



Terms of Reference (TOR)

Comprehensive Research on Experiences of African Women Migrant Workers and Trade Union Responses

1 Introduction

Migration is a natural human phenomenon that has significantly contributed to human development, economic growth, and cultural exchange. It addresses labour shortages within markets and serves as a crucial economic survival strategy for many. Migration is an essential livelihood strategy for many African women seeking economic opportunities both within the continent and beyond. While migration offers financial independence and improved economic prospects, the labour conditions faced by African women migrants remain precarious. They often endure exploitation, discrimination, and abuse in their host countries, particularly in domestic work, informal trade, and low-skilled service sectors. This experience-gathering research attempts to examine the labour conditions of African women migrants, highlighting their challenges, economic contributions, gender-specific migration experiences, and the legal and policy landscape that governs their mobility. The study will discuss African trade unions' perspectives on labour migration and African women's experiences. The study will also attempt to contrast intra-African migration with extra-African migration, detailing the unique challenges posed by each. 20 African countries will be drawn for this comprehensive study. Additionally, the role of trade unions in mitigating the negative narrative and effects of migration and protecting women migrant workers' rights shall be explored.

2 Problem Statement

Globally, women constitute nearly half the migrant population, yet their migration experiences and labour conditions differ significantly from men's (ILO, 2021). The feminisation of migration in Africa has led to an increasing number of women migrating independently for work, but they often face unique vulnerabilities. African women migrants, particularly those employed as domestic workers, caregivers, traders, and in low-skilled service jobs, are exposed to severe exploitation (Adepoju, 2020). Exploitation and abuse, particularly in domestic work, are rampant. Women migrants endure overwork, physical and sexual abuse, wage theft, and lack of access to justice (UN Women, 2021). The study "African Labour Migration to the GCC States" (2018) by ITUC-Africa documented similar conditions faced by African migrants, which should serve as an essential reference for this research. The kafala system in the Middle East has subjected African domestic workers to conditions akin to modern-day slavery, where they are often confined to homes, forced to work without pay, and denied the right to leave or seek help (MFA, 2019). Within Africa, women migrants face

xenophobia, informal employment without contracts, and lower wages than local workers. In some instances, African women migrant workers are trafficked, deceived by recruitment agencies, or fall into debt bondage (IOM, 2022).

Legal barriers further constrain African women's migration experiences. Gender-discriminatory policies in some African countries make it difficult for women to obtain passports or travel without male consent, pushing them into irregular migration channels where they lack legal protection. Some countries have imposed migration bans on women to prevent abuse abroad, but these restrictions often drive women into more dangerous, unregulated routes (ILO, 2020). Meanwhile, destination countries rarely extend labour protections to migrant women, particularly in domestic work, reinforcing their exploitation. Recent efforts by the African Union aimed at protecting migrant female workers, such as the AU's Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA) and the Joint Labour Migration Programme (JLMP), are critical to strengthening advocacy framework around migration.

Despite these challenges, African women migrants contribute significantly to their home economies through remittances, often sending a higher proportion of their income home than men (World Bank, 2021). However, wage theft, delayed salaries, and family mismanagement of remittances weaken their financial security, leading to a cycle of re-migration.

Additionally, African women migrants face peculiar socio-economic challenges linked to their roles in society. Many are primary breadwinners for their families, juggling financial responsibilities with caregiving roles. A significant proportion of women migrants originate from rural and low-income backgrounds where access to education and skills training is limited, pushing them into informal employment (ILO, 2021). Traditional and cultural expectations regarding women's roles in the family often create additional stress, as they are expected to provide financially while maintaining emotional ties and caregiving responsibilities remotely. In many African societies, extended family networks rely heavily on migrant women's earnings, further exacerbating their financial and emotional burdens (Adepoju, 2020).

3 Intra-African vs. Extra-African Migration

Women migrating within Africa benefit from regional free movement agreements, particularly within ECOWAS and the EAC. However, they still face challenges such as informal employment, lack of job security, and gender-based discrimination. Migrant women working in informal cross-border trade often experience extortion by border officials and local authorities (IOM, 2022). Within Africa, xenophobia and racial discrimination also play a significant role in undermining the economic security of migrant women.

Women who migrate outside Africa, particularly to the Gulf states, Europe, and North America, encounter even more significant risks. The kafala system in the Middle East and restrictive immigration policies in Europe leave many women in situations of

forced labour, with little to no legal recourse (UN Women, 2021). The trafficking of African women to foreign labour markets under false promises of high-paying jobs further exacerbates their vulnerability (MFA, 2019). There is also the construction of negative stereotypes and narratives against African migrant workers. The effects of these negative narratives affect women disproportionately compared to their male counterparts, who are more likely to defend themselves better than women. For domestic migrant workers, the nature of the workstation (mostly homes), which makes them seldom seen (veiled), makes their experiences worse and it harder for them to seek and enjoy redress.

4 The Role of Trade Unions

Trade unions play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of migration for African women workers. They advocate for better working conditions, fair wages, and protection against abuse. Key roles of trade unions in addressing migrant labour issues include:

- Unions advocate and lobby governments to improve labour laws, ensuring that intra-African and extra-African migrants receive equal protection under employment laws.
- Migrant worker unions provide legal aid and support services for women experiencing wage theft, unfair dismissals, and workplace abuses.
- Unions help equip migrant women with vocational skills, financial literacy, and awareness of their rights to ensure they are not exploited.
- Trade unions across Africa and with international partners collaborate to track migrant abuses, push for policy changes, and offer protection mechanisms for African migrant workers.
- Many unions have established migrant workers' committees (especially those in the Middle East who were prevented from forming and joining trade unions of their choice) that provide support, community networks, and advocacy channels for African women migrants.

5 Objective of the study

The following are considered as the reasons for undertaking this study:

- To contribute to the documentation of the **experiences** of African women migrant workers critical for knowledge and references.
- To garner knowledge and information critical for furthering and deepening the African trade union advocacy campaign to change negative narratives on labour migration and its ills.
- Contribute to the better defence, protection and promotion of the rights of women migrant workers.
- To showcase African trade unions' contributions to advancing women workers' rights and social justice.
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6 Expected outcomes

The study anticipates achieving:

- Comprehensive documentation of the experiences and challenges of African women migrant workers.
- Enhanced understanding and awareness of trade unions' contributions towards protecting migrant women's labour rights.
- Improved collaboration between trade unions, civil society organisations, recruitment agencies, employers, and government agencies.
- A shift in narratives regarding labour migration, highlighting migrant women's economic and social contributions positively.
- Policy recommendations for stakeholders aimed at improving migrant women's welfare and labour conditions.

7 Methodology

This research will employ a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the labour conditions of African women migrants from their experiences and actions trade unions took to counter the issues. The deployment of quantitative analysis is taking pragmatic efforts to respond to bridging the dearth of data generation, which is why quantitative analysis

A desk review will analyse existing literature, policy documents, and international labour standards related to women's migration and labour rights. Secondary data will be sourced from organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and national statistics agencies. Primary data collection will involve key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, including government officials, trade union representatives, human rights organizations, and migrant women themselves. Surveys and questionnaires will be administered to collect quantitative data on employment conditions, wage disparities, and socio-economic challenges faced by African women migrants.

Additionally, case studies will be documented to provide in-depth insights into specific migration journeys, working conditions, and coping mechanisms of African women migrants. Focus group discussions will be organized with migrant women, trade unions, and advocacy groups to capture collective experiences and formulate actionable policy recommendations.

The study will focus on 20 African countries, including **Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Togo, Morocco, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.**

The final study report will be presented in non-technical/non-academic-heavy manner to make for easy comprehension and utilisation of the recommendations to cause positive change.

8 Key Areas of Investigation

Pre-migration

The study will investigate socio-economic conditions, cultural expectations, family dynamics, and decision-making processes influencing women's migration. It will also explore legal and structural factors, such as access to passports, recruitment practices, and gender-discriminatory laws affecting migration decisions.

During Migration

Examination of experiences en route, including exposure to trafficking, deception, debt bondage, abuse by recruitment agencies, and border officials. The study will contrast intra-African migration (e.g., ECOWAS, EAC zones) with extra-African migration, particularly conditions under the kafala system in the Middle East and immigration policies in Europe and North America. Attention will also focus on workplace conditions, wage theft, forced labour, and barriers to legal protection.

Post-migration

The research will examine challenges faced by returnee women migrants, including socio-economic reintegration, the impact of remittances on family economies, financial insecurity due to mismanagement of earnings, and the socio-cultural burdens of remote caregiving roles.

9 Deliverables

- Detailed research report with comprehensive analysis and policy recommendations.
- Non-technical summaries and briefs for easy dissemination and advocacy use.
- Policy dialogues and stakeholder engagement forums facilitated by trade unions.

10 Time Frame

The research is expected to be completed within 4 months, with specific timelines established upon contracting the research team.

11 Qualifications of Researchers

- Proven experience in migration studies, labour economics, gender studies, or related fields.
- Familiarity with qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.
- Demonstrated ability to engage effectively with migrant communities, trade unions, and policymakers.

12 Reporting

The research team will report directly to the Executive Director of the Africa Labour Research and Education Insititue (ALREI) Executive Director. Interim reports will be required, with a final comprehensive report upon conclusion of the project.

13 Budget

A detailed budget proposal should submitted by the research team, clearly outlining personnel costs, data collection expenses, stakeholder consultations, analysis, report production, and dissemination activities.

14 Application

All techical and financial proposals should be sent to hod.anyigba@ituc-africa.org by May 15, 2025.

References

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