

Where Africans Go

The Top 10 Destinations for African Migrants — 2026

Published: June 2026 | Verified against UN DESA 2024, INSEE 2023, Afrobarometer R10 (2024), and national census data

Africa does not need sympathy. When millions of its people pack their bags every year, that is not a tragedy — it is a signal worth decoding.

Overview

More than **45.8 million Africans** live outside their country of birth, according to **UN DESA's International Migrant Stock 2024** released in January 2025. That number has more than doubled since 2000, when there were roughly 22 million African migrants globally. The global African diaspora is no longer a niche demographic — it is an economic and cultural force reshaping cities from Paris to Dubai to Toronto.

What drives this movement? Where do Africans go, and why those specific places? This report profiles the **top 10 destination countries outside Africa**, the African communities living there, and the real reasons they chose those destinations — drawing on data from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Afrobarometer's Round 10 surveys (2024), the IOM, and World Bank migration datasets.

One fact cuts through every stereotype: **nearly half (47%) of Africans have considered emigrating**, per Afrobarometer's 2024 survey across 24 countries — up from 37% in the 2016/2018 round. Among those who actually leave, the decision is overwhelmingly economic — not desperation. These are young, educated, mobile people pursuing opportunity. The narrative of the "desperate refugee" covers only a small fraction of the data.

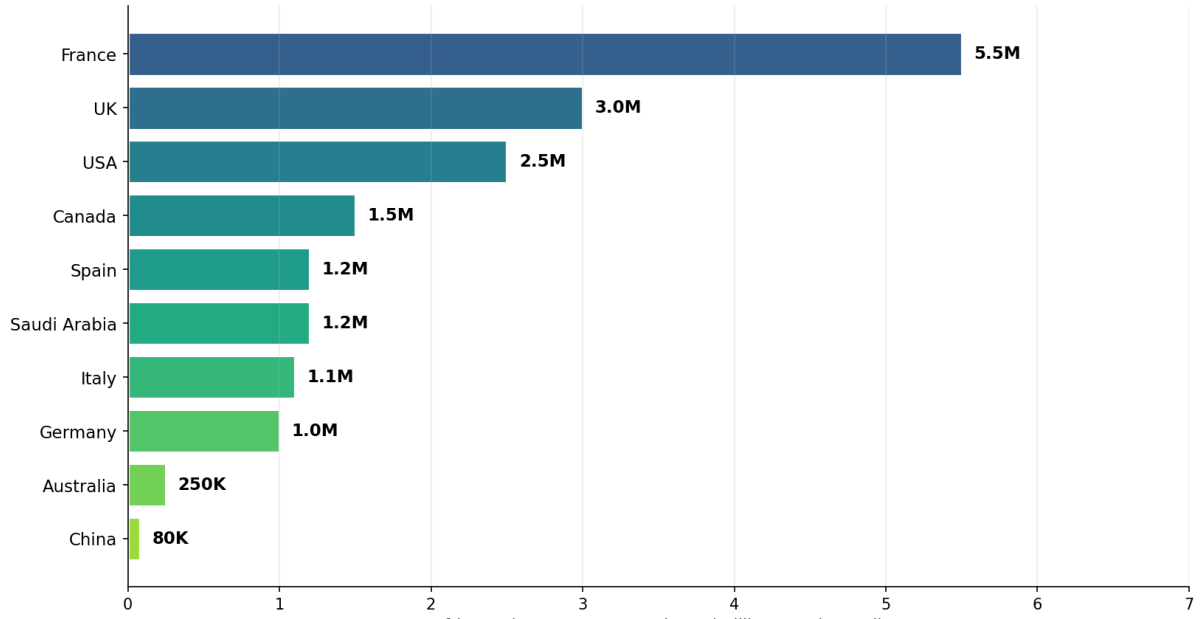
The Scale of African Migration in 2026

Of the 45.8 million Africans living abroad (UN DESA 2024):

- **Approximately 25 million** remain within Africa — intra-continental migration is by far the most common form. Africa hosts 29.2 million international migrants total, of whom 86% originated within the continent.
- **~13 million** live in Europe and North America
- The remaining ~8 million are distributed across the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania
- Annual outflows from Africa to outside the continent are estimated in the low millions, though no single authoritative figure exists.

The World Bank notes that Africa is the continent with the **fastest-growing emigrant population**, and that migration decisions are tightly tied to wage differentials. A surgeon earns roughly **\$216,000/year in the United States**. The same professional earns approximately **\$45,000/year in Kenya** and **\$10,000–24,000/year in Uganda**, per current Glassdoor and PayScale data (May 2026). The gap is **roughly 5–10x** — substantial enough to be life-changing, even if not the 70x sometimes claimed in popular framing.

Top 10 Destinations for African Migrants — 2026 (Estimates, definitions vary by country)

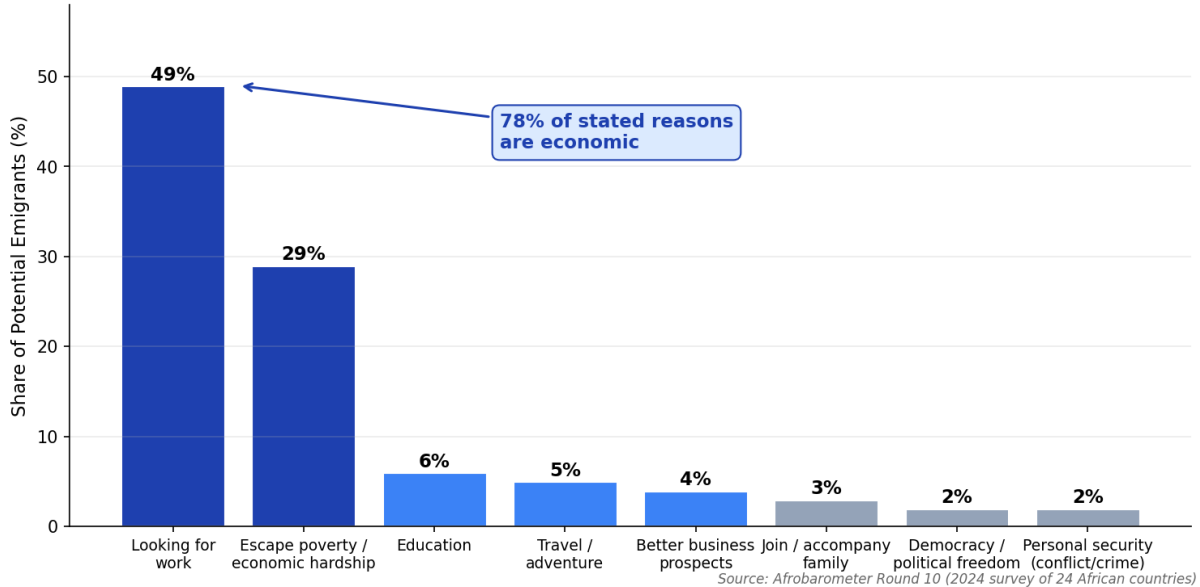


Sources: UN DESA 2024, INSEE 2023, ONS 2021, Saudi Census 2022, ISTAT, INE, StatsCan, ABS, Destatis. Figures vary by definition (first-gen vs. incl. descendants).

Why Africans Leave: The Push Factors

Before examining where Africans go, it helps to understand the forces pushing them out. The most comprehensive primary-source data is **Afrobarometer's Round 10 (2024)** survey covering 24 African countries — replacing the previously-cited 2016/2018 Round 7 data:

**Why Africans Consider Emigrating — Afrobarometer 2024
(24 countries surveyed, R10)**



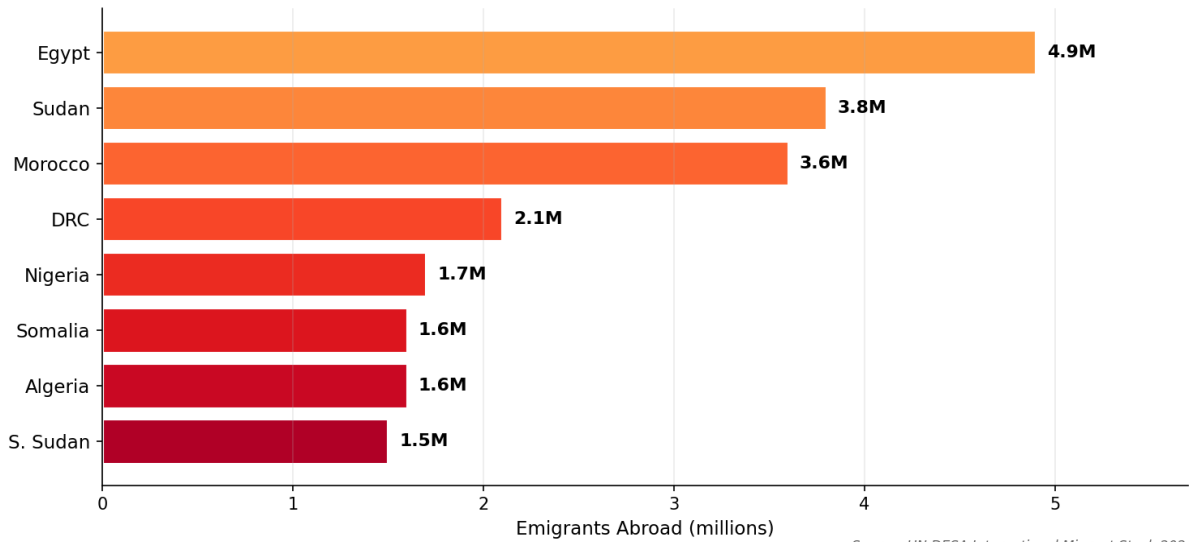
Push Factor	Share of Potential Emigrants
Looking for work	49%
Escape poverty / economic hardship	29%
Education	6%
Travel / adventure	5%
Better business prospects	4%
Join / accompany family	3%
Democracy / political freedom	2%
Personal security (conflict / crime)	2%

The data is unambiguous: **78% of stated reasons for considering emigration are economic** (work + escape from hardship). Safety and conflict — the dominant framing in European political debate — account for just 2% of stated reasons. The **Mo Ibrahim Foundation's 2024 Facts & Figures on African Migrations** reinforces this: 80% of migrations are driven by better economic opportunities, and the typical African migrant is young, educated, and approximately 47% female (UN DESA 2024).

Where Africans Come From

Before reaching their destination, African emigrants leave from a concentrated set of origin countries. **Egypt leads the continent with 4.9 million emigrants abroad** — the majority heading to the Gulf and broader Middle East — followed by Sudan (3.8M), Morocco (3.6M, mostly to Europe), DRC (2.1M), and Nigeria (1.7M), based on UN DESA's International Migrant Stock 2024.

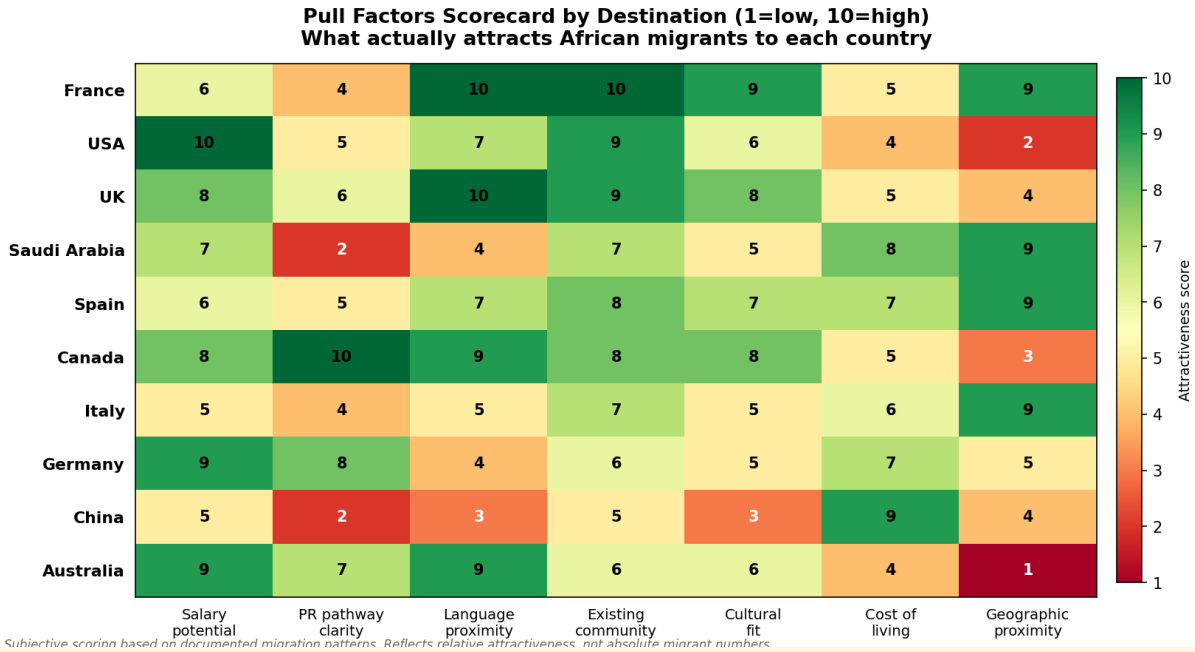
Top African Origin Countries — Where Africans Leave From (2024)



Source: UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024

North African countries dominate the top three because geography, colonial language ties, and proximity to Europe and the Gulf create natural migration corridors. Sub-Saharan Africa's top sender is Nigeria, whose diaspora skews heavily toward skilled professionals (engineers, doctors, tech workers) in the USA and UK.

The Top 10 Destinations — Country Profiles



Note on diaspora population figures: Estimates vary significantly depending on whether they count first-generation immigrants only, include second/third-generation descendants, or count by ethnicity/heritage. Where figures differ, we cite the methodology. France's restrictive ethnic-data laws and Saudi Arabia's distinction between ethnic Afro-Saudis and current African migrants are particularly important to disentangle.

1. France — The Francophone Anchor

African diaspora population: ~3.5 million first-generation African-born immigrants (INSEE 2023, 48% of France's immigrant population). Including second- and third-generation descendants, estimates range from 5 to 8 million people of African heritage — though France's restrictive ethnic-data laws make precise figures impossible to verify. In 2022, France hosted the largest number of African students in the world — over 95,000.

Key communities: Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Malian, Senegalese, Ivoirian, Cameroonian, Congolese (DRC).

Why this destination?

France's African diaspora is not an accident of geography — it is the product of 150 years of colonial entanglement. French is the official or co-official language of 29 African countries, and the French education system was exported wholesale across West and Central Africa. The result: a natural linguistic and cultural pipeline.

Pull factors are layered. University tuition at public French institutions runs roughly €170–380/year for EU students and €2,770–3,770 for international students — dramatically cheaper than the UK or USA. The Schengen Zone provides visa-free access to 26 European countries after arrival. Established communities in Paris suburbs (Seine-Saint-Denis, Val-de-Marne) and cities like Lyon and Marseille reduce the social friction of arrival.

Proximity is real: Dakar to Paris is a 5-hour flight; Abidjan to Paris is 6 hours. The African diaspora in France does not feel like a departure — it feels like an extension of home.

Challenge: Institutional racism and discrimination in the labor market remain documented barriers. Anti-immigration political movements have grown significantly since 2022, increasing social pressure on African communities. France's restrictive citizenship policies (jus soli is conditional) mean many second-generation Africans still navigate dual identities.

2. USA — The Salary Magnet

African diaspora population: Approximately **2.5 million voluntary sub-Saharan African immigrants** (US Census, MPI estimates), plus a smaller North African population. Note: ~42 million Americans identify as Black, but the overwhelming majority are descendants of historic populations, not voluntary African migrants.

Key communities: Nigerian (largest voluntary African immigrant group), Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Somali, Ugandan.

Why this destination?

The United States offers the single largest salary multiple of any destination country for skilled African professionals. Beyond salaries, the USA hosts the world's most prestigious research universities, the deepest capital markets, and the largest venture ecosystem. For educated Africans, the USA is not just a migration destination — it is a career accelerator.

The Nigerian-American community holds the highest educational attainment of any immigrant group in the United States, with median household income exceeding that of US-born averages, per Migration Policy Institute data. The Diversity Visa Lottery (DV-55,000 visas/year) creates a documented legal pathway for Africans with no family connections.

Challenge: US immigration is adversarial for most Africans — there is no direct professional visa from Africa without a US employer sponsor, visa rejection rates are high for African applicants at US consulates, and the political environment around immigration has intensified since 2024.

3. United Kingdom — The Commonwealth Network

African diaspora population: Approximately **3 million people of African heritage** in the UK including descendants, per ONS 2021 Census estimates. First-generation African-born population is closer to 1.5 million, with Nigerians (~272K) and Ghanaians (~136K) the largest individual nationalities, plus 235,000 South Africans.

Key communities: Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, South African, Zimbabwean, Ugandan, Somali.

Why this destination?

The Commonwealth is not merely symbolic — it creates tangible migration infrastructure. University degrees from Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Kenyan institutions are recognized and valued in UK professional markets. English as a shared language eliminates one of the highest barriers in international migration.

The NHS has systematically recruited African healthcare workers since the post-war period, and that pipeline has never stopped. Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, and Zimbabwean nurses and doctors fill structural shortages in Britain's health service — officially and actively recruited through the NHS International Workforce Programme.

The UK also hosts some of the world's most prestigious universities (Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, Imperial) at costs that, while high by European standards, include post-study work rights of up to 2–3 years (Graduate Route visa), making the investment calculable.

Challenge: The UK's post-Brexit immigration environment has become more restrictive and more expensive. The Graduate Route visa was targeted for reduction in 2024 debates. Net migration is a sustained political flashpoint, and African applicants face disproportionately high visa refusal rates at UK Visas and Immigration.

4. Saudi Arabia — The Gulf Labor Corridor

African diaspora population: Approximately **1–1.5 million sub-Saharan African migrants**, dominated by Ethiopians (~750,000 per Ethiopian government and Addis Standard estimates). The 2022 Saudi Census specifically recorded 715,000 nationals from sub-Saharan African countries — 5.3% of the foreign population. Note: figures sometimes cited as "3.6 million Afro-Saudis" conflate current migrants with ethnic Afro-Saudis (descendants of historic populations who are Saudi nationals) and are not directly comparable to migration counts.

Key communities: Ethiopian (dominant), Kenyan, Ugandan, Nigerian, Eritrean, Somali.

Why this destination?

Saudi Arabia is the most underreported major destination in African migration discourse. Its draw is specific: the Gulf labor market pays wages that are inaccessible in East Africa, particularly for domestic workers, caregivers, construction workers, and hospitality staff. An Ethiopian domestic worker in Riyadh can earn several times what comparable work pays in Addis Ababa.

Geographic proximity amplifies the flow: the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya) is separated from the Arabian Peninsula by just 30 km of sea at the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. For migrants who cannot afford European routes, the Gulf corridor is the economically rational choice.

Religious ties matter too — Saudi Arabia is the spiritual center of Islam, and for millions of Muslim Africans, living near Mecca carries cultural and religious significance beyond economics.

Challenge: The kafala (sponsorship) system strips migrant workers of labor rights — they cannot change employers without their sponsor's consent. Documented abuses, particularly against domestic workers, are extensive. Women from Ethiopia and Kenya have faced exploitation in Gulf households, and the ILO has flagged Saudi Arabia repeatedly for migrant worker protection failures. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians have been forcibly deported since the early 2010s.

5. Canada — The Clearest Immigration Pathway

African diaspora population: Approximately **1.5 million Black Canadians** (Statistics Canada 2021 Census), of whom roughly **600,000–800,000 are first-generation continental African immigrants**. The remainder includes Caribbean-origin populations (Haitian, Jamaican) and historic Black Canadian communities. Top continental African source countries: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa.

Key communities: Nigerian, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, South African, Congolese.

Why this destination?

Canada stands out for one reason above all others: **the immigration system is legible**. Express Entry uses a transparent Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) — applicants know their score, know what to improve, and can track draws in real time. There are no arbitrary refusals, no unexplained consular denials. For Africans who have watched family members rejected from US and European visas without explanation, the Canadian system feels like a different world.

The Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) pipeline is particularly powerful: international students can work 24 hours/week during studies, work full-time after graduation on a work permit, and convert to Permanent Residency through Express Entry. The entire journey from student visa to PR typically takes 5–7 years and is well-documented in the Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Kenyan diaspora communities.

Canada's multicultural policy — constitutionally enshrined — creates genuine, if imperfect, social acceptance. Safety scores consistently rank Canadian cities among the world's safest for immigrants.

Challenge: Housing costs in Toronto and Vancouver have become a serious barrier, with average rents for a one-bedroom exceeding CAD \$2,200/month in 2025. The Canadian government tightened international student intake in 2024–2025, reducing study permit issuances in response to domestic housing pressure.

6. Spain — The Atlantic Route

African diaspora population: Approximately **1.2 million people of African descent**, with Morocco (over 800,000) and Senegal representing the largest communities (INE 2023).

Key communities: Moroccan (dominant), Senegalese, Malian, Guinean, Nigerian, Ivoirian.

Why this destination?

Spain is reached through the Atlantic route: the Canary Islands sit just 100 km from the Moroccan coast and within reachable distance for West African fishing boats from Senegal and Mauritania. In 2023, a record 39,910 migrants arrived in the Canary Islands in a single year, per Spanish Interior Ministry data. The numbers reflect the pull force of Spain's labor market — particularly in agriculture, construction, and hospitality.

Spain's Spanish language creates specific synergy with African communities where French is dominant (many West Africans are multilingual, and Spanish is adjacent to French). The established Senegalese community in Barcelona and Madrid — historically one of the largest in Europe — acts as a migration network, facilitating subsequent arrivals and employment connections.

Challenge: Spain has faced intense political controversy over migration management, particularly in the Canary Islands where arrivals have overwhelmed local reception capacity. While Spain provides basic services for asylum seekers, integration support is inconsistent, and labor protections for undocumented agricultural workers are poorly enforced.

7. Italy — The Mediterranean Crossing

African diaspora population: Approximately **1.1 million people of African heritage** in Italy (ISTAT estimates), drawn primarily through the Central Mediterranean route. The community includes long-established

Moroccan, Tunisian, and Senegalese communities as well as recent arrivals from Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, and Mali.

Key communities: Moroccan (largest, ~430K first-gen), Tunisian, Senegalese, Nigerian, Eritrean, Malian, Ghanaian.

Why this destination?

Italy's African diaspora is largely shaped by geography rather than active pull factors. The Central Mediterranean route — from Libya and Tunisia to Lampedusa and Sicily — is one of the world's most active migration corridors. Many arrivals initially seek asylum and remain as Italy's labor market absorbs them into agriculture (seasonal, in Southern Italy), construction, domestic care work, and the informal economy.

Italy's historic colonial ties to Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia create cultural and linguistic connections — small but meaningful.

For a subset of migrants — particularly Senegalese, Malian, and Moroccan communities — Italy is a deliberate destination. Labor demand in the agricultural regions of Puglia, Calabria, and Basilicata creates seasonal employment, and remittances from these earnings are significant for West African families.

Challenge: Italy has implemented some of the harshest anti-migration policies in the EU since 2022 under successive right-wing governments. The Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisia and Libya pays those governments to prevent departure. Social integration support is limited, and documented racism in Italian workplaces and public life is a persistent reality.

8. Germany — The Free Tuition Door

African diaspora population: Approximately **1 million people of African heritage** (Destatis estimates), including descendants. First-generation sub-Saharan African population is closer to 400,000–500,000. The community has grown rapidly since 2015 — long-established Cameroonian, Ghanaian, and Nigerian communities in Frankfurt and Hamburg, plus newer arrivals from Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan following EU asylum processing.

Key communities: Cameroonian, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Eritrean, Somali, Togolese.

Why this destination?

Germany offers perhaps the most transparent value proposition in European migration: **public universities charge a semester administrative fee of roughly €300 — no tuition.** For an African student who can secure admission, Germany delivers a world-class engineering or science degree for the cost of living expenses. DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) supplements this with thousands of full scholarships annually.

Post-graduation, Germany's Skilled Immigration Act (in force since 2020, expanded in 2023) provides an 18-month job-seeker visa and a clear pathway to the EU Blue Card for workers in shortage occupations — which covers the majority of STEM and healthcare fields. Germany's skills shortage is structural and documented: the government needs approximately 400,000 skilled workers per year that the domestic labor market cannot supply.

Challenge: Language remains the dominant barrier — German-taught programs dominate, and B1/B2 proficiency is required for most professional roles. Racism incidents, particularly in Eastern Germany, are a documented risk. Germany's asylum system has simultaneously become more contested politically, creating a more hostile public atmosphere even for skilled migrants who arrive through legitimate pathways.

9. Australia — The Points-Based Meritocracy

African diaspora population: Over **250,000 people of African heritage** in Australia, with South Africans forming the dominant community (approximately 224,000), per the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census. Additional communities from Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Somalia make up the remainder.

Key communities: South African (by far the largest), Sudanese, Ethiopian, Kenyan, Zimbabwean, Somali.

Why this destination?

Australia's skilled migration system is transparent and meritocratic — points are awarded for age, education, English proficiency, work experience, and occupation. For South Africans especially — English-speaking, with professional qualifications recognized under mutual recognition agreements, and culturally proximate — Australia is the most accessible major English-speaking destination after the UK.

Quality of life metrics consistently rank Australian cities (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane) among the world's most livable. Australia's skilled worker demand consistently covers healthcare (nurses, doctors), construction (engineers), and technology — exactly the profiles that dominate African professional emigration.

The South African community is particularly concentrated in Perth (Western Australia), with cultural, sporting, and social clubs creating a dense support network. South African professionals dominate Australia's mining sector, where skills overlap directly.

Challenge: Australia is expensive. Sydney and Melbourne rental markets rank among the world's least affordable, and the cost of living for new arrivals is high. The refugee and asylum seeker pathway has been one of the world's most controversial, with offshore processing on Nauru and Papua New Guinea drawing sustained international criticism.

10. China — The Scholarship Route

African diaspora population: Approximately **60,000–80,000 African students and residents**, though precise current figures are uncertain. The widely-cited 60,800 African student figure represents the 2018 peak — comprehensive post-COVID enrollment data has not been released. The resident African business community (historically concentrated in Guangzhou) adds another 20,000–40,000 to this figure.

Key communities: Nigerian, Cameroonian, Ghanaian, Ugandan, Malian, Tanzanian, Ethiopian.

Why this destination?

China has deliberately cultivated African student migration as a strategic investment since the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The **Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC)** provides full tuition, accommodation, a monthly stipend of CNY 2,500 (undergrad), 3,000 (master's), or 3,500 (PhD) — approximately \$350–490/month — and health insurance. This is a complete funding package for students who qualify. Several thousand African students receive CSC scholarships annually, per FOCAC secretariat data.

Beyond scholarships, Chinese university fees for self-funded students remain dramatically lower than Western equivalents — typically \$3,000–5,000/year for undergraduate engineering or science programs, compared to \$20,000–45,000 in the USA or UK. The STEM focus aligns with strong African demand for engineering, computing, and medical degrees.

The business migration dimension is significant: Guangzhou (nicknamed "Chocolate City" within African trade networks) hosts a large Nigerian, Malian, and Ghanaian trading community engaged in import/export between China and Africa.

Challenge: China does not offer a migration or PR pathway equivalent to Western countries — post-study work visas are limited, and long-term settlement is practically unavailable. Cultural and racial tensions, particularly documented in Guangzhou during COVID-19, exposed the fragility of African communities' position. English-medium programs are growing but still limited outside major cities.

Summary Comparison Table

Rank	Country	Est. African Pop.	Top Communities	Primary Pull
1	France	~3.5M first-gen / ~5–8M incl. descendants	Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Senegal, DRC	Language, proximity, Schengen, low tuition
2	USA	~2.5M voluntary sub-Saharan	Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya	Highest salaries, research, DV Lottery
3	UK	~3M incl. descendants	Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa	NHS recruitment, Commonwealth, English
4	Saudi Arabia	~1–1.5M sub-Saharan migrants	Ethiopia (dominant), Kenya, Uganda	Labor wages, Gulf proximity, religious ties
5	Canada	~600–800K continental Africans (1.5M Black Cdn total)	Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya	Clear PR pathway, safety, multicultural policy
6	Spain	~1.2M	Morocco, Senegal, Mali, Guinea	Atlantic route, agriculture, labor demand
7	Italy	~1.1M	Morocco, Senegal, Nigeria, Eritrea	Mediterranean proximity, agriculture, asylum
8	Germany	~1M incl. descendants (~400–500K SSA 1st-gen)	Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Eritrea	Free tuition, Blue Card, skills shortage
9	Australia	~250K	South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya	Points immigration, quality of life
10	China	~60–80K (students + business)	Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Uganda	CSC scholarships, STEM, affordable living

Sources: UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024 · INSEE 2023 · ONS 2021 Census · Saudi Census 2022 · Gulf Migration Research Centre · Statistics Canada · ISTAT · INE · Destatis · ABS · MPI. Figures vary by methodological definition (first-generation vs. including descendants).

The Pattern Behind the Map

Three structural forces explain the geography of African migration:

1. Colonial language corridors still dominate.

France captures francophone Africa; the UK captures Anglophone Africa; Spain captures North/West Africa; Portugal (not in the top 10 globally but growing) pulls Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde. Language is not just communication — it is the full cultural infrastructure of education, law, and professional recognition. Immigrants follow the languages they were educated in.

2. The salary multiplier drives skilled migration.

Wage gaps documented by the World Bank are real and substantial. A doctor, engineer, software developer, or nurse who emigrates does not just earn more — they access a completely different economic universe. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation estimates that the income gain from Africa-to-Europe migration is among the largest income shocks a household can experience. The gap is not the 70x sometimes claimed in popular framing, but a 5–10x multiple is still life-changing.

3. Network effects compound over time.

Once a community establishes itself in a destination — Nigerian professionals in Houston, Senegalese traders in Paris, Ghanaians in London — the migration corridor self-reinforces. Information flows back. Contacts are made. The next generation follows known paths to known communities. This is why migration corridors are so geographically concentrated and why they are so resistant to policy intervention.

What This Means for the Diaspora

The African diaspora is not a population that left Africa behind — it is a population that is **building bridges**. The same World Bank data that tracks outbound migration also tracks inbound remittances: **Sub-Saharan Africa received approximately \$56 billion in remittances in 2024**, exceeding foreign direct investment and development aid combined. Africa-wide remittances reached approximately \$92–100 billion.

The countries that attract the most African talent are also the countries that receive the most from the diaspora economically, through remittances, trade networks, and knowledge transfer. **Migration is not extraction — it is circulation.**

The next chapter for African migration is not about managing flows. It is about capturing returns: diaspora bonds, dual citizenship reforms, business investment corridors, and the growing movement of second-generation Africans who are choosing to return — with capital, skills, and networks accumulated abroad.

That story is already beginning. The data shows it clearly for anyone willing to read it.

Report compiled June 2026 | All figures verified against primary sources May 2026. Sources: UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2024 · INSEE 2023 · ONS 2021 Census · Saudi Census 2022 (via Gulf Migration Research Centre) · Statistics Canada · Destatis · ISTAT · INE Spain · Australian Bureau of Statistics · Afrobarometer Round 10 (2024) · Mo Ibrahim Foundation Facts & Figures 2024 · World Bank Migration & Development Brief · Migration Policy Institute · FOCAC Secretariat · Glassdoor / PayScale / WorldSalaries (current salary data, May 2026).