

African Development Bank: Visa openness will help recovery



Getting from country to country in Africa is challenging, with business travelers from other continents sometimes finding it easier to travel back to their home countries before moving on to the next place within Africa. Added to this, residents of one African nation often need a visa to visit another.

Since 2016, the African Development Bank and the African Union Commission have jointly issued an annual index on the openness of African countries to travellers from elsewhere on the continent

This year's edition found that the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic substantially impacted free movement. "In this new era of travel, safety and hygiene protocols have become as important as travel documentation and visa formalities," said the report.

"The evidence is clear: the countries that make it simpler for Africa's business people, tourists, students, and workers to visit their territories, are the countries that stand to attract more investment and talent. They are the countries whose economies will recover quickly," said Khaled Sherif, the African Development Bank's Vice-President for Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery.

Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, said: "The Covid-19 crisis has made one thing very certain: Africa needs to be more self-sufficient. To get there, we need to boost intra-African trade, and that means fewer visa restrictions."

The 2021 Visa Openness Index also makes a compelling case for streamlining the visa process for young Africans. "All young people need is the freedom to move around the continent and support as they develop into Africa's entrepreneurs and business leaders," it stated.

While 36 African countries have improved or maintained their Visa Openness Index score since the

index began in 2016, overall the continent is almost evenly split between countries with a liberal visa policy and those that partially restrict entry from other African states.

Roughly 25% of African countries welcome some or all African visitors without the need for visas. An equivalent number permit some or all African visitors to obtain a visa on arrival. Twenty-four countries offer electronic visas, up from 15 five years ago.

The Africa Visa Openness Index aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Protocol on the Free Movement of People and, in particular, advances the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, with a market of 1.3 billion people.

"By supporting the free movement of people, we make it easier for Africans to do business in Africa. Free movement of people, especially workers, could help plug skills gaps, while enabling countries to fix skills mismatches in their labour markets," said Jean-Guy Afrika, the Officer-In-Charge of the Regional Integration Coordination Office at the African Development Bank.