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At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010

Sub-Saharan migration to the United States also growing

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Terminology

Sub-Saharan Africa includes all countries and territories in continental Africa except Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara. Sub-Saharan Africa also includes the islands of Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and St. Helena. For a complete list, see [Appendix B](#).

Migrants includes people moving across *international* borders for any reason, including economic or educational pursuits, family unification, or flight from conflict, which can apply to refugees and asylum seekers.

Europe is used in this report as a shorthand for the 28 nation-states that form the European Union (EU), as well as Norway and Switzerland, for a total of 30 countries. At the time of this report's production, the UK was still part of the European Union, even though the country triggered Article 50 on March 29, 2017, to begin its withdrawal from the EU.

The terms **asylum seekers**, and **asylum applicants** are used interchangeably throughout this report and refer to individuals who have applied for asylum in a European country after reaching Europe. All family members, whether male or female, children or adults, file individual applications for asylum. Reported figures in this report are first-time asylum applicants with counts of withdrawn applications removed. See "[Still in Limbo: About a Million Asylum Seekers Await Word on Whether They Can Call Europe Home](#)" for more information on Europe's asylum seeker process.

U.S. lawful permanent residents (previously known as legal permanent residents) or green card holders are granted permanent residence in the U.S. based on a complex system of admission categories and numerical quotas. Most are immigrants sponsored by family members, either as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or other family members of citizens and lawful permanent residents.

Refugees denotes the group of people fleeing conflict to a nearby country. **Resettled refugees** are refugees (often living in a neighboring country), who are processed and approved for resettlement. They later move to countries like the United States or those in Europe.

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Sub-Saharan migration into the United States also growing

International migration from countries in sub-Saharan Africa [has grown dramatically](#) over the past decade,¹ including to Europe² and the United States. Indeed, most years since 2010 have witnessed a rising inflow of sub-Saharan asylum applicants in Europe, and lawful permanent residents and refugees in the U.S.

The factors pushing people to leave sub-Saharan Africa – and the paths they take to arrive at their destinations – vary from country to country and individual to individual. In the case of Europe, the population of sub-Saharan migrants has been boosted by the influx of nearly 1 million [asylum applicants](#) (970,000) between 2010 and 2017, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from [Eurostat](#), Europe’s statistical agency. Sub-Saharan Africans also moved to European Union countries, Norway and Switzerland as international students and resettled refugees, through family reunification and by other means.³

In the U.S., those fleeing conflict also make up a portion of the more than 400,000 sub-Saharan migrants who moved to the States between 2010 and 2016. According to data from [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) and [U.S. State Department](#), 110,000 individuals from sub-Saharan countries were [resettled as refugees](#) over this seven-year period. An additional 190,000 were granted lawful permanent residence by virtue of family ties; nearly 110,000 more entered the U.S. through the [diversity visa](#) program.⁴

Will the inflow of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and the U.S. continue at the same pace in the years ahead? It is difficult to say. However, the idea of migrating is on the minds of many Africans living south of the Sahara. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey in six sub-Saharan countries that have supplied many of the region’s migrants to the U.S. and Europe, many say they would move to another country if the means and opportunity presented themselves. And in Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria, more than a third say they actually plan to migrate in the next

¹ The increase between 2010 and 2017 in the number of sub-Saharan African migrants living in the U.S. and EU, however, is significantly smaller than the increase in sub-Saharan African migrants living in other sub-Saharan African countries over the same time period. Most of the latter increase, which is nearly 5 million migrants, is due to refugees fleeing to other sub-Saharan African countries.

² Europe is defined as European Union countries, Norway and Switzerland. The UK is counted as part of the EU as it was still a member of the EU at the time of this report’s publication.

³ For example, Europe admitted roughly 17,000 sub-Saharan African refugees through resettlement programs. Also, migrants can enter Europe via family unification programs, such as the [family visa process](#) in the UK.

⁴ These figures represent new, lawful permanent residents that were [not already living](#) in U.S.

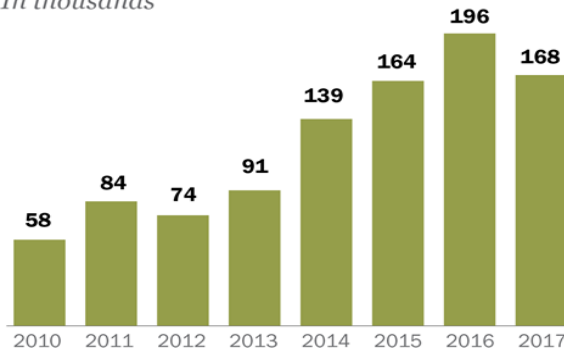
five years. Of those who plan to move, more individuals plan to move to the U.S. than to Europe in most countries surveyed.

Since 2010, most years have seen a rising tide of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and the U.S.

Migrant inflows from sub-Saharan African countries into European Union countries, Norway and Switzerland and the U.S.

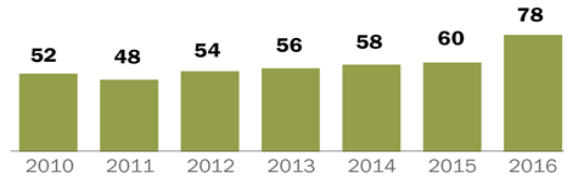
Asylum applicants to Europe

In thousands



Lawful permanent residents and refugee arrivals to U.S.

In thousands



Note: Asylum applicants to Europe are first-time applicants after the removal of withdrawn applications; they are shown in calendar years. Lawful permanent resident and refugee arrivals to U.S. are shown in fiscal years (Oct. 1 to Sept. 30). U.S. data for fiscal 2017 was unavailable at time of publication. Sub-Saharan African migrants may enter each destination by other than the means displayed in this chart. Consequently, these flow figures are incomplete and likely represent minimums. See report's textbox, "Increases in migrant stock and inflows are not the same." See Appendix B for list of sub-Saharan Africa countries included. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Eurostat data, accessed March 14, 2018, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. State Department data, accessed March 13, 2018. "At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010."

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Increases in migrant stocks and inflows are not the same

About 420,000 more sub-Saharan African migrants lived in Europe in 2017 (4.15 million) than in 2010 (3.73 million). And an estimated 1.55 million sub-Saharan African migrants lived in the U.S in 2017, an increase of about a 325,000 from 2010, when an estimated 1.22 million sub-Saharan African migrants lived in the country, according to the [United Nations](#). These populations are also sometimes referred to as *migrant stocks*. They constitute the balance of increases and decreases in the total accumulated population of sub-Saharan migrants for a specified time period.

Inflows, by contrast, in this report refer to the annual migration of people born in sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and the United States. Inflows can boost the total migrant stock if inflows to a region or country exceed the combined effects of deaths, outflows and return migration to countries of origin. As a result, in some instances, differences in migrant stocks between two time points can be lower than inflows.

EU countries, Norway and Switzerland received nearly 1 million first-time asylum applications from sub-Saharan Africans between 2010 and 2017, according to data from [Eurostat](#), Europe's statistical agency. (This number removes application counts withdrawn by sub-Saharan Africans between 2010 and 2017 to account for the possible duplication of asylum seekers applying in multiple countries). But asylum applications are not the only way sub-Saharan migrants enter Europe. Some enter, for example, on family or work visas, or as resettled refugees or international students, so the total inflow is likely larger.

At the same time, [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) and [U.S. State Department](#) records indicate that more than 400,000 sub-Saharan Africans entered the U.S. between fiscal 2010 and fiscal 2016 as arriving lawful permanent residents or resettled refugees. (Data from fiscal 2017 were unavailable). A smaller number of sub-Saharan Africans also entered the U.S. as [international students](#) or as employees with work visas.

Nigeria and Ghana have been major sources of sub-Saharan migrants to both Europe and the United States

More than half (51%) of sub-Saharan African migrants living in the U.S. as of 2017 were born in just four countries: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana and Kenya, according to migrant population data from the [United Nations](#).⁵

Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya are also major sources of migrants to the EU, Norway and Switzerland. However, compared with the U.S., sub-Saharan migrants to Europe arrive from a more diverse set of origins, with more than half of migrants living in Europe born in South Africa, Somalia, Senegal, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, in addition to Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya.

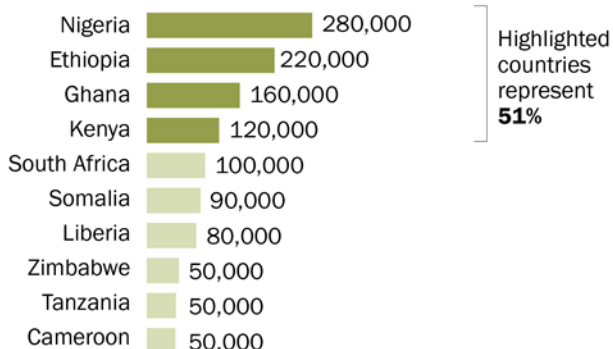
Some origin countries of these sub-Saharan migrant populations in the U.S. and Europe have increased more than others. For example, between 2010 and 2017, the total number of [Somalian migrants](#) in Europe increased by 80,000 people. Over the same period, the total population of Eritreans living in Europe climbed by about 40,000, according to UN estimates.

In the U.S., between 2010 and 2017, several sub-Saharan migrant populations increased, including those from Nigeria (70,000

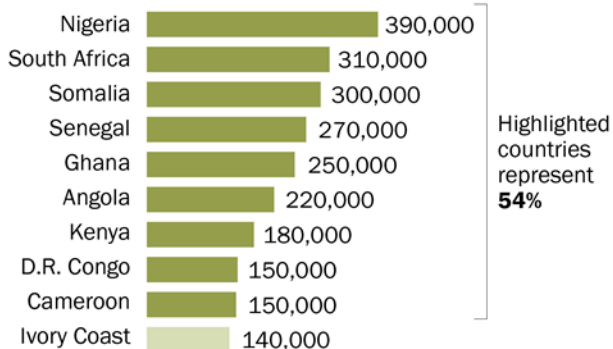
Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Kenya stand out as origin countries for sub-Saharan migrants living in both the U.S. and Europe

Top countries of birth of sub-Saharan migrants living in the U.S. and the European Union, Norway and Switzerland in 2017, in thousands

U.S.



EU, Norway and Switzerland



Notes: See Appendix B for list of countries in sub-Saharan Africa included in this analysis. Estimates rounded to the nearest 10,000. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations data accessed on Dec. 23, 2017.

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⁵ [Data analysis](#) of the 2015 American Community Survey indicates a higher number of Nigerian and Kenyan immigrants living in the U.S. than UN data in 2017. The UN's estimates do differ at times with country-specific figures. Nonetheless, estimates from the UN were used to ensure comparability across countries and regions.

individuals), Ethiopia (70,000) and Ghana (40,000).

In terms of destinations, as of 2017, nearly three-quarters (72%) of Europe's sub-Saharan immigrant population was concentrated in just four countries: the UK (1.27 million), France (980,000), Italy (370,000) and Portugal (360,000). In the U.S., migrants from sub-Saharan Africa can be found across the country, with 42% in the American South, 24% in the Northeast, 18% in the Midwest and 17% in the West.⁶

If circumstances permitted, many sub-Saharan Africans would migrate abroad

Between February and April 2017, Pew Research Center surveyed in six of the 10 countries that have supplied many of the sub-Saharan immigrants now living in the U.S. Four of these countries – Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Kenya – are also among the top 10 origin countries for sub-Saharan migrants to Europe.

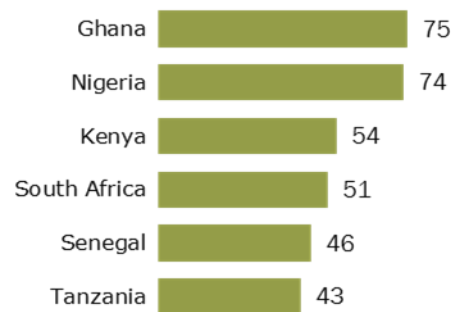
The survey asked respondents whether they would go to live in another country, if they had the means and opportunity. At least four-in-ten in each sub-Saharan country surveyed answered yes, including roughly three-quarters of those surveyed in Ghana (75%) and Nigeria (74%).

The relatively high shares of people in these countries who say they would resettle in another country is generally consistent with findings from other surveys, like Afrobarometer in [Nigeria](#) and [Ghana](#), that pose questions about the desirability of migrating. Compared with other world regions, [Gallup](#) polls find that sub-Saharan countries have some of the highest shares of people who say they would move to another country.

What's behind the widespread appeal of migrating in some sub-Saharan countries? Multiple factors could be at play. To begin with, while many sub-Saharan African economies are [growing](#),

About half or more in several sub-Saharan African countries would move to another country

% that would live in another country if had the means and opportunity to go



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q140.
 "At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010."

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⁶ Pew Research Center analysis of the 2016 American Community Survey.

many countries continue to have [high unemployment](#) rates and relatively low wage rates. In addition, the job market looks unlikely to improve anytime soon, thanks to [high fertility levels](#) that will mean even more people [competing for jobs](#). Against this backdrop, sub-Saharan Africans could see migrating to countries with more – and better paying – jobs as a means of improving their [personal economic prospects](#).

Political instability and conflict are other factors pushing sub-Saharan Africans to move. For example, the number of sub-Saharans displaced within their own country nearly doubled to 9 million between 2010 and 2016, according to [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\) estimates](#). Also, the total number of refugees from sub-Saharan countries living in other sub-Saharan countries grew about 2.3 million in the same period. At the same time, reports indicate that anywhere between [400,000 and a million sub-Saharan Africans](#) are in Libya; some of them have been sold as slaves or are being held in jail-like facilities.

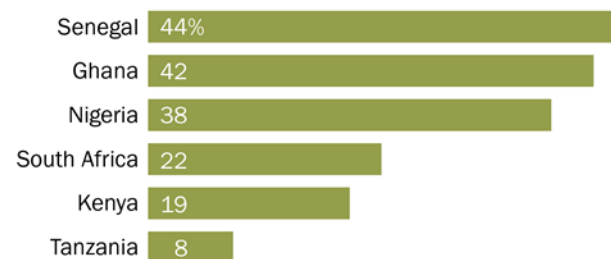
Pressures related to economic well-being and insecurity may help to explain why, beyond a general willingness to migrate, substantial shares of sub-Saharan Africans say they actually *plan to move to another country in the next five years*. Among the six countries polled, the share with plans to migrate ranges from roughly four-in-ten or more in Senegal (44%), Ghana (42%) and Nigeria (38%) to fewer than one-in-ten in Tanzania (8%).

Will all those with plans to migrate in fact leave their home countries in the next five years? If recent history is a guide, the answer would most likely be no. But data from official sources suggest that this will not be for lack of effort.

For example, [1.7 million Ghanaians](#) (or 6% of Ghana’s population) applied for the U.S. diversity lottery in 2015, even when only 50,000 people *worldwide* are permitted to move each year to the U.S. through this visa program. In the same year, other sub-Saharan African countries, such as the Republic of Congo (10%), Liberia (8%) and Sierra Leone (8%) saw high shares of their populations

One-in-five or more adults in Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa say they plan to move to another country

% say they plan on moving to another country in the next five years



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q142.
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apply for the lottery. Although the lottery only requires an online application and the completion of a high school diploma for eligibility, the high number of applicants underscores the seriousness with which many sub-Saharan Africans contemplate and actively pursue migrating abroad.

In some sub-Saharan countries, U.S. preferred over Europe as destination

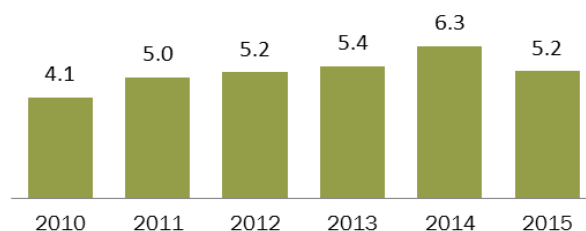
Europe's border statistics show a [well-traveled route of migrants](#) from Africa to Europe. But this does not necessarily mean Europe is the top choice of potential sub-Saharan African migrants. In fact, in several of the countries surveyed by Pew Research Center, those planning to migrate more often cited the U.S., as opposed to Europe, as their preferred destination when asked where in the world they planned to move.

For example, among the 42% of Ghanaians who say they plan to migrate abroad in the next five years, four-in-ten (41%) identify the U.S. as their intended destination, while three-in-ten (30%) name a country in the EU, Norway or Switzerland. Similarly, shares of potential migrants in South Africa (39% vs. 22%) and Kenya (39% vs. 12%) say they intend to migrate to the U.S. over Europe.⁷ Only in Senegal, a Francophone country, do more respondents that plan to move intend to migrate to a European country (49%), as opposed to the United States (24%).

The survey did not ask respondents why they preferred the U.S. or Europe, but it did ask whether respondents were in personal contact with friends or relatives in other countries. People planning to migrate in the next five years tended to identify destinations where they already had friends or family. This finding is generally consistent with studies showing that personal connections influence the decision and [likelihood of migrating](#).

U.S. diversity visa applicants from sub-Saharan Africa have increased

Number of people participating in the visa lottery, in millions, fiscal 2010-2015



Note: Fiscal year is Oct. 1-Sept. 30. Application period occurs two fiscal years in advance of each year's lottery. Applicants include principal applicants, spouses and children.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. State Department data, 2010-2015, accessed March 1, 2018

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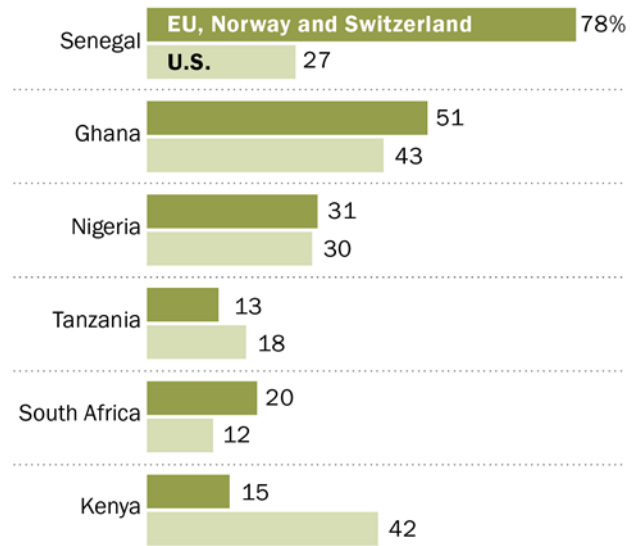
⁷ [Migration researchers](#) have noted the high-level of migration among sub-Saharan Africans to other sub-Saharan African countries. Only in Kenya did large shares of respondents say they were intending to move to other sub-Saharan African countries in the next 5 years. Among those intending to move, 7% of Kenyan adults say they plan to move to Tanzania in the next 5 years with another 7% saying they plan on moving to Uganda.

Higher shares of adults in Senegal and South Africa say they have friends or relatives they stay in touch with regularly in Europe than say this about friends or relatives in the U.S. Meanwhile, in

Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania, people have friends or relatives they stay in touch with in Europe and the U.S. at about the same rate. In Kenya, a higher share of people have contacts in the United States.

Sub-Saharan Africans have personal ties to the U.S. and Europe

In which countries do you have friends or relatives that you stay in touch with regularly?



Note: Among those indicating they have friends or relatives who live in another country they stay in touch with regularly (Q138). Multiple country responses permitted.

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q139.

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Demographic methodology

Migration statistics for this report were drawn from datasets from Europe and the U.S., as well as from global datasets.

Europe

Europe's asylum applications from sub-Saharan Africa

Number of asylum applications was drawn from [Eurostat](#), Europe's statistical agency. Annual inflows were calculated from first-time applications minus withdrawn applications within each country of application and applicant nationality group. Europe includes European Union countries (including the UK), Norway and Switzerland.

United States

U.S. American Community Survey

Every year, the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) administers the American Community Survey (ACS), a nationally representative household survey of the U.S. general public. Respondents are asked for their place of birth and their geographic state of residence, among other things. These data for 2016 were used to calculate the breakdown of sub-Saharan African-born immigrants, regardless of citizenship, across census regions of the United States for the non-institutionalized population.

U.S. lawful permanent resident and refugee arrivals

Annual flows of sub-Saharan Africans entering the U.S. are based on *new arrivals* of lawful permanent residents (LPR) across all classifications (family, employment-based, diversity visa and other means), based on data from the [Department of Homeland Security](#). Using data from the [U.S. State Department](#), the annual flow of refugees with sub-Saharan Africa nationalities admitted to the U.S. were added to arriving LPRs in each fiscal year (Oct. 1 to Sept. 30). Refugees adjust their status to LPR after living several months in the United States. This report counted refugees the year they arrived in the U.S. rather than the year they adjusted their status.

Global

United Nations international migrant stock estimates

The [United Nations](#) has estimated the countries of birth and countries of residence for foreign-born populations living around the world as of 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2017. International migrant stock estimates used in this report do not use the category "Other South," a country-of-birth category representing less than 3% of the world's international migrants. These

estimates for migrant populations from less-developed nations cannot be specifically attributed to a particular country of birth. It is possible that migrants from some sub-Saharan African countries are in this category.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR collects data on refugees throughout the world. These data were used for [displaced populations](#) in sub-Saharan Africa as well as [refugees formally resettled](#) in other countries.

Survey methodology

Results for the survey are based on face-to-face interviews conducted under the direction of ORB International. The results are based on national samples, unless otherwise noted. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are [available here](#).

[Detailed information on survey methods for this report](#)

[General information on international survey research](#)

Topline Questionnaire

Pew Research Center
Spring 2017 Survey
March 22, 2018 Release

Methodological notes:

- These are among the major findings from a Pew Research Center survey conducted among 6,795 respondents in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania from February 21, to April 28, 2017.
- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Methodology section and our [international survey methods database](#).
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2017 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q138. Do you have friends or relatives who live in another country that you stay in touch with regularly?			
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total
Ghana	Spring, 2017	46	54	0	100
Kenya	Spring, 2017	26	74	0	100
Nigeria	Spring, 2017	30	69	0	100
Senegal	Spring, 2017	71	29	0	100
South Africa	Spring, 2017	26	74	0	100
Tanzania	Spring, 2017	14	85	0	100

		Spring, 2017					
		Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Senegal	South Africa	Tanzania
Q139 COMBINED. ASK IF HAS FRIENDS, RELATIVES LIVING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY THEY CONTACT REGULARLY: In which countries do you have friends or relatives that you stay in touch with regularly? [MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED]	United States	43	42	30	27	12	18
	United Kingdom	25	7	19	2	16	8
	Germany	15	4	7	5	2	2
	Italy	16	1	8	36	0	1
	Nigeria	9	1	0	0	6	1
	Canada	6	3	6	5	3	2
	Spain	5	0	2	31	1	0
	UAE	3	7	3	1	2	6
	South Africa	8	7	9	1	0	13
	France	5	1	2	50	1	1
	Australia	3	5	2	0	10	1
	Gambia	1	0	0	7	0	0
	Uganda	0	18	0	0	0	11
	Other	27	43	54	34	56	69
	DK/Refused	3	1	3	1	6	2
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N=	547	325	342	769	358	167	

Data are displayed vertically. Total exceeds 100% because of multiple responses.

		Q140. If at this moment, you had the means and opportunity to go to live in another country, would you go?			
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total
Ghana	Spring, 2017	75	24	1	100
Kenya	Spring, 2017	54	45	0	100
Nigeria	Spring, 2017	74	26	0	100
Senegal	Spring, 2017	46	53	1	100
South Africa	Spring, 2017	51	48	1	100
Tanzania	Spring, 2017	43	57	0	100

		Spring, 2017					
		Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Senegal	South Africa	Tanzania
Q141. ASK IF WOULD LIVE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY: To which country would you go to live?	United States	42	55	34	25	36	34
	United Kingdom	11	6	12	3	10	7
	Germany	6	1	3	3	5	2
	Italy	6	0	1	7	2	1
	Canada	5	3	6	12	3	1
	Spain	2	0	2	8	1	0
	UAE	2	5	1	1	2	0
	China	2	4	3	2	5	12
	South Africa	1	2	2	0	0	6
	France	1	0	2	20	4	2
	Australia	1	1	1	1	6	1
	Saudi Arabia	1	1	14	2	0	0
	Other	12	21	16	14	23	28
	DK/Refused	7	2	3	2	3	5
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N=	884	644	829	491	664	477	

Data are displayed vertically.

		Q142. Are you planning on moving to another country to live sometime in the next 5 years?			
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total
Ghana	Spring, 2017	42	56	1	100
Kenya	Spring, 2017	19	80	1	100
Nigeria	Spring, 2017	38	60	2	100
Senegal	Spring, 2017	44	54	2	100
South Africa	Spring, 2017	22	76	2	100
Tanzania	Spring, 2017	8	91	1	100

		Spring, 2017				
		Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Senegal	South Africa
Q143. ASK IF PLANNING TO MOVE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY: To which country do you plan to move?	United States	41	39	32	24	39
	United Kingdom	9	5	10	3	12
	Germany	7	3	4	4	3
	Italy	6	1	1	9	2
	Canada	5	7	6	8	4
	Spain	3	0	2	9	2
	UAE	4	1	3	2	2
	China	2	2	2	3	3
	South Africa	2	4	1	0	0
	France	2	0	3	21	3
	Australia	2	4	1	1	6
	Saudi Arabia	2	2	15	3	0
	Other	11	29	17	12	23
	DK/Refused	4	2	2	1	1
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
N=	549	230	430	472	268	

In Q143, Tanzania not reported because of small sample size. Data are displayed vertically.

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Appendix B: Sub-Saharan African countries

Angola	Ghana	Republic of the Congo
Benin	Guinea	Reunion
Botswana	Guinea-Bissau	Rwanda
Burkina Faso	Ivory Coast	Sao Tome and Principe
Burundi	Kenya	Senegal
Cameroon	Lesotho	Seychelles
Cape Verde	Liberia	Sierra Leone
Central African Republic	Madagascar	Somalia
Chad	Malawi	South Africa
Comoros	Mali	South Sudan
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Mauritania	St. Helena
Djibouti	Mauritius	Swaziland
Equatorial Guinea	Mayotte	Tanzania
Eritrea	Mozambique	Togo
Ethiopia	Namibia	Uganda
Gabon	Niger	Zambia
Gambia	Nigeria	Zimbabwe