


GPSPD eHabari

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Issue#2

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As we continue to “build new social contracts in Africa,” we are reminded of the mega trends that will define Africa’s transformation. Urbanization and digitalization are two of them. By 2050, 6 out of 10 Africans will be living in cities and given they are the economic centers, we need to ensure that we can harness technology to enhance the benefits from urbanization. As you will notice, countries are at very different stages of development – both economically and technologically.

→ **Read *Urbanization and Digitalization at a Crossroads* by Giuseppe Tesoriere**




While demographic changes are at our doorsteps, migration also shapes them. By 2050, 4 out of 10 youth will be Africans, and these young people need opportunities to work and grow. Not finding them in their homeland, millions will traverse the borders to look for a better life as many Africans do now. At the 2nd Review of the Global Compact on Migration from 8-10 October 2024, discussions will be held on how to improve governance around migration.

→ **Read *The Plight of Migration: A Story of Hope Amidst Struggles* by Helina Dawit, Eden Hailu and Gideon Rutaremwa**



Thanks to everyone who sent notes of appreciation and votes of confidence, while providing very useful comments on our inaugural eHlabari. We have taken note and are bringing them onboard. This edition will further highlight the work of GPSPD.



We cannot have inclusive development until we make it fair for one half of the population that is called women. So, gender equality remains at the center. We highlight what needs to be done to break the financial glass ceiling, where women can have access to finance as men do.

→ **Read *Can Legislation break the financial glass ceiling for women in Africa?* by Edna Akullq**

These issues will be important as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action completes 30 years in 2025. Our review suggests that Africa has made great strides in boosting women’s political representation, achieving legislative gains, and fostering economic empowerment. But deep-rooted cultural norms continue to hinder women’s full participation in society.

→ **Read *The Road to Beijing+30* by Judith Oduol**

Last but not the least, in ***Our Staff Voices***, we feature our dear colleague, Saurabh Sinha, Chief of Social Policy Section, who retired at the end of August. We couldn’t let him go without tapping into his unlimited wisdom, which he generously shared in an interview with Keiso Matashane-Marite, Chief of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Section. It is not to be missed!

Urbanization and Digitalization at a Crossroads!

We live in a world that is increasingly technology driven. Technology has transformed our lives from the moment we wake up as global news is delivered on our palm-held devices to the moment we sleep while surfing through social media. While we can argue about the value of technology in our daily lives, what we cannot argue is that digital technologies – such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and 5G – have the power to transform the development trajectory of Africa.

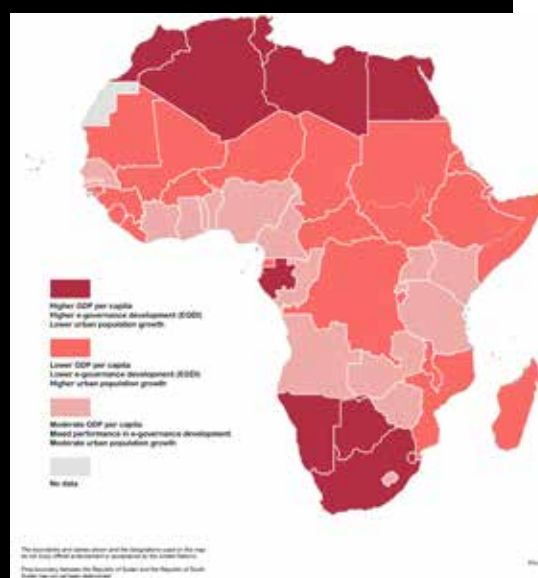
In fact, these innovations are instrumental in improving the delivery of government services (Jieutsa et al., 2023). The good news is that in half of the African countries, subnational governments have developed digital platforms for paying utilities (electricity, gas, and water), obtaining building permits, and registering land titles. This shift is positively impacting the efficiency of local services and improving the collection of utility fees.

But more needs to be done. Not all countries are at the same level of e-development. There is a clear spatial divide among African countries, driven by similarities in economic development and urbanization rates. Our new analysis in a forthcoming

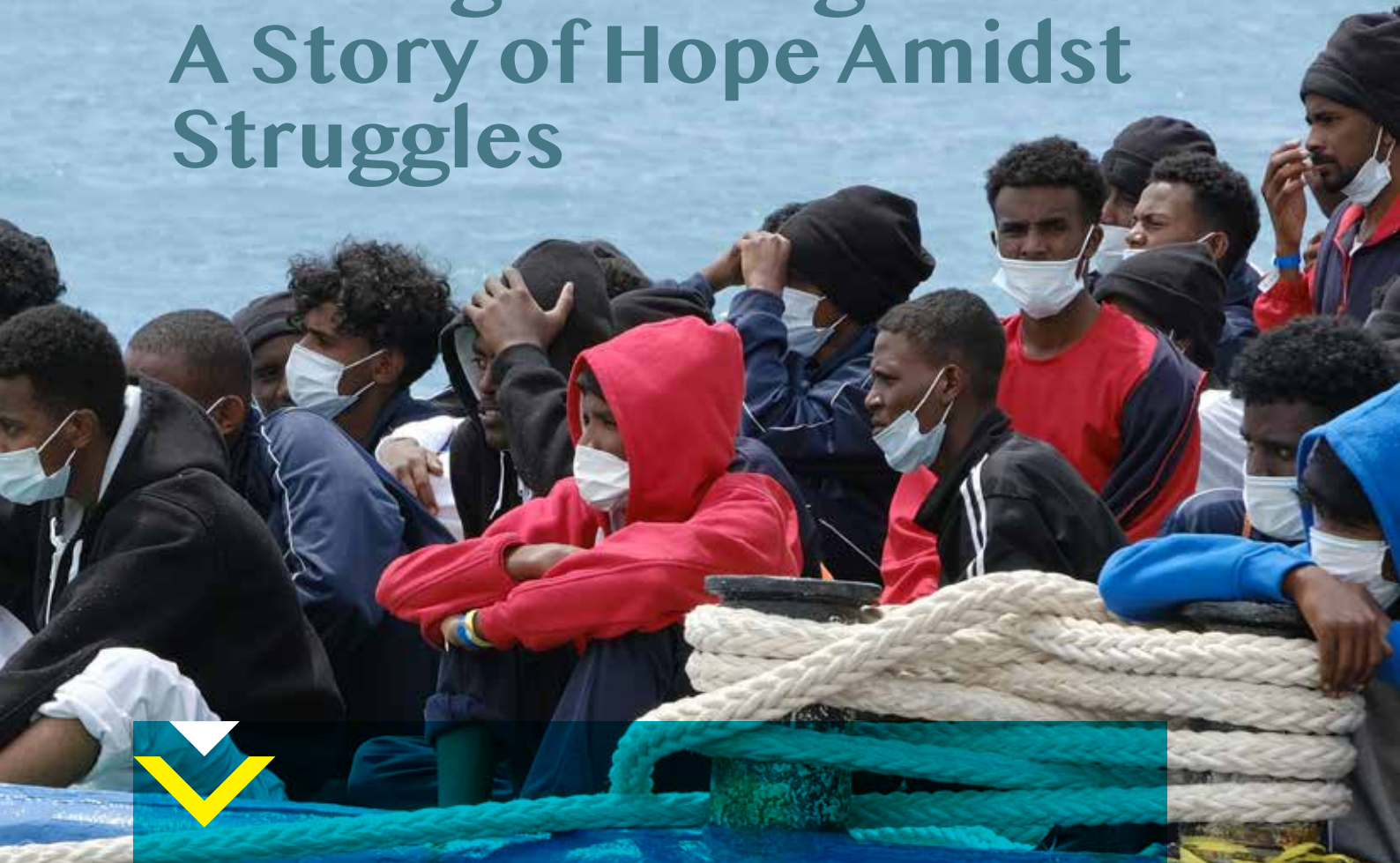
report shows that economic development and e-development go hand in hand. In clusters where the urban population growth rate is high and GDP is low, e-government performance, as measured by quality of online services, status of development of telecommunication infrastructure and human capital, tends to decline.

Digital transition is struggling to deal with structural problems and to keep pace with the rapid pace of urbanization. As urbanization accelerates and economic growth declines, digital transformation stands at a critical crossroads. Inaction or missteps at this stage could lead to significant lost opportunities for economic and social development.

Stay tuned for our report!



The Plight of Migration: A Story of Hope Amidst Struggles



In West Africa, a young man named Akili walks along a dusty road in the relentless heat. His journey is long and the burden he carries on his shoulders is heavy – it is not just the physical weight of his belongings, but the emotional toll of leaving behind his home, his family, and the life he once knew. Akili's experience reflects the experience of 68,000 migrants who have faced tragic situations during their travels since 2014, with approximately 8,500 reported as missing just in 2023 alone (IOM 2024). Akili's story is also that of about 169 million migrant workers worldwide, including 70 million women (ILO 2021), emphasizing that migration can be a vital means of survival and a pathway to new economic opportunities. Despite these struggles, there remains a flicker of hope for a future where

every migrant's journey is recognized and valued, paving the way for improved lives for millions like Akili.

This urgent need for recognition and support flows directly into the broader context of migration, an age-old phenomenon that is becoming ever more complex considering the challenges of the modern world. The reasons that drive people like Akili to leave their homes are multifaceted. Some are escaping the ravages of war, while others like Akili are seeking opportunities not available in their home countries. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM), adopted in December 2018 in Marrakesh, aims to address these diverse challenges by providing a comprehensive framework that covers all dimensions of international migration. But does it truly encompass all types of migration?

The Scope and Impact of the Global Compact for Migration

The GCM is a notable milestone as the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement to cover migration comprehensively and holistically. It emphasizes the importance of protecting the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their legal status. However, its primary focus is on regular, legal migration pathways, often leaving those who migrate irregularly – whether voluntarily or involuntarily – in a precarious situation. The compact also aims to establish better cooperation among nations, ensuring that migration is safe, orderly, and regular but the elephant in the room remains: *how do we address the needs of migrants who fall outside of this framework?*

Since its adoption, the GCM has made advancements in safe migration practices and enhanced international cooperation. The first



Africa Regional Review conducted in 2021 highlighted progress across several areas such as the development of national migration strategies and improvements in data collection of migration flows. However, challenges continue, particularly in the implementation of these strategies at the grassroots level.

A Game Changer on the Horizon: The 2nd GCM Review

As we approach the second review of the GCM to be held in Addis Ababa on 8-10 October 2024, there is a palpable sense of hope. This review, organized by ECA in conjunction with the IOM and the AUC, comes at a critical time for the global community as the world grapples with intensifying and novel migration pressures, including those brought about by climate change and ongoing geopolitical tensions. Within this context, the review presents an opportunity to not only take stock of what has been achieved but also to address the gaps that still exist.

ECA's involvement ensures that the perspectives of our member states are adequately represented and considered in the global

dialogue. It provides an important avenue for identifying region-specific challenges and opportunities, particularly in light of the unique intraregional migration trends observed throughout the continent. By engaging with local stakeholders, governments, and civil society, ECA is helping create an inclusive space for dialogue.

What makes this review a potential game changer is the heightening urgency and wider recognition of the interconnectedness of migration issues. The review is expected to focus on actionable steps to more effectively integrate irregular migrants into the framework, ensuring that no one is left behind. Additionally, there is a renewed commitment from governments to strengthen partnerships, share expertise, and enhance the resilience of migrants, particularly in regions that are most affected by migration pressures, such as North and Southern Africa.



Embracing the Dawn: A New Hope for Migrants' Futures

The second GCM Review is more than just a checkpoint; it is an opportunity to reimagine the future of migration governance. As political will continues to grow stronger and more inclusive approaches are being developed and implemented, there is hope that the outcomes of this review will lead to tangible improvements in the lives of migrants like Akili. The focus on cooperation and shared responsibility is key, as no single country can alone address the complexities of migration.

As the world gathers to discuss and debate the future of migration, let us keep in mind the human stories at the heart of these statistics and policies. People like Akili have dreams, aspirations, and a deep desire to fulfill their human potential and build a better life. The decisions made in October will shape their futures and, now more than ever, we must rise to the challenge with compassion, urgency, and a commitment to leaving no one behind. *This is a call to action* to advocate for policies that prioritize human dignity and encourage inclusive solutions that empower every individual to thrive, while also ensuring that migration processes are safe, regular, and orderly. We can then say: Migrants' Lives Matter!





Can Legislation break the financial glass ceiling for women in Africa?



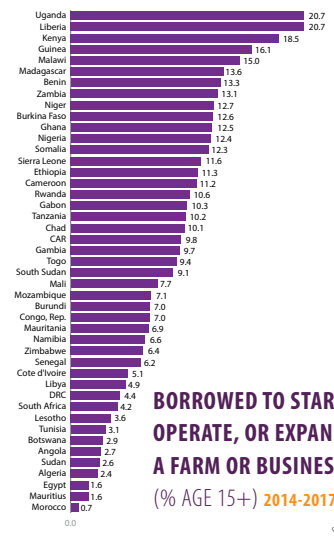
Women in Africa are still trying to break the financial glass ceiling. Not having access to finance could be shattering the dreams of young girls and women. Very few women – 1 in 5 women – borrow to start, operate or expand a farm or business. And in only a third of the countries can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man.

This begs the question: how can we eliminate this financial apartheid? The answer lies in political will, manifested in legislation, evidence-based policies and frameworks, backed by resources to ensure real change. Here, we can take a leaf from Sierra Leone's book. With only 1 out of 3 women, compared to 2 out of 3 men, engaged in entrepreneurial activities as business owners and only 1 out of 4 women having access to formal financial services, such as bank accounts, loans, and savings accounts in 2020, a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE) was enacted in 2022 to provide for women to have equal access and rights to credit and financial services, transactions and products. This Act also assigns statutory responsibility to the Bank of Sierra Leone and Ministry of Finance to prescribe procedures and processes for improving access to finance for women.

As they say, the proof is in the pudding. This timely Act needs to be followed by implementation as well as analyses of impact. It is also critical to identify and address underlying gender inequalities, such as occupational segregation, unequal



employment earnings, lower labour market participation and hindered access to credit, which sustain economic disparities. Only then can we succeed in breaking the financial glass ceiling!



A WOMAN CAN SIGN A CONTRACT IN THE SAME WAY AS A MAN



BORROWED TO START, OPERATE, OR EXPAND A FARM OR BUSINESS, (% AGE 15+) 2014-2017



The Road to Beijing+30

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) in March 2025, it's time to take stock of the progress in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa. This review is a crucial opportunity to celebrate our achievements, recognize the challenges that still exist, and prioritize future actions to keep the momentum for gender parity going strong. The impact of the BPfA on Africa has been profound, shaping policies and initiatives to tackle gender disparities. In the upcoming review, dubbed Beijing +30, we will be looking back at the strides we've made while acknowledging the obstacles that still need to be overcome.

Speaking of achievements, it's amazing to see the progress Africa has made in boosting women's political representation, achieving legislative gains, and fostering economic empowerment. In 2023, Rwanda made history with 61% of parliamentary seats held by women, setting a global standard for female political representation. Not only that, but many African countries have also passed laws to address gender-based violence, and over 20 nations have established frameworks to combat domestic violence. Africa is also making strides in closing the gender gap in economic empowerment, which could help address migration issues. Initiatives like the African

Development Bank's Affirmative Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA) have secured over \$1.5 billion to support women entrepreneurs. Exciting times for progress in Africa!

Despite progress, deep-rooted cultural norms continue to hinder women's full participation in society. But there is hope - enrolment rates have improved, even though gender disparities in education still persist.

Join us in our next edition, where we will explore the journey to overcome these obstacles, including emerging challenges and empowering women to achieve economic independence using illustrations from best practices from over 30 country narrative reports!

Our staff voices

Personal questions



Keiso: Who is Saurabh Sinha? Tell us a bit about yourself, where do you draw your endless energy, wit and intelligence from? What inspired you to pursue a career as an International Civil Servant?

Saurabh: This is a very difficult question. I do not know the answer. But let me try. I think I draw a lot of my energy from a passionate sense of self-belief and believing in what I do. I also love what I do.

At the professional level, I prefer to rely on evidence before I believe in anything.

Personally, I am an optimist, which is what has enabled me to take risks in life.

I stand up for what I think is right or against what I think is unjust.

So rights matter a great deal to me.

I don't provoke a conflict, but I don't shy away from it either if it is inevitable.

I love a good argument.

I am not very creative in the sense of knowing an art or a skill like music or dancing, but I always look for creative alternatives in my work.

I am always besieged by the question – is there a better way of doing it or saying the same thing?

There is a term in Economics for this kind of an approach – search for Pareto optimality where you keep increasing efficiency of allocation of

resources until the point after which a more efficient allocation is not possible.

Maybe I am always searching for a Pareto optimal solution.

I think humour and laughter are my constant companions – they are my ways of seeing the funny side and de-stressing by not taking things too seriously.

I love books and reading enormously.

I believe in constant learning and that's where books and reading have helped me.

In my time at ECA I learnt (or, taught myself) subjects like migration, demography, health – all areas that were new to me when I joined and am grateful to ECA for the opportunity for self-improvement.

I enjoy cooking and I am a fairly good cook, though would like to expand my repertoire.

I have admired the UN and the values it espouses, but I don't think there was any long-term plan or a strategy to join the UN. I think I just took the opportunity when it came my way.

That is something I have done all my life – take calculated risks and never be afraid to venture into the unknown. That's what made me shift from my original discipline from Electrical Engineering to Economics, which I found was a lot more interesting and exciting than engineering.



I went to Vietnam, my first UN posting, and then to Afghanistan, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Mongolia and finally to ECA.

I didn't really have a plan or a strategy – I know it doesn't make me look good when I say it like this. Makes me look like a drifter through life and that is why I count myself very lucky to have succeeded and in having an enjoyable and a wholesome career with a full mixture of good times and difficult times and where I learnt a lot and picked up many new disciplines.

I have never been reluctant to learn and from anyone. I am still learning.

Keiso: Looking back at your professional journey, what aspects have you enjoyed the most? What do you want to be remembered for? and what are the toughest challenges you've had? How did you cope with the demands made on your time?

Saurabh: I have enjoyed variety, challenges, doing different things.

This is not my epitaph, but I think I would like to be remembered as someone who was a stickler for quality and analytical rigour. That matters a lot to me.

Managing the numerous demands on my time has been a challenge, particularly after the two sections (Population and Development and Employment and Social Protection sections) became the Social Policy section in 2018.

This was also the toughest challenge to not only manage the demands on my time but coming to grips with the different thematic areas. So I "learnt" or "self-taught" demography and migration when the merger of the two sections happened, and

Work related questions:



later I "taught" myself the economics of health when the HEGA 1 report landed on my lap from the 9th floor.

It was hugely challenging staying on top of these issues, but at least today when I leave, I am at a good place as even if not an expert, I think I am fairly knowledgeable about these fields.

So am grateful to ECA for this opportunity.

Getting the balance right among think tank, convening and capacity strengthening functions is extremely challenging.

No one is equally proficient or comfortable with all the three functions and so the section and division composition or work allocation should balance these three skills.

Keiso: Let's talk about the work you have been doing in ECA to end poverty and reduce inequalities; Your thoughts on what the division you are leaving should do better? Can do better? Reflections on your own contribution?

Saurabh: As mentioned above, I have not only been 'doing' poverty and inequality reduction, but also social protection, employment, migration, demography and health, esp health financing.

All the while we were handling different thematic areas and sometimes the pressure became too much. But on the whole as I look back, the experience was extremely rewarding.

The division can do many things better, and one of these is for the three sections to somehow coalesce (at least conceptually) so that we have a strong focus.

I think we can come together in doing some common flagship reports which will increase our visibility too. For instance, the African Social Development Report can be a divisional product rather than being led always by the Social Policy section.

And this could be done every two years, on a theme of relevance across the three sections and the work could be done by a team from all the sections.

The policy paper currently under preparation on developing a new social contract on education is a good example of joint work within the division.

There are many areas where we can do joint work among the sections since many or areas overlap with each other.

Keiso: Your thoughts on what the commission needs to do to better in order to support and build capacity of member States to put in place robust social policies? Reflections on your own contribution?

Saurabh: My experience of more than 9 years at ECA and working with different countries to influence policy is that policymaking is messy, noisy and slow.

There are multiple paths, often a result of the presence of numerous agencies and policy advisors, through which policy initiatives are channelled.

This has the potential to enhance the quality of policy advice, but also slow down policy formulation and sometimes even stall the process.

But it is important to keep at it, be patient but persevere, and be prepared for reversals.

The most important contribution ECA can make is to strengthen the quality of its analytical work, which can support its technical assistance work and also policy advocacy.

This is important because African member States look up to the UN and ECA for an alternative perspective on various issues.

And this will come from our own analytical work.

At present the analytical work is getting lost in all the other work we do and the various requests we need to respond to.

I agree with Sweta that consultants should not write our analytical reports, rather we should do

Closing questions



the final writing.

I have always ensured that the knowledge products coming out of the Social Policy section are written internally.

Maybe because I enjoy doing analytical work myself.

Keiso: Do you have any advice for current or future employees at the ECA? Any final words and nuggets of wisdom for those you are leaving behind?

Saurabh: I am not sure if there is any wisdom in the words, but here are some thoughts:

Work-life balance is like the SDGs – necessary but aspirational, difficult to achieve, and often not easy to quantify. Keep trying to get the perfect balance, knowing that you may not get it, and even if you do, you wouldn't know what it looks like.

Cut out the noise and enjoy your work.

It is very important to take your work seriously and give it your best shot.



But never take yourself seriously.

Doing what you believe in is more important than being popular.

So, if some people don't like you, it means you're doing something good.

Keiso: What will you miss the most about the section/division/ECA/Addis after retirement?

Saurabh: I will miss the people and the camaraderie and the friendships the most. Made some very good friends during my time here.

Will miss the ECA compound which is getting more beautiful every day.

Addis' salubrious weather; the avocados, the smell of good coffee.

Keiso: What do you plan to do after retirement?

Saurabh: I didn't plan my career, so can't really plan my retirement. Though have a number of things lined up.

I will rest; catch up with friends and family; do some serious cooking; catch up on my reading; do some writing and research; and travel (I am buying a motorbike next month).

I am planning to stay very busy and active.

And yes, I hope to get back to my first love – teaching. Actually, it is my second love. The last I heard from friends was that my first love is now a grandmother!

Āmeseghinalahu and Melkam Berera.



Recent Blogs

- [*As Africa's Population Crosses 1.5 Billion, The Demographic Window Is Opening; Getting The Dividend Requires More Time And Stronger Effort*](#), 12 July 2024
- [*To think or Not to think: UN Economists' Thinking on Global Challenges and Solutions*](#), 16 July 2024
- [*Bunna with Sweta: A Glimpse into Harnessing Insights and Inspiring Each Other for Africa's Transformation*](#), 22 August 2024

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