



European  
Research Area

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## Changing patterns of migration between Africa and Europe: Departures, trajectories & returns

MAFE PROJECT Policy Briefing No. 2

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*Project overview: The Migrations between Africa and Europe (MAFE) Project focuses on all phases of the migration process, encompassing migration, return, routes of transit, economic implications and transnational relationships. Its findings are based on multi-sited and comparative surveys, including over 5,000 retrospective longitudinal interviews with individual migrants and non-migrants in six European countries and three African countries, and 4,000 interviews of urban African households, conducted in 2008-2009. The four main areas of the MAFE Project's enquiry are: (1) changing patterns of migration over time; (2) determinants of migration; (3) economic integration of migrants, and re-integration of returnees; and (4) transnational families and networks. For more information visit: [www.mafeproject.eu](http://www.mafeproject.eu).*

### Key findings: Leaving and returning – the changing dynamics of African migration

- **MAFE research suggests that despite restrictive immigration policies in Europe, migration rates to Europe have increased in two of the three African countries studied by the MAFE Project.** These policies have also coincided with increasing irregularisation of migrants and – for two countries – decreasing rates of return. However, immigration policies are not the only factors that shape migration; conditions in the country of origin and opportunities in other African countries are also important.
- **Although the overall probability of Africans migrating internationally has increased over the past 35 years, there has not been a consistent rise in the likelihood of migration to Europe.** In the case of Senegal and Ghana, the proportion of migrants moving to Europe has increased since the 1970s.

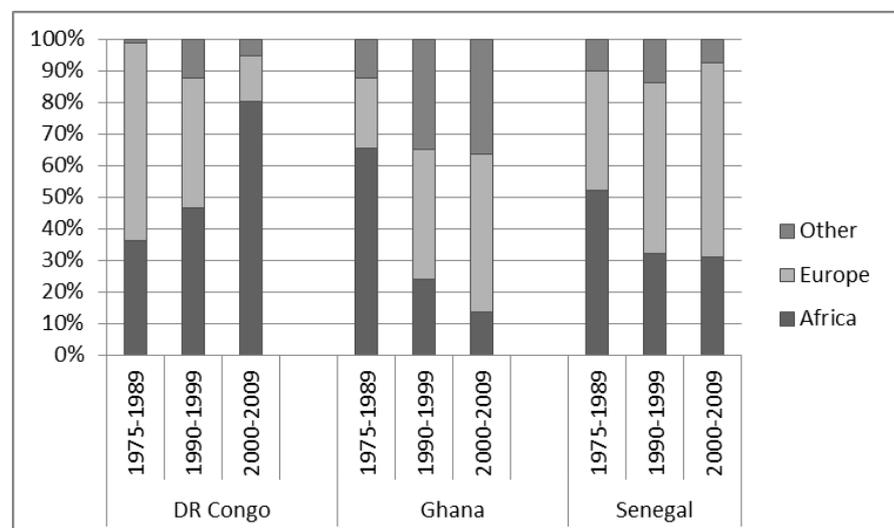
However, migration to Europe from the Democratic Republic of Congo has stagnated since the 1990s.

- **Return migration from Europe to Africa appears to be on the decline.** The probability of migrants returning from Europe has steeply declined in DR Congo and Senegal since 1975, whilst in Ghana return probability decreased drastically in the 1990s before increasing again between 2000 and 2008.
- **Although the majority of African migrants are legally resident in Europe, irregular migration appears to be on the increase.** This is particularly so in the case of Senegal and DR Congo, less so in the case of Ghana and – importantly – also varies according to different European destination countries.
- **African migrants to ‘new’ European destination countries tend to have different profiles than those who move to more ‘traditional’ European destination countries.** Specifically, they are more likely to be less educated and undocumented.
- **Transit migration is much more common for migration to ‘new’ European migration destinations, and a significant proportion of migrants appear to be moving within Europe itself,** particularly from traditional receiving countries to ‘new’ destinations.

### The changing geography of African migration

In Senegal, Ghana and DR Congo, the lifetime probability of international migration has increased since the 1970s. **This increase in the overall likelihood of migration has occurred at the same time as major shifts in migrant destination countries** (see Fig 1).

FIG 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST MIGRATIONS BY DESTINATION, BY PERIOD OF DEPARTURE



Senegal and Ghana have both witnessed an increase in migration to Europe (and for Ghana, to North America as well), accompanied by

a decrease in migration to other African nations. In DR Congo, the opposite has occurred, with migration to other African states increasing as the probability of migration to Europe has decreased.

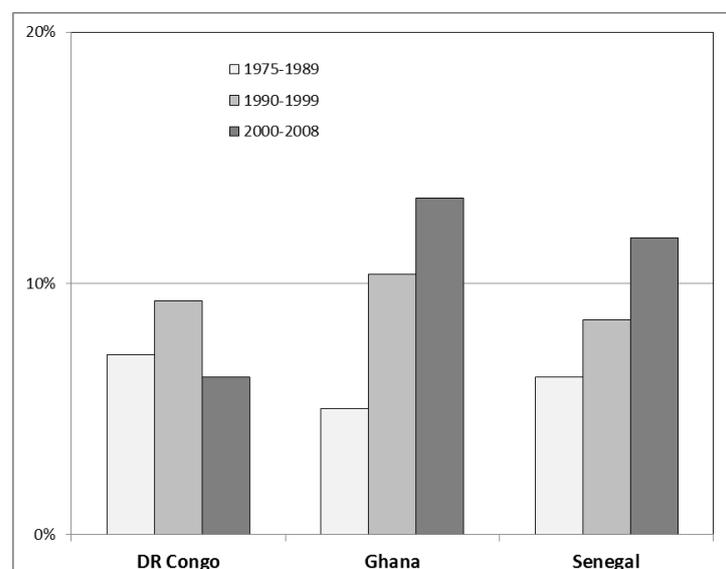
**The reasons for the substantial shifts in the geography of these migration flows over recent decades appear to be multiple.** In the case of both Senegal and Ghana, migration to regional destination countries (such as Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon in the case of Senegal, and Nigeria in the case of Ghana) was commonplace in the 1970s and 1980s, but was interrupted by political upheaval or economic crisis in these destinations. Paradoxically, although legal means of migration to Europe were becoming more restricted, the lack of opportunities in regional receiving countries and the demand for cheap labour in Mediterranean countries contributed to increased European migration from Senegal and Ghana.

In the case of DR Congo, by contrast, increased regional migration opportunities have emerged, due both to the end of apartheid in South Africa and to the conclusion of the conflict in Angola in the early 2000s<sup>1</sup>. With the deterioration of the political and economic context in DR Congo, this has contributed to a large increase in out-migration to these countries.

## Migration and development – increasing mobility?

**MAFE research found a link between increased propensity to migrate to Europe and increasing levels of development,** echoing previous research findings on the relationship between migration and development. In the 2000s, Ghanaians had the highest propensity of migration to Europe, followed by the Senegalese and the Congolese (see Fig 2).

**FIG. 2: LIFETIME PROBABILITY OF MIGRATION (BETWEEN AGE 18 AND 70) FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE (1975-2009)**



Ghana also had the highest level of human development indicators among the three countries in 2005. Ghana and Senegal have both made slow but continuous progress in their development indicators

<sup>1</sup> Angola and South Africa now receive around half of Congolese international migrants.

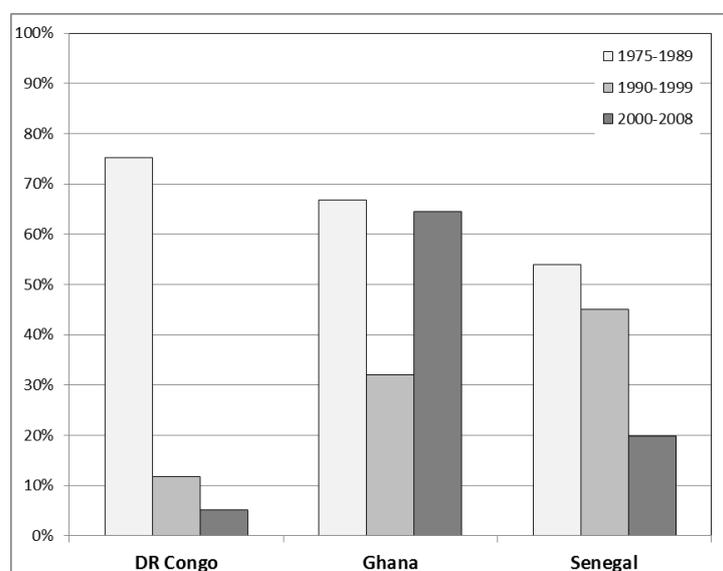
in recent decades, whereas DR Congo's have not improved since the 1980s<sup>2</sup>. These results are not an empirical test of the development-migration relationship, but they provide an illustration that more development does not translate into less migration to Europe.

### Emerging patterns of African migration to and from Europe: Return, irregularity and new trajectories and destinations

Although return migration to all three countries from other African destinations remains relatively high (ranging from 75 per cent of Ghanaian migrants to 50 per cent of Congolese)<sup>3</sup>, **MAFE data provides new evidence to suggest that return migration<sup>4</sup> from Europe is on the decline, particularly in the case of Congolese and Senegalese migrants** (see Fig 3). The decrease in return migration of Senegalese and Congolese migrants from Europe has occurred in a context of uncertainty for migrants, with more restrictive immigration policies encouraging the more permanent settlement of these migrants in Europe.

Additionally, the lack of opportunities in origin countries (and serious political and economic instability in the case of DR Congo) have likely impacted prospects for return. The Ghanaian context provides a counter-example: while returns declined in the 1990s, they rebounded in the 2000s. This trend does not exist for Ghanaian migrants in North American or African destinations, suggesting that it is to be explained by the particular characteristics of Ghanaians in Europe – including the possibility that the initial cohort of Ghanaian migrants to Europe in the 1980s are now returning<sup>5</sup>.

FIG 3: PROBABILITY OF RETURNING FROM EUROPE WITHIN 10 YEARS OF FIRST DEPARTURE (1975-2008)



<sup>2</sup> These data are not shown in this policy brief; please refer to MAFE Working Paper 18 in the 'Key resources' section for more information.

<sup>3</sup> These data are not shown in this policy brief; please refer to MAFE Working Paper 18 in the 'Key resources' section for more information.

<sup>4</sup> The MAFE Project data on return migration primarily captures unassisted return as opposed to forced removals.

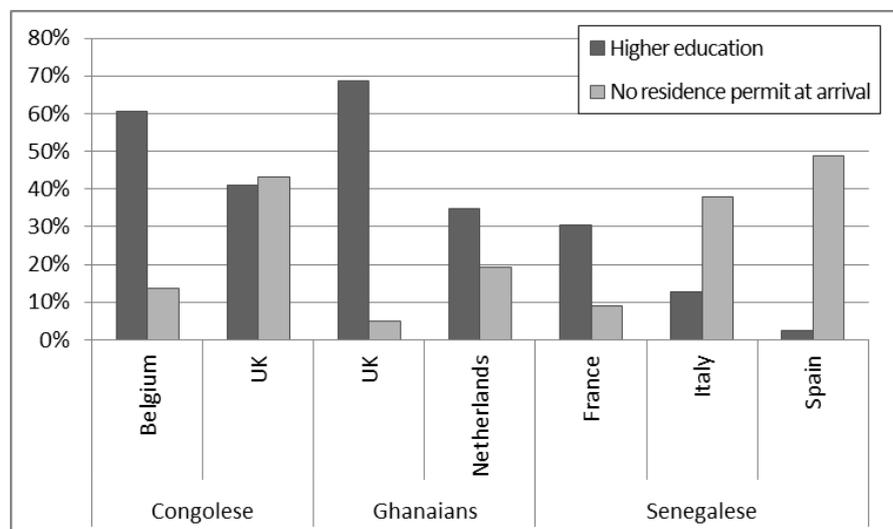
<sup>5</sup> These data are not shown in this policy brief; please refer to MAFE Working Paper 18 in the 'Key resources' section for more information.

## Irregular migration and new destinations

While the majority of African migrants arrive via legal channels and enjoy legal status in Europe, there has nonetheless been an increase over recent decades in irregular migration from the three MAFE countries of origin – with rates typically doubling between the 1980s and the 2000s<sup>6</sup>. Whilst irregular migration affects all three countries, rates are higher for Congolese and Senegalese migrants compared to Ghanaian migrants (see Fig 4). Rates of irregular movement have also increased significantly amongst Congolese and Senegalese migrants in Europe since the 1980s<sup>7</sup>.

MAFE data show that migrants living in traditional destinations (usually former colonial powers) tend to have quite different profiles from migrants living in ‘new’ destinations (see Fig 4). These very different profiles suggest that ‘new’ destinations – such as Spain and Italy for Senegalese migrants, the Netherlands for Ghanaians, and the UK for Congolese – have attracted distinct migrant populations.

**FIG 4. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS BY ORIGIN AND DESTINATION**



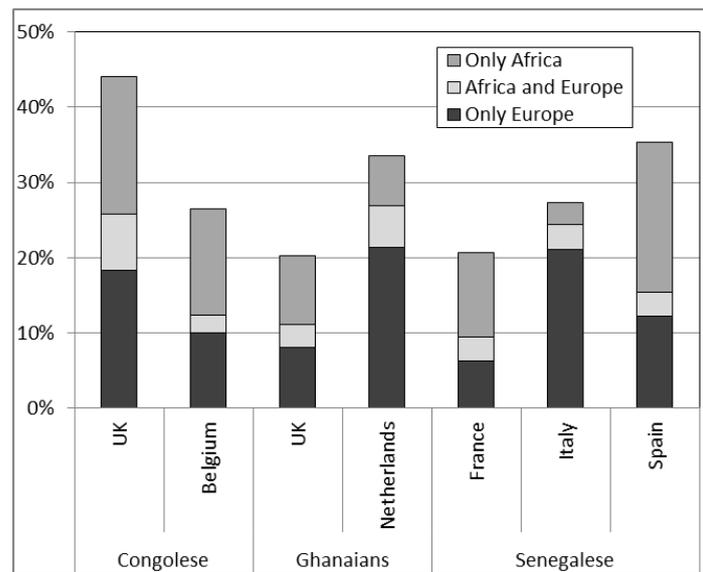
## Transit migration and secondary mobility

Overall, migrants to new destinations are more likely to have transited through other countries before arriving at their current country of residence. Although **the majority of migrants in all European destinations arrive directly from their country of origin**, this was a more common trajectory amongst migrants who were moving to traditional receiving countries, such as Senegalese moving to France, Ghanaians to the UK, and Congolese to Belgium (see Fig 5).

<sup>6</sup> Defined as not having a residence permit at some point during the first year at destination.

<sup>7</sup> These data are not shown in this policy brief; please refer MAFE Working Paper 18 in the ‘Key resources’ section for more information.

**FIG 5. PERCENTAGE OF MIGRANTS WHO TRANSITED VIA ANOTHER COUNTRY BEFORE ARRIVING IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE, BY REGION OF TRANSIT (1975-2008)**



**In terms of secondary mobility in Europe, MAFE findings show that this was more common when migrants moved to ‘new’ countries of destination, challenging assumptions that these countries act as a ‘gateway’ for African immigration to Europe.**

### Policy implications

- MAFE data suggest that the geography of migration from Africa to Europe has changed significantly in recent decades. **Policy needs to respond to the shifting geographies of migration, rather than assuming that established patterns continue through time.**
- **Policies that assume that economic growth and development will lead to a reduction of pressure to migrate may be wide of the mark.** On the contrary, evidence from MAFE and other surveys suggests that such growth can be associated with increasing migration – at least over the short-term – whilst patterns of movement respond to opportunity structures at destination, not just to conditions at origin.
- **‘New’ destination countries in Europe appear to be facing different migration challenges to more traditional destination countries.** In these countries, the challenges of dealing with a migrant population that is less educated, and more irregular in terms of legal status, are substantial.
- Intra-Africa migration is also a significant phenomenon, and is growing in the case of DR Congo. **European policies should address issues around intra-African migration, and not simply focus on Europe as a destination.**
- **MAFE findings suggest that levels of secondary migration in Europe remain relatively low, and mostly channel African migrants to new destination countries, rather than**

representing a new route to traditional destinations following the introduction of direct immigration controls.

## Key resources

### MAFE Project:

Schoumaker B., Flahaux M.-L., Schans D., Beauchemin C., Mazzucato V., and Sakho P. (2013) 'Changing patterns of African migration: A comparative analysis'. MAFE Working Paper 18. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

Schoumaker, B., and Flahaux, M.-L. (2013) 'Changing patterns of Congolese migration'. MAFE Working Paper 19. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

Schans, D., Mazzucato, V., Schoumaker, B., and Flahaux, M.-L. (2013) 'Changing patterns of Ghanaian migration'. MAFE Working Paper 20. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

Sakho, P., Beauchemin, C., Schoumaker, B., and Flahaux, M.-L. (2013) 'New patterns of migration between Senegal and Europe'. MAFE Working Paper 21. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

Flahaux, M.-L., Beauchemin, C., and Schoumaker, B. (2010) 'Partir, revenir: Tendances et facteurs des migrations africaines intra et extra-continentales'. MAFE Working Paper 7. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

Schoumaker, B., Vause, S. and Mangalu Mobhe, A., (2009) 'Political turmoil, economic crises, and international migration in DR Congo: Evidence from event history data (1975-2007)'. MAFE Working Paper 2. Paris: MAFE Project, INED.

*MAFE working papers and briefing papers are available online at:*  
<[www.mafeproject.eu/publications](http://www.mafeproject.eu/publications)>

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This briefing paper was prepared by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (UK) in collaboration with Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium) and INED (France). For more information on the MAFE Project contact Catherine Daurele at <[catherine.daurele@ined.fr](mailto:catherine.daurele@ined.fr)>.