

Africa's would-be migrants who keep their jobs through pandemic may choose to stay home rather than head overseas

February 16 2022



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Would-be migrants in West Africa who managed to keep their jobs through the pandemic have a greater desire to stay in their home country—even if they see their economic prospects in the wake of COVID-19 to be brighter abroad, a new study reveals.

Young people in Gambia perceive big inequalities between their country's performance and the speed of recovery abroad, but their perception of rich countries' post [pandemic](#) performance does not have significant effects on their aspirations to migrate.

Researchers from the Universities of Birmingham, Essex and Royal Holloway conducted an original survey in Gambia as part of the MIGCHOICE project, funded by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The experts discovered that young would-be migrants who kept their [jobs](#) during the pandemic may seek comfort in familiar contexts, even if perceptions of their home country's recovery prospects seem worse than the alternatives abroad.

Co-author David Hudson, Professor of Politics and Development at the University of Birmingham, commented: "For a large portion of African youth, the pandemic has fed into an unfortunate cycle of precarious employment and unemployment—in Sub-Saharan Africa, some 50% of [young people](#) had no job before COVID-19 struck.

"Individuals who keep their jobs through the pandemic are less likely to want to move abroad. Would-be migrants who managed to maintain a stable income may seek comfort in familiar contexts; even if they appear worse than alternatives abroad."

Researchers also find that the insecurity of COVID-19 job loss may be

compensated by confidence in the Gambian government's ability to tackle the pandemic. The recently-unemployed aspire to migrate less the more they trust their government. All in all, confidence in one's local and personal circumstances appear to matter more than the pull of wealthier countries, even in the presence of clearly perceived global inequalities.

Lead author Miranda Simon, Senior Lecturer at the University of Essex, commented: "COVID-19 has forced citizens to rely on their government. Our findings show how important it is for governments and donors to try to protect jobs in crises. Employment has a unique stabilizing effect, which goes above and beyond the safety net that savings might provide."

The researchers tested their expectations with an original survey of aspiring entrepreneurs in Gambia with a higher-than-average pre-pandemic employment rate. In many ways, Gambia is representative of African emigration. However, in some ways, it is a unique case—there is some evidence, for example that Gambian migrants are proportionately more highly-educated.

Nevertheless, it is an important case to study. Due to its reliance on international tourism, the Gambian economy experienced some of the region's greatest disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also one of the region's highest sender-countries of migrants through the dangerous Central Mediterranean route to Europe.

Co-author Cassilde Schwartz, Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, commented: "The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated international inequalities to unprecedented levels, as some states had more resources than others to protect their economies and their citizens.

"We show that this widening gap is not necessarily going to drive individuals into insecure and dangerous migration routes. It is reassuring that—even among those who lose their jobs—trust in the local

government can foster a significant sense of security and stability at home."

Professor David Hudson added: "COVID-19 setbacks in the developing world make it even more necessary that rich states provide opportunities for legal migration, in addition to helping individuals regain stability in the country where they were born. Furthermore, this assistance should not be limited to those most likely to migrate; it should go to all those who need it."

More information: Miranda Simon et al, Covid-19 insecurities and migration aspirations, *International Interactions* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/03050629.2022.1991919](https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2022.1991919)

Provided by University of Birmingham

Citation: Africa's would-be migrants who keep their jobs through pandemic may choose to stay home rather than head overseas (2022, February 16) retrieved 22 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-africa-would-be-migrants-jobs-pandemic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.