

Managing Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa: the developmental approach

The event held at the Mountain Club of South Africa in Cape Town on the 22nd of March 2018, jointly hosted by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) Western Cape Branch and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), provided a platform for a lively debate on the question of how to manage migration from Sub-Saharan Africa in a developmental approach.

The discussion was opened by Ms. Sheila Camerer, Chairperson of SAIIA WC and Ms. Christina Teichmann, KAS-Project Manager, giving a warm welcome and introducing the two guest speakers Ms. Miranda Madikane and Mr. Sibusiso Nkomo. Miranda Madikane is the director of the Scalabrini Centre in Cape Town, which provides para-legal services and socio-economic support to migrants and refugees in South Africa. Sibusiso Nkomo is a senior project leader in the Research and Policy Program at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in Cape Town.

Migration in South Africa

Ms. Madikane first gave some background information about the South African asylum system. Refugees - persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution - get registered at one of the Refugee Reception Offices (RROs), based in urban areas around South Africa. They enjoy the same rights as South African citizens such as freedom of movement, freedom from detention and the right to work. The only exception is that they are not allowed to vote. In theory they should receive an individual status determination interview within the first three months after entering the country, but in practice this

can take up to a decade. Nevertheless they are issued with documentation papers until the repatriation, resettlement or receipt of the final rejection.

Ms. Madikane however pointed out that South Africa faces a mixed flow of migrants, especially from neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique but also further away countries such as the DRC or Somalia. In addition to the refugees, an extensive number of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa enters the country. In contrast to refugees, migrants choose to move not because of a direct threat of life or persecution, but mainly due to economic reasons. These migrants do not always meet the conditions for application of a permanent visa, which results in a huge number of undocumented migrants in South Africa. These undocumented migrants do not enjoy any legal rights in South Africa and apart from that they cannot access a hospital, open a bank account or send their children to schools. Furthermore to the difficult living conditions, refugees and migrants are regularly exposed to xenophobic attacks. Many South Africans accuse foreigners from other African countries of taking away their jobs, women and other resources. This is why the Scalabrini Centre engages especially with young South Africans to help them overcome these prejudices and show them the benefits of integrating migrants into the society. These benefits include additional skills, different cultures, new trade opportunities, etc.

With the Refugees Amendment Bill 2017, the situation of the legal refugees has deteriorated considerably. Since then, refugees are confronted with expanded exclusions

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from refugee status for administrative infractions such as failure to report to RRO within five days. Moreover they face the threat of abandonment of asylum claim if their permit expired for 30 days or more. Lastly the state removed their right to work.

Migration and development

The second speaker Mr. Nkomo presented the latest Afrobarometer report on Migration and development from 2016/17. The Afrobarometer is a non-partisan survey research project based on public opinion surveys that includes 36 African countries. The report comprises preliminary data from ten different countries: Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Amongst other questions, the survey asks a representative sample of individuals in the respective countries, why people consider emigration, which country or region do they favor, did they plan to emigrate and which kind of preparation did they undertake to emigrate.

The findings of the latest survey show, that only 25% of the population of these ten countries consider emigrating to another country with Malawi having the highest percentage (37%) and Mali the lowest (15%). The survey shows that male citizens between the age of 18-25 from urban areas with a post-secondary education are the most likely group to emigrate. The preferred destination of the emigration however varies considerably between the different countries. In Malawi and Zimbabwe the preferred destination is the "most prominent destination country in the region", which usually translates to South Africa, whereas people from Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana tend to state "North America" as their favored destination. As a last point, Mr. Nkomo gave the audience an overview of the different reasons for considering emigration. The most prominent reason were the following: "to find work" (40%), "economic hardship" (26%), "poverty" (10%), "poor infrastructure/services" (6%) and several insignificant other factors. It is interesting to note that "conflict" did not show up as a prominent reason for emigration in the surveyed countries.

The event concluded with a fruitful discussion which touched on many topics concerning undocumented migrants and the question whether the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was signed on the 21st of March 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda, will have a considerable impact on emigration within the African continent. The audience and the speakers came to the conclusion, that the AfCFTA will not bring any significant improvement to migrants in South Africa as the South African government did not ratify the whole document but signed only parts of it.



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