghana and Senegal.⁴⁹ Both countries have anti-trafficking laws in place and have ratified the Palermo Protocols, which aim to prevent and fight trafficking in persons, but enforcement efforts are under-resourced.⁵⁰ ECOWAS has also been active in this field, approving in 2017 a regional Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons for 2018–22.⁵¹

The pandemic may lead Ghana and Senegal to revisit their migration policy agendas and adjust their priorities to reflect a range of new issues and constraints. Most specifically, it is likely that balancing migration management and public-health concerns will become a major focus for the two countries. Diaspora engagement may also become more urgent to attract remittances, foreign investments, and expertise to support national recovery plans. In comparison, the pause on international travel may make efforts to create new legal pathways and improve recruitment procedures less pressing.

4 Improving the Governance of Labor Migration to and from West Africa

Prior to the pandemic, Ghana and Senegal were making concrete progress to improve migration governance both nationally and regionally. As detailed in the previous section, the two governments had developed comprehensive migration policy frameworks and were taking steps to implement

these measures. But the scale of the challenges posed by COVID-19 have delayed the rollout of many of these efforts—and raised questions about the future of mobility and cross-border movement.⁵² This section explores the steps Ghana and Senegal have taken and that they could take moving forward to adjust to this rapidly evolving environment, ranging from national to regional actions to facilitate the labor mobility of their nationals.

A. *Facilitating Labor Migration Opportunities for Workers from Ghana and Senegal*

Like other countries of emigration, a top priority for Ghana and Senegal is expanding legal and safe migration opportunities for their nationals. Until recently, the two governments played a fairly limited role in facilitating labor migration, with many migrants moving on their own and finding employment upon arrival or using the services of informal recruitment agencies. The pandemic may lead Ghana and Senegal to be more active, for example to help migrants navigate new health-related requirements when borders reopen. This is likely to make initiatives such as information campaigns for aspiring migrants even more important. At the same time, the main tool available to governments to shape the migration opportunities available to their nationals remains diplomacy. Negotiations with immigrant destination countries to encourage them to open up additional opportunities for labor migration and streamline recruitment procedures may now see health and safety measures come to the fore. The pandemic thus seems likely to have direct effects on the range of tools available to Ghanaian and Senegalese policymakers, potentially raising the profile of bilateral agreements with partner countries and of projects offering training and opportunities to gain work experience to migrants in sectors in high demand at home and in destination countries.

The Role of Diplomacy: Bilateral Agreements and Projects with Destination Countries

Bilateral labor agreements, memoranda of understanding, and mobility projects are among the most common instruments available to origin countries to encourage and regulate labor migration.⁵³ However, their impact is often relatively limited in terms of numbers, and the pandemic is adding a layer of complexity to their implementation. In this unprecedented situation, Ghana and Senegal may need to strengthen their capacity to meet new health-related requirements and adapt their approach to engaging with destination countries.

Future efforts can capitalize on the negotiating experience of both countries. For example, in the wake of Ghana's 2017 ban on the recruitment of Ghanaian workers to the Gulf and the Middle East (citing concerns about violations of migrants' rights), the government has pursued bilateral agreements with destination countries in the region with stronger provisions to protect Ghanaian workers, while also pursuing greater regulation of recruitment agencies operating in Ghana. At the time of writing, Ghana had signed agreements with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates and was in the process of negotiating one with Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴ Senegal also has bilateral labor agreements with European countries (e.g., France, Italy, and Spain) and African partners (e.g., Djibouti, Gabon, Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco).⁵⁵ An agreement with Qatar, for instance, targets a few sectors (e.g., construction and nursing) and aims to facilitate the recruitment of Senegalese workers.⁵⁶

In practice, many of these agreements are not fully implemented or end up lapsing into disuse as political or economic priorities change. With migration-management actors often in the driving seat for these negotiations, some agreements do not reflect private-sector priorities in destination countries—or simply do not offer employers a compelling reason to use them as an alternative to other recruitment

channels. Senegal's experiences with Spain and France illustrate some of these dynamics. In the case of Senegal and Spain, while there was a clear political imperative for a deal, labor market demand was inconsistent. Madrid and Dakar entered into a bilateral labor agreement in 2007 as part of Spain's broader efforts to decrease spontaneous migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands. The agreement initially facilitated some circular migration opportunities for Senegalese low-skilled workers,⁵⁷ but this cooperation was later discontinued because of the 2008–10 economic crisis in Spain, issues with recruitment processes, and workers overstaying their visas.⁵⁸ In early 2021, Spain and Senegal reopened discussions on the idea of issuing more work visas for Senegalese migrants in exchange for increased border controls to curb rising arrivals to the Canary Islands,⁵⁹ but with Spain facing another recession (this time linked to the COVID-19 pandemic), it is unclear whether there will be sufficient demand or political will to get this initiative off the ground in the short term. Meanwhile, the labor agreement France and Senegal signed in 2006 illustrates the importance of getting the private sector onboard. While Senegal was able to add occupations to the shortage list issued by the French government to facilitate the hiring of third-country nationals, this agreement did not result in more recruitment of workers by French companies.⁶⁰

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In an attempt to gain more leverage in discussions with the European Union and its Member States, Ghana, Senegal, and other African states have tried to band together to negotiate additional labor migration opportunities for their nationals. Since the

EU-Africa Valletta Summit in 2015, African governments have repeatedly advocated for the issuance of more work visas to Europe as part of their broader migration cooperation with the European Union.⁶¹ African states have also coordinated under the umbrella of the African Union and regional policy dialogues (the Rabat and Khartoum Processes). In 2018, for instance, Ghana, Senegal, and most of the other countries that are part of the Rabat Process adopted the Marrakesh Political Declaration and Action Plan, a joint strategy document committing African and European signatories to enhance legal migration and mobility, among other things.⁶² To date, the outcomes of these joint dialogues have, however, been limited, partly because decisions about admissions ultimately lie with EU Member States, not the European Union, and several of them have been skeptical about the benefits of creating additional labor migration schemes in the short term.⁶³ The COVID-19 crisis has further disrupted these efforts; for instance, the AU-EU Summit, which was initially scheduled for October 2020 and intended to cover labor migration and opportunities to create new pathways, was postponed.⁶⁴

But there are some opportunities on the horizon for origin countries to pursue cooperation at the EU level, most notably through the new “Talent Partnerships” proposed in the European Commission’s September 2020 New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Talent Partnerships envision the European Union working with priority partner countries in Africa and other regions to create frameworks that link mobility schemes for work or training with broader investments in development, education and training, and other areas.⁶⁵ The Talent Partnerships proposal builds on a long history of standalone projects between countries of origin and destination that offer experience and training to small numbers

of people in priority sectors. For example, Ghana and Italy participated in a pilot project funded by the European Commission in 2011, as part of which 20 Ghanaian workers were recruited to work in the grape and apple harvest for three months in Trento, Italy, and provided with predeparture training in Ghana.⁶⁶ However, it is unclear what the outcomes of this project were, and there are no signs it was subsequently scaled up. Ghana and Senegal were also identified as priority countries for pilot projects the European Commission launched in 2018, as part of an initiative that aimed to increase EU cooperation with origin countries on labor migration while addressing labor shortage gaps in the bloc.⁶⁷ But in the first phase, projects were only developed with North African countries and with Nigeria, and the total number of people to move remained limited (in the hundreds).⁶⁸

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While this type of initiative can offer an opportunity to test new migration corridors (for example, between Lithuania and Nigeria for tech workers) or to experiment with different approaches to managing migration and promoting development benefits (such as the Global Skills Partnership model discussed in Box 2), common challenges include securing private sector buy-in and finding a viable pathway to scale.⁶⁹ Following a soft launch of the Talent Partnerships in June 2021, the Commission is in discussions with Member States and other stakeholders to roll them out.⁷⁰ North African countries such as Morocco and Tunisia are likely to be prioritized for this cooperation, but Ghana and Senegal could also be candidates for cooperation.

BOX 2**Boosting the Development Benefits of Mobility Schemes: The Global Skills Partnership Model**

An ongoing question about the design of these labor mobility projects is how to effectively promote development benefits in countries of origin and allay concerns about potential “brain drain” in certain sectors. For example, Germany’s Triple Win project on the sustainable recruitment of nurses has targeted three countries with established surpluses of qualified nurses to avoid contributing to brain drain from countries where medical professionals are more scarce.

One model that has received a lot of interest in recent years is the Global Skills Partnership model proposed in the Global Compact for Migration that would invest in training systems and skills development in countries of origin and destination. The concept hinges on the cost differentials of training in different countries: for the price of training one person in a high-income country of destination, governments or employers could afford to train several people in a low- or middle-income country of origin. While some of these trainees may go on to migrate (and thus meet destination-country labor needs), others may stay, enabling the country of origin to benefit from additional skilled workers trained at little or no cost to them. Most recently, this approach has been tested in an EU-funded pilot project between Belgium and Morocco that provided a five-month training course to 120 recent Moroccan graduates that covered information and communications technology, English, and soft skills before helping 30 to find employment opportunities in Flanders, Belgium, and 90 to find employment opportunities in Morocco.

While this model faces similar obstacles to those encountered by other projects, including how to engage employers and find a sustainable funding model, it holds promise both as an avenue to provide development benefits that are delinked from the migration decisions of individuals (e.g., whether they will return to their country of origin and put their new skills to use there) and to address long-standing concerns about potential brain drain.

Sources: United Nations, “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”; Enabel, “PALIM- European Pilot Project Linking Moroccan ICT Development and Labour Shortages in Flanders” (press release, November 27, 2019); Kate Hooper, *Exploring New Legal Migration Pathways: Lessons from Pilot Projects* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

National Actions to Facilitate Labor Migration

Alongside building relationships with destination countries, origin-country governments can take some actions on their own to facilitate labor migration. These include promoting existing opportunities open to their nationals or even playing a more active role in the recruitment process, such as by identifying possible candidates for jobs. Ghana and Senegal are taking steps in this direction, but further efforts are needed, and in light of the pandemic, the two countries may wish to invest in information campaigns to ensure prospective migrants are aware of the health requirements imposed by destination countries, as well as investing in new health-related border infrastructure. In the longer term, migrant or-

igin countries could consider reforms in their education and training systems and skills recognition procedures to make it easier for their nationals to apply their skills in destination countries and on return. These policies should be informed by the labor markets in destination and origin countries, as reshaped by the pandemic.

Publicizing existing labor migration schemes and raising awareness of international recruitment or training opportunities is an important step toward the goal of promoting safe and legal migration. But to date, these efforts are happening in a piecemeal fashion. In Ghana, the Labour Department is responsible for managing emigration, but its work focuses on regulating private employment agencies and due diligence related to emigration (for example,

identifying which countries are safe to migrate to, issuing exit permits, and facilitating travel for labor migrants).⁷¹ In the past, the department has played a role in implementing mobility schemes (such as the one with Italy detailed above), but its Public Employment Centres currently only disseminate information about job opportunities within Ghana.⁷² Meanwhile, the Ghanaian-German Centre for Jobs, Migration, and Reintegration and its Senegalese equivalent, both managed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in coordination with the respective national authorities, share information about legal migration opportunities to Germany and support the reintegration of returning migrants.⁷³

Investing in skills recognition procedures is generally less controversial, with clear advantages for both individual returning migrants and the broader society.

Longer-term investments by origin-country governments in their education and training systems could make the process of migrating more seamless, particularly for workers at the middle- and high-skilled levels. Given long-standing concerns about brain drain in particular sectors, such as health care, this can be a sensitive topic for countries of origin. Investing in skills recognition procedures is generally less controversial, with clear advantages for both individual returning migrants and the broader society by helping returnees apply their skills more effectively. A first step in that direction is standardizing skills recognition procedures at the national level. In Senegal, a 2020 study concluded that the country still lacks a unified national framework for skills certification and recommended more engagement with all ministries and private and public education providers to build one.⁷⁴ The second step is to harmonize education and training standards for key professions with other countries and eventually de-

velop common standards at a regional or even continental level (as attempted under the ILO's SKILL-UP program⁷⁵).

As part of their broader education and training strategy, governments could also think about investing in growth sectors that are in demand in both origin and destination countries. An advanced example of such an approach can be seen in the Philippines, where the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority runs a certification and training system that grants credentials used in the Philippines and recognized by other countries. The system also involves skills courses and language training for Filipinos migrating to popular destinations such as Japan, South Korea, China, and countries in the Gulf and Middle East. However, critics point to the risk of brain drain in key sectors such as medicine, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; possible mismatches between the skills in demand in destination countries and in the Philippines; and the poor working conditions Filipino migrants face in some countries.⁷⁶ But while the Philippines is unusual in offering training explicitly aligned with the requirements of another country, models such as the Global Skills Partnership (see Box 2) illustrate the potential gains of investing in training in sectors that are likely to see continuing demand both at home and overseas. Ghana and Senegal could draw on their previous experiences cooperating with destination countries such as Spain to take a similar approach. For example, Spanish authorities previously worked with the Senegalese employment agency to recruit workers on behalf of Spanish employers and subsidized predeparture training for workers in sectors such as fisheries.⁷⁷

Finally, as the pandemic continues to reshape migration systems, Ghana and Senegal may need to explore what measures they can adopt to facilitate the mobility of their nationals in light of new travel requirements. Since March 2020, countries around the world have adopted thousands of policies to

limit travel—from entry restrictions on travelers coming from or through certain countries to specific conditions for entry (e.g., testing prior to departure or on arrival, quarantine requirements)—and many of these measures are likely to be maintained in the near future.⁷⁸ If they wish to help resume labor migration more quickly, Accra and Dakar may wish to invest in infrastructure and processes to help their nationals abide by these rules, for example by facilitating access to testing for those seeking to take up work abroad and promoting resources that share the latest requirements for key destination countries.

B. Facilitating Regional and Continental Mobility

While Ghanaian and Senegalese migration policies have focused on promoting safe and legal labor migration to high-income countries, most migration happens to and from other ECOWAS Member States. Regional integration, whether at the level of ECOWAS or the African Union, is thus another main facet of labor migration governance for both countries. This dimension may even grow in importance if high-income countries maintain pandemic-related travel restrictions and Ghana, Senegal, and their ECOWAS partners cannot meet them. Some destination countries may also introduce new public-health requirements, such as that travelers provide proof of vaccination, which could further limit mobility from countries such as these where vaccines have not yet become widely available. But to reap the full benefits of intraregional migration, ECOWAS will need to overcome some persistent barriers to free movement within the bloc, many of which result from inconsistent policy frameworks across the region and a lack of staff capacity and resources to enforce new policies and regulatory frameworks.⁷⁹

Free Movement within ECOWAS

While the pandemic initially triggered uncoordinated border closures within ECOWAS, over the course

of 2020 Member States began to harmonize their COVID-19 response and set up regular communication channels to share good practices.⁸⁰ The situation has confirmed the importance of cross-border movement for local economies, from trade activities to the movement of livestock and seasonal labor migration corridors.⁸¹ At this stage, however, many land borders are still closed, several countries have forcibly returned ECOWAS citizens trying to cross the border irregularly, and discrepancies in the fees charged for COVID-19 tests by border authorities have generated tension.⁸² Policymakers will thus need to attend both to long-standing efforts to further regional integration and to new, pandemic-related challenges to intraregional mobility.

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The foundation for free movement within the region has been well laid. Over the past 40 years, the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol has been critical for opening up opportunities to travel, reside, and work within the region and for reducing barriers to mobility, including for cross-border communities, pastoralists, and traders. But the bloc has yet to implement all of the protocol's provisions, as well as common policy documents such as the 2008 ECOWAS Common Approach to Migration.⁸³ Member States have fully implemented the first phase of the protocol on abolishing visas and entry permits, thus allowing ECOWAS citizens to enter for up to 90 days, but progress on phases two and three (providing ECOWAS citizens the right to seek employment and establish their own businesses in other Member States) has been slower.⁸⁴ To some extent, these delays reflect difficulties mustering the political will to move forward linked to concerns about security (due to the cross-border activities of terrorist groups

such as Boko Haram) and the economy (including worries about foreign- and native-born workers competing for jobs), but they also reflect the enormity of the task of full integration.⁸⁵

Providing other ECOWAS citizens equal access to national labor markets (in line with the protocol) has proved particularly politically delicate in many countries.⁸⁶ For example, in a breach of ECOWAS rules providing for full labor market access, Ghana bars noncitizens from participating in petty trading and a number of other activities such as operating a taxi service or running a barber or beauty salon, which has repeatedly led to tensions between Ghanaian and Nigerian traders.⁸⁷ In addition, ECOWAS citizens applying for a work permit in Ghana do not benefit from a facilitated procedure and fall under the same rules as other third-country nationals (which involve a labor market test).⁸⁸ Similarly, while social security benefits are meant to be portable across the bloc, as set out in the 2013 ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security, this is not effective in practice.⁸⁹ If not addressed by ECOWAS leaders, these sensitivities may grow further in light of the pandemic, given increased competition for jobs.

At the same time, implementing and enforcing the Free Movement Protocol poses bureaucratic challenges for countries with limited capacity and resources. Many issues stem from the lack of identity documents among many ECOWAS residents. Such documents are required to cross borders regularly, but they can be difficult to obtain in countries where civil registry systems are not fully functioning. A series of international projects are working to improve civil registration and national identification systems,⁹⁰ but in the meantime, informal border crossings are relatively common.⁹¹ Pastoralist communities are particularly affected by these difficulties, which can lead to extortion at border points.⁹² Cases of corruption and harassment, especially toward female migrants, are regularly documented at border crossings, and accountability mechanisms tend to

be limited.⁹³ Another issue results from the lack of a common understanding among ECOWAS countries as to what identity documents are considered valid for the purposes of crossing borders.⁹⁴ And even if ECOWAS citizens manage to enter another country, this same documentation issue can prevent them from applying for residence permits.⁹⁵ Finally, staff deployed at border points often lack adequate equipment to monitor crossings and share data with central authorities.⁹⁶ All these shortcomings have become even more acute since the beginning of the pandemic, with public-health concerns adding an additional dimension to border management. As a result, ECOWAS Member States, donors, and their partners have deployed a range of activities to align border procedures with health and safety guidelines. For instance, in December 2020, the Ghana Immigration Service received personal protection equipment from the European Union and ECOWAS, to be distributed to its staff at points of entry.⁹⁷

Other signs point to continued commitment to regional integration. For example, Ghana and Senegal are both engaged in regional dialogues and projects seeking to improve regional migration governance and build capacity (such as the Migration Dialogue for West Africa and the Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa project).⁹⁸ All ECOWAS Member States except for one have adopted the ECOWAS passport, and Ghana and Senegal have introduced the ECOWAS National Biometric Identity Card—intended to serve as a travel certificate across the bloc and facilitate regional mobility⁹⁹—with Ghana already issuing more than half a million such cards as of 2018.¹⁰⁰ Finally, the efforts of ECOWAS Member States to coordinate since the start of the pandemic, including via the ECOWAS Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control and by moving toward common standards around testing and air travel, show a continued impetus for regional coordination, without denying the likely difficulties of the recovery process.¹⁰¹

Free Movement within the African Continent

Meanwhile, at the continental level, Ghana and Senegal are both signatories to the African Union's Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, which was adopted in 2018 and came into effect in 2020, with the goal of achieving freedom of movement across the continent by 2030.¹⁰² As of early 2021, 32 of the 35 AU Member States had adopted the protocol¹⁰³ but only four had ratified it.¹⁰⁴ Free movement across the continent will build on the free movement established within each regional economic community, and over time, the ability to travel freely without visa requirements could lead to the free movement of labor and the rights of establishment and residence at the continental level.¹⁰⁵

But many obstacles remain to making these objectives a reality. These barriers largely predate the pandemic and range from the many visa requirements that currently apply to Africans seeking to travel across Africa to the absence of a joint strategy on border governance (still in drafting by the African Union).¹⁰⁶ A number of African states have indicated they are concerned about security, especially in regions where militant groups such as Boko Haram and al-Shabab are active, and governments fear that freedom of movement may facilitate their cross-border activities.¹⁰⁷ Some countries also consider continent-wide free movement to be premature, as many regional economic communities are still working toward implementing regional freedom of movement. Finally, a whole range of technical and administrative reforms will be needed to fully operationalize the protocol—for instance, to raise awareness of the African Passport and train border officers about its use.¹⁰⁸ AU Member States may not be ready to mobilize the significant capacity and financial resources needed, both because the pandemic-related economic recession has tightened many national budgets and because segments of the African population (especially in North Africa) are skeptical

about the principle of continental freedom of movement.¹⁰⁹ Still, as may prove the case within ECOWAS, if COVID-19-related restrictions continue to limit travel beyond Africa, this may eventually convince AU Member States and skeptical members of the public of the benefits of freedom of movement throughout the continent.

5 Improving the Governance of Emigration and Diaspora Engagement

Even prior to the pandemic, Ghana and Senegal were both focused on building closer ties with their diasporas to encourage foreign direct investments, remittances, and skills transfers. These efforts are now even more critical, in the context of the pandemic-induced economic crisis. The pandemic has also underscored the need for greater protections for migrants, with border closures and travel restrictions, lockdowns, and lost livelihoods stranding some migrants abroad.¹¹⁰ In addition, the suspension of most legal migration channels is raising further concerns about migrant workers resorting to irregular routes, having to pay higher smuggling fees, or falling prey to trafficking networks.¹¹¹ Ghana and Senegal have sought to address some of these challenges, with interventions that have mainly aimed to improve the regulation of international recruitment at home and expand the services available to workers in destination countries. While pressing pandemic-related challenges are likely to take priority particularly in the short term, this disruption to international migration could also offer a window in which to reflect on the limitations of existing systems for emigration governance and diaspora engagement, begin to address shortcomings, and work toward improving cooperation with destination countries.

A. *Regulating Emigration*

There are many uncertainties as to what the landscape for international recruitment will look like after the COVID-19 crisis abates, including which sectors will be in demand in destination countries, how recruitment agencies will reorganize their operations, and how health considerations will be integrated into recruitment procedures. To help their nationals weather this changing landscape, Ghana and Senegal could refocus their efforts to strengthen legislation or enforcement mechanisms around ethical recruitment. In parallel, the situation of thousands of migrants stranded abroad has brought new urgency to previous efforts to strengthen consular networks and emergency procedures to assist migrants in crisis.

Enforcing Fair and Ethical Recruitment and Compliance with New Health-Related Travel Requirements

Concerns about the rise of informal agencies in international recruitment have taken on a new dimension in the context of the pandemic and may make monitoring emigration even more challenging. In both Ghana and Senegal, obtaining a license to operate as a formal labor recruiter can be expensive and time-consuming, and many actors choose to operate outside the system—and many migrants may be willing to pay the lower fees charged for informal services. Limited capacity to enforce recruitment laws means that this practice goes largely unchecked. Often, these agencies utilize community or religious networks or social media, all of which are difficult for the government to monitor.¹¹² According to a 2020 study by the IOM, the number of unlicensed agencies outstrips the number of licensed agencies in Ghana.¹¹³

In Ghana and Senegal, governments have limited tools beyond legislation to ensure these actors play by the rules. For example, a sizable number of mi-

grants have circumvented Ghana's ban on labor migration to the Gulf by using the services of informal agencies that have helped them reach their destination via neighboring countries.¹¹⁴ And while Ghana has legal provisions to regulate private agencies, incentivizing compliance is an ongoing challenge. This situation illustrates a broader policy conundrum facing the two countries: how to incentivize private agencies to comply with government regulations while informal actors face limited repercussions for violating them and can afford to charge migrants lower fees, thus tipping the market in their favor.

One of the consequences of this lack of regulation is inconsistent recruitment fees and minimal transparency in job matching. This is a major problem as, in Senegal, previous research shows migrants often face high recruitment fees and lack information about the nature of the position they will be taking.¹¹⁵ Ghana, meanwhile, has set a few rules around recruitment fees, but these are relatively vague; for example, Accra authorizes agencies to charge migrant workers an "appropriate" fee without defining what constitutes such a fee.¹¹⁶ Research from Ghana has documented cases of migrant workers relying on a registered agency who spent about 30 percent more on recruitment and other fees compared to migrants relying on an informal intermediary.¹¹⁷

Beyond regulating recruitment, governments can also invest in predeparture orientation to share information with departing migrants about their rights, expectations for working and living conditions, and the resources available to them in destination countries.¹¹⁸ In both Ghana and Senegal, responsibility for providing predeparture orientation rests with the government (the Labour Department in Ghana, and the Reception, Orientation, and Follow-up Offices for Senegalese Abroad [Bureaux d'Accueil, Orientation et Suivi] in Senegal).¹¹⁹ Civil society and international organizations are key actors as well: for example, the Trades Union Congress of Ghana issued and disseminated a predeparture

guide for migrant workers in 2016, while the ILO has previously organized predeparture sessions for Senegalese migrants moving to Spain.¹²⁰ Still, outreach can be challenging, especially to migrants recruited through more informal channels or outside of major cities, and the quality of training can vary. A recent review of recruitment practices in Ghana, Senegal, and several other West African countries found wide disparities in the quality and duration of predeparture orientation, with some migrants receiving an hour-long information session while others may receive several days' worth of training from their recruitment agency.¹²¹

Recruitment agencies will need to comply with new rules and reorganize some of their activities, especially if the demand for migrant workers in destination countries focuses on new sectors.

When international labor migration begins to pick up again, many of these challenges are likely to become more acute. Migrant workers will need to be aware of new destination-country requirements (e.g., that new arrivals be tested, quarantined, and ultimately, be vaccinated) as well as about health and safety guidelines, the epidemiological situation, and the health services available in the destination country. Recruitment agencies will need to comply with new rules and reorganize some of their activities, especially if the demand for migrant workers in destination countries focuses on new sectors and they have to create new selection channels. Altogether, the recruitment field may look considerably different once the pandemic eases, depending on which agencies have been able to maintain their activities (perhaps influenced by whether actors operating formally receive some government support that informal agencies do not qualify for) and any new business models they may need to adopt (e.g., online recruitment procedures). It also remains

to be seen how the expenses associated with these new measures and methods will be shared among workers, employers, and recruiters. The risk is that these additional costs, requirements, and travel restrictions will drive more workers to migrate irregularly, potentially putting them at heightened risk of exploitation.¹²²

Deploying Services for Workers in Destination Countries

Many origin countries have had limited scope beyond their consular networks to assist their nationals abroad during the pandemic. Consulates have often played a critical role in reaching out to migrants, sharing information, and organizing their emergency repatriation.¹²³ The vital importance of consular protection is also recognized in the Global Compact for Migration's Objective 14.¹²⁴ For instance, Ghana has deployed labor attachés to their embassies in major destination countries to assist their nationals, while Senegal, as part of its bilateral labor agreement with Qatar, has sent an official to monitor the working conditions of its nationals.¹²⁵

The resources and capacity of consulates and embassies are, however, often narrow.¹²⁶ Consular authorities also face limitations in terms of outreach as not all migrants formally register with their services, especially if they have overstayed their visa or arrived through irregular channels. Efforts deployed by other countries of emigration could offer lessons for future efforts by Ghana and Senegal. For example, Mexico has deployed an extensive consular network in the United States and regularly organizes awareness-raising events to disseminate information about workers' rights and services available to Mexican nationals and within Latino communities more broadly.¹²⁷

In parallel, international organizations and civil-society actors can play an important role in providing services to migrants in destination countries. This can take the form of operating migrant resource

centers, such as those managed by IOM (as in Sudan) or trade unions (as in Malaysia¹²⁸), and of liaising with origin countries to organize voluntary returns. Migrants from Ghana and Senegal have accessed such services in countries such as Morocco and received basic assistance (e.g., food, basic health care), counselling about their situation, and for those who opt to return to their origin country, assistance in doing so.¹²⁹

The COVID-19 crisis has shown the complementarity of these governmental and nongovernmental services. Moving forward, Ghana, Senegal, and other ECOWAS countries may wish to cooperate to boost the services they are able to offer to their citizens abroad, even in the face of resource constraints, by opening joint service centers and conducting joint missions in key destination countries.

B. Building Closer Ties with Diasporas

Diaspora engagement is a top policy priority for Ghana and Senegal, with Accra developing a draft diaspora engagement strategy and Dakar making the maximization of diaspora contributions one of the top objectives in its draft National Migration Policy. Both countries have also been working to gather more comprehensive information about their diasporas, decrease the cost of sending remittances, and encourage diaspora direct investments and skills transfers. Given the pandemic's heavy impact on household incomes, diaspora contributions are likely to be both a lifeline for local communities in the short term and, in the longer term, a means to promote economic recovery.¹³⁰

Making It Easier to Send Remittances

Since the pandemic began, Ghana and Senegal have sought to engage their diasporas in efforts to support local economies. For example, Ghana created a COVID-19 National Trust Fund and asked its

embassies to encourage donations.¹³¹ Yet, when it comes to remittances, the high cost of money transfers to Ghana and Senegal (and many other origin countries) continues to be a major issue.¹³² Other challenges reported by diaspora members and their families in origin countries are lack of access to financial services, unfavorable exchange rates, and outdated regulatory frameworks.¹³³ In practice, large proportions of remittances to Ghana and Senegal are transferred through informal channels, which research has shown to be less conducive to economic development.¹³⁴ However, pandemic-related travel restrictions and lockdowns in countries of destination and origin have reportedly led to a greater share of remittances being sent through formal channels.¹³⁵

With a range of public and private partners, Ghana and Senegal have explored ways to decrease transfer costs, improve the financial inclusion of migrants and their families, and promote formal remittance channels. For example, the two countries have worked with private actors to offer financial services and products more adapted to migrant families and designed to increase their financial literacy.¹³⁶ Such efforts are noteworthy and should ultimately facilitate migrant families' access to remittances as well as to credit, savings accounts, and insurance. Moving forward, the two countries could explore schemes similar to the one tested by the Nigerian Central Bank, whereby the government offers financial incentives to migrants to use formal channels to send money from the United States.¹³⁷

In parallel, the development of digital remittance channels and related innovations have helped overcome some obstacles to financial inclusion by making transfers easier and cheaper and allowing households to save money in digital wallets.¹³⁸ This has proved particularly promising in Ghana, where the financial inclusion of vulnerable populations, including women, has recently risen.¹³⁹ The pandemic may also have accelerated the digitization of the

remittance market, with more migrants becoming comfortable with using digital tools to send money home.¹⁴⁰ Such digital tools come with a range of benefits in terms of affordability, transparency, accessibility, and ease of use.¹⁴¹ They are not, however, within the reach of all households, especially for people who are not digitally literate or who live in rural areas where access to electricity and the internet can be limited.¹⁴²

Digital tools come with a range of benefits in terms of affordability, transparency, accessibility, and ease of use. They are not, however, within the reach of all households.

Both Ghana and Senegal are invested in bridging these gaps, as are some international projects. For instance, the Remittance Grant Facility, established in 2017 by the governments of Ghana and Switzerland, is trying to create new formal channels to direct remittances to rural areas in Ghana. The facility awards grants to fintech and money transfer companies that pilot projects to support new remittance products and associated services.¹⁴³ Further efforts could also be deployed to promote interoperability between banks, on the model of the agreement concluded between the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of Mexico, helping to lower transfer prices and offer tailored services to migrants and their families.¹⁴⁴ Finally, in the context of the pandemic and uncertainties about its effects on remittances,¹⁴⁵ Ghana has sought to facilitate money transfers by adapting its legislation and policies, for instance to lower the identification requirements for small transactions with mobile money applications.¹⁴⁶

Promoting Investment and Skills Transfers

Beyond remittances, Ghana and Senegal actively encourage other contributions from their diasporas as well, including through investments, skills transfers, and temporary or permanent returns. These

engagement efforts take many forms, sometimes seeking to leverage cultural or historic events. Since the mid-2000s, Dakar has encouraged its diaspora to make direct investments in the private sector, and in 2008, it created an Investment Support Fund for Senegalese Abroad (Fonds d'Appui à l'Investissement des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur), which provides financial support and counselling to members of the diaspora willing to invest in Senegal.¹⁴⁷ Ghana has engaged in similar efforts, for instance deploying diaspora officers in consulates¹⁴⁸ and relying on its Ghana Investment Promotion Centre to reach out to Ghanaians abroad.¹⁴⁹ However, previous analysis has showed that while more members of the Ghanaian diaspora would be interested in making investments in the country—and not only for economic gains—some are reluctant to do so.¹⁵⁰ For instance, some Ghanaian investors have shared concerns about corruption, weak regulatory frameworks, the quality of infrastructure and supply chains, as well as the lack of data on investment opportunities to inform business decisions.¹⁵¹ These findings suggest that, in parallel to diaspora engagements, Ghana and Senegal could work to improve their business environments and gain the confidence of foreign investors.

In addition to private-sector investments, Ghana and Senegal have tried to promote diaspora bonds to help finance infrastructure and other public projects. The Ghanaian government was an early player with its first diaspora bond in 2007, which aimed to finance infrastructure projects throughout the country. Although this first diaspora bond did not fully reach its targets, Ghana has continued to raise revenue through diaspora and other bonds.¹⁵² In 2019, the Housing Bank of Senegal (Banque de l'Habitat du Sénégal)¹⁵³ launched a diaspora bond to finance housing projects.¹⁵⁴ Looking ahead, diaspora bonds may be a helpful source of financing for the COVID-19 recovery, especially as development assistance budgets are likely to face cuts. Such strategies can draw on good practices identified in other contexts (such as India and Israel¹⁵⁵), from the need

to make these bonds easily accessible (e.g., low subscription threshold) and clearly explain what they will finance, to closely monitoring the outcomes of these projects and communicating about them to the public (and especially diaspora communities).¹⁵⁶

In the context of the pandemic and limited international mobility, cooperation with diaspora health experts could prove particularly valuable and pave the way for other forms of knowledge transfer.

Finally, Accra and Dakar are working to encourage skills transfers, including through the temporary or long-term return of members of their diasporas. In 2019, Ghana launched the Year of Return—an initiative linked to the 400th anniversary of African slaves arriving in the Americas—to encourage the African diaspora to visit Ghana. The initiative led to a significant increase in tourism and reportedly raised U.S. \$1.9 billion in tourism revenue and additional private-sector investments by the diaspora.¹⁵⁷ Both Ghana and Senegal have worked with international organizations as part of these engagement efforts. Under the IOM's Migration for Development in Africa health project in Ghana, for instance, more than 300 Ghanaian health workers residing in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Germany were deployed for short-term assignments to health facilities and training centers between 2002 and 2012.¹⁵⁸ In Senegal, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa launched a project in 2017 to support the deployment of diaspora experts and the creation of a volunteer program for diaspora youth.¹⁵⁹ In the context of the pandemic and limited international mobility, cooperation with diaspora health experts could prove particularly valuable and pave the way for other forms of knowledge transfer (e.g., telemedicine). Somalia, for example, has built on its ties with diaspora health specialists both to provide telecon-

sultations and to develop their COVID-19 response on the ground, with temporary returnees providing assistance ranging from trainings to support for diagnostic services to rolling out containment measures (for example, in the wake of schools reopening).¹⁶⁰

6 Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has both disrupted efforts to improve labor migration governance and also vividly illustrated their paramount importance. The transnational threat posed by the spread of the virus quickly overwhelmed national responses in West Africa, as elsewhere, making a fresh case for deeper regional cooperation to minimize further disruptions and support strategies to restart mobility.¹⁶¹ The economic impacts of the pandemic, coupled with new public-health requirements, may also reshape the demand for and supply of labor migration for the foreseeable future. Demand for migrant workers in many destination countries remains uncertain; while demand for workers in health care and seasonal agriculture appears to have held steady or even increased, it has fallen in other sectors such as retail, hospitality, and tourism.¹⁶² Destination-country quarantine policies and other public-health measures may render short-term migration impractical or too costly for now, especially if employers are responsible for covering other costs such as travel. The result may be a growing emphasis on intraregional migration that can build on common public-health standards.

At the same time, the pandemic may cause governments to reassess the order of their priorities for migration governance. For example, in a situation where governments are under pressure to introduce new public-health screening measures at borders (such as COVID-19 testing or quarantine requirements), improving how migration-related data are

collected, stored, shared, and analyzed may become more of a priority. And while doing so would serve immediate public-health imperatives, improved data collection and analysis could also support the aims of governments looking to facilitate labor migration. At the same time, the countercyclical nature of remittances and the potential for knowledge transfer in areas such as health care may fuel diaspora engagement efforts. Finally, while the pandemic-induced lull in international recruitment may lead to regulation efforts falling down the list of government priorities, it could provide some space for governments to build capacity for better monitoring and enforcement of recruitment laws while the volume of workers on the move remains low.

Looking ahead, this review points to several priorities on labor migration governance for Ghana and Senegal—and for other low- and middle-income countries more generally—and how donors and development agencies can best support these governments and other stakeholders in the years to come:

- ▶ **Capitalize on existing cooperation to restart migration corridors.** As countries race to introduce new public-health measures that will allow them to restart mobility, low- and middle-income countries with weaker border and public-health infrastructure risk being left behind. An element of trust underpins efforts to reopen borders and restart mobility, as governments must be confident of each other's ability to successfully implement public-health measures and screen travelers. The early stages of restarting mobility to high-income countries may thus hinge on the strength of existing bilateral relationships (for example, between Senegal and Spain). Development actors can play a critical role in these efforts, for instance by supporting migrant origin countries in building up public-health infrastructure.
- ▶ **Leverage regional cooperation when negotiating with destination countries.** The pandemic may pave the way for closer regional coordination between countries of origin (for example, within ECOWAS) when negotiating with destination-country partners in Europe and the Gulf. Developing common priorities or standards, such as on protecting migrant workers' rights, at a regional level can create more leverage in negotiations with destination countries and potentially speed up the process of reopening migration corridors while avoiding a situation where some countries of origin get left behind. However, this involves investing further effort in regional dialogues, moving toward greater policy coherence, and building capacity to enforce common rules. Donors and international organizations can help with funding and technical assistance (for example, via initiatives such as the Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa project), but political buy-in of all regional partners is a prerequisite for these initiatives to be successful.
- ▶ **Pursue closer (and mutually beneficial) ties with the diaspora.** The economic downturn triggered by the pandemic has added urgency to ongoing efforts to facilitate the sending of remittances by lowering costs and exploring new channels to transfer money. In various countries, remittances have helped support communities affected by lockdown measures and travel restrictions in the absence of a social safety net.¹⁶³ The pandemic may also pave the way for further innovations by fintech companies—though these new tools, like other technological innovations, may not be accessible to communities that are not digitally literate or that do not have ready access to the internet. As governments have developed their pandemic response plans, some have looked

to their diasporas for technical and financial assistance. But for diaspora engagement efforts to be sustainable and to maximize their benefits, governments will also need to ensure they are meeting the priorities of diaspora members, whether improving consular services or addressing long-standing diaspora priorities such as voting rights and access to social security systems.

- ▶ **Create more incentives for recruiters to comply with existing regulations and incorporate new public-health measures into efforts to regulate recruitment.** With labor migration largely on hold for more than a year, many recruitment agencies have suffered severe income losses. The sector is also likely to go through major transformations as a result of changing destination-country labor market demands. This may be an opportunity for origin countries to incentivize compliance with regulations, including by linking it to offers of support to overcome the crisis. In parallel, as destination-country governments roll out new health-related travel requirements, it will be essential to work with recruiters to ensure they understand and assist migrants in following these measures. For example, governments that require recruitment agencies to register and/or obtain a license may need to factor in compliance with these measures going forward and could explore ways to reward agencies that play by the rules (such as granting preferential access to certain migration opportunities). Governments will also need to work with recruiters to ensure that the costs associated with these new measures do not fall disproportionately on migrants.

- ▶ **Invest in consular services and bilateral relationships to support migrants in destination countries.** The challenges of supporting and repatriating migrants stranded by pandemic-related travel restrictions and lockdowns demonstrate the importance of investing in consular services, building good working relationships with destination-country counterparts, and developing guidelines for emergency evacuations. The pandemic has also shown that consulates need additional outreach mechanisms to allow them to more fully connect with a country's diaspora. In the future, ECOWAS Member States could also increase their cooperation by providing joint consular services and monitoring the working conditions of their nationals abroad, especially in the Gulf countries where not all ECOWAS countries have a permanent representation.
- ▶ **Prioritize investments in regional integration to support South-South migration.** While migration to high-income countries is a key feature of migration policies in Ghana and Senegal, most migration from both countries is to other low- and middle-income countries in West Africa. Should high-income countries in Europe and elsewhere introduce more stringent and costly public-health measures as a precondition to travel, South-South migration may take on an even larger role in movement from some countries of origin, at least in the near term. The ECOWAS free movement area is the most advanced of its kind in Africa, but more than three decades on, implementation is still ongoing. Financial and technical assistance from donors and development agencies will

be key to advancing these efforts, including support to improve border management and civil registry systems. But making progress on some of the thornier issues (such as full access to the labor market and entrepreneurship for migrants from other ECOWAS Member States) will first require making the case for the merits of deeper integration to skeptical governments.

Many uncertainties prevail when it comes to the reopening of borders and what labor migration will look like for the foreseeable future. Low- and middle-income countries such as Ghana and Senegal have been significantly affected by the health and economic crisis, and the path to fully restarting travel remains deeply uncertain for now. But this drop in migration, coupled with renewed attention to managing borders and mobility, could also provide

an opportunity to double down on efforts to improve labor migration governance and strengthen cooperation with regional partners and destination countries more broadly, for example by building on recent efforts at coordinating COVID-19 response measures at the ECOWAS level. At the national level, this would require mustering the political will to finalize draft policies (in Senegal) and operationalize mechanisms such as the National Migration Commission (in Ghana), as well as addressing ongoing barriers to free movement within the ECOWAS region. Donors and development actors (such as the European Union and its Member States) can provide financial and technical assistance to help Ghana and Senegal operationalize these frameworks and, more broadly, to assist them and their neighbors with reopening borders safely and promote safe, orderly, and regular migration.

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Endnotes

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