

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African Union Calls for Visa-Free Movement to Boost Regional Integration

As African leaders gather for the 38th African Union (AU) Summit, the call for a visa-free continent has taken center stage. The AUC and the African Development Bank (AfDB) have jointly urged African governments to accelerate the removal of visa restrictions that continue to hinder regional integration, trade, and economic development.



Speaking at the High-Level Strategic Dialogue on Accelerating Visa-Free Movement for Africa's Transformation, on 12 February, AU officials, policymakers, and business leaders highlighted the contradiction between Africa's regional integration goals and the reality that many Africans still need visas to travel across the continent.

"We cannot talk about a united Africa if Africans themselves cannot move freely within their own continent. It is time for our governments to evaluate what has worked and what has not worked," said Ambassador Albert Mudenda Muchanga, the African Union Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals. Visa restrictions remain one of the biggest barriers to intra-African trade, he added.

The Africa Visa Openness Index, a joint initiative by AfDB and the AUC, has consistently shown slow progress in easing travel restrictions, despite policy frameworks like the AU Free Movement Protocol and Agenda 2063's vision of a borderless Africa. The ninth edition of the Index reveals that while some countries, such as Rwanda, The Gambia, Seychelles, Benin, and Ghana, have embraced visa-free policies, many others remain restrictive.

"The vision of an integrated Africa will not happen by chance. It requires bold leadership and collective commitment to dismantle visa barriers," noted Nnenna Nwabufo, Vice President for Regional Development, Integration, and Business Delivery at AfDB.

With over 50% of African nations requiring visas for most Africans, restricted mobility hampers labor migration, business and trade, skills, and innovation, slowing development.

"If we truly believe in the AfCFTA, then free movement must be the backbone of our integration. We must align trade facilitation with mobility—because goods do not move themselves; people move them," said Mr. Prudence Sebahizi, Rwanda's Minister of Trade and Industry.



With momentum building for change, the AU and AfDB announced the launch of the 2025 Visa-Free Roadshow, a campaign designed to engage policymakers, businesses, and civil society in accelerating visa liberalization efforts across the continent. The initiative aims to showcase success stories, highlight economic benefits, and push for political commitments to break down travel barriers.

As the AU Summit progresses, the push for visa-free movement is expected to remain a critical topic, with leaders being reminded to align policy commitments with concrete action. The AU's call is clear: Let the people move, and Africa will prosper.

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