



STATEMENT BY THE AFRICAN REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC-AFRICA) At the 2nd 2026 International Migration Review Forum organised by the United Nations Migration Network Group, 5 – 8 May 2026, New York, United States of America,

Dealing with Africa's development Issues and Countering Dangerous and Desperate Migration through socio-economic inclusion for all

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa, www.ituc-africa.org), representing over 18 million workers across 52 African countries, addresses this 2026 International Migration Review Forum at a time when human mobility is being shaped not by choice but by crisis.

As we convene here in New York, ITUC-Africa raises several urgent and interlinked issues that governments, stakeholders, and social partners must confront—both within this Forum and beyond. These include the impact of insecurity and conflict on forced displacement, the deepening crisis of inequality and austerity, the erosion of social protection systems, the continued loss of resources through illicit financial flows, and migration governance frameworks that too often sideline workers' rights and voices.

Migration today reflects the fractures of our global system—fractures defined by injustice, economic imbalance, and a failure to deliver dignity and decent work for all. Migration must never be reduced to a problem to be managed. It is a human reality to be governed with dignity, rights, and solidarity.

Migration in a Time of Crisis and Displacement

From Sudan to the Sahel, conflict and instability continue to uproot millions. Millions of workers and their families are forced into dangerous migration routes, often with devastating consequences. Yet insecurity is only one part of the story. Economic exclusion, weak labour markets, and failing public systems are pushing people out just as forcefully. Migration in this context is not a choice. It is a last resort.

Inequality, Kleptocracy, and the Failure of Social Protection

The 2026 Inequality Report by Oxfam confirms a reality workers confront daily: inequality is widening, and wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few. Public systems are underfunded, while workers face stagnant wages and declining protections.

In too many contexts, this is reinforced by kleptocratic practices that divert public resources away from social investment. Social protection systems remain weak or absent, leaving workers exposed to shocks and without safety nets.

When systems fail to provide dignity and opportunity, people move.

Austerity, Illicit Financial Flows, and the Forced Exit of Africa's Youth

Our African governments are implementing austerity measures that continue to place the burden of adjustment on workers. Cuts to public services, wage suppression, and reduced social spending are pushing young people into precarity. These conditions drive irregular migration and deepen vulnerability.

At the same time, Africa loses billions annually through illicit financial flows. These are resources that should finance development, create jobs, and build resilience. Instead, they are extracted, leaving economies hollowed out.

Africa is not only losing wealth but also its future workforce.

Labour Migration Agreements and the Question of Decent Work

Bilateral labour migration agreements are increasingly used as tools to manage youth unemployment. However, many of these arrangements prioritise labour export over workers' rights. They are often negotiated without the meaningful involvement of trade unions and lack adequate safeguards for decent work.

Migration cannot be treated as an economic escape valve. Labour mobility must be anchored in rights, standards, and social dialogue. Workers are not commodities.

Regularisation and Practical Pathways

Meanwhile, the picture is not all doom and gloom. There are positive examples that show a different approach is possible. Spain's efforts in regularisation demonstrate that practical, humane migration policies can protect workers while supporting economies.

Regularisation is not an exception-it should be the norm grounded in fairness and inclusion.

Trade Union Action: ATUMNET and Worker Protection

Through the Africa Trade Union Migration Network (ATUMNET), ITUC-Africa, together with the African Non-State Actors Platform, is actively organising across borders. We are raising awareness among migrant workers about their rights, duties, and responsibilities. We are providing support-legal, organisational, and practical-to ensure workers are not left unprotected.

In collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), we are advancing Migrant Resource Centres and skills-development initiatives as spaces for protection, information, support, and opportunity deepening, respectively. This is trade unionism in action, defending workers wherever they are.

Skills, Mobility, and Shared Responsibility

Africa's youthful population presents an opportunity. With the right investments in skills development and fair mobility frameworks, migration can contribute to shared prosperity.

Partnerships must be structured, ethical, and mutually beneficial. Skills recognition, portability of rights, and protection of workers must be central to any mobility framework.

Women in Migration

Women migrant workers face heightened risks, including exploitation and violence. Yet they are central to economies and communities. Migration governance must be gender-responsive, ensuring protection, access to justice, and recognition of their contributions.

Rejecting Xenophobia, Afrophobia and the Politics of Division

Migration is increasingly used to fuel hate, Afrophobia, xenophobia, and extremism. This is a deliberate political strategy that diverts attention from inequality and governance failures.

Trade unions reject this. Our response must be firm, grounded in solidarity, and focused on justice.

A Call for Justice and Solidarity

Migration is not the problem. Inequality is. Injustice is. Failed governance is.

ITUC-Africa calls for a shift in approach: end austerity that punishes workers, halt illicit financial flows, pursue progressive taxation, cancel unsustainable debt, and invest in social protection and decent work.

The rights of migrant workers and their families are not negotiable. Workers do not lose their rights when they cross borders.

Trade unions will continue to organise, defend, and fight for dignity, justice, and a world where migration is a choice, not a necessity.

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Akhator Joel Odigie
General Secretary
ITUC-Africa