

Aide-Mémoire

EXPERT GROUP MEETING:

JOBS IN AFRICA OR JOBS FOR AFRICANS?

Integrating skills migration in national youth employment strategies

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) ▪ Addis Ababa

Conference Room 3

31 October – 1 November 2023

I. BACKGROUND

Africa's future growth and prosperity depends upon whether young Africans can access suitable jobs. By 2050, the continent will add 184 million to its youth population (15-24) so that by 2050 one in every three young people will be African. In the same period, Africa's working-age population (20-64 years) will be more than double the number in 2022 and constitute almost 25 per cent of the global working-age population.

The growing young and working-age population offers Africa the prospect of reaping the benefits of a demographic dividend, improving peoples' lives, and reducing poverty. It is also the biggest challenge facing policymakers as the absence of suitable jobs for the youth can lead to fragility, social tension, and economic stress.

The working-age population in Africa is growing faster than jobs are created and at current rates, there will likely be 150 million new jobs in 2022-2050, less than a quarter of the number of people seeking them. Unfortunately, African youth are not entering the domestic labor markets with industry-relevant skills.

With a skills-mismatch and few jobs available, the anticipated 'demographic dividend' is lost as young people often settle for unfulfilling, low paying, and unproductive work without social protection benefits, or drop out of employment completely. Six out of nine million jobs created in Africa other than North Africa since 2000 have been self-employed and largely informal.

At the same time, Europe is rapidly aging and faces severe labour shortages with the region's population living longer and having fewer children. The proportion of the working-age population is going down in Europe – there will be nearly 100 million fewer people aged 20-64 in 2050 than there are in 2022.

So, while Europe faces labour shortages, Africa needs to provide jobs for its growing young and working-age population. The global mismatch between jobs and labour – demand for



workers in Europe and North America and demand for good jobs in Africa – has huge implications for development policy.

Most Africans still migrate within Africa, though migration flows to Europe and North America are increasing and the mobility of skilled labour from Africa has become a prominent issue in the recent migration debates. Tertiary-educated workers account for more than 40 per cent of total migrants from the continent.

In a globalised world with ease of movement of capital, goods and services, the mobility of skilled workers across international borders is a natural consequence of global integration and orderly migration can bring many benefits, including remittances, investment, and trade linkages with countries of destination.

Yet the loss of skills is worrisome for countries in Africa that already suffer from low human capital. As tertiary and professional education are financed from severely limited public education budgets, in effect poor African countries implicitly subsidize rich countries through migration of highly skilled labour.

In the absence of regular pathways many African youth migrate illegally, are at the mercy of touts, and put their lives in danger. But properly managed migration presents an immense opportunity for alleviating the challenge of job shortages for skilled workers in Africa with development benefits for all parties.

However, in most countries, issues and policies relating to youth employment and migration are dealt with independently of each other across different ministries such as ministries of Youth, Labour or Employment, and Home, Internal or External Affairs and with little integration among them. Lack of coordination across ministries results in inefficiencies and lack of attention to important, overlapping issues.

This needs to change so that policymakers while devising policies to increase jobs for youth within national boundaries (or *Jobs in Africa*) also identify opportunities, and partner with countries, in the region and outside the continent to absorb their increasing and young labour force (for *Jobs for Africans*).

Skills migration needs to become a key element of national employment policies to increase youth employment and balance the supply and demand of labour across national boundaries. There are many advantages of this approach for global economic output, young migrating Africans, and sending and receiving countries if people move from low productivity, high worker availability regions to high productivity, low worker availability regions to find jobs.

The task of connecting African youth to suitable jobs is as immense as it is urgent, and on its own, migration of skilled African youth through regular pathways to Europe and North America cannot solve the continent's employment problem. Nor is it a permanent solution to Europe's labour shortages. At best, movement of skills within Africa and from Africa to Europe and elsewhere, negotiated through a fair, open and transparent bilateral partnership, will address some of the immediate problems of youth employment in countries of origin and



worker shortage in countries of destination. The larger challenge of finding jobs for the youth within national boundaries remains and requires urgent and innovative approaches. We are hopeful that the analysis and the recommendations in this report will contribute to this process.

II. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the meeting is to bring together experts from government, academia, think tanks, and the United Nations system to review the key findings of the draft report (**Jobs in Africa or Jobs for Africans?**) that aims to inform and stimulate debate, contribute to better policies, facilitate further research, and identify prominent knowledge and data gaps.

The meeting aims to provide an opportunity to discuss questions related to the issues of demography, education and skills migration in an integrated way so as to accelerate national and regional-level actions for increasing employment opportunities for young Africans. In particular, the meeting will:

- a. Discuss the trends in demographics, education, skills and migration, and review the challenges and opportunities for Africa.
- b. Reflect on the implication of these trends for enhancing youth employment.
- c. Share country perspectives on good practices and initiatives to promote youth employment.
- d. Review lessons learnt from designing and implementing youth employment strategies that can be leveraged to spur further progress for reaping the demographic dividend.
- e. Explore current and potential regional and global skills partnerships that can contribute to safe, orderly and regular migration and enhance employment prospects for African youth without depletion of human capital in countries of origin.
- f. Review the key findings of the draft report and provide suggestions for its finalization.

The meeting will allow a robust exchange of ideas and good practices on the continent that will lead to analysing the inter-related issues in an integrated way and foster the identification of actionable policies for enhancing youth employment and reaping the demographic dividend in Africa.

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Discussions at the meeting are expected to help validate the draft report “**Jobs in Africa or Jobs for Africans?**” by assessing the gaps, challenges, opportunities and progress made in promoting youth employment in Africa.

Specifically, the meeting will produce the following outputs:



- i. Discussions on the various aspects of the draft report to receive expert inputs and concrete policy recommendations.
- ii. Enhanced and better-informed dialogue between policy makers, international experts, representatives from UN agencies and researchers on good practices for integrating youth employment, skills migration, and skills partnerships for regular migration; and
- iii. A report of the expert group meeting, summarizing the key policy messages and recommendations to help revise the draft report.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

The meeting is organized by the Social Policy Section in the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division (GPSPD) and will be held in the UN Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 31 October-1 November 2023.

The draft agenda of the meeting is enclosed. All sessions will be in plenary and invited experts are expected to actively participate in the discussions and contribute to finalizing the report. The Social Policy Section will prepare a final report summarizing the key policy messages and recommendations emerging from the discussions.

Participants are encouraged to contact **Ms. Wafa Aidi** (aidiw@un.org), Economic Affairs Officer, and **Ms. Sofanit Abebe** (abebes.uneca@un.org), Administrative Assistant for further details.

V. DOCUMENTATION AND LANGUAGE

The documentation of the meeting comprises of the draft report to be shared subsequently.

The working language of the meeting will be English with facility for simultaneous interpretation in French. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in both languages.