Africa Visa Openness Report 2021

VISA OPENNESS INDEX

African Union

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

"The success of all is the success of Africa… Together, we would become like a Baobab tree whose roots will be deep enough to touch all parts of Africa." [1]

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

Championing Freedom of Movement Across Africa

Africa Visa Openness Index 2021 Headlines

Despite the lockdowns necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, many African countries continue to signal visa openness to the citizens of other countries on the continent:

The top 10 countries' average score on the Africa Visa Openness Index rose to 0.904 from 0.902 in 2020.

Benin, The Gambia, and Seychelles continued to offer visa-free access to all Africans.

Nonetheless, visa openness in Africa as a whole dropped slightly over the year. The continent is almost evenly split between countries with a liberal visa policy and countries whose visa policy is more restrictive:

25% of African countries welcome some or all African visitors, visa-free.

24% of African countries allow some or all African visitors to obtain a visa on arrival.

51% of African countries require African visitors to obtain a visa before they arrive.

Highlights from 2016-2021

Between 2016 and 2021, 36 countries—two-thirds of the continent—improved or maintained their AVOI score.

In 2021, 24 African countries—44% of the continent—offered an eVisa to Africans, up from 9 African countries—17% of the continent—in 2016.

Africa Visa Openness Index

The Africa Visa Openness Index (AVOI) measures the extent to which African countries are open to visitors from other African countries. The index analyzes each country's visa requirements to show which countries on the continent 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 do not need a visa to enter. Each country is then assigned a visa openness score and ranked accordingly.

First published in 2016, the AVOI also tracks changes in countries' scores over time. This shows how countries' policies are evolving as regards the freedom of movement across Africa. Future editions of the AVOI are expected to analyze not only how countries are cutting processing times, reducing visa costs, and simplifying the visa process, but also the extent to which countries' visa policies match up to their visitors' experience in applying for, obtaining, and using a visa.

Data for this year's edition was collected between June and July 2021. The main sources of information were the International Air Transport Association and countries' official websites.

Acknowledgements

This is the sixth edition of the *Africa Visa Openness Report*. It presents the findings of this year's Africa Visa Openness Index, which has been produced jointly by the African Development Bank (Bank) and the African Union Commission (AUC) since 2016.

In the last 18 months, countries across Africa instituted strict travel restrictions to contain the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As infection rates declined, a number of countries began to open their borders safely and securely.

The emergence of new variants makes the evolution of this process uncertain, not only in Africa, but around the world. The situation calls for careful planning, grounded in the best evidence and developed in collaboration, not in isolation. By championing the Africa Visa Openness Index, the leadership of the Bank and the AUC is helping this process and building a more integrated, safer, and more secure Africa that encourages intra-African trade, tourism, and investment.

Sincere appreciation is extended to Zodwa Florence Mabuza, who led this flagship project, and to Ambroise Kitohou and Johanna Pangeiko Nautwima, whose assistance with data collection and analysis was invaluable. Special thanks go to the Bank's Regional Integration Coordination Office team, especially Patrick Kanyimbo, Youssouf Kone, Memory Dube, Ometere Omoluabi-Davies, and Lufeyo Banda, for helping to develop this tool.

I would also like to acknowledge the Bank's consultants who have produced excellent work on the *Africa Visa Openness Report* over the years: Elena Immambocus for developing the report, and Peggy King Cointepas for design and graphics. Thank you also to Jennifer Petrela for her fine editing of this publication.

—Jean-Guy Afrika
Officer in Charge, Regional Integration Coordination Office,
African Development Bank

Visas

How they work

A **visa** is an endorsement, usually figuring as a certificate or a stamp in a visitor's travel document, that shows that the visitor is allowed to enter the country of destination for a specific length of time and for specific activities.

Countries use visas for **different purposes:** as a security measure (to control the entry and length of stay of people entering the country), as a means of limiting visitors' activities, as a source of revenue, or as a way of reciprocating the treatment their citizens receive from other countries.

Definitions

Visa required before travel means that a visitor must obtain a visa from an embassy, an honorary consulate, or another official representative of the country of destination before the visitor travels to the country of destination.

Visa on arrival means that a visitor must obtain a visa upon the visitor's arrival in the country of destination. The visa obtention process could include filling out visa forms, paying a visa fee, and receiving a stamp in the visitor's travel document.

No visa means that a visitor needs no visa, either before departure or upon arrival, to enter the country of destination. The visitor does not need to be authorised to enter the country. Nonetheless, the visitor must still comply with entry procedures. These can include filling out entry forms and receiving an entry stamp.

eVisa refers to an electronic visa that can be obtained before the visitor's departure from an official platform online.

Visa openness refers to the ease with which visitors are authorized to enter their country of destination.

A more **visa-open** country has a 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.

A **visa-restrictive** country requires visitors to obtain a visa before they travel. Visitors might obtain the visa from an embassy, a consulate, or another source.

The **visa openness rate** refers to the percentage of other countries in Africa whose citizens are permitted to enter the country's territory without having obtained a visa before arriving. Earlier editions of the AVOI referred to this as the "liberal access rate."

Important: Visa policies change frequently. Before travelling, please check with the embassy or consulate of your country of destination.

Methodology

How the AVOI calculates each country's score

Scores and rankings. AVOI scores range from 0 to 1, where 0 designates countries with the most restrictive visa policies and 1 designates countries with the most welcoming policies.

The higher a country's index score, the more "visa-open" is the country and the higher it ranks.

Categories and weightings. To calculate each country's score, the AVOI assesses the country's visa policy vis-à-vis each of the other 53 countries in the continent[2] and classifies each policy in one of three categories. The AVOI gives each category a weighting:

Category	Weighting
Visa required before travel	0
Visa on arrival	0.8
No visa required	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 required before travel, visa on arrival, no visa required).
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: Visa openness score = [(% of African countries whose nationals must obtain a visa before travelling x 0) + (% of African countries whose nationals may obtain a visa on arrival x 0.8) + (% of African countries whose nationals are not required to obtain a visa x 1)] / 100

An Example

Country X requires the nationals of 13 countries to obtain a visa before travel. It 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:

Visa openness score for Country X = ((visa required before travel: 13/53 x 0) + (visa upon arrival: 30/53 x 0.8) + (no visa required: 10/53 x 1) / 100 = 0.642

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Visas 4

Methodology 4

Definitions 4

Abbreviations 5

The AVOI Platform 5

Foreword, African Development Bank 6
Dr. Khaled F. Sherif
Vice-President
Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery

Foreword, African Union Commission 7
H.E Dr. Monique Nsazabaganwa
Deputy Chairperson
African Union Commission

African Union: Latest Developments on Agenda 2063 8

Africa Snapshot: Rebounding After Shocks 11

Visa Openness in Africa: Progress from 2016 to 2021 13

Visa Openness in Africa: Findings for 2021 16

Regional Overview, 2021 20

Case Studies: Countries That Moved Up in 2021 22
- **Namibia** 22
- **Tunisia** 23
- **Morocco** 23

Visa Openness in Africa: Looking Ahead 25

Annexes 26

Notes 28

Abbreviations

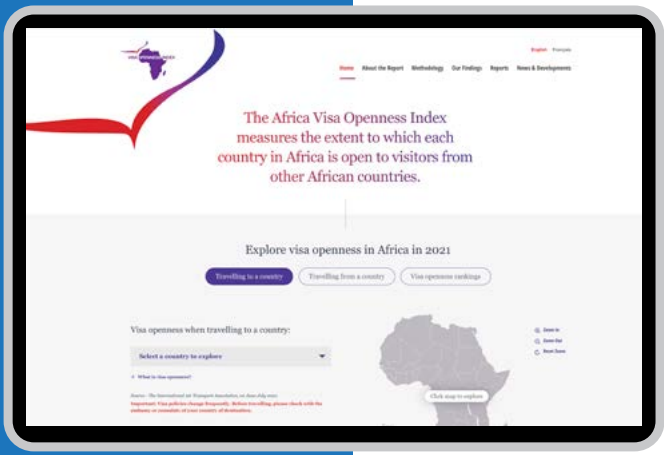
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank Group
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AVOI	African Visa Openness Index
AUC	African Union Commission
COVID-19	Infectious disease caused by coronavirus
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
eVisa	Electronic visa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IATA	International Air Transport Association
REC	Regional Economic Community
SAATM	Single African Air Transport Market
SADC	Southern African Development Community
USD	United States Dollars

The AVOI Platform

The AVOI's online platform summarizes the visa policy of each country in Africa. It shows the changes in each country's scores and rankings from year to year, and it explains how Africa is performing on visa openness overall.

Visit it at:

www.visaopenness.org



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

Foreword, African Development Bank

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a health crisis not seen in years and has had a devastating socioeconomic impact on countries across Africa. To recover and rebuild, it is imperative that we combine efforts not only to expand access to vaccines, but also to ease the movement of people on the continent. Making vaccines more accessible and easing the movement of people are essential to kick-start trade and investments in tourism, travel-related industries, and other equally crucial sectors, such as agriculture, energy, and manufacturing.

The findings of the Africa Visa Openness Index can help countries drive policy reforms that will build resilience and strengthen Africa's recovery. By supplying readers with the latest data, the *Africa Visa Openness Report* will help Africans decide where to visit, where to do business, and where to invest. It will also show the African Development Bank's regional member countries what areas require policy reform.

Notwithstanding positive developments over the past five years, reform is still necessary. For the first time since the *African Visa Openness Report* was published, the data shows that openness levels dropped slightly in 2021, after some governments temporarily reversed their liberal visa regime partly in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and largely to respond to recent instability in their countries. African travellers now require a visa to access just over half of the continent's countries.

Nonetheless, the trends between 2016 and 2021 are heartening. They show that two-thirds of countries in all regions of the continent have improved or maintained their visa openness score over the past five years. At the same time, to facilitate access, 24 African countries now offer an eVisa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given a new impetus to human mobility. Let us capitalize on this silver lining by improving connectivity and embracing technological solutions. An Africa with liberal visa regimes and open borders benefits us all.

—Dr. Khaled F. Sherif
Vice-President, Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery

Foreword, African Union Commission

In January 2021, the largest free trade area in the world began operations. This trade area covers all but one African country, and its increase in intra-African trade is expected to produce huge economic and social gains for the continent.

If implemented fully and in an inclusive manner, the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement will extend a critical lifeline to African small businesses and will boost the livelihoods of African women and young people—those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet this sixth edition of the *Africa Visa Openness Report* reveals a real danger of Africa losing the gains in liberal visa policies that the continent has realized over the years. In 2021, Africans can only travel to one-quarter of the continent visa-free, and fewer countries issue visas on arrival than before. Many travellers also report excessive fees and delays in obtaining a visa. A lot more can be done to reduce bureaucracy, address the security implications for the free movement of persons agenda, and simplify the visa process so that Africans have a smoother travel experience.

On a positive note, the top 10 countries' average score on the Africa Visa Openness Index rose over the last year, and Benin, The Gambia, and Seychelles continue to offer visa-free access to all Africans. The East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) remain the top performing regional economic communities.

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the urgent need for African countries to be more self-sufficient—economically and socially. To get there, we need to intensify our efforts to boost intra-African trade. It is more urgent than ever that we expand Africans' freedom to move around their own continent. It is even more urgent that countries sign and ratify the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.

We have committed to a model of African integration. Let us bring that model to life.

—H.E. Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa
Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission

Agenda 2063
The Africa we Want

African Union's Agenda 2063[3]

ASPIRATION 2.

An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.

We aspire that by 2063, Africa shall:

Be a United Africa;

Have world class, integrative infrastructure that criss-crosses the continent;

Have dynamic and mutually beneficial links with her Diaspora; and

Be a continent with seamless borders, and management of cross border resources through dialogue.

Africa shall be a continent where the free movement of people, capital, goods and services will result in significant increases in trade and investments amongst African countries rising to unprecedented levels, and strengthen Africa's place in global trade.

African Union: Latest Developments on Agenda 2063

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Creating One African Market

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)[4] is an ambitious trade arrangement that forms the largest regional free trade area in the world. Trading under the AfCFTA Agreement began on 1 January 2021, after delays exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, the AfCFTA Agreement has been ratified by 38 countries that committed to reducing 90% of trade tariffs on goods within five years for developed countries and 10 years for less-developed countries. On the trade in services, countries agreed to initially liberalise five sectors: business services, communication services, financial services, tourism, and transport.[5] The countries also committed to addressing non-tariff barriers and other policy bottlenecks among themselves. The AfCFTA Agreement's ultimate objective is to eliminate 97% of tariffs by the time the Agreement is fully operational.

> *"Africa's stimulus package [...] post COVID-19 is the AfCFTA: aggressively implementing it will boost intra-Africa trade and [...] contribute to Africa's recovery."*[6]
>
> —**Wamkele Mene**, Secretary-General, AfCFTA Secretariat

For trade and investment, the AfCFTA offers an unprecedented breadth of opportunity. The AfCFTA covers a market of more than 1.2 billion people. Its GDP—now USD 3 trillion—is expected to more than double by 2050.[7] To take advantage, though, Africans must be able to move freely across the continent. Free movement will also make it possible for more African women and young people to claim their share of prosperity.

Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in Africa

Implementing the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons[8] would transform Africa's prospects for economic growth. In the wake of the recession caused by the pandemic, making the Protocol operational is more critical than ever.

> *"It is the free movement of people which will boost intra-African trade under the AfCFTA, and enable African countries to proactively and swiftly respond to the twin green and digital transitions we are faced with in the 2020s. We cannot afford to not build seamless borders for tomorrow's Africa."*[9]
>
> —**David Luke,** Coordinator, African Trade Policy Centre, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

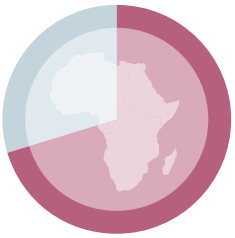
To date, 33 countries have signed the Protocol, and four countries (Mali, Niger, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe) have ratified it.[10] This falls short of the 15-country threshold needed for the Protocol to enter into force. We must keep working to liberalize Africans' access to other countries, even as we continue efforts to issue an African passport—in line with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization—to all citizens on the continent.[11]

Single African Air Transport Market

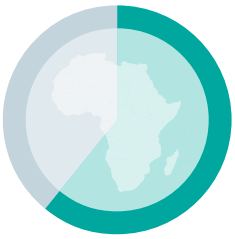
Moving to implement the Single African Air Transport Market[12] (SAATM) will support the African aviation industry's recovery from the downturn caused by the pandemic. So far, 34 countries accounting for 75% of Africa's passenger traffic have signed up to the SAATM. Of these, 10 countries are ready to implement the SAATM fully.[13] Making it easier and quicker for Africans to travel to other countries, visa-free or with the possibility of obtaining a visa on arrival, will contribute immensely to regional connectivity on the continent.

> *"As economies reopen and economic activity recovers, a proper synergy between the SAATM, the AfCFTA, and the Free Movement of Persons Protocol presents an opportunity for unfettered movement and trade."*[14]
>
> —**Adefunke Adeyemi**, Africa Regional Director, International Air Transport Association

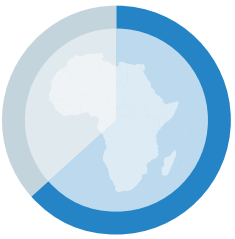
Of 54 African countries:



38 countries (70%) have ratified the AfCFTA Agreement[15]



33 countries (61%) have signed the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons[16]



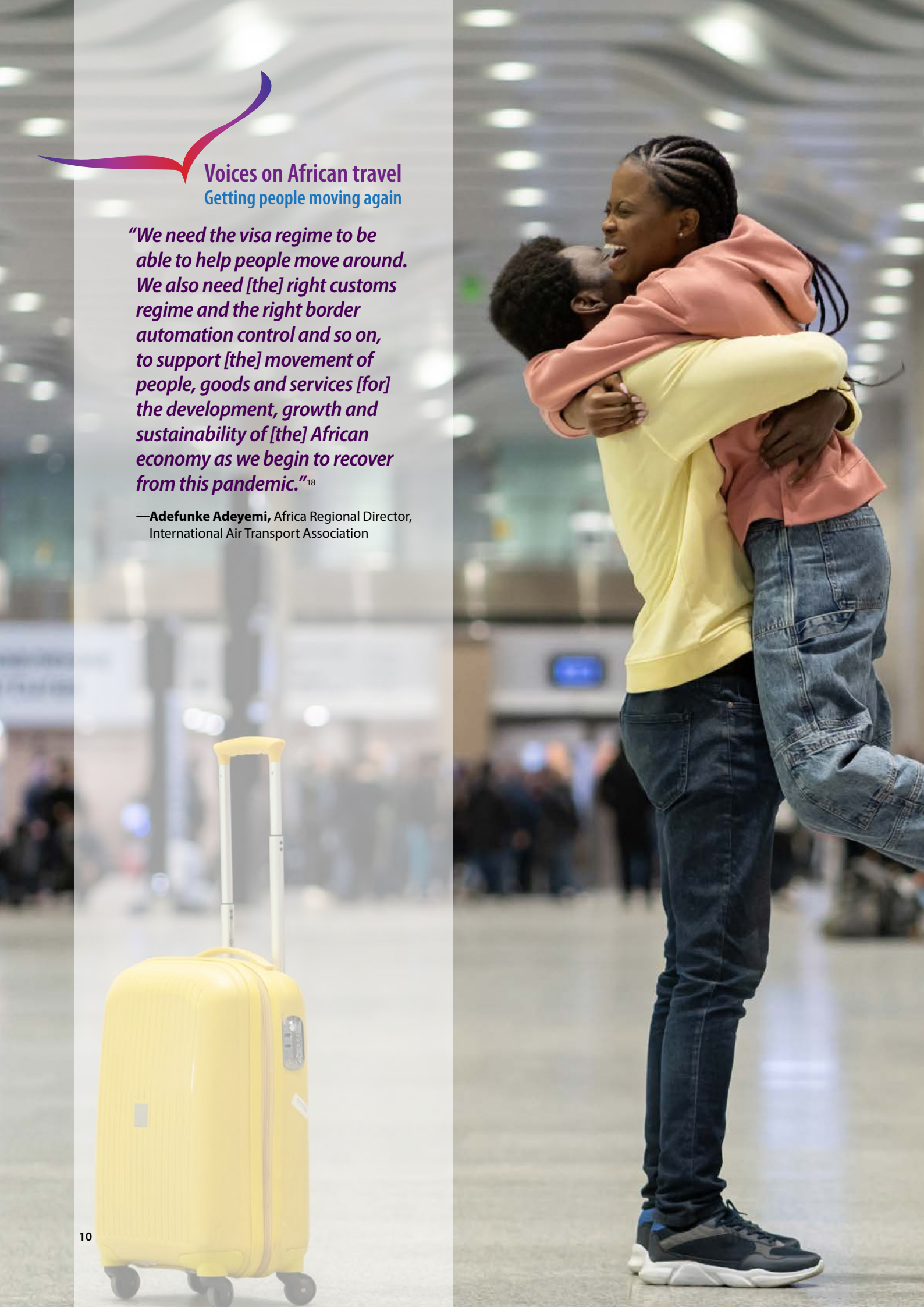
34 countries (63%) have signed up to the Single African Air Transport Market[17]

Voices on African travel

Getting people moving again

"We need the visa regime to be able to help people move around. We also need [the] right customs regime and the right border automation control and so on, to support [the] movement of people, goods and services [for] the development, growth and sustainability of [the] African economy as we begin to recover from this pandemic."[18]

—**Adefunke Adeyemi,** Africa Regional Director, International Air Transport Association



Africa Snapshot
REBOUNDING AFTER SHOCKS

"We project that African economies will recover gradually from the pandemic, with GDP growth reaching 3.4% in 2021. Recovery is expected across the board: for oil-exporting countries, tourism-dependent economies, commodity-dependent economies, and non-resource-dependent economies."[19]

—**Dr. Akinwumi Ayodeji Adesina**, President, African Development Bank Group

Headlines

77 million Africans have been fully vaccinated so far—about 6% of the continent's population.

Two African airlines—Ethiopian Airlines and RwandAir—are piloting the IATA Travel Pass for travellers to store and manage certifications for COVID-19 tests or vaccines.[20]

More than 15 African countries and regions have been awarded the World Travel & Tourism Council's SafeTravels™ stamp, which recognizes the adoption of global health and hygiene protocols.[21]

Regional and global travel has experienced unprecedented disruptions over the last 18 months. As measures to contain the pandemic reached their peak, 43 African countries accounting for 80% of the continent's population closed their borders.[22]

After borders re-opened, movement began again, but at a slower pace. Travellers were required to show their COVID-19 health status and pay for tests and other processes. Several African countries—especially those in East and West Africa—reintroduced stricter visa requirements in response to political and social fragility. Around the continent and the world, the new complexity of travel caused many people to stay home.

As Africa and the world continue to adapt to uncertainty around the epidemic, it will be important that they build resilience by implementing the AfCFTA Agreement. The AfCFTA's success depends on three elements: the free flow of goods, the free flow of services, and the free movement of people. By liberalizing access to their territory, African countries can unlock the AfCFTA's social and economic potential.

Visa fees and processing times[23]

Average visa fee for Africans travelling on the continent:
USD 63

•

Range of visa fees, depending on the length of stay:
USD 12 to USD 250

•

Average processing time for issuing a visa:
72 hours (3 days)

•

Range of processing times where shown:
1-2 days to 10 days

High visa fees and cumbersome application processes are a major deterrent to travel in Africa, especially for businesspeople. A survey of one-third of countries spanning East, West, North, Southern, and Central Africa shows that visa fees, types of entry granted, and visa processing times vary widely. These variations make it arduous for travellers to visit several countries on the same trip. Simplifying visa applications, reducing fees, and decreasing processing times are important reforms that countries can make to open their borders and ease movement across the continent.

"I would not say Africa has a problem with mobility, it is more that it can be a very slow process. It is quite a bureaucratic procedure."[24]

—**Dimieari Von Kemedi**
Co-Founder and CEO,
Alluvial Agriculture and Angalafintech

"The commitment to Africans moving in their own continent is a top priority. We are saying to African Union member states, as part of implementing the roadmap of the [Free Movement of Persons] Protocol, first, relax visas and allow citizens to move."[25]

—**Dr. Khabele Matlosa,** Director, Political Affairs, African Union Commission

New solutions for intra-African travel

How can countries and regional economic communities expedite a safe and secure return to intra-African travel for tourism, business, and investment?

The WTTC SafeTravels™ stamp

More than 15 African countries and regions have received the World Travel & Tourism Council's **SafeTravels™ stamp**, which recognizes the adoption of global health and hygiene protocols.[26] Given a choice of destinations, travellers are more likely to opt for areas with the stamp.

The IATA Travel Pass

The airline industry's travel pass allows passengers to manage travel documentation digitally and seamlessly. Two African airlines—Ethiopian Airlines and RwandAir—are piloting the **IATA Travel Pass** for travellers to store and manage certifications for COVID-19 tests or vaccines.[27]

Voices on African travel
Getting people moving again

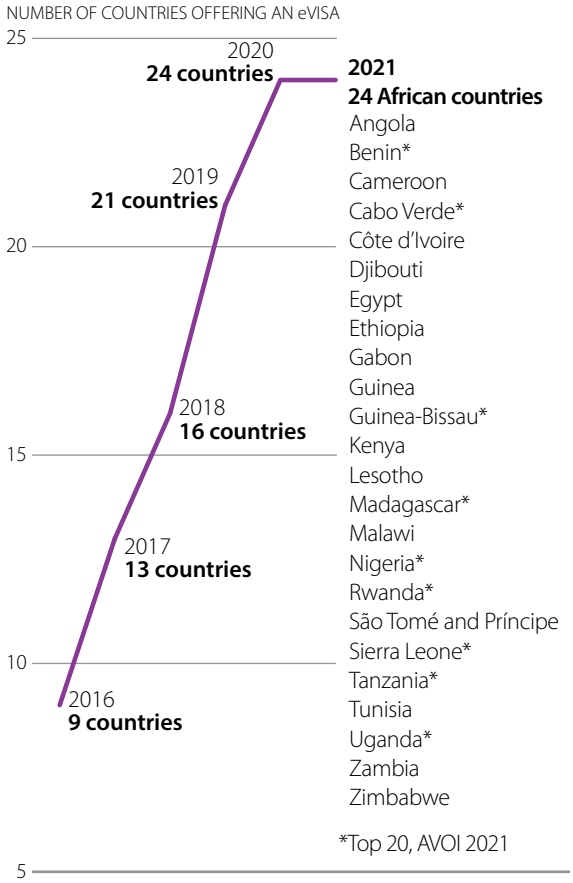
"A businessperson should be able to travel easily. This is important if we are going to integrate the region economically. It is just a question of getting the right visa and immigration systems in place."[28]

—**Dimieari Von Kemedi,** Co-Founder and CEO, Alluvial Agriculture and Angalafintech

eVisas

By putting more of the visa application process online, electronic visas (**eVisas**) make it easier for people to practice social distancing. eVisas also streamline the visa application process, open doors for travellers unable to visit a visa bureau in person, and save time for people who prefer to apply from home.

eVisas on offer, 2016–2021



24 African countries offer an eVisa, 15 more than five years ago:

- 12 countries introduced an eVisa in the last five years.
- 9 of the AVOI's top 20 performers offer an eVisa.
- Over 80% of countries offering an eVisa are in East, West, and Southern Africa.

Visa Openness in Africa

PROGRESS FROM 2016 TO 2021

Although visa openness in Africa dropped slightly in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, scores have trended upward over the last five years. Close to half of countries have adopted a more liberal visa policy for African travellers since 2016, and a large number of the top performers added an eVisa to their electronic border systems.

Yet close to half of countries with a low visa openness score do not offer a visa on arrival to visitors from elsewhere on the continent—and the number of those countries rose by 5% over the last year. The visa-on-arrival policy is an effective way to encourage the free movement of people on the continent; implementing it would boost regional integration and raise countries' AVOI score.

Between 2016 and 2021

AVOI scores have trended upward

36 countries improved or maintained their AVOI score.

9 of the 2021 top 20 countries improved their AVOI score.

•

More countries offered an eVisa

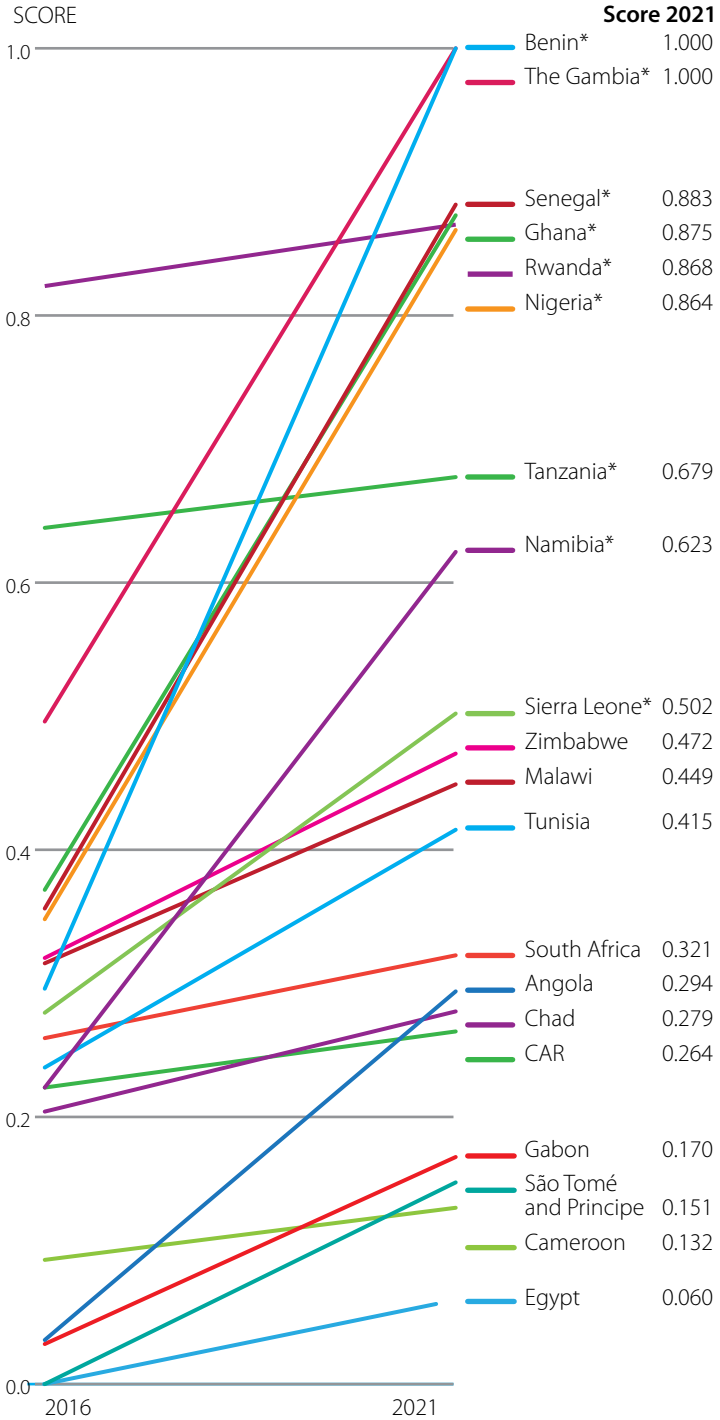
13 of the countries that made the most progress on the AVOI from 2016–2021 offer an eVisa.

•

Lower-income countries made progress

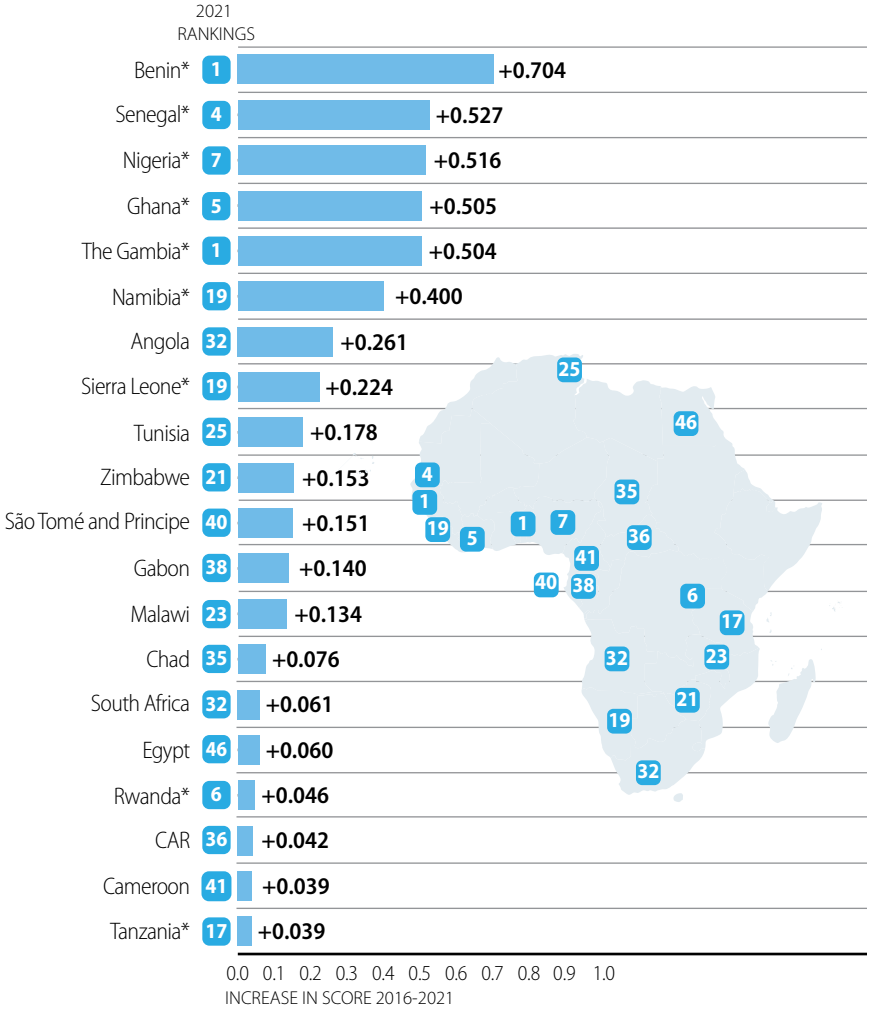
Over 80% of countries that made the most progress are low-income or lower-middle-income countries.

Upward trends in visa openness, 2016–2020



* Indicates Top 20, AVOI 2021

Highest increases in AVOI scores and rankings, 2016–2021



*Top 20, AVOI 2021

Does income affect visa openness? Does geography?

17 of the 2021 top 20 countries are low-income or lower-middle-income countries.

5 of 7 of Africa's upper-middle-income countries have a low visa openness score.

4 of 6 of Africa's island states are among the 2021 top 20 performers (Cabo Verde, Comoros, Mauritius, Seychelles).

2 of 16 of Africa's landlocked states are among the 2021 top 20 performers (Rwanda and Uganda).

Which countries progressed the most in the last five years?

In West Africa:
Benin, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone

In Southern Africa:
Angola, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe

In Central Africa:
Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe

In East Africa:
Rwanda, Tanzania

In North Africa:
Egypt, Tunisia

Top performers, 2016–2021: Visa openness and AU initiatives

Country	Most progress in score 2016–2021	Most progress in score 2020–2021	Visa Openness rank, 2016	Visa Openness rank, 2021	Top 20, 2021	Offers eVisa	Ratified AfCFTA[29]	Joined SAATM[30]	Signed PFMP[31]
Angola	●		35	34		●	●		●
Benin*	●		31	1	●	●		●	●
Cameroon	●		44	41		●	●	●	●
Central African Republic	●		32	36			●	●	●
Chad	●		38	35			●		●
Egypt	●		45	46		●	●	●	●
Gabon	●		50	39		●	●	●	●
Ghana*	●		3	5	●		●	●	●
Malawi	●		22	23		●	●		●
Namibia*	●	●	38	19	●		●	●	●
Nigeria*	●	●	5	7	●	●	●	●	●
Rwanda*	●		6	6	●	●	●	●	●
São Tomé and Principe	●		52	40		●	●		●
Senegal*	●		22	4	●		●	●	●
Sierra Leone*	●		19	20	●	●	●	●	●
South Africa	●		49	30			●	●	●
Tanzania*	●		27	18	●	●	●		●
The Gambia*	●		24	1	●			●	●
Tunisia	●	●	25	25		●	●		●
Zimbabwe	●		28	21		●	●	●	●

** Top 20, AVOI 2021*
AfCFTA=African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement; PFMP=Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons; SAATM=Single African Air Transport Market

Visa Openness in Africa

FINDINGS FOR 2021

For the first time since the AVOI was launched in 2016, many countries backslid on their AVOI ranking over the year. For example, only nine countries offered visa-free access or a visa on arrival to all African visitors in 2021, down from 11 countries in 2020.

Just under half of the continent's countries—5% fewer than in 2020—offered visa-free access or a visa upon arrival to the citizens of at least one other African country. More Africans than before must now obtain a visa before travelling.

In most countries, the newly restrictive measures are temporary. They are largely meant to manage and contain the spread of the pandemic. They are expected to be removed once the situation normalizes.

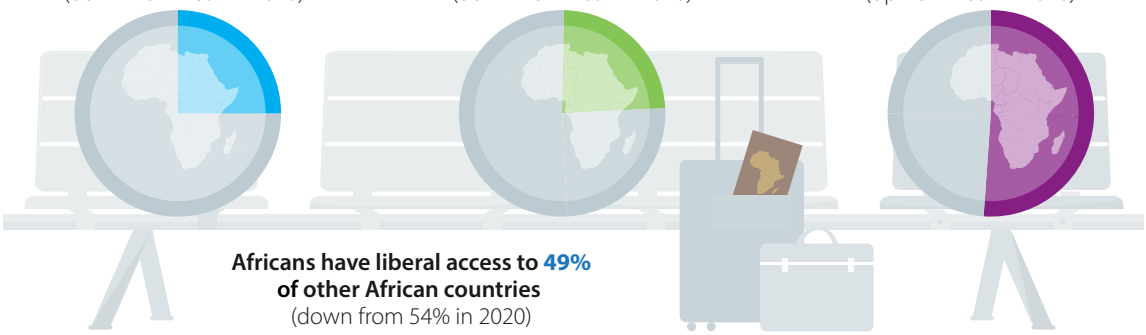
The number of countries offering an eVisa in 2021 remained constant: 24 countries, or 44% of the continent.

What proportion of African countries are fully open to African travellers?

Africans can obtain a visa on arrival in 24% of other African countries
(down from 28% in 2020)

Africans don't need a visa to travel to 25% of other African countries
(down from 26% in 2020)

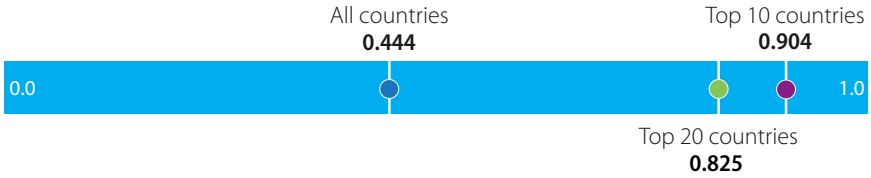
Africans need a visa before travelling to 51% of other African countries
(up from 46% in 2020)



Africans have liberal access to 49% of other African countries
(down from 54% in 2020)

The continent's average, 2021

Countries' average AVOI score is 0.444 (down from 0.484 in 2020, 0.459 in 2019, 0.443 in 2018, 0.420 in 2017, and 0.425 in 2016).

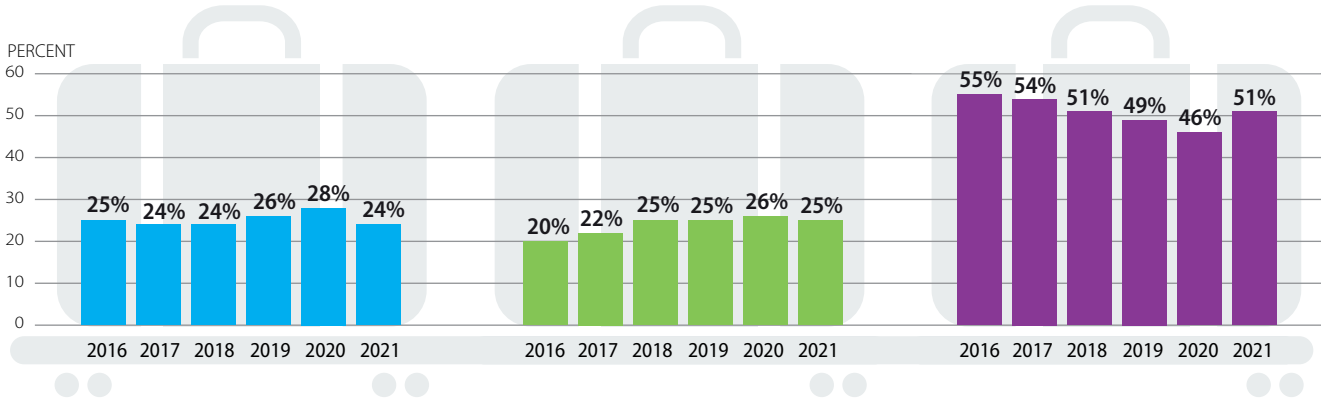


Change in visa openness scores, 2016–2021

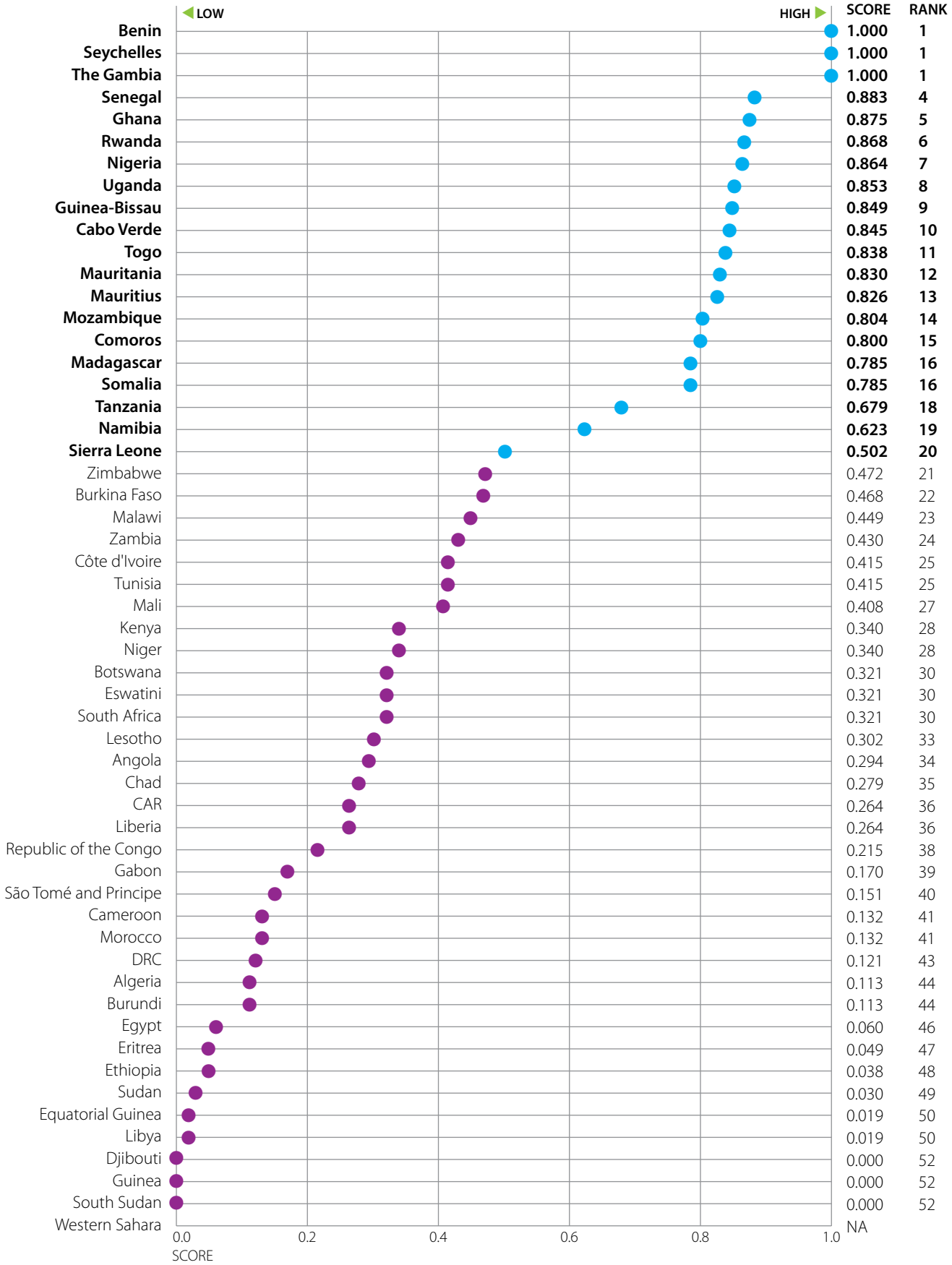
Africans can obtain a visa on arrival in other African countries

Africans don't need a visa to travel to other African countries

Africans need a visa before travelling to other African countries

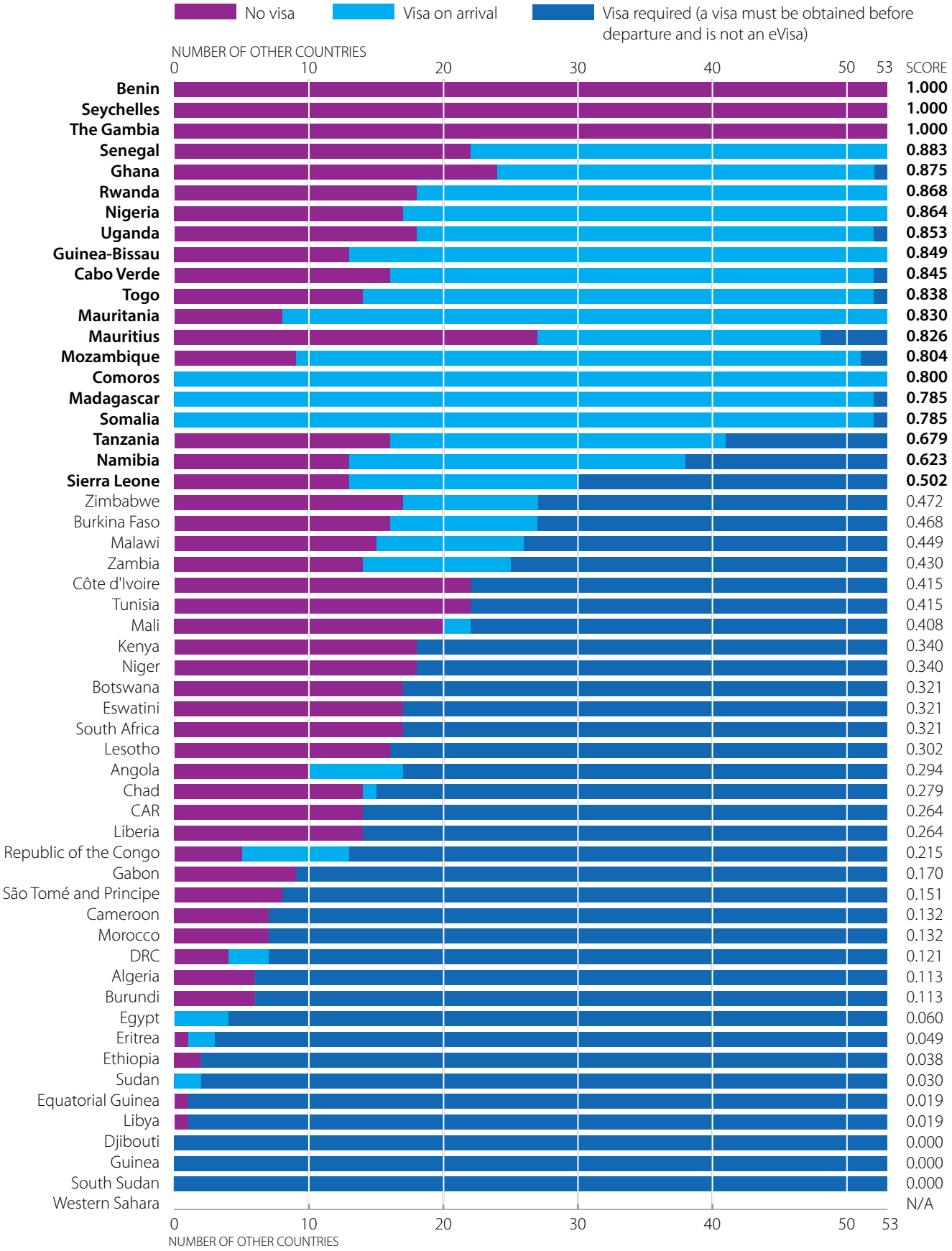


Visa openness in Africa 2021: Country scores and rankings



Scores range from 0-1 (highest)
Source: Bank calculations based on IATA data, June–July 2021

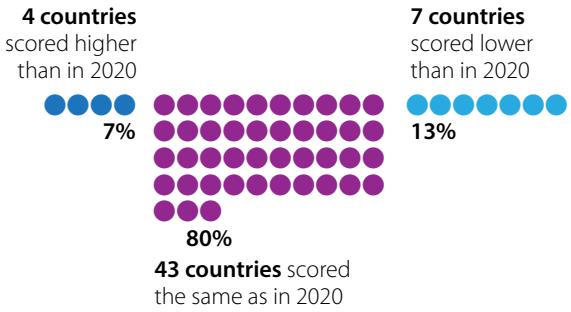
Visa openness in Africa by category: No visa, Visa on arrival, Visa required



Scores range from 0-1 (highest)

Source: Bank calculations based on IATA data, June–July 2021

Change in AVOI score, 2020–2021

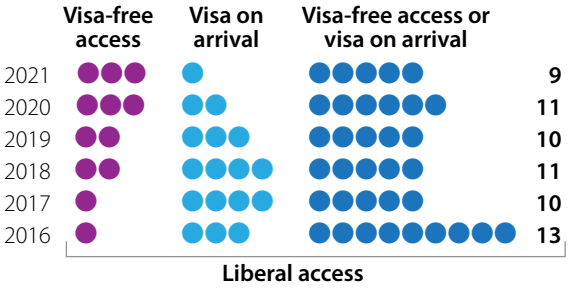


Some countries are open to all

Three African countries—Benin, The Gambia, and Seychelles—offer visa-free access to all Africans (3 countries in 2020, 2 in 2019 and 2018, 1 in 2017 and 2016).

One African country—Comoros—offers a visa on arrival to all Africans (2 countries in 2020, 3 in 2019, 4 in 2018 and 2017, and 3 in 2016).

Five African countries—Senegal, Rwanda, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania—offer either visa-free access or a visa on arrival to all Africans.



In total, nine African countries offer liberal access (visa-free access or a visa on arrival) to all Africans (down from 11 countries in 2020, 10 in 2019, 11 in 2018, 10 in 2017, and 13 in 2016).

Africa's Top 10 / Africa's Top 20

Benin, The Gambia, and Seychelles are 2021's top performers. All three countries offered visa-free access to all African visitors in 2021, as they did in 2020.

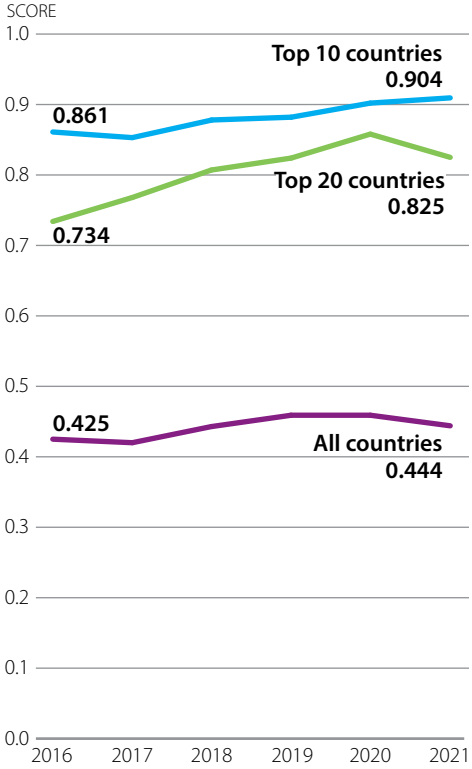
Namibia, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania joined the top 20 performers in 2021.

The average score (0.904) of the top 10 countries has risen since 2016 (0.861).

The average score (0.825) of the top 20 countries has risen since 2016 (0.734).

Over half of the top 20 performers have ratified the AfCFTA Agreement, signed up to the Single African Air Transport Market, and signed the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons. Only one country—Rwanda—has ratified the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.

Trends in average AVOI scores, 2016–2021



11 of the top 20 countries have ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement[32]

11 of the top 20 countries have signed the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons[33]

12 of the top 20 countries have signed up to the Single African Air Transport Market[34]

Regional Overview for 2021

Where are Africa's top performers?

In 2021, close to half of the top performing countries were in West Africa. The remaining top performers were in East, Southern, and North Africa.

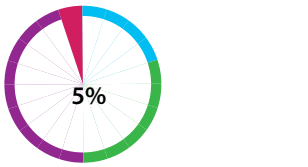
No Central African country has yet featured among the AVOI's most visa-open countries. This calls for assisting countries in Central Africa to reform their visa regime.

Voices on African travel
Getting people moving again

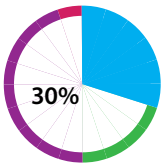
"Where we've seen some resilience is when there's domestic travel. The free-trade agreement is an absolute game changer for travel. If 97% of commodities and goods are tariff-free, that's going to do a lot for regional trade. And when there's regional trade, travel will follow." [35]

—**Wayne Godwin,** Senior Vice-President, JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group for Sub-Saharan Africa

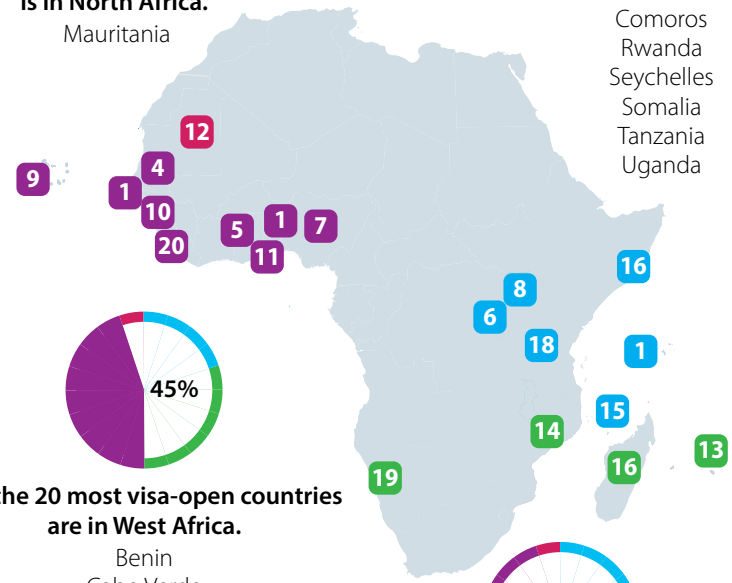
Top 20 most visa-open countries by region and rank, 2021



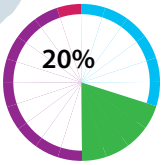
1 of the 20 most visa-open countries is in North Africa.
Mauritania



6 of the 20 most visa-open countries are in East Africa.
Comoros
Rwanda
Seychelles
Somalia
Tanzania
Uganda



9 of the 20 most visa-open countries are in West Africa.
Benin
Cabo Verde
Ghana
Guinea-Bissau
Nigeria
Senegal
The Gambia
Togo
Sierra Leone



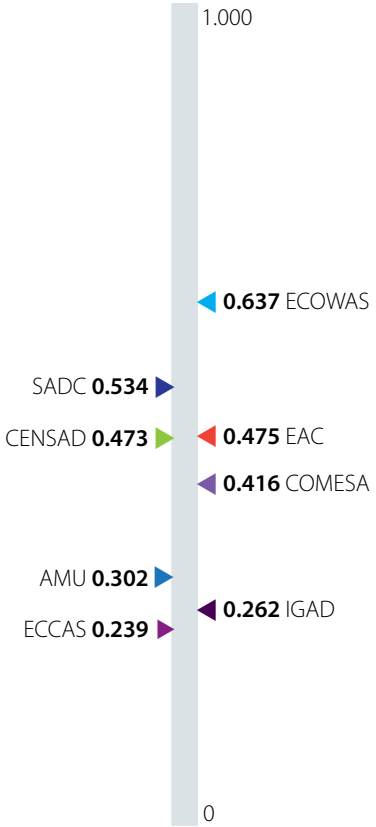
4 of the 20 most visa-open countries are in Southern Africa.
Madagascar
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia

None of the 20 most visa-open countries are in Central Africa.

How did regional economic communities perform?

Parallel to the fall in the average AVOI score for African countries, 2021 saw a slight regression in visa openness within the continent's regional economic communities (RECs), whose average score fell to 0.417 in 2021 from 0.483 in 2020.

Average REC scores on the 2021 AVOI



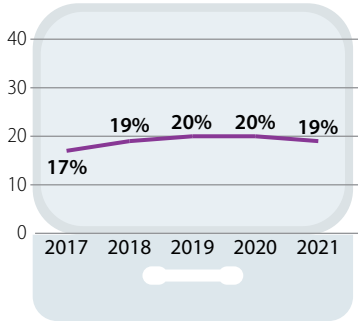
Reciprocity

Open reciprocity—the practice of two countries reciprocating each other's open visa policy—fell by 1 percentage point in 2021, from 20% to 19%.

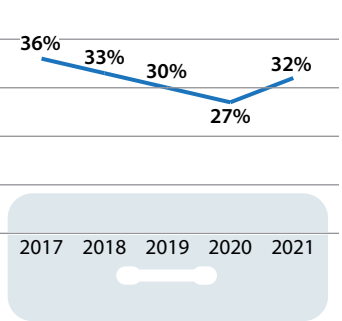
Closed reciprocity—two countries applying similarly restrictive visa policies for each other's citizens—rose by 5 percentage points, from 27% to 32%.

Compared to five years ago, open reciprocity is on the rise, and closed reciprocity is receding.

Open reciprocity, 2016–2021



Closed reciprocity, 2016–2021



90% of EAC's members reciprocate each other's open visa policies

Among Africa's RECs, EAC, ECOWAS, SADC, and AMU practice open reciprocity the most. Countries that are members of these four RECs reciprocate each other's open visa policies more than countries that are members of Africa's other RECs do.

What percentage of REC member countries do not require a visa of the nationals of other member countries?

Case Studies

COUNTRIES THAT MOVED UP IN 2021

Namibia

Namibia rose 21 places in 2021, moving into the AVOI'S top 20 countries and improving its score by 180% since the 2016 edition.

2021 AVOI ranking: 19/54 (up from 40 in 2020 and 2019, 38 in 2018, 36 in 2017, and 38 in 2016)

2021 openness rate: In 2021, the citizens of 72% of African countries could enter Namibia visa-free or could obtain a visa on arrival (up from 25% in 2020, 2019 and 2018).

Namibia's precipitous rise in ranking follows its introduction of a new visa-on-arrival policy for the nationals of 47 countries worldwide, including 27 African countries. In addition, Namibia exempts travellers from 12 African countries from all visa requirements.

"The decision for Namibia to implement visa on arrival for tourists/visitors is a contribution to, and is in line with [the] general principles and agenda of the African Union for African integration and visa-free Africa as well as Namibia's strategies to improve the performance of the economy."[36]

—**Frans Kapofi**, Former Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration, Namibia

The Namibian Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration launched the policy in September 2019 at Hosea Kutako International Airport and planned to extend it to seven more entry points, including Walvis Bay Airport.[37] The policy applies to tourists, visitors, and investors looking for business opportunities in Namibia.

The policy was one of the strategies discussed at the Economic Growth Summit convened by President Dr. Hage G. Geingob in 2019. The Government of Namibia is also looking at eVisas and other mechanisms to encourage tourism and economic growth. At the same time as it adopted the new visa policy, the government began issuing five-year employment permits to potential investors and people with critical skills and expertise.[38]

"This initiative will make Namibia a destination of choice, attract skills and facilitating increased trade and investment to position Namibia as the logistic hub. Granting visas at airport[s]…should be a means to make a competitive nation in terms of movements of people and goods, in terms of service delivery and of projecting an image of professionalism."[39]

—**Dr. Leake Hangala**, Chairman, Namibia Airports Company Board of Directors

In Namibia, as in the Southern Africa Development Community, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the tourism sector particularly hard.[40] The country's visa-on-arrival policy will play an important role in helping the sector rebound.

In 2020, visitors from other African countries accounted for 75% of all visitors to Namibia (up from 72% in 2019). This figure is likely to increase in coming years.[41]

Tunisia

Tunisia rose five places on the AVOI in 2021, increasing its score to 0.42 from 0.40 the previous year and improving by 75% since 2016, when the AVOI was first released. The country is one of the 15 countries that most improved their visa regime between 2016 and 2021.

2021 AVOI ranking: 25/54 (30 in 2020, 27 in 2019, 24 in 2018, 23 in 2017, and 36 in 2016)

2021 openness rate: In 2021, the citizens of 42% of African countries could enter Tunisia visa-free or could obtain a visa on arrival (40% in 2020 and 2019, and 42% in 2018).

Tunisia's move to open its borders to African and global travellers is helping to realize the government's vision of rebuilding and revitalizing the tourism sector to boost youth employment.[42]

The COVID-19 pandemic caused Tunisia's travel and tourism industry to lose almost half its share of GDP in 2020: the figure fell from 14.0% in 2019 to 7.3% a year later.[43] But Tunisia was also among the first countries in North Africa to reopen its borders as the pandemic began to come under control. The country established a health protocol for each part of the tourism value chain. In return, it was acknowledged with the SafeTravels™ stamp of the World Travel & Tourism Council.[44]

> *"@WTTC recognizes #Tunisia as a World Safe Travel destination. This endorsement provides consistency and reassurance for #travelers."* [45]
>
> —**Mohamed Ali Toumi**, Minister of Tourism, Tunisia

Morocco

Morocco rose five places on the AVOI in 2021, increasing its visa openness score by 17% from the year before and regaining its position on the 2016 and 2017 rankings.

2021 AVOI ranking: 41/54 (46 in 2020, 46 in 2019, 40 in 2018, 41 in 2017 and 2016)

2021 openness rate: In 2021, the citizens of 13% of African countries could enter Morocco visa-free or could obtain a visa on arrival (11% in 2020 and 2019, 17% in 2018).

> *"Easing the travel and the mobility of the tourists is priority number one. [We have] been investing in health and safety, working on appropriate protocols for a cautious restart."* [46]
>
> —**Nadia Fettah Alaoui**, Minister of Tourism, Morocco

Before the pandemic, over 2.5 million Moroccans—almost 25% of the workforce —held a job related to tourism. Tourism contributed more than 8% to Morocco's GDP directly and almost as much indirectly. Between 2019 and 2020, however, those figures fell by half.[47]

In response, the Ministry of Tourism introduced the "Welcome Safely" certification for local establishments that adhere to protocols to protect against COVID-19.[48] The country continues to welcome the citizens of dozens of countries around the world, visa-free.[49]

Few of those countries, however, are in Africa.

In December 2020, at the suggestion of HM King Mohammed VI of Morocco, the African Union inaugurated the African Migration Observatory in Rabat, Morocco's capital.[50] By collecting data and promoting collaboration on migration, the Observatory will help African Union member states develop coherent policies on migration, visas, and related areas.

"Travelling freely on the continent with the African passport is a crucial asset for promoting labour mobility, investment, and skill-sharing between neighbouring member states. The elimination of travel barriers also requires individual countries to effect and implement open visa regimes, policies that in turn will accelerate AfCFTA initiatives and other free movement principles."[51]

—*Free Movement*, a video by the African Union Commission

Visa Openness in Africa: LOOKING AHEAD

In this new era of travel, safety and hygiene protocols have become as important as travel documentation and visa formalities. Ensuring that visitors can move through border controls smoothly and securely has taken on a new urgency. One way of getting there, is to streamline the visa process.

To do this, countries can use a range of solutions. They can reduce the documents, fees, and time necessary to obtain a visa. They can move to eVisas. They can issue visas on arrival. And they can eliminate visas altogether. Even as the continent rolls out mass vaccinations and coordinated testing, getting the continent to move safely again needs a continental push on all these fronts.

In the end, free movement is central to Africa's recovery from the crippling effects of the pandemic. Allowing businesspeople, investors, tourists, students, and workers to travel across the continent with ease will revitalize African economies and re-energize pan-African unity.

Africa's rising young population is poised to take charge of the continent's future. All young people need, is the freedom to move around the continent and support as they develop into Africa's entrepreneurs and business leaders.

Opening borders will ensure that Africa's travel, tourism, and investment grow apace.

Africa Visa Openness Index: The seventh edition

The seventh edition will continue to track trends in visa openness across Africa and measure the extent to which countries ease the restrictions they put in place to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learn more about the Africa Visa Openness Index and join the debate:

www.visaopenness.org

Visa Openness: Suggestions for 2021+

Visa solutions

- Visa on arrival
- Visa-free regional blocs
- Regional bloc visas
- A multi-year visa after an applicant has been assessed
- Positive reciprocity (countries relax visa requirements for each other's citizens)
- Unilateral opening of the visa regime
- A simpler visa process:
  Fewer documents
  Lower fees
  Faster processing times
  Online applications
  eVisas
- More visa-related information online
- More information on visas available in different languages

Travel document solutions

- A regional passport or national identity card for regional travel
- An African passport for businesspeople, issued by a competent authority following to strict criteria
- The African Union passport for all African citizens, issued by national authorities using the criteria rolled out by the African Union in 2016

Annex 1. Visa openness in Africa: 2021 country scores and rankings

Country	VISA OPENNESS INDICATORS (by number of African countries)			Score	Rank
	No visa required	Visa on arrival	Visa required*		
Benin	**53**	**0**	**0**	**1.000**	**1**
Seychelles	**53**	**0**	**0**	**1.000**	**1**
The Gambia	**53**	**0**	**0**	**1.000**	**1**
Senegal	**22**	**31**	**0**	**0.883**	**4**
Ghana	**24**	**28**	**1**	**0.875**	**5**
Rwanda	**18**	**35**	**0**	**0.868**	**6**
Nigeria	**17**	**36**	**0**	**0.864**	**7**
Uganda	**18**	**34**	**1**	**0.853**	**8**
Guinea-Bissau	**13**	**40**	**0**	**0.849**	**9**
Cabo Verde	**16**	**36**	**1**	**0.845**	**10**
Togo	**14**	**38**	**1**	**0.838**	**11**
Mauritania	**8**	**45**	**0**	**0.830**	**12**
Mauritius	**27**	**21**	**5**	**0.826**	**13**
Mozambique	**9**	**42**	**2**	**0.804**	**14**
Comoros	**0**	**53**	**0**	**0.800**	**15**
Madagascar	**0**	**52**	**1**	**0.785**	**16**
Somalia	**0**	**52**	**1**	**0.785**	**16**
Tanzania	**16**	**25**	**12**	**0.679**	**18**
Namibia	**13**	**25**	**15**	**0.623**	**19**
Sierra Leone	**13**	**17**	**23**	**0.502**	**20**
Zimbabwe	17	10	26	0.472	21
Burkina Faso	16	11	26	0.468	22
Malawi	15	11	27	0.449	23
Zambia	14	11	28	0.430	24
Côte d'Ivoire	22	0	31	0.415	25
Tunisia	22	0	31	0.415	25
Mali	20	2	31	0.408	27
Kenya	18	0	35	0.340	28
Niger	18	0	35	0.340	28
Botswana	17	0	36	0.321	30
Eswatini	17	0	36	0.321	30
South Africa	17	0	36	0.321	30
Lesotho	16	0	37	0.302	33
Angola	10	7	36	0.294	34
Chad	14	1	38	0.279	35
Central African Republic	14	0	39	0.264	36
Liberia	14	0	39	0.264	36
Republic of the Congo	5	8	40	0.215	38
Gabon	9	0	44	0.170	39
São Tomé and Principe	8	0	45	0.151	40
Cameroon	7	0	46	0.132	41
Morocco	7	0	46	0.132	41
Democratic Republic of Congo	4	3	46	0.121	43
Algeria	6	0	47	0.113	44
Burundi	6	0	47	0.113	44
Egypt	0	4	49	0.060	46
Eritrea	1	2	50	0.049	47
Ethiopia	2	0	51	0.038	48
Sudan	0	2	51	0.030	49
Equatorial Guinea	1	0	52	0.019	50
Libya	1	0	52	0.019	50
Djibouti	0	0	53	0.000	52
Guinea	0	0	53	0.000	52
South Sudan	0	0	53	0.000	52
Western Sahara					

** "Visa required" means a visa has to be obtained before departure and is not an eVisa.*
Scores range from 0 to1 (highest)
Source: Bank calculations based on IATA data, June–July 2021

Annex 2. Visa openness in Africa: Latest developments and initiatives, 2021

Country	Rank	Top 20	Offers eVisa	Ratified AfCFTA[52]	Joined SAATM[53]	Signed PFMP[54]
Benin	**1**	●	●		●	
Seychelles	**1**	●				
The Gambia	**1**	●		●	●	●
Senegal	**4**	●		●	●	●
Ghana	**5**	●		●	●	●
Rwanda	**6**	●	●	●	●	●
Nigeria	**7**	●	●	●	●	
Uganda	**8**	●	●	●		●
Guinea-Bissau	**9**	●	●		●	
Cabo Verde	**10**	●	●		●	
Togo	**11**	●		●	●	●
Mauritania	**12**	●		●		●
Mauritius	**13**	●		●		
Mozambique	**14**	●			●	●
Comoros	**15**	●				
Madagascar	**16**	●	●			
Somalia	**16**	●				●
Tanzania	**18**	●	●			●
Namibia	**19**	●		●	●	
Sierra Leone	**20**	●	●	●	●	●
Zimbabwe	21		●	●	●	●
Burkina Faso	22			●	●	●
Malawi	23		●	●		●
Zambia	24		●	●		●
Côte d'Ivoire	25		●	●	●	●
Tunisia	25		●	●		
Mali	27			●	●	●
Kenya	28		●	●	●	●
Niger	28			●	●	●
Botswana	30				●	
Eswatini	30			●	●	
South Africa	30			●	●	
Lesotho	33		●	●	●	●
Angola	34		●	●		●
Chad	35			●	●	●
Central African Republic	36			●	●	●
Liberia	36				●	●
Republic of the Congo	38			●	●	●
Gabon	39		●	●	●	●
São Tomé and Principe	40		●	●		●
Cameroon	41		●	●	●	
Morocco	41				●	
Democratic Republic of Congo	43				●	●
Algeria	44			●		
Burundi	44			●		
Egypt	46		●	●	●	
Eritrea	47					
Ethiopia	48		●	●	●	
Sudan	49					●
Equatorial Guinea	50			●	●	●
Libya	50					
Djibouti	52		●	●		●
Guinea	52		●	●	●	●
South Sudan	52					●
Western Sahara				●		

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

Notes

1. https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/speeches/speech-delivered-dr-akinwumi-adesina-president-african-development-bank-group-virtual-finance-common-spring-meeting-may-11-2021-43599
2. The AVOI counts all African Union member countries except Western Sahara, which was not ranked due to a lack of available information.
3. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/3657-file-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf
4. https://au.int/en/cfta
5. https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20210329/afcfta-and-undp-sign-strategic-partnership-agreement-promote-trade
6. www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Gx70NdfrQ
7. https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20210329/afcfta-and-undp-sign-strategic-partnership-agreement-promote-trade
8. https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/reports/37472-rp-pa25606_e_original_004_ff.pdf
9. www.uneca.org/stories/free-movement-of-people-critical-to-boost-intra-african-trade-under-the-afcfta%2C-says-eca's
10. https://investmentmonitor.ai/analysis/freedom-of-movement-unlock-africa-potential
11. www.travelnews.co.za/article/au-africa-passport-ready-42-years
12. www.iata.org/en/policy/business-freedom/saatm/
13. Ibid.
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