

Chapter 16

Youth Migration and Mobility

Historically, migration has been a critical survival strategy and a means of economic and social advancement for many Ghanaians. International migration trends as of 2010 indicate that only 1 per cent of the country's population lives abroad, with Europe the dominant direction of Ghanaian emigration (GSS, 2013). However, 48.6 per cent of the population has migrated internally, primarily from rural to urban areas, with females outnumbering males (GSS, 2014). The majority of these migrants are of working age and around a third of them belong to the youth demographic. Unfortunately, insufficient data exists to build a more comprehensive analysis on migration trends. With advancements in migration policy as well as trade and economic integration, principally within the continent of Africa, Ghanaian youth emigration particularly for employment is likely to increase. Similarly, youth from other countries within the continent are likely to immigrate to Ghana. As such, government must position itself to manage this human mobility not only at home but also in terms of a diaspora engagement.

16.1 Ghanaian migration policies

Ghana has a well-defined migration policy that addresses legal and regulatory aspects of migration. Recently, GoG adopted the first National Migration Policy (2016), which serves as the country's official migration strategy document, and validated the draft of the Labour Migration Policy (2018) prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR) (IOM, 2019). Strategies have also been put in place to combat human trafficking. Additionally, as Ghana is part of the Economic Community of West African States,

Box 16.1 Migration in the SDGs

Migration is a key element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognises for the first time the contribution of migration to sustainable development. The SDGs' central reference to migration is made in SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) – target 10.7: 'Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well- managed migration policies.'

However, migration is a cross-cutting issue, relevant to all the SDGs – for example SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals) – with target 17.18 identifying the importance of disaggregated migration data.

it has several agreements in place with many countries concerning cooperation on labour migration (IOM, 2018a). Internationally, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes for the first time the importance of migration, and the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was adopted in 2018, as well as the UN Global Compact for Refugees, which Ghana has ratified. However, Ghana still has not signed the ILO Migration for Employment Convention 1949, the ILO Migrant Workers Convention 1975 or the Convention on Statelessness (*ibid.*). The legal framework of the National Migration Policy could be strengthened with bilateral agreements, especially with a focus on youth migrant workers, and with a view to establishing new youth labour mobility agreements with countries that uphold migrant rights/human rights laws (Boampong, 2018).

16.2 Youth migration

16.2.1 Internal migration

Internal migration, particularly rural–urban migration from northern to southern parts of Ghana, with the majority of internal migrants destined for Accra and Kumasi, is a significant migratory flow in Ghana (Hashim, 2005). Data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 suggests that 48.6 per cent of the population, the majority of them youth, have migrated internally (GSS, 2014).

Youth internal migration is linked to inequalities in spatial development as well as to poor colonial era and post-independence economic restructuring policies, including Structural Adjustment Programme (SAPs) (Awumbila, 1997; Awumbila et al., 2014). In this regard, the literature suggests triggering factors for migration, especially in the most underdeveloped areas in northern Ghana. These including socio-economic disparities, lack of educational opportunities, desire to enjoy modern facilities, an upsurge in unemployment, environmental deterioration in agriculture, armed conflicts and violence, parental neglect and gradual breakdown of social support networks in rural areas (Edwin and Glover, 2018; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019).

For youths moving to urban areas, migration represents not only an escape out of poverty and an opportunity to improve livelihoods but also a coping mechanism and a chance to feel a sense of pride and self-respect (Boampong, 2020). This is because it provides an avenue for improving social status, learning new skills and transitioning youth into adulthood (Min-Harris, 2009; Boampong, 2020). Studies also suggest rural–urban youth migration can be part of a collective household survival strategy, whereby migration is viewed as a collective strategy rather than an individual action (Edwin and Glover, 2018).

Most migrants above age 15 are engaged in services and sales (37.4 per cent) and agricultural, forestry and fisheries (32.7 per cent). The former are concentrated in urban areas and the latter in rural localities (GSS, 2018).

In general, youth migrating to urban areas work in unskilled positions (street vendor, minibus conductor, shop assistant, etc.), as the majority do not have higher education or professional skills (Boateng et al., 2018). Migration provides young migrants

Table 16.1 Employment sector of migrants 15 years and older by locality

Employment Sector	Locality of residence							Total
	Accra	Urban Coastal	Urban Forest	Urban Savannah	Rural Coastal	Rural Forest	Rural Savannah	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Government sector	8.9	11.3	13.6	9.8	5.0	6.2	2.6	8.4
Parastatals	–	0.5	0.1	–	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2
NGOs (Local & International)	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5	–	0.2	0.2
Cooperatives	–	0.1	0.2	–	–	–	–	0.1
International Organization/ Diplomatic Mission	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.1	–	0.1
Private Sector	41.1	34.8	36.2	27.8	39.0	30.8	34.1	34.6
Self-employed	47.0	50.4	42.1	55.0	53.5	56.4	55.4	51.0
Other	2.6	2.4	7.3	6.9	1.4	6.2	7.7	5.4

Source: GSS (2018).

with the opportunity to earn a living while acquiring new skills and at the same time sending remittances and contributing to the well-being of their families (Teye et al., 2015).

Internal migration does not benefit all young migrants entirely. Many struggle with low-wage employment, underemployment and unemployment, and are vulnerable to drug abuse and crime (Teye et al., 2015). Additionally, young migrants, including *Kayayes* (head porters), are exposed to increased health risks, as the majority are forced to settle in slums without decent housing, schools, health facilities, sanitation and water systems, as noted by research interviewees.

Without management, the influx of youth into city centres will continue to place further stress on already overloaded infrastructure (Edwin and Glover, 2018). Investing in rural youth, through the prioritisation of sustainable agriculture to create meaningful employment opportunities and the provision of skills and abilities to increase rural incomes, would help diminish the current rate of rural–urban migration.

16.2.2 International migration

In Ghana, only 1 per cent of the country's population is thought to live abroad (GSS, 2013), although this number may be an underestimate, owing to lack of data. Moreover, it is not clear how many youth migrate internationally. Major international destinations outside of Africa include Europe, followed by North America (Quartey, 2009; Boampong, 2020). Youth international migration trends have been affiliated with historical, colonial-era, political and kinship ties, as well as advanced and cheap means of mobility (Anarfi et al., 2000; Mazzucato et al., 2005).

Most emigrants originate from Ashanti region (27.6 per cent) and Greater Accra (25.2 per cent), and most are young adults in their 30s, with a certain level of education, a lack of appropriate employment and enough savings to afford travel costs (GSS, 2013; Dako-Gyeke, 2015). Ashanti and Greater Accra are major administrative regions with high youth unemployment rates (Quartey, 2009) and established travel intermediaries (known as 'connection men') available to offer travel advice and facilitate visa acquisition (Coe, 2013; Boampong, 2020).

16.2.3 Risks of international migration

Young migrants are particularly vulnerable to risks associated with migration. This is of particular concern for those without the proper documentation, who are then forced to enter the informal economy, where they are even more vulnerable to exploitation. These young migrants, especially young women, face the risk of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and slavery.

In order to mitigate these risks, GoG introduced a ban on the recruitment of workers to the Gulf region in 2017, after hearing widespread reports of abuse and exploitation of Ghanaian migrant workers in the region (Boampong, 2018). Nevertheless, the ban does not address the underlying drivers of migration, such as unemployment. Strengthening information campaigns to educate the population on the realities of migration will better allow young Ghanaians to make informed decisions (*ibid.*). Additionally, improving the legal framework for migrant workers through bilateral agreements, including opportunities to establish new youth labour mobility agreements with countries that uphold human rights, would help mitigate the risks young Ghanaian migrants, especially females, face.

16.3 Main factors related to migration

Generally, young Ghanaians migrate for reasons including employment, education or training, marriage or family reunification, and political persecution (Anarfi et al., 2000; Coe 2013; Boampong, 2020). However, the majority are driven by a hope for better economic or social prospects, as a result of lack of employment and underemployment within the country.

16.3.1 Aspirations matter

It can be an oversimplification to classify young migrants as moving for purely economic reasons, and it is crucial to take into consideration young people's aspirations (the wish to change personal situation, economically or socially) in order to understand the drivers behind migration (Boateng et al., 2018; Boampong, 2020). Such aspirations are determined primarily by the context within which young people grow up, being influenced by their social network, including the network of relations abroad or returnees (*ibid.*).

16.3.2 Student mobility

In a globalised world, an increased number of young Ghanaians are migrating to study abroad after completing secondary education (Coe, 2012)

‘[I would want to travel outside Ghana for] education. I want to explore more and broaden my knowledge.’ Male, 15–20 years

For many young people, studying abroad is the first step in establishing permanent residence in the host country, as the migration regulations of the traditional countries of immigration (currently most of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries) have generally allowed foreign students permission to work for a period after they complete their studies and to adjust their status if they find long-term employment.

16.4 Immigration to Ghana

In recent times, the level of student immigration has increased significantly, as more young people recognise the opportunities for higher education present in Ghana. A total of 2,992 foreign students were granted resident permits in 2007, representing 8.5 per cent of all resident permits granted that year (Quarthey, 2009). The share of foreign nationals studying at the University of Ghana rose from 1.5 per cent in 2001/02 to 3.8 per cent in 2006/07 (University of Ghana, 2008). In 2007/08, the University of Ghana admitted 1,142 foreign students from 42 countries (Table 16.2).

16.5 Impact of migration

The nature and extent of the impact of migration depends on who moves, how they fare abroad, their proclivity to stay connected and their intention to return (UNDP, 2009). Through the enabling of exchanges of information, ideas and knowledge as well as remittances, youth migration can have positive impacts for all countries involved (Boampong, 2020).

16.5.1 Financial remittances

The inflow of financial remittances, at the household and community level, contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction in the country of origin, as the primary use of these remittances is to buy basic necessities such as food, clothing

Table 16.2 Number of foreign students in the University of Ghana, 2007/08

Country	Students	%
Nigeria	527	46.1
United States	353	30.9
Botswana	28	2.5
Liberia	20	1.7
Togo	24	2.1
Benin	19	1.6
Other nationalities	171	14.9
Total	1142	100

Source: University of Ghana (2008).

and household goods, as well as to invest in education and health care (IOM, 2017; Boampong, 2019).

While estimates by the World Bank show that total remittances to Ghana in 2015 were US\$2.008 billion, available figures from the Bank of Ghana indicate that migrant remittances to Ghana increased from \$1.5 billion in 2005 to \$2.1 billion in 2010 and then almost \$5.0 billion in 2015 (Teye et al., 2017).

16.5.2 Social remittances

Social remittances refer to the transfer of knowledge, ideas and practices that migrants have acquired in their host countries (Boampong, 2020). Youth migrants can transmit them to communities and workplaces in Ghana through visits, communication, trade networks, transnational networks, forums and return to the country of origin, among others.

16.5.3 Brain drain and gain

One of the adverse effects of migration is human capital flight, or brain drain, which can deprive Ghana of the social and economic contributions of her most educated and highly skilled youth, thus affecting the quality of basic services such as education and health care. The migration of young health professionals and educators can be linked to lack of incentives, inadequate resources and limited administrative capacity.

Nevertheless, although migration can result in brain drain in the country of origin, if young Ghanaian migrants return home, this loss can be offset, as they return with enhanced skills, business networks and knowledge.

16.5.4 Urbanisation and reduced workforce in rural areas

Rural–urban migration has been very pronounced in the northern sector of Ghana, presenting a challenge to these rural areas, as it has drastically reduced the young workforce as well as the health and vitality of such communities (Edwin and Glover, 2018). Studies show that remittances can also be an important source of rural investment, however, improving the productivity of the agriculture sector. Another negative impact that internal migration has had relates to rapid urbanisation in some areas and the consequent pressure on urban amenities.

16.5.5 Impact of youth migration on country of destination

Migration has long been a controversial issue, with the common perception being that immigrants take jobs away from native-born workers. However, as noted earlier, migrants have a positive impact on destination countries like Ghana, if migration is well managed. In particular, with economic growth in Ghana and regional integration, Ghana is likely to become an immigrant destination for young people from other countries. For instance, highly skilled youth migrants may be engaged in skill-intensive sectors and can play an important role in fostering innovation, enabling entrepreneurship and stimulating job growth.

Box 16.2 African Continental Free Trade Area and implications for youth migration

The Agenda 2063 flagship initiative AfCFTA refers to a continental geographic zone where goods and services move among member states of the AU with no restrictions. AfCFTA aims to boost intra-African trade by providing a comprehensive and mutually beneficial trade agreement among member states, covering trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policies.

The agreement has achieved its minimum threshold – 22 out of the 55 member states including Ghana – to go into effect. If the trade agreement is implemented, it will have huge implications for human mobility within Africa. This will include movement of skills to facilitate movement of goods and services. Consequently, it will be critical for governments to equip young people with the necessary skills and education to empower them to work in Ghana or in other parts of the African continent.

16.6 Diaspora

Diasporas are defined as populations of migrant origin that are scattered among two or more destinations, between which they develop multifarious links, involving flows and exchanges of people and resources – between the homeland and destination countries and among destination countries (Quartey, 2009). The Ghanaian diaspora youth plays a critical role in the development of Ghana, necessitating the creation of policies that aim to maximise their development contributions.

Ghana has an active diaspora, being historically committed to national development (Boateng et al., 2018). In this sense, even though private remittances by individuals constitute the most sizeable and tangible forms of diaspora contribution to development, there are also collective contributions of various kinds by home-town associations and students to their former schools (van Hear et al., 2014). Encouraging the transfer of expertise can have a much further-reaching positive effect on long-term development when compared with charity donations.

Second-generation young Ghanaian migrants also contribute to the development of Ghana. The Future of Ghana Report (Boateng et al., 2018) found that half of the second-generation British Ghanaians surveyed already contributed to some extent to the development of the country, with social remittances being the dominant form of engagement – although a significant proportion also remit financially. The report also found that identity was the most powerful determinant of how second-generation British Ghanaians engaged with Ghana, playing a key role in language fluency and the sense of cultural identity they hold. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of participants indicated they would consider relocating to Ghana at some point in the future. Generally, it is also necessary to bear in mind that diaspora youth are not

Box 16.3 Sustainable Development Goals and migration

Goal 17.3.2: Increase the volume of remittances as a percentage of GDP. Global trends suggest a considerable increase from 2017 to 2018, and remittances are expected to keep growing for 2019.

Goal 10.c.1: Reduce remittance costs. The global average cost of sending remittances in the first quarter of 2019 remained at about 7 per cent, significantly higher than the SDG target of 3 per cent.

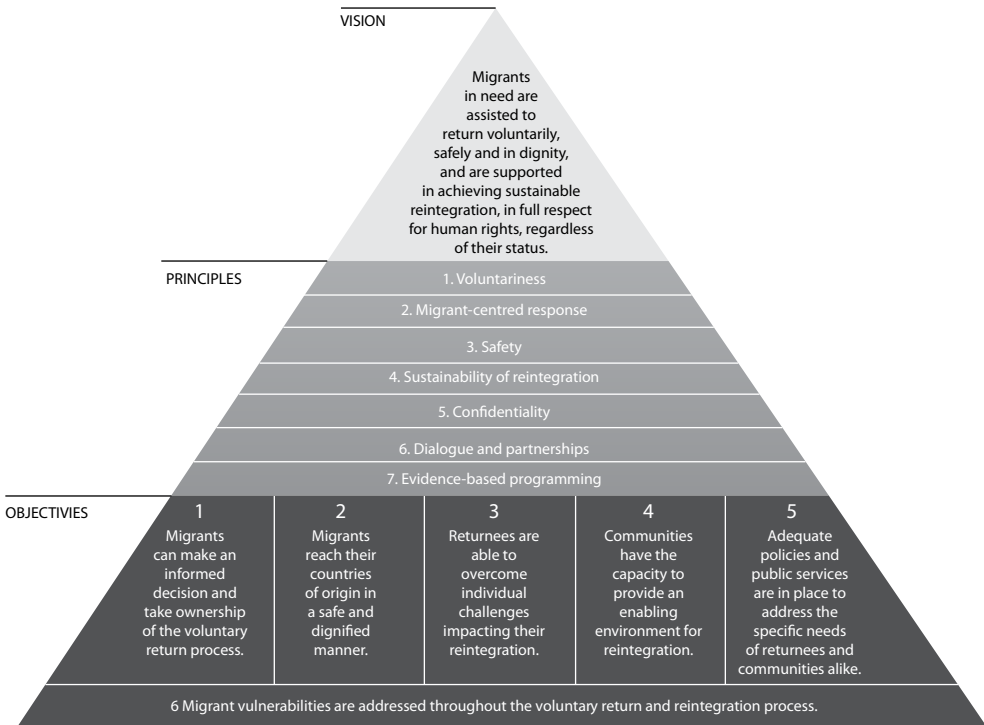
Goal 10.7.1: Reduce recruitment costs for migrant workers.

homogeneous social groups, and they may comprise different age, gender, religious, ethnic and linguistic capacity groupings.

16.7 Return migration

To understand the dynamics of return migration, it is important to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary migration. Voluntary return migration among young migrants tends to be linked to greater potential for development in Ghana.

Figure 16.1 IOM framework for assisted voluntary return and reintegration



Source: IOM (2018b).

Returnees may often be equipped with new skills, qualifications and economic resources that may generate long-term benefits for them, their families and the local community (Boampong, 2020). Even though voluntary returnees are generally at a relative advantage, they nonetheless require social support and reliable information on economic prospects to facilitate their reintegration.

On the other hand, young migrants subjected to involuntary migration frequently experience difficulties that increase their vulnerability and make their return and reintegration more challenging. Often, they have suffered from major trauma (such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation – especially women) and are trapped in a vulnerable position. In these cases, mechanisms to support their return and provide them with reintegration assistance are critical (IOM, 2018b). As such, in close cooperation with GoG, IOM is implementing an assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme, primarily for migrants in vulnerable situations (victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, migrants with health-related needs) but that also extends to migrants returning voluntarily (*ibid.*). In recent times, IOM together with GoG has supported the return and reintegration of irregular migrants from Libya and other countries to Ghana.

Updating data regarding return migration in Ghana would help facilitate the return, readmission and reintegration of Ghanaian migrants (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019).

16.8 Summary points

1. Almost 50 per cent of the population migrate internally (similar gender ratios), from rural to urban areas, in search of opportunities (mainly employment or education). Most of these are young migrants who work in unskilled positions and are exposed to health risks, as the majority settle in slums.
2. Most internal migrants above age 15 are engaged in services and sales (37.4 per cent) and agriculture, forestry and fisheries (32.7 per cent).
3. Most international migrants are young adults with a certain level of education and a lack of appropriate employment opportunities in Ghana.
4. Young migrants are particularly vulnerable to risks associated with migration, in particular those immigrating without the proper documentation and especially young women, who face the risk of human trafficking and slavery, among others.
5. Migration contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction through the inflow of remittances but it results in the loss of highly skilled workers and a young workforce from rural areas. It also has an impact on the children left behind, increasing their vulnerability.
6. The Bank of Ghana indicates that migrant remittances to Ghana increased from US\$1.5 billion in 2005 to \$2.1 billion in 2010 and then almost \$5 billion in 2015.
7. Remittances (social and financial) from Ghanaian diaspora youth can contribute to the development of the country if the right policies are put in place.

8. It is necessary to create mechanisms to support migrants' return, readmission and reintegration, especially for those who have suffered major traumas.
9. It is difficult to analyse youth migration as data is scarce and is not typically aggregated by age.

16.9 Recommendations

1. Create a database on migration information categorised by age, sex, level of education, occupation, etc., in order to be able to understand youth migration trends and develop policies accordingly.
2. Invest in rural youth, prioritising sustainable agriculture to create meaningful jobs as well as training programmes to expand their skills and abilities in order to increase their rural income and reduce the migration flow.
3. Strengthen information campaigns about the realities and dangers of migration (especially irregular migration) to allow young migrants to make informed migration decisions.
4. Promote and facilitate the return and reintegration of skilled youth emigrants and the diaspora (second generation) to foster socio-economic development in Ghana through brain gain, knowledge-sharing, information sessions and remittances.
5. Promote the effective management of labour migration in the country, optimising the benefits of labour migration for development, and counter xenophobia, racism and discrimination against immigrants in Ghana.
6. Facilitate the return, readmission and reintegration of Ghanaian emigrants with a special focus on vulnerable migrants who have suffered major human rights violations.
7. Negotiate bilateral agreements to strengthen the legal framework for migrant workers with countries that uphold human rights laws.
8. Enhance and strengthen the capacity of diaspora youth organisations in order to effectively access funding, run sustainable programmes and initiatives and facilitate networks to improve diaspora engagement.

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