



# Africa Visa Openness Report 2020



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

"A global COVID-19 health pandemic has upended all plans - including travels. . . Yet our interdependency, our need for pulling together, uniting and staying focused together, has never been more important."<sup>1</sup>

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

"We should go beyond the present situation, by preparing for post-pandemic conditions in the world.

There is an urgent need for Africa to develop new forms of resilience. . . There is an urgent need for Africa to chart its own course. . . We should, in full lucidity, boldly opt for an innovative approach that is inward-looking rather than outward-looking."<sup>2</sup>

Moussa Faki Mahamat  
*Chairperson, African Union Commission*

# Africa Visa Openness Index: Headlines in 2020

## 20 countries

moved upwards in rank  
on the Africa Visa  
Openness Index.

## 24 countries

offer eVisas  
reflecting 44%  
of the continent.

## Seychelles, Benin and The Gambia

offer visa-free access  
to all Africans.

26%

Africans do not need  
a visa to travel to 26%  
of other African countries

46%

Africans need visas  
to travel to 46%  
of other  
African countries

28%

Africans can get  
visas on arrival in 28%  
of other African countries

## 50 countries

improved or maintained their  
visa openness score on the Index.

## ECOWAS, EAC, SADC and UMA

are the top performing RECs  
on open reciprocity.

# Africa Visa Openness Index



**The Africa Visa Openness Index** measures how open African countries are when it comes to visas by looking at what they ask of citizens from other countries in Africa when they travel. It aims to show at

a glance which countries are facilitating travel for citizens of other countries and how; whether they allow people to travel to their country without a visa, if travellers can get a visa on arrival in the country, or if visitors need to get a visa before travel.

Data on visa openness was collected in July and August 2020. The primary source of information was from official country websites and the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The *Africa Visa Openness Index* is tracking changes in country scores over time to show which countries are making improvements that support freer movement of people across Africa.

In future editions, the Report will look at how countries are facilitating visa openness by cutting time, reducing costs, or simplifying the visa process as well as how far a visitor's experience on the ground matches up to the agreements or visa policies on paper.

## Methodology

The higher a country's score in the Index, the more visa open it is and the higher it ranks. Scores range from 0 (lowest) – 1 (highest).

**Index categories:**

- Visa required
- Visa on arrival
- No visa

Each category is weighted based on its degree of openness. For example, a 'no visa' result is weighted by 1 (high openness), 'visa on arrival' is weighted by 0.8 and a 'visa required' by 0.

**Index category indicators based on 54 African countries:\***

- Number of countries from whose citizens a visa is required as a % of total number of countries
- Number of countries whose citizens can get a visa on arrival as a % of total number of countries
- Number of countries from whose citizens no visa is required as a % of total number of countries

A country's score is calculated by adding the results from all three indicators:

$$[(\% \text{ of visa required} \times 0) + (\% \text{ of visa on arrival} \times 0.8) + (\% \text{ of no visa} \times 1)] / 100 = \text{country visa openness score.}$$

\*All African Union member countries except Western Sahara, which was not ranked due to a lack of available information.

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## Acknowledgements

This 2020 edition of the Africa Visa Openness Index marks the fifth report that has been produced jointly by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Union Commission (AUC).

This latest publication is set against the profoundly different context of the COVID-19 pandemic that is having far-reaching impacts that risk reversing Africa's economic gains of recent years. This edition of the report highlights the shockwaves affecting sectors from tourism through to investment and how promoting visa openness solutions can support the continent's economic recovery. It is notable that the upwards trend for countries to liberalize visa regimes and welcome African travellers continues in this 2020 edition. As travel restrictions ease and safety measures put in place, sustaining this progress and momentum is vital.

Sincere acknowledgment is due to the senior management of the AfDB and AUC that are at the forefront of spearheading a greater freedom to travel across the continent for all African citizens. The visa openness project is led by Zodwa Florence Mabuza, with valuable support from Ambroise Kitohou and Johanna Pangeiko Nautwima in calculating and updating the Index. Recognition also goes to Jean-Guy Afrika and Youssouf Koné for their contributions.

Special thanks on the report go to consultants engaged by the AfDB: Elena Immambocus for the writing and report development, Peggy King Cointepas for the design and graphics, and José Carlos Alexandre for selected images.



**Moono Mupotola**

*Director,*

Regional Development and Regional Integration

**"... as the evolving fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, countries increasingly need to look beyond domestic frontiers in order to boost their economic prospects. Visa openness will support Africa to reposition its future growth.."**

**Dr. Khaled F. Sherif**

*Vice-President,*

Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery

## Foreword, African Development Bank

In a period where the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still hitting hard, the benefit of expanded horizons and increased open borders is even more evident. With countries putting in place restrictions to movement to manage the crisis, the rising costs of immobility are clear. Integrating Africa – from trade to travel – is more critical than ever.



The Africa Visa Openness Index marks its fifth edition in 2020, a testament to the vision of a continent showing steady progress in easing the movement of African citizens to travel, invest and to do business. The fact that governments have continued this move in spite of the global pandemic, reveals the value placed on freer visa regimes and revitalizing key sectors of their economies to maintaining the right investor climate.

The 2020 Index shows that a record 54% of the continent is now accessible for African visitors who no longer need visas to travel or can get one on arrival. This marks a significant increase of 9% from five years ago. In 2020, The Gambia joins Seychelles and Benin in leading the way, allowing visa-free access for all African travellers. In addition, 20 countries have moved upwards in the rankings, while 93% of countries have improved or maintained their scores.

The overall picture on visa openness is positive, and reflected in the latest Africa Regional Integration Index, which finds freedom of movement to be the strongest of the continent's integration dimensions.

Yet, as the evolving fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, countries increasingly need to look beyond domestic frontiers in order to boost their economic prospects. Visa openness will support Africa to reposition its future growth and, at the same time, promote participation in regional and global value chains.

Next year, we hope to see more African countries easing travel restrictions for students, investors, tourists or businesspeople. This, in a significant way, can help lessen the severity of the COVID-19 crisis and make us more connected than before.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Sherif', written in a cursive style.

**Dr. Khaled F. Sherif**

*Vice-President,*

Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery



## African Union's Agenda 2063<sup>3</sup>

### ASPIRATION 2.

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

20. 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.

24. 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.



*"[The AfCFTA] sends a strong signal to the international investor community that Africa is open for business, based on a single rule-book for trade and investment... Aggressively implementing the AfCFTA has the potential to be Africa's economic recovery tool."*<sup>4</sup>

**Wamkele Mene**

Secretary-General, AfCFTA Secretariat

## African Union: latest developments on Agenda 2063

### African Continental Free Trade Area

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), due to start on 1 July 2020, was moved to 1 January 2021. The AfCFTA is set to open up horizons for intra-African trade and investment, with more companies standing to benefit, including small and medium-sized businesses. Allowing freedom of movement will mean African investors and entrepreneurs, including young people, can access information, skills and technology to capitalize on these opportunities.

### Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in Africa

At the foundation of Africa's integration stands the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, which ties in with the Index's efforts to track progress on visa openness on the continent. As of November 2019, the Protocol had been signed by 33 countries and ratified by four of them, showing the imperative behind more countries taking steps to move further ahead."<sup>5</sup>

### Single African Air Transport Market

The Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) will support greater African connectivity by opening up Africa's skies at the same time as boosting the travel sector, driving business and tourism. To date 34 countries have signed up to the SAATM, representing 80% of the aviation market. Opening up visa access for travellers is vital to accompany these efforts."<sup>6</sup>



## Foreword, African Union Commission

Every country in Africa has been affected by the consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. From a dramatic fall in air traffic on the continent to the profound losses that have accompanied closures spanning business as well as leisure and tourism sectors. As a result of the crisis, the vast majority of African economies are experiencing GDP contraction and investment levels are dropping. A number of economies are projected to enter a recession, and many citizens face unprecedented upheavals in jobs and livelihoods.



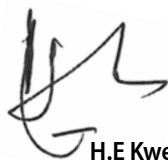
Yet the measures put in place by governments across the continent to stem the health crisis and manage its economic impacts underscore that decisive and bold action is possible. As the time comes to safely reopen and reinvigorate economic opportunities across Africa, it is critical to advance measures that propel the continent and all its citizens further forward. Liberalizing a country's visa regime is a policy tool that can be quickly adopted to do this.

The *Africa Visa Openness Index* continues to track the striking results made by the top performers on the continent and the speed with which countries can move up in rank. In this 2020 edition, three countries in West Africa – The Gambia,

Nigeria and Sierra Leone - show how this is possible, expanding travel horizons for citizens from other African countries. It serves as a clear reminder of the benefits of prioritizing visa openness solutions in large and small economies, with big gains accruing to business, investment, innovation and tourism.

Importantly, as the 1 January 2021 start date for trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area moves closer, key measures that facilitate the movement of people will underpin its success. The rise in eVisas, with 24 countries across Africa offering online systems, is a case in point. While the progress over the last five years is laudable, more can be done as the Index findings show that African citizens still need visas to travel to 46% of other African countries. Countries in East and West Africa rank among the majority of the Index top performers, showcasing the potential that exists for countries in other regions to follow suit.

The advantages of a united, integrated Africa are undisputed. For countries and regions to benefit the most from regional integration, they must take bold steps. The thesis, *Africa Must Unite*, remains unassailable" -Kwame Nkrumah. Together, we move towards a visa-free Africa.



**H.E Kwesi Quartey**  
*Deputy Chairperson,*  
African Union Commission

## Visa definitions

A VISA is an endorsement (through a certificate or stamp in a travel document) showing a visitor is allowed to enter the country for a specific length of time and for specific activities.

VISA REQUIRED means a visa has to be obtained before departure from an embassy, an honorary consulate or another official representative.

VISA ON ARRIVAL means a visa has to be obtained on arrival in the country. This includes filling out any visa forms, paying the visa fee if applicable and receiving a visa in a travel document.

NO VISA means that there is no visa needed either before departure or on arrival, with no entry authorisation required to enter freely into the country. Entry procedures still need to be complied with – these can include filling out entry forms and receiving an entry stamp.

eVISA means an electronic visa that can be obtained before departure from an official online platform.

## Visa overview

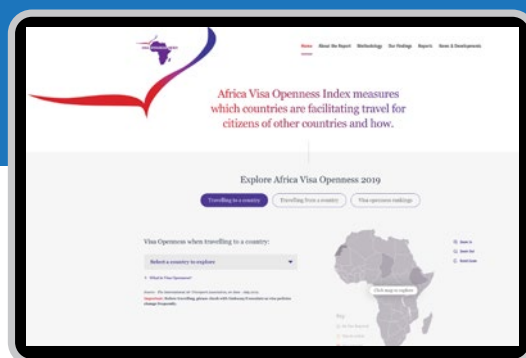
VISA OPENNESS means how easy it is for visitors to travel to a country when it comes to visas.

A MORE VISA-OPEN COUNTRY has a liberal or relaxed visa policy for travellers, so that visitors either do not need a visa when they enter or can get a visa on arrival. A more visa-restrictive country requires visitors to get a visa before they travel, for example, from an Embassy.

VISAS ARE USED FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, as a security measure to control the entry and duration of the stay of people coming into a country, to limit a visitor's activities, to generate revenue or to show reciprocity to match the treatment other countries give to one's citizens.

## Glossary

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank Group
AUC	African Union Commission
AU	African Union
CEMAC	Central African Economic and Monetary Union
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
COVID-19	Infectious disease caused by coronavirus
EAC	East African Community
ECA	United Nations) Economic Commission for Africa
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
eVisa	Electronic visa
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IATA	International Air Transport Association
PFMP	Protocol on Free Movement of Persons
REC	Regional Economic Community
SAATM	Single African Air Transport Market
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
UMA	Arab Maghreb Union
UMIC	Upper middle-income country
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization (UN specialized agency)
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council



## Visa openness platform

A visa openness online platform is available at:

[www.visaopenness.org](http://www.visaopenness.org)

The platform showcases how African countries are performing on visa openness overall and the progress being made on scores and rankings on a yearly basis. To promote greater transparency, the platform highlights the visa policy of each country from a centralized hub.

# Latest developments on regional integration



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa

## Africa Regional Integration Index 2019

The second edition of the *Africa Regional Integration Index* published by the AUC, ECA and AfDB in May 2020 is helping to track progress and identify integration priorities Africa-wide. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Index findings serve to underline the importance of integration in building more resilient economies to withstand wider systemic shocks.



The 2019 Index provides up-to-date data to assess the level of integration for Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member countries, and is scored across five key dimensions spanning trade, productive capacity, macroeconomic policy, infrastructure, and the free movement of people. On the free movement of people, the *Africa Regional Integration Index* measures the degree to which African countries have

committed to the Protocol on the Free Movement of People, Rights of Residence and Establishment, alongside the openness of countries' visa regimes.

***“Regional integration is indispensable for... connectivity, investment flows and value creation... African countries need to implement the Protocol on the Free Movement of People, which will in turn enable traders and investors to operate beyond their national borders.”<sup>7</sup>***

Joint Foreword, AfDB, AUC, ECA,  
*Africa Regional Integration Index*, 2019 Report

The Index sets out how putting in place the Protocol will allow African workers, students, researchers and border residents to move freely between signatory states. In turn, it points to how welcoming visa policies will translate to more business, investment and innovation. The report also highlights how greater openness will make it possible to scale up local ventures, build economies of scale and develop efficient regional and global value chains. In addition, it showcases how digital technology plays a role in streamlining entry processes making it possible for more students, traders, and residents to travel, exchange knowledge and build new markets.

## Regional Integration highlights

- **‘Free movement of people’ performs the strongest across the five key dimensions in Africa** with a score of 0.441 (average score across all dimensions: 0.327)

## Africa Regional Integration Index recommendations:

- **Implementation of the Protocol on the Free Movement of People**, which will enhance economic growth and allow firms to find skills more easily, in turn driving productivity.
- **Greater visa openness** with the goal of a visa-free regime for all African citizens and use of the African passport.
- **More regional cooperation on the freedom of movement among RECs**. Visa openness solutions include issuing multi-year visas and creating visa-free regional blocs.<sup>8</sup>

The *Africa Regional Integration Index*, 2019 report is available at: [www.integrate-africa.org](http://www.integrate-africa.org)

# COVID-19 impacts

## Headline figures

- International traffic in Africa dropped 95% in July 2020.<sup>9</sup>
- Africa saw a 57% decline in international tourist arrivals in the first half of 2020.<sup>10</sup>
- FDI flows to Africa are forecast to contract between 25% and 40% in 2020.<sup>11</sup>



## Travel, tourism and investment in Africa

In 2020, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves across health systems and economies across the African continent, upending travel, tourism and investment.

In 2019, travel and tourism in Africa had a 2.2% growth rate, contributing USD 168.5 billion to GDP and supporting 24.6 million jobs.<sup>12</sup> Yet over the course of 2020, the backdrop to travel and leisure changed radically as governments put in place measures to control the spread of the disease. These approaches, in Africa and elsewhere, ranged from bans on international travel through to targeted bans, and screening and quarantine requirements for travellers.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside a 95% fall in international traffic in July, Africa's hotels saw occupancy fall by 73%, witnessing a loss of 18 million international arrivals year-on-year through June.<sup>14</sup> To bounce back, the travel and tourism sector Africa-wide has worked hard to adapt and meet global protocols and guidelines, including through the display of the World Travel & Tourism Council's 'Safe Travel' stamp, which features in 13 African countries or sub-regions.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, there has been a growing focus for the leisure industry on championing regional as well as domestic tourism in Africa.

**...the move to start trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2021, and expected finalization of its investment protocol, offers renewed possibilities for growth.<sup>16</sup>**

Foreign direct investment (FDI) to the continent rose in recent years having picked up by 10.9% in 2018, reaching USD 45.9 billion and moving to an estimated USD 49 billion in 2019.<sup>17</sup> As a result of fallout from the pandemic and the uncertain climate for investors, FDI flows to Africa are due to fall in 2020, with investments either reduced or postponed. Securing renewed confidence will be critical and there is hope that increased, decisive investment can channel economic recovery as highlighted by partners of the Africa Investment Forum.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the move to start trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2021, and expected finalization of its investment protocol, offers renewed possibilities for growth.<sup>19</sup>





## Visa openness in Africa

### Border restrictions

- 26 destinations in Africa had eased restrictions by 1 September 2020, while borders in 27 destinations remained closed.<sup>20</sup>

As close to half of African destinations ease travel restrictions in line with plans to manage the pandemic, the topic of travel remains foremost in policy makers' and people's minds. Safety and security are critical factors in decision-making when it comes to the opening up of borders, and updated government measures have been rolled out for visitors in the region.

At the same time, however, with GDP in Africa projected to contract by between 1.7% to 3.4% in 2020<sup>21</sup> and African economies due to enter a recession losing up to USD 212 billion dollars,<sup>22</sup> countries need to adopt a resilient recovery plan to withstand the systemic shocks.

Once restrictions ease, allowing people to move freely across the continent can make a significant impact in reviving key sectors of the economy, from tourism to investment. Countries that relaxed visa regimes and adopted visa-free and visa-on-arrival policies have seen economic benefits in recent years, attracting growing numbers of business and leisure travellers. This is the approach recently adopted by small as well as large economies on the continent – from The Gambia to Nigeria – that moved to open up to African visitors.

The latest trends show a rapid growth in the use of smart electronic solutions when it comes to travel on the continent, with a 167% increase in eVisas across Africa in the last five years. Going digital and using cutting-edge technology, including biometrics, to speed up and secure entry for visitors will play a key role as countries respond to a changing travel climate.

## Impact on African airlines

*"The economic consequences resulting from a disconnected continent are severe. Millions of jobs and livelihoods are at risk in family-run enterprises and large corporations along the entire travel and tourism value chain. For Africa's economic recovery and future prosperity, it is essential to expedite the safe restart of the industry."*<sup>23</sup>

**Muhammad Al Bakri,**  
Regional Vice President for Africa  
and the Middle East, IATA

Africa's airlines have been badly hit by the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic; the International Air Transport Association (IATA) reports that aviation is at a virtual standstill.<sup>24</sup> While top airlines on the continent continued to operate cargo and repatriation flights, many companies have reported losses, and governments have pledged financial support. Air connectivity and countries' adoption of more liberal visa regimes will be vital to promote free movement of people across Africa, which in turn will help to accelerate economic recovery.

# Visa openness findings, 2020

The **2020 Visa Openness Index** shows that African borders are increasingly opening up to African citizens, as year-on-year progress is made to support the freer movement of people.

African travellers have liberal access to travel to a record 54% of the continent, up by 9% since 2016, and can travel visa-free or get a visa on arrival in their destination. At the same time, fewer African countries are requesting visitors to have a visa prior to travel.

Three African countries now offer visa-free access to all African visitors. The Gambia joins Seychelles and Benin at the top of the 2020 Index, having removed the need for any visa.

The number of countries on the continent offering eVisas for African travellers also continues to rise, with 44% of countries hosting an online platform, up from 17% in 2016. Most eVisa countries are either in the top scoring countries on the Index or have made the most progress on the Index, and have introduced their eVisa policies in the last four years.

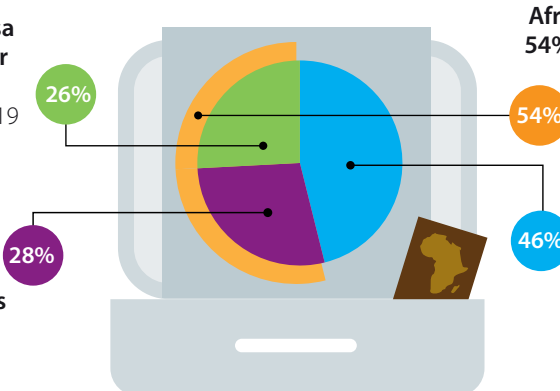
## Average Visa Openness, 2020

**Africans don't need a visa to travel to 26% of other African countries**

(improved from 25% in 2019, and 2018, 22% in 2017, and 20% in 2016).

**Africans can get visas on arrival in 28% of other African countries**

(up from 26% in 2019, 24% in 2018 and 2017, and 25% in 2016).



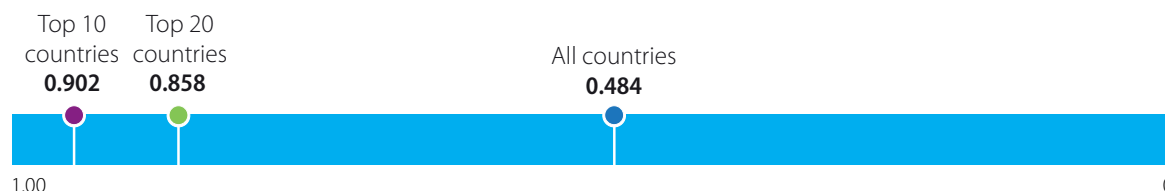
**Africans have liberal access to 54% of other African countries**

(up from 51% in 2019, 49% in 2018, 48% in 2017, and 46% in 2016).

**Africans need visas to travel to 46% of other African countries**

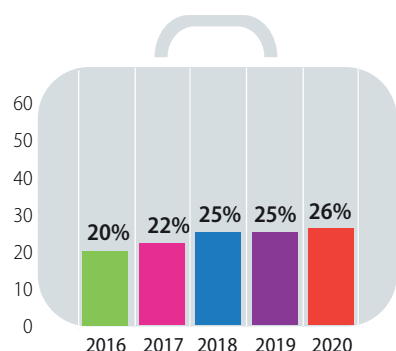
(down from 49% in 2019, 51% in 2018, 54% in 2017, and 55% in 2016).

## Average Visa Openness scores, 2020

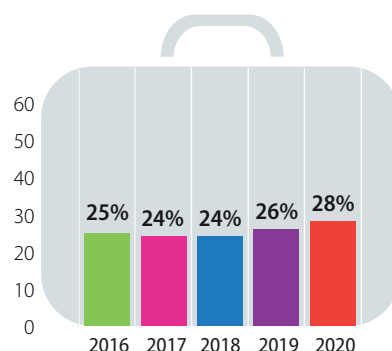


## Change in Visa Openness scores, 2016-2020, %

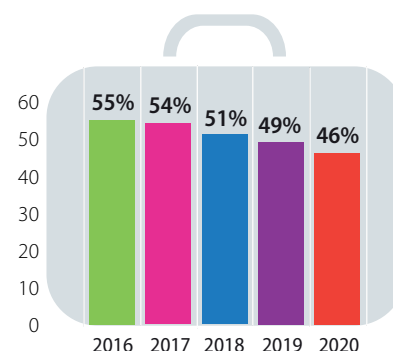
**Africans don't need a visa to travel to other African countries**



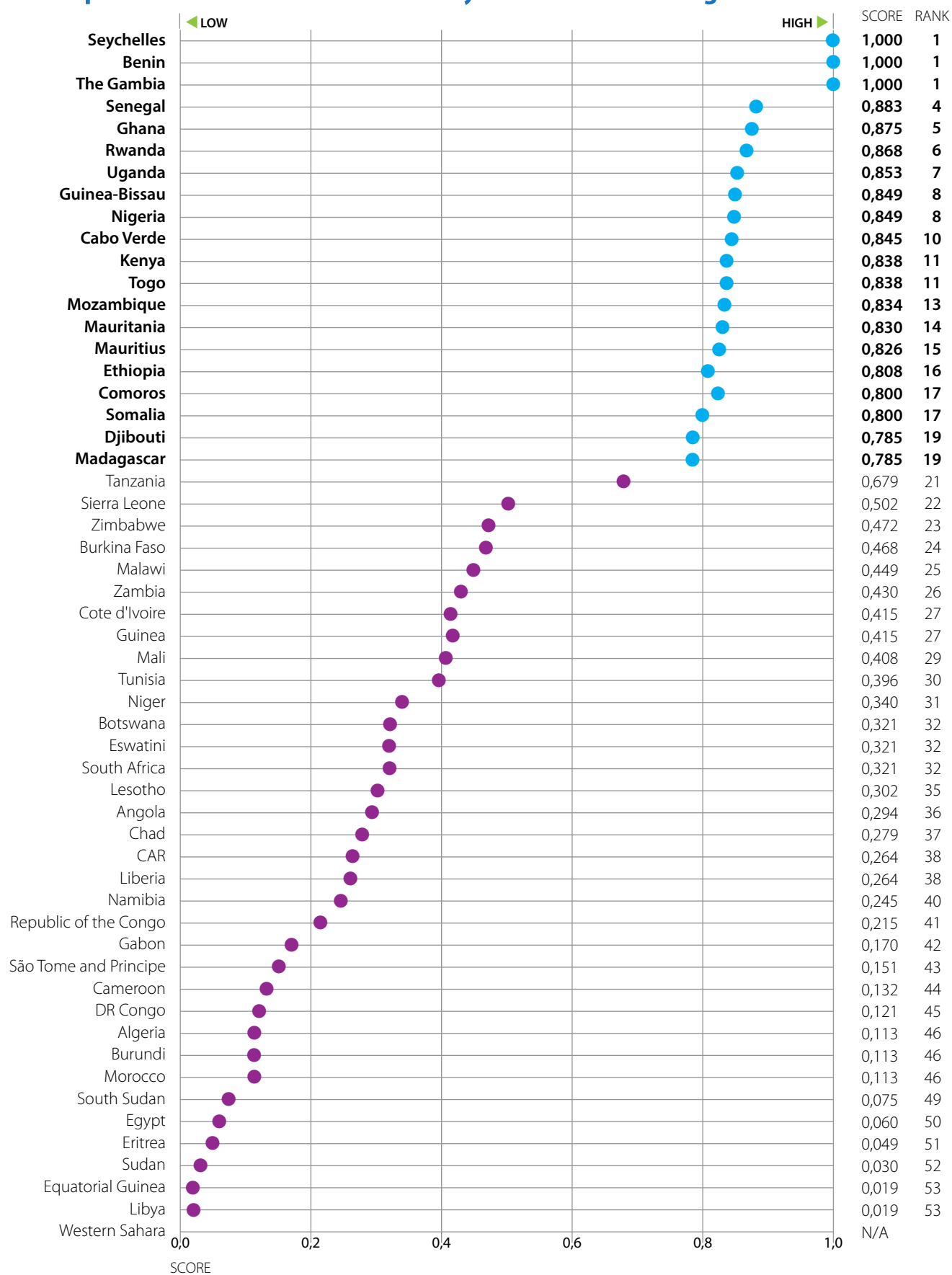
**Africans can get visas on arrival in other African countries**



**Africans need visas to travel to other African countries**



## Visa openness in Africa 2020: country scores and ranking

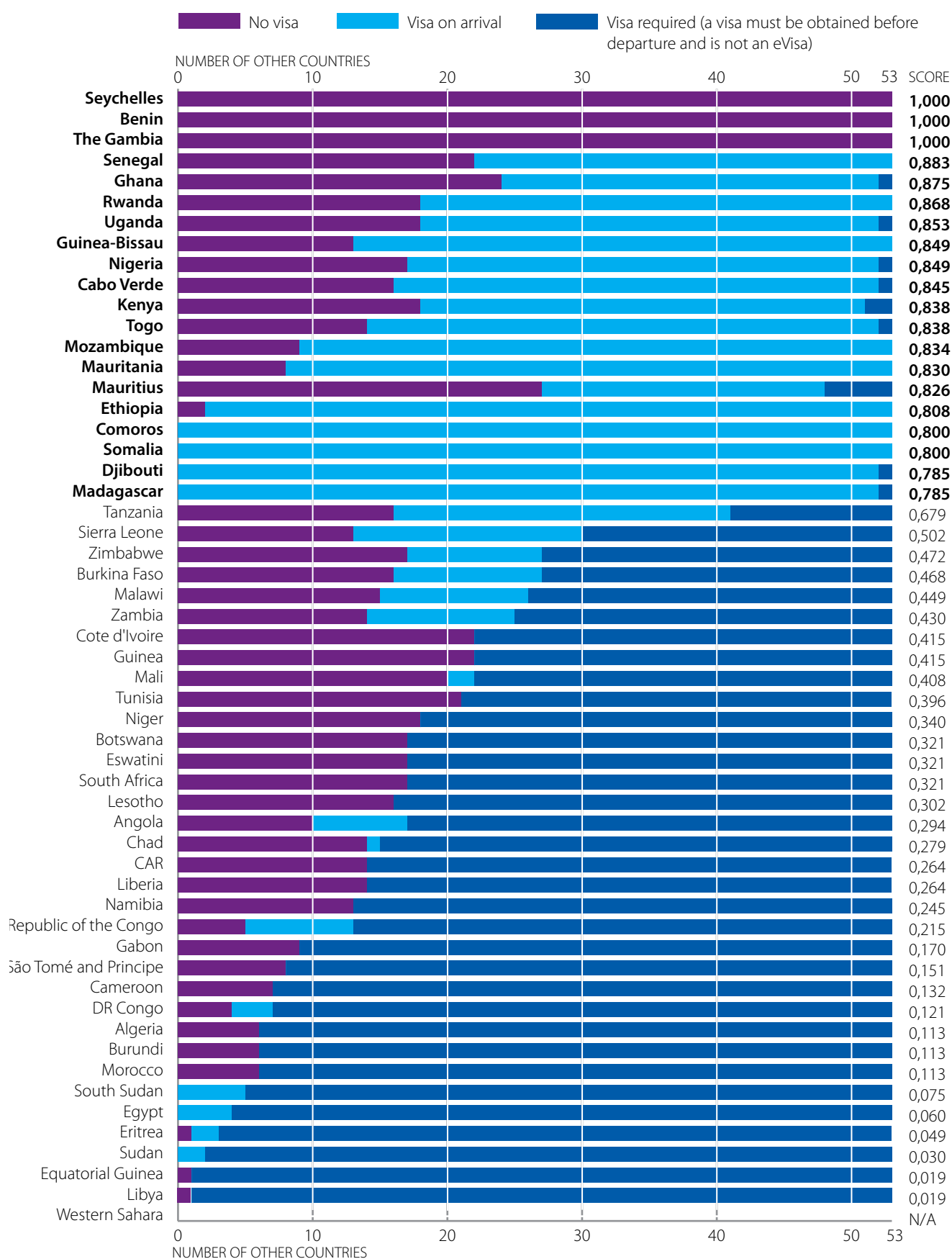


Scores range from 0-1 (highest possible)

Source : AfDB calculation based on data obtained from IATA – June-July, 2020.



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



\*Scores range from 0 to 1 (highest)

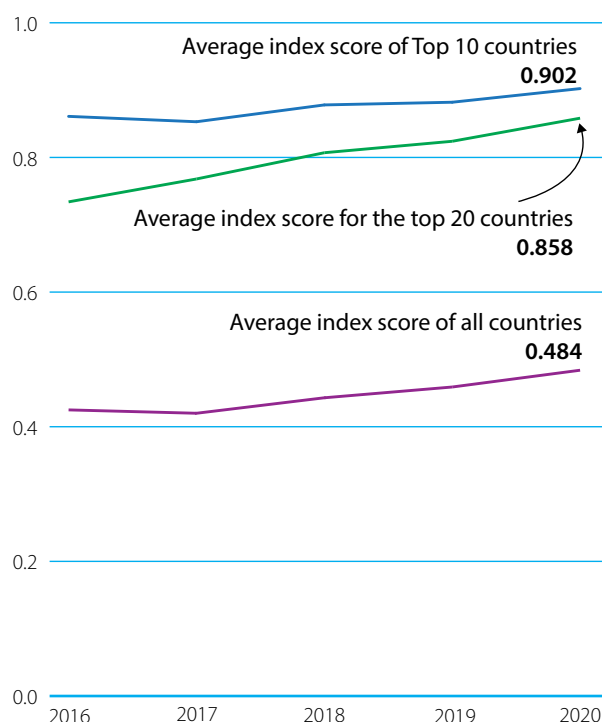
Source : AfDB calculation based on data obtained from IATA – June-July, 2020.

## Access overview

The average visa openness score for all countries continued to rise in 2019, even though the number of countries offering liberal access to all Africans stayed the same or decreased slightly.

■ **Average score for all countries is 0.484** (up from 0.459 in 2019, 0.443 in 2018, 0.420 in 2017, and 0.425 in 2016).

### Progress in average index scores, 2016-2020



**Three African countries, Seychelles, Benin and The Gambia, offer visa-free access to all Africans** (two in 2019 and 2018, one in 2017 and 2016).

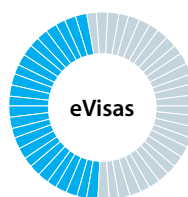


**11 African countries offer liberal access (visa-free or visa on arrival) to all Africans** (up from 10 in 2019, also 11 in 2018, 10 in 2017 and 13 in 2016).



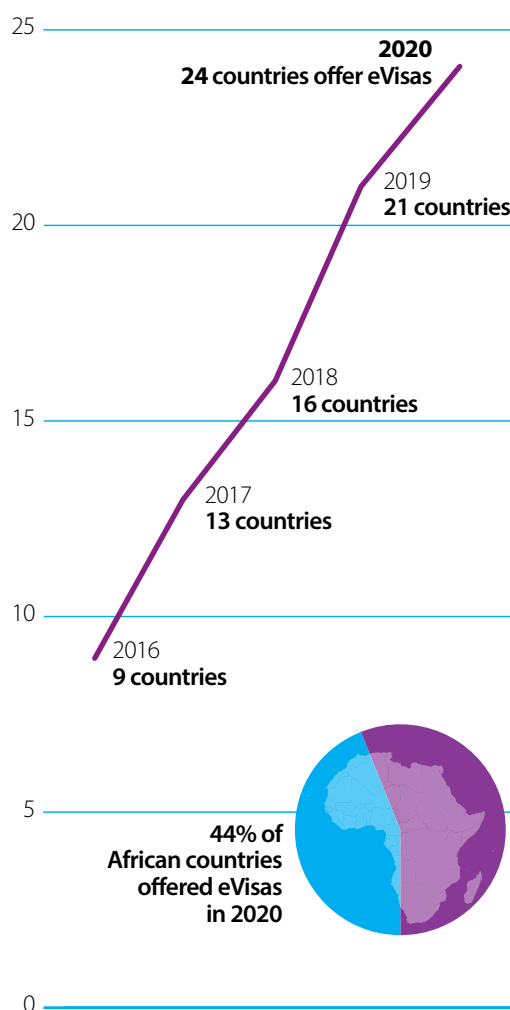
**Two African countries offer visa on arrival to all Africans** (three in 2019, four in 2018 and 2017, and three in 2016).

## eVisas



**24 African countries offer eVisas** (up from 21 in 2019, 16 in 2018, 13 in 2017, and 9 in 2016).

### Progress in use of eVisas, 2016-2020



- **10 out of the top 20 countries offer eVisas.**
- **Over 70% of the countries that offer eVisas improved their visa openness scores the most since 2016 or remained in the top 20.**
- **11 countries that improved their visa openness scores the most since 2016 or remained in the top 20 introduced eVisas in the last four years.**

## Top performers

The Visa Openness Index top performers saw a continued rise in scores in 2020, with 17 of the top 20 countries also among the destinations most open to all international travellers.<sup>25</sup> A growing number of top 20 countries committed to the continent's integration agenda. Over half of the top 20 have signed up to the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Single African Air Transport Market, and ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area.

### Top 10/20 countries

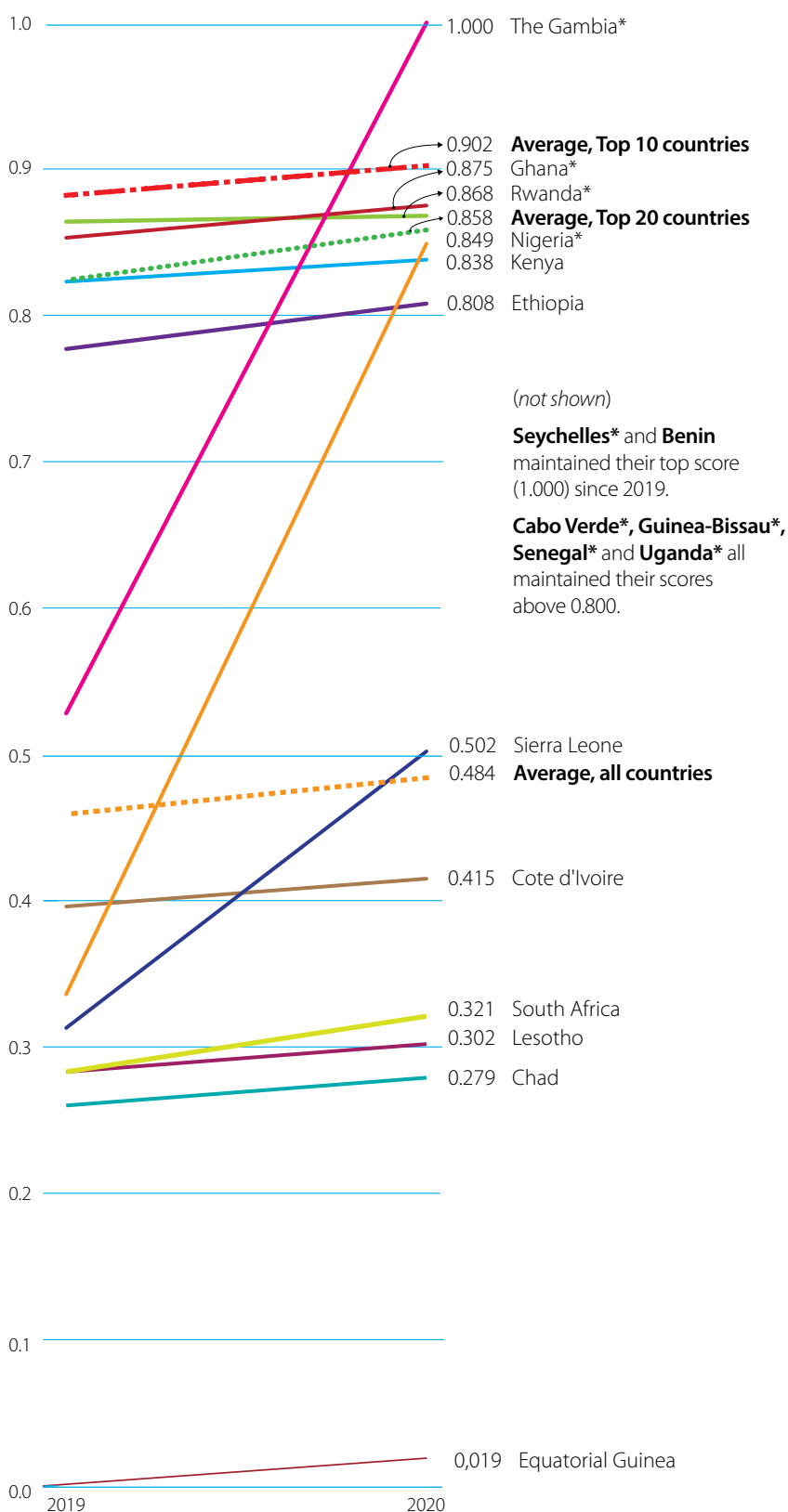
- **Seychelles, Benin and The Gambia are the top performing countries**, offering visa-free access to all Africans.
- **One new country from West Africa, Nigeria**, entered the top 20 most visa-open countries.
- **Average score for the top 10 countries is 0.902** (up from 0.882 in 2019, 0.878 in 2018, 0.853 in 2017, and 0.861 in 2016).
- **Average score for the top 20 countries is 0.858** (up from 0.824 in 2019, 0.807 in 2018, 0.768 in 2017, and 0.734 in 2016).
- **17 out of the top 20 most open African countries** for African travellers are also in the top 20 least restrictive African destinations for global travellers.<sup>26</sup>

### Income and geography

- **18 of the top 20 countries** are low-income or lower-middle income economies.
- **Five out of six** of Africa's island states are in the top 20 countries.
- **All six** of Africa's upper-middle income economies have low visa openness scores.

## Progress in top performers 2019-2020

\* Top 10 country, 2020



## Top performers and regional integration



11 of the top 20 countries have signed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons.<sup>27</sup>



11 of the top 20 countries have ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area.<sup>28</sup>



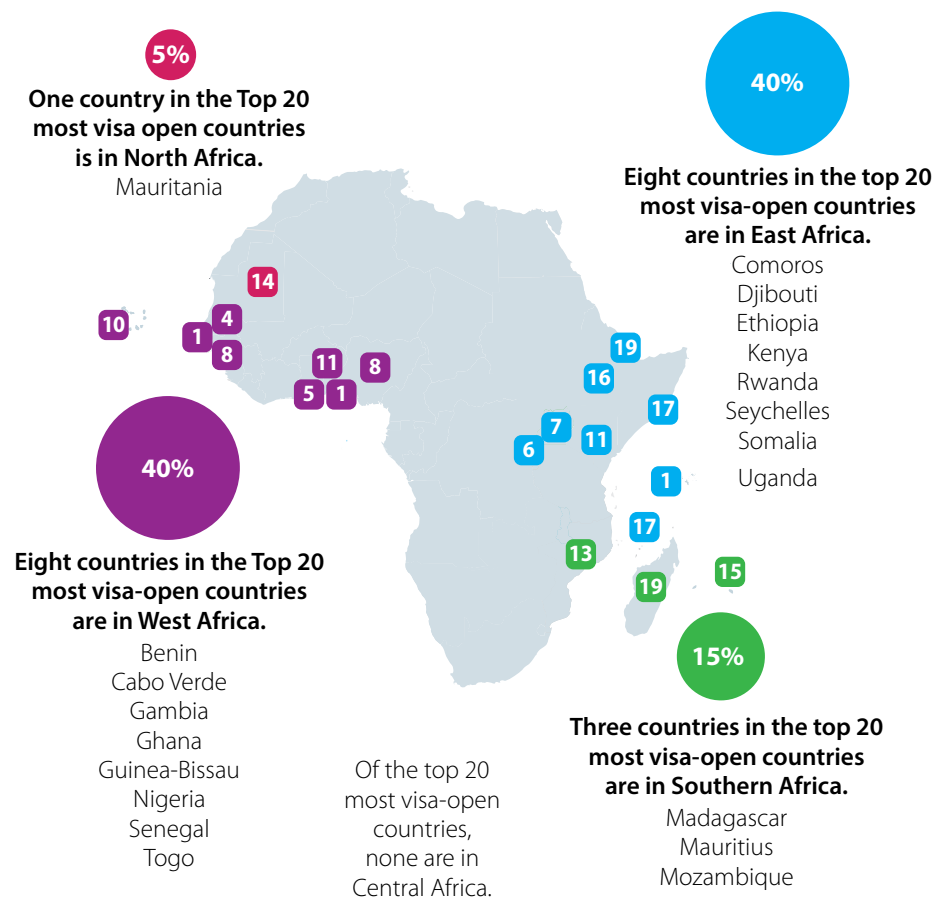
12 of the top 20 countries have signed up to the Single African Air Transport Market.<sup>29</sup>

## Regional overview, 2020

In 2020, progress was also made on visa openness across Africa's eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), with their average score rising to 0.483 in 2020, up from 0.473 in 2019.

In line with previous Index findings, 80% of the top 20 most visa-open countries on the Index continue to be in East or West Africa, with the remainder in Southern Africa or North Africa.

### Top 20 most visa-open countries by region and rank, 2020



Since 2017, the top performers across the RECs on open reciprocity, which measures 'no visa' policies, are ECOWAS, EAC, SADC and UMA.

- In 2020, the EAC increased its open reciprocity to 90%, up from 60% in 2019, and SADC saw a rise to 68%, up from 59% in 2019.
- Open reciprocity Africa-wide was 20% (also 20% in 2019, 19% in 2018 and 17% in 2017).
- Closed reciprocity Africa-wide was 27% (30% in 2019, 33% in 2018 and 36% in 2017).
- Top performing RECs on open reciprocity:  
ECOWAS (97%), EAC (90%), SADC (68%) and UMA (60%).





## Visa openness progress, 2016-2020

There has been a general positive trend when it comes to visa openness across the continent in recent years, with a record 93% of countries either improving or maintaining their scores in the 2020 Index. At the same time, 20 countries moved upwards in rank, up from 13 in 2019.

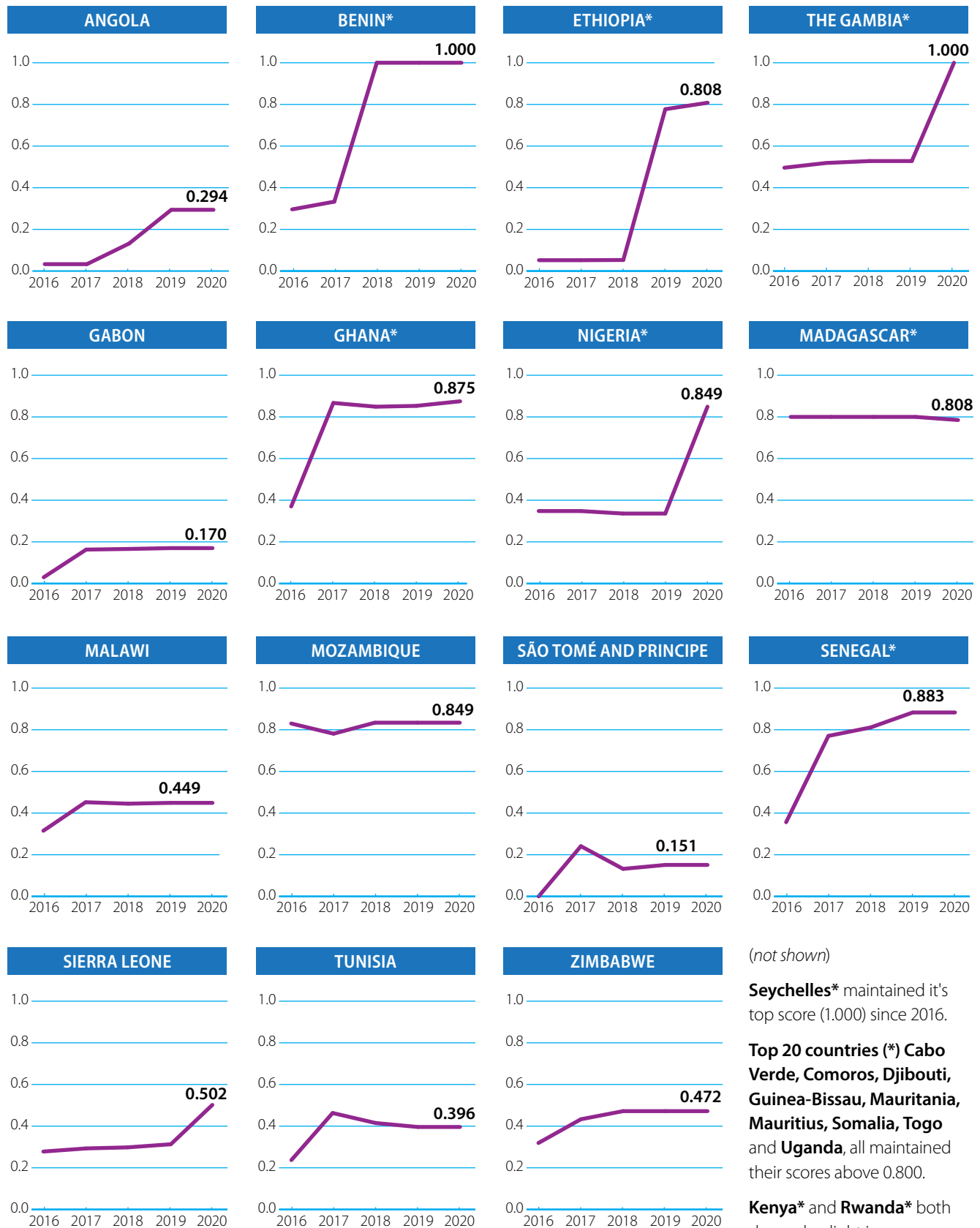
Ten countries that have made progress on the Index in the last five years are also adopting online solutions to streamline the travel process for African visitors by offering eVisas. Among those that most improved their visa openness scores between 2016-2020, six countries are in West Africa, while seven countries in East Africa maintained or increased their high scores.

In 2020, 42% of African countries with low visa openness scores still do not offer any visas on arrival for African travellers, although this improved from 60% in 2016. This shows the scope that exists for countries lower down the Index to adopt more visa-on-arrival policies.

- **50 countries improved or maintained their score** (47 countries in 2019, 43 in 2018 and 47 in 2017).
- **20 countries moved upwards in rank on the Index** (13 in 2019, 14 in 2018 and 12 in 2017).
- **Ten countries that made the most progress on the Index between 2016-2020 also offer eVisas** (Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Gabon, Malawi, Nigeria, São Tome and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Zimbabwe).
- **Six countries that made the most progress on the Index between 2016-2020 are in West Africa** (Benin, The Gambia, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone).
- **Seven countries that maintained high scores or increased their high scores on the Index are in East Africa** (Seychelles, Comoros, Djibouti, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda).

## Trends in visa openness, 2016-2020

\* Top 10 country, 2020





Country has ratified the African Continental Free Trade Agreement







Country has joined the Single African Air Transport Market



Country has signed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons

## Top performers and reformers, 2016-2020: innovations and AU initiatives

Country	Visa openness rank, 2020	Top 20, 2020	Most progress 2016-2020	Most progress 2019-2020	Offers eVisa	Ratified AfCFTA	Joined SAATM	Signed PFMP
								
Angola	36							
Benin	1							
Cabo Verde	10							
Chad	37							
Comoros	17							
Côte d'Ivoire	27							
Djibouti	19							
Ethiopia	19							
Gabon	42							
The Gambia	1							
Ghana	5							
Guinea-Bissau	8							
Kenya	11							
Lesotho	35							
Madagascar	19							
Malawi	25							
Mauritania	14							
Mauritius	15							
Mozambique	13							
Nigeria	8							
Rwanda	6							
São Tome and Principe	43							
Senegal	4							
Seychelles	1							
Sierra Leone	22							
Somalia	17							
South Africa	32							
Tanzania	21							
Tunisia	30							
Togo	11							
Uganda	7							
Zimbabwe	23							





# Case studies

Countries moving up in 2020

## The Gambia

**RANK 1**

■ **The Gambia moved into the top position** in the Index (alongside Seychelles and Benin)

**TOP 10**

■ **2020 Index ranking:** no. 1 (up from no. 20 in 2019, no. 19 in 2018, no. 18 in 2017, and no. 18 in 2016).

**100% LIBERAL ACCESS**

■ **2020 Liberal access** (visa-free or visa on arrival to Africans): 100% (up from 53% in 2019).

**ACFTA**

The Gambia rose to the top of the Visa Openness Index moving up 19 places in 2020 by offering visa-free entry to all African travellers, and almost doubling its score in the last year.

**SAATM**

**PFMP**

In September 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad declared the country a visa-free zone for all charter and scheduled flights.<sup>30</sup> The move applies to African Union citizens and those from Commonwealth and select countries.

***“Africa needs to develop its domestic and regional tourism; our integration is key. We must make sure that we work together in our regional bodies - the ECOWAS within the AU - to promote interstate tourism, develop the infrastructure, including in the rural areas.”<sup>31</sup>***

**Hamat N.K Bah**

*Tourism and Culture minister, The Gambia*

A top performer on the Index over the last five years, The Gambia has fully liberalized its visa policy in line with its commitment to African integration, having signed up to the Free Movement of Persons Protocol and the Single African Air Transport Market in addition to having ratified the AfCFTA.

At the 63<sup>rd</sup> UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa, the country’s Minister for Tourism and Culture also highlighted critical communication and connectivity areas that need to be addressed on the continent including greater air access and affordable airfares.<sup>32</sup>

***“Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economic growth of the Gambia, and as we strive to recover from the devastating impacts COVID-19 has on our economy, tourism is integral in this process.”<sup>33</sup>***

**Hamat N.K Bah**

*Tourism and Culture minister, The Gambia*

The new visa policy adopted by The Gambia’s Ministry of Tourism and Culture supports the country’s strong focus on promoting regional tourism alongside the domestic market. As part of this, the government plans to boost the tourism sector by encouraging travellers from across the continent to engage with African culture during their travel in the country.<sup>34</sup>

The Gambia ranks among the top 20 fastest growing economies worldwide in terms of travel and tourism contribution to GDP, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). In 2019, the sector made up 17.7% of the economy and was responsible for 18.2% of employment.<sup>35</sup> The country has received a WTTC ‘Safe Travels’ Stamp for adopting health and hygiene global standardized protocols for the safety of travellers and the workforce.<sup>36</sup>



## Nigeria



■ **Nigeria joined the top 10 countries**, moving up 22 places.



■ **2020 Index ranking:** no. 8 (up from no. 30 in 2019, no. 29 in 2018, no. 30 in 2017, and no. 25 in 2016).



■ **2020 Liberal access** (visa-free or visa on arrival to Africans): 98% (up from 34% in 2019).



Nigeria moved into the top 10 countries of the Index for the first time, rising 22 places since the last edition, achieving a record 153% increase in its visa openness score in the last year.



The Nigeria Visa Policy 2020 is part of the country's reform programme under the National Immigration Service's Borders Strategy 2019-2023, and it includes an increase in the number of visa classes to better connect visas to the purpose of travel. A new border management information system is also being rolled out, which puts a greater emphasis on technology and automation to improve security and transparency. Biometric eVisas are also available.<sup>37</sup>

***"Pleased to announce that Nigeria has a new Visa Policy, which I launched today. This new Policy will help improve our business environment, attract FDI, boost tourism, and improve African integration, without compromising national security and our territorial integrity.***

***This new Visa Policy will advance our goal of building a globally competitive economy, by helping attract Innovation, and specialized skills and knowledge from abroad, to complement locally available ones.***

***We are sending a message to the world that Nigeria is Open for Business."** @MBuhari, February 4 2020<sup>38</sup>*

**Muhammadu Buhari**  
President of Nigeria

Nigeria's declared commitment to support free movement of Africans within Africa<sup>39</sup> and grant Africans visas on arrival has been widely welcomed by governments and businesses.

***"The Visa on Arrival facility is available to two categories of travelers: 1. Frequently traveled High Net Worth Investors with business interest in Nigeria. 2. Citizens of African Countries."***

**Nigeria Immigration Service,**  
<https://immigration.gov.ng/voa-new/>

The relaxation of the visa policy aims to attract investors and skills, drive trade and promote tourism. Nigeria ranks among the largest African economies in terms of travel and tourism contribution to GDP, totalling USD 18.1 billion in 2019 according to the WTTC.<sup>40</sup>

As a hub for trade, technology and investment on the continent, Nigeria has made strong progress to improve its business environment. Thanks to the country's reforms on business registration, the entry and exit of goods and people, transparency and information, Nigeria rose a significant 15 places in the World Bank's 2020 *Doing Business Index*.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the country signed the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2019 and is set to follow with ratification, while setting up a National Action Committee on the Agreement.<sup>42</sup>





## Sierra Leone

RANK  
22

57%  
LIBERAL  
ACCESS

eVISA

ACFTA

SAATM

PFMP

■ **Sierra Leone moved up** to just below the top 20 countries in the Index

■ **2020 Index ranking:** no. 22 (up from no. 33 in 2019, 2018, and 2017, and no. 32 in 2016).

■ **2020 Liberal access** (visa-free or visa on arrival to Africans): 57% (up from 32% in 2019).

Sierra Leone moved close to the top 20 most visa-open countries on the Index in 2020, rising 11 places on the ranking and improving its score by 60% since the last edition of the Index.

In September 2019, the Immigration Service under the Ministry of Internal Affairs shared the news that all African visitors would be able to obtain visas on arrival into Sierra Leone for a USD 25 fee and, at the same time, ECOWAS nationals would be able to gain visa-free entry.

***"Sierra Leone has announced new Visa on Arrival policy. Visa is free for ECOWAS @ecowas\_cedeao member states & Visa is \$25 for @\_AfricanUnion member states."***<sup>43</sup>

@AfricaTradeLink

Sierra Leone, with a total of 179 improvements, is one of the countries featured among the UNWTO African destinations that improved visa procedures the most over the last decade.<sup>44</sup>

The visa policy fits within the country's efforts to boost tourist arrivals and increase tourism receipts, matched by initiatives to reduce airline ticket prices to increase competitiveness.<sup>45</sup> Sierra Leone is seen as an emerging visitors' destination, and ranks as 7th out of the top 20 fastest growing economies on travel and tourism based on WTTC reports.<sup>46</sup> The sector contributed 12.9% to GDP growth in 2019, adding USD 3.9 billion to the overall economy.<sup>47</sup>

***"This is an indication that the new direction is poised to take the country to another level and our latest step in making the country attractive to tourists and foreign investors."***<sup>48</sup>

**Mohamed Rahman Swaray,**  
Information Minister, Sierra Leone

In line with the momentum on closer integration on the continent, Sierra Leone has signed up to the Free Movement of Persons Protocol and the Single African Air Transport Market, as well as having ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In 2020, according to the World Bank's *Doing Business Index*, the country also promoted faster trading across borders. In addition, a workshop was held in 2020 to validate the National Trade Strategy in line with the AfCFTA to reposition the country towards more diversified goods and services.<sup>49</sup>

# Looking ahead



As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to deal countless blows to lives and livelihoods across Africa and globally, the full force of the economic consequences has yet to be determined. While the overall impact varies by sectors and countries, the crisis has laid bare the critical need for ever closer cooperation and integration for the continent to respond and recover.

**...there are fresh opportunities to capitalize on the momentum that will come with trading under the AfCFTA and progress on opening up Africa's skies and freer movement of people.**

As travel restrictions ease and measures put in place to contain the spread of the disease, there are fresh opportunities to capitalize on the momentum that will come with trading under the AfCFTA and progress on opening up Africa's skies and freer movement of people.

Relaxing a country's visa policies for other African travellers offers immediate benefits, supporting the hard-hit travel and tourism sector that provides critical incomes and jobs, as well as facilitating the ability to return to business and encouraging prospective investors.

The current crisis has shone a light on the value of mobilizing growth opportunities within Africa as well as the importance of fostering an exchange of skills and expertise, and the need to accelerate a digital transformation to shore up resilience against future shocks. Forward-looking countries have already adopted this approach through their visa openness policies, looking to create greater connectivity across different places, people and platforms. Recent trends show African countries that have set up online visa systems are at the same time taking action to adopt reforms that allow a more liberal access to other African visitors.

Against the backdrop of the 2020 crisis, African countries can take bold steps now to adopt liberal visa policies that open up travellers' horizons, as well as those of the continent itself.





## Africa Visa Openness Index sixth edition

The sixth edition of the Index will look at the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on visa openness on the continent and the steps towards economic recovery in key sectors from tourism to investment.

The report will also go deeper into how the crisis opens up prospects for Africa's countries and regions to use data-driven technology to streamline the travel experience for African visitors, at the same time as safeguarding security and health. In addition, the next report will include a focus on the cost of visas and set out the case for how reducing or eliminating fees can promote freer movement of people on the continent.

Follow, and be part of, the debate on the Africa Visa Openness Index:

[www.visaopenness.org](http://www.visaopenness.org)

## Visa openness solutions in 2020+

Visa on arrival for Africans

Visa-free regional blocs

Regional bloc visas

Multi-year visas after assessing applicant

Promoting positive reciprocity  
(for citizens of countries that relaxed  
visa requirements to benefit from  
similar requirements  
when visiting other African countries)

Opening up on visas unilaterally

Simplifying the visa process:  
documents required, fees, processing time,  
online applications  
(introducing eVisas can help  
to facilitate visitor access)

Improving access to information:  
online and in different languages

## Travel Document Solutions

Regional travel using regional passports  
or national identity cards

African passport for business people  
(issued by competent authority to strict criteria)

African passport for all African citizens  
(issued by national authorities  
to follow the African Union passport  
rolled out in 2016)



## Annex 1. Visa openness in Africa: country scores and ranking

Country	VISA OPENNESS INDICATORS (by number of African countries)			Score	Rank
	No visa required	Visa on arrival	Visa required*		
Seychelles	53	0	0	1.000	1
Benin	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
Uganda	18	34	1	0.853	7
Guinea-Bissau	13	40	0	0.849	8
Nigeria	17	35	1	0.849	8
Cabo Verde	16	36	1	0.845	10
Kenya	18	33	2	0.838	11
Togo	14	38	1	0.838	11
Mozambique	9	44	0	0.834	13
Mauritania	8	45	0	0.830	14
Mauritius	27	21	5	0.826	15
Ethiopia	2	51	0	0.808	16
Comoros	0	53	0	0.800	17
Somalia	0	53	0	0.800	17
Djibouti	0	52	1	0.785	19
Madagascar	0	52	1	0.785	19
Tanzania	16	25	12	0.679	21
Sierra Leone	13	17	23	0.502	22
Zimbabwe	17	10	26	0.472	23
Burkina Faso	16	11	26	0.468	24
Malawi	15	11	27	0.449	25
Zambia	14	11	28	0.430	26
Cote d'Ivoire	22	0	31	0.415	27
Guinea	22	0	31	0.415	27
Mali	20	2	31	0.408	29
Tunisia	21	0	32	0.396	30
Niger	18	0	35	0.340	31
Botswana	17	0	36	0.321	32
Eswatini	17	0	36	0.321	32
South Africa	17	0	36	0.321	32
Lesotho	16	0	37	0.302	35
Angola	10	7	36	0.294	36
Chad	14	1	38	0.279	37
Central African Republic	14	0	39	0.264	38
Liberia	14	0	39	0.264	38
Namibia	13	0	40	0.245	40
Republic of the Congo	5	8	40	0.215	41
Gabon	9	0	44	0.170	42
São Tome and Principe	8	0	45	0.151	43
Cameroon	7	0	46	0.132	44
DR Congo	4	3	46	0.121	45
Algeria	6	0	47	0.113	46
Burundi	6	0	47	0.113	46
Morocco	6	0	47	0.113	46
South Sudan	0	5	48	0.075	49
Egypt	0	4	49	0.060	50
Eritrea	1	2	50	0.049	51
Sudan	0	2	51	0.030	52
Equatorial Guinea	1	0	52	0.019	53
Libya	1	0	52	0.019	53
Western Sahara					

Scores range from 0 to 1 (highest)

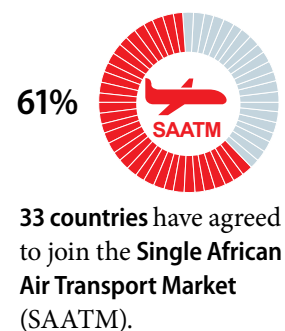
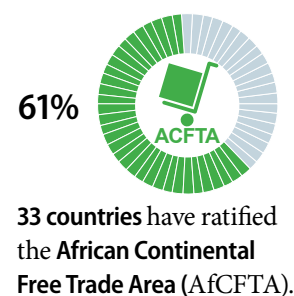
\* Visa required means a visa has to be obtained before departure and is not an eVisa.

Source: IATA (June-July 2020)

## Annex 2. Visa openness in Africa: latest developments and initiatives

Country	Visa openness rank, 2020	Top 20 2020	eVisa available	Ratified AfCFTA	Agreed to join the SAATM	Signed the PFMP
						
Seychelles	1	●				
Benin	1	●	●		●	
The Gambia	1	●		●	●	●
Senegal	4	●	●	●	●	●
Ghana	5	●		●	●	●
Rwanda	6	●	●	●	●	●
Uganda	7	●	●	●	●	●
Guinea-Bissau	8	●				
Nigeria	8	●		●	●	
Cabo Verde	10	●			●	
Kenya	11	●		●	●	●
Togo	11	●		●	●	●
Mozambique	13	●	●		●	●
Mauritania	14	●		●		
Mauritius	15	●	●	●		
Ethiopia	16	●		●	●	
Comoros	17	●	●			●
Somalia	17	●	●	●		●
Djibouti	19	●	●	●		●
Madagascar	19	●				
Tanzania	21		●			●
Sierra Leone	22			●	●	●
Zimbabwe	23			●	●	●
Burkina Faso	24		●	●	●	●
Malawi	25					●
Zambia	26			●		
Cote d'Ivoire	27		●	●	●	●
Guinea	27		●	●	●	●
Mali	29			●	●	●
Tunisia	30		●			
Niger	31			●	●	●
Botswana	32				●	
Eswatini	32		●	●	●	
South Africa	32		●	●	●	
Lesotho	35		●		●	●
Angola	36					●
Chad	37			●	●	●
Central African Republic	38				●	●
Liberia	38				●	●
Namibia	40			●		
Republic of the Congo	41			●	●	●
Gabon	42		●	●	●	●
São Tome and Principe	43		●	●		●
Cameroon	44		●	●	●	
DR Congo	45				●	●
Algeria	46			●		
Burundi	46					
Morocco	46				●	
South Sudan	49		●			●
Egypt	50			●	●	
Eritrea	51					
Sudan	52					●
Equatorial Guinea	53			●	●	●
Libya	53					
Western Sahara				●		

Of 54 African countries:





## Notes

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## **African Development Bank**

Immeuble CCIA

Rue Jean-Paul II, Plateau

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Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire

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