

Chapter 2

Contemporary Labor Migration in West and Central Africa: The Main Patterns, Drivers and Routes



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2.1 Introduction

Migration movements in and from the West and Central African region are diverse and have largely been reported about in relation to forced displacement and irregular migration. The region has been affected by widespread poverty, violent conflicts and challenging climate conditions, all of which have caused significant migrant flows both within the region as well as beyond. Moreover, migration is, to some extent, historically a way of life in West and Central Africa and is fostered in the Western part of the region through the promotion of free movement of persons and goods within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Existing literature on these movements has largely focused on migration from the Global South to the Global North, specifically looking at the various external migration routes to Northern Africa and onwards to Europe.

However, there is a growing body of evidence that emphasizes that the largest part of African migration, in fact, occurs intra-continently, and even intra-regionally, most commonly to neighboring countries (Horwood et al. 2018; RMMS West Africa 2017). Between 1960 and 2000, a larger number of Africans migrated within Africa than from Africa to the rest of the world (Flahaux and de Haas 2016); a trend that is confirmed in a contemporary data analysis of migration volumes within and from Africa conducted by Mberu and Sidze (2017). Reflecting

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these general trends, the West and Central African region is especially characterized by intense intra-regional mobility (RMMS West Africa 2017). As Horwood et al. (2018) note, the largest migration flows in Central, East and West Africa in 2017 were to other countries within the respective regions. Overall, intra-regional movements seem to be far more significant in volume than migrant flows towards Europe and the rest of the world (UNICEF WCARO 2016).

Furthermore, existing evidence shows that, next to conflict-induced migration, contemporary migration in the region is often driven by the search for employment and other economic opportunities as well as a growing labor demand, predominantly for low-skilled migrants. Economic inter-regional migration patterns are mostly concentrated in agriculture and domestic service sectors as well as the informal trade sector (UNCTAD 2018). Along the same lines, Flahaux and de Haas (2016) suggest that migration in West and Central Africa is foremost voluntary and driven by development, education, employment and economic growth. Others have indicated that most Africans migrate for reasons related to family, work or study; or more generally in search of economic opportunities (Schoumaker et al. 2015; Awumbila 2017).

Considering the importance of labor and other economic factors as drivers of migration within West and Central Africa, this chapter focuses on the drivers and trends of contemporary migration in the region for economic purposes. In order to provide an overview of the evidence that exists on the topic, the remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. First, the regional context will be set in Sect. 2.2, where necessary background information will be presented. Following that, this chapter analyses the intra-regional patterns of labor migration. These patterns look at both, the main drivers of labor migration (Sect. 2.3) and the most important labor migration routes within the region (Sect. 2.4). Within both of these sections, specific attention is paid to labor migration of women and children as they currently represent a growing and significant share of migratory flows in the region. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main patterns of labor migration in the West and Central African region in Sect. 2.5.

It is important to note that there may be differences across studies with regards to what African countries are considered to make up the West and/or Central African region. Therefore, differences may also exist in how the region has been researched and discussed in the literature, and the data reported may include different countries.

2.2 Regional Context

The countries in West and Central Africa show a different regional context than the rest of the continent. Intra-regional migration seems to be particularly present in this region and is not necessarily a transit strategy towards other, extra-continental destinations; instead other countries in the region are a destination in the search of better (economic) opportunities. In addition, migration intensities in the region seem to evolve, especially in comparison to other African regions. While the overall

volume of intra-African migration has decreased in recent decades, the trends in West Africa are an exception in this regard. More concretely, research has found that the majority of African migrants reside in other African countries and move within the continent. However, an increasing share of African migrants is also going to North America and, especially, Europe, showing a declining trend in intra-African migration. This, however, does not apply to the West African region. Intra-continental migration from West African countries has remained on a consistently high level and West Africa has, on average, become most open to African migration (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

The most recent data for 2017 on the international migrant stock, available from the United Nations Population Division (UN DESA), confirms that migrants from West and Central African countries are predominantly represented in destination countries that are also in the West and Central African region. While the reported numbers are only estimates, a clear representation can be seen of Middle and West African migrants that have migrated within the region (UN DESA 2017a). Other sources have estimated that intra-regional movements make up 84.0% of overall migration movements in West Africa (SWAC and OECD 2012 as cited in Awumbila 2017) and that 75.0% of migrants from West and Central Africa travelled within Sub-Saharan Africa more generally (Devillard et al. 2015).

It is also important to mention that migration of women is increasingly common in the West and Central African region. The UN DESA (2017a) data shows that for some countries the share of women amongst migrants is comparatively higher than for others. When looking at the percentage of female migrants among the total migrant stock,¹ the available data shows that, for example, the majority of Beninese migrants in Niger and Sierra Leone are women, with percentages above 60.0% for both countries. Togolese migrants in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger are also more often female than male; the percentage is especially high in Niger with 68.7%. The stock of Ghanaian migrants in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Togo is likewise dominated by women (around 60.0%, Burkina Faso almost 65.0%). Overall, Niger and Burkina Faso seem to host comparatively higher percentages of female migrants than the other countries in the region, suggesting that these are popular destinations for female migrants.

Many of the intra-regional movements are undertaken by labor migrants who take advantage of opportunities in other parts of the region (Awumbila 2017). Historically, migrants have generally considered West Africa as a single socio-economic unit and, nowadays, labor migration is fostered by the promotion of free movement of persons and goods within ECOWAS. This allows individuals to travel without visas, and move and trade between member states.² ECOWAS was established in the early 1970s as an important step towards regional integration and even further

¹Where this data is available.

²The ECOWAS region consists of 15 member states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

integration into the global economy, with one of its key objectives being the removal of obstacles to the free movement³ of goods, capital and people in the sub-region (Adepoju 2007).

Next to ECOWAS, the other main regional economic community in the West and Central African region is the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS⁴) (African Development Bank Group n.d.). Both, ECOWAS and ECCAS are recognized by the African Union (AU) as Regional Economic Communities (RECs). RECs are regional groupings of African states, which have developed individually and therefore have differing roles and structures. Generally, the purpose of the RECs is to facilitate the economic integration between countries in the individual regions across the continent (AU n.d.).

Besides such institutional factors, another important factor that likely impacts migration in West and Central Africa, as well as Africa as a whole, is of demographic nature. It is projected that the global population will grow by 2.2 billion people between 2017 and 2050, where more than half of this growth is expected to occur on the African continent (1.3 billion) (UN DESA 2017b). The African continent as a whole is furthermore characterized by, on average, relatively young populations. In 2017, children under the age of 15 accounted for 41.0% and youngsters between the age of 15 and 24 for 19.0% of the African population (UN DESA 2017b). The World Population Prospects of 2017 estimate that the West as well as Central African region will more than double its population between 2017 and 2050. At the same time, the population is already rather young. In mid-2017, 44.0% of the West African population and 46.0% of the Middle African population was under the age of 15 (UN DESA 2017c). This is important to mention insofar that migration movements of young individuals in the West African region are becoming increasingly prominent (Charrière and Frésia 2008). The situation in Central Africa is similar. The lack of employment as well as future prospects push young people into rural-urban movements, which has resulted in unexpected migration levels in various Central African countries and has encouraged international migration (Fall 2017).

The rapidly growing and extremely young population in West and Central Africa is posing major challenges to the labor markets in the region's countries. West African labor markets do not have the capacity to absorb the working age population. Contemporary labor markets in West Africa are therefore characterized by high unemployment rates, especially among youth, and by economies that structurally offer few opportunities for formal employment (Dimechkie 2015). The socio-economic conditions are expected to remain weak and (economic) growth among

³The first ECOWAS protocol, as adopted in May 1979, stipulates the right of ECOWAS citizens to enter, reside and establish economic activities in the territory of other member states (UNECA n.d.). ECOWAS citizens visiting other member states are free of visa requirements for a period of ninety days (through the official entry point) (ECOWAS/979/1979).

⁴The ECCAS Community is composed of the following countries: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Rwanda (ECCAS n.d.).

ECOWAS Member States has largely been uneven. As a result, poor living conditions still prevail due to an unequal distribution of wealth (Devillard et al. 2015). Some of the West African countries' economies, such as Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, have shown considerable growth from 2010 to 2015⁵ (Awumbila et al. 2018; UNDP 2010, 2016). Guinea specifically has shown considerable growth for the period 2015 to 2017, when the country's economy almost doubled its gross national income per capita (UNDP 2018). However, many countries also remain within the low-income category and disparities continue to exist within the region (Awumbila et al. 2018). This may help to explain some of the migration flows within the region, often directed towards neighboring countries. Cape Verde and Ghana are an exception and are considered to have medium levels of human development (UNDP 2018). The Central African region shows a somewhat different reality. In terms of growth rates, there is similarly a small group of countries, such as Angola, Congo, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe, that have shown considerable growth from 2010 to 2015 (UNDP 2010, 2016). However, in comparison to the West African region, more Central African countries are considered Medium Human Development countries (UNDP 2018). The Fragile States Index⁶ data furthermore shows that six West African countries are among the 30 highest ranked countries (out of 178 countries) in terms of uneven economic development. For the Central African region, the majority of countries are among the 30 highest ranked countries, with three of its countries, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad, even ranked among the top 10 (FFP 2018).

Considering the migration trends in West Africa specifically, it is safe to say that population movements mostly take place within the region (Devillard et al. 2015). Looking at the total migrant stock⁷ at mid-year in 2017, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria hosted the highest number of migrants within the Western African region; Côte d'Ivoire accounts for a bit over 30% and Nigeria for almost 20%. Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Saint Helena hosted the smallest stocks of migrants in the region (UN DESA 2017a). In Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the highest migrant stock in the region (almost 25%) and Angola also hosted a considerable share (around 15%). Sao Tome and Principe hosted the smallest stock of

⁵When looking at gross national income (GNI) per capita.

⁶The Fragile States Index (FSI) produced by The Fund for Peace (FFP), is a critical tool in highlighting not only the normal pressures that all states experience, but also in identifying when those pressures are outweighing a states' capacity to manage those pressures. By highlighting pertinent vulnerabilities which contribute to the risk of state fragility, the Index—makes political risk assessment and early warning of conflict accessible to policymakers and the public at large" (FSI 2018, Methodology).

⁷It is likely that these official statistics underestimate the true size of migration between countries in the region due to the nature of flows, which, among others, include many temporary and unregistered movements. Yet, the data provides important insights into the significance of migration in the region.

migrants (UN DESA 2017a). In the next section, the focus will be on the factors driving these trends.

2.3 Main Labor Migration Drivers in West and Central Africa

2.3.1 Mixed Migration in the Region

This section will focus on the contemporary drivers of labor migration in the region. Consensus has been reached that there are forces that lead to the inception of migration and to the perpetuation of movement (Massey et al. 1993). In other words, “drivers are the factors which get migration going and keep it going once begun” (Van Hear et al. 2012, p. 4). As such, this section will show that migration, including migration for economic purposes, has always formed a part of West and Central Africa’s history. This includes seasonal and circular migratory flows, nomadic migration as well as cross-border workers. Overall, it is clear that migrants in the region have been and continue to be in search of better (economic) opportunities. This is the case for men, women and children.

Before looking at the particular drivers of labor migration in West and Central Africa, it is important to acknowledge that migration is historically a way of life in West Africa (Adepoju 2007; Agyei and Clotey 2007; Devillard et al. 2015). In some communities, migration is seen as a common and important phase of one’s life trajectory (RMMS West Africa 2017). Labor migration has become widespread among adolescents in rural Sub-Saharan Africa, such as in Southeast Mali as well as other West African populations with low school enrolment, as a key event in the transitions into adulthood. In many populations, labor migration, usually temporary, has now also developed among adolescent girls (Hertrich and Lesclingand 2013). Migration patterns and processes in the West African sub-region have furthermore continued to change throughout the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras (Ikwuyatum 2012). The post-independence era is characterized by changing patterns of migration, including a ‘feminization’ of migration, commercial migration as well as a shift in the diversification of migration destinations within the West African region (Ikwuyatum 2012).

Throughout history, migrants in West and Central Africa have included temporary cross-border workers, seasonal migrants, clandestine workers, professionals, refugees and asylum seekers. Cross-border migrants have typically been in search of new land or trade-related opportunities (Adepoju 2007). Historically, these types of migration took place on a routine basis between neighboring countries with similar social and ethno-cultural features (Adepoju 1998 as cited in Adepoju 2007, p. 162). An example includes nomadic communities that have continually been moving for economic and social reasons, also in pre-colonial times when current territorial borders were not yet established. Before national borders were established,

intra-regional mobility was not restrained and ethnic groups not separated across different countries (UNICEF WCARO 2016; Devillard et al. 2015).

In present-day, migratory movements continue across national borders within the region, mostly in the form of labor migration (Devillard et al. 2015). Movement might take place across greater distances within the region, for example from the Northern zones to the coastal regions, but also on a smaller scale from rural to urban areas (Adepoju 2007). Geographical proximity, together with socio-cultural and economic ties, seem to link West African countries and populations and facilitate long-distance movements (Devillard et al. 2015). Other factors influencing the choice of destination might include colonial legacy, common official language and ethnic ties. Many ECOWAS migrants also perceive mobility across borders as being within one socio-cultural space rather than between two nations (Awumbila et al. 2018).

As discussed previously, the migration movements in, between and from countries in the region are rather diverse and mixed in nature. They include forced migrants such as asylum seekers and refugees alongside voluntary migrants, such as labor migrants. The drivers of migration are therefore likewise of mixed nature and include conflict, persecution, political and socio-economic conditions in countries of origin, health epidemics and environmental stresses (Bruni et al. 2017), but also economic factors, including strategies to diversify risks and seek economic opportunities (Charrière and Frésia 2008). Traditional labor-importing countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have also experienced political and economic crises, which have encouraged their nationals to emigrate. The same applies to some coastal countries and attractive migrant hubs, such as Nigeria and Senegal (Adepoju 2006). In addition, other migration drivers, such as (state) conflicts and environmental degradation, have aggravated the pressure for migration from poorer to relatively more prosperous regions (Adepoju 2006). Charrière and Frésia (2008) note that migratory movements within the West African region also constitute a number of people in need of international protection, such as refugees and victims of human trafficking. They, however, tend to use the same migration routes as other (labor) migrants.

2.3.2 Economic Factors as Drivers of Regional Migration

Although different mixed migration routes exist within the region and migratory movements are characterized by different migration drivers, migration from the West African region is largely driven by economic reasons (Horwood et al. 2018). In line with this, major reasons for migration are indeed the lack of job opportunities in origin countries, but also social pressures to (financially) support one's family (Altai Consulting 2015). For the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) Review 2018, 4451 interviews were conducted with West African migrants (including refugees) en

route to West and Central Africa⁸; of these 87.3% indicated to have left their home country due to economic reasons (Horwood et al. 2018). Specifically, reasons to migrate were not earning enough in their home countries and/or being unemployed and unable to find work.

Other main drivers that can be identified also seem to be linked to economic factors. One such driver is improving the living conditions of the rest of the family that often remains in the village. This type of migration is often pursued by men on their own as part of a ‘family project’ (Charrière and Frésia 2008, p. 10). Another driver is characterized by strategies for diversifying risks. According to Charrière and Frésia (2008), the majority of migration movements correspond to a strategy of diversifying risks and seeking economic opportunities, and as such, take advantage of the (minimal) economic disparities between the countries of the sub-region. The same authors furthermore found that migrants of rural origins generally do trade or other small crafts in the city and send back funds to the family remaining in the village to pay for agricultural or pastoral activities.

In line with the economic factors that drive labor migration in the West African region are the low employment rates in most ECOWAS countries. The unemployed labor stock in West Africa that is struggling to find employment in the formal sector of the economy is furthermore showing a shift towards commercial migration: entrepreneurial self-employment (especially) in the informal sector. As such, trading has become a survival strategy and commercial migration is evolving as a major migration pattern (both internal as international) in West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana (Ikwuyatum 2012). A recent Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa indeed confirms that, similar to the local population, the vast majority of foreigners or migrants in ECOWAS countries work in low-skilled positions in the informal sector and tend to have a low level of education (Devillard et al. 2015). Lower-skilled migrants, for example, work in the agricultural sector, in mines and other industries, but also in small-scale businesses and trade (Manby 2015).

Although labor migration in West Africa is primarily low-skilled (Dimechkie 2015), it also includes highly skilled migrants to some extent. Examples include doctors, paramedical personnel, nurses, teachers, and others moving from countries such as Ghana and Benin to other countries in the region (or beyond) (Manby 2015). Since the 1970s, highly skilled Ghanaians have, for example, migrated to Nigeria and elsewhere (Dimechkie 2015). Other examples include Beninese teachers who emigrate to work in Gabon as well as Togolese teachers who work in Nigerian and Ghanaian schools (Devillard et al. 2015). Highly skilled workers furthermore also tend to migrate to countries in other regions in Africa or abroad, for example to Europe or North America (Dimechkie 2015). Therefore, the region experiences what can be described as a ‘brain drain’. Cape Verde, for example, has an emigration rate of 67.0% of its highly skilled workers, and The Gambia and Sierra Leone see many of their highly skilled nationals leaving the country. This ‘brain drain pattern’ might

⁸“West Africa to West and Central Africa (interviews with nationals from a wide range of West African countries in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger)” (Horwood et al. 2018, p. 12).

be explained by the fact that all three countries have relatively small economies and hence have little to offer in terms of employment opportunities for (highly) skilled workers (Dimechkie 2015).

Another demographic trend that influences economically driven migration decisions is Africa's rapidly growing population and urban growth. The continent's 'urban transition' is proceeding rapidly and urban growth is expected to continue in the future. Urban growth and spatial transition are increasingly driven by people on the move, in search of social and economic opportunities, but might also be a consequence of environmental deterioration. As such, rural-urban migration remains a dominant migration stream and will continue to play an important role in the urbanization process (Awumbila 2017). Adepoju (2007) has similarly argued that rural-urban migration of farm laborers in search of wage labor in the cities has intensified. Migrants might also move to urban centers, because cities provide different opportunity structures to create livelihoods, for example, by engaging in entrepreneurship and accumulating assets. These employments activities then also contribute to human capital development (Awumbila 2017).

2.3.3 Drivers of Regional Labor Migration of Women and Children

Women and girls make up a significant, growing share of the contemporary mixed migration movements in the West and Central African region. Women increasingly move alone and decide to do so as an independent economic actor (MMC 2018; Adepoju 2005). Adepoju (2007) argues that interdependent economies across the West African region have facilitated, and poverty has propelled, a wide variety of migration configurations, including the autonomous migration of women. Therefore, in this subsection, female migration, particularly for the purpose of labor, will be addressed specifically, in order to better understand the drivers of this growing migrant trend in the region.

The MMC has collected new data on women on the move through the Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) to generate insights on the drivers, expectations and experiences of migrant and refugee women travelling in mixed migration flows, including from and through West Africa (MMC 2018). Data from the West (and Central) African region includes interviews with women from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Although there is rarely a single driver for women and girls to migrate, the 4Mi data does show that the most common migration drivers combine violence, insecurity and economic considerations (Horwood et al. 2018; MMC 2018). In the West African region, the search for better economic opportunities is the most predominant migration driver for (female) refugees and migrants. Indeed, 37.0% of the respondents indicated that they did not earn enough in the job they had and

22.0% indicated that they were unemployed or could not find work. These are then among the most important economic migration drivers for migrant women in the West African region (MMC 2018).

In line with these economic migration drivers, other important decision-making factors for women and girls to migrate are expectations regarding the situation in the destination country and what opportunities it may offer, believing the country may offer favorable conditions (Horwood et al. 2018). Nuclear and extended families, however, also seem to play a role in encouraging women in the West African region to migrate (MMC 2018). This applies, for instance, to women joining their husbands, in which case the husband usually organizes the journey, as well as to women who are encouraged to migrate to join family abroad (MMC 2018; Altai Consulting 2013). The MMC's research (4Mi) furthermore shows that participants from West Africa were among the ones most likely to believe they would find a job within six months of arrival in the destination country. The most common type of employment for West African women (similar to other regions) was suggested to be domestic work. However, West African women also commonly expressed their intention to apply for family reunification. In contrast, 55.0% indicated to intend to migrate only temporarily, of whom most were looking to stay between one and five years before returning to their country of origin (MMC 2018).

Although highly skilled emigration from West Africa has increased among female migrants, women continue to be disproportionately represented among low-skilled migrants (Dimechkie 2015). In addition to domestic work in specific, female migrants seem to be generally more drawn to the wage labor market (both formal and informal) as a strategy to augment meagre family income and as a response to deepening poverty in the region (Adepoju 2005); again, showing that the search for better economic opportunities is the predominant driver of migration for females. Commercial migration in the region is also heavily female-dominated, with female traders dominating the Nigeria-Benin-Togo-Côte d'Ivoire-Senegal-Gambia trade network (Adepoju 2005). Dimechkie (2015) indeed confirms that female migrants are represented in low-skilled employment such as cross-border trading.

Lastly, it should be reported that women and girls are a more vulnerable migrant group and often more constrained than men and boys in their ability to exercise agency over their migration trajectories (MMC 2018). Therefore, trafficking in persons⁹ is a major concern in the West and Central African region and women and girls are more vulnerable to becoming a victim of this, although men are also

⁹“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” (Art. 3(a), UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000). Trafficking in persons can take place within the borders of one State or may have a transnational character” (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross 2011, p. 99).

being trafficked for purposes of forced labor, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation (Bruni et al. 2017). Trafficking of women within and outside of the region is a reality, especially in relation to (forced) labor. Trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation, both inside and outside West and Central Africa, as well as to Europe and South Africa can be considered one of the main trafficking types (Manby 2015). Within the West African region, however, victims are mainly trafficked within a country or to a neighboring country, which is in line with the evidence suggesting that the largest part of African migration occurs intra-regionally and often to neighboring countries. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Togo are among the ECOWAS countries that are most affected by trafficking as an origin, transit and/or destination country (Manby 2015).

Migration of children is also an increasing reality in West and Central Africa as the region is facing population and urban growth. This demographic trend might affect migration patterns in the region (Devillard et al. 2015) and one such pattern that is likely to intensify is migration by young people. Therefore, it is relevant to better understand the different factors influencing this specific migrant flow, especially since children can be considered to be a particularly vulnerable migrant group (UNICEF WCARO 2016).

The West and Central African region has the youngest population in the world with a median age of 17 to 18 years old and young people are willing to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities. In addition, families may also feel pushed to send their young children away as a coping mechanism in response to social pressures and poor education and economic opportunities (Global Migration Group 2014). Hence, labor motivated migration among youngsters and children towards urban areas and across borders is likely to intensify within the region. Flahaux and de Haas (2016) confirm that processes of development and social transformation have increased young Africans' capabilities and aspirations to migrate. It is likely that this trend will continue in the future.

The preceding sections have shown that, historically, different migration movements have been part of the 'way of life' in West and Central Africa, and child migration flows are also a part of this. Children in the region have traditionally been sent away by their families as part of their education, their socialization in the wider kinship network or as a family strategy to cope with shocks. Migration of children can, therefore, be regarded a widespread phenomenon in the region. Just as migratory movements in general take on different forms, children's movements do as well. Children might migrate voluntarily or involuntarily, for a variety of reasons, at a young age or later in life as an adolescent, either accompanied or unaccompanied, and through regular or irregular routes (UNICEF WCARO 2016).

Child migration is often of involuntary nature and sometimes associated with trafficking and forced labor. Work placement channels are still used in West Africa to secure work for migrant children. Work placements have, for example, been organized by men (and some women) in Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Brokers might recruit children on request of employers, but might also help to find work or an apprenticeship abroad (one of the most desired routes out of poverty) on the request

of the child or the parents themselves. Hence, there is also evidence of child migration that has more voluntary characteristics. Young migrants might for example, for reasons of age and experience, migrate in search of social adulthood and independence (Thorsen 2018).

The 2015 Report on Mixed Migration in West and Central Africa furthermore notes that many children across the region undertake risky journeys for work in the informal sector, often with a high child labor component and exploitative working conditions. The informal sector may include activities such as street vending and begging, but also domestic work and work in the gold and diamond mines (UNICEF WCARO 2016). Manby (2015) furthermore notes that trafficking in children also includes trafficking for farm labor and domestic work purposes, but also in the mining and fishing sector, and other sectors. This includes trafficking within and across countries.

A recent baseline study on ‘Child Migrants Along the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor’ provides some more insights in the factors ‘driving’ children to migrate for labor purposes. The study shows that in West Africa, adolescents (under the age of 18) often take on social responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings and their own children, but also earning a wage to contribute to family wellbeing. Adolescents might, for example, migrate temporarily for work or to earn money to pay for school fees. These are mostly economic needs, however, adolescent’s motivations also include the social responsibility to contribute to their families, as well as the desire to grow and learn, and to overcoming hardships. Adolescents in the study frequently indicated that severe poverty and families’ inability to feed and care for family members, and to educate their children, was a reason for leaving home. Other reasons included the loss of one or both parents and intra-familial conflict (Thorsen 2018). Lastly, according to Awumbila (2017), young West Africans are also increasingly moving to take advantage of educational facilities in other parts of the region.

2.4 Main Labor Migration Routes in West and Central Africa

After having provided an overview of the drivers of labor migration in the West and Central African region, this section will focus on the direction and routes of migration in the region. Emphasis will be placed on contemporary trends, which are often linked to historic directions and routes. Generally, this section will show that economically driven migration movements in the region are mostly directed towards the relatively more developed coastal countries in the Southern part of the region as well as to neighboring countries; with the latter often being the case for migrants with fewer resources.

As has been discussed, African migration mainly takes place intra-continental, rather than extra-continental. Within the African continent, intra-continental

migration intensities are highest in inland West African countries (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). This trend seems to be linked to the fact that West Africa is comprised of many smaller countries, with smaller populations, which increases the likelihood that migrants cross borders for rural to urban migration purposes (de Haas 2010; Flahaux and de Haas 2016). However, other factors might also be influential; such as the region's many ethnic groups that are spread across borders, the migration patterns already established under colonial rule and, lastly, the visa-free movement between ECOWAS countries (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

2.4.1 Historically Rooted Migration Patterns

In order to understand contemporary labor migration, it is important to recognize the history of migration in the region. Contemporary patterns of migration are rooted in socio-economic, political and historical-cultural factors that have shaped the direction of development and types of economic activities (Adepoju 2005). One such movement builds on a long history of circular trade and migration across the Sahara Desert, connecting West and North Africa, passing through Mali and Niger. Traditionally, circular labor movements along these routes constituted an important livelihood strategy for those living in the Sahara. Movements along the route also provide labor to the expanding economies of the North African countries and, more recently, are used by refugees and migrants en route to Libya and onwards to Europe (Horwood et al. 2018). Furthermore, the colonial period also provoked large-scale labor migration towards coastal areas to establish plantations, mines and public administration (Adepoju 2007). Contemporary migration patterns show a certain historical continuity of such colonial mobility patterns, such as the migratory flows from hinterland African countries and the Sahel towards coastal territories (Robin 2014 as cited in RMMS West Africa 2017). Seasonal migration is especially common among the agro-pastoral communities in the Sahel region and includes migration flows from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire for agricultural or informal trade activities. Another flow includes emigration from Niger to neighboring countries to work in the agricultural sector. These are mainly rural to rural movements (Devillard et al. 2015).

Three main intra-regional routes in the West African region can be identified, as also shown in Fig. 2.1. Firstly, there is the South coastal route, which links the west coast of the region (including Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) to the south coast (up to Nigeria), following the coastal line of the region. On this route, migrants travel by land or by sea. It is clear that the coastal zones attract most migrants in the region, which is related to the development of income crops and pioneer agricultural fronts there as well as the urbanization of ports. Environmental deterioration in the Sahel region is also causing migration movements to the south. Hence, a second migration route is referred to as the Sahelian route. One could say that this route is 'agricultural' in nature, as it was traditionally used by cattle guards. This route crosses Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and then Nigeria, and some

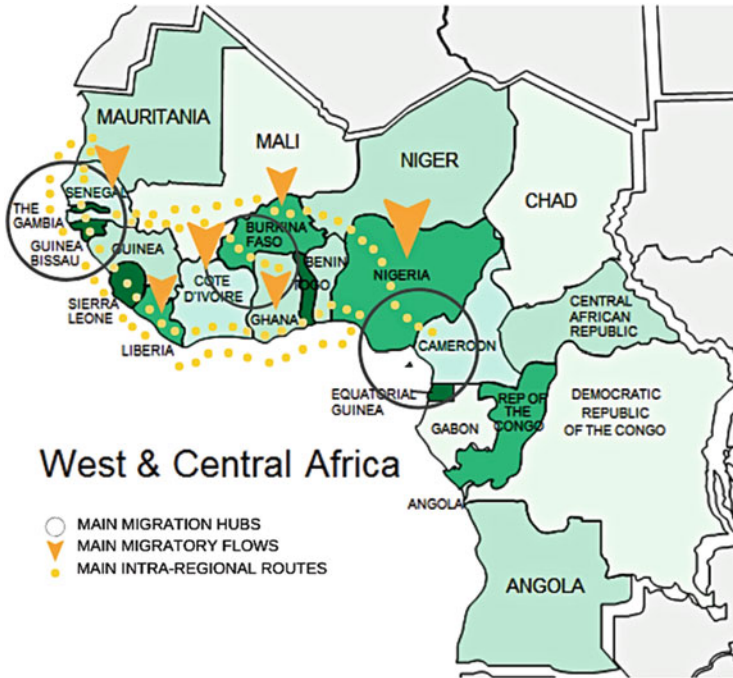


Fig. 2.1 Main migration routes and hubs in West and Central Africa

migrants move on to Cameroon. The third route is the ‘Middle’ route, which links Senegal and Mauritania to Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana. It is a combination of the North (towards Europe) and South route and combines travel by train, public transport such as buses and sometimes travel by sea (Charrière and Frésia 2008).

In addition, the RMMS West Africa (2017) summary on Mixed Migration in West Africa notes that since the late 1980s, three migration patterns can be identified that are tied to economic dynamics. These are migratory flows (1) towards Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, countries that are rich in commercial crops and mines; (2) towards Senegal where there are a lot of trading networks and agriculture; and (3) towards Nigeria, which is rich in oil and industries. Côte d’Ivoire specifically is a major destination country, partly due to its vast natural resources, but also because the domestic labor force is relatively small. As such, foreigners have for many years constituted about a quarter of the country’s waged labor force. Another concrete direction of labor migration includes the flows from Sahel West African countries to mineral and plantation rich countries in the South of West Africa located along the coast. Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal and Ghana have attracted migrants in the past to work on plantations and do menial jobs, work that the local population despised (Adepoju 2007). Another example includes North-South patterns from inland marginal rural areas to fertile agricultural areas, towns and cities, between

(e.g. Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire) and within countries (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

This information corresponds with UNICEF WCARO's current report on Mixed Migration in West and Central Africa. The report identifies three migration hubs within West and Central Africa: the Southeast area around Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea, the Central area around Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire and the Western area around Senegal (UNICEF WCARO 2016). Overall, a clear trend of movements can be identified, directed towards the more Southern, coastal countries in the region, especially in the context of labor migration. The coastal countries in West and Central Africa are furthermore the more developed countries that have relatively higher urbanization rates and higher levels of economic development. Migrants from these relatively more developed countries have access to better infrastructures and transportation and are more inclined to move over greater distances. Therefore, these urban coastal zones, including Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, form an emergent zone of increasing extra-continental emigration (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). Dimechkie (2015) also identifies Nigeria as a transit zone and country of origin for extra-regional movements.

Migrants from less-developed countries, on the other hand, often have fewer resources and tend to migrate over shorter distances, for example into neighboring countries (Flahaux 2017). In fact, most intra-regional movements remain cross-border, accounting for up to 80.0% of the movements in the region. Common cross-border movements, besides those already mentioned, are movements around the northern borders of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, between the countries of the Gulf of Guinea, but also Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, between Mali and Burkina Faso, Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as Nigeria and Chad (Charrière and Frésia 2008). Cross-border commuting also makes up a considerable proportion of migration in the West and Central African region. This includes commuting at key borders within the region; for example, the borders between Ghana and Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin, Senegal and The Gambia, and others (Kwankye and Anarfi 2011 as cited in Siddiqui 2012).

2.4.2 West and Central Africa: A Region of Origin, Destination and Transit Countries

Drawing on the above information, one can conclude that many West African countries are now simultaneously immigration, emigration and transit countries (Adepoju 2007). Manby (2015) similarly acknowledges that all countries in West Africa are places of origin, transit and destination of complex population movements. There seems to be general agreement in the literature that Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria are attractive hubs for immigration in the West African region (Adepoju 2007; Carciotto and Agyeman 2017; Charrière and Frésia 2008; Dimechkie 2015). Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, is considered to be a major intra-

regional destination and more an immigration than emigration country (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). The data shows that Côte d'Ivoire holds the highest number of immigrants in the ECOWAS region (UN DESA 2017a; Awumbila 2014 as cited in Awumbila et al. 2018; Devillard et al. 2015), of which the majority originates from other ECOWAS countries. Other main host countries are Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Ghana. In relation to the size of the total population, however, Nigeria hosts a relatively lower share of immigrants as compared to countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia (Devillard et al. 2015).

Countries such as Gabon and Congo have emerged as new migrant destination countries as they are natural resource rich and hence considered poles of economic prosperity (Charrière and Frésia 2008; Lompo 2015 as cited in UNICEF WCARO 2016). In the case of Gabon, the oil economy has attracted increasing numbers of migrants. As a consequence, Gabon has grown as a migration hub more recently (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). This information is coherent with the 2015 Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa that confirms that labor migration patterns change in response to the discovery of natural resources and subsequently, the establishment of new industries (Devillard et al. 2015). The major labor-exporting or sending countries in the region include Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Togo (Adepoju 2007; Carciotto and Agyeman 2017). Different authors furthermore conclude that Mali and Cape Verde are two main emigration countries (Charrière and Frésia 2008; Devillard et al. 2015).

Looking at the labor migration context in more detail, it is observed that migrants in West and Central Africa who come from the same country of origin tend to work in the same labor market niches as fellow migrants from the same country. Looking at the specific countries and niches one can see that in Côte d'Ivoire, migrants originating from Burkina Faso mostly work in the agricultural sector, while migrants from Mali work in the herding, fishing, industry, service and trade sectors. Ghanaians in Côte d'Ivoire similarly work in the fishing, trade and service sectors. Another example of this pattern is found in Liberia where Guineans and Malians work as petty traders, artisans and plantation workers; similarly, Guineans in Senegal also work in fruit and vegetable trade as well as in the transport sector. Of the Malian migrants, women however specialize in selling paintings, although men are more active in the cola nut business. Overall, migrants from Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo more often seem to be employed in higher-skilled positions (Devillard et al. 2015). In Mauritania, migrants work in fishing, construction, as well as various urban occupations following more recent urban growth. New migrants often arrive with the help of existing members of the community, which emphasizes the role played by network effects, and suggests some sort of self-regulation regarding capacity and job availability (Bensaâd 2009). The work of Nordman and Pasquier-Doumer (2014) has also emphasized the role played by networks in the West African context. They, in particular, highlight family networks, especially with regards to stabilizing or helping workers to enhance their professional situation.

2.4.3 Patterns of Regional Labor Migration of Women and Children

As described before, a ‘feminization of flows’ in the West African region has been observed to some extent. In their research, the MMC (2018) finds that women select their destination before leaving the country of origin and generally ‘stick’ to their plan along the journey. This helps to explain the main migration routes of women and girls in West Africa. The route that refugee and migrant women take is furthermore closely related to what they can afford, given the geographic and legal context (ECOWAS, free movement policies) of West Africa. Women have relatively easy access to public transport, making travel by bus, car and truck a popular mode of transport (Horwood et al. 2018). In the West African region, 59.0% of the 4Mi respondents indicated travel by bus as the most common mode of transport. Indeed, in countries such as Nigeria bus travel is common, also for women traveling alone (MMC 2018). According to the MMC (2018) this accords with other reporting that indicates that West Africans have easy access to visas and public transport networks within the ECOWAS region.

Evidence furthermore shows that trade and commerce motivated migration in the region is increasingly dominated by females. According to Awumbila et al. (2014), female migrants are increasingly drawn to the wage labor market, stimulating intra-regional migration by women for commercial trade purposes as a livelihood strategy. The 2015 Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa furthermore reports that female migrants in West and Central Africa tend to work in certain labor market niches. Female labor migrants in Niger, for example, work in domestic and hospitality sectors and Malian women in Senegal often specialize in selling paintings in the market (Devillard et al. 2015).

Turning to migration of children for the purpose of labor, a recent baseline study on ‘Child Migrants Along the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor’ was conducted in major markets and border points in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. These research sites represent vibrant economies that attract many migrants who are trying to make a living, children included. Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria, in particular, were found to be important (labor) migration destinations within West Africa. This includes cross-border regional flows as well as internal flows. Child migration routes and destinations may be explained by the fact that most child migrants follow adult migratory flows, although historical networks also seem to play a role in placing children with employers and skilled masters (Thorsen 2018).

It should be noted that there is a lack of research into the variety of migration forms young people might engage in and that there is insufficient knowledge about why they migrate (migration drivers) and what their journeys look like (UNICEF WCARO 2016). Therefore, the UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) 2016 report on Mixed Migration in West and Central Africa aimed to identify key trends affecting children, including the key directions or routes taken by children and youth, particularly by those working in the streets. Important known routes include those from Togo and Benin to the Gulf of Guinea countries. Gabon

and Equatorial Guinea have become important destination countries for young people across the region. This can be explained by the fact that oil windfall and the lumber industry in these countries generate significant employment prospects. It is important to mention that children are frequently exposed to issues of child abuse, exploitation and trafficking along these routes (UNICEF WCARO 2016).

Child trafficking for (forced) labor purposes from Benin has similarly been identified by Sawadogo (2012) as a significant issue. This concerns employment in the cocoa agricultural industry in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, but also domestic, commercial and agricultural work in Nigeria, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire (Devillard et al. 2015). Sawadogo (2012) furthermore notes that girls are more frequently victims of child trafficking than boys are. Adepoju (2005) additionally identifies child trafficking flows from Togo, Nigeria and Mali, also to work on plantations in Côte d'Ivoire and for domestic work in Gabon. The 2015 Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa confirms Guinea as a destination country for child trafficking from countries in the ECOWAS region. Children in Guinea mostly work, or are exploited, in prostitution and domestic servitude (Devillard et al. 2015).

In addition, child migrant flows have been identified from countries with a significant Muslim population such as Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Niger, to other largely Muslim countries in the region such as Senegal or Mali for Koranic education. Children on these routes may also be exploited through begging (Devillard et al. 2015). Carrion et al. (2018) identified Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger as destination countries for children who move in order to learn the Koran. The 2015 UNHCR and IOM West Africa study identifies additional types of child trafficking for labor in the farming, mining and fishing sector. Overall, child trafficking is highlighted as a major concern in West Africa and it is clear that there are 'established trafficking routes' in West Africa (Manby 2015).

2.5 Conclusion: Drivers and Routes for Labor Migration— What Are the Main Patterns in West and Central Africa?

The majority of migrant flows in West and Central Africa are intra-regional and most migrants, in fact, move to neighboring countries. These migration patterns, including labor and other economically driven migration, are historically a part of the 'way of life' in the region. Intra-regional migration can, furthermore, be considered a dominant livelihood strategy of households. Therefore, although different factors might influence migrants' decision to move for labor or other economic purposes, it is clear that migrants in West and Central Africa have been and continue to be in search of better (economic) opportunities. This holds for men, women as well as children.

The region is facing demographic changes that are and will continue to affect (labor) migration in the region. In particular, West Africa is experiencing rapid population growth, resulting in an, on average, extremely young population. West

African labor markets are struggling to provide the (growing) working age population sufficient opportunities, resulting in growing unemployment numbers and informal employment. These challenging conditions are main drivers of migration from countries in the region and it is likely that this trend will not change in the near future. Migration for employment purposes is often directed towards the informal labor market, associated with vulnerable employment conditions, especially for children. Female labor migration is mostly directed towards trade and commercial related opportunities.

The region is also facing rapid urban growth, which has intensified rural to urban migration movements of people in search of wage labor and employment in informal business sectors in cities. In particular, the coastal cities in the Southern part of the region are considered attractive hubs. More generally, the main migration pattern in the region that stands out is that consisting of movements from the North to the South or, more especially, from the more Northern located inland countries to the more developed coastal countries in the South. This trend also shows historical continuity, as migratory flows from hinterland African countries and the Sahel towards coastal territories were already common during colonial times. Nowadays, countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria are relatively more (economically) developed than other countries in the region. They also tend to have higher levels of urbanization and attract the highest number of international migrants in the ECOWAS region. In the ECCAS region, Gabon stands out for being an attractive destination country for intra-regional migrants. Migrant children often follow adult migratory flows and, hence, have similar directions and routes, increasingly moving towards urban centers and cross-border areas.

Overall, migration in the context of West and Central Africa is characterized by intra-regional mobility, with a large proportion of migrants being economically driven. However, it is also important to note that there is a general lack of reliable, up-to-date and complete statistical data on African migration. This makes it challenging to capture mixed migration patterns, their drivers and routes (Black and King 2004; Flahaux and de Haas 2016; RMMS West Africa 2017). Most data is furthermore based on national migrant stocks, which makes it difficult to capture actual movements. Hence, the data used in this chapter, as well as the research referred to that is based on migrant stocks, should be considered with caution, since it might not be able to provide a complete picture, nevertheless it still helps to demonstrate and map the main migration patterns.

Lastly, based on the evidence presented in this chapter, some recommendations for policy-making can be put forward by arguing that labor migration in the region could be organized or managed more effectively. Intra-regional migration, and labor migration in particular, is and has been a common phenomenon in the region, yet many differences exist between countries' migration patterns and drivers, as well as their national labor migration laws. Hence, it would be essential that regional labor migration be placed higher on the development and political agenda of the countries in the region. Especially regarding informal work, as this is a reality and many vulnerabilities are associated with this type of labor migration. In particular, human trafficking is a challenge very much present in the region. Further efforts to combat

trafficking are therefore essential to make migration in and from the region safer, especially for women and children.

Although free movement of persons and goods is only officially formalized in the ECOWAS region, it also exists, at least informally, in the wider region (Adepoju 2007). Irregular movements are a reality in the region and should be taken into account when looking at a possible framework for more effectively managing labor migration. Orderly labor oriented movements have the potential to enhance the region's economic integration and, as a consequence, to catalyze the region's integration into the wider global economy.

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