



Turkey's Policy on Sub-Saharan Africa

Laura Malagón Sotero

BRIEFING

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Turkey's Policy on Sub-Saharan Africa

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Turkey's approach towards Sub-Saharan Africa

Due to its geostrategic importance and richness manifested in vast natural resources, the African continent has sparked an increase in competition between the leading worldwide players. In the struggle for control of access and exploitation of these resources, Turkey seeks to secure a place there. Judging by the dynamics of relations, it can be deduced that the Turkish government intends to continue consolidating its position in Africa through the “win-win policy” of trying not to appear as a competitor, and instead, supporting African countries in international institutions. In this sense, Turkey's association with Africa is based on the support of the African Union (AU) slogan “African solutions to African problems”, based on traditional diplomacy, public and civil diplomacy (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the former Ottoman Empire set its sights on Europe. The struggle to join the Western bloc had stalled for several years, and after the 2008 crisis, Turkey had to redefine its foreign policy. Africa was presented as a great opportunity to diversify the Turkish economy and ensure an active role in the quickly-growing continent, economically and demographically.

The approach of Turkish politics concerning “Black Africa” gained substantial momentum since the Justice and Development Party (APK), founded by Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2001, won the general elections in 2002. However, it was not until 2005 that it was declared the “Year of Africa”, igniting a vertiginous offensive of the Turkish government on the region. Relations with Africa became one of Turkish foreign policy's main priorities, gathering pace and importance since the AU declared Turkey a strategic partner of the continent in January 2008.

The summit that established the Africa-Turkey Partnership was held in Istanbul between April 18 to 20, 2008, with the participation of 49 African countries. Its objectives were to consolidate and develop the areas of cooperation at all levels, to establish a long-term stable relationship between Africa and Turkey based on mutual interest, equality and respect for national sovereignty and the internal affairs of each state. It was agreed to hold this event every five years.

In compliance with this requirement, in 2014, the II Summit was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, with the attendance at its inaugural session of the Head of State of Mauritania and President of the AU Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of the AU Commission Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, with the addition of broad representation of the heads of state and governments of the continent. At this summit, a Declaration and a Joint Implementation Plan for the period of 2015-2019 were adopted. Its main agreements highlighted the Turkish will to increase foreign direct investment in Africa, employment opportunities for nationals and the creation of an environment conducive to economic development in African countries. The III Summit was slated for 2020 in Istanbul, but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

As president of G20, in 2015, Turkey organised several events in line with the “Agenda 2063” of the AU. In this regard, the High Level Conference on Energy Access in Sub-Saharan Africa was held for the first time on October 1, 2015, within the framework of G20 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Turkey is currently present in the African banking sector (it was accepted as the 26th non-regional member of the African Development Bank), infrastructure construction (the Port of Mombasa) and the security sector (Sudanese army, military base in Somalia). According to a report published in October 2015 by the *Financial Times*, Turkish investment in Africa created the most job opportunities on the continent (16,693 in 2014), compared with other foreign direct investments. In addition, Turkish investments have achieved accreditations with the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC).

In other words, they are strongly represented in subregional integration organisations.

Diplomatic offensive

One of the strategies forming part of Ankara's African policy is precisely the establishment of high-level contacts with sub-Saharan countries. To achieve greater influence and presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Turkish government has developed a political and diplomatic offensive through the opening of embassies and consulates throughout the continent.

Turkey maintains diplomatic relations with most of the African countries. In 2008, there were only 12 Turkish embassies in Africa (five of them in North Africa). The number of its diplomatic representations rose to 37 embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which 30 were opened as of 2008. According to Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, his country is represented on the African continent with 42 embassies. Moreover, he noted that the aim is to have 50 embassies in the medium term (*Anadolu Agency*, 2020). The number of diplomatic missions intends to cover the entire continent in this manner.

For its part, Ankara is one of the world's capitals boasting the most embassies of African countries. The number of African embassies in Ankara, only ten at the beginning of 2008, has grown to 36. Meanwhile, the number of high-level mutual visits between 2015 and 2019 alone exceeds 500 (*Anadolu Agency*, 2020).

In 2011, Erdogan, while still prime minister, became the first foreign leader to visit Somalia, a country devastated by conflict in the last two decades. In 2018, Erdogan, this time as president, made an official visit to the Republic of Mauritania, where he held meetings with his counterpart Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. This was Turkey's first presidential visit to Mauritania, strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

Economic-trade relations: Cooperation and development aid

In 2018, Director General for Africa Affairs at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Rıza Demirel, in an interview with Anadolu Agency, stated that Turkey-Africa relations were at an all-time high, noting that the continent would occupy increasingly more space on the global agenda (*Anadolu Agency*, 2019). The volume of trade between Turkey and the African continent reached \$186.5 billion between 2010 and 2019, according to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) (*Anadolu Agency*, 2020).

Turkey has made a financial contribution of \$1 million to the AU since 2009. According to the Turkish Permanent Representative of the AU Fatih Ulusoy, his country has contributed substantially to Africa's economic development and security, fully sharing Agenda 2063 of the continental body. The fact that Turkey has extended its development assistance programme to most African countries is evidence of its intention to become an active partner of the continent.

The volume of bilateral trade with Sub-Saharan Africa has reached \$7.5 billion. Ulusoy also pointed out that trade between Turkey and Africa reached \$18.8 billion in 2017, an increase of 12 per cent compared with 2016, while Turkish companies carried out 1,150 projects on the continent, for a total of \$60 billion. Turkey has opened commercial consulates in 26 African capitals. In addition, Turkey's Council for Foreign Economic Relations has established business councils with 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The number of countries with which Turkey signed the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement rose to 39 in 2015, up from 23 in 2003. This agreement established a regular bilateral monitoring mechanism covering various areas, ranging from trade, investment and finance to small and medium-sized businesses, healthcare and technology.

In 2018, the second Turkey-Africa Ministerial Review Conference was held in Turkey, with the assistance of 19 African nations, where levels of cooperation

and multilateral and bilateral political relations were analysed. The conference was organised by Çavusoglu and included the participation of Vice President of the AU Thomas Qwesi Quartey, as well as the ministers of foreign affairs of African countries, members of the African Union Commission (AUC) and other senior officials. This event coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Turkish Strategic Partnership with the AU.

The Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) operates 22 programme coordination offices in Africa (*Anadolu Agency*, 2020). Cooperation areas include trade, investment, peace and security, youth empowerment, technology transfer, rural economy and agriculture, infrastructure, energy, human resources, science and technology, tourism and education. Some projects carried out include:

1. In Namibia, the “programme to support the protection of natural life, sustainable rural economic development and ecotourism” was implemented. TIKA supported the construction of the cheese and yoghurt facility to use the goats’ milk produced by the local population. This project aims to improve the well-being of the people of Namibia by introducing new products to those living in the surrounding villages.
2. TIKA has been supporting Kenya’s Big Four Agenda with over 100 projects implemented in Nairobi since 2012. TIKA’s activities in Kenya focus on healthcare, education, agriculture, water hygiene and capacity buildings programmes. In line with the agenda announced by President Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya’s Big Four Agenda includes prioritising food security, improving accessible and quality healthcare services, increasing the number of municipal housing and strengthening the manufacturing industry in the fight against unemployment until 2030. The work of public and academic institutions is supported by the government of Kenya.
3. TIKA and the Djibouti Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training set up the Department of Greenhouse Education at the Higher Technical School in Dikhil City. In Djibouti, where arable land constitutes one per cent of the area due to soil structure, the total area used for

agricultural activities is about 600 hectares. Production in this limited area can only satisfy ten per cent of the country’s needs. TIKA built a total of 500 square metres of applied greenhouse gardens in an area of 2,000 square metres, located in one of the arable regions of Djibouti, to meet the needs of production, employment and food production, establishing an infrastructure for the agricultural development of the country and encouraging young people to engage in agricultural activities (TIKA).

At the continental level, these projects have not generated much momentum, but they have had a substantial local impact, contributing to improvements in healthcare, education, productivity, food, hygiene, among other areas.

Another aspect demonstrating the progressive extension of Turkey’s presence on the continent is the increase in Turkish Airlines flights, currently connecting 52 destinations in 34 countries on the continent (*Daily Sabah*, 2018). In 2003, Turkish Airlines was only flying to North Africa. People-to-people contact has significantly grown as a result of direct flights between Turkey and African countries, as well as the proliferating number of students, business-people and tourists travelling both ways.

Cooperation in the field of healthcare and education

Turkey has been providing a considerable number of scholarships to African students. In the period between 1991 and 2014, the total number of scholarships was 4,380. Scholarships have dramatically increased in recent years, with Turkey awarding 1,239 scholarships for the 2015-2016 academic year to students from Africa. There are currently 5,437 students in higher education and 116 professors as visiting research assistants from African nations in Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

In addition to many technical training programmes carried out by different ministries and institutions, a significant number of junior diplomats have attended the International Training Programme for Young Diplomats organised by the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1992. The

academy organises multiple training programmes unique to individual African countries, including Somalia, Madagascar, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria and Namibia. Similarly, the Maarif Foundation, a Turkish government agency, has started operating schools in Africa.

The healthcare sector is another important facet of Turkey's humanitarian assistance to African countries. The Turkish government has signed healthcare cooperation agreements with around 20 African countries and is actively involved in overcoming humanitarian crises in Africa. One example is the "African Falls Project", which has been implemented in four countries - Niger, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan - in collaboration with a Turkish NGO. As part of this programme, a total of 21,600 patients have been operated on in 2018 alone. Furthermore, the Turkish government has provided treatment to African patients who cannot be treated in their own country. Turkey has treated more than 1,000 patients in accordance with bilateral agreements and the emergency humanitarian aid programme (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Vocational training, which the Turkish Ministry of Health extends to African countries, is a crucial element of cooperation between Turkey and Africa in the healthcare sector. The Turkish-Sudanese Research and Training Hospital in Nyala was built by TIKA and has been operational since February 2014. The administration will run for five years jointly with the Sudanese Ministry of Health, and will be handed over to the Sudanese government after five years. In Somalia, Turkey has built and equipped the largest hospital in Mogadishu. The Recep Tayyip Erdogan Hospital was officially opened by President Erdogan on January 25, 2015, during his visit to Somalia. The Juba Teaching Hospital in South Sudan and the Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, are among the healthcare institutions to which the Turkish Ministry of Health has contributed generously.

Security and Defense

Ankara is not just using development aid and economic cooperation to consolidate its influence in Africa. Turkey has expanded its contributions to the United Nations (UN) missions deployed on the continent, providing personnel and financially contributing to five of the nine peacekeeping missions deployed in Africa: MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MINUSMA in Mali, MINUSCA in the Central African Republic, UNAMID in Darfur and UNMISS in South Sudan.

There is also the inclusion of Turkey in the fight against terrorism. In July 2020, during his visit to Niamey, Niger, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavusoglu completed a military cooperation agreement focussing on the formation of counterterrorism units to confront Boko Haram in the Sahel region (Atalayar, 2020). Furthermore, at the end of 2017, the establishment of the TURKSOM military base on Somali soil was completed, in support of operations against Al-Shabaab and the training of Somali security forces, both military and police, in counter-insurgency activities. In practice, the Turkish military presence has replaced the African Union Mission to Somalia forces (AMISON), which in the last two years has reduced the number of troops in Somalia (Atalayar, 2020).

The TURKSOM camp is the largest military base outside Turkish territory, located in an important strategic region such as the entrance to the Red Sea, through which much of the world trade transits. This unit has also served to monitor regular shipments of humanitarian aid from Turkey during the coronavirus pandemic.

Final notes

Since 2008, the AKP government has made enhancing its influence in Sub-Saharan Africa a priority in its foreign policy, seeking a way to extend the reach of Turkish participation beyond its immediate surroundings. Although the African continent continues to be Turkey's third-largest trading partner behind Europe and Asia, the reported figures gradually indicate that, since 2008, Ankara has elevated the importance of its links with the region.

In this regard, political relations have advanced considerably, taking into account that diplomatic missions have tripled, with the addition of a system of summits within the establishment. This has improved relations with the continent since many other powers also have this type of mechanism, especially the powers of traditional influence in the region.

While economic and commercial links have a greater degree of institutionalisation, supported by the dissimilar agreements signed and ratified by the parties. Considering the region's economic growth, and therefore the new opportunities, there is a high probability that the volume of trade and investment will grow in the coming years.

The cultural influence and the willingness to redefine a new image, different to the one left by the former Ottoman Empire, is still a work in progress. Within its policy of "soft power", Turkey has been exploiting the cultural factor and cooperation for geostrategic purposes, where the role of TİKA fits perfectly. The Turkish cooperation agency has spread rapidly throughout the continent, and due to the magnitude of its missions that are not conditioned by military or political factors, it has been very well received on the internal level. On the other hand, Turkish participation in the security of the continent goes unnoticed, while its greatest military ties and interests, for now, are concentrated in the Maghreb region, specifically in the Libyan civil war.

The aforementioned aspects indicate a sustained increase in Turkey's economic, political and cultural influence in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Economic relations are vital for this country since it needs a greater

diversification of its commercial ties and enhanced access to financial resources and investments. However, regarding security issues, the influence is minimal; it must be remembered that Turkey is still a developing power.

The Turkish government intends to continue intensifying its political-diplomatic offensive with the aim of expanding both multilateral and bilateral relations with Sub-Saharan countries, while strengthening its economic, political and military power in this geopolitical area, where most of the planet's wealth is concentrated.

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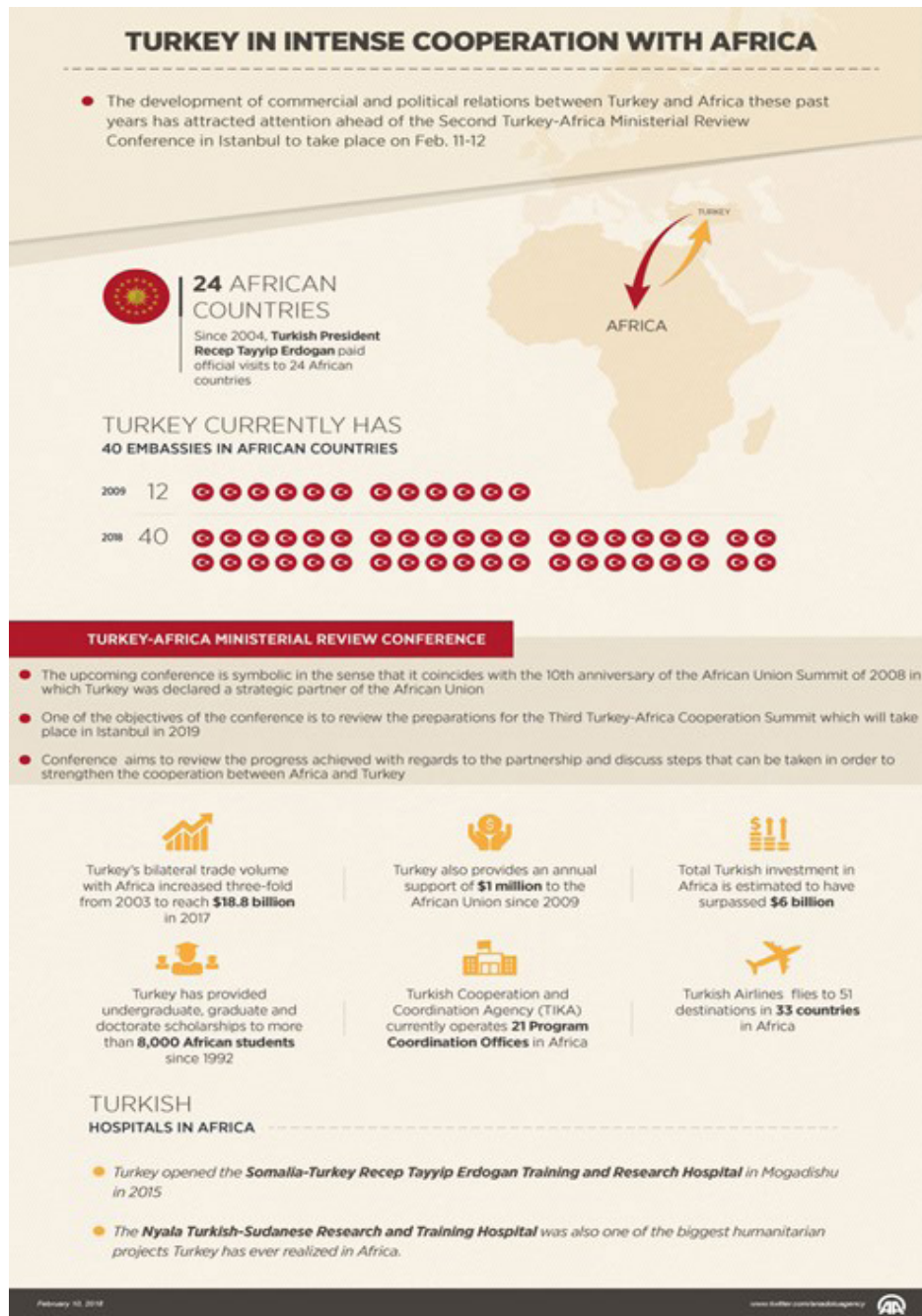
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Annexes

Turkey in Africa (2018)



Implantation of Turkey in Africa (2020)

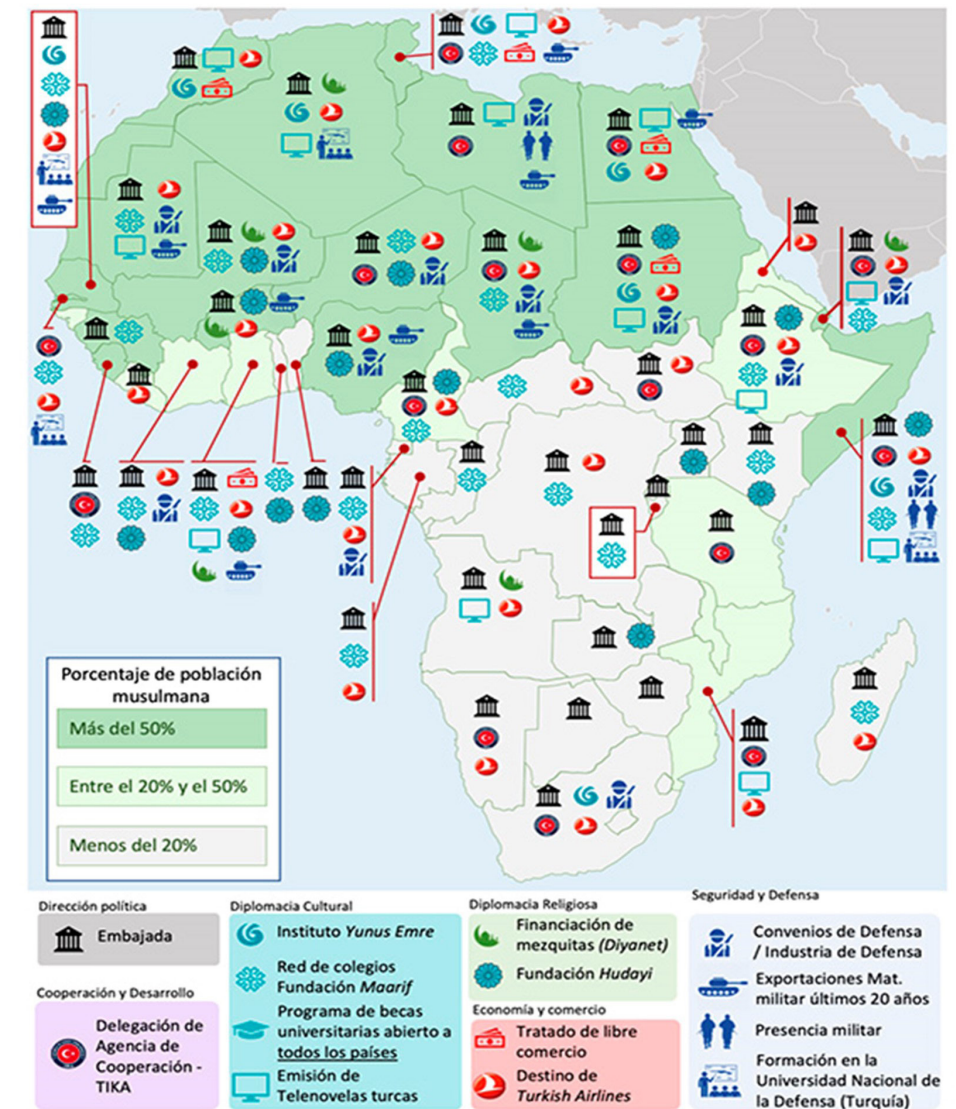


Figura 1. Implantación de Turquía en África. Fuente. Elaboración propia.

Source: (Atalay, 2020)

Turkey's Development Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa (2018)

SOUTH OF SAHARA							
Angola	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
Benin	0.1	0.1	1.2	0.6	0.3	0.7	2.2
Botswana	0.1	-	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1
Burkina Faso	1.9	0.8	0.4	4.2	0.9	0.7	1.1
Burundi	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.4	1.3
Cabo Verde	-	-	0.1	0.0	-	0.0	-
Cameroon	0.4	0.5	2.5	2.0	0.3	1.9	2.6
Central African Republic	0.1	0.1	1.0	1.5	0.4	0.5	0.8
Chad	0.1	0.0	1.1	1.4	0.5	1.3	2.5
Comoros	0.3	4.1	0.4	0.4	1.0	0.3	1.1
Congo	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.7
Côte d'Ivoire	0.3	0.5	0.8	1.2	0.2	1.0	1.4
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.1	0.1	1.5	1.4	0.2	1.0	2.5
Djibouti	0.1	0.2	1.4	3.0	3.9	1.8	3.5
Equatorial Guinea	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	-
Eritrea	4.4	1.9	2.2	0.1	-	0.2	0.5
Eswatini	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3
Ethiopia	1.4	3.8	3.0	3.7	0.7	4.0	5.8
Gabon	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.3
Gambia	0.3	0.4	1.1	1.8	12.7	1.2	2.1
Ghana	0.4	0.8	2.1	3.0	0.3	1.6	4.5
Guinea	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.9	0.5	4.3	1.5
Guinea-Bissau	0.1	0.6	1.2	1.2	0.2	0.4	1.0
Kenya	2.1	1.1	5.1	3.3	0.2	2.0	2.0
Lesotho	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.7
Liberia	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.8	1.3	0.2	0.6
Madagascar	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.4	1.2
Malawi	0.0	-	0.2	0.4	-	0.2	0.5
Mali	0.2	1.0	6.1	1.5	0.7	2.5	1.7
Mauritania	0.4	1.6	4.7	4.5	12.7	0.8	1.2
Mauritius	-	0.0	0.2	0.2	-	0.1	0.3
Mozambique	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.7
Namibia	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.8	0.6
Niger	2.6	3.0	9.6	4.1	8.9	11.9	9.6
Nigeria	0.5	0.7	1.3	1.0	0.1	0.7	1.1
Rwanda	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.6	-	0.4	1.3
Saint Helena	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sao Tome and Principe	-	-	-	0.2	-	0.0	0.1
Senegal	1.9	2.2	5.1	2.9	7.5	0.8	1.2
Seychelles	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0
Sierra Leone	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.6
Somalia	93.4	86.6	115.7	74.4	314.8	59.6	60.6
South Africa	0.2	0.1	0.6	1.1	0.4	0.5	0.1
South Sudan	0.1	0.4	1.1	1.5	0.7	0.4	1.3
Sudan	21.3	62.3	6.3	9.4	22.0	9.4	7.0
Tanzania	0.3	0.5	1.4	1.7	0.4	1.1	1.7
Togo	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.8
Uganda	0.7	1.6	1.7	2.0	0.3	1.1	2.5
Zambia	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.5	1.3
Zimbabwe	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	-	0.8	1.2
South of Sahara, regional	75.4	2.7	6.0	12.7	1.6	1.2	0.5
Total	211.3	179.5	190.9	153.6	395.8	118.4	136.1
Africa, regional	-	-	-	-	32.5	6.8	0.9
AFRICA TOTAL	269.8	749.5	782.7	383.3	183.4	-306.2	-296.7

Source: (OECD, 2018)

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