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# **Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa's Countries to the European Union Member States: Do the Prospects for Better Economic Well-Being Matter?**

## **Abstract**

*International migration is not a new phenomenon. However, because of a growing number of people coming from less developed countries to the more developed ones migration has become a serious challenge creating a need for new approaches how to cope with it. International migration can be interpreted in light of both positive and negative consequences. Migration from Sub-Saharan countries to the European Union Member States has been seen by populist politicians and thus the media as a threat for European future. Therefore, most migrants coming to Europe are considered by general public to be economic migrants looking for better living conditions. However, unacceptable living conditions in many Sub-Saharan countries can be understood as violations of basic human rights and thus these immigrants have to be regarded as refugees. The aim of the paper is to describe trends in the number of asylum applicants coming to the EU Member States from Sub-Saharan Africa, and to assess if the prospects for better economic well-being can explain differing number of asylum applicants registered in the EU Member States. Conclusions are based on a review of relevant academic literature as well as on own statistical analysis done for the 2008–2017 period.*

**Key words:** asylum applicant, economic well-being, European Union, migration, Sub-Saharan Africa.

**JEL Classification:** F22, O11, O15.

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## Introduction

Mobility is one of the fundamental features of human society. People have migrated since the beginning of time. They have usually moved to different regions with the aim to improve their living conditions understood in broader terms. Because of the existence of international borders, this phenomenon is not considered a natural process as it was seen in the past, especially if it concerns migration from less developed countries to the more developed ones. Human mobility between developed countries is usually invited and explained with the existence of flexible labour markets (Ellis 2003). However, mobility between countries with different levels of development is seen as a different case, although personal motivation of people, who are mobile, can be the same.

In recent years, the number of asylum applicants coming to Europe has dramatically increased. The European Union (EU) is considered to be a developed region of the world with a high standard of living and a generous welfare system. Its economic, political and social prosperity is attractive not only to people coming from other developed regions, but also to those coming from the less developed ones. Current international migration flows towards the EU can be classified as mixed movements, because they include both refugees and economic migrants (Nová 2016).

As a result of this increased mobility, populist European politicians can use actual migration waves as instruments to create fear (Kasozi 2017) and interpret migration in negative terms. Therefore, general public regards most asylum seekers coming to Europe as economic migrants looking for better living conditions and not as refugees with the right to international protection. According to the regular Eurobarometer surveys (GMDAC 2017), immigration is still the top of the list of concerns for the EU citizens (following terrorism). As a result of these circumstances, migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the EU belongs to one of the most stigmatized forms of migration of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Schapendonk 2012).

Especially, the inability of the EU and its Member States to apply common mechanisms of how to cope with a growing number of people coming to the EU from Africa's Sub-Saharan countries exposes their weakness and creates fears among European citizens. Some EU Member States are affected by the actual migration waves more significantly than others, but the idea of solidarity that the EU is based on does not work to alleviate this.

## 1. Definitions, Research Objectives and Methods

Enormous number of studies concerning international migration has been introduced to this date. International migration as a multidimensional phenomenon has been examined in many contexts with the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. As a discussion topic, migration attracts the attention of many serious conferences as well as public meetings. Many official documents and statistical reports demonstrate the urgency of the actual migration wave.

Because of increased migration flows between developed industrialized countries and the developing ones, impressive research attention is paid to interconnections between migration and development. In reality, they are closely interconnected in both directions – migration stimulates development both in home and host countries (under certain assumptions) and vice versa, development stimulates migration. Migration is motivated by the natural ambition for better conditions for individual development and well-being and thus it has to be understood in terms of livelihood strategies too. See the explanatory studies of Ellis (2003), De Hass (2010, 2011) or Clements (2014).

The aim of the paper is to describe trends in the number of asylum applicants coming to the EU Member States from Sub-Saharan Africa, and to assess if the prospects for better economic well-being can explain differing number of asylum applicants registered in various EU Member States. Conclusions are based on a review of relevant academic literature as well as on own statistical analysis done for the period of 2008–2017. As the first step of the analysis, basic terms and methods are explained.

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention (known as Geneva Convention) a refugee is someone who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum, understood as the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance (UNHCR 2018). The European Union, based on full and inclusive application of Geneva Convention, means an asylum applicant (AP) a person having submitted an application for international protection or having been included in such application as a family member. Presented analysis concerns so-called first time asylum applicants in the EU Member States. First-time asylum applicants for international protection (defined in Article 2(h) of Qualification

Directive 2011/95/EU) are persons who lodged an application for asylum for the first time in a given Member State during the reference period. The term 'first-time' implies no time limitation and therefore person can be recorded as first-time applicant only if he or she had never applied for international protection in a reporting country in the past.

In the analysis, only asylum seekers coming from the Sub-Saharan Africa's countries are taken into account. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a quite frequent term used in various contexts. However, each researcher covers a different number of states with this regional and socio-economic designation. Presented analysis uses this term to denote all African countries, besides Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic and Tunisia.

The presented analysis is divided into two parts. The first part of the analysis deals with the 2008–2017 period and identifies SSA countries contributing in the most significant way to the current SSA-EU migration flows; and EU countries with the highest number of registered asylum applicants from SSA countries.

The second part of the analysis links the number of SSA immigrants applying for asylum in the EU Member States with the prospects for better economic well-being there. Economic well-being is understood to be the material living conditions, which determine people's consumption possibilities and their command over resources. Material living conditions are described with such measures as wealth, income, jobs and earnings (for details see OECD 2013). Prospects for asylum applicants' better economic well-being are evaluated in the paper with the use of these measures: GDP per capita, median equivalised net income per capita, social benefits per capita, risk of poverty indicator and price level indices for actual individual consumption.

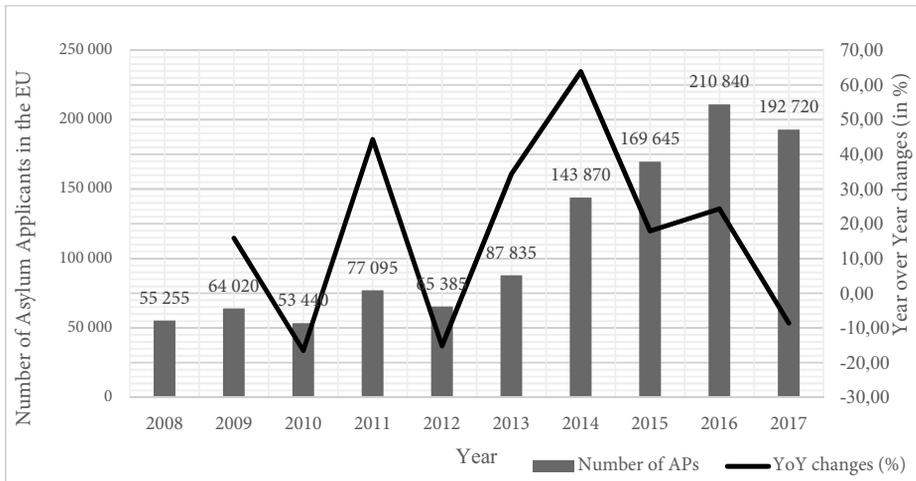
Analysis is made with the use of descriptive statistical methods. The number of asylum applicants is put into the relation to composite index (*CI*) assessing prospects for better economic well-being. *CI* is calculated as the simple arithmetic mean of normalized values of above defined measures of economic well-being for the period 2008–2015 (because of the data availability for all measures). Normalisation is done according to a standard formula converting the original values of defined measures into numbers varying in a range from 0 to 1 (0 for the worst possible outcome and 1 for the best possible outcome). To see the differences in *CI* more evident, the traffic light method is applied, where yellow colour is used for percentile 50. Then, values of *CI* are put in relation to the number of asylum applicants in the year 2016 and 2017.

## 2. Empirical Analysis And Results

Total number of asylum applications registered in the EU Member States has increased in recent years. However, in the 1990s, the EU faced a similar phenomenon. Because of political crises and armed conflicts, the number of new asylum applications started to increase in 1987. The peak was reached in 1992 when the EU Member States registered about 700 thousand applications. In the second half of the 1990s, the number of application permanently declined. Between years 1998 and 2003, the EU recorded from 300 to 400 thousands asylum applicants annually. Since 2004, a significant drop was observed and the EU Member States registered 192 300 new asylum applications in 2006 (Juchno 2007). Between years 2008 and 2012, the total number of asylum applications submitted in the EU Member States was slowly increasing. Year over year changes in the number of registered asylum seekers started to grow rapidly in 2013. In 2014, the EU recorded more than 600 thousand asylum applicants and their number doubled to 1,300 thousand in the year 2015 (Kovářová 2018b).

The number of first time asylum applicants (APs) coming to the EU Members States from SSA started to grow significantly between years 2013 and 2014 and exceeded 100 thousand in the year 2014. This impressive growth was also observed in the next two years, when the number of APs reached 210 840 and 192 720 (see details in Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Total number of first time asylum applicants coming from SSA to the EU Member States**



Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.

Although between years 2008 and 2017 the total number of migrants coming to the EU from third countries increased, asylum applicants coming from SSA contributed to this growth less significantly than migrants coming from other third countries. SSA migrants' share in total number of asylum applicants declined from 30.5% to 17.4%. However, the latest data show increased number of migrants in vulnerable situation (GMDAC 2017). For instance, nearly one fifth of all APs from Sub-Saharan Africa were children under the age of 17 (Kovářová 2018b).

Figure 1 reflects data concerning the mixed migration movements. It means that it covers both economic migrants and refugees who applied for asylum in EU countries. In reality, it is important to distinguish different categories of people involved in mixed migratory movements because every category has different rights. Therefore, the specification of the countries the migrants come from is a very valuable information

## 2.1. Sub-Saharan Africa's Countries with the Most Significant Contribution to the SSA-EU Migration Flows

In the long-term, Sub-Saharan Africa has been a low-income developing region with a marginal share in the world's GDP, trade and influence on the international economic order. Its economic, political and social stability has always been fragile and uncertain because of various crises, civil wars, ethnic conflicts or coup d'états that have occurred there very often and have affected SSA progress in socio-economic and human development. Most SSA countries face serious structural, socio-economic and developmental problems.

However, great differences exist when the SSA countries are compared. In some countries, possibilities for the improvement in living conditions are limited because of the lack of resources and capacity, or because of political instability connected with human rights' violations. Migration to Europe is, in many cases, seen by citizens of these countries as the livelihood strategy that would improve prospects for their family's present and especially future life. Therefore, in relation to existing ways how to get to Europe from these countries, their emigrants contribute more significantly to actual SSA-EU migration flows. However, it was proven in many research studies that European immigrants do not come from the poorest SSA countries.

Between years 2008 and 2017, the highest number of asylum applicants in the EU Member States came from Nigeria (185 560), followed by Eritrea (169 080), Somalia

(149 325), Guinea and Gambia (see details in Annex 1). Besides these countries, also other SSA countries were in certain years classified as the countries with the most significant contribution to SSA-EU migration flows, e.g. Zimbabwe (in 2010), Sudan (in 2015) or Côte d'Ivoire (in 2017). During the analysed period, the number of SSA countries contributing to the SSA-EU migration flows increased. In 2008, more than 1 000 asylum applicants came from only ten SSA countries, compared to twenty in 2017.

## 2.2. The EU Member States Registering the Highest Number of Asylum Applicants from Sub-Saharan Africa

In 2017, 36 million migrants worldwide were born in Africa, which accounted for 14% of all international migrants. However, 53% of them lived in a different African country and only 26% in Europe (United Nations, 2017). The number of first time asylum seekers who came to the European Union accounted for 192 720 in this year and in total 1 120 105 for the 2008–2017 period (see above Figure 1). They usually applied for asylum in a quite narrow group of EU Member States. Five EU Member States with the highest number of APs registered from 75% to 90% of all applications placed in the EU (see for details Annex 2). Between years 2008–2017, the highest number of APs was in Italy (343 555), followed by Germany (220 470), France (182 530), the United Kingdom and Sweden. Differences between specified groups of the EU Member States are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Asylum applicants registered in specified groups of the EU Member States**

Country Group	Year										
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2 012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2008–2017
V4	110	80	105	185	360	2 905	1 520	5 935	625	85	11 910
EU6	32 635	37 480	34 350	57 085	40 170	58 250	104 405	124 165	187 075	168 570	844 185
EU15	52 425	61 395	52 925	75 075	62 875	81 955	141 395	163 165	209 010	191 560	1 091 780
EU13	2 825	2 640	535	2 045	2 475	5 820	2 485	6 370	1 805	1 245	28 245

Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.

Significant difference exists especially when the 'old' EU Member States (joining the EU before the year 2004, EU15) and the 'new' ones (EU13) are compared. Within the group of Visegrad Countries (V4 – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic), the highest number of APs were registered in Hungary and accounted for nearly 11 000. In the Czech Republic, only 350 people coming from SSA applied for asylum between years 2008 and 2017, similarly to Poland.

### **2.3. The Number of Asylum Applicants in Relation to Prospects for Better Economic Well-being in EU Member States**

If migration is discussed by the general public, it is usually understood to be migration from developing countries to rich countries in Europe and North America. This misleading interpretation is based on the fact that on average three quarters of international migrants came to a country with a higher level of human development than their country of origin had. However, the majority of international migrants moved to improve their living standard within the same megaregion.

Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa is considered a negative trend by most citizens of the EU Member States regardless of the asylum applicants' countries of origin (and thus their possible rights for the refugee status). People coming from SSA are simply seen as economic migrants wanting to obtain social benefits offered by the countries they apply for asylum in. However, in many cases, the relation between better economic well-being and number of registered first time APs is not as strong, as the general public expects. Following is Table 2, which sums up classification of the EU Member States according to the achieved levels of economic well-being during the period of years 2008–2015, and the number of APs registered in these countries in the year 2016 and 2017.

The composite index (*CI*) is calculated as the simple arithmetic mean of normalized values of above defined measures of economic well-being. Classification of the EU Member States in every dimension of economic well-being is presented in Annex 3.

**Table 2: Classification of the EU Member States with respect to CI of economic well-being and number of APs**

Country	CI 2008–2015	Number of registered first time APs	
		2016	2017
Austria	0,58	4 080	2 445
Belgium	0,53	4 140	4 330
Bulgaria	0,21	25	35
Croatia	0,31	35	15
Cyprus	0,41	415	430
Czech Republic	0,46	35	25
Denmark	0,58	850	640
Estonia	0,36	10	0
Finland	0,55	1 220	870
France	0,55	26 420	30 515
Germany	0,55	68 825	42 655
Greece	0,33	1 845	3 265
Hungary	0,33	575	30
Ireland	0,45	735	860
Italy	0,43	84 075	86 995
Latvia	0,26	10	20
Lithuania	0,31	0	30
Luxembourg	0,79	345	465
Malta	0,41	545	515
Netherlands	0,59	3 270	3 610
Poland	0,36	15	30
Portugal	0,37	335	605
Romania	0,23	95	65
Slovakia	0,40	0	0
Slovenia	0,44	45	50
Spain	0,40	1 600	3 405
Sweden	0,56	3 485	3 495
United Kingdom	0,46	7 785	7 405

Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.

Prospects for better economic well-being are higher in every EU Member State than in Sub-Saharan Africa if we consider ordinary people. However, between EU countries, significant differences exist. It is evident that the best preconditions for economic well-being during the examined period were reached in Luxemburg,

but the number of APs in this country is not the highest one. However, in case of Germany or France, preconditions for relatively better economic well-being (in comparison to other EU countries) exist and thus the number of SSA immigrants applying for asylum there is very high. In case of Italy, this relation is weak. Here location of Italy is the most significant cause of a very high number of registered APs. Lower economic attractiveness of the 'new' EU Member States is possibly connected with the low number of migrants coming there from Sub-Saharan Africa. However, in some EU Member States there still are very good preconditions for better economic well-being, but they are not so attractive to migrants applying for asylum (see the case of Austria, Belgium or the Netherlands). Therefore, it is expected that also other factors influencing APs decision-making have to be taken into account. As the most significant ones can be considered the influence of relatives already living in the EU, influence of global media or active campaigns of migrants' smugglers, who offer a possibility to get to Europe. However, these factors cannot be covered by standard statistical measures.

## Conclusions

Between years 2008 and 2017, the number of migrants coming to the EU increased. Asylum seekers coming from Sub-Saharan Africa contributed to this increase with more than 1 million people who applied for asylum in EU Member States. The peak in current migration flows was reached in the year 2016 when the total number of asylum applicants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa to the EU accounted for 210 840. However, in relative terms, their share in total number of asylum applicants declined from 30.5% to 17.4%, because of growing migration flows from other third countries.

Migration can be analysed in different contexts. When the relation between individual well-being and migration is examined, then migration can be seen as a livelihood strategy enabling to increase prospects for better economic well-being for present and future life of a migrant and his family. This context has to be discussed if the international migration from less developed countries to the more developed ones is analysed.

Economic well-being can be measured by various economic indicators, such as GDP p.c., net incomes, provided social benefits, prevalence of poverty or price level of actual individual consumption (that were taken into account in this paper). The EU Member States offer better perspectives for economic well-being than Sub-Saharan

African countries, but significant disparities among them exist. However, the relation between prospects for better economic well-being and number of asylum seekers coming to the EU Member States from Sub-Saharan Africa is not as strong, as it is widely expected.

The number of registered asylum applicants in the EU Member States differs. Differences are evident especially when the 'old' and 'new' EU Member States are compared. In some cases, attractiveness of the 'old' ones is, inter alia, related to their relatively more favourable preconditions for better economic well-being (in comparison to other EU countries). And thus, these countries registered a high number of asylum applicants (cases of Germany or France). However, it is evident that also other factors affecting migrants' choice have to be analysed because some 'old' EU countries with very favourable preconditions for better economic well-being were not attractive for immigrants at all (cases of Luxembourg, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands). At least, the country's location also plays a role in asylum applicants' decision-making (case of Italy).

Presented findings concerning the relation between the existing prospects for economic well-being in the EU Member States and registered number of asylum applicants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa open space for further research. It should be focused on asylum procedures, as well as on possibilities for immigrants' integration to the society in hosting EU countries.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: Five SSA countries most significantly contributing to the SSA-EU migration inflows, 2008–2017

Year	Number of first time APs										Total number of APs in EU	Number of SSA countries with more than 1 000 APs in EU
2008	Somalia	15 255	Nigeria	8 970	Eritrea	6 930	Zimbabwe	4 730	Ghana	2 515	55 255	10
2009	Somalia	16 865	Zimbabwe	7 825	Nigeria	7 735	Eritrea	4 990	Congo DR	4 180	64 020	14
2010	Somalia	12 920	Nigeria	5 435	Congo DR	5 000	Guinea	4 440	Eritrea	4 325	53 440	12
2011	Nigeria	12 225	Somalia	10 600	Congo DR	5 795	Eritrea	5 575	Guinea	5 560	77 095	18
2012	Somalia	12 850	Congo DR	7 475	Nigeria	6 725	Eritrea	6 235	Guinea	4 480	65 385	16
2013	Somalia	14 715	Eritrea	13 920	Nigeria	10 190	Congo DR	7 505	Mali	6 425	87 835	16
2014	Eritrea	36 250	Nigeria	18 895	Somalia	14 805	Mali	12 790	Gambia	11 315	143 870	14
2015	Eritrea	33 115	Nigeria	30 025	Somalia	19 610	Gambia	12 225	Sudan	10 920	169 645	17
2016	Nigeria	46 255	Eritrea	33 370	Somalia	18 975	Gambia	15 725	Guinea	13 465	210 840	20
2017	Nigeria	39 105	Eritrea	24 370	Guinea	17 730	Côte d'Ivoire	14 020	Somalia	12 730	192 720	20
2008–2017	Nigeria	185 560	Eritrea	169 080	Somalia	149 325	Guinea	67 390	Gambia	60 595	1 120 105	---

Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.

### Annex 2: Five EU Member States with the highest number of APs coming from SSA, 2008–2017

Year	Number of first time APs										Share of top 5 in total number of APs
2008	Italy	21 490	UK	12 150	Sweden	5 200	Netherlands	5 135	Belgium	3 150	85,29
2009	UK	13 880	France	12 780	Italy	9 435	Sweden	8 140	Netherlands	7 705	81,11
2010	France	14 810	Sweden	8 285	UK	7 835	Germany	5 875	Netherlands	5 295	78,75
2011	Italy	25 095	France	17 380	Sweden	7 145	UK	6 645	Belgium	6 555	81,46
2012	France	17 055	Sweden	10 235	Italy	7 730	UK	6 785	Germany	6 575	74,03
2013	France	18 945	Germany	17 050	Italy	14 450	Sweden	9 920	UK	6 995	76,74
2014	Italy	40 645	Germany	33 280	France	20 510	Sweden	17 250	UK	9 445	84,19
2015	Italy	50 375	Germany	35 035	France	24 115	Sweden	14 555	UK	11 965	80,25
2016	Italy	84 075	Germany	68 825	France	26 420	UK	7 785	Belgium	4 140	90,72
2017	Italy	86 995	Germany	42 655	France	30 515	UK	4 330	Belgium	4 330	87,56
2008–2017	Italy	343 555	Germany	220 470	France	182 530	UK	90 890	Sweden	87 710	82,60

Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.

**Annex 3: Classification of the EU Member States according to the normalized values of measures assessing economic well-being 2008–2015 (normalized values of defined measures)**

Country	GDP per capita	Median equivalised net income p.c.	Social benefits p.c.	At risk of poverty indicator	Price index: individual consumption	Composite index
Austria	0.41	0.63	0.66	0.86	0.32	0.58
Belgium	0.37	0.59	0.58	0.80	0.30	0.53
Bulgaria	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.21
Croatia	0.06	0.11	0.10	0.49	0.77	0.31
Cyprus	0.22	0.45	0.24	0.64	0.49	0.41
Czech Republic	0.12	0.17	0.21	1.00	0.79	0.46
Denmark	0.51	0.79	0.68	0.91	0.00	0.58
Estonia	0.10	0.14	0.08	0.72	0.75	0.36
Finland	0.40	0.65	0.57	0.93	0.19	0.55
France	0.34	0.59	0.61	0.88	0.33	0.55
Germany	0.37	0.56	0.61	0.83	0.39	0.55
Greece	0.17	0.25	0.27	0.45	0.52	0.33
Hungary	0.06	0.08	0.15	0.48	0.87	0.33
Ireland	0.46	0.61	0.42	0.59	0.15	0.45
Italy	0.28	0.45	0.46	0.60	0.40	0.43
Latvia	0.07	0.09	0.03	0.33	0.77	0.26
Lithuania	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.49	0.86	0.31
Luxembourg	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.90	0.06	0.79
Malta	0.15	0.30	0.18	0.76	0.65	0.41
Netherlands	0.43	0.60	0.67	0.97	0.31	0.59
Poland	0.06	0.09	0.12	0.62	0.90	0.36
Portugal	0.14	0.20	0.25	0.64	0.60	0.37
Romania	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.14	0.96	0.23
Slovakia	0.10	0.14	0.13	0.84	0.80	0.40
Slovenia	0.16	0.32	0.26	0.86	0.60	0.44
Spain	0.22	0.38	0.32	0.62	0.46	0.40
Sweden	0.47	0.67	0.63	0.90	0.12	0.56
United Kingdom	0.35	0.54	0.48	0.72	0.23	0.46

Source: Eurostat (2018), own data processing.