

# Africa Visa Openness Report 2024



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP



**“Apart from the fact that you need connectivity, you also need to have freedom for people to move from one place to the other. I believe we cannot say we have borderless trade when we put up barriers for people to travel.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina**  
President, African Development Bank Group

# Welcome to the 2024 Report

The **Africa Visa Openness Index** (AVOI) tracks visa-openness on the African continent:

How easy is it for **African citizens** to travel to other African countries?

What **visa policies** do countries apply to the citizens of other African countries?

Are countries embracing the notion of **freedom of movement** in the broader context of **Africa's integration**, by easing the need for a visa or reducing the administrative overheads in obtaining a visa?

By assessing countries' **visa policies** according to several **key metrics** – whether a visa is required by the casual traveller, and through which means the visa must be obtained – this report provides a **snapshot of where Africa stands** this year, and provides a comparison to previous years.

Each country's **visa policy is measured**, as applicable to the citizens of every other African country, to create a consolidated index.

This year's report sheds further light on **latest developments** and assesses where **countries and RECs** are on easing the movement of people through the proxy of **visa openness**.

# The Bank's New Ten-Year Strategy – anchoring a future of prosperity on the High 5s for transforming Africa



Light up and power Africa Feed Africa  
Industrialise Africa Integrate Africa  
Improve the quality of life for the people of Africa

## Integrate Africa

The African Development Bank (AfDB) was established to promote regional integration in Africa. It is playing a pivotal role through its new Ten-Year Strategy (2024–2033) – a core part of which is the Integrate Africa pillar.

Free movement of people is a cornerstone of regional integration and of the Bank's work in advancing the African Union's (AU) vision to create the world's largest single market in Africa – the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Greater mobility of Africans across the continent will facilitate the creation of larger, more attractive markets – elevating intra-African trade to more consequential levels.

**“The Ten-Year Strategy outlines how the African Development Bank Group (the Bank) will invest in Africa's best asset: its vibrant men and women. Africa's population, which is fast growing in the world, presents the continent with an unparalleled demographic window of opportunity.”<sup>2</sup>**

### Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina

President, African Development Bank Group

Liberal visa policies allow businesspeople to move freely across Africa, resulting in higher levels of investment, skills mobility, expansion of the range of goods and services on offer, and contributing to the overall economic activity and prospects for growth.

To deliver on Integrate Africa, the Bank's Regional Integration Strategy Framework seeks to expand the size of the regional market through building transformative regional infrastructure, enhancing productive capacity for industrialisation, boosting intra-African trade and investment and facilitating the movement of people across borders. The AVOI plays a central role in operationalising this strategy, by tracking the trends in easing people mobility across the continent.

Find out more at [www.afdb.org/en/documents/ten-year-strategy-african-development-bank-group-2024-2033](http://www.afdb.org/en/documents/ten-year-strategy-african-development-bank-group-2024-2033).

# Preface and acknowledgements

That Africans continue to require visas for the most part to enter other African countries is one of the most profound contradictions to the continent's aspirations on regional integration. In this ninth edition of the AVOI, the AfDB and the African Union Commission (AUC) join hands to present what is a mixed set of findings. On the one hand, some countries have made progress, and on the other, regression in rankings is observed. The situation and performance of countries within the AU-recognised Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are assessed. A unique feature of this report is the investigation of the question of Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs) which, notwithstanding intent, resemble features of a visa. The report also updates on emerging opportunities for mobility in the AfCFTA and reflects on the status of the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons (PFMP).

One thing is clear – Africa will not meet its development aspirations in the absence of regimes that promote mobility across the continent. Think of tourism. There is no single country that does not want to reap the dividends of tourism – given the continent's abundance of some of the most historic attractions. And yet, visa restrictions make it difficult for Africans to contribute to each other's tourism revenues. Or industrialisation, as the continent looks to build the production houses to benefit from the AfCFTA, it is imperative that people can move – not only to bring skills into managing such operations but also to take advantage of the jobs that will be created. It follows therefore that creation of conditions easing movement of Africans across Africa is in the continent's enlightened self-interest.

While some progress has been made since the inaugural edition of the AVOI, we are far from where we need to be. The good news is there is a solid base to build from. Many of Africa's RECs have significant advancements in a *rights-based* approach to movement: the right to enter, reside and establish. This is something that should inspire us to know that it is possible – and it can work. It is also noteworthy that Africans are moving. Research shows that more Africans leave their countries for another African country, than they do leave the continent. This makes it more urgent to get solutions that work – that are safer and that are orderly.

I am confident that with the right mobilisation of advocacy for visa-free movement, better results can be achieved. This report is a contribution in that direction.

I would like to express deep appreciation to the leadership of both the AfDB and AUC for championing the AVOI. Special thanks go to the team at the AfDB, Zodwa Florence Mabuza who is at the heart of the production of this report. Thanks also go to Jean Guy Afrika who offered substantive guidance, as well as the consultants that supported data collection and analysis in the production of this edition: Gbanbele Coulibaly and Johanna Pangeiko Nautwima. Appreciation also goes to Eckart Naumann – who drafted the report, to Peggy King Cointepas for graphic design, and to Lucinda Cruickshank for editing services.

**Dr. Joy Kategekwa**

Director

Regional Integration Coordination Office

African Development Bank Group

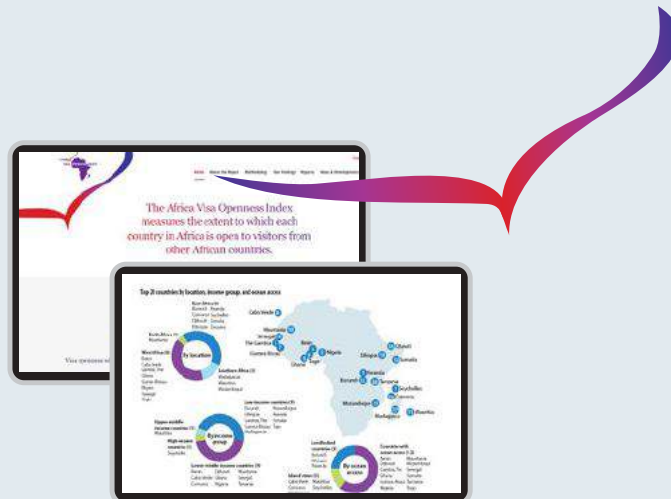
## Africa Visa Openness Index

The AVOI measures the extent to which African countries are open to visitors from other African countries. The AVOI analyses each country's visa requirements to show which African countries most facilitate travel to their territory.

For each country, the AVOI calculates the number of African countries whose citizens must obtain a visa before travelling there, the number of countries whose citizens may obtain a visa upon arrival, and the number of countries whose citizens can enter visa-free. Each country is then assigned an AVOI score and ranked accordingly.

First published in 2016, the AVOI also tracks changes in countries' scores over time. It does the same for the eight AU-recognised RECs. The report analyses these trends in light of other developments in Africa and in the world.

Data for this year's edition was collected in July and August 2024. As is the case with all previous editions, the main source of data and information was the International Air Transport Association (IATA).



[www.visaopenness.org](http://www.visaopenness.org)

**THE AVOI'S ONLINE PLATFORM** summarises the visa policy of each country in Africa, shows the changes in each country's scores and rankings from year to year, and explains how the continent is performing on visa openness overall.

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

AES	<i>Alliance des États du Sahel</i> (Alliance of Sahel States)
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank Group
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AVOI	Africa Visa Openness Index
CEMAC	Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
E-visa	Electronic visa
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETA	Electronic Travel Authorisation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GTI	Guided Trade Initiative
IATA	International Air Transport Association
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
PAPSS	Pan-African Payments & Settlement System
PFMP	Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons
QR code	Quick Response code
REC	Regional Economic Community
RoO	Rules of Origin
SAATM	Single African Air Transport Market
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TPR	Trade Promoting Regime
TYS	Ten-Year Strategy
USD	United States Dollar
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

## Use of terminology

Visa openness refers to the ease with which travellers can obtain authorisation to travel to and enter a country, pending final determination by the destination country's immigration officials. The more visa-open a country, the easier it is for a traveller to visit that country.

There are different degrees of visa openness. A more visa-open country has a generally more liberal or relaxed visa policy for visitors, meaning that visitors either do not need a visa to enter its territory, or can obtain a visa upon arrival. In contrast, a visa-restrictive country requires visitors to obtain a visa before they travel. In such instances, visitors may be required to obtain a visa from an embassy, a consulate, or another source. Many countries have implemented electronic visa (e-visa) systems, adding a measure of convenience, but still requiring the visa application process to be completed ahead of travel.

Where percentage scores are assigned, this generally relates to the share of African citizens that a country's particular visa policy applies to, or in the case of visa reciprocity, the proportion that a country's visa policies are reciprocated by every other country within the region.



## Methodology

The individual scores, derived from countries' different categories of visa policies, serve as proxy indicators of the ease with which citizens can travel to each country, and as a broad reflection of how welcoming countries are to the citizens of other African countries.

The AVOI score for a country is calculated by aggregating the individual scores for the country's visa policy as applied towards the citizens of every other African country. Here the methodology primarily differentiates between policies that require travellers to apply for and obtain a visa ahead of travel, where travellers have the option of obtaining a visa on arrival at the port of entry in the destination country, and travel scenarios where entry is permitted without the requirement for a visa.

### Scores and rankings

AVOI scores range from 0 to 1, where 0 applies to a country with the most restrictive visa policies (that require a visa to be obtained ahead of travel by all travellers), while a score of 1 applies when a country has removed visa restrictions for all other African citizens.

The higher a country's index score (the closer to 1), the more "visa-open" the country is and the higher it ranks on the AVOI.

### Categories and weightings

To calculate each country's score, the AVOI assesses the visa policy each country applies to the citizens of each of the other 53 countries on the continent and classifies each policy in one of three categories. The AVOI gives each category a weighting:

Category	Weighting
Visa before travel	0
Visa on arrival	0.8
Visa-free	1.0

### Calculations

To compute the country's score, the AVOI follows four steps:

1. It counts the number of countries that fall in each visa category (visa before travel, visa on arrival, visa-free).
2. It converts that number into a percentage of all countries in Africa.
3. It weighs each percentage according to the weighting given to each category.
4. It adds the figures.

### Formula

AVOI score = [(% of African countries whose nationals must obtain a visa before travelling  $\times$  0) + (% of African countries whose nationals may obtain a visa on arrival  $\times$  0.8) + (% of African countries whose nationals are not required to obtain a visa  $\times$  1)]

### An example

Country X requires the nationals of 13 countries to obtain a visa before travel; allows the nationals of 30 countries to obtain a visa on arrival; and it allows the nationals of 10 other countries to enter its territory visa-free. Country X's score is calculated as follows:

$$\text{AVOI score for Country X} = [(13/53 \times 0) + (30/53 \times 0.8) + (10/53 \times 1)] = 0.642$$



## Foreword

# African Development Bank Group

Africa is advancing on its quest for greater integration, and the AVOI provides a clear gauge of progress – to ensure there is constant attention to the need to create a continent where movement is seamless, and borders connect rather than divide. This year’s Index reveals both inspiring progress and some persistent barriers.



At the AfDB, we see visa openness as fundamental to realising the goals of our Ten-Year Strategy (2024–2033), which seeks to seize Africa’s *opportunities for a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and integrated continent*. When we remove barriers to movement, we facilitate the creation of larger, more attractive markets, enhance intra-African trade, and encourage investments that boost job creation and industrialisation.

Many African countries have stepped up action to simplify visa processes or offer visa-free or visa-on-arrival options to more African travellers. Today, visa openness across Africa stands at its highest level since we began tracking it nine years ago in 2016. So far, 39 African countries have improved their scores, a testament to Africa’s shared commitment to ease travel and foster collaboration across borders.

Despite this progress, the 2024 AVOI reveals pestering challenges. Many Africans still face significant visa hurdles when crossing into neighbouring countries, not only restricting access to opportunities for curious travellers, but also constraining the dreams of young entrepreneurs, and professionals.

As we seek to advance the AfCFTA, strengthen regional value chains, and open new opportunities in the dynamic services sector, it is evident that visas, their attendant processes and high costs, are barriers we must dismantle. To achieve “*The Africa We Want*” as envisioned in the AU Agenda 2063, we must address these barriers with urgency and creativity. Solutions such as e-visas and electronic travel authorisation are paving the way for easier travel. But we can and must go further. As regional economic communities continue to model best practices for free movement, we have an opportunity to expand these practices continent-wide.

By breaking down visa-related barriers, we will come much closer to an Africa that is united by shared goals, free movement and collective prosperity for all. It is my hope that this Index continues to serve as a powerful tool for policy makers, spotlighting areas to celebrate, while highlighting areas for continual improvement. The African Development Bank is proud to support this important work alongside the African Union Commission.

**Nnenna Lily Nwabufo**

Vice President, Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery  
African Development Bank Group

African countries continue to make strides in finalising several outstanding issues on the AfCFTA. In accordance with the AU’s vision to be a socio-economically well-integrated continent, this important flagship project of the AU’s framework for structural transformation – Agenda 2063 – is expected to uplift millions of the continent’s citizens out of poverty by



boosting intra-Africa trade in goods and services, creating economic opportunities domestically and a platform for the expansion of intra-African value chains, and by reducing barriers to the movement of capital.

They all have one thing in common: successful outcomes hinge on the ease with which Africans are able to cross national borders, be it for economic reasons, to share ideas, to enable greater social cohesion, as entrepreneurs, or to provide and obtain services outside of their home country. The inherent sharing of services in productive activities and trade is often vastly underestimated, yet remains a critical component.

In turn, nearly all services contain a human element, and for the most part, involve the movement of persons across borders in the delivery or sourcing of such services. The freedom to move is thus a key determinant of an endogenous stimulus for development towards the ultimate success of the AfCFTA in achieving its goals and objectives.

Bringing together 55 countries under one preferential trade umbrella, whose disciplines extend beyond trade in goods and services but also cover investment, digital trade, women and youth in trade, competition, and intellectual property rights, has been a momentous undertaking. Ultimately, traders in every country will be in a position to trade on a preferential basis with every other market and country on the continent. While work remains to be done, several important initiatives ensure that positive outcomes are already felt: the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), with an increasing number of participating countries, has allowed commercially meaningful trade under the AfCFTA to begin; an online reporting and monitoring system helps address and eliminate non-tariff barriers; and the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) facilitates efficient cross-border payments in different currencies in real time. Accordingly, civil registration and interoperable systems including digitised legal identity play a crucial role in easing movements and bolstering cross-border trade.

This year’s AVOI report demonstrates that the only constant is change: several developments on visa openness suggest positive policy trajectory and political will to ease the cross-border movement of persons. However, several countries remain reluctant, and the emerging success stories will hopefully contribute to further positive momentum overall. There remains a long way to go, and much room for progress on visa openness to translate into deeper and more progressive commitments on facilitating the movement of businesspersons and service providers across Africa’s borders.

Let us embrace the opportunities before us.

**H.E. Ambassador Minata Samate Cessouma**

Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development  
African Union Commission

# Visa openness in Africa: Findings

2024 Intra-Africa travel

Update on e-visas

Africa's 2024 top 20

Spotlight on 2023–2024  
performers

Progress since 2016

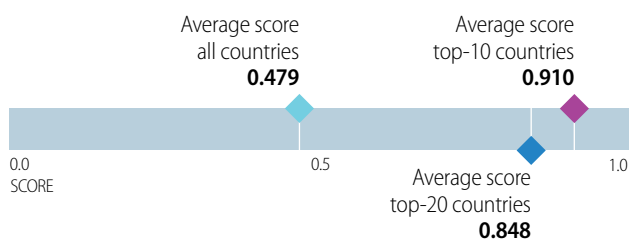
Electronic travel  
authorisations:  
a visa by another name?

# 2024: A year of change

## The year 2024 witnessed important changes in AVOI scores.

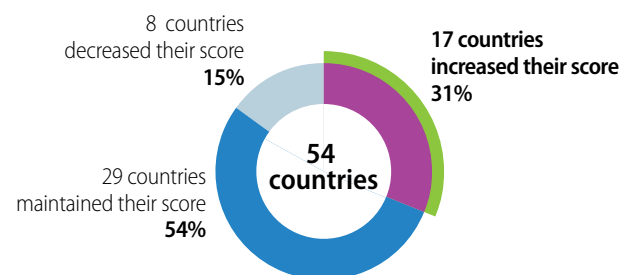
Of 54 countries on the continent, 17 have improved their AVOI score over the past year, building on the 15 countries that showed an improvement in the last edition. Twenty-nine (29) countries' scores remain unchanged (2023: 35), while eight countries score lower in this edition (2023: 4). The net effect of these changes has been a slightly lower aggregate score than in 2023, down from 0.485 (2023) to 0.479 (2024). In the context of the AVOI, this score is on par with 2022, and higher than the aggregate score in the six prior years.

## Average AVOI scores, 2024



In 2024, several countries have implemented visa policy changes. Some have been bold, instituting positive visa reforms which have resulted in tangible progress towards a more open continent. Many have involved bilateral changes in visa policy, often on a reciprocal basis and implemented in a seemingly coordinated manner. In some instances, policy changes have been more nuanced, while still resulting in tangible benefits for those directly affected, especially on the introduction of e-visas.

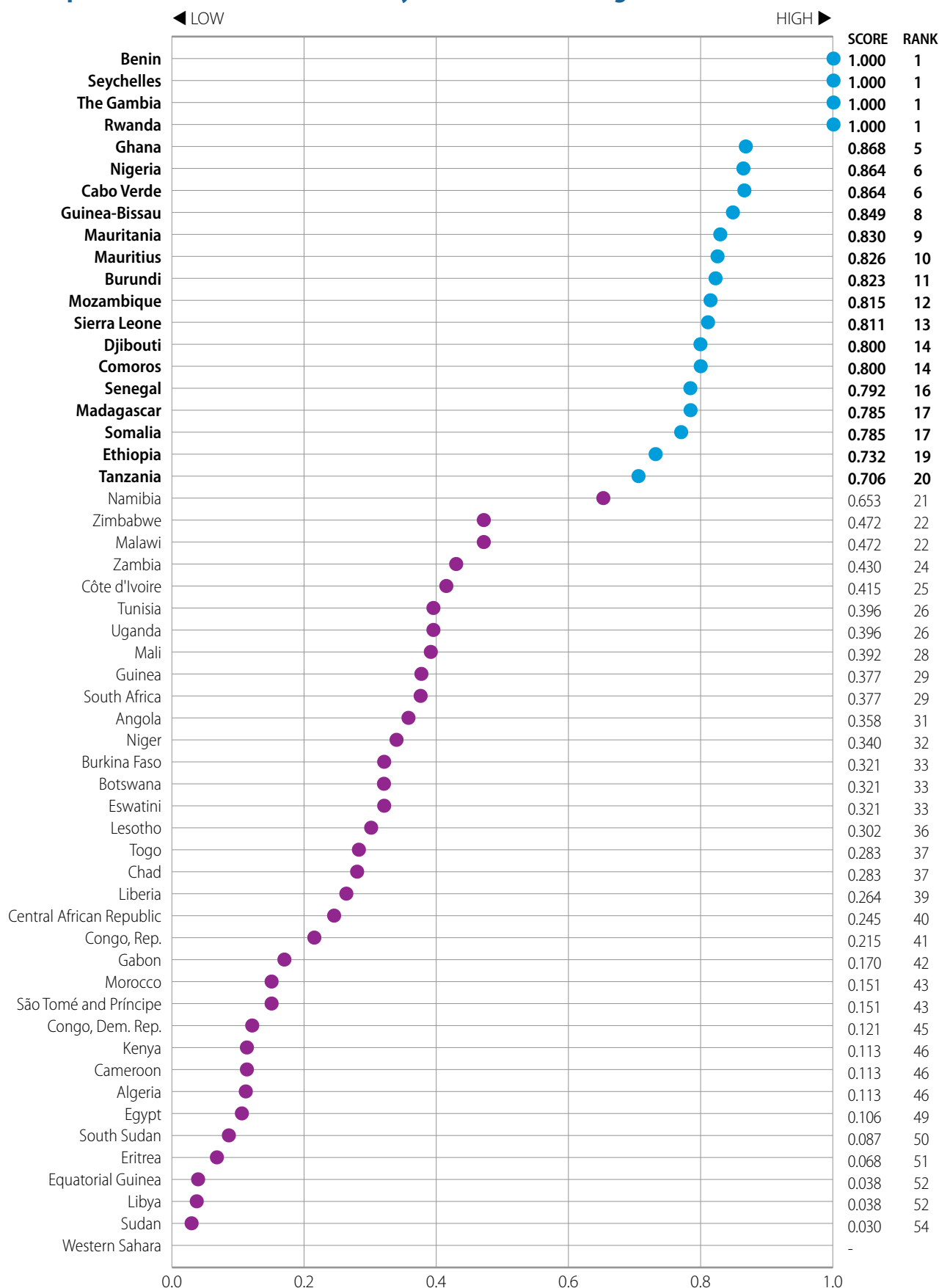
## Change in AVOI score, 2023–2024



Other policy changes have created new impediments that undermine the ease of movement, resulting in more burdensome travel for some citizens. Some of these policy changes relate to domestic or foreign policy, political, security or other concerns. For example, during 2024, some countries removed the option of obtaining a visa on arrival, requiring travellers to obtain a visa (traditional or electronic) before embarking on their journey. In other instances, a significant number of countries have embraced new technologies and launched processes of digitising the travel and immigration process, which although well intended, added additional layers of requirements to the traveller and did not facilitate ease of movement. The introduction of ETAs by some countries is a case in point.

Conflict in some parts of Africa plays a role in travel and migration more broadly, displacing people, forcing them to move, yet also impeding their movement in some cases, and often resulting in a lived experience for cross-border travellers that diverges from official policy.

## Visa openness in Africa 2024: Country scores and rankings

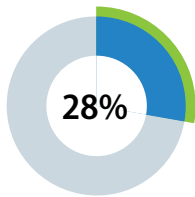


Scores range from 0–1 (highest).

Source: African Development Bank calculations based on IATA data, July–August 2024.

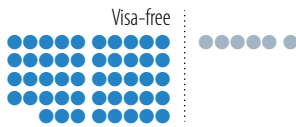
## 2024 Intra-Africa travel\*

### Visa-free entry



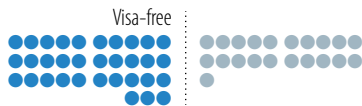
**For 28% of intra-Africa travel\*, Africans do not need a visa**

No change from 2023 and up from 20% in 2016

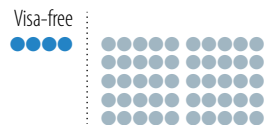


**48 of 54 countries currently offer visa-free entry privileges to the citizens of at least one other African country, unchanged from the previous year.**

Of those that do not offer any visa-free access, four are ranked in the top 20 on the AVOI since they offer visa-on-arrival facilities to the citizens of all other African countries.

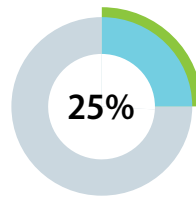


**33 of 54 countries offer visa-free travel to at least 10 other countries, while 42 apply this policy to five or more countries.**



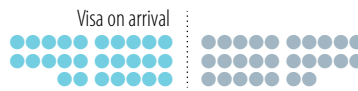
**Four countries offer visa-free entry to the citizens of the rest of the continent (unchanged from 2023).**

### Visas on arrival



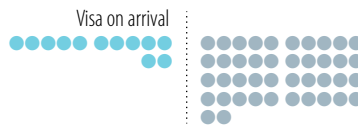
**For 25% of intra-Africa travel\*, Africans can obtain a visa on arrival**

Down from 26% in 2023, and no change from 2016



**27 countries offer a visa on arrival to the citizens of at least one other African country (2023: 30).**

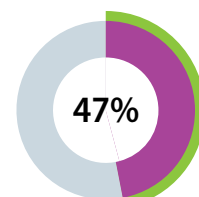
Changes in this metric follow Burkina Faso, Togo and Chad removing visa-on-arrival facilities, with the former two countries adopting an e-visa process.



**12 countries offer a visa on arrival to the citizens of at least 35 other African countries.**

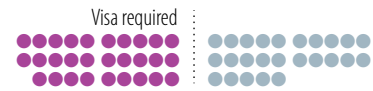
The same 12 countries only require a visa ahead of travel from a combined 9 African countries.

### Visas ahead of travel and e-visas

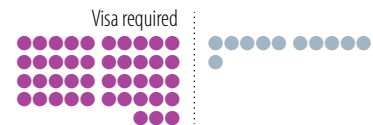


**For 47% of intra-Africa travel\*, Africans need a visa before travelling**

Up from 46% in 2023 and down from 55% in 2016



**29 countries require a visa ahead of travel from citizens of at least half the countries on the continent.**



**43 countries require the citizens from at least one other country on the continent to obtain a visa ahead of travel.**

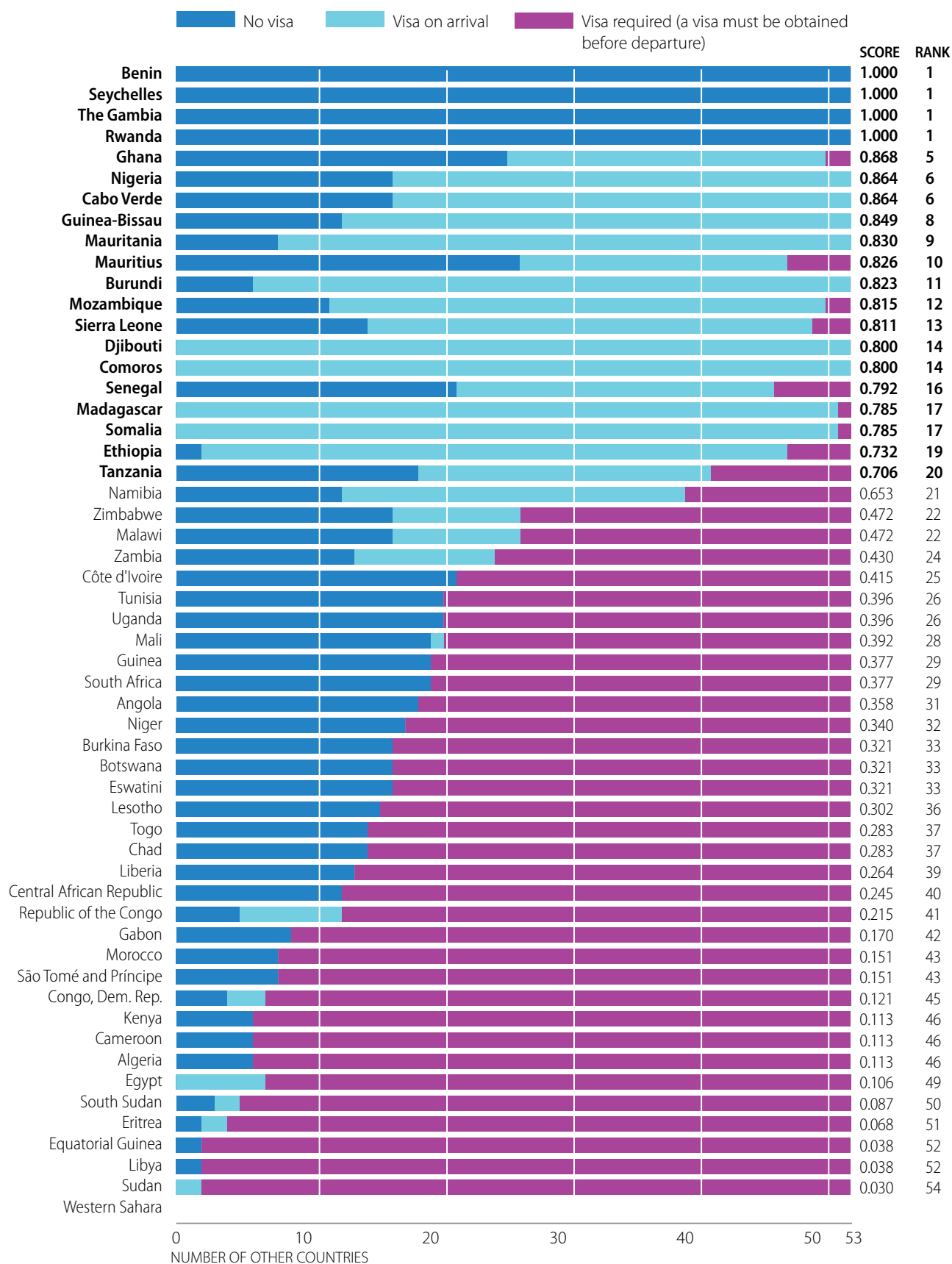


**26 countries offer visitors an e-visa.**

This allows travellers to complete an important component of their travel arrangements online before travelling, adding convenience.

\*Intra-Africa travel refers to travel by African citizens between African countries.

## Types of entry that African countries offer each other, in order of AVOI score



Scores range from 0–1 (highest).

Source: African Development Bank calculations based on IATA data, July–August 2024.



## Update on e-visas

E-visas offer travellers the option of obtaining a visa through electronic means ahead of travel. The key distinction between an e-visa and a traditional visa lies in the procedural convenience associated with e-visas which can be completed from the comfort of one's home or office, or even while travelling. An important benefit lies in the fact that an e-visa does not require the applicant to part with their passport, or to travel to the relevant diplomatic representation office, which may be in another city (entailing extra cost, and being without a passport for a period of time – itself bringing with it considerable additional risk). Some of the key benefits of e-visas are:

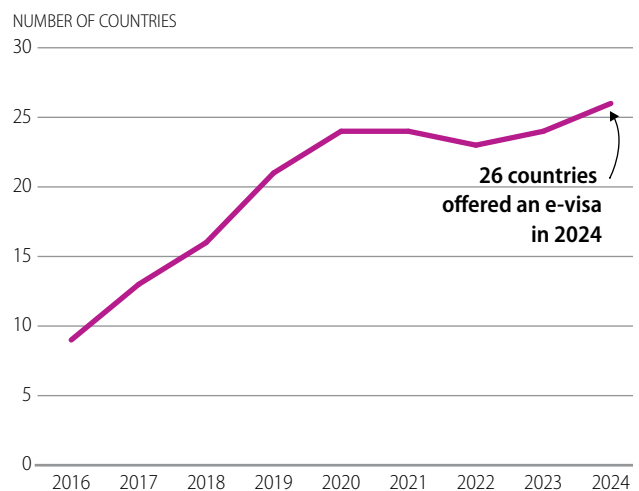
- **Convenience:** the traveller applies electronically
- **Reduced risk:** the applicant retains their passport during the process
- **Less cost:** no shipping or travel costs, no time off work, and potentially lower application costs
- **Efficiency:** lower administrative overheads and consular facilities needed
- **Better data capture:** benefits of digital data capture and retention enable improved decision making and automation
- **More visitors:** lower turnaround times and administrative overhead can increase desire to visit a country

Fundamentally, an e-visa retains the key elements of a visa ahead of travel and is recognised as such in the AVOI. Information requirements from the applicant are often the same or similar, which may include biometric data, copies of air tickets, confirmed accommodation in the destination country, letters of invitation, a means test (such as bank statements), a scanned copy of the passport and so forth. Some African e-visa systems are more complex and demanding than others, and this remains the prerogative of the host country.

E-visas can be considered a part of a country's digital strategy and immigration modernisation process. They offer advantages to the prospective traveller in terms of cost, time and convenience, but depending on the specific country's requirements, can still involve a significant administrative overhead. They also necessitate access to digital facilities for the application process. For the host country, they require investment in an appropriate web-based platform, and associated digital systems and processes, but offer the benefit of digitally capturing and storing applicant's information. This imposes obligations around digital security and privacy on the host country.

While an e-visa represents technological progress and eases the administrative burden on both the traveller and authorities, it remains but an interim step and should be part of an effort that ultimately eases cross-border travel without visas, so as to fulfil the aspiration of a truly integrated continent. For e-visas to reduce the travel burden and increase efficiency, the process of obtaining them should be efficient, technically reliable, secure, transparent, affordable, and reduce the overall administrative overhead on the traveller.

### The growing use of e-visas, 2016–2024



Africa's experience with e-visas has been somewhat mixed: even though the number of e-visa portals has grown from 24 to 26<sup>3</sup> over the past year, the 2024 AVOI report nevertheless notes several shortcomings.

While most of the sites offer a relatively straightforward process involving the uploading of biometric information of the prospective traveller, submission of a passport-type or self-taken photograph, and certain other travel information (such as details of the travel itinerary or confirmation of air tickets and accommodation), others are more akin to an ETA and advise that the e-visa should first be obtained before making final travel arrangements. That would preclude confirmed air tickets and accommodation. This process sometimes requires collection of the e-visa at the port of entry, using proof of the travel authorisation or entry letter previously obtained through the destination country's e-visa process. In some systems, the e-visa is issued for self-printing or storage on an electronic device, while others issue a quick response (QR) code that allows collection of the e-visa at the port of entry – in effect merging a form of ETA with a visa-on-arrival process.

But several e-visa systems do not necessarily offer the expected convenience, or security of data. An e-visa portal that is not secure means that the connection between the website and the applicant's web browser is not encrypted, potentially exposing information such as credit card numbers and other personal information to interception by third parties.

In one particular country's e-visa platform, travellers were notified of the suspension of services. Another country's e-visa portal provided no information on eligibility, basic requirements or costs, and all its web links and references for additional information were inactive. A written enquiry to the stated address raising this issue yielded no response or change, at the time of publication. In other sites, the availability of basic information on costs, critical documents or information requirements in a clear, non-contradictory manner to facilitate application completion was missing and only revealed after registration on the e-visa portal, allowing little space for preparation. Regular review of e-visa systems is encouraged to ensure that they facilitate simpler processes.

The costs of e-visas also vary significantly among countries. For example, an e-visa may cost USD 10/EUR 10 (for stays up to 14 days) in one country, while in another, it could go up to EUR 153.

Visa costs can add significant overheads to the overall travel burden. It is not clear whether visa costs are intended to contribute to basic and direct administrative overheads, are a form of cost recovery by the issuing country (for processing and system maintenance) or are a lucrative source of revenue. In order to facilitate intra-African movement of people, it is important that these costs, where they exist are affordable, reasonable and an approximation of the service rendered, rather than solely a source of revenue.

## Africa's 2024 top 20

Benin, The Gambia, Rwanda and the Seychelles continue to occupy the top spot on the AVOI even this year. 16 of the top-20 ranked countries are located in West and Eastern Africa in equal parts (8 in West Africa and 8 in East Africa). North Africa is represented by one country (Mauritania) whilst Southern Africa accounts for three countries, namely Madagascar, Mauritius and Mozambique.

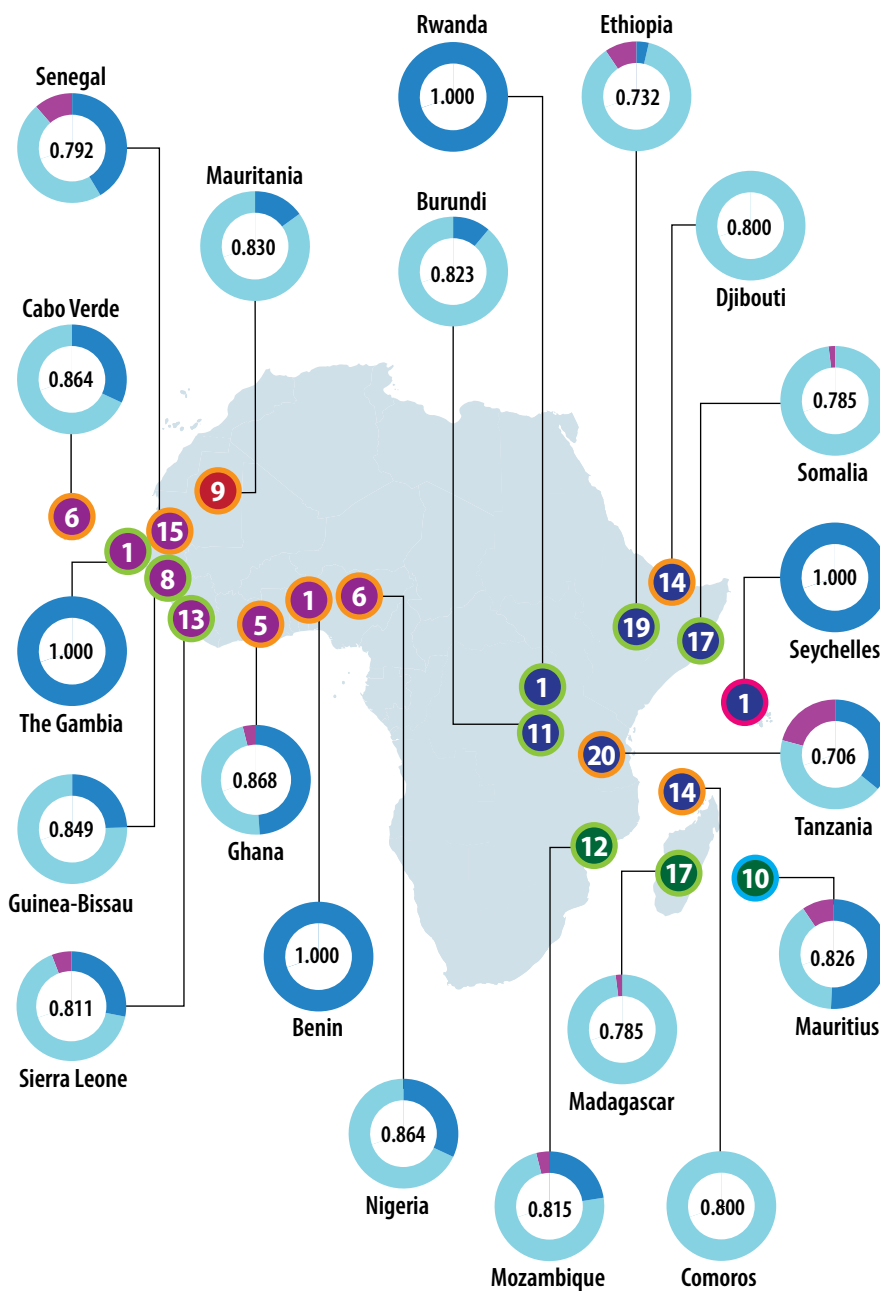
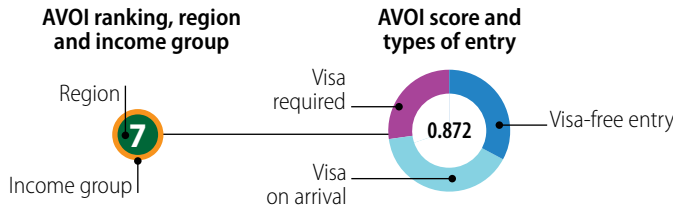
Eighteen of the top-20 countries on the AVOI are classified as either lower-middle-income, or low-income countries, suggesting that lower income countries are often more embracing of liberal visa regimes. In contrast, several of the higher income countries continue to maintain restrictive visa regimes, perhaps owing to concerns around visa openness incentivizing inbound travel for purely economic reasons or creating pathways to irregular migration. It should be noted that visa-openness, as measured by the AVOI, relates to casual travel and is not linked to other rights, such as the right to undertake business activities, or take up residence.

Nevertheless, two of the top-20 countries, classified as upper-middle-income (Mauritius) and high-income (Seychelles), are an exception, and may be explained in the context of their geographic location as Island States, and not typically subject to the same travel and migration routes as countries with land borders. As is shown in the graphic on the following page, five of the top-20 countries on the AVOI are Island States (Cabo Verde, Comoros, Mauritius, Madagascar and Seychelles). Their visa policies range from visa-free to visa-on-arrival, or a combination of both.

Three of the landlocked countries rank in the top 20, and these are Rwanda, Burundi and Ethiopia. Burundi takes a predominantly visa-on-arrival approach for all citizens from other African countries, apart from those of six EAC Member States, who are granted visa free entry. Ethiopia also offers a visa-on-arrival to citizens of 46 countries, while citizens of four countries that previously qualified for a visa-on-arrival are now required to obtain this ahead of travel.

## A closer look at the Top 20 countries: region, type of entry, ranking, score and income group

### HOW TO READ THIS CHART



### BY REGION

- North Africa (1)**  
Mauritania
- East Africa (8)**  
Burundi  
Comoros  
Djibouti  
Ethiopia  
Rwanda  
Seychelles  
Somalia  
Tanzania
- Southern Africa (3)**  
Madagascar  
Mauritius  
Mozambique
- West Africa (8)**  
Cabo Verde  
The Gambia  
Benin  
Ghana  
Guinea-Bissau  
Nigeria  
Senegal  
Sierra Leone

### BY INCOME GROUP\*

- High-Income country (1)**  
Seychelles
- Upper Middle-Income Country (1)**  
Mauritius
- Lower Middle-Income Countries (9)**  
Benin  
Cabo Verde  
Comoros  
Djibouti  
Ghana  
Mauritania  
Nigeria  
Senegal  
Tanzania
- Lower Income Countries (9)**  
Burundi  
Ethiopia  
The Gambia  
Guinea-Bissau  
Madagascar  
Mozambique  
Rwanda  
Sierra Leone  
Somalia

### BY ACCESS TO PORTS

#### Landlocked countries (3)

- Burundi
- Ethiopia
- Rwanda

#### Island states (5)

- Cabo Verde
- Comoros
- Madagascar
- Mauritius
- Seychelles

#### Coastal states (12)

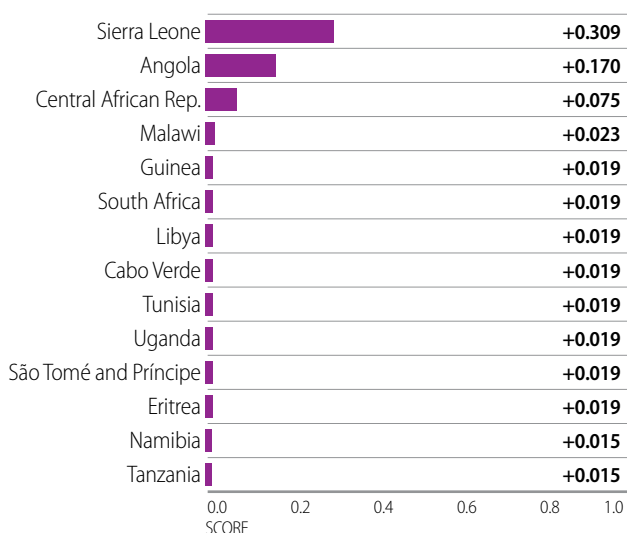
- Benin
- Djibouti
- The Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea-Bissau
- Mauritania
- Mozambique
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- Tanzania

\*Source, income classification: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

## Spotlight on 2023–2024 performers

Some significant and notable improvements have occurred over the past year. Sierra Leone and Angola have shown the greatest increase in their AVOI score. Sierra Leone now offers citizens of 15 countries visa-free access, a slight increase over 2023 (13). Angola has added nine countries to its list of citizens who qualify for visa-free access, almost doubling the number of countries whose citizens previously qualified for the same (2023: 10).

### Countries who increased\* their AVOI score, 2023–2024



\*Three other countries (Ghana, Mozambique and Chad) that increased their score less than 0.010 are not shown.

## Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has made significant strides in easing access to travellers, resulting in a 62% increase in its visa openness score, significantly changing its rank from 22nd in 2023 to 13th in 2024. This improvement follows Sierra Leone’s granting of visa-free access to citizens of two more countries – Ghana and Nigeria, whereas the policy before was granting visa on arrival. Since both Ghana and Nigeria are ECOWAS Member States, this has also impacted positively on ECOWAS’ regional reciprocity score, which now stands at 99%, leaving Guinea Bissau as the sole member to not fully reciprocate regional visa-free policies (with respect to citizens of Cabo Verde).

**SIERRA LEONE**  
AVOI RANKING 13  
SCORE 0.811  
INCREASE 2023–2024 +0.309

The most impactful policy change for Sierra Leone is that citizens of 20 countries no longer require a visa ahead of travel to the country. Today, only citizens from three countries are subjected to visa requirements ahead of travel, and these are from Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia. While citizens of most African countries still require a visa to enter Sierra Leone, 35 now qualify for a visa on arrival, with citizens of 15 countries offered visa-free access. Sierra Leone has also concluded reciprocal agreements with some countries to exempt their citizens from paying for their visas: this benefits the following AU Member States: Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi and Mauritius.

## Angola

Angola now offers visa-free access to citizens of 19 African countries, an increase from the 10 recorded in the 2023 AVOI report. In a presidential decree late in 2023 (No. 189/23), Angola announced sweeping changes to its visa regime for tourism purposes and extended visa-free access to citizens of an additional 98 countries mostly outside of Africa, for short stays of up to 30 days (and 90 days per year). Until that point, Angola had granted some African countries visa-free access, mainly under bilateral agreements (Mozambique, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa and Zambia).

Angola also announced simplified bureaucratic procedures in the granting of visas at its consular facilities as well as its e-visa portal, guaranteeing processing in under three working days for both.

For citizens utilising the e-visa portal, pre-entry electronic authorisation is granted, and the traveller then obtains the visa at the port of entry. Information obtained from this portal suggests that the documentary requirements are relatively straightforward: applicants must be in possession of a relevant travel document (passport) and fulfil certain security criteria (such as not being included in a list of unwanted persons).

Since Angola does not offer visa-on-arrival facilities, these changes are noteworthy and potentially impactful, given that the countries whose citizens now qualify for visa-free access, previously had to obtain a visa prior to travel. Even though Angola still requires a visa ahead of travel, which applies to the citizens of 34 countries, the newly introduced expedited processing of visas will ease movement to the country.



These positive policy changes on visa requirements impact citizens from several countries across Africa, in different regions. They are Algeria and Morocco (North Africa), Equatorial Guinea (Central Africa), São Tomé and Príncipe (West Africa), Madagascar and Tanzania (East Africa) as well as Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar and Malawi (Southern Africa). Six of these countries, now accorded visa-free status, are members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – as is Angola.

Previously, visa-free access to Angola was accorded mainly to countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, with Cabo Verde in West Africa as an exception.

Both Angola and Cabo Verde are Community of Portuguese Language Countries, and former Portuguese colonies. Previous visa-free beneficiaries were mainly the result of bilateral agreements (Mozambique, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa and Zambia).

Citizens from two of Angola’s three neighbours currently do not require a visa to enter Angola: Namibia and Zambia. Although Angola remains in the lower half of the AVOI, ranked 31st, the relaxation of its visa policy has resulted in a jump of 10 places from ranking number 41st in 2023.

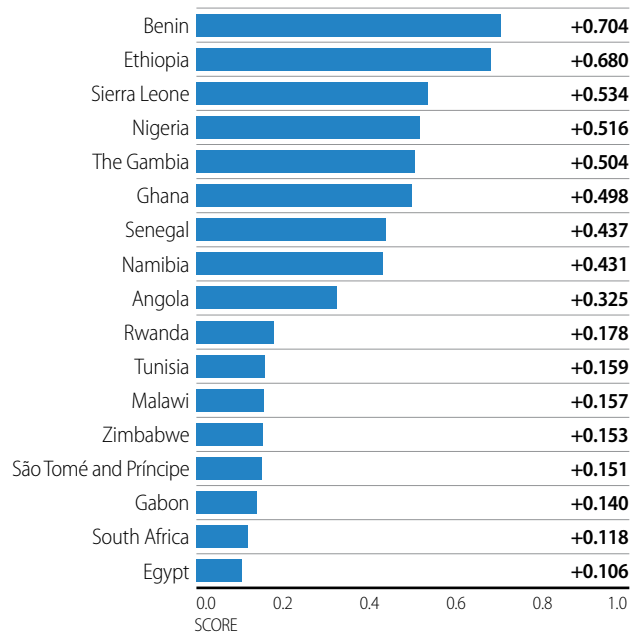
## Progress since 2016

### Countries that have improved the most

Over the period 2016 to 2024, 39 countries score higher now than they did in 2016, a reflection of overall progress towards easing travel between African countries.

The following five countries have had the most improved scores on the AVOI: Benin (moved rank from 31 to 1), Ethiopia (from 46 to 19), Sierra Leone (from 32 to 13), Nigeria (from 25 to 6) and Gambia (from 18 to 1). Some are now joint top-ranked countries on the AVOI, a commendable achievement given the individual progress on embracing visa openness that they have made in recent years.

### Countries that increased\* their AVOI score, 2016–2024



\*22 other countries that increased their score less than 0.100 are not shown.

The most striking observation about changes in visa openness since 2016 is that there has been a significant increase in the number of intra-Africa travel scenarios where African citizens are no longer subject to a visa requirement concerning casual travel. This metric has moved from 20% in 2016 to 28% in 2024, translating to a 40% increase in visa-free travel over the past nine years.

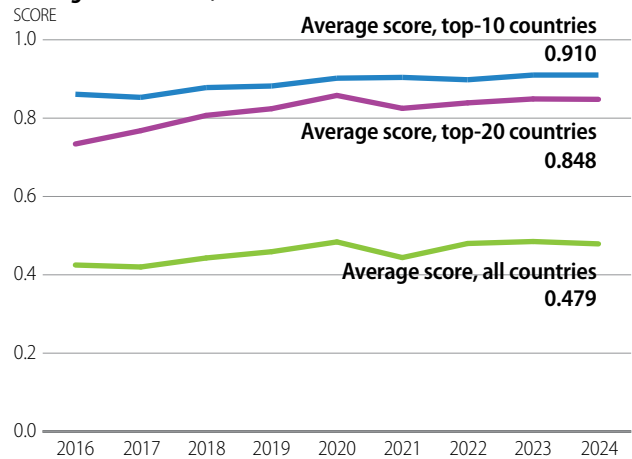
These positive developments are illustrated in the **first indicator** (see graphic below), and while the rounded percentage remains unchanged, closer scrutiny of the data reveals that the number of visa-free travel scenarios between African countries has in fact increased to 803 (nine were added over the past year), resulting in the highest number of visa-free travel possibilities to date.

The **second indicator** relates to the situation where a visa can be obtained on arrival. While nominally unchanged since 2016 but with a slight decrease over 2023, this metric is nevertheless representative of progress that has been made on easing travel. In terms of scoring, two opposing, yet often complementary developments underlie this metric. On the one hand, countries ease travel by moving from a visa-required (ahead of travel) policy to a visa-on-arrival, thereby easing the travel experience and contributing to a *higher* percentage score in this indicator. On the other hand, countries relax their visa policy by moving from a visa-on-arrival to a visa-free policy, thus *lowering* the applicable percentage.

The **third indicator** measures travel scenarios where the visa process must be completed ahead of travel. A lower percentage of travel scenarios to which such policies apply (55% in 2016 down to 47% in 2024) is a positive development. While this is an important improvement overall, there has also been a small increase over the past year in instances where a visa-required policy is being applied. The overall percentage remains considerably high, notwithstanding progress that has been made, and leaves much room for further evolution. While 26 African countries – close to half of the continent – offer an e-visa that can be obtained ahead of travel, this issue is not directly captured by the scoring, as it still requires a visa before travelling.

Overall visa openness has improved significantly in the period 2016–2024, notwithstanding a small decline in the combined score (visa-free and visa on arrival) since the previous report (from 0.485 to 0.479). The combined average score in 2024 nevertheless remains 13% higher than in 2016, and still exceeds the annual score recorded in most years since then.

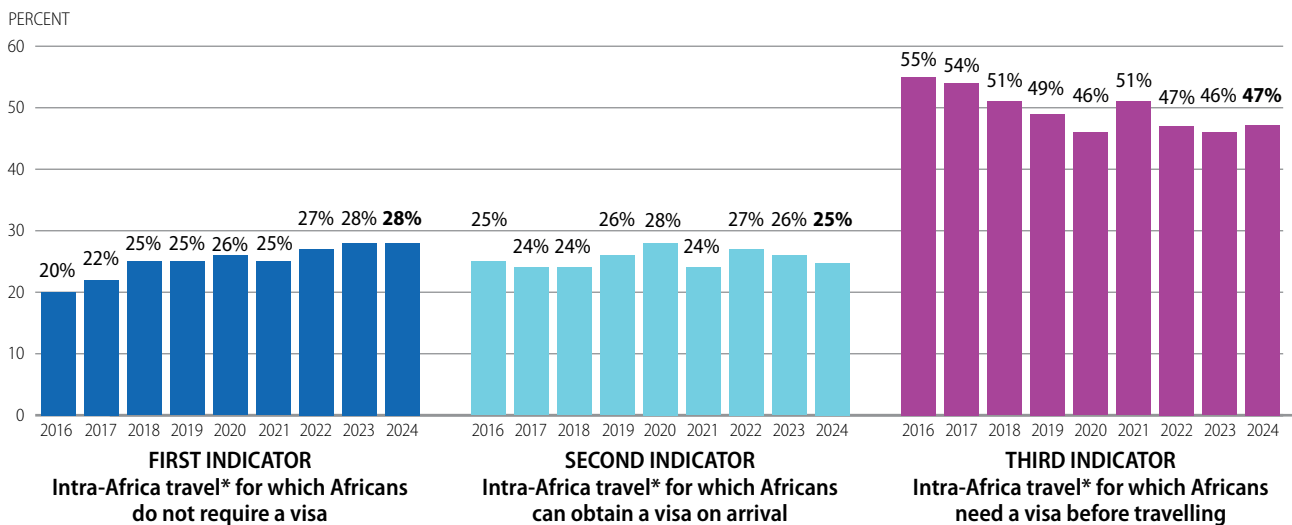
Average AVOI scores, 2016–2024



Amongst the top-10 countries on the AVOI, average visa openness remains unchanged compared to 2023, but is today 6% higher than it was in 2016.

**Among the top-20 countries on the AVOI, average visa openness has increased by 16% over this period.** It can be concluded therefore that the leading countries have continued to make progress in easing movement of persons. Amongst the current top-10 countries, eight have their score higher than in 2016, while 14 of the top 20 have improved their score over this period. Note that the composition of the top-10 and top-20 groups has changed over time, and each year’s average score relates only to the countries falling into each of these groups.

Visa openness in Africa, 2016–2024



\*Intra-Africa travel refers to travel by African citizens between African countries.

## Electronic Travel Authorisations: a visa by another name?

**ETAs are considered a form of electronic pre-approval that destination countries may require of travellers ahead of embarking on their trip.** They are typically reserved and intended for travellers that otherwise already qualify for visa-free entry (and where little is known about the traveller ahead of travel) and are aimed at streamlining the travel process while adding security pre-screening and data efficiency to this digital and often largely automated process. Like a visa, it is important to recognise that an ETA only provides permission for the holder to travel to the issuing country, and that entry remains subject to the final determination of immigration officials at the border.

ETAs enable the issuing country to identify certain risks posed by individual travellers by comparing their details to national or international databases, sometimes to screen for infectious diseases (some ETAs may require the applicant to undertake a health check for public health reasons), or to check for a criminal record (character criteria). Some of the information is gathered through self-declarations by the applicant, while other information may be obtained by means, for example through automated cross-checks by the host country against information that is either already at hand or contained in international databases and other sources. Algorithms may also be developed to help detect other risk factors.

While ETAs are not a common feature in African travel regimes, several electronic systems to manage visa-exempt arrivals ahead of time have been in place for several decades elsewhere. Early adopters of an ETA include Australia (1996), followed by the United States (2008) and Canada (2015)<sup>4</sup>. More recently, the United Kingdom (UK) introduced a limited ETA (late 2023) while the European Union (EU) aims to launch its own ETA<sup>5</sup> by mid-2025. Several other countries offer ETA systems, including Korea, New Zealand and Mexico, while Thailand, Israel and Japan plan to launch an ETA for citizens that qualify for visa-free entry soon.

**Globally, ETAs display several common traits.** Most commonly intended for short visits only (90 days or less), they generally cover multiple entries to a country and are valid for several years, with two-three years being the norm, and as many as five years (Canada). They are also not limited to tourism travel but tend to cover certain classes of business-related travel too, or even short-term study.

A general proviso is that business travel under an ETA may not involve earning an income from a local company; in other words, local employment or sales are not permissible, while attending conferences, trade shows and business meetings would pass. ETAs typically also don't require the applicant to provide a detailed travel itinerary and are generally limited to basic biometric data alongside some security-related and health questions. In terms of cost, this is generally in the range of USD 5–USD 15, with several countries facilitating the application process through a dedicated smartphone app.

For citizens of African countries – and abroad – that previously required a visa ahead of travel, however, the ETA offers improvements in terms of ease of use, time savings and cost, compared to obtaining a visa ahead of travel.

The attractiveness of an ETA to help digitise aspects of the immigration process for travellers, for national security purposes through pre-screening, for basic information capture and data management alongside efficiency benefits, cannot be disputed. From a traveller's perspective, in terms of easing and facilitating the movement of people across borders, the benefits are often tenuous and are entirely conditional on the substantive aspects and costs of the ETA. New or additional costs to travellers that go beyond at most a nominal contribution towards system cost recovery by the host country (bearing in mind demonstrable efficiency improvements and savings in countries' immigration overheads and infrastructure), ETA lead times that undermine spontaneous travel, the need for confirmed itineraries and accommodation, can all serve as impediments to free movement of people and undermine the inherent benefits that ETA systems potentially offer. The line between sometimes onerous ETA systems and e-visa processes becomes blurred.

Like in other jurisdictions, ETAs should, at a minimum, be electronically linked within the host country's immigration system to applicants' passport details and biometric data and include much longer periods of validity than is currently the case. An ETA that requires only basic information from the applicant (a copy of a passport and basic related details) could then arguably be considered a valid security instrument for the host country rather than a visa in disguise.

Several of the ETAs mentioned above feature aspects that minimise the overhead for travellers while still addressing host countries' immigration system efficiency and security priorities around inward travel.



# Visa openness in Africa: Regional Economic Communities

Tracking average REC scores

Reciprocity within RECs

Visa openness and  
reciprocity in each REC

How conflicts impede  
the movement of people



# Proven enablers of freedom of movement

**The AU recognises eight RECs and considers them the building blocks of the broader continental integration initiative.**

This approach ensures that these RECs remain the engine rooms advancing deeper integration and that the progress made is elevated to continental level. The following are the AU-recognised RECs:

- Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- East African Community (EAC)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Integration within the RECs occurs at different levels and pace. It may involve liberalising trade flows by reducing or removing tariffs on intra-regional trade, collaboration on trade facilitation measures such as improved border processes and facilities, infrastructure development, and easing the movement of people across their national borders. Integration follows on from, and results in, cooperation in various fora, be it peace and security, public health initiatives and responses, sustainable resource management (for instance among coastal economies), or responses to natural disasters.

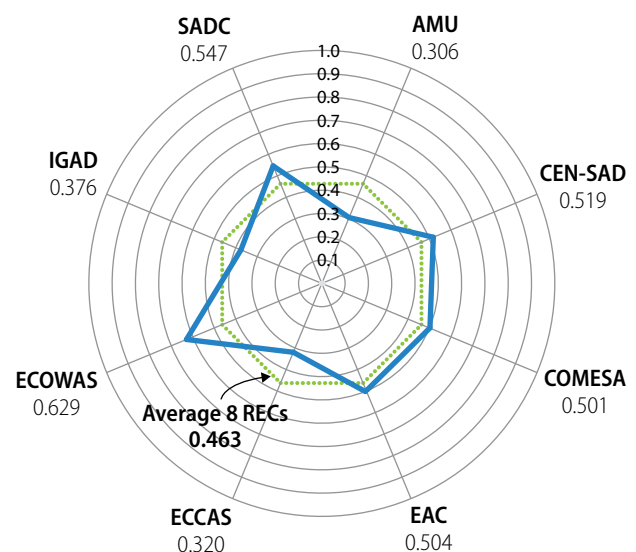
Several RECs have established regional protocols on intra-regional movement of people. These are often at different stages of implementation – with some agreed but not ratified. The cohesive nature of RECs can be a catalyst for initiatives and policies on intra-regional movement of persons. Where these initiatives are followed by high levels of adoption, this may sometimes serve as a springboard for countries to extend similar liberties towards nationals from outside of the region. Generally, RECs that maintain higher levels of regional openness also fare better, on average, at the continental level.

Within the RECs, bilateral initiatives sometimes compensate for the lack of regional commitments or progress on implementation of protocols. Some of these initiatives could be more progressive, like the case of Namibia and Botswana, who signed an agreement in 2023 to simplify their mutual border controls by allowing each other's nationals to pass through their common border using only their national identity document. Similar examples occur elsewhere, for example within the EAC.

## Tracking average REC scores

Alongside countries' individual rankings, this report also measures a REC's average visa openness, which is derived by combining each member state's individual score in that REC, divided by the number of members. It offers insights into regional attitudes towards easing the movement of people more broadly, and in this respect, established trends towards visa openness over a period of time. Average visa openness often correlates with regional visa-free reciprocity scores, which provide insights not only into advances in freeing the movement within a region, but also alludes to possible policy congruence in this regard.

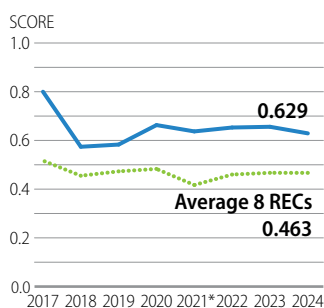
### Average AVOI scores, RECs 2024



In 2024, four of the eight RECs have achieved higher average scores on the AVOI than in 2023, with the remaining four scoring lower for varying reasons. EAC, ECCAS, SADC and AMU all improved on their previous regional averages. CEN-SAD, ECOWAS, IGAD and COMESA recorded a slightly lower average score than 2023. Five of the eight RECs also have higher scores than the pre-pandemic year, 2019, reflecting sustained progress towards greater visa openness and with that, the ease of movement. While EAC is one of three RECs whose average score in this year’s report is lower than in 2019, it is important to consider that changes in the bloc’s membership – with new members acceding (the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia in the last two years) – complicate direct comparisons over time.

ECOWAS achieves the highest average score amongst the eight RECs, notwithstanding a slightly lower score compared to 2023. The REC adopted a *Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment* in 1979, under which member states grant visa-free travel to each other’s nationals, and which also accounts for

ECOWAS average AVOI score, 2017–2024

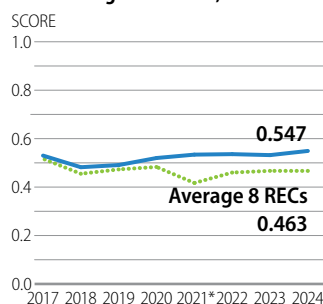


the near perfect regional reciprocity score as seen in the next section. Experience with this regional visa-free policy may have helped drive member states’ broader visa openness too: seven of its members offer visa-free access to at least 20 other African countries, thus exceeding the REC

membership pool. Two REC members – Benin and The Gambia – remain in top spot on the index. But there are emerging challenges: the announcement of leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, in January 2024, of their states’ intended withdrawal from ECOWAS affects the REC’s prospects in the years to come, undermining the region’s significant achievements in regional integration, and removing the three landlocked countries’ free-trade status, including preferential access to ports in the region. Without doubt, free movement of people in the region would be severely impacted by this announcement.

SADC scores second highest in average visa openness. Its score has been on an upward trajectory in recent years. This has been driven largely by Angola, which, in late 2023, almost doubled the number of countries whose

SADC average AVOI score, 2017–2024

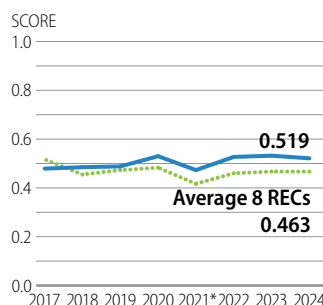


nationals now qualify for visa-free access, from 10 to 19. Other changes include South Africa and Malawi offering visa-free access to Ghana nationals, Mozambique granting Senegal visa-free status, as well as some changes in Namibia and Tanzania’s visa regimes. Namibia

announced that it would in future require visas from nationals whose countries do not reciprocate visa-free access, effective April 2025. However, at this stage no AU Member State should be impacted by this development.

CEN-SAD’s regional score has declined slightly since last year when it held joint second place with SADC. The treaty establishing CEN-SAD lists the free movement of people as a core objective, even if it has not been uniformly implemented. However, with CEN-SAD largely overlapping with ECOWAS, several of its members have

CEN-SAD average AVOI score, 2017–2024



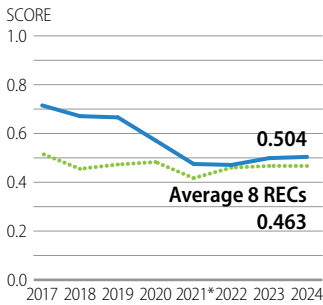
dropped restrictions on the movement of people within the region<sup>6</sup>. CEN-SAD’s regional average score has been negatively impacted by visa restrictions applied by Burkina Faso on 11 countries, which no longer qualify for visa on arrival. The Central African Republic,

meanwhile, implemented visa-free access to nationals from four nearby countries. Chad and Comoros both changed aspects of their visa regime, with a slight tightening by Comoros and a slight easing by Chad (towards Benin). Togo has moved away from visa on arrivals to requiring a visa ahead of arrival, including through its e-visa portal. This is a roll-back and impacts 37 countries.

\*The 2021 average scores reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**EAC** scored slightly higher in 2024, due to a combination of factors. On the one hand, Uganda and Tanzania have eased access to the DRC and Ethiopia respectively. Somalia,

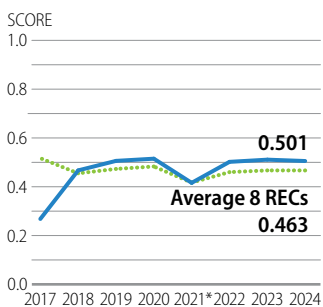
**EAC average AVOI score, 2017–2024**



Tanzania and Uganda, while at the time of writing, Somalia was not included in this list of exempt countries).

**COMESA** scores fifth amongst the RECs, slightly lower than in 2023 where it ranked fourth. Several COMESA members implemented changes to their visa policies:

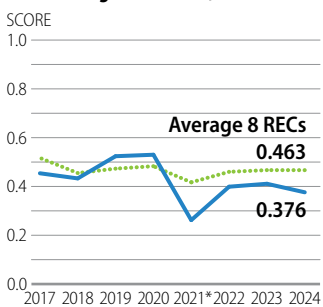
**COMESA average AVOI score, 2017–2024**



with respect to nationals of Kenya. Kenya’s requiring of an ETA prior to travel for most travellers from other African countries lowered the score, notwithstanding exemptions for EAC Member States.

**IGAD** scores slightly lower in 2024 following a significant increase in 2023. However, it still scores lower than before the pandemic in 2019. Overall, in four intra-regional

**IGAD average AVOI score, 2017–2024**

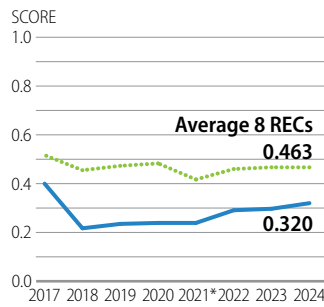


scenarios there has been a tightening of visa policy (from visa-on-arrival to visa-required-ahead-of-travel), while in four other scenarios, the requirement for obtaining a visa was dispensed with. Among the eight IGAD members, half are also members of the EAC.

\*The 2021 average scores reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**ECCAS** achieved the highest nominal year-on-year increase in its regional visa openness score amongst all RECs. ECCAS comprises several central African states, the majority of which rank in the lower third on the index. The significant improvement in the regional average is driven primarily by Angola’s removal of visa requirement

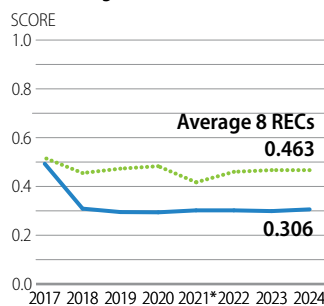
**ECCAS average AVOI score, 2017–2024**



from nationals of nine countries, and the Central African Republic’s abolishing of visa requirements ahead of travel for nationals of Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger and Burundi. Chad now provides visa-free access to Benin, while Cameroon requires a

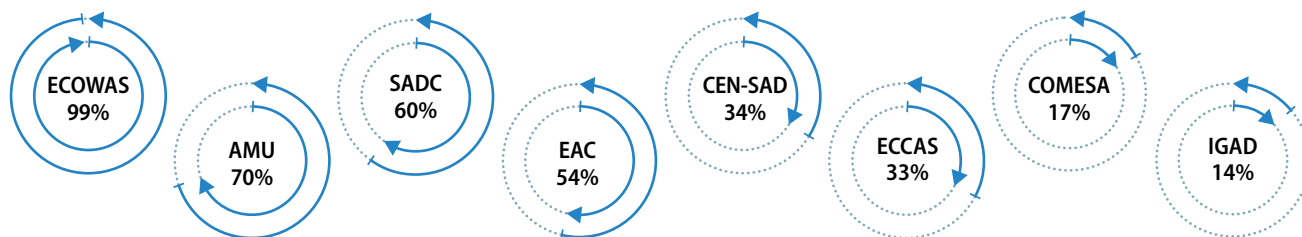
visa from nationals of Mali. Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) members within ECCAS generally offer visa-free entry to each other’s citizens. These latest developments have elevated ECCAS’s rank, after recording the lowest regional average score in 2023.

**AMU average AVOI score, 2017–2024**



AMU is currently the lowest ranked REC in terms of average score and sits slightly below ECCAS. Its score has however seen a slight improvement in 2024 compared to 2023 owing to several visa-related policy changes amongst its five North African members. Libya dropped its visa requirement for nationals of Algeria, while Tunisia did likewise for Benin. Mauritania tightened its policy towards Burundi, which now requires a visa on arrival, and Morocco requires the same from nationals of Côte d’Ivoire, while abolishing visas for nationals of Cabo Verde. Within AMU, Mauritania’s visa openness ranks high above the regional average and falls within the top 10 on the overall index, Tunisia ranks in the middle of the index, while Morocco, Algeria and Libya rank in the bottom quarter.

### Visa-free reciprocity among RECs, 2024



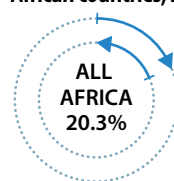
## Reciprocity within RECs

**Regional reciprocity is a measure of how aligned the visa regimes of individual member states within a REC are with respect to one another.** Reciprocity on its own only measures the bilateral alignment of visa policies within a REC and makes no claim on visa openness. A high reciprocity score therefore indicates that the visa policies between the members of a REC are largely harmonised, while a low score indicates that visa policies are largely mismatched. This alignment can relate to reciprocity on visa-free policies, but similarly measures alignment of visa-on-arrival, and visa-required-ahead-of-travel policies. This report focuses on how REC members extend visa-free-entry policies to one another on a reciprocal basis.

A high score in the visa-free reciprocity metric is therefore indicative of a high degree of harmonisation of visa-free policies within a REC. Countries are generally open to arrivals of each other’s nationals and permit easy access, without the need for a visa. High scores in this variable tend to be reflective not only of regional policies on the intra-REC free movement of persons, but also high levels of adoption and compliance with such protocols. RECs with high scores tend to be well integrated economically too.

Low reciprocity scores emanate from a lack of harmonisation of visa policies, one country may require a visa on arrival, while the other offers visa-free entry. Or where both countries compel a visa, but one offers a visa on arrival while the other requires nationals to apply for a visa ahead of travel. Scenarios such as these suggest a lack of regional policy framework on the movement of persons, poor adoption, or point towards specific issues underlying the bilateral relationship of these countries.

### Visa-free reciprocity in African countries, 2024



The scores above capture aggregate positive (visa-free) reciprocity within the respective RECs: the extent to which member states grant nationals of each other visa-free access on a reciprocal basis. Overall, there has been a modest decline in the level of visa-free reciprocity, to 20.3% in

2024, compared to 21% in 2023. Within the confines of RECs, reciprocity is generally much higher, ranging from 99% (ECOWAS) to 14% (IGAD).

## Key observations

**ECOWAS (99%)** remains the leader in visa-free reciprocity and improved slightly over 2023, although political developments remain a concern.

**AMU (70%)** has seen a significant improvement in visa-free reciprocity (2023: 60%).

**SADC (60%)** records an unchanged visa-free reciprocity score, with a slight improvement in the visa-required metric (fewer visa-ahead-of-travel scenarios).

**EAC (54%)** records a lower score (2023: 71%), mainly due to Somalia (a full EAC member since early 2024 ) requiring a visa on arrival from all travellers. The region would otherwise have maintained an unchanged visa-free reciprocity score.

**CEN-SAD (34%)** sees a slight improvement in visa-free reciprocity (2023: 32%), with fewer member states now requiring a visa from each other’s citizens ahead of travel.

**ECCAS (33%)** shows a slight improvement in visa-free reciprocity (2023: 31%) following a decrease where visas are required ahead of travel.

**COMESA (17%)** has lower visa-free reciprocity (2023: 21%), along with a slight decline in the visa-on-arrival reciprocity metric.

**IGAD (14%)** sees lower regional visa-free reciprocity and higher scores for visa-on-arrival reciprocity within the REC, and unchanged visa-required reciprocity.

\*The 2021 average scores reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Visa openness and reciprocity in each REC

## Charting visa policy reciprocity

The charts on visa reciprocity in this section depict the extent to which the three types of visa policies measured by the AVOI (visa-free, visa-on-arrival, and visa-before-travel) are reciprocated among the member states of the eight AU-recognised RECs. The charts rank countries in descending order of reciprocal visa openness: at the top are those countries whose visa-free policies are reciprocated the most by others within the REC.

Countries' rankings in the reciprocity charts do not relate to countries' rankings on the AVOI. Neither do they necessarily reflect the average visa openness of each country's REC. Instead, they show the extent to which countries' visa policies – whether liberal or restrictive – are reciprocated by the other members of their REC.

If a country ranks highly on the AVOI but experiences low visa-free reciprocity within its REC, the cause may be that its REC has not developed a structure for harmonising its members' visa policies, or that the country is not implementing agreed policy. It could also be that the country's fellow REC members do not reciprocate the country's visa-open stance.



## Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)

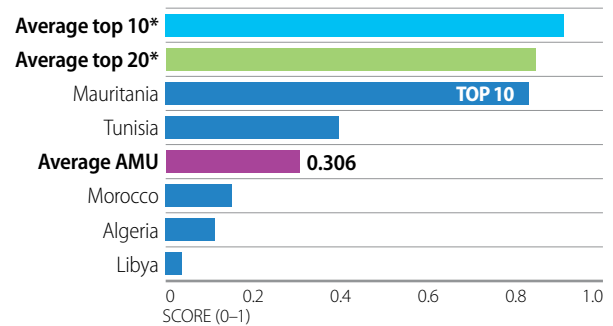
*Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia*

### Visa openness

The AMU, comprising five North African countries, was founded in 1989, with the aim of political and economic unity amongst its member states. To attain this, one of its objectives is to gradually achieve the free movement of persons, along with the free circulation of goods, services and capital<sup>7</sup>.

Visa openness varies greatly among its member states. Mauritania (ninth on the AVOI) ranks highest within AMU, offering visa-free access to eight other countries and visa-on-arrival facilities to all others. Tunisia ranks in the middle of the index, while the other three countries are each in the bottom quarter. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia together offer visa-free access to a combined 16 countries, far below the continental average. None of the three countries maintains visa-on-arrival facilities.

### 2024 AVOI scores, AMU



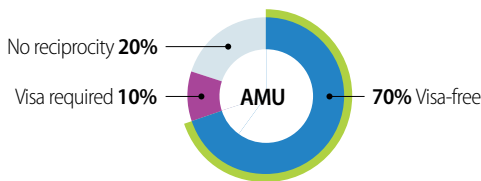
\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

Since the last report, only Tunisia and Libya have made some positive adjustments to their visa policy, with Tunisia extending visa-free access to Benin and Libya and doing the same for regional neighbour Algeria, thus advancing regional integration within AMU. Morocco made two changes: citizens of Cabo Verde may now enter visa-free, while those from Côte d'Ivoire now require a visa. Overall, only Algeria and Tunisia offer visa-free access to nationals from all AMU Member States. Libya and Morocco each require a visa ahead of travel from two of their regional neighbours.

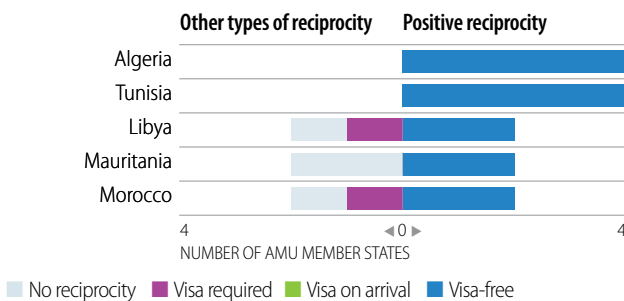
### Regional reciprocity

The visa-free policies of the member states have reached relatively high levels of harmonisation with respect to intra-regional travel. In 70% of regional travel scenarios, nationals are able to enter another country within the community without the need for a visa. Libya and Morocco still maintain the highest level of visa restrictions within the region (each requiring a visa from two other AMU Member States, Mauritania and Morocco, and Libya and Mauritania respectively), while Mauritania maintains a visa-on arrival policy for nationals of Morocco. All other travel within the region is visa-free, on a reciprocal basis. In 20% of travel scenarios, member states' visa policies differ from one another (no reciprocity). Mauritania's visa openness is not reciprocated by two of its regional neighbours. Given the relatively low number of countries that make up this group, any bilateral change between two countries is likely to reflect a significant change in the regional score. ■

#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within AMU



#### Reciprocity within AMU



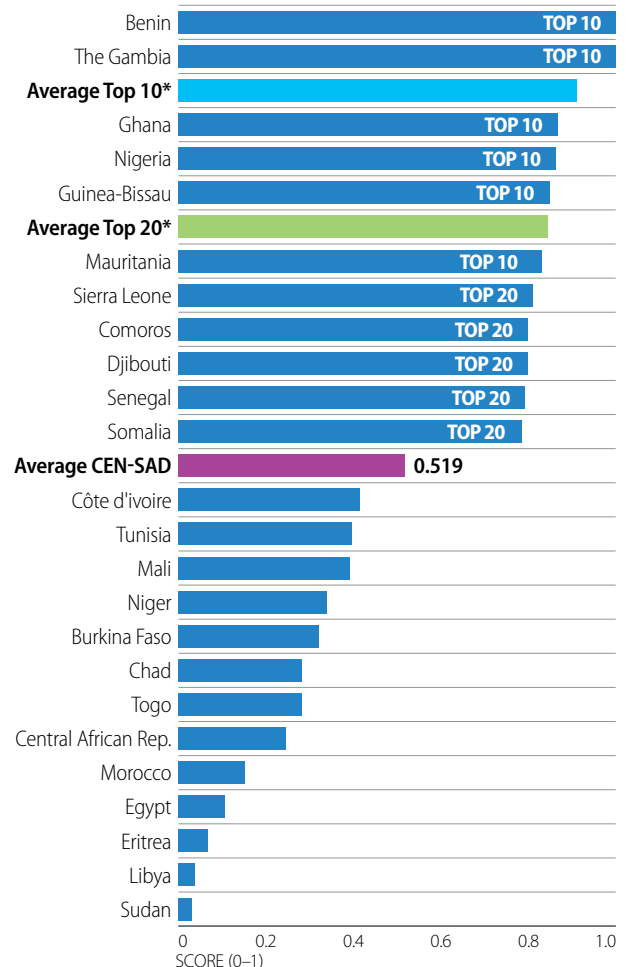
### Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

*Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia*

### Visa openness

CEN-SAD includes many of the continent's visa openness leading performers. While its regional average score has slipped slightly since last year, dropping it from joint second to third place among the eight RECs, the region continues to account for most of the top-10 and top-20 ranked countries on the AVOI. Seven of the continent's top-10 performers are members of CEN-SAD.

#### 2024 AVOI scores, CEN-SAD



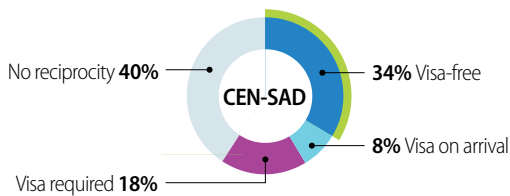
\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

This REC also counts the highest number of member states, with almost half of the continent's countries part of this REC. However, most also belong to other RECs, including ECOWAS, the leading and most integrated REC in terms of the free movement of people, which in turn has a large influence on the score of CEN-SAD. Yet at the same time, three of the four lowest ranked countries on the AVOI are also members of CEN-SAD.

### Regional reciprocity

Promoting the free movement of persons, goods and services remains a core objective of CEN-SAD<sup>8</sup>. However, this has not yet resulted in coordinated and sustained high levels of visa openness among all of its member states. Visa-free reciprocity is achieved in 34% of intra-regional travel scenarios, placing the region fifth among the RECs in this metric. Nine of the 10 highest performers in terms of regional visa-free policy reciprocity in CEN-SAD are also members of ECOWAS, which achieves a 99% score in this metric. This focuses attention on the fact that not only is there large variation in the way visa policies are applied within the region, but also that visa openness by individual countries towards non-members of CEN-SAD are often far more liberal than those applied to members of the group.

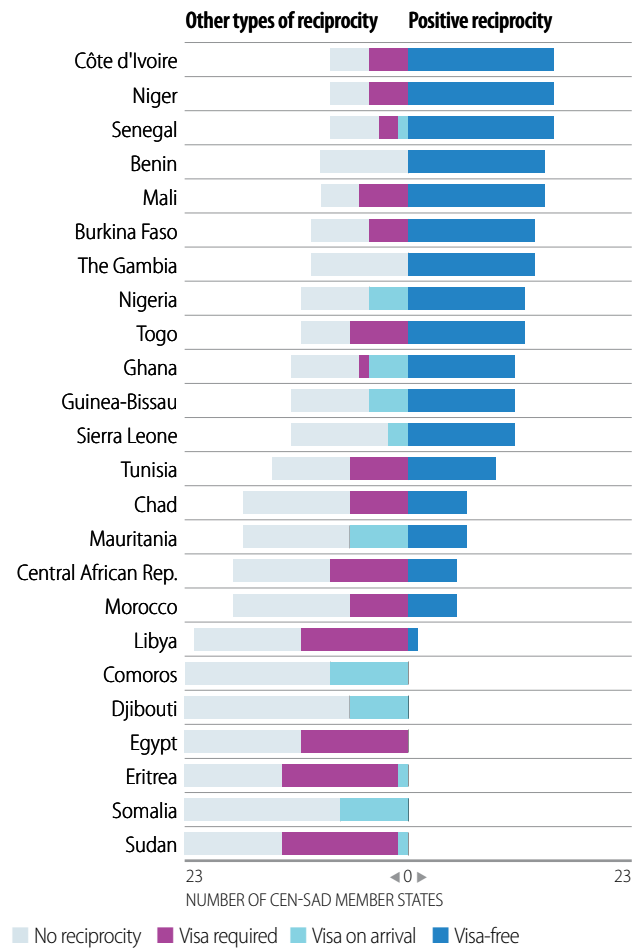
#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within CEN-SAD



Sometimes economic reasons drive individual countries' resolve to adopt more liberal policies than what other member states offer in return. Seasonal labour may play an important role in regional migration patterns, especially in the agricultural sector, where for example cocoa, and cotton production, particularly in some coastal countries, may attract inward migration when demand for labour and associated job opportunities are high.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, only two RECs (IGAD and COMESA) have higher levels of non-reciprocity on their visa regimes than CEN-SAD, suggesting relatively high non-uniformity in the implementation of regional movement of person policies, and different approaches towards inward migration among the member states.

### Reciprocity within CEN-SAD



This is illustrated by some of the countries with high scores on the AVOI, such as Benin and The Gambia, which offer visa-free access to all on the continent, yet this openness is reciprocated by only 14 and 13 CENSAD member states, respectively. These visa requirements, however, are typically applied by countries much further afield (yet still part of CEN-SAD), and not by neighbouring countries. Ghana and Nigeria, the fifth and sixth ranked countries respectively, also tend to have stricter visa policies towards non-ECOWAS countries within this REC, albeit the resultant non-reciprocity in these two examples tends to involve visa-on-arrival facilities that are not reciprocated by the partner state, as no such system exists. ■



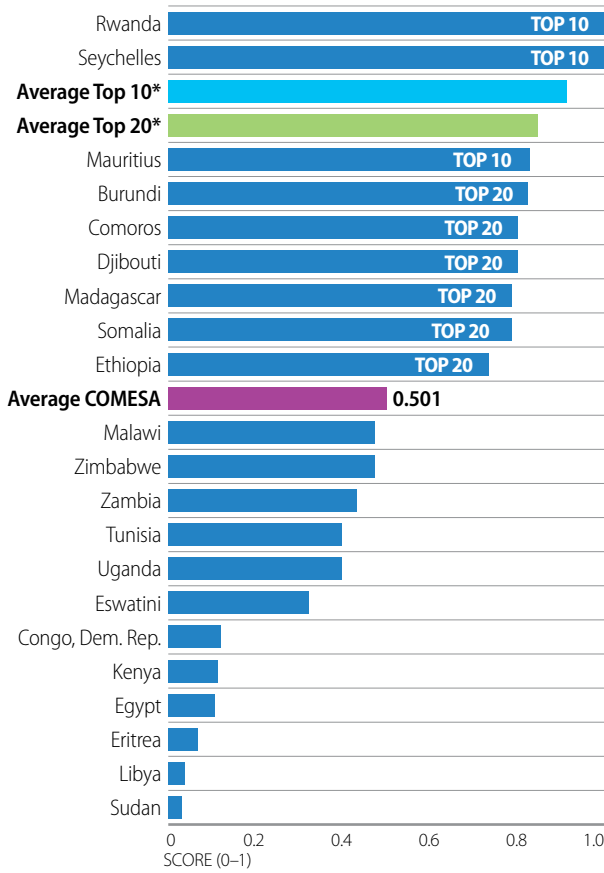
## Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

*Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe*

### Visa openness

COMESA currently ranks fifth of the eight RECs for average visa openness (2023: fourth), with several factors contributing to this change. Two of its member states are jointly top-ranked countries on the index, while seven others have a place inside the top 20. Several changes, alongside Kenya’s introduction of an ETA for all non-EAC countries have contributed to a slight net-negative change

#### 2024 AVOI scores, COMESA



\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

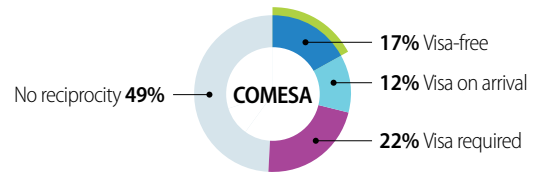
in visa openness within the region overall. Eight member states have made some changes, five positive and three tightening their visa policies. One country, Ethiopia, now requires a visa ahead of travel from Egypt, Eritrea, Libya and Sudan, but has abolished the need for a visa from nationals of Morocco and South Africa.

Interestingly, the changes are not generally directed at one or two other countries only, for example as might be expected when countries conclude bilateral arrangements on relaxing their visa policies. Countries that have implemented one or more positive changes – some of which were already noted in last year’s report but fell outside of the data collection period – are Eritrea, Libya, Malawi, Tunisia and Uganda, while new restrictions have been implemented by Comoros (vis-a-vis fellow COMESA members Burundi and Somalia, whose citizens no longer qualify for a visa on arrival), and Ethiopia with respect to earlier mentioned countries.

### Regional reciprocity

Visa-free reciprocity in COMESA continues to be at relatively low levels, only marginally ahead of IGAD. The region scores 17% in this metric – lower than in all prior years. Tellingly, visa-free reciprocity is far less aligned than the type of reciprocity where a visa is required ahead of travel, which applies to 22% of travel within COMESA.

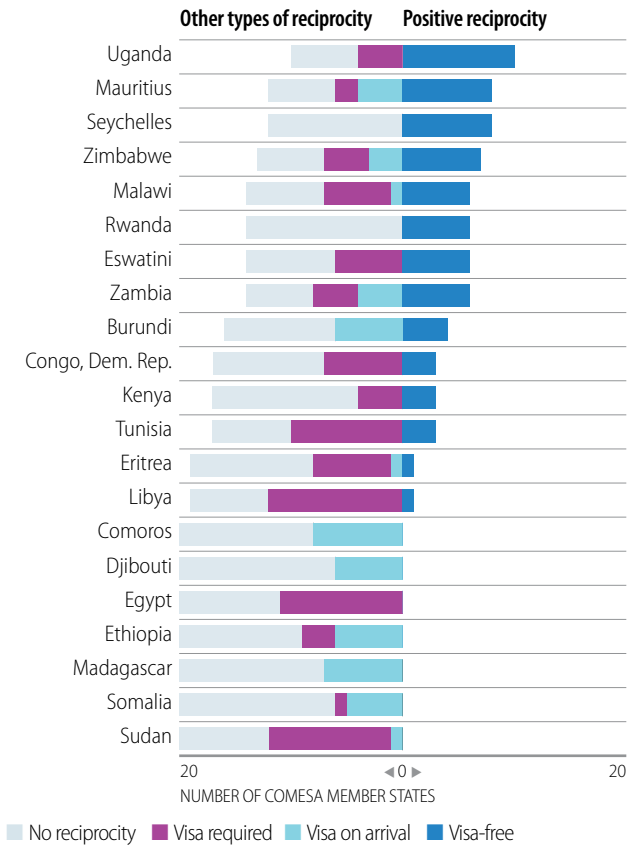
#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within COMESA



Kenya and Uganda score the highest in the regional visa-free reciprocity stakes: both reciprocate visa-free-access with half of COMESA’s member states. Both are also members of the EAC, a region where most intra-regional travel is visa-free. In contrast, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Madagascar, Somalia and Sudan do not reciprocate visa-free access with any other COMESA Member States, because their visa policies always require a visa, either ahead of travel, or on arrival. In 50% of all intra-regional travel scenarios, the respective visa policies between a source and destination country are not harmonised.



Reciprocity within COMESA



COMESA’s low visa-free reciprocity score demonstrates that the region’s protocols on the free movement of persons are still not widely ratified and implemented. The first instrument – the *Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visa Requirements* – was adopted in 1984 and aimed to scale back visa requirements for intra-regional travel by allowing visa-free access for 90 days. The second instrument – COMESA’s *Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, the Right of Establishment and Residence* – was adopted in 1998<sup>9</sup> and was aimed at substantially expanding the movement of persons to include the right to establishment, through staged implementation. But this has still not been ratified by all member states, with only 10 out of 21 countries implementing the protocol (Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Rwanda, Eswatini, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) despite renewed efforts since late 2023 to drive this process forward. ■



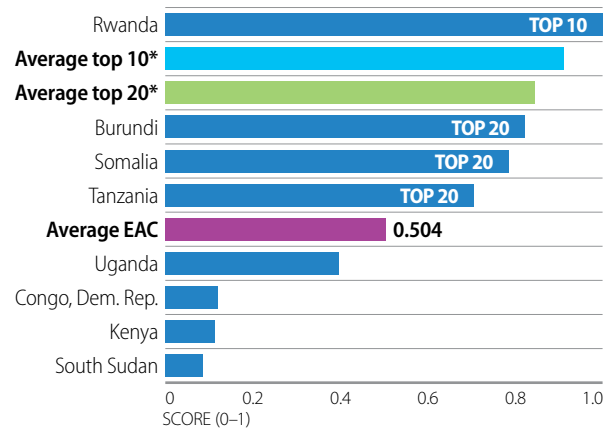
East African Community (EAC)

Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda

Visa openness

EAC, a common market comprising eight member states after Somalia became a member in early 2024, currently ranks fourth among the eight RECs in terms of average visa openness. As a region, it scores slightly higher than it did a year ago, owing to several factors. The relatively low member base also means that individual countries’ policy changes can have a significant impact on the regional average score, while changes in membership challenge a straightforward linear comparison with the regional scores from a few years back. There has been some easing of restrictive visa policies by Tanzania towards Ethiopia (citizens now qualify for a visa on arrival, resulting in visa policy consistency between the countries), while Uganda now allows citizens of the DRC to enter visa-free.

2024 AVOI scores, EAC



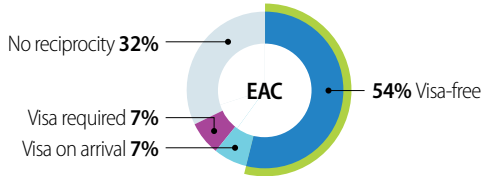
\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

Amongst the leading performers in the region, Rwanda remains at the top, while Burundi (which offers visa on arrival for non-EAC citizens), Somalia (which requires a visa on arrival for all, except Kenya) and Tanzania are all top-20 countries on the index.

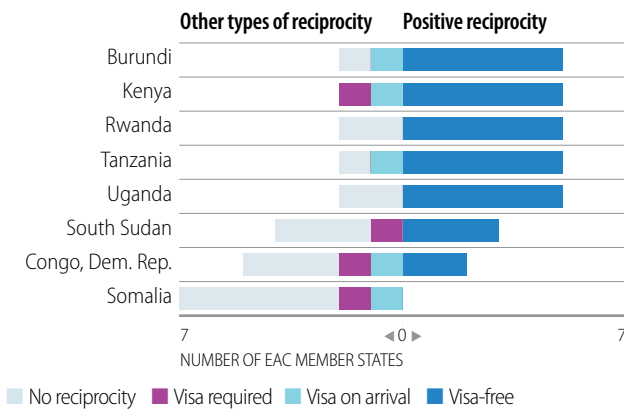
## Regional reciprocity

Free movement of persons is an important tenet of the EAC. Commitment towards the free movement of persons within the region is well grounded in the region’s founding objectives and policies, including the Treaty Establishing the EAC (Article 104) and the Protocol on the Establishment of the EAC Common Market (in Article 5).

### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within EAC



### Reciprocity within EAC



This year, the region’s reciprocity score of 54% relating to the visa-free policies among member states is much lower than it was in 2023 (71%). Statistically, there is less alignment than previously, but this is largely driven by the fact that Somalia – now included in the data after recently joining the bloc – has the lowest levels of alignment of all the member states. Somalia does not currently offer any other EAC Member States visa-free access and maintains a visa-on-arrival policy towards the continent. This situation will change once there is greater alignment of visa-free policies particularly by, and towards, the more recent member states South Sudan, DRC and Somalia (having the lowest level of visa-free reciprocity of the EAC). Kenya’s introduction of ETA formalities ahead of travel has little impact on this metric, as the country exempts EAC Member States (excluding Somalia).



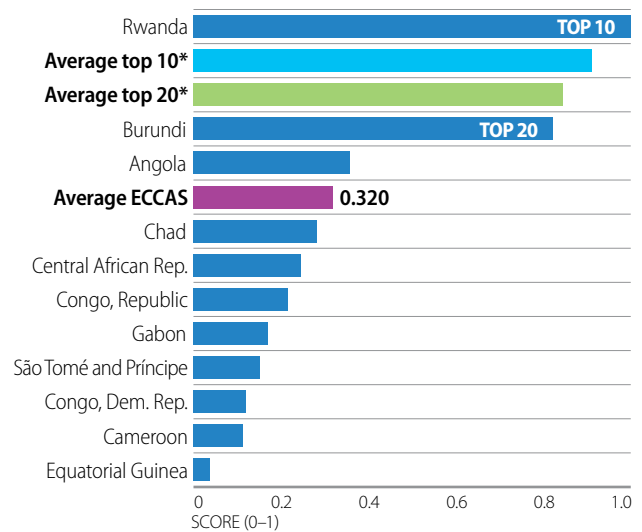
## Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe

## Visa openness

Although visa openness is low in ECCAS, the region’s average score recorded the highest nominal improvement among the RECs. For example, Angola abolished requirements for a visa from nine countries after the data collection period for last year’s AVOI report had closed, resulting in the country gaining nine places on the rank to 32nd. The Central African Republic, one of several member states in Central Africa, also abolished the requirement for a visa from nationals of four member states who previously required a visa ahead of travel. One of these, Benin, does not require visas from nationals of African countries. Central Africa Republic ranks 40th in 2024, from 42nd in 2023 on the AVOI. Other notable changes have come from Chad and Cameroon, with the former offering visa-free access to Benin, while the latter has imposed a visa requirement on nationals of Mali.

### 2024 AVOI scores, ECCAS



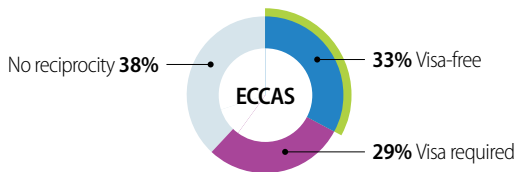
\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

Although ECCAS adopted its *Protocol on Freedom of Movement and Rights of Establishment of Nationals of Members States* in 1983, general visa openness remains low in the region: both towards nationals of other ECCAS member states (the general exception being visa openness among CEMAC members), as well as towards other African countries more broadly. Of the ten ECCAS Member States, four improved their score (Angola, Central African Republic, Chad and São Tomé and Príncipe), one scored lower (Cameroon) and the remaining six remained unchanged.

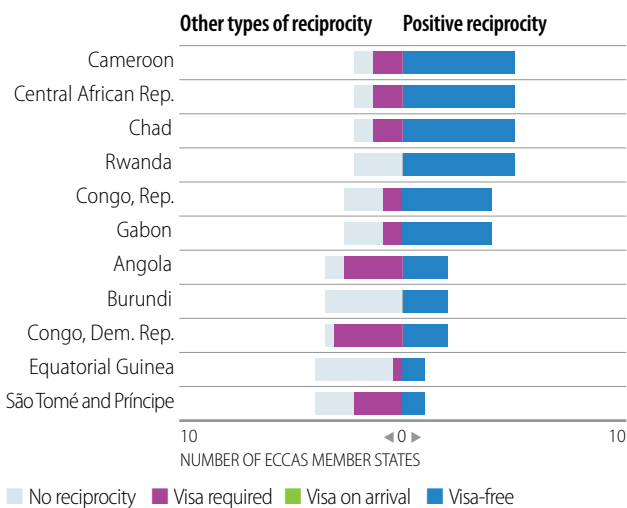
### Regional reciprocity

Among the RECs, ECCAS scores relatively lower in terms of regional visa-free reciprocity. With a score of 33%, this implies that only one in three countries reciprocates each other's visa-free status. In most travel permutations among member states, there is no reciprocity, suggesting that a significant mismatch between the policies of member states continues to prevail. It also means that measures taken to implement regional visa openness policies are not well advanced.

#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within ECCAS



#### Reciprocity within ECCAS



ECCAS is also the region with the highest reciprocity among RECs on the visa-before-travel metric, suggesting that to advance progress on visa-free reciprocity, member states need to address this issue not only regionally, but also bilaterally. Each new visa-free update will raise the region's profile. ■



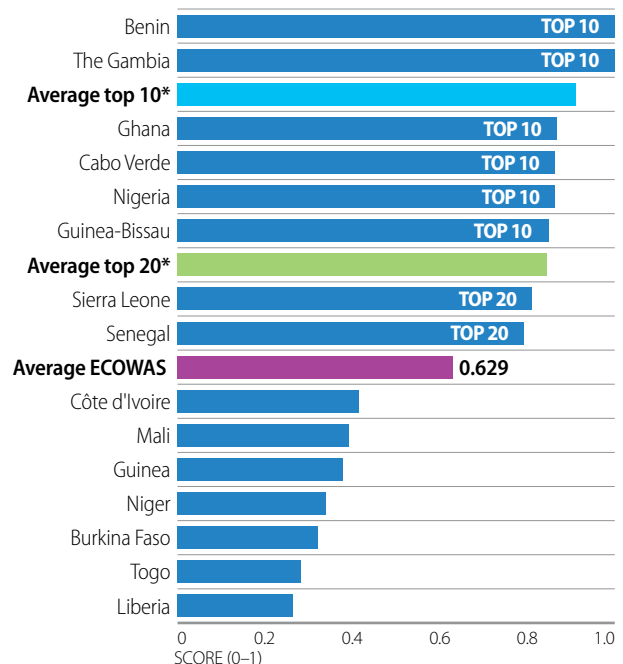
## Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

*Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo*

### Visa openness

Human mobility features highly in ECOWAS. Six member states of ECOWAS rank within the top 10 on the AVOI, and a further two in the top 20. The region's progressive stance towards free movement of persons often reaches beyond the regional market: ECOWAS scores highest both in terms of being the region with the highest average visa openness generally, and the highest reciprocal visa-free access with respect to intra-REC movement. Benin (since 2018) and The Gambia (since 2020) are in joint first place on the index.

#### 2024 AVOI scores, ECOWAS



\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

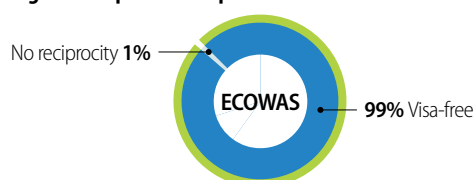
Several countries have made changes to their visa policies over the past year. Ghana, Cabo Verde, Guinea and Sierra Leone have advanced their score, with Sierra Leone making significant strides towards visa openness: citizens of 37 African countries can now obtain a visa on arrival, having previously been required to obtain a visa ahead of travel. Mali and Senegal have seen a slight decline in their scores, while the rankings of Burkina Faso and Togo have declined

by 11 and 29 places respectively. This follows Burkina Faso’s decision to remove visa-on-arrival privileges from all 11 countries that had previously qualified for this, with Togo abolishing visa-on-arrival, replacing it with e-visa requirements. In terms of the AVOI methodology, this is counted as a visa-ahead-of-travel, even though it is notable that a well-functioning e-visa process can offer benefits to travellers. The region’s average score remains impressive, and the highest among Africa’s eight RECs.

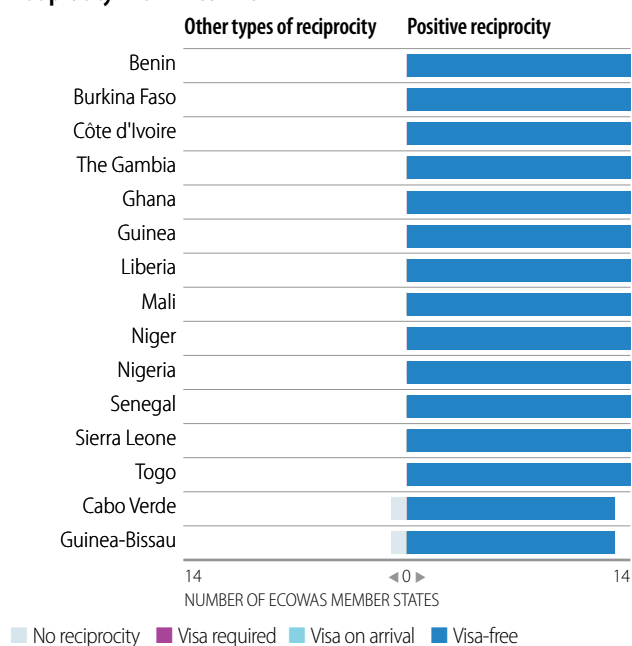
### Regional reciprocity

ECOWAS continues to boast a near-perfect score with respect to regional visa-free reciprocity. This now stands at 99%, a further improvement from 2023 (97%).

#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within ECOWAS



#### Reciprocity within ECOWAS



Only Cabo Verde and Guinea Bissau, the sixth and eighth ranked countries on the 2024 AVOI, do not fully reciprocate visa-free access to each other’s nationals – Guinea Bissau requires a visa on arrival from nationals of Cabo Verde. While ECOWAS maintains a very high score, lingering uncertainty around the future status of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger remains. Informal mobility may continue notwithstanding any developments, but the dynamics will impact the situation on the ground, where political and security-related uncertainty may affect border openings and impede the ability of nationals of ECOWAS Member States to travel freely within the region. ■



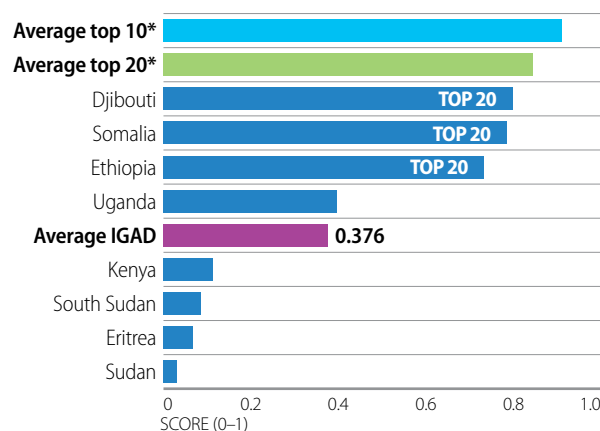
## Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda

### Visa openness

IGAD’s Member States are mainly from the East African region, and all are also members of other RECs. Several rank in the top 20 on the overall index (Djibouti, Somalia and Ethiopia) while some of the lowest ranked on the AVOI, such as Sudan and Eritrea, also feature in this REC and contribute to the average. The region’s average visa openness score – and sixth rank position amongst the eight RECs – perhaps belies the fact that initiatives to free the movement of persons within the region are ongoing and include some recent progress in this respect (see regional reciprocity below).

#### 2024 AVOI scores, IGAD



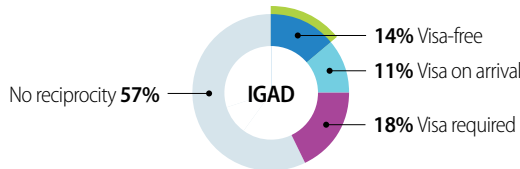
\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

While IGAD’s overall visa openness has shown upward progress in recent years, its lower score in 2024 compared to 2023 follows several changes implemented over the past year. Ethiopia has tightened its visa policy towards its northern neighbours and beyond, with citizens of Egypt, Eritrea, Libya and Sudan now requiring a visa ahead of travel, instead of qualifying for a visa on arrival. They form the bulk of the countries (altogether five) whose citizens Ethiopia currently requires a visa ahead of travel from – two of which are from IGAD.

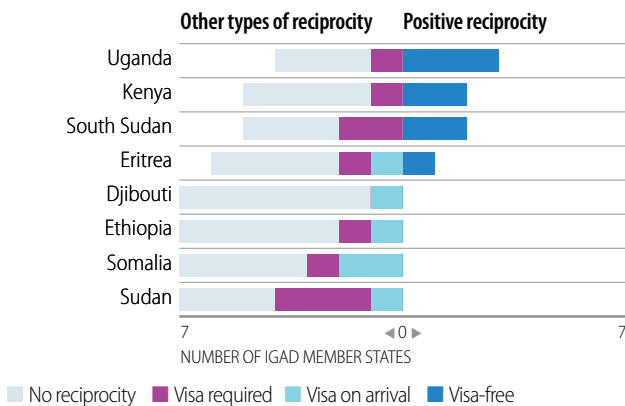
## Regional reciprocity

While IGAD’s intra-regional visa-free reciprocity score is low (14%), and also lower than the other seven RECs, movement of persons within the region nevertheless remains fluid. IGAD Member States developed a PFMP in 2020. It was adopted by the IGAD Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2021 and establishes a phased approach on the free movement of persons, and rights of establishment and residence, with phase one articulating the right of entry and abolition of visa requirements (Art. 4). Five member states have signed the Protocol: Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Uganda (the latter in May 2024)<sup>10</sup>. The Protocol enters into force after the fourth instrument of ratification has been deposited with IGAD. Member states have yet to ratify it. The Secretariat is focusing efforts on ratification of the Protocol. Implementation will boost the movement of persons and reflect favourably on IGAD’s regional visa-free reciprocity score.

### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within IGAD



### Reciprocity within IGAD



Notwithstanding its regional Protocol, several bilateral agreements between member states help facilitate the movement of people, including between Djibouti and Ethiopia, Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as Uganda and South Sudan<sup>11</sup>. ■



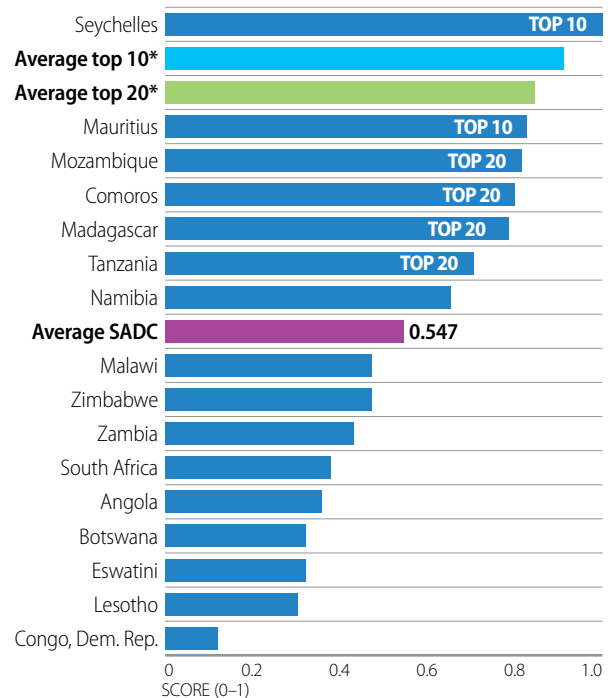
## Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

### Visa openness

SADC continues to claim the second highest average visa openness score. Two of its 16 members (Seychelles and Mauritius) rank in the top 10 and a further 4 countries are in the top 20 on the AVOI (Mozambique, Madagascar, Comoros and Tanzania). Each of these countries is situated on the east coast of Africa or is an Island State. Several are also jointly members of COMESA. Namibia falls just outside of the top 20 (2024: 21), having eased visa restrictions towards Ghana over the past year.

### 2024 AVOI scores, SADC



\*The average score of the 10 or 20 countries that scored the highest on the 2024 AVOI.

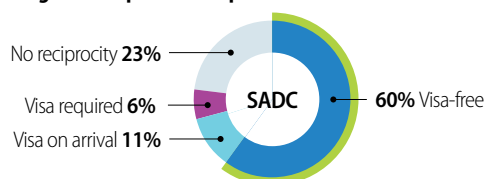
SADC’s score shows a slight improvement over 2023 and is now at its highest level since the first AVOI report, gradually progressing upwards over the years. Over time, six member states have improved their score: the biggest jump was by Angola, which removed visa restrictions towards nationals from nine African countries. Notably, five of the countries benefiting from this more liberal policy are SADC members, a reflection of Angola’s commitment to embrace established SADC principles around the free movement of persons. Other improvements came from Malawi (loosening of its policies towards Ghana and Sierra Leone), from Namibia, Mozambique (visa-free policy towards Senegal), South Africa (no visa required by nationals of Ghana), and Tanzania (visa required ahead of travel to visa-on-arrival policy towards Ethiopia).

Several commitments towards freeing the movement of persons within the region are contained in different regional protocols and regional plans, including the Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, (which in Article 3 obligates member states to permit visa-free entry by citizens of other member states, for up to 90 days a year, for bona fide visits). Full implementation is lagging; not all members have signed it, and only seven have ratified and domesticated it<sup>12</sup> (below the required threshold for it to enter into force – the last ratification was in 2019). This cross-cutting issue also features in other SADC protocols and plans, for example the Protocol on Trade in Services, which critically relies on the movement of persons, or the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan.

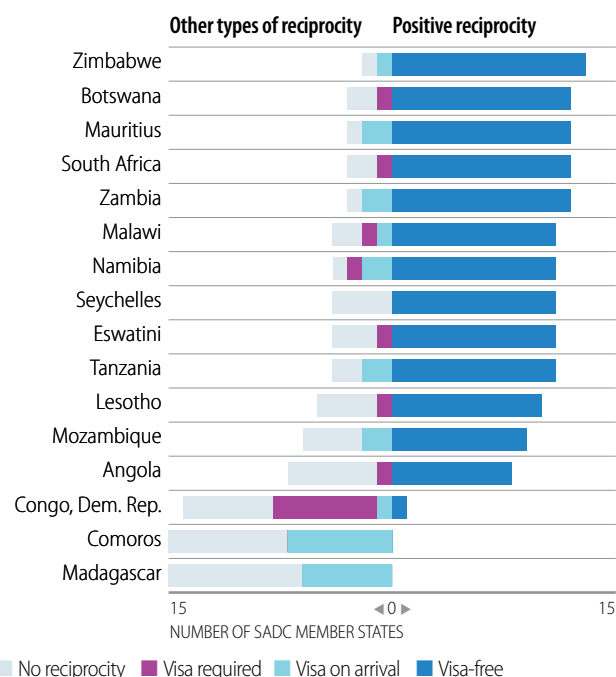
### Regional reciprocity

With a score of 60%, SADC’s visa-free reciprocity ranks third amongst the RECs. The visa policies of some countries, such as DRC, which require a visa ahead of travel from all but two other SADC Member States, and those of Madagascar and Comoros which offer only visa on arrival, weigh on SADC’s reciprocity score. But overall, the requirement for a visa ahead of travel is low for intra-SADC travel, and in only 6% of travel scenarios do member states require a visa from each other’s citizens.

#### Percentage of visa policies reciprocated within SADC



### Reciprocity within SADC



Angola, the lowest ranked SADC country among those offering any significant visa-free entry, has improved its reciprocity score remarkably after allowing visa-free access to citizens from five more SADC Member States since the previous AVOI report. The performance of several SADC Member States indicates that there is relatively high visa-free alignment of their bilateral policies, consistent with an overall regional agenda, even if some countries individually still fare relatively poorly on the overall index. For example, Eswatini (33rd) and Lesotho (36th) feature well down in the lower half of the AVOI but offer visa-free entry to 12 and 11 other SADC Member States respectively, and benefit from relatively high levels of policy alignment within SADC in this metric. This can be attributed to the importance of regional policies on the free movement of persons and is an indicator that the regional environment can serve as an important first step towards greater visa openness but also offers a relatively safer environment to do so, where countries might otherwise be more reluctant or constrained by political and other sensitivities. ■

# How conflicts impede the free movement of persons

Conflicts within and between some countries continue to weigh heavily on movement of persons, either through displacement, or by denying/restricting the movement of persons across international borders. In response to conflict, borders often close altogether, or implement additional and often unilateral and ad-hoc security measures in response to local conflict or political regime change. Ad-hoc military checkpoints along travel routes impede the ease of travel and are a lived reality in different parts of the continent.

In West Africa, over the past few years, regime change through unconstitutional changes in government occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso, Gabon and Niger. Elsewhere, for example in Sudan, conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of nationals, many of whom have fled across the border to Chad. The evolving security situation along Sudan's borders with Chad, Eritrea and Ethiopia has drastically curtailed the regular movement of persons. The security situation along the Rwanda–DRC border also remains a concern.

Research notes that from 2022 to 2023, there were surges in conflict in some parts of West Africa<sup>13</sup>. This must be seen in the context of the decline in the security situation in recent years, and the spread of conflict to regions in West Africa previously largely unaffected by such developments. Some of the conflict has also transcended over the northern borders of several West African coastal countries. These developments cumulatively remain concerning impediments for the movement of persons in several regions of Africa, with a real risk of further contagion in the wider region.

The announced decision by Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to withdraw from ECOWAS, and form the *Alliance des États du Sahel* (AES), has implications for movement and for trade within the region. Alongside five other ECOWAS Member States, these three countries are also part of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the common monetary area which heavily supports trade ties and regional economic integration. None of the AES States have direct access to port facilities and rely on their regional neighbours.

# Visa openness in Africa: The African Continental Free Trade Area

The AfCTFA Protocol on  
Trade in Services

Update on the  
Guided Trade Initiative

AU Protocol on the Free  
Movement of Persons

Single African Air  
Transport Market

Breaking down Barriers:  
Protocol on Women and Youth  
in Trade

Facilitating cross-border  
trade by small-scale  
entrepreneurs in border  
communities



# Promises of a more integrated continent

As one of the flagship projects of the AU, the AfCFTA promises to transform Africa in several ways, laying the foundation for unprecedented levels of economic integration through creation of the world's largest free trade agreement for goods and services – based on number of members. The AfCFTA is comprehensive and addresses several levers that can contribute to a more integrated continent.

There is optimism that the potential impacts of the AfCFTA will be significant. A World Bank study on the economic impacts of the AfCFTA<sup>14</sup> estimates that total African exports would increase by almost 29% by 2035, driven mostly by an expected substantial increase in intra-African trade in African made goods and services.

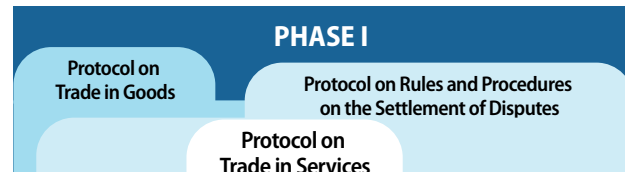
While the economic and social gains from the AfCFTA will largely stem from reduced barriers to intra-Africa trade, and export-led industrialisation, these developments do not happen in silos. The AfCFTA is comprehensive and ambitious, and its disciplines cover trade in goods and services, investment, competition policy, dispute settlement, women and youth in trade, digital trade, and many related disciplines. Although its full implementation is delayed, significant progress has been made. This report provides an update on several of these developments.

## The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services

Trade in services plays a crucial role in economic growth and regional integration: as an economic activity in its own right (e.g. the provision of cross-border telecommunication services, consulting services); as complementary to trade in goods (e.g. financial and legal services, intellectual property as an input on the manufacture of goods); and is directly linked to the movement of people (e.g. professionals, truck drivers moving goods across borders, students obtaining education services in another country, engineers working on an infrastructure project abroad).

The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services entered into force on 30 May 2019 and seeks to create a single market for trade in services through the progressive liberalisation of services in a range of sectors commencing with five priority ones: business, communications, financial, tourism, and transport services. In each of these sectors, state parties are exchanging schedules of specific commitments, and working on regulatory cooperation towards reform of domestic regulation to facilitate open markets.

## Agreement Establishing the AfCTFA



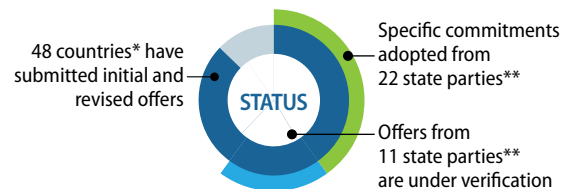
### Focus areas of AfCFTA service liberalisation

#### PHASE I PRIORITY:



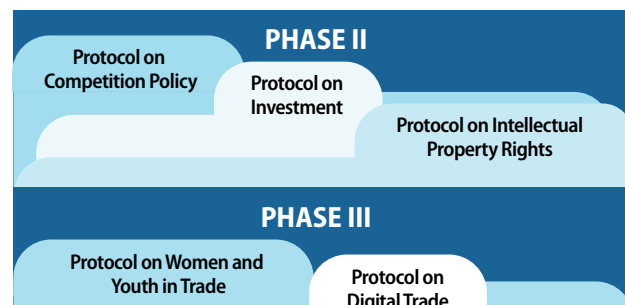
#### PHASE II:

construction and related engineering, distribution, education, environmental, health-related and social services, recreational, cultural and sporting services



\*48 countries have submitted initial and revised offers relating to the five priority sectors, with the request/offer process at an advanced stage<sup>a</sup>. Initial offers are made by each state party to all other AU state parties.

\*\*Specific commitments from 22 state parties have been adopted by the AU Assembly (the body comprising Heads of State and Government of the AU and which provides oversight and strategic guidance), while offers from a further 11 state parties are under verification by the AfCFTA Secretariat<sup>b</sup>.



a. <https://au-afcfta.org/trade-areas/trade-in-services/>.

b. Tralac – Trade in Services in the AfCFTA Factsheet.

Available at <https://www.tralac.org/resources/infographic/16187-trade-in-services-in-the-afcfta-factsheet.html>.

Commitments are made in four “services modes” of supply (Modes 1–4), where Mode 1 covers the provision of a service from one country to another (cross-border supply). Mode 2 relates to the consumption of services abroad in the territory of another country (for example, tourism, education, or when seeking medical treatment). Mode 3 relates to the provision of services abroad, through the establishment of commercial presence in the territory of another country. Finally, Mode 4 commitments relate to the (temporary) movement of persons to another country to provide a service, for example in the fields of engineering, education, technology, medical, or the supply of other consulting services.

It is anticipated that in each of the five priority sectors, AfCFTA state parties will offer access for movement of persons under Mode 4.

### Update on the Guided Trade Initiative

The GTI is an initiative championed by the AfCFTA Secretariat to begin trade under the Agreement. While the GTI is not explicitly provided for in the AfCFTA, its legal basis was adopted by the AfCFTA Council of Ministers, whose mandate includes taking measures to ensure implementation of the Agreement<sup>15</sup>. The GTI involves trade between countries that have joined the initiative, in products for which any tariff treatment and rules of origin (RoO) have been finalised. It is a unique initiative to test the broader institutional and operational environment of the AfCFTA while facilitating the start of commercially meaningful trade under the arrangement. The GTI signals to traders and governments that Africa is ready to embrace these new trade opportunities.

The GTI initially comprised eight countries (Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tanzania and Tunisia), while Algeria joined later, and 96 products (including horticulture products, pharmaceuticals, rubber, coffee and tea, and others) to be traded preferentially under the AfCFTA. This requires administrative and regulatory readiness by the participating countries, and alignment with the provisions of the AfCFTA.

Early transactions, including agrifood products from Tunisia to Cameroon, Kenyan batteries to Ghana, or Rwandan coffee to Ghana, were guided through the trade process and assisted with customs procedures at the port of export and import.

South Africa joined the initiative in January 2024 with shipments of home appliances and mining equipment to Ghana and Kenya, marking an important milestone and enabling possibilities for new trade between participating countries in South, East, West and North Africa. Under a Phase II of the GTI, announced by the AfCFTA Secretariat, more than 30 state parties expressed interest to join and at the Biashara Afrika Forum of October 2024 held in Kigali, Rwanda, a showcase of interest was expressed in agriculture and agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, automotive, transport and logistics, and digital technologies. The GTI currently has representation from all regions in Africa, including Island States.

The GTI is a commendable initiative and important catalyst to help drive progress in the AfCFTA, yet it must ultimately be seen as a bridging facility to enable preferential trade between countries that have completed critical aspects of the trade negotiations, and in turn, to finalise national legal processes to implement these outcomes.

From the perspective of movement of people, the GTI can be leveraged as a case for acceleration of movement of persons for the purposes of intra-African trade – including but not limited to trade in services. This is essential because people must follow both the goods and services. Building on the GTI momentum, it is important to work towards visa-free movement for AfCFTA-related business.

### AU Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons

The PFMP was adopted by AU Member States in 2018, and contains several migration mobility provisions, aimed at progressively freeing the movement of persons across African borders, and extending this to the right to enter, reside and establish in other African countries. However, it remains a different undertaking from the AfCFTA. To date, 32 member states have signed the Protocol, yet notwithstanding the positive momentum towards a more integrated continent, only four countries have ratified it (15 are needed for the Protocol to enter into force). The last ratification was in July 2019 (Niger).

The first phase of implementation would involve visa-free travel, with more progressive rights to follow. Despite the relatively high initial endorsement of the PFMP, the lack of progress suggests deep-rooted concerns about the scale and scope of the Protocol, perhaps a concern about the depth and pace of commitments it requires, and fears about a loss of policy autonomy. Notwithstanding the largely unchanged status quo, efforts to ease the movement of persons – often within the regional context – remain positive precursors to creating a broader platform for human mobility across AU member states.

## Single African Air Transport Market

The Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) is an initiative to significantly expand intra-African air connectivity through a range of measures, including deregulation and increased transnational competition. The SAATM initiative considers enhanced traffic rights for eligible airlines, improved connectivity schedules and common standards on issues such as safety and security, consumer protection and competition, as important building blocks towards a fully liberalised African air transport market.

One of the pillars considered for further liberalisation extends to creating more opportunities for airlines to operate flights that drop off and collect passengers in third countries. New routes and improved frequencies would offer travellers wider choices, encourage lower fares, and help grow air travel to facilitate tourism, trade in goods and services, economic opportunity and investment.

As one of the AU's flagship projects under Agenda 2063, the SAATM was officially launched in 2018 at a Summit of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Thirty-seven countries, representing more than 80% of Africa's aviation market, have signed up to the SAATM. However, in order for the initiative to deliver on its objectives and to significantly advance intra-African connectivity, it requires the political will to be fully operationalised.

## Breaking down barriers: Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade

An AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade was finalised earlier in 2024. It aims to promote and attain “sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, equality for women and youth”<sup>16</sup>. In many ways, this is groundbreaking, moving beyond gender equality and inclusivity as a general objective, to having provisions with concrete obligations to empower women and youth in trade.

The Protocol requires countries to pay particular attention to women and youth engaged in intra-African trade, including support for access to trade related infrastructure. This would include improvements to border infrastructure, to ease cross-border customs processes, and related trade facilitation issues.

The Protocol contains several specific and targeted provisions aimed at assisting women and youth to enhance their participation in cross-border trade. For example, easing non-tariff barriers, measures to improve access to finance, training to improve compliance with regulatory requirements and standards, by focusing on those aspects specifically affecting this target group. These are commendable goals.

Where the Protocol is limited on specific implementation modalities, given that it defers to and operates within the confines of the applicable national laws, the AU recently published a draft ministerial regulation on preferential market access for women and youth in trade, as required by the Protocol in Article 4(4). This details several actions specific to overcoming the challenges faced by women, youth and small-medium enterprises that are engaged in cross-border trade, thereby supporting implementation of the Protocol. Explicit objectives include promoting border transparency through dedicated trade information offices, cooperation on gender-sensitive infrastructure development (including safe storage of goods, and gender sensitive sanitary facilities), capacity building initiatives and generally addressing trade and border-related disparities and barriers that impede the participation of women and youth in the regional trade market.

The AU regulation also introduces a trade promoting regime (TPR) for small scale traders, highlighting how initiatives to facilitate cross-border trade also depend on the ease with which citizens of African countries can travel across borders unburdened by excessive bureaucracy.

It will be crucial that this Protocol is complemented by a facilitated regime for women and youth to move visa-free across the continent so as to seize AfCFTA-related opportunities.

## Facilitating cross-border trade by small-scale entrepreneurs in border communities

The TPR envisaged by the regulation on preferential market access for women and youth in trade aims to significantly reduce restrictions on low-value cross-border trade and is “developed to facilitate a preferential market for women and youth trading under the AfCFTA” (Draft Ministerial Regulation on Preferential Market Access for Women and Youth in Trade, Aug 2024).

Details must still be finalised and aligned with the general AfCFTA RoO regime (and offer tangible enhancements over the simplified customs measures envisaged there), however the TPR intends to ease trade in eligible product categories typically traded among adjacent border communities, reducing or even doing away with some of the administrative responsibilities usually applicable to such trade.

# Visa openness in Africa: Moving forward

Recommendations  
and suggestions  
for 2025 and beyond

# Recommendations and suggestions for 2025 and beyond

**The freedom to move across borders remains a fundamental pillar of the continent's integration agenda.** Over the past year, countries' visa policies have continued to evolve, sometimes in broad terms, but often in more nuanced and country-specific ways, for example, within the regional context, reciprocal arrangements or presumed security concerns. Sometimes, however, visa policy developments highlight a seemingly paradoxical misalignment between countries' visa openness and support for facilitating intra-African travel in the context of a broader regional integration agenda. Yet still, countries are demonstrating reluctance and even suspicion towards committing to deeper commitments to easing the movement of persons within the continental integration agenda.

In the context of progress made over the past years, visa openness remains at a much higher level today, compared to nine years ago, when the first AVOI report was published. In 2024, notwithstanding a marginally lower overall score compared to 2023, there have been further positive developments. Some of these have involved digitisation of visa formalities, or ETAs ahead of travel. While ostensibly progressive, this has sometimes – but not always – eased travel and has impacted citizens of different countries in different ways. It is important that countries carefully consider visa policy changes in the context of whether such changes ultimately lower rather than merely shift the burden associated with intra-Africa travel.

While the AVOI tracks and measures countries' visa policies, another important factor involves visa-related and administrative costs and overheads. African visa regimes impose vastly different information requirements on travellers ahead of travel. Visa costs can become a significant burden and indeed barrier to the movement of persons.

## Suggestions

- Extend visa-free travel policies to all AU member states, if necessary, in increments (by moving from a visa-before-travel to a visa-on-arrival or visa-free entry; moving from a visa-on-arrival to visa-free entry)
- Extend visa-free travel policies for AfCFTA-related business
- For all scenarios where citizens of African countries are still required to obtain a visa ahead of travel, offer the option of an e-visa based on a secure, reliable, mobile-friendly platform with a guaranteed response time
- Implement outstanding commitments on visa-free movement within RECs; to African citizens who are still required to obtain a visa, offer a visa on arrival, at low cost or at no cost
- Consider regional visa systems that apply to travel within an entire REC, or at a minimum, cover travel to several REC member states
- Promote higher levels of visa-free reciprocity within RECs as a stepping stone to more visa openness, within and outside of movement of persons protocols
- Offer longer-term and multiple-entry visas to repeat travellers
- Where an ETA is required ahead of travel, require only minimum passport and biometric information, electronically link this to the passport number, offer this at no or very low cost, and extend its applicability to multiple entries and at least two years or longer validity (or the applicant's passport expiry date)
- Reduce the documentary and associated administrative overhead on travellers in the application process, while guaranteeing short turnaround times
- Maintain low (or reduce, where necessary) applicable visa fees – as an approximation of the service rendered – so that these do not become a travel burden and barrier in their own right
- Keep government websites updated with reliable information on different categories of visas – tourism, business, study – and visa exemptions
- Present visa-related information in different languages and in an accessible format
- Use government social media channels to support and inform travellers, as well as to promote official and legal channels where a visa is still required

## Annex 1. Visa openness in Africa: 2024 country scores and rankings

Country	VISA OPENNESS INDICATORS (by number of other African countries)			Score	Rank
	No visa	Visa on arrival	Visa required*		
<b>Benin</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Seychelles</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Gambia</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Rwanda</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Ghana</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.864</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.864</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.849</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Mauritania</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.830</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Mauritius</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.826</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Burundi</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.823</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Mozambique</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.815</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.811</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Djibouti</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.800</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Comoros</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.800</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Senegal</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.792</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Madagascar</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.785</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Somalia</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.785</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.732</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0.706</b>	<b>20</b>
Namibia	13	27	13	0.653	21
Zimbabwe	17	10	26	0.472	22
Malawi	17	10	26	0.472	22
Zambia	14	11	28	0.430	24
Côte d'Ivoire	22	0	31	0.415	25
Tunisia	21	0	32	0.396	26
Uganda	21	0	32	0.396	26
Mali	20	1	32	0.392	28
Guinea	20	0	33	0.377	29
South Africa	20	0	33	0.377	29
Angola	19	0	34	0.358	31
Niger	18	0	35	0.340	32
Burkina Faso	17	0	36	0.321	33
Botswana	17	0	36	0.321	33
Eswatini	17	0	36	0.321	33
Lesotho	16	0	37	0.302	36
Togo	15	0	38	0.283	37
Chad	15	0	38	0.283	37
Liberia	14	0	39	0.264	39
Central African Republic	13	0	40	0.245	40
Republic of the Congo	5	8	40	0.215	41
Gabon	9	0	44	0.170	42
Morocco	8	0	45	0.151	43
São Tomé and Príncipe	8	0	45	0.151	43
Democratic Republic of Congo	4	3	46	0.121	45
Kenya	6	0	47	0.113	46
Cameroon	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47</b>	0.113	46
Algeria	6	0	47	0.113	46
Egypt	0	7	46	0.106	49
South Sudan	3	2	48	0.087	50
Eritrea	2	2	49	0.068	51
Equatorial Guinea	2	0	51	0.038	52
Libya	2	0	51	0.038	52
Sudan	0	2	51	0.030	54
Western Sahara					

\* "Visa required" means a visa must be obtained before departure.  
Scores range from 0 to 1 (highest).

## Annex 2. Visa openness in Africa: Developments and initiatives, 2024

Country	Rank	Top 20	Offers e-visa	Ratified AfCFTA <sup>17</sup>	Signed AfCFTA (not ratified) <sup>17</sup>	Signed PFMP <sup>18</sup>	Joined SAATM <sup>19</sup>
Benin	1	●	●		●		●
Seychelles	1	●		●			
The Gambia	1	●		●		●	●
Rwanda	1	●	●	●		●	●
Ghana	5	●		●		●	●
Nigeria	6	●	●	●			●
Cabo Verde	6	●		●			●
Guinea-Bissau	8	●		●			●
Mauritania	9	●		●			
Mauritius	10	●		●			
Burundi	11	●		●			
Mozambique	12	●	●	●		●	●
Sierra Leone	13	●	●	●		●	●
Djibouti	14	●	●	●		●	
Comoros	14	●		●		●	
Senegal	16	●		●		●	●
Madagascar	17	●	●		●		
Somalia	17	●			●	●	
Ethiopia	19	●	●	●			●
Tanzania	20	●	●	●		●	
Namibia	21			●			●
Zimbabwe	22		●	●		●	●
Malawi	22		●	●		●	
Zambia	24		●	●			●
Côte d'Ivoire	25		●	●		●	●
Tunisia	26			●			
Uganda	26		●	●		●	
Mali	28			●		●	●
Guinea	29		●	●		●	●
South Africa	29		●	●			●
Angola	31		●	●		●	●
Niger	32			●		●	●
Burkina Faso	33		●	●		●	●
Botswana	33			●			●
Eswatini	33			●			●
Lesotho	36			●		●	●
Togo	37		●	●		●	●
Chad	37			●		●	●
Liberia	39		●	●		●	●
Central African Republic	40			●		●	●
Republic of the Congo	41			●		●	●
Gabon	42		●	●		●	●
Morocco	43		●	●			●
São Tomé and Príncipe	43		●	●		●	●
Democratic Republic of Congo	45			●		●	●
Kenya	46			●		●	●
Cameroon	46		●	●			●
Algeria	46			●			
Egypt	49		●	●			●
South Sudan	50		●		●	●	
Eritrea	51						
Equatorial Guinea	52			●		●	●
Libya	52				●		
Sudan	54				●	●	
Western Sahara				●			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37</b>

AfCFTA=African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement; PFMP=Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons; SAATM=Single African Air Transport Market.

## Annex 3. Limitations

The AVOI collates and scores the visa policies of each African country as they apply to the casual short-term traveller from every other African country. These policies are generally applied on a differentiated basis, for example, most countries apply different visa regimes to different nationalities. The visa policies that are measured do not extend to the right of residence and occupation in another country, notwithstanding that some regions have attained higher levels of integration and have made significant advances in these aspects. By default, they also do not extend to other commercial activities that may, for example, require a business visa.

Assessing visa openness requires a consistent source of information. Since the report's inception in 2016, visa policy data has been drawn from IATA, the representative body of the international airline industry, because it maintains a global database of countries' passport, visa and health requirements pertaining to cross-border travel. It is thus of critical importance that countries cross-check the information that IATA shares with the industry, since it informs the advice given to travellers by their booking agents or displayed on travel websites and helps determine any pre-boarding restrictions that airlines may apply to prospective travellers, given certain liabilities that they hold as the carrier.

There are times when IATA information appears at odds with information shown on government websites or other resources. There are also times when information is outdated, not fully updated, or has not been communicated to IATA. At other times, new policies may not be fully in force yet, or old policies may continue to appear on different official websites.

To approach the data collection with consistency, this report uses the information as shown in relevant fields in the IATA database during the data collection period. In the absence of obvious errors, to deviate from this approach would risk potentially introducing unverified or even anecdotal sources of data, and other inconsistencies, even where at face value they may appear to be accurate.

The real-world experience of travellers may not always correlate with countries' official visa policies. By definition, a visa merely authorises travel to a country but does not guarantee a right to entry. The final determination is the prerogative of immigration officials at the point of entry. Countries also differentiate visas according to purpose: for example, where travel is for business purposes, a visa may be required or is subject to different criteria. Likewise, standard visa entry typically does not grant the holder long-term stays or residence.

Visa policies (and what travellers experience) may, in practice, differ between points of entry, for example, travellers arriving on international airlines at a country's commercial airport, and those that enter through land borders. At some borders, one may be subject to restrictions and requirements that are inconsistent with official visa policy. Certain land borders might even be traversed through un-regulated border crossings, follow other informal systems and customs, even without formal travel documents such as a national passport. At other times, the lived experience of travellers presents a far greater administrative burden than that which is expected based on official policy. Sudden border closures or unilateral travel restrictions continue to form part of the experience of many prospective cross-border travellers, be it because of broader conflict, local cross-border disputes, or a myriad of other factors.

Further, more travellers cross Africa's land borders by car, bus, truck, bicycle or on foot, than through formal and usually highly regulated international air travel. The data and findings of the AVOI must therefore be considered within this broader context.



## Endnotes

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