

BORDERS

FOR

SALE

The Price of a Visa for African Travellers



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Editorial note: *Integrate Africa Advisory Services is a pan-African advisory firm that helps governments, African institutions, and international partners navigate the political, regulatory, and strategic realities of African integration. Based in Johannesburg, we combine high-level African policy, diplomatic, and geopolitical expertise to deliver actionable advice on AU systems, peace and security, governance, economic integration, and institutional engagement.*

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Foreword

Africa's integration project is, at its core, a project about people. It is about creating a continent in which Africans can trade more easily with one another, invest across borders with greater ease and confidence, build partnerships across regions, and participate more fully in a shared economic future. The African Continental Free Trade Area was established to help unlock that future by creating a single African market for goods and services, supported by the freer movement of businesspersons and capital. It is in this wider context that *Borders for Sale* makes an important and timely contribution.

For many years, discussions on mobility in Africa have rightly focused on visa openness, and that work has helped advance reform across the continent. Yet this report reminds us that the real experience of mobility is shaped not only by whether entry is legally possible, but also by whether it is affordable. This is an important distinction. A border may be formally open in one sense, while the financial and administrative cost of crossing it remains beyond the reach of many ordinary Africans. In that respect, the report broadens the policy conversation in a valuable way.

What this report does well is to bring evidence to an issue that is often discussed in general terms. It shows that the burden of mobility is not borne equally, and that for many Africans, the question is not only whether they may travel, but whether they can afford to do so. This is especially significant for smaller businesses, young entrepreneurs, women traders, researchers, creatives, and professionals whose participation in the continental economy may be most constrained by high entry costs and cumbersome procedures and requirements. If integration is to be inclusive, then the practical barriers that limit participation must be taken seriously.

This matters profoundly for the AfCFTA. Trade does not move by legal instruments alone. It moves through people, through traders, entrepreneurs, investors, professionals, service suppliers, and citizens whose ideas, skills, and enterprise connect African markets to one another. When the cost of short-stay travel is high, uncertain, or difficult to navigate, it creates friction in the very relationships and transactions that continental integration is meant to encourage. Mobility costs therefore deserve closer attention, not as a peripheral matter, but as part of the wider enabling environment for intra-African trade and economic transformation.

That economic case, however, is only part of the story. The visa barriers documented in this report also impose costs that no GDP model can fully capture. They weaken the human ties on which Pan-Africanism depends. Behind every fee, form, queue, rejected application, hidden charge, and delayed approval is a lost encounter: a student who does not travel, a cultural exchange that is moved outside Africa, a family visit that becomes unaffordable, a young entrepreneur who cannot test a market, or a citizen who learns that the continent is easier to imagine than to experience. Costly mobility does not only restrict movement. It narrows the lived meaning of a shared African identity.

This human loss, in turn, becomes a strategic loss. Continental integration becomes real through ordinary contact: students discovering other African societies, artists and athletes building audiences across borders, researchers and professionals forming networks, families sustaining ties, SMEs meeting partners, and first-time travellers learning to see Africa as a lived common space. When visa costs and administrative friction price these encounters out of reach, they weaken trust, reduce solidarity, and limit the internal soft power that integration needs. Large firms and well-funded institutions may absorb these costs. Smaller businesses, youth-led enterprises, creatives, students, and ordinary citizens often cannot. In that sense, mobility

affordability is not only an administrative concern. It is part of whether African integration becomes broad-based, competitive, inclusive, and credible in the lives of Africans themselves.

The report's central message is therefore both clear and compelling. Mobility that is formally available but financially prohibitive cannot fully serve the objectives of African integration. If the promise of a single market is to be realised in meaningful terms, then the systems that govern movement across borders must evolve in ways that are more transparent, more predictable, and more supportive of lawful travel within the continent. That does not mean disregarding the legitimate concerns of states in relation to security, migration management, internal political dynamics and border administration. It means pursuing those responsibilities in ways that are consistent with our broader continental ambitions.

The value of this report lies not only in diagnosis, but also in the practical reflection it invites. It encourages policymakers to look beyond binary categories of visa-free or visa-required travel and to consider the full architecture of mobility cost, including fees, procedural burdens, payment systems, and administrative design. In doing so, it opens space for reforms that are realistic, gradual, and achievable. Greater transparency, lower and more predictable charges, streamlined procedures, and a stronger alignment between national border practices and continental integration goals are all steps that can make a meaningful difference.

At a time when Africa is working to deepen implementation of the AfCFTA, this conversation is both necessary and constructive. The success of the continental market will depend not only on what is agreed at the policy level, but also on whether Africans are able to engage one another more easily across borders in the ordinary course of business, innovation, study, family life, culture, tourism, and exchange. This is especially important because many of those who negotiate, administer, or represent integration travel on diplomatic, official, or institutionally supported channels that often shield them from the full cost, uncertainty, and frustration faced by ordinary passport holders. Reports such as this help to reconnect the integration agenda with those lived realities.

But evidence alone will not change mobility systems unless citizens also exercise agency. Ordinary Africans who experience these barriers every day, traders, students, artists, researchers, entrepreneurs, professionals, families, and young people, have a role in making the cost of mobility visible. Their stories, data, complaints, petitions, advocacy, public debate, and organised engagement can help ensure that visa affordability is not treated as a technical matter for governments alone, but as a continental citizenship issue. Integration will be more credible when those most affected by its barriers are also heard in shaping its reforms.

I commend *Borders for Sale* to member states, Regional Economic Communities, AU organs, policymakers, business leaders, researchers, civil society, the media, and ordinary Africans committed to advancing Africa's integration and prosperity. It is a thoughtful contribution to an important debate, and it deserves careful consideration by all who seek to build a more connected, more inclusive, and more economically dynamic continent.

Comrade Brian Bright Tamuka Kagoro

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Executive Summary

"A home that welcomes strangers will never lack food."

1. The issue

Borders for Sale starts from a simple question: when Africans travel within Africa, is entry affordable, predictable, and usable in practice?

For many years, Africa's mobility debate has focused on visa openness. That work has been important. It tells us whether a traveller needs a visa before departure, can obtain one on arrival, or can enter without a visa. But legal access is only one part of the story. A border may be open on paper while the cost of crossing it still places travel beyond the reach of many ordinary Africans.

This report therefore completes the conversation by asking whether legal entry is also affordable, predictable, and usable in practice. It asks what an African traveller must actually pay to enter another African country lawfully for a short stay, and what those costs mean for trade, services, tourism, professional exchange, research, family connection, and continental integration.

The issue matters because people make integration work. The AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, and the African Union's free movement agenda depend on traders, entrepreneurs, investors, service suppliers, technicians, students, artists, researchers, professionals, families, and citizens being able to move across borders at costs they can bear. Where entry is legally available but financially prohibitive, integration becomes narrower before any market transaction begins.

Visa cost is therefore not a minor administrative issue. It is a continental integration governance test. It shows

whether African states are pricing movement in ways that support continental integration or in ways that quietly restrict it.

2. What the evidence shows

The report analyses 2,862 Africa-to-Africa travel scenarios across 54 countries, using one standard traveller profile: an adult African citizen travelling on an ordinary passport for a short stay. For each route, the report selects the cheapest lawful official option available and counts only the charges the traveller must pay, including official visa fees, unavoidable authorised-provider fees, platform charges, payment fees, biometric fees, ETA fees, arrival-sticker fees, and mandatory non-visa border charges. It also discusses wider lived burdens, such as time, uncertainty, and administrative difficulty, where they matter, but it does not assign artificial cash values to those burdens.

The evidence is clear. Across the ranked paid destinations, the corrected average short-stay entry cost for an African traveller is about US\$82. But that average hides a sharply uneven burden. Angola and Ghana sit at the top at US\$200, followed by Nigeria at US\$198 and Cameroon at US\$194. Mozambique and Tunisia follow at US\$160, then Niger at US\$155, Sudan at US\$154, and the Central African Republic at US\$150. At the lower end of the non-zero ranking are Seychelles at US\$12, Botswana at about US\$22, Djibouti at US\$23, Egypt at US\$25, and South Africa at about US\$26.

Some countries sit outside the paid visa-fee ranking because their treatment differs. Rwanda remains the report's universal strict visa-free and zero-cost benchmark. Mauritius and Burkina Faso are treated as zero-fee or zero-cost cases, depending on the applicable entry process. The Gambia is not a paid visa-fee case, but it remains a non-zero border-charge case because mandatory entry and exit charges apply.

The ranking also shows that Africa's mobility burden is not driven only by the passport a traveller holds. It is heavily shaped by destination policy. The typical African passport receives fee-free access to only 17.3 of 53 possible African destinations. Across the 2,862 directional Africa-to-Africa corridors, 936 are fee-free and 1,926 still involve paid entry. A small group of high-cost destinations therefore creates a continental problem because their charges affect the routes through which Africans trade, study, meet, invest, provide services, attend events, and build networks.

The burden becomes more severe when visa costs are compared with income. For a traveller from the Central African Republic, the visa cost to many African destinations is equivalent to about 300 per cent of average monthly income. In Mozambique, it is about 213 per cent. Sudan stands at 163 per cent, Cameroon at about 132 per cent, Niger at 111 per cent, Nigeria at about 101 per cent, and Chad at 89 per cent. At those levels, a visa is no longer a routine administrative charge. It becomes a practical barrier to movement, especially for small traders, students, jobseekers, young entrepreneurs, women cross-border traders, first-time exporters, and travellers without institutional support.

Even these figures do not capture the full burden. Headline visa fees often understate what travellers actually pay. Mandatory platform charges, authorised-provider fees, payment frictions, biometric fees, arrival-sticker charges, non-visa border levies, opaque digital processes, and aviation-related passenger charges can all raise the real cost of movement. In some cases, digitisation reduces friction. In others, it simply moves the burden online and adds new charges.

The evidence therefore points to the report's central proposition: Africa cannot build an integrated market while pricing Africans out of the movement that makes integration real. Formal openness matters, but it is not

enough. If lawful entry is too expensive, uncertain, or cumbersome for traders, students, entrepreneurs, professionals, families, and citizens to use, then mobility exists in policy but fails in practice. Visa affordability is therefore not a side issue. It is part of the operating infrastructure of African integration.

3. Why it matters

High visa costs weaken the practical foundations of African integration in at least four main ways:

- a) *They weaken AfCFTA market access.* Traders and service suppliers need to travel to identify opportunities, meet partners, deliver contracts, attend trade fairs, solve problems, and build trust. When travel costs are high or uncertain, the market may remain legally open, but it becomes commercially harder to use.
- b) *They suppress tourism and the visitor economy.* High entry costs reduce demand before travellers reach hotels, restaurants, transport providers, venues, tour operators, and local businesses. Money spent clearing entry requirements is money not spent in destination economies.
- c) *They narrow who can participate in continental opportunity.* Large firms, officials, and well-funded organisations may absorb repeated fees and administrative friction. Smaller businesses, youth-led enterprises, informal traders, creatives, researchers, students, and ordinary citizens often cannot. The result is an integration model that risks favouring those already equipped to move.
- d) *They weaken the credibility of African integration itself.* Africa has adopted major integration frameworks, including the AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, the African Passport initiative, the Single African Air Transport Market, and the Free Movement Protocol. Yet the

everyday experience of movement remains costly, uneven, and uncertain for many African passport holders. That gap weakens the promise of a more connected continent.

The report's evidence also shows that the problem is not inevitable. Visa costs are substantially a policy choice. Where states remove fees, widen exemptions, publish clear rules, simplify systems, or reduce avoidable charges, the burden falls. Where they rely on high fees, opaque platforms, narrow exemptions, or outsourced payment architectures, the burden rises.

4. The policy choice

Africa now faces a practical choice. It can retain a costly permission-based mobility system that limits participation in its own integration project, or it can move towards managed openness that protects legitimate state interests while reducing avoidable barriers for lawful short-stay travel.

This does not require abandoning sovereignty or border management. States have legitimate responsibilities in relation to security, migration management, reciprocity, revenue, and administrative control. The question is whether those responsibilities are being pursued in ways that are proportionate, transparent, and aligned with Africa's integration commitments.

The reform path is realistic. Member states can publish complete fee schedules, remove hidden mandatory charges, reduce avoidable authorised-provider mark-ups, simplify

digital systems, create clearer payment channels, and move ordinary short-stay visa charges for African nationals towards an affordable ceiling. They can also create simplified channels for low-risk, integration-relevant travel, including business, research, education, culture, sport, and professional exchange.

Regional Economic Communities can widen waiver corridors, harmonise short-stay rules, and build bridges between blocs so that regional openness does not remain trapped inside separate sub-regional spaces. AU organs and partners can measure affordability alongside openness, make mobility visible in AfCFTA implementation reviews, support early movers, operationalise the African Passport, and develop a common African position in external mobility negotiations.

A serious affordability agenda should also look beyond the visa window. Where passenger taxes, service charges, payment fees, and digital platform costs inflate the total price of travel, visa reform alone will not be enough. Mobility affordability requires attention to the full cost stack.

The central conclusion is straightforward. Africa does not need to wait for full treaty implementation before reducing the cost of lawful movement. Many of the most important reforms are available now. The question is whether African mobility will remain a priced privilege, or whether it will become a practical foundation for AfCFTA delivery, inclusive participation, and continental citizenship.

Chapter 1 Introduction

*“Umuzi ngumuzi ngokuphanjukelwa”
- “A home is a home if it is visited.”*

Africa’s mobility debate can no longer stop at visa openness. For many African travellers, the decisive question is whether lawful entry is affordable, predictable, and administratively workable, not only whether it is legally permitted.¹ The next phase of the mobility conversation must therefore test whether African borders are usable in practice as well as open in form.

1.1 The continental mobility problem after the visa-openness conversation

For almost a decade, the continental debate on mobility has been shaped by a few questions, the dominant one being: does an African traveller need a visa before departure, can the visa be obtained on arrival, or is entry visa-free? The Africa Visa Openness Index (AVOI) has been essential in answering that question. It created a continent-wide baseline, documented reform, and showed that policy change is possible.

The 2025 edition of the AVOI confirms both progress and fragility: the continent’s average openness score is its highest yet, but 51.1 per cent of intra-African travel scenarios still require a visa ahead of travel, while visa-on-arrival availability has fallen to 20.4 per cent, its lowest recorded level.²

The policy conversation now needs a second metric. Visa openness captures formal legal access; it does not measure the price or friction of access. E-visas, electronic travel authorisations, and visas on arrival may reduce consular visits, but they can still leave travellers facing ancillary mobility costs, administrative burden layers, payment and documentation frictions, repeated data entry, and opaque approval processes.

This creates a policy blind spot. Africa has measured whether entry is legally possible more systematically than it has measured whether entry is financially affordable and administratively usable.

Mobility that exists on paper but remains unaffordable for traders, students, artists, tourists, researchers, families, and small firms is not effective freedom of movement.

Recent changes in visa practice make this gap more important. Several countries have moved from broad visa-on-arrival arrangements towards visa-required-before-travel or e-visa systems. Digitisation may help states manage borders, but it can also front-load compliance, require earlier payment, and attach process costs to journeys that appear more open in formal terms.

Current practice shows the point. Ghana’s 2025 visa-on-arrival guidance listed a US\$200 single-entry fee. The East African Tourist Visa costs US\$100. Uganda’s online visa payments include a 3 per cent surcharge. Equatorial Guinea’s e-visa platform combines the visa fee with a VFS service charge. Nigeria’s process may include a NGN 29,400 (US\$22) VFS service charge. For selected categories, Nigeria also adds an additional US\$65 biometric capture fee.^{3,4,5,6} These examples illustrate the range of ancillary mobility costs; they are not repeated as a fee catalogue.

The wider issue is structural: mobility cost is shaped by state fee schedules, outsourced platforms, authorised service providers, and payment systems. The burden lies in the processing architecture as well as in the headline visa fee.

For the purposes of this report, visa cost has three layers:

1. The official visa or authorisation charge.
2. Administrative and service-provider costs, including platform fees, processing charges, biometric fees, authorised-provider charges, arrival-

sticker fees, and related compulsory add-ons.

3. Wider access costs and frictions needed to complete the process lawfully, including document expenses, payment friction, courier charges, travel to embassies or visa centres, uncertainty, and procedural delay.

This framework is the report's canonical formulation of hidden and ancillary costs. Later chapters use shorthand terms such as ancillary mobility costs, administrative burden layers, authorised-provider charges, payment frictions, transparency burden, and process opacity to avoid relisting the same items.

Transparency is part of the burden. Travellers need to know the full price, process, required documents, payment conditions, and likely timeline before they begin an application.⁷ In some e-visa systems, applicants may discover the final cost only after moving deep into the process, sometimes at the payment stage.⁸

This report starts from that gap. It asks what Africans must pay and navigate to travel lawfully within Africa, while distinguishing measurable mandatory costs from wider burdens that are discussed qualitatively.

The focus is lawful short-stay travel by African citizens within Africa, assessed through a standardised traveller case. The report does not attempt to capture the full politics of migration management, long-stay migration, or every non-monetary barrier. Its purpose is practical: to compare the financial and administrative burdens attached to lawful short-stay entry and show how those burdens affect mobility.

1.2 Why visa cost is a continental policy issue

Visa costs are a substantive part of the African integration agenda because they shape who can move, connect, trade, work, and participate across borders.

First, visa costs are a market-access issue. Agenda 2063, the African Passport and Free Movement flagship, and the African

Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) all assume that trade, services, investment, and opportunity depend on people being able to move. Traders, technicians, professionals, investors, consultants, service suppliers, and entrepreneurs must travel to identify markets, open deals, deliver contracts, solve problems, and build trust.⁹ Visa costs therefore help determine whether African markets are linked only in law or accessible in practice.

Short-stay movement is the everyday channel through which much of Africa's cross-border life takes place: trade missions, business meetings, professional services, family visits, conferences, cultural events, tourism, research travel, and exploratory commercial trips. If these journeys remain costly, uncertain, or administratively difficult, a large share of the exchange on which integration depends is weakened at source.

Second, visa costs are a tourism and visitor-economy issue. The effect is not limited to business travel. Visa facilitation has long been associated with stronger tourism performance because travellers respond not only to the attractiveness of a destination, but also to the cost, predictability and ease of entry.¹⁰ Intra-African tourism, conference travel, family visits, events and cultural circuits all depend on borders that can be navigated at reasonable cost. Where visa fees and related charges absorb a substantial share of the travel budget, they suppress demand, shorten trips, and divert spending away from the destination economy.¹¹ The burden therefore falls not only on the traveller, but also on hotels, restaurants, transport providers, venues and local businesses that depend on visitor spending.

Third, visa costs are an African citizenship and inclusion issue. The African Union's vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens weakens when Africans cannot move across the continent affordably to visit family, do business, study, attend events, or experience Africa as a shared home, market, and community. High visa costs favour wealthy travellers, large firms, and institutionally

supported movement over students, small traders, young entrepreneurs, ordinary families, and citizens at large.

The distributive effect is cumulative. One visa may already be significant relative to monthly income. Multi-country travel for trade, research, performance, study, or tourism can quickly become prohibitive once ancillary mobility costs and administrative burden layers are added.

High visa costs also reduce the development gains from mobility. Money spent clearing entry requirements is money not spent in destination economies on hotels, food, local transport, tourism services, event participation, business activity, and cross-border trade. Costly visas therefore operate as a drag on intra-African exchange, enterprise growth, and visitor spending.

The fiscal argument for high visa charges is weak if it counts revenue but ignores wider losses. The relevant test is whether revenue generated by visa charges is proportionate to the trade, tourism, services, visitor spending, and integration activity they may deter. High visa costs tax mobility at the point where African states need to reduce friction.¹² Any short-term state revenue must be weighed against income not realised by hotels, transport providers, restaurants, traders, tourism operators, conference venues, and other domestic sectors. Expensive visas can therefore create a false economy: government collects a modest fee while the wider economy loses more.

1.3 The policy moment

This report appears at a policy moment in which visa cost intersects with three questions about African integration.

First, Africa's continental free-movement framework remains unfinished. The Free Movement Protocol was adopted in 2018 alongside the AfCFTA, but it has not entered into force because too few countries have ratified it. Only four countries – Mali, Niger, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe – have ratified the protocol, far below the 15 required for entry into force. No new ratification has been added since July 2019.¹³ Africa therefore cannot wait for the protocol

to become fully operational before easing practical barriers that make mobility difficult and expensive for ordinary citizens.

Second, formal economic integration is moving faster than freedom of movement. AfCFTA implementation is advancing through tariff schedules, services negotiations, and institutional development. Yet a continental market cannot work well if the people needed to activate it still face costly and cumbersome travel barriers. Traders must travel to open deals; service providers to deliver contracts; investors, technicians, consultants, and business partners to meet, verify, solve problems, and build trust.¹⁴ Visa reform is therefore part of the practical infrastructure that makes the AfCFTA work.

Third, recent gains in visa openness are real, but they are not secure. Recent AVOI findings show that Africa's average visa openness has improved. But they also show a drop in visa-on-arrival access, from 28 per cent in 2020 to 20 per cent in 2025, while pre-travel visa requirements have eased only slightly, from 55 per cent to 51 per cent. This means progress is uneven and can be reversed quietly through administrative changes, even without any open political rejection of integration. In practice, mobility can be narrowed step by step while the language of integration remains unchanged.

Together, these trends mean that the cost and design of visa systems will shape whether African integration advances during the period before full legal harmonisation is achieved.

States continue to view visa policy through sovereignty, security, migration management, reciprocity, and revenue concerns. Those concerns are legitimate, but a narrow revenue approach can become self-defeating when it overlooks the wider costs imposed on trade, tourism, services, investment, knowledge exchange, and citizen integration. The policy task is to align border management more intelligently with continental commitments and economic interests.

Africa has already had the first-generation visa-openness conversation. The next task is

to determine whether lawful travel is low-cost, transparent, and predictable enough to support integration.

The report documents the cost of short-stay travel for African citizens across African states, identifies where the burden is highest, and shows how fee structures, administrative design, and hidden charges can dilute formal openness. That evidence supports reforms available now: clearer publication of fees, lower and more predictable charges, removal of avoidable service-provider mark-ups, simpler digital processes, reduced payment frictions, and targeted exemptions for African short-stay travel.

Reducing visa costs does not require waiting for full treaty implementation or dismantling sovereign border controls. It requires member states to bring the administration and pricing of entry closer to the spirit of Agenda 2063, the African Passport and Free Movement flagship, and the AfCFTA. For AU institutions and member states seeking near-term, politically feasible mobility reforms, cost reduction is an actionable starting point.¹⁵

The chapters that follow set out the methodology, present the evidence, map regional patterns and regime types, and translate the findings into decision-oriented options for AU institutions, member states, Regional Economic Communities, and other stakeholders.

Chapter 2 Concept and Methodology

“Muenzi haapedzi dura” - “A visitor does not finish the granary.”

This chapter sets out the measurement rules used to compare lawful short-stay entry costs across Africa. It separates formal access from cost burden, identifies the standard traveller case, defines what counts as cost, and explains how evidence is sourced, coded, converted, and flagged.

The method is deliberately restrained. It ranks only observed mandatory official and unavoidable authorised charges. Wider lived burdens are discussed where relevant but are not monetised unless they are payable, compulsory, and consistently observable.

2.1 From visa openness to mobility affordability

The report uses a simple distinction between visa openness and mobility affordability.

Visa openness records the legal form of access; mobility affordability records the mandatory cost and practical burden of using that access.

2.1.1 The report’s baseline definition of cost burden

Visa cost burden means the entry-related financial and administrative burden borne by a traveller seeking lawful short-stay entry into another African country. It includes the official charge and unavoidable official or authorised-provider payments required by the entry process.

The framework distinguishes four dimensions of burden.

Table 2.1: Cost burden framework

Cost layer	Definition	Illustrative examples
Direct official cost	Charges formally levied by the state or by authorised	Visa fee, processing fee, administrative fee, mandatory portal charge,

Cost layer	Definition	Illustrative examples
	service providers for issuing or processing the required travel authorisation.	biometric fee, arrival-sticker fee.
Compliance cost	Expenditure required to satisfy documentary or procedural conditions attached to the application.	Photographs, notarisation, certified translations, invitation letters, proof of accommodation, travel insurance, vaccination certificates, proof of funds.
Access-friction cost	Time, travel, opportunity, and uncertainty costs created by the process through which authorisation is obtained.	Travel to an embassy or visa centre, repeated appearances, courier costs, passport retention, restricted payment channels, waiting time, lost workdays.
Transparency burden	The clarity, availability, and predictability of fee and process information before the traveller begins the application.	Unpublished charges, incomplete or outdated official guidance, opaque platform fees, embassy-specific variation, late disclosure of mandatory requirements.

The table provides the conceptual map. The ranking uses only the monetary components that can be observed and compared consistently.

2.1.2 The classification problem: when legal access and financial cost diverge

Where legal access and payment status diverge, the coding rule is simple: separate the legal route from the payment burden. The table classifies the relevant patterns.

The framework below applies that rule.

2.1.3 A dual-variable coding framework

Each destination-by-origin scenario receives an access-regime code and an official-cost code. The policy implication is that reform can target legal restriction, financial burden, or both.

Variable A: Access Regime

Table 2.2: Access-regime coding framework

Code	Category	Definition
A1	Strict Visa-Free	No visa, no ETA, no e-visa, and no prior online clearance of any kind is required. Entry is granted on presentation of a valid passport.
A2	Zero-Fee Authorisation-Based Entry	An application, ETA, e-visa, or prior online clearance is mandatory, but the official state fee for that authorisation is zero.
A3	Paid Authorisation	A visa or travel authorisation is required, and an official fee (visa fee or authorisation fee) is charged.

Variable B: Official Cost Burden (Entry-Specific)

Table 2.3: Official-cost burden coding framework

Code	Category	Definition
B1	Zero Official Entry Cost	No mandatory payment of any kind (visa fee, border charge, or security levy) is levied.
B2	Non-Zero Visa/Authorisation Fee	An official fee is charged specifically for the visa or travel authorisation.
B3	Non-Zero Non-Visa Border Charge	No visa fee exists, but a separate, mandatory state or border management charge (e.g., Securiport fee) is applied upon entry or exit.

Application of the Framework to Sui Generis Cases

Table 2.4: Application of the coding framework to sui generis cases

Country	Variable A: Access Regime	Variable B: Official Cost Burden	Classification in this Report
Rwanda	A1 (Strict Visa-Free)	B1 (Zero Official Entry Cost)	Universal Visa-Free & Zero-Cost Benchmark
The Gambia	A1 (Strict Visa-Free)	B3 (Non-Zero Non-Visa Border Charge)	Visa-Free but Paid Entry (Securiport Charge)

Country	Variable A: Access Regime	Variable B: Official Cost Burden	Classification in this Report
Mauritius	A2 (Zero-Fee Authorisation-Based)	B1 (Zero Official Entry Cost)	Zero-Fee Authorisation (Application Required)
Seychelles	A3 (Paid Authorisation)	B2 (Non-Zero Authorisation Fee)	Paid Authorisation (Travel Authorisation Fee). Visa-free in the legal sense, but Travel Authorisation is mandatory and paid.
Kenya	A1/A3 (Mixed: 51 exempt, 2 require authorisation)	B1/B2 (Mixed: Zero exempt, fee for non-exempt)	Near-Universal Zero-Fee Regime
Burkina Faso	A2 (Zero-Fee Authorisation-Based Entry)	B1 (Zero Official Entry Cost)	No mandatory payment of any kind (visa fee, border charge, or security levy) is levied

The policy consequence is methodological clarity: the paid ranking captures actual paid-authorisation burden, while benchmark cases remain available for access, waiver, and non-visa-charge analysis.

2.1.4 Why the distinction matters for policy

For policy purposes, the distinction makes the reform target visible: charges, waivers, payment architecture, disclosure, digital design, and authorised-provider costs.

It also prevents false equivalence: a high-cost visa-on-arrival regime is not low-cost access, and a digital route is not automatically affordable merely because it removes a consular visit.

In this report, visa-free travel means entry without a visa fee or mandatory prior authorisation. Zero-fee visas, ETAs, e-visas, and similar authorisations are coded

separately because they still require a permission process.

2.1.5 Measurable indicator

The measurable indicator is the total mandatory official amount, plus unavoidable authorised-provider, platform, payment, biometric, ETA, arrival-sticker, or non-visa border charges, that the standard traveller must pay to secure lawful short-stay entry. No assumed, additional flat, or artificial amount is added to the figures.

2.2 Methodology and comparability framework

The methodology applies one standard traveller case, selects the cheapest lawful official route available to each destination-by-origin scenario, records mandatory payable costs, converts them into US dollars using one reference date, and flags weaker evidence.

2.2.1 Design logic and principles

The framework compares official and unavoidable authorised costs imposed by African destinations on African travellers who require short-stay entry authorisation. Comparability is the governing discipline.

The method applies six principles.

1. *Comparability*: Every case is assessed using the same standard traveller and the same scoring rules so that countries can be compared fairly.
2. *Transparency*: The scoring rules are clear, open, and capable of being checked by others.
3. *Proportionality*: The score is driven mainly by the official fees that travellers actually have to pay.
4. *Reproducibility*: Another researcher should be able to use the same dataset and method and arrive at the same result.
5. *Fairness*: The method looks not only at how high the burden is, but also at how widely that burden is applied across African nationalities.

6. *Restraint*: Where certain burdens cannot yet be measured consistently, the report does not assign them an artificial monetary value.

The main ranking measures absolute cost in US dollars. Income effects are analysed separately in Section 3.3, not built into the primary ranking.

2.2.2 Unit of analysis and standard traveller case

The unit of analysis is the destination-by-origin scenario: one African nationality seeking lawful short-stay entry into one African destination. This preserves nationality-specific rules, fees, channels, and exemptions.

Scenario-level coding separates severity from scope and preserves legal variation, including nationality-specific treatment, for instance, in Ethiopia and Regional Economic Community (REC) -based exemptions.¹⁶

The standard traveller profile is summarised below.

Regional and bilateral exemptions, nationality-specific fees, and route restrictions are recorded at scenario level. South Africa illustrates the point: its ranking figure is US\$26 for most African nationalities, while an example like the Sierra Leonean traveller to South Africa exception remains visible in the scenario data.¹⁷

The main visa-burden calculation includes only non-zero visa or equivalent paid-authorisation cases. Visa-free, waiver-based, and zero-cost scenarios remain in the 2,862-scenario dataset for exposure, waiver, reciprocity, and regime-type analysis.

Table 2.5: Standard traveller case

Element	Standard case used for scoring
Traveller profile	One adult African citizen travelling on an ordinary passport.
Purpose of travel	Short visit for tourism, family visit, cultural travel, or an ordinary business meeting.
Entry type	Single entry.
Length of stay	Thirty days or, where unavailable, the closest ordinary short-stay option up to ninety days.

Element	Standard case used for scoring
Processing speed	Ordinary processing only. Express or premium channels are excluded.
Channel	The cheapest lawful official route available to the traveller.
Currency	All charges converted to US dollars using one common reference date.

Product selection follows one hierarchy: 30-day single-entry where available, then the closest ordinary short-stay single-entry product up to 90 days, then multiple-entry only where no standard single-entry option exists. Where entry is visa-free, the case is recorded as zero.

2.2.3 Source hierarchy, data management, and version control

Because evidence is uneven, the report applies the source hierarchy below. Official government, embassy, consular, immigration, and e-visa sources carry greatest weight. Weaker sources are used only with corroboration and flagged.

Table 2.6: Source hierarchy and editorial treatment

Tier	Source type	Primary use	Editorial treatment
A	Official immigration portal, e-visa portal, embassy, consulate, or immigration notice.	Primary evidence on fees, process, and requirements.	Use directly and record date accessed.
B	Authoritative mobility classification source or official regional policy instrument.	Travel-scenario classification and legal-openness coding.	Use for status coding and cross-checking, not as the sole fee source where an exact fee is required.
C	Validated dataset entry reproducing an official amount or rule.	Gap-filling and verification.	Use where consistent with stronger evidence.
D	Secondary travel site, blog, or commercial service	Last-resort support only.	Use only when corroborated and clearly flagged as provisional.

Tier	Source type	Primary use	Editorial treatment
	provider.		

2.2.4 What counts as cost

For scoring purposes, the report counts only costs that can be observed consistently and compared across countries. Total cost consists of mandatory official charges and unavoidable authorised-provider, platform, payment, biometric, ETA, arrival-sticker, or non-visa border charges that the standard traveller must pay to obtain or use lawful short-stay entry.

Table 2.7: Cost-treatment rules

Item	Treatment in the score
Visa fee	Include in full where compulsory for the standard traveller case.
Administrative or processing fee	Include where levied by the state or through an authorised official channel.
Mandatory portal or service-centre fee	Include where the traveller has no lawful way to avoid it.
Biometric, ETA, or arrival-sticker fee	Include where compulsory for lawful entry.
Unavoidable official payment surcharge	Include if it is inseparable from the official payment route.
Optional courier fee	Exclude unless no lawful non-courier option exists.
Premium or express processing	Exclude. The framework uses ordinary processing only.
Travel-agent or facilitator charge	Exclude unless the route is compulsory and evidenced as such.
Airfare, accommodation, general passport acquisition cost	Exclude.
Refundable deposits and informal payments	Exclude.

2.2.5 Scenario scores, country scores, and publication score

For each travel case, the report calculates total cost using the cost-treatment rules above. Visa-free, waiver-based, and zero-

cost cases are recorded as zero. Visa or paid-authorisation cases record the mandatory official and unavoidable authorised charges payable by the standard traveller. The main paid ranking includes only real non-zero entry costs.

Nationality-specific fees are coded at scenario level before country scores are calculated. This preserves differentiated treatment rather than hiding it within a single national average.

For the ranking, the final destination cost recorded in the final visa table is used throughout Chapter 3 for ranking, regional averages, and income-relative burden.

CRBS (Composite Real Burden Score) $_j = (1 / N_j) \times \sum \text{Total Cost}_{ij}$

Here, N_j means the number of included origin-country cases for destination j .

The published score represents the cost burden attached to each destination. Wider scenario data support exposure, reciprocity, waiver, and channel analysis, but do not replace the destination total used for main cost comparisons.

The full 2,862-scenario dataset supports separate indicators on zero-cost access, waiver coverage, channel patterns, and paid exposure across 54 African origins and 53 possible destinations. It does not include outward-facing charges imposed by a traveller's own country, such as departure taxes, passenger service charges, airport security levies, API/PNR fees, or exit-visa requirements. These charges are relevant to the wider cost of African mobility and are discussed where they affect the traveller's total burden, but they are excluded from the core entry-cost analysis because the dataset measures what an African traveller must pay to enter another African state, not what their own state may charge them to leave, return, or use an airport.

Box 2.1. How to read the three rankings used in this report and tools

This report and its interactive tools use the same underlying data, but they rank different things.

The report's main ranking is a price-of-entry ranking. **It asks:** how much does an African traveller pay to enter this country when entry is

not free?

The interactive map ranking is a destination-openness ranking.

It asks: how many African countries does this country allow to enter visa-free?

The passport tool ranking is a passport-access ranking. **It asks:** how many African countries can this passport enter visa-free?

These rankings should not be read as the same league table. A country can be expensive to enter but still grant many exemptions. A passport can also enjoy wide access even if its own country grants fewer exemptions to others.

In simple terms:

- **Cost ranking** = what visitors pay to enter a country.
- **Destination-openness ranking** = how many countries a destination exempts.
- **Passport-access ranking** = how many countries a passport can enter visa-free.

2.2.6 Missing data, nationality-specific pricing, and confidence flags

Where a destination applies one uniform charge to all non-exempt African nationals, that charge is assigned to each affected scenario. Where it applies nationality-specific prices, the actual fee is coded for each affected scenario.

Where several official prices exist, the standard traveller case selects the cheapest lawful official route available to that nationality.

If no exact official fee can be identified, a provisional value is used only where at least two independent corroborating sources point to the same narrow amount. Where no defensible fee exists, the scenario remains missing rather than imputed.

Country-level confidence flags identify evidential strength; results supported mainly by third-party commercial sources are reported as Provisional.

Transparency is assessed separately by asking whether the full fee structure, mandatory charges, documentary requirements, and process are knowable before application.

2.2.7 Definition of confidence flags

- *High confidence:* The CRBS for all or nearly all scenarios is based on Tier A sources (official immigration portals, e-visa platforms, embassy notices) with clear, current, and publicly verifiable fee schedules that match the standard traveller case.
- *Medium confidence:* The score is supported by strong but partial Tier A evidence, or by Tier B sources (authoritative mobility classifications) combined with some Tier A cross-checks.
- *Provisional:* The score relies primarily on Tier D sources (secondary travel sites, blogs, or commercial service providers) because no official government source could be located, or because available official sources are incomplete, internally inconsistent, or clearly out of date (more than two years old without evidence of revision). Provisional scores should be treated as best available estimates, not as official fees. They are included in the ranking to maintain continental coverage but are flagged for caution.

2.2.8 Validation, robustness checks, and limits of comparison

Before publication, the report team applied a minimum validation workflow: standardise country names and process labels, harmonise currencies and duration fields, remove duplicates, verify outliers against the strongest available source, and produce final scores from the clean master dataset.

All fees originally published in local currencies (CFA, GHS, ZAR, NGN, etc.) were converted to US dollars using the exchange rates from OANDA as of 31 December 2025. Where conversion produced cents, values were rounded to two decimal places. Where fee collection occurred before 31 December 2025, original local currency amounts were converted using the 31 December 2025 rate to ensure comparability across all observations, not the rate at the time of data collection.

2.2.9 Limitations and interpretive caution

The ranking measures the cost of lawful short-stay entry as consistently as the available data permit. It is a structured indicator of official and near-official financial burden, not a full monetisation of every delay, compliance cost, or hardship.

Destination totals exclude process burdens such as time, uncertainty, data costs, translation, notarisation, or transport to processing points unless they appear as mandatory official or unavoidable authorised charges.

Evidence quality varies. Where official sources are incomplete or unavailable, corroborated secondary or commercial sources are used cautiously and flagged. Dollar totals use one exchange-rate reference date and do not reflect currency fluctuations, purchasing-power differences, or disposable-income inequality.

The main paid ranking covers only non-zero official or authorisation costs and must be read alongside exemptions, reciprocity, and regime type. Rwanda is the sole universal strict visa-free and zero-cost benchmark; zero-cost and waiver-based access remain visible on the ranking table.

The dataset is a snapshot as of 31 December 2025. Visa policies, fees, and digital systems change frequently. The analysis excludes the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic because sufficiently robust public data could not be obtained; no other African country is excluded.

Wider implications for trade, tourism, route development, external leverage, and integration performance are reasoned policy conclusions grounded in the burden evidence and wider literature, not single-factor causal claims.

These limitations define the boundaries of the evidence.

Chapter 3 The Price of Entry

"When goods don't cross borders, soldiers will"

Chapter 3 moves from method to evidence. It asks what an ordinary African traveller must pay when lawful short-stay entry into another African country is not free.

The chapter presents the paid-destination ranking, then maps regional burden clusters, income-relative severity, and the additional charge layers that can make posted fees understate the real burden.

Unless otherwise noted, all figures reflect visa fees and destination-side exemption rules as of 31 December 2025. Later developments are treated as contextual updates, not as part of the baseline ranking.

The Findings: The price of entry for African travellers

Box 3.1. Five headline findings at a glance

1. Destination-side visa burden is sharply uneven across Africa, with the highest totals concentrated in a relatively small group of destinations.
2. Central Africa remains the continent's principal burden cluster, while East Africa is the least burdensome sub-region on average.
3. Income-relative analysis shows that in several destinations the visa functions less as a routine fee than as a *de facto* barrier to movement.
4. Hidden charges, uneven digitisation, and opaque pricing mean that the posted visa fee often understates the traveller's actual burden.
5. Passenger taxes and related charges create a second layer of cost that can sharply inflate the total price of intra-African movement.

3.0 The Landscape of Access and Cost: A Benchmark Panel

Table 3.0 is a benchmark panel. It clarifies which cases sit outside or alongside the paid ranking so the empirical comparison in Section 3.1 remains clean.

Table 3.0: Classification of Entry Regimes (African Travellers)

Category	Definition	Countries (Data Lock 31 Dec 2025)	Official Entry Cost
1. Strict Visa-Free & Zero-Cost	No prior authorisation; no payment of any kind.	Rwanda	US\$0
2. Visa-Free but Non-Zero Border Charge	No visa required, but mandatory state levy applies.	The Gambia	US\$20 (Securiport Entry) + US\$20 (Exit)
3. Zero-Fee Authorisation-Based	Prior authorisation (e-visa/ETA) is mandatory, but the state fee is zero.	Mauritius Burkina Faso	US\$0 (Application required, where applicable)
4. Near-Universal Zero-Fee	Authorisation not required for almost all African states.	Kenya (51 exempt) Benin (48 exempt)	US\$0 (For exempt nationalities)
5. Paid Visa/Authorisation	An official fee is charged for the visa or authorisation.	See Section 3.1	Varies (US\$12 - US\$200)

3.1 The Continental Destination Picture

The continental distribution of visa cost burden is sharply uneven. Among the ranked destinations with non-zero official entry costs, Angola and Ghana sit at the top at US\$200, followed by Nigeria at US\$198 and Cameroon at US\$194. Mozambique and Tunisia follow at US\$160, then Niger at US\$155, Sudan at US\$154, and the Central African Republic at US\$150. At the lower end of the non-zero ranking are South Africa at US\$26, Egypt at US\$25, Djibouti and Botswana at about US\$22, and Seychelles at US\$12.

Table 3.1 should be read as a full entry-cost map, not only as a visa-fee ranking. The colour coding distinguishes paid visa or authorisation regimes from special cases. The Gambia remains visa-free in legal form, but because mandatory entry and exit charges apply, it is recorded as a non-zero border-charge case at US\$40. Burkina Faso, Mauritius, and Rwanda are different: they are shown as zero-cost or zero-fee benchmark cases at US\$0.

Rwanda sits outside the paid-burden ranking as the report's only universal visa-free benchmark. Mauritius is excluded from the paid ranking, but for a different reason: official guidance states that visas are free of charge, yet some African nationalities still require prior or on-arrival authorisation. In practical terms, this means Mauritius imposes no monetary cost but does impose process friction on certain travellers: the visa application itself, even when free, requires

time, documentation, and administrative compliance. Seychelles must also be distinguished carefully. It remains visa-free in the legal sense, but all travellers must obtain a paid Travel Authorisation before departure. Under the strict methodology used in this report, Seychelles therefore belongs on the paid-authorisation side of the line.

The central point is not only that some destinations are expensive. In several cases, high burdens apply to a broad share of African travellers rather than a narrow residual group. Sudan most clearly fits the near-universal paid pattern. Libya comes close. Angola and Tunisia remain high-cost destinations with broad paid exposure. Where high cost and wide paid exposure combine, the visa operates less as a routine consular charge than as a general mobility barrier.

The continental average across paid destinations is about US\$82 for one traveller. For a family of five, that means roughly US\$410 in visa fees alone, before transport, accommodation, or any other travel costs are added. If that family travelled to the most expensive destinations, Angola or Ghana, where the visa cost is US\$200 per person, it would pay US\$1,000 in visa fees alone. The gap between the cheapest paid destination and the most expensive one is US\$188. Africa's mobility burden is therefore not a marginal pricing problem. It is a structurally uneven system in which a relatively small number of destinations impose very high costs, while low-cost and universal zero-cost regimes remain exceptional.

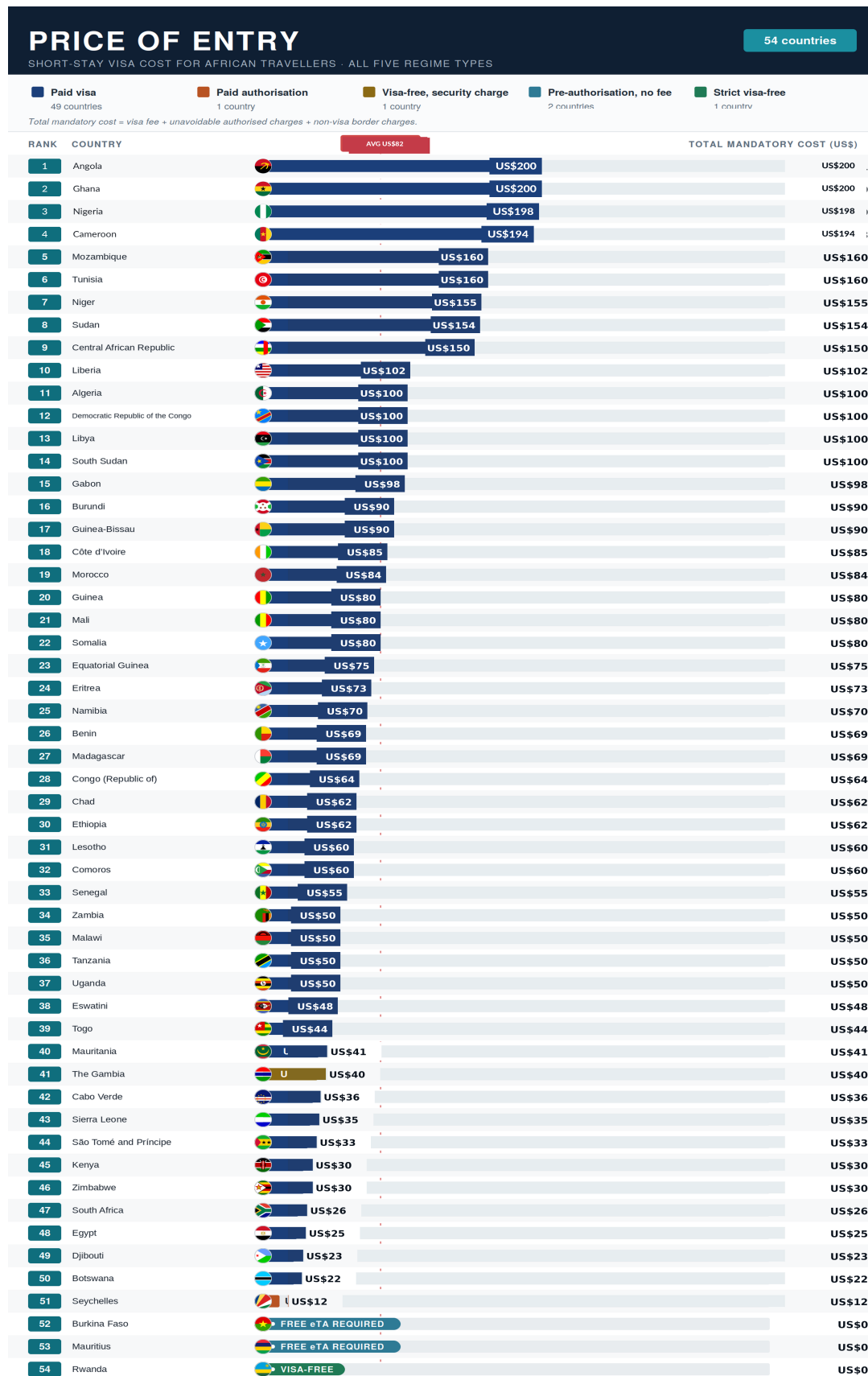



Table 3.1: Price of Entry Ranking and Regime Classification, African Travellers. Note: The table shows all 54 African destinations so that the full continental entry-cost universe is visible at once. Colour coding distinguishes paid visa or authorisation regimes, paid travel authorisations, visa-free but non-zero border-charge cases, residual paid-authorisation cases, and zero-cost or zero-fee benchmark cases. The Gambia is therefore included at US\$40 because mandatory entry and exit charges apply, although it is not a paid visa-fee case.

Box 3.2. Editorial note on 2025-2026 Developments

Research for this report was completed in 2025, and the rankings, calculations, averages, and comparative tables are based on the report's locked dataset. Several African countries announced or implemented material entry-policy changes in 2026, including Togo's visa-free entry for African nationals, Ghana's proposed fee-free e-visa for Africans, Uganda's expanded visa-exempt list, Malawi's revised reciprocal visa regime, Cabo Verde's suspension of visa-on-arrival access for affected nationalities, Egypt's visa-fee increase, and selected bilateral visa-waiver arrangements involving Ghana-Zambia, Nigeria-Rwanda, and Rwanda-Botswana. These developments are acknowledged as important post-research developments, but they have not been incorporated into the report's rankings, calculations, regional averages, or comparative tables.

- a) Ghana: Ghana announced on 3 April 2026 that it intended to introduce free electronic visas for African nationals from 25 May 2026. This announcement falls after the report's 31 December 2025 data-lock. Because the ranking is a baseline snapshot as of that date, and because implementation details may change or require operational confirmation, Ghana remains recorded at US\$200 in the baseline ranking. Once the reform is formally implemented and its operational rules are verified, Ghana should be reclassified as a zero-fee authorisation regime, unless the final rules establish unconditional visa-free entry. As soon as Ghana's announcement goes live, the interactive tools will be updated to reflect this.
- b) After the research cut-off, Togo announced that, effective 18 May 2026, nationals of all African countries holding valid passports may enter Togo visa-free for stays of up to 30 days, subject to immigration checks and an online travel declaration completed at least 24 hours before arrival. This important post-research development is acknowledged, but it has not been factored into the report's rankings, calculations, averages, or comparative tables. However, the interactive tools have captured this development since it happened just before publication.
- c) As of March 1, 2026, travellers arriving in Egypt and applying for a single-entry visa on arrival are now paying \$30, an increase of \$5 over the previous \$25 visa fee that had been in effect through the end of February.
- d) In February 2026, Ghana and Zambia announced visa waivers for each other's citizens. This too has been captured on the interactive tools.
- e) In May 2026, Nigeria implemented a visa-free policy for Rwandans visiting Nigeria. This has been captured on the interactive tools.
- f) Kenya's Legal Notice No. 93 of 30 May 2025 exempted most African nationals from the eTA requirement, but not all. Kenya should therefore be treated as a significantly liberalised near-universal zero-cost destination, not a universal one.
- g) Benin introduced visa requirements for citizens of five African countries. Benin should therefore not be described as a universal zero-cost benchmark.
- h) Seychelles remains outside the universal zero-cost benchmark category because all travellers must obtain a paid Travel Authorisation before departure.

 **Interactive dashboard** — explore the visa cost map by destination:
afrikamoja.africa/borders-for-sale/cost-map

3.2 Where the Burden Concentrates: Regional Patterns

The ranking identifies the most and least costly destinations. The next set of figures steps back from individual countries to show where burden clusters regionally and whether high costs are concentrated or broadly shared across Africa's sub-regions.

The regional figures show a pattern that is clear but uneven. Central Africa remains the main cost hotspot, although the margin over North and West Africa is now narrower, with an average burden of about US\$96. West Africa averages about US\$85, North Africa about US\$85, East Africa about US\$54.50, and Southern Africa about US\$72. North

Africa stands out for near-universal paid exposure, while Central Africa carries the highest average cost burden.

The figures that follow unpack these differences in more detail. Their purpose is not to repeat the ranking country by country, but to show how average cost, non-zero exposure, and high-cost concentration vary across Africa's sub-regions.

The regional burden averages quoted in this section are simple arithmetic means of the *destination* CRBS reported in the ranking table above. Countries are assigned to the five geographic regions used throughout the report:

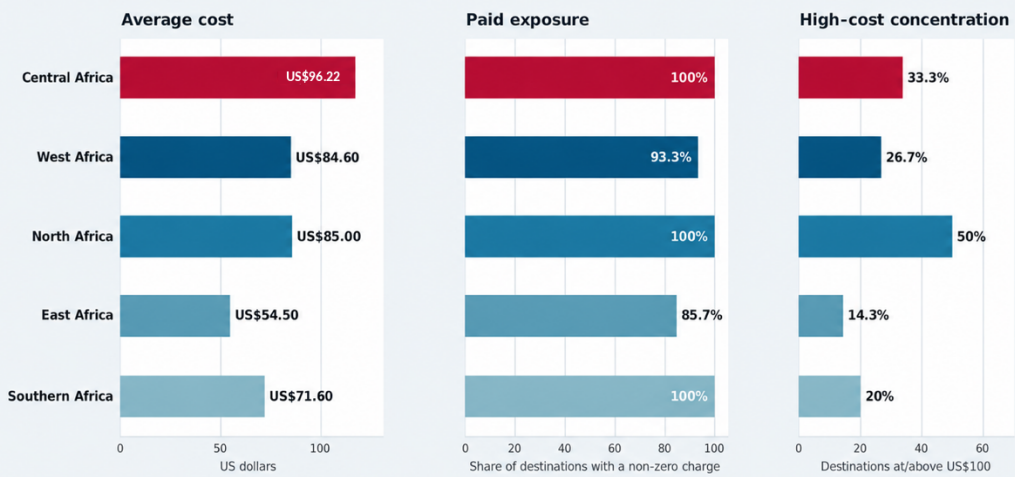
- a) *Central Africa*: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, DR Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe.

- b) *East Africa*: Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.
- c) *North Africa*: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia.
- d) *Southern Africa*: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

- e) *West Africa*: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

Figure 3.1. Where the Burden Concentrates

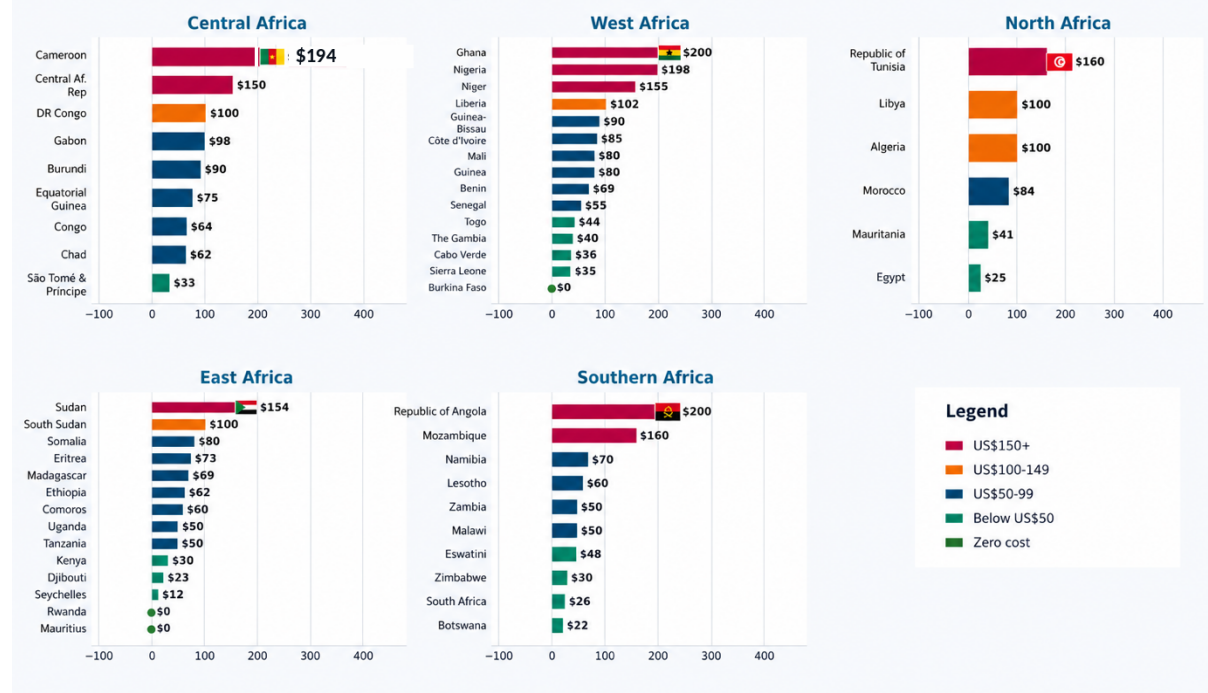
Regional average cost, paid exposure, and high-cost concentration.



Reading note: Central Africa has the highest average cost. North Africa has the highest high-cost concentration. Paid exposure is 100% in Central, North and Southern Africa, 93.3% in West Africa, and 85.7% in East Africa.

Figure 3.2. Regional Burden Profiles

Country-level distribution within each sub-region. A flag marks the highest-cost destination in each region.



The next set of regional figures sharpens the picture by showing how the burden is distributed within each sub-region rather than across the continent as a whole.

Central Africa emerges as the clearest hotspot. West Africa is uneven, with a few costly destinations pulling the average upward. East Africa is mixed, while North Africa and Southern Africa follow different profiles.

Read together, these figures show that regional burden is concentrated, but not in a single pattern.

The regional summary that follows then brings these patterns together in a single comparative view.

East Africa's distribution confirms a mixed profile: some of the least costly destinations sit alongside sharper outliers, especially Sudan and South Sudan.

North Africa and Southern Africa form a clear contrast. North Africa is marked by near-universal paid exposure, while Southern Africa is generally lighter but still includes a high-cost outlier in Angola.

The summary below pulls these regional contrasts together by comparing average

costs, non-zero exposure, and the share of destinations in the high-cost tier.

Taken together, the figures show that the heaviest burdens are concentrated in a relatively small set of destinations rather than spread evenly across the continent.

Central Africa

Central Africa is the clearest problem area in the data. It has the highest average visa cost, a non-zero exposure rate of 100 per cent, and the highest concentration of very expensive destinations.

Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) exemptions provide some relief within the bloc, but they do not materially change the broader continental picture. For most African travellers, Central Africa remains the most expensive region to enter.

The regional burden profiles add a further point. The largest differences in visa costs do not mainly come from the traveller's passport. They come from the country the traveller wants to enter.

The gap between the most expensive and least expensive passports is small, about US\$30.5, while the gap between destinations is much larger. Some destinations charge

little or nothing, while the upper end is set by Angola and Ghana at US\$200, followed closely by Nigeria at US\$198 and Cameroon at US\$194.

The implication is that Africa's heaviest visa-cost burden is driven less by where the traveller comes from than by where the traveller is going.

West Africa

West Africa presents a mixed profile. ECOWAS free movement materially reduces the burden within the bloc, but that internal openness has not yet become wider continental openness. For the roughly 93 per cent of African travellers who do not benefit from ECOWAS-based exemption, fees still range from about US\$55 to US\$200. Ghana at US\$200, Nigeria at US\$198, and Niger at US\$155 pull the regional profile upward, while Senegal, Togo, Cabo Verde, and Sierra Leone sit in a lower band. The point is not that ECOWAS has failed; it is that bloc-based openness has not yet become broader African openness.

East Africa

East Africa is more internally mixed. It includes low-cost and zero-cost reform examples, including Djibouti at US\$23 and Kenya's near-universal zero-fee regime, while sharper outliers remain, especially Sudan and South Sudan. Rwanda remains the critical benchmark because it shows that broad African opening is administratively and politically achievable. Kenya's May 2025 reform sharply reduced the burden for most African travellers, but because the exemption does not extend to all African countries, Kenya remains outside the

report's universal zero-cost benchmark category.

North Africa

North Africa's defining feature is not a single extreme fee but near-universal paid exposure. Bilateral and bloc waivers remain scarce, which means most African travellers heading north still pay something even where the nominal fee is not among the continent's highest. For a report concerned with continental integration, North Africa therefore stands out both as a cost issue and as a major waiver-gap issue.

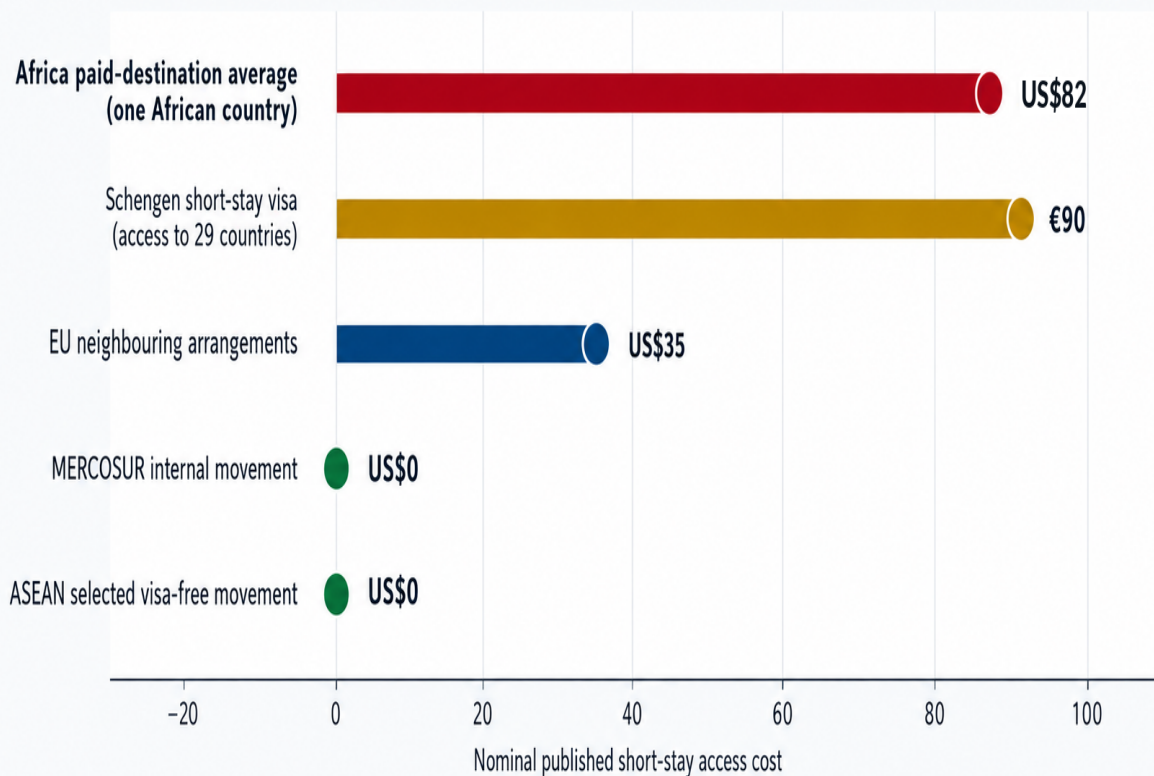
Southern Africa

From a cost and friction perspective, Southern Africa remains comparatively lighter than several other regions and has one of the widest reaches of zero-cost entry outside the universal-access cases. However, Figure 3.1 shows East Africa as the lowest-cost region by average entry cost, partly because of low-cost and zero-cost reform examples. South Africa, Botswana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe illustrate different pathways to relative openness, while Angola remains the region's sharpest outlier at US\$200 and broad paid exposure. Much of this relative openness is bilateral rather than protocol-driven, showing that sovereign policy choices can materially reduce mobility costs even without a binding regional free-movement regime.

These regional patterns show where travel within Africa is most costly and restrictive. The next figure widens the lens by comparing how African states price the movement of fellow Africans with how other regions price the entry of outsiders.

Figure 3.3. The Africa Mobility Penalty

Benchmark comparison. The issue is the scale of the permission cost relative to access granted.



Interpretive point: Africa's average paid-destination cost approaches the Schengen fee, but normally buys entry to one country.

Figure 3.3 places Africa's visa burden in comparative perspective by setting the average cost of intra-African travel against charges in other regional mobility systems. Its purpose is not to suggest that every traveller pays each of these amounts, but to show how Africa's average entry cost compares with established models of regional movement. The contrast is striking. An African traveller pays an average of US\$85 to enter a single African country where a visa fee applies, while a standard short-stay visa provides access to the wider Schengen area of 29 countries. The global comparison places Africa's internal visa costs in a wider frame, but it still treats every dollar as if it carries the same weight for every traveller. It does not. A burden that looks moderate on paper can become severe when read against income.

The next section therefore shifts from absolute cost to income-relative burden,

Schengen visa costs €90 and provides access to the wider Schengen area of 29 countries. The figure also shows lower benchmarks elsewhere, including US\$35 in EU neighbouring arrangements and zero-cost movement within MERCOSUR and ASEAN.¹⁸ Read together, these comparisons situate Africa's visa regime in a wider global context and underscore the extent to which African citizens continue to face unusually high costs to move within their own continent.¹⁹

showing where visa cost operates as a *de facto* exclusion mechanism.

3.3 The Income-relative Burden: When a Visa Becomes a Prohibition

The destination total used in the ranking measures absolute cost. The lived experience

of that cost depends on income. A US\$150 visa may be manageable for a professional in a higher-income economy but prohibitive for a small trader in a low-income one.

The income-relative analysis compares each destination's total against approximate monthly income, measured as GNI per capita divided by 12 using World Bank 2023-24 data. Measured against each destination country's own average monthly income proxy, the visa total is equivalent to about 300 per cent in the Central African Republic and about 213 per cent in Mozambique. Sudan stands at 163 per cent, Cameroon at

about 132 per cent, Niger at 111 per cent, Nigeria at about 101 per cent, and Chad at 89 per cent. At those ratios, the visa becomes a serious affordability barrier even for an average earner, and more so for a trader, student, or jobseeker earning below the national mean.²⁰

To make these ratios easier to interpret, the report groups them into severity bands. These thresholds do not eliminate nuance, but they provide a practical way to distinguish between a visa that is inconvenient, one that is financially punitive, and one that is effectively exclusionary.

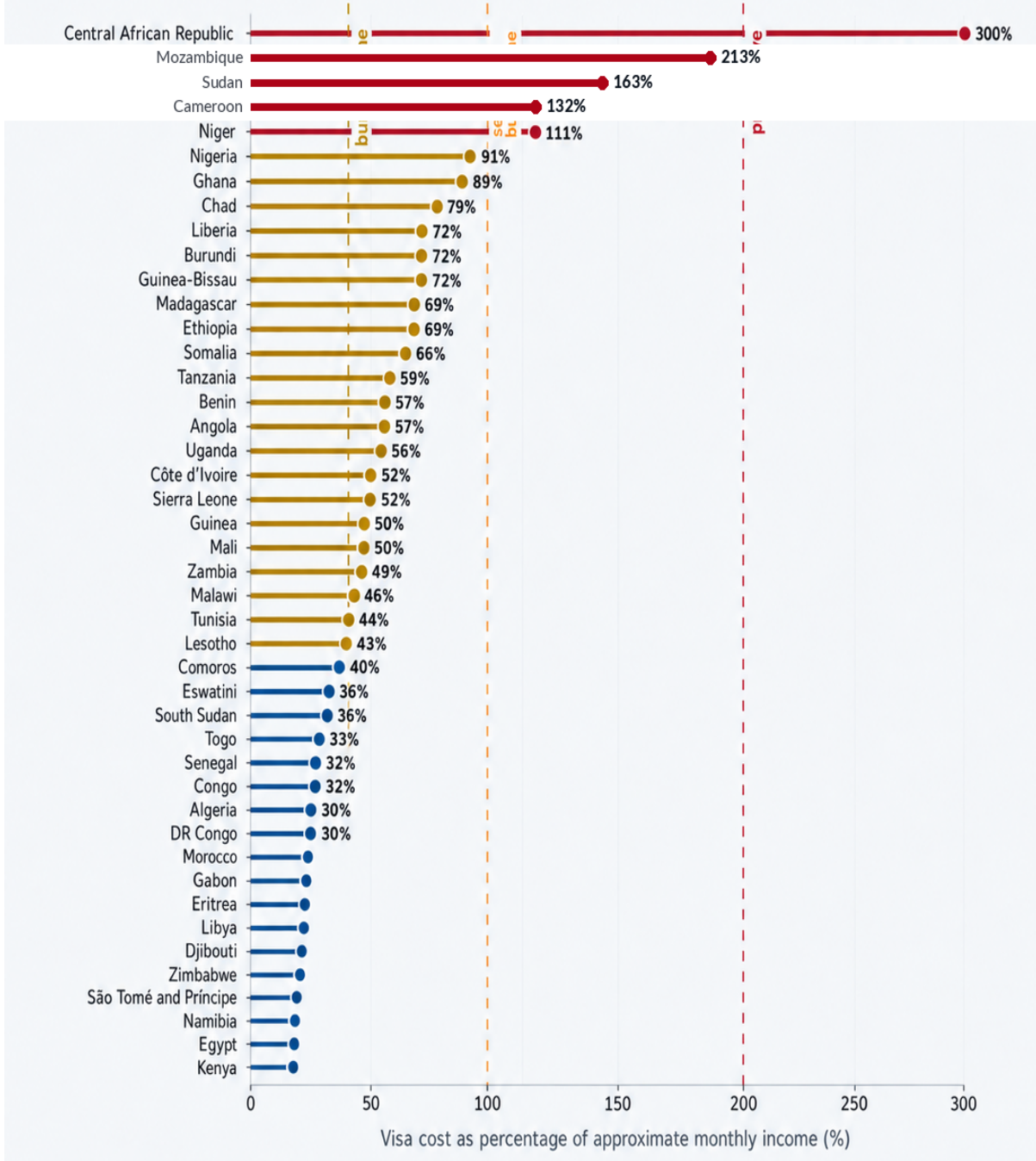
Box 3.3. Severity thresholds

- *Prohibitive*: above 200 per cent of GNI-based monthly income (a threshold at which even the average earner cannot afford the visa).
- *Severely burdensome*: 100–199 per cent.
- *Burdensome*: 40–99 per cent. *Moderate*: 10–39 per cent. *Low or none*: below 10 per cent.

These thresholds are based on national averages; for travellers with below-average incomes, the effective burden is higher.

Figure 3.4. When a Visa Becomes a Barrier

Visa totals compared with monthly income proxy. Percentages indicate severity, not disposable income.



Bands: Prohibitive >200%; severely burdensome 100-199%; burdensome 40-99%; moderate 10-39%; low/none <10%.

Nine countries fall in the prohibitive or severely burdensome category. Another 26 are classified as burdensome. Seven fall into the low-or-none category. Of these, Rwanda remains the only universal visa-free case. These thresholds are based on national averages. For travellers with below-average incomes, the effective burden is higher.

What destination-side price means from the traveller's side

From the destination side, visa prices show which countries charge more than others. From the traveller's side, they show how the same fee can produce radically different levels of exclusion depending on who is travelling.

Cameroon's US\$194 fee is a severe burden for low-income travellers, even though it is no longer the continental maximum. For a traveller from Burundi, the US\$194 charge is equivalent to about 9.7 months of monthly income proxy. For Malawi, it is about 6.5 months. For Niger, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone, it is about 4.3 months. By contrast, the same charge is equivalent to about 0.4 months for a traveller from South Africa and about 0.2 months for one from Seychelles. The pattern is even sharper for the highest-cost destinations, Angola and Ghana at US\$200 and Nigeria at US\$198, and remains visible even for South Africa's much lower US\$26 fee, which still amounts to about 1.3 months for Burundi and 0.9 months for Malawi. A single destination-side fee schedule therefore produces sharply unequal mobility outcomes across African travellers.

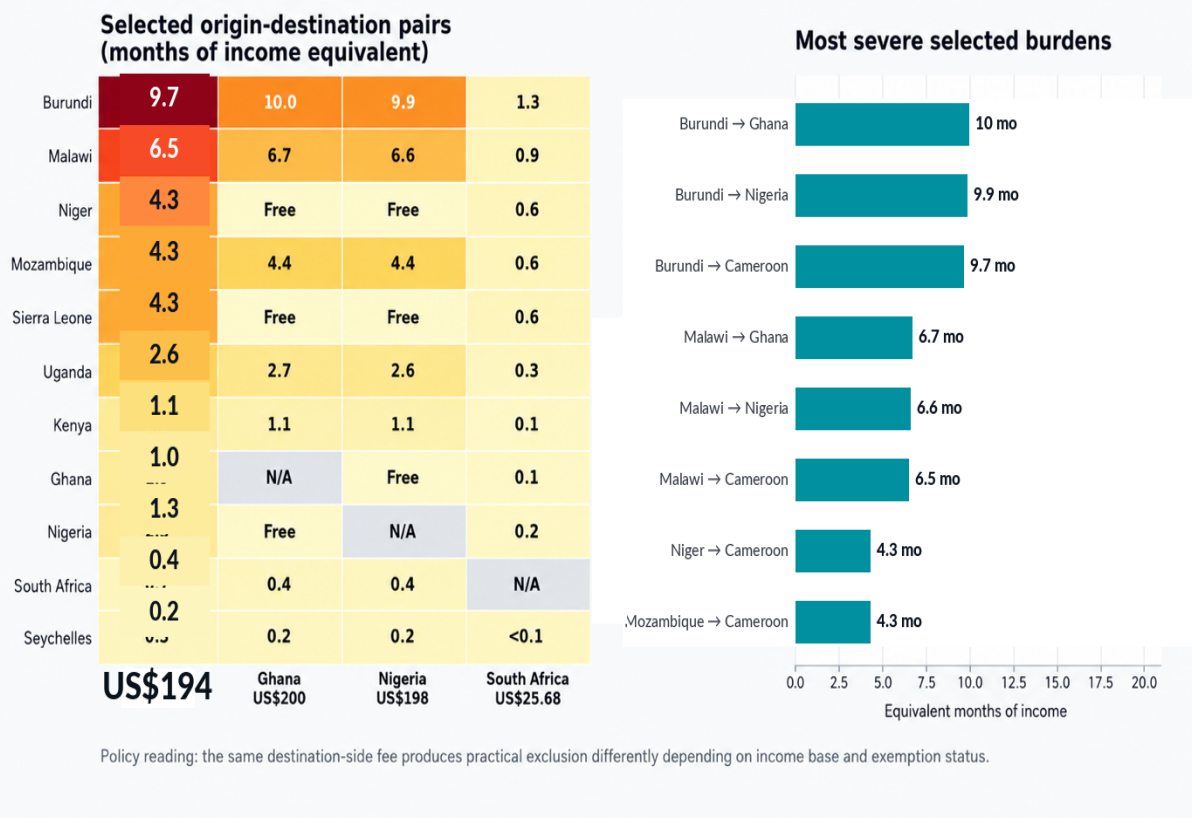
Visa policy is not only about legal availability. It is also about material attainability. A charge that absorbs ten, twelve, or eighteen months of income no longer functions as an ordinary administrative fee. It becomes a prohibitive barrier.

The implications for continental mobility are substantial. Burdens at this level are likely to suppress small-scale trade, exploratory business travel, student mobility, family visits, professional networking, conference attendance, and everyday cross-border movement without institutional sponsorship. Higher-income travellers, officials, and those supported by employers or organisations may still move. Lower-income travellers, especially those operating informally or independently, are more likely to be priced out.

The visualisation below also shows that this outcome is not inevitable. ECOWAS exemptions remove the burden entirely for eligible regional travellers, demonstrating that policy choices can sharply reduce exclusion even where standard visa prices for non-exempt travellers remain high. The most severe burdens identified here are therefore shaped not only by administrative necessity or state capacity, but by how governments define and distribute exemptions.

Figure 3.5. Same Fee, Different Burden

Selected origin-destination pairs, measured as months of income.



The Burden in Human Terms

The abstract percentages and month-equivalent burdens in Figures 3.5 and 3.6 above can obscure the tangible, cumulative impact of these fees on real economic activity. Consider this example: In 2025, a 12-member Ghanaian delegation planning a pan-African cultural and business tour were quoted a total of US\$14,520 in visa fees alone for travel to just 39 countries.²¹ This figure, which excludes all travel, accommodation, and hidden surcharge costs, is more than the annual per capita income in several African nations. For a small business or a cultural group, a cost of this magnitude transforms a cross-continental opportunity into a financial impossibility. It is the cumulative weight of these fees, payable upfront, per country, per person, that most clearly illustrates how the architecture of payment functions as a *de facto* travel ban for all but the wealthiest individuals and institutions.

Box 3.4. An example

Consider a hypothetical case of a 12-member Ethiopian delegation traveling to just one country, Angola, to see Mount Moco. At US\$200 per person, they would pay US\$2400 in visa fees alone for that single destination.

Caveat on income-relative burden

The income-relative analysis uses GNI per capita divided by 12 as a proxy for monthly income. This is a standard comparative metric, but it has two important limitations. First, GNI per capita is an average, not disposable income, and in unequal or highly informal economies it will often understate the burden on ordinary travellers. Second, the visa is paid from disposable resources, not from gross national averages.

The percentages shown in Figure 3.5 should therefore be read as destination-side severity indicators. They compare each destination's total with that destination country's own average monthly income proxy, not with the actual income of the

traveller arriving from elsewhere on the continent.

Consequently, the percentages should be read as lower-bound estimates of the true burden. In countries with high inequality or large informal sectors, the real burden may be substantially higher than the table suggests.

The severity thresholds are illustrative of relative cross-country patterns, not precise predictions of individual hardship. Even so, they sharpen the central finding: in several cases visa cost in Africa is exclusionary.

The income-relative analysis confirms a stark point. For many African travellers, the visa is prohibitive. The next section shows why even that finding understates the full burden.

3.4 What the Headline Fee Does Not Show

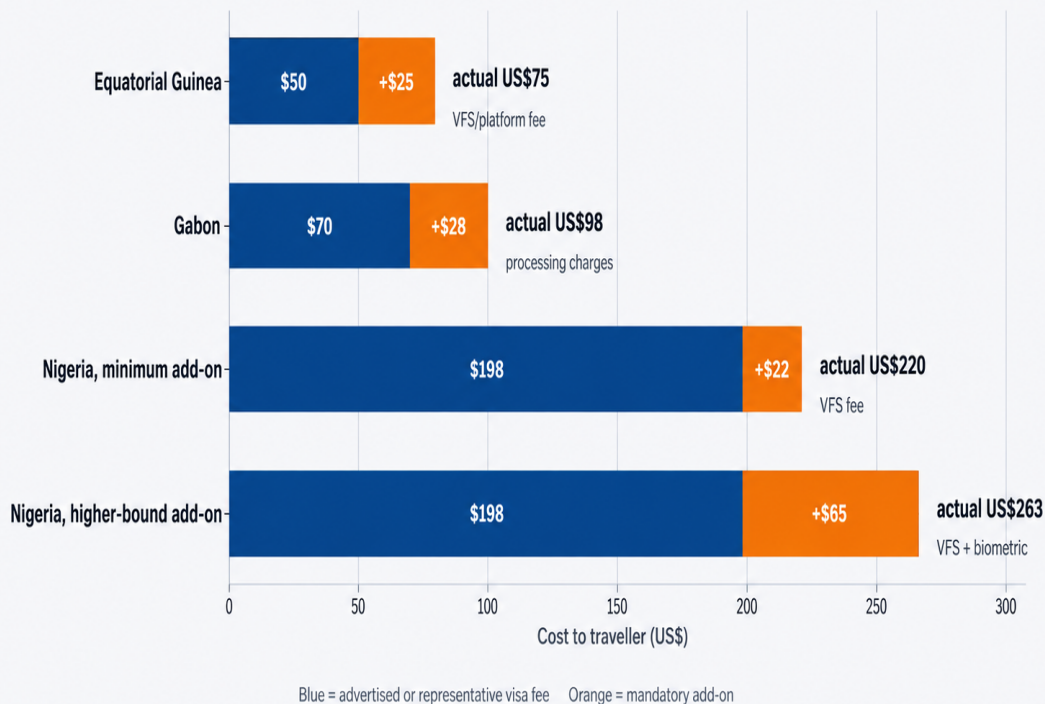
Figure 3.6 shows that the posted visa fee is often not the full fee. For many African travellers, the final cost of lawful entry is shaped by mandatory add-ons, authorised-provider charges, payment fees, biometric charges, and late-disclosed process costs.

Digitisation improves access only when it lowers cost, reduces uncertainty, or both. Where the online route adds unavoidable platform or service-provider charges, it may simply move the burden into a digital payment system.

The figure points to two realities. For travellers, the price encountered at the start of an application may not be the amount ultimately paid. For policymakers, the fastest affordability gains may come from full-price disclosure, direct zero-surcharge state payment channels, and removal of avoidable authorised-provider mark-ups.

Figure 3.6. Posted Fee vs Real Fee

Mandatory or unavoidable authorised charges only.



The ranking is an essential starting point, but it cannot carry the full analytical weight of

the evidence. Three findings qualify the league table and show why reform cannot be

reduced to cutting the headline visa fee

3.4.1 The posted fee is often not the real fee

In several destinations, the posted visa fee understates what the traveller actually pays. Mandatory platform charges, airport sticker fees, service-provider surcharges, and compliance costs lift the real burden above the nominal figure. Equatorial Guinea is the clearest case: the advertised US\$50 e-visa becomes US\$75 once the compulsory VFS surcharge of US\$25 is added. Cabo Verde, Gabon, and Eritrea show similar divergence between posted and effective cost.

3.4.2 Digitisation does not automatically deliver affordability

Digitisation can reduce friction, but it does not automatically reduce cost. Some digital systems genuinely simplify access, but others merely shift the application online while adding mandatory platform charges or revealing the true price only at the payment stage.

A digital channel is an improvement only when it lowers cost, reduces uncertainty, or both. Digital reform should therefore be judged by the traveller's end-to-end burden, not by the mere existence of an online portal.

3.4.3 Opacity is itself a mobility cost

In several destinations, the central problem is unstable or unclear price. Where fee schedules vary by embassy, mandatory charges appear late in the process, or published figures do not match consistently reported payments, travellers cannot budget or plan with confidence. That uncertainty is itself a burden.

Opacity should be treated as a substantive policy problem. Some destinations are costly because they charge a great deal. Others are

alone.

costly because the traveller does not know the final price until late in the process. Both patterns undermine mobility.

The headline fee is therefore only one part of the burden. Hidden charges, uneven digitisation, and opaque pricing make lawful travel costlier than it first appears. A second layer then emerges in the wider travel chain, where for example, air passenger taxes and charges can sharply raise the real price of movement.

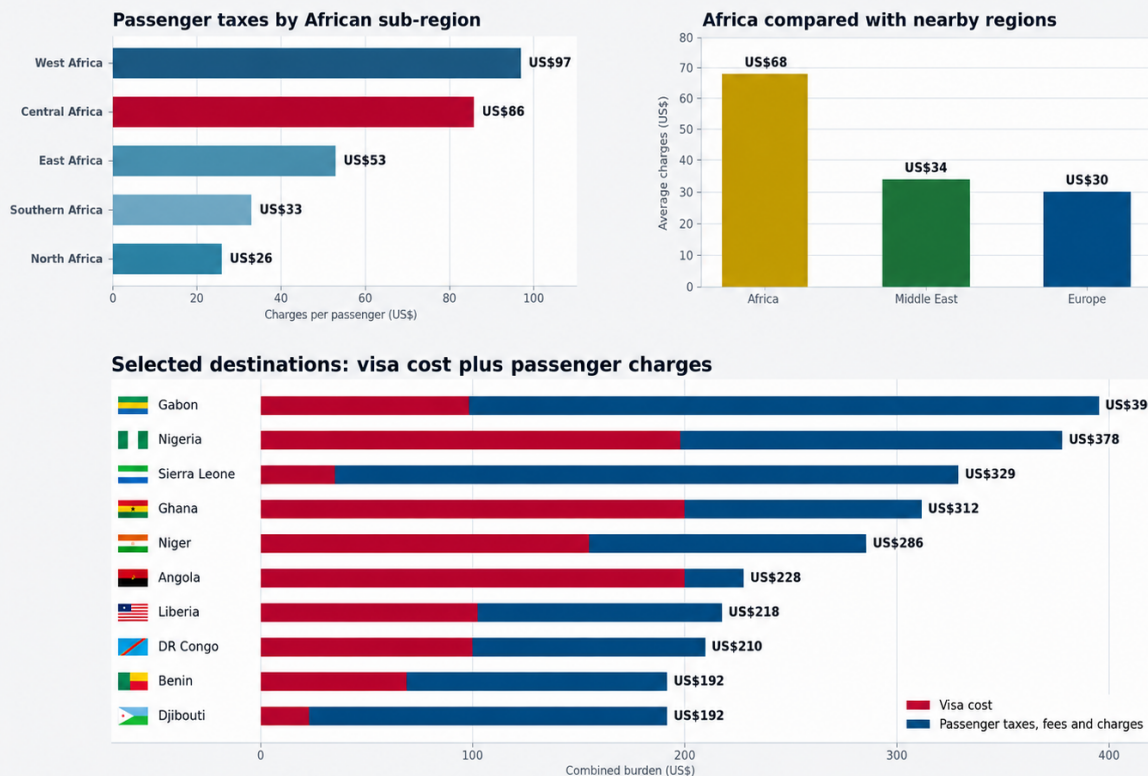
3.4.4 The double penalty: when visa costs meet passenger taxes and charges

For many African travellers, the visa is only the first financial hurdle. A second sits in the cost of the trip itself, through passenger taxes, fees, and charges levied on top of other ticket-related costs. Read together, the visa-cost evidence in this report and AFRAA data on passenger taxes and charges reveal a double penalty in parts of Africa, especially West and Central Africa: travellers pay first to secure permission to move, and again to undertake the journey.

The first figure below shows how these aviation-related charges are distributed across Africa's sub-regions. The pattern is strikingly familiar. AFRAA's 2024 review finds the highest average passenger taxes, fees, and charges on regional departures in West Africa at US\$96.98 and Central Africa at US\$85.84. These levels are well above Eastern Africa at US\$52.82, Southern Africa at US\$33.33, and Northern Africa at US\$26.31. When read alongside the visa-cost patterns presented earlier in this report, the same geography of burden reappears. The regions that already impose the heaviest entry costs are also among those where the journey itself is most heavily taxed.

Figure 3.7. The Double Penalty

Visa costs plus passenger taxes and charges.



Source note: passenger-tax figures are based on AFRAA/IATA/ACIC 2024 data referenced in the chapter. Combined totals use visa costs from the ranking table.

That regional picture matters, but the second visual in figure 3.7 above sharpens the policy significance by placing Africa in comparative perspective. It asks where the burden falls within Africa and how Africa performs against neighbouring regions.

AFRAA’s comparison shows that Africa’s average passenger taxes and charges stand

For integration policy, high passenger taxes and charges function like a tax on mobility. They reduce the practical value of visa waivers, dilute the affordability gains expected from liberalised air services, and weaken the demand effects that the Single African Air Transport Market is meant to unlock.

When the travel-cost stack is inflated, tourism demand weakens, business travel falls, route viability worsens, and secondary African cities become harder to connect sustainably.²² In a continent where physical distance is significant and surface connectivity uneven, aviation-related passenger charges become

at US\$68, compared with US\$34 in the Middle East and US\$30 in Europe. The average passenger-charge burden associated with air travel in Africa is therefore about double that of the Middle East and more than double that of Europe. African travellers are moving within one of the world’s most heavily burdened regional aviation spaces.

more than a transport issue. They become a development constraint.

The matched country sample reinforces this conclusion. Once passenger taxes and charges are added to the report’s visa-related totals for the 22 matched destinations in the figure above, the burden landscape shifts sharply. Gabon rises from 15th place in the ranking to 1st. Sierra Leone rises from 44th to 3rd. Djibouti moves from 48th to 10th, and Benin climbs from 27th to 9th. The affordability problem does not begin and end with the visa window.

The composition of the totals is equally important. In several destinations, passenger taxes are not a minor add-on to a high visa cost. They are the dominant component of the traveller's burden. Sierra Leone, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal, Benin, and Chad illustrate this pattern.

Visa reform alone may not unlock intra-African travel demand in corridors where aviation taxes, fees, and charges remain high. A serious strategy to reduce the cost of movement should pair visa reform with review of passenger taxes, fees, and charges, consistent cost-recovery principles, and closer adherence to ICAO guidance on aviation charges.²³

Box 3.5. ECOWAS Aviation Reform: A Model for Visa Policy?

ECOWAS has adopted a reform intended to take effect from 1 January 2026, requiring abolition of selected non-transport taxes and reduction of passenger service and security charges by 25 per cent. Implementation should be monitored, as early 2026 reporting suggests uneven follow-through.²³

3.5 Conclusion: What the Burden Evidence Shows

Taken together, the evidence shows that the price of lawful intra-African movement is often higher, less transparent, and less

affordable than the posted visa fee suggests. The burden is concentrated in identifiable destination clusters, rises to prohibitive levels when read against income, and is further inflated by hidden charges and passenger taxes outside the headline consular transaction.

Box 3.6. The gendered burden of the visa fee

The analysis of cost in this report, like many policy studies, is necessarily aggregate. It is important to note, however, that the burden of high and opaque visa costs does not fall equally on all African travellers. Women, who constitute an estimated 70 per cent of informal cross-border traders in Africa, face a disproportionate and compounded impact from these fees.

For women traders, the barrier is not only the absolute cost relative to often slim profit margins, but also the specific administrative and social hurdles of the visa process. These include:

- a) Lack of access to formal financial channels: Requirements for online payment via credit card or bank transfer can be exclusionary for those operating primarily in cash economies.
- b) Complex and opaque processes: Navigating fragmented embassy websites and opaque service provider portals imposes a higher time and opportunity cost on individuals who are simultaneously managing household and care responsibilities.
- c) Vulnerability to harassment: The requirement to travel to distant embassies or navigate complex border posts can expose women to heightened risks of harassment and exploitation.

The high cost of lawful entry is therefore not just a tax on mobility; it is a regressive tax that deepens existing gender inequalities in economic participation. Aligning visa reform with the AU's Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade requires a specific focus on reducing both the monetary and administrative barriers that uniquely constrain women's cross-border livelihoods.


This establishes the financial problem. The next question is why some African travellers pay nothing while others face repeated charges. That turns on passport nationality,

waiver design, regional corridors, and reciprocity. The next chapter shifts from the price of entry to the architecture of access.

Chapter 4 The Politics and Patterns of Visa Access

“Mu dai beran rami daya, in ba a gama a shiga ba, a gama a fita.” —
 “We are mice of one hole, if we don't meet going in, we meet going out.”

Chapter 3 showed what African travellers pay to enter African destinations. This chapter explains why those costs arise. It examines the visa burden from the passport side, maps reciprocity net, analyses regional and waiver arrangements, tests whether openness tracks wealth and development, and groups Africa's visa systems into practical reform categories.

 **Interactive dashboard** — see how many countries each African passport opens:
afrikamoja.africa/borders-for-sale/passport-map

4.1 The passport perspective: the origin-side burden

The passport analysis turns the lens around. Instead of asking what each destination charges, it asks what an ordinary citizen of each African country pays when trying to travel across the rest of Africa. That shift matters because it reveals who actually carries the burden of Africa's uneven visa system, whether openness is reciprocated, and whether high visa costs fall mainly on a small number of passports or are spread more broadly across African travellers.

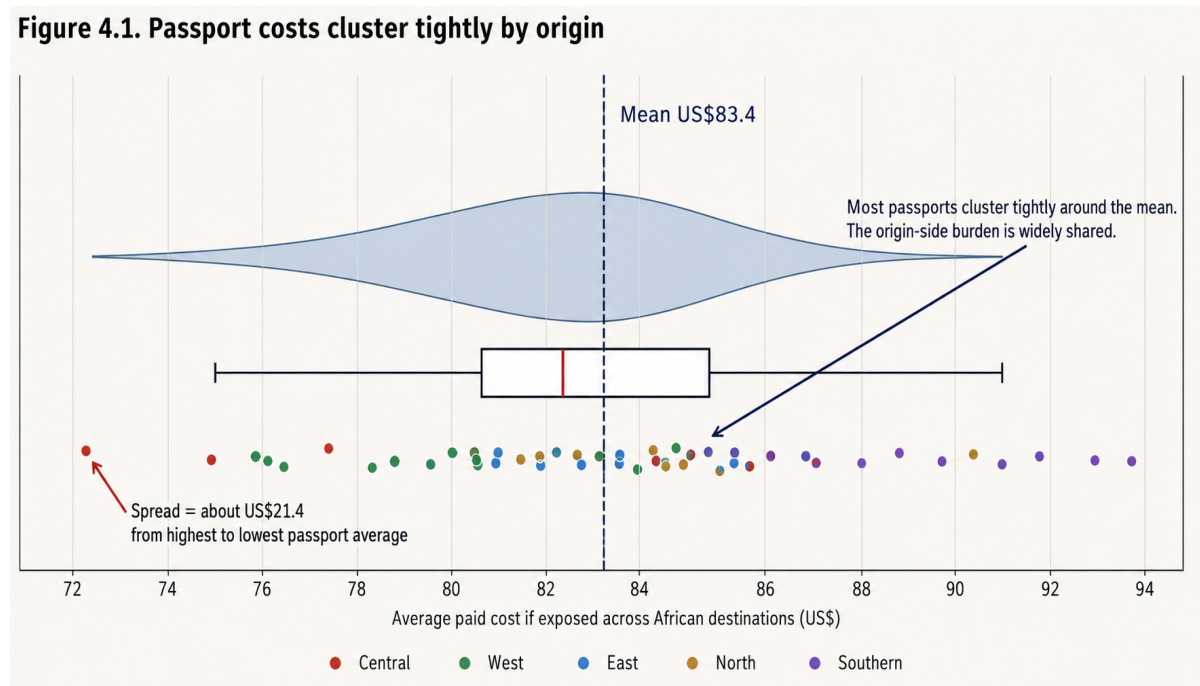
The results point to a clear policy problem. Some of the most expensive passports to travel with are found in countries that are themselves relatively open to African visitors. Being open to others does not automatically mean that a country's own citizens receive easier access in return.

Being open to others does not automatically mean that a country's own citizens receive easier access in return.

For the origin ranking, every African passport was assessed against the other 53 African destinations. Where travel was visa-free, covered by a waiver, or otherwise free of charge, the cost was counted as zero. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 therefore use the full origin-side average, not only the average paid cost among exposed routes.

Figure 4.1 shows how these average costs are distributed across African passports. The key point is simple. The gap between passports is not very wide, but that narrow gap matters. It shows that high travel costs are not a problem for only a few unlucky passport holders. They affect Africans across much of the continent.

Figure 4.1. Passport costs cluster tightly by origin. The burden is shared.



Box 4.1. The narrow origin spread

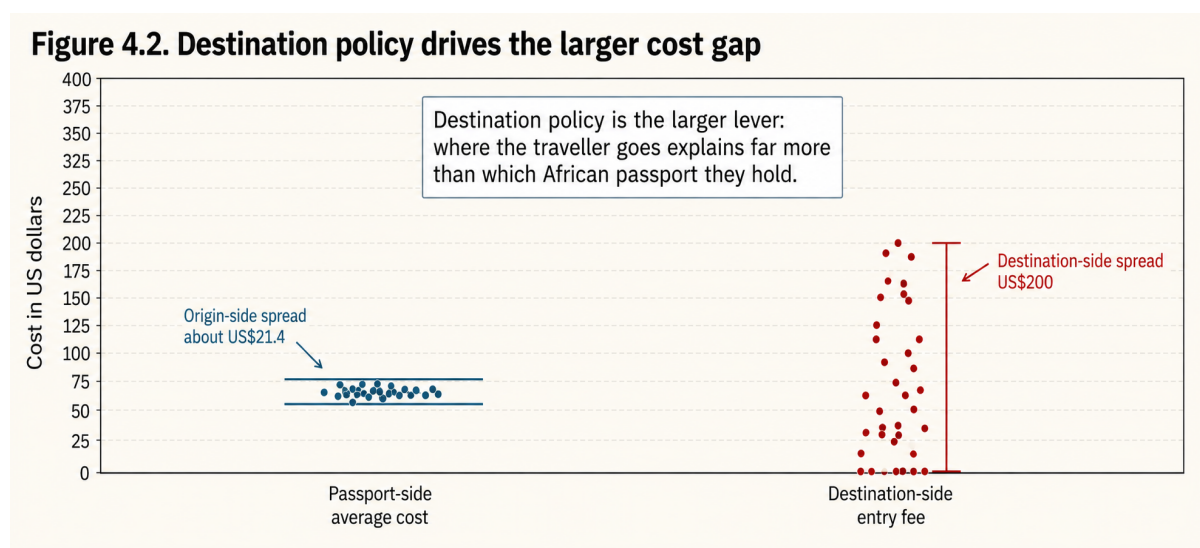
The small gap between the most and least expensive passports points to a wider continental problem. The passport-side spread is far smaller than the gap between destination countries. This is the narrowest variance in the report. High visa costs are not mainly a problem for a few especially disadvantaged passports. They are a burden shared across the continent.

Taken together, the destination and origin analyses reveal a double burden. On the destination side, differences are sharp. Some countries are relatively low-cost, while others are extremely expensive. On the passport side, the spread is much tighter.

That does not mean travellers are protected by nationality. It means that most African passports face the same broad mobility penalty.

Figure 4.2 makes that variance comparison explicit. Destination-side burdens vary widely, while passport-side burdens cluster in a narrow band. The policy implication is direct: destination-side reform remains the faster continental lever, but reciprocity still matters because no African passport is insulated from the wider system.

Figure 4.2. Destination policy drives the larger cost gap. Reform should start there.



The passport-side story therefore has a regional structure as well as a continental one. The next question is whether that burden is connected to the openness states extend to other Africans, or whether some countries open their borders without securing comparable treatment for their own citizens.

4.2 The architecture of openness

Regional Economic Communities remain the strongest institutional mechanism reducing visa costs inside defined mobility corridors. ECOWAS and the EAC show this clearly. Where bloc rules function, member-state citizens benefit from zero-cost entry inside the corridor. But the cost story is not only about how much travellers pay. It is also about how many African countries each destination allows to enter at no cost, and why.²⁴

Some openness is inherited through regional bloc rules. Some is chosen through bilateral

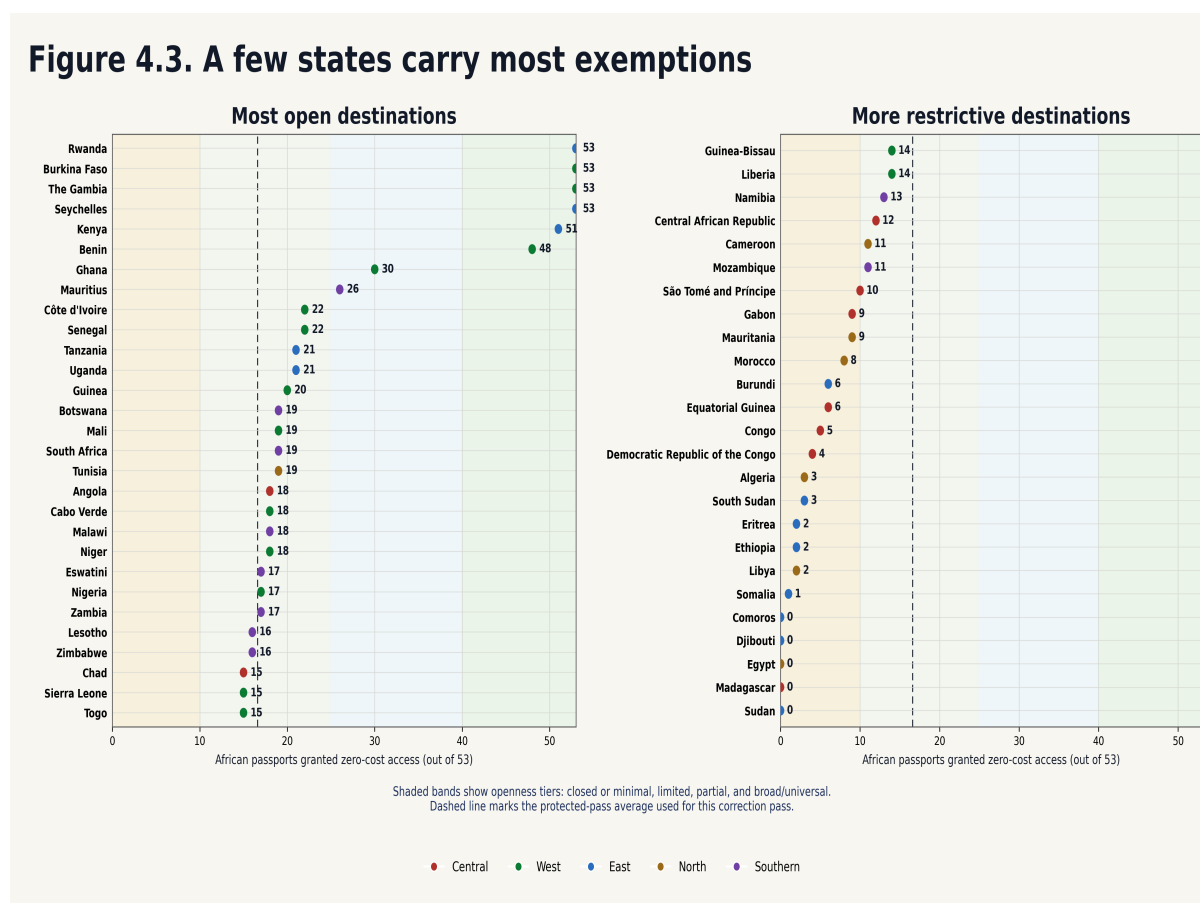
or unilateral decisions. This distinction matters because inherited openness reduces costs inside protected corridors, while chosen openness determines whether Africa functions as a genuinely continental mobility space.²⁵

4.2.1 The landscape of exemptions

The continental distribution of exemptions is sharply skewed. Only a small number of destinations grant universal or near-universal zero-cost access, while a larger group grants relatively few exemptions and a smaller but important cluster grants none at all. On average, an African destination still exempts only a minority of the other 53 African passports. Broad continental openness therefore remains exceptional rather than normal.

Figure 4.3 consolidates the earlier exemption ranking, reverse barrier ranking, and tier chart into one openness spectrum. It shows both the position of every destination and the tier structure of the continent's visa architecture.

Figure 4.3. A few states carry most exemptions. Broad fee-free access remains exceptional.



The spectrum underlines that openness is a policy choice, not an automatic consequence of wealth, location, or administrative capacity. Rwanda, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, and Seychelles sit at the universal end of the exemption spectrum. Kenya and Benin remain near-universal, at 51 and 48 destination exemptions respectively. By contrast, Sudan, Madagascar, Comoros, Egypt, and Djibouti grant no zero-cost access at all, leaving their default posture towards African travellers as paid entry.

Box 4.2. Five countries sit behind a complete visa wall

Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Madagascar, and Sudan still require every other African nationality to obtain paid entry. In reciprocity terms, these five destinations are

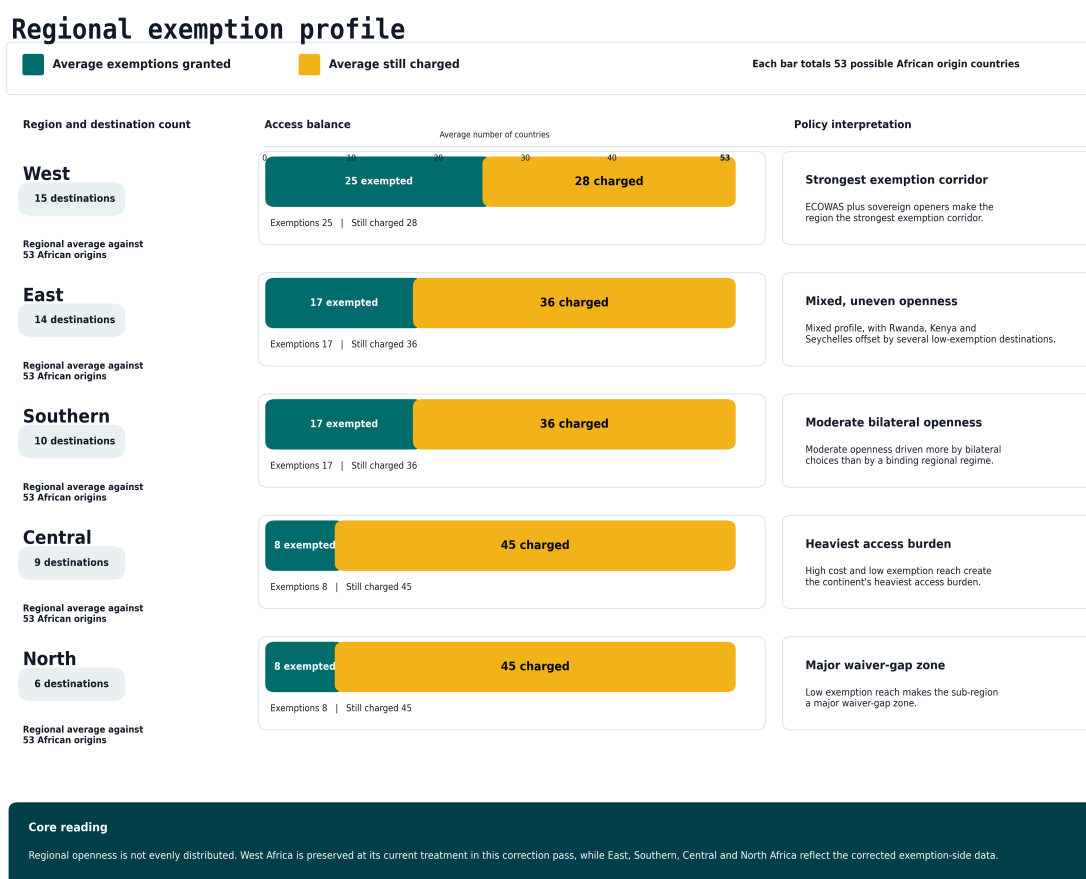
among the clearest cases where visa costs are paid in both directions.

4.2.2 Regional patterns in openness

The regional picture complements the cost analysis in Chapter 3. West Africa grants the highest average number of exemptions, driven by ECOWAS rules and by the unusually open posture of Benin, Burkina Faso, and The Gambia. North Africa sits at the opposite end despite its comparatively stronger development profile.

The regional pattern sharpens the reform agenda. Where REC-based free movement exists, it is doing most of the actual work reducing friction. Where it does not, the cost of closure falls most heavily on cross-regional mobility, especially between North Africa and the rest of the continent.

Figure 4.4. Regional exemption profile by African sub-region



4.2.3 Bloc obligations versus bilateral choice

The next question is what kind of openness the continent is observing. Some exemptions are inherited through regional obligations. Others reflect deliberate sovereign decisions to open beyond those obligations. Inherited openness reduces costs inside protected corridors; chosen openness determines whether Africa functions as a genuinely continental mobility space.

The continent's more open destinations are not open for the same reason. Burkina Faso, Benin, and The Gambia combine ECOWAS obligations with extensive non-REC opening. Rwanda, Kenya, and Seychelles are even more important analytically because their broad reach depends mainly on sovereign choice beyond regional protocol, with Seychelles combining universal visa-exempt

legal access with a paid Travel Authorisation. At the other end, Guinea-Bissau, South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea show that low openness is sometimes the result of limited regional arrangements. This makes the reciprocity question clearer.

4.3 Reciprocity and the cost of being closed

Once the architecture of openness is visible, the reciprocity question becomes sharper: do states that open their borders to other Africans receive comparable treatment in return? If openness is not reciprocated, countries that liberalise entry may still find their own citizens facing costly and restrictive travel elsewhere. This weakens the incentive for reform and slows the wider goals of continental integration.

Figure 4.5. State reciprocity net shows who offer more visa-free access than they receive.



4.3.1 Who benefits without reciprocating

BOX 4.3 RECIPROCITY NOTE

How to read reciprocity in this report

This report measures reciprocity from the state's point of view.

- **Granted** means the number of African countries whose citizens this state allows to enter visa-free.
- **Received** means the number of African countries that allow this state's citizens to enter visa-free.
- **State reciprocity net** = Granted minus Received.
- **A positive number** means the state gives more visa-free access than its citizens receive.
- **A negative number** means the state's citizens receive more visa-free access than the state gives to others.

Note for the campaign tool: The passport campaign tool presents the same data from the

citizen's point of view. It therefore uses the opposite formula: **Passport access gap = Received minus Granted.**

The reciprocity net is the most directly actionable diplomatic finding in the exemption data. It is not simply about which countries grant no exemptions at all. It is about which countries extend no openness beyond what bloc rules compel, even while benefiting from the much wider openness of other African states.

Several of the zero non-REC granters still benefit from the openness of Rwanda, Seychelles, Benin, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, and near-universal Kenya without offering comparable continental access in return. This makes reciprocity a concrete reform target. It also shows why the diplomatically valuable next step is not only expanding formal bloc protocols but persuading relatively closed states to adopt bilateral and cross-regional waivers beyond their immediate neighbourhoods.

Governments that have taken the decision to open their borders to all or most African travellers are effectively subsidising the mobility of citizens from countries that maintain restrictive and costly visa regimes. Over time, this imbalance can erode the domestic coalition for openness. The full reciprocity ledger, including bilateral creditor-debtor relationships, is presented in the Interactive Map Tool.

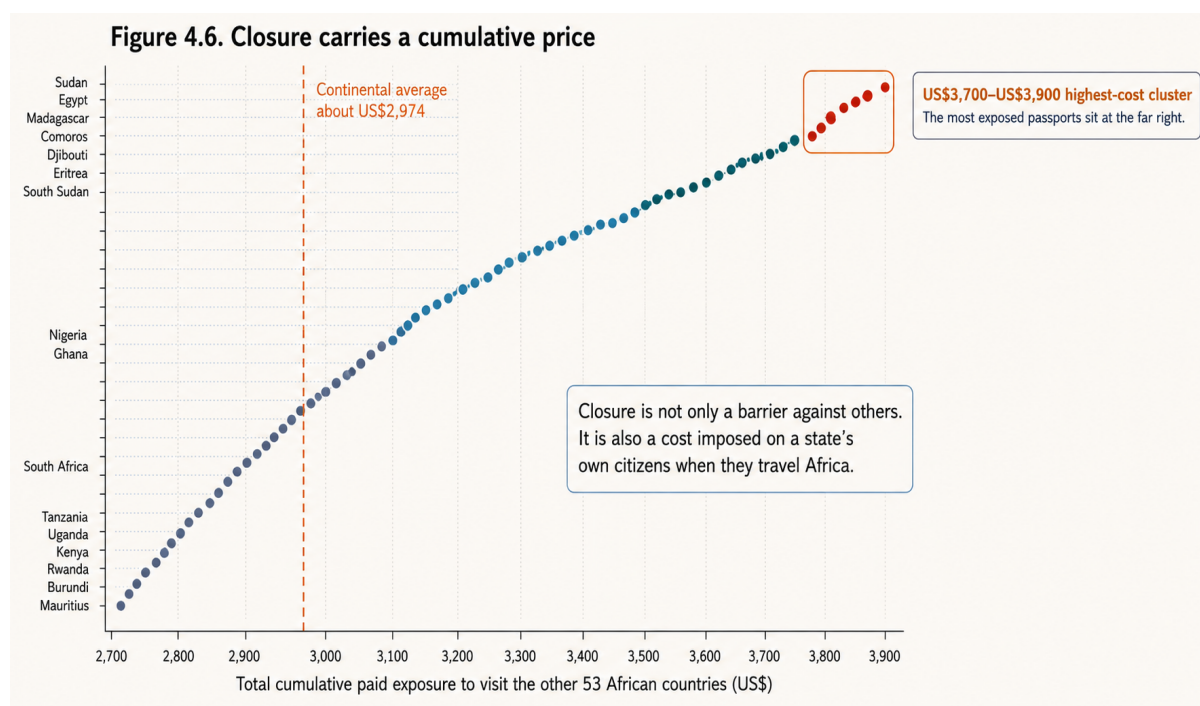
4.3.2 The cost of being closed

The reciprocity net is often framed in terms of diplomatic fairness. But a simple calculation reveals the economic self-harm

of restrictive visa policies. Using the dataset collected in this report, the cumulative burden on citizens can be quantified. For citizens of the most exposed passports, the cumulative cost of visiting the other African countries where payment is required can approach US\$3,900 per person.

This “cost of being closed” metric reframes restrictive visa policies not only as a protective measure for national security, but also as a direct financial penalty imposed by a government on its own citizens’ ability to trade, study, and build networks across the continent.

Figure 4.6. Closure carries a cumulative price. It penalises citizens.



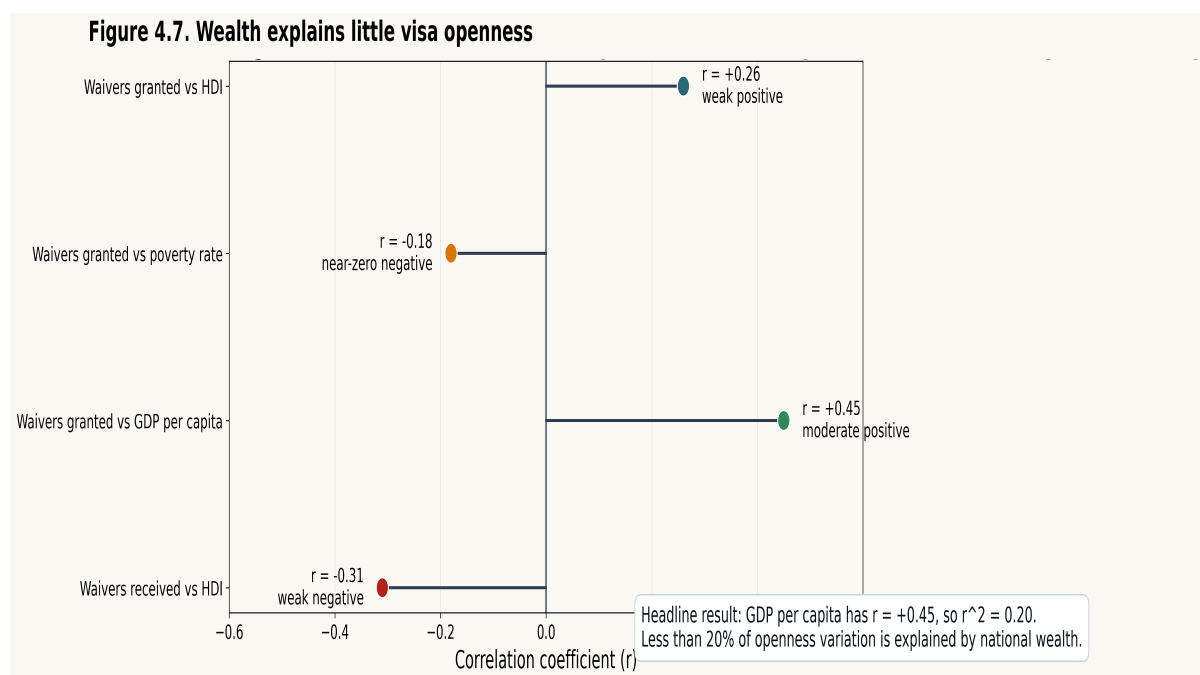
4.4 What explains openness?

The architecture mapped in the preceding sections raises a direct question: what determines whether a country is open or closed? If the pattern tracked wealth or development closely, the explanation would be largely structural. But the evidence points elsewhere.

4.4.1 Correlation with development and income

The exemption data become more policy-relevant when read against development indicators. The question is whether openness tracks wealth, poverty, or human development closely enough to explain the pattern. The answer is no. The earlier table of correlations is replaced here by a visual-first coefficient plot that makes the central finding easier to see.

Figure 4.7. Wealth explains little visa openness. Politics explains more.



A more precise reading of the correlation with GDP per capita provides even stronger support for the policy-choice argument. The r^2 value for this correlation is just 0.20, meaning that less than 20 per cent of the variation in visa openness across African states can be explained by differences in national wealth. The overwhelming majority of the pattern is determined by factors other than income: political will, institutional design, regional commitments, and deliberate sovereign decisions.

Box 4.4 What the correlation result does and does not show


The r^2 result shifts the burden of explanation. If wealth explained most variation, Africa's openness map would








largely be a development story. It is not. Income matters at the margin, but most of the difference still has to be explained by political choice, institutional design, and regional commitment.

4.4.2 The political determinants of openness: beyond wealth and capacity

The correlation analysis narrows the field of explanation. Wealth matters, but it does not explain the map. The remaining variation is better understood through politics and institutional design: who makes the decision, how regional obligations operate, how border systems implement policy, and how governments weigh African mobility against domestic priorities and politics.

Table 4.1. Political determinants of visa openness



 Political predictor	 How it shapes visa openness	 Why it matters analytically
 <p>Political leadership and state strategy</p> <p>01</p>	<p>Executive prioritisation can widen or narrow entry rules quickly, especially when mobility is linked to competitiveness, diplomacy, or destination strategy.</p>	<p>Rapid policy shifts show that visa policy can move faster than structural variables such as income or long-term administrative development.</p>
 <p>Domestic politics and elite framing</p> <p>02</p>	<p>Narratives about jobs, sovereignty, migration pressure, and border control can make restriction politically easier to defend.</p>	<p>Similar-income states still adopt sharply different visa regimes, indicating that internal political framing matters.</p>
 <p>Institutional delivery capacity</p> <p>03</p>	<p>Traveller experience depends on whether border agencies implement legal rules consistently, transparently, and predictably.</p>	<p>Implementation gaps can make nominally open regimes difficult in practice and distort the map seen by travellers.</p>
 <p>Regional commitments and reciprocity</p> <p>04</p>	<p>Binding REC rules make openness more durable, reciprocal, and harder to reverse than purely unilateral arrangements.</p>	<p>ECOWAS outperforms looser regional frameworks on consistency, showing that institutional commitment changes outcomes.</p>

 **Note:** REC = Regional Economic Community.

Leadership matters because visa policy is highly centralised. Rwanda’s move to remove visa requirements for all African

nationals, The Gambia’s earlier opening, and Kenya’s subsequent liberalisation all show that governments can act quickly when

openness is framed as economic strategy rather than as a security concession.

Regional Economic Communities matter because they reduce the fragility of unilateral reform. When openness is embedded in a reciprocal legal framework, it becomes harder to reverse and easier to normalise. ECOWAS remains the continent's clearest example: its free movement regime emerged from political agreement, legal obligation, and an institutional architecture that treats regional mobility as a shared entitlement rather than a discretionary concession.²⁶

4.4.3 Why closure persists

If openness is a choice, so too is closure. The policy question is not only why some states open, but why many still prefer restrictive and costly regimes despite the integration, trade, and tourism gains associated with reform. The answer lies, partly, in the political economy of restriction: revenue incentives, bureaucratic discretion, security narratives, demographic anxieties, and external migration diplomacy can all make closure politically resilient.

In many states, visa systems do more than regulate entry. They generate revenue and allocate discretion. Fees, service charges, processing layers, and opaque border practices can create institutional interests in preserving paid visa regime rather than removing it. A government that wants to liberalise cannot assume that evidence alone will overcome resistance. It may need to replace lost revenue, digitise high-discretion processes, publish all-in costs, and strengthen oversight so that border management is not treated as a quasi-rent system.

Security is the most common public justification for restrictive visa policy. States are right to screen entrants and deny entry where risks are credible. The policy problem begins when a blanket, fee-based visa regime is treated as the main instrument of security rather than as one tool among

many. A defensible reform agenda must separate legitimate screening needs from the routine use of security as a catch-all explanation for economically costly closure.

Law enforcement concerns about fraud, petty crime, drug trafficking, visa overstays, and undocumented work cannot be dismissed lightly. But high visa fees fall most heavily on students, small traders, families, conference delegates, and other low-risk travellers attempting to move lawfully. Organised criminal actors are less likely to be deterred by a US\$200 fee. A more credible approach is risk management by evidence: better watchlist checks, stronger links between immigration and law-enforcement databases, and focused cooperation against specific criminal networks.²⁷

The fear of being “overrun” by more populous neighbours remains politically potent but empirically weak. Migration within Africa is overwhelmingly intra-regional, frequently circular, and often linked to trade, family networks, and seasonal opportunity rather than permanent relocation. Where real governance problems exist, the evidence points back to implementation failure, corruption, weak data systems, and poor border management, not to free movement as such.²⁸

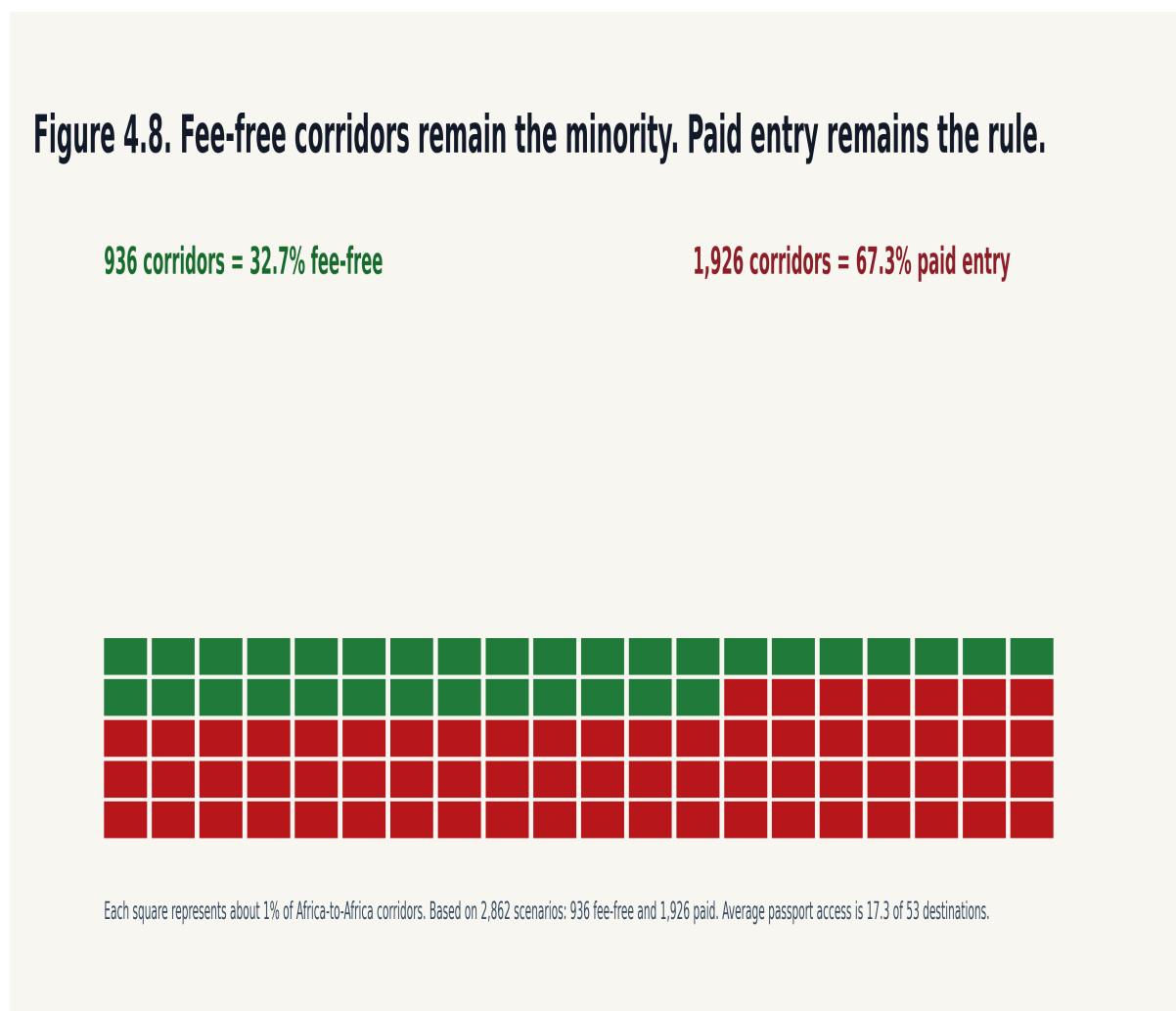
External leverage also matters. In wider migration diplomacy, some governments may hesitate to liberalise intra-African mobility while negotiating with powerful external partners on returns, readmission, and migration management. This makes AU coordination more important, not less.²⁹

4.4.4 From pattern to scale

The bookend statistic in this chapter deserves visual prominence because it translates the architecture into people. Across the full Africa-to-Africa matrix, the typical African passport provides fee-free access to 17.3 of 53 African destinations. In corridor terms, 936 of the 2,862 Africa-to-

Africa scenarios are fee-free, while 1,926 | remain subject to paid entry.

Figure 4.8. Fee-free access remains the minority. Paid entry remains the rule.



4.5 A typology of visa regimes

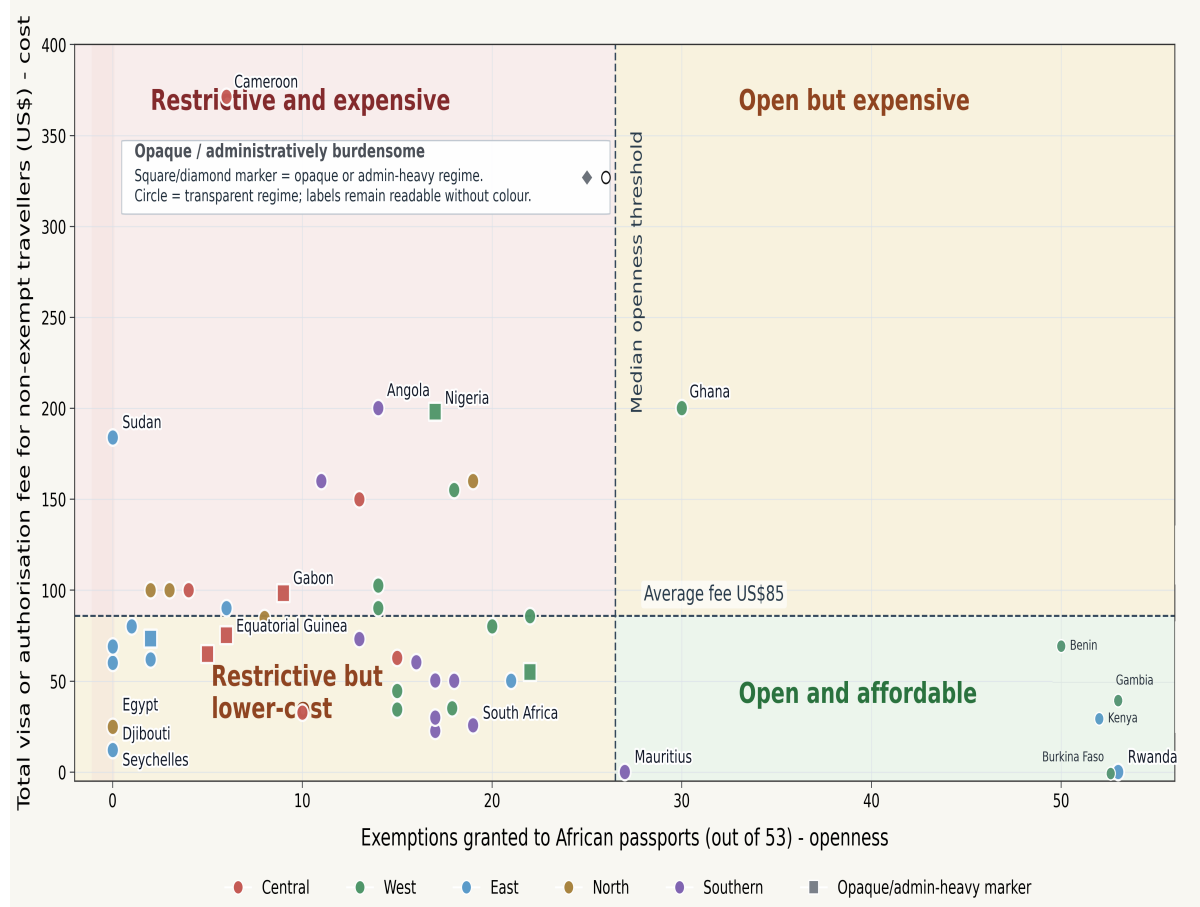
The ranking shows where each destination sits. The typology turns that descriptive picture into a practical reform map by reading openness, cost, and administrative opacity together. The first four categories combine waiver reach and cost. The fifth category, opaque and administratively burdensome, cuts across the others and identifies destinations where poor disclosure

or complex procedures are themselves major reform problems.

Figure 4.9 consolidates the earlier scatterplot and typology matrix into one integrated visual. It prevents an overly simple ranking conversation by showing that different states face different reform problems. Some need cost rationalisation. Others need wider waiver coverage. Others need both, and a smaller group needs transparency reform even where nominal fees are not the highest.

Figure 4.9. Five regime types combine cost, restriction, and opacity. Each needs a different correction. Opaque or administratively burdensome regimes are marked with a diamond icon, cutting across the other quadrants.

Figure 4.9. Five regime types combine cost, restriction, and opacity



The first group, open and affordable, has the strongest base and should focus on preserving gains and widening waiver coverage. The second group, open but expensive, needs cost rationalisation so that broad opening is not undermined by high residual charges on non-exempt travellers. The third group, restrictive but lower-cost, needs wider waiver coverage and simpler entry architecture. The fourth group, restrictive and expensive, requires simultaneous action on both openness and cost. The fifth group, opaque and administratively burdensome, requires transparency reform even where nominal fees are not especially high.

4.6 Conclusion: what the architecture reveals

The evidence in this chapter points to a clear conclusion. Africa's visa map is structured less by nationality alone or wealth alone than by

the interaction of cost, waiver coverage, reciprocity, and institutional choice.

The continent therefore does not display a single mobility regime. It displays a layered architecture: some corridors protected by REC commitments, some widened by sovereign opening, and many still governed by paid entry and narrow reciprocity.

That architecture matters because it clarifies the reform terrain. Some states face a cost problem. Others face an openness problem. Others face both, and a smaller group faces an additional transparency problem.

Box 4.5. The bottom line

The data shows that the typical African passport provides fee-free access to 17.3 of 53 African destinations. Across the full 2,862 Africa-to-Africa travel scenarios, 936 corridors are fee-free and 1,926 corridors remain subject to paid entry. Put differently, 32.7 per cent of Africa-to-Africa corridors are fee-free, while 67.3 per cent still face a paid-entry barrier.

The typology developed in this chapter therefore serves a practical purpose. It moves

the discussion beyond a single ranking and shows that different visa regimes require different forms of correction. The next chapter turns from architecture to consequence by examining what these patterns mean for trade, tourism, inclusion, and the credibility of continental integration.

Mobility restriction in Africa is not random, and it is not structurally preordained. It is patterned, interpretable, and politically made. That is precisely why it can be politically remade.

Chapter 5 The Cost of Closure and the Politics of Reform

“Mgeni njoo, mwenyeji apone.”
— Let the guest
come so that the host may
benefit (heal/get well).

5.1 Introduction: Why Visa Affordability Matters

Building on the evidence and analysis developed in Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter examines the consequences of Africa’s current mobility structure for the continent’s integration, economic opportunity, and strategic trajectory. The chapter focuses on the economic, distributive, institutional, and strategic consequences of making lawful intra-African movement costly, uneven, and unpredictable.

Restrictive visa policy shapes whether traders can test markets, whether investors can scout opportunities, whether students and professionals can circulate, and whether the AfCFTA can function as more than a tariff project.

The policy issue before the African Union is now practical rather than conceptual. A continent committed to trade integration, services liberalisation, and people-centred regionalism cannot treat mobility affordability as a secondary implementation matter. It is part of the integration problem itself.

5.2 The Economic Penalty: GDP, Trade, and Tourism

The developmental case for more affordable movement is not symbolic. It rests on a set of linked channels through which people move opportunity across borders: trade, services, tourism, labour matching, market discovery, investment scouting, knowledge exchange, and informal commerce. When short-stay movement becomes costly, slow, or opaque, these channels weaken together. The result is not simply fewer trips. It is thinner markets, slower business formation, weaker regional value chains, and a more fragmented continental economy.

This is especially important for trade. Businesses do not begin transacting only when a consignment reaches a customs post. Trade begins earlier, with exploratory visits, supplier inspections, contract negotiation, trade fairs, after-sales support, standards verification, and relationship-building. Where short-stay entry is expensive or unpredictable, many transactions fail before they appear in formal trade statistics. Visa cost can therefore operate as a pre-trade barrier.

The wider literature supports that interpretation. World Bank analysis of the African Continental Free Trade Area has shown that a large share of the expected gains comes not only from tariff liberalisation, but also from reducing red tape, lowering compliance costs, and easing the practical obstacles that keep firms from trading across borders.³⁰ Eric Neumayer’s work adds a sharper point: visa restrictions materially reduce bilateral trade and foreign direct investment.³¹ Visa policy therefore shapes economic geography because it changes who can meet, explore, and transact across borders.

This is particularly important in Africa, where intra-African trade remains below potential and many cross-border opportunities are relationship-intensive, service-linked, and

still emerging. A continent trying to deepen regional value chains cannot treat the cost of moving traders, technicians, consultants, investors, and service providers as marginal. It is part of the broader trade-cost environment.

AU and AfDB work on regional integration has long linked freer movement of people to growth, productivity, and deeper market integration.³² The mechanism is intuitive. When business travellers, service suppliers, investors, and professionals face fewer entry barriers, the effective size of the market expands, and transaction costs fall.³³

For that reason, the report's affordability findings should be read not only as a fairness or solidarity issue but as a destination-competitiveness issue. As noted earlier, an African traveller often faces a Schengen-like fee burden merely to access a single African state. Europe's Schengen short-stay visa covers access to 29 countries. In Africa, comparable or higher costs can attach to entry into one country. This makes intra-African travel appear poorer value, more uncertain, and less attractive than it should be, even when the destination itself is commercially or culturally appealing.

The costs of closure are not uniform across sectors, but several channels are clear. Tourism loses immediately when regional travellers are diverted by visa fees, slow processing, or uncertainty. Conference economies, airlines, hotels, and tour operators all depend on entry systems that are predictable as well as lawful.³⁴

The direct visa fee is only part of the burden. Embassy travel, courier costs, document procurement, waiting time, and lost commercial opportunities can raise the effective cost of movement well beyond the posted amount. Even moderate fee regimes can therefore remain economically restrictive.

The economic case for easier intra-African movement extends beyond trade in goods. A 2024 study examining the relationship

between short-term labour mobility and firm-level innovation found that a 10 per cent increase in short-stay travel per 10,000 people is associated with a 0.43 per cent rise in the probability of innovation.³⁵ In Africa, short-term mobility enhances the likelihood of innovation by 0.4 percentage points more than in other parts of the world, a statistically and economically meaningful difference.³⁶ Business visitors, technicians, consultants, and service suppliers carry knowledge, observe practices, build trust, and adapt ideas across borders. Where short-stay travel remains expensive or administratively heavy, those innovation transmissions are stifled at source. For AfCFTA implementation, this is a competitiveness issue: a continental market designed to deepen production and service linkages cannot price out the movement through which firms learn and upgrade.

Reform experience already shows that travellers respond. In the Ghana-South Africa corridor, official data show 38,521 Ghanaian visitors to South Africa between April 2024 and March 2025 against a projection of 18,590, a 207.2 per cent performance rate following the visa waiver.³⁷ This single corridor cannot prove a continental rule, but it is consistent with the hypothesis that lowering entry friction can unlock suppressed demand. The policy lesson is conditional: where demand is already strong and the main barrier is administrative cost, waivers can produce rapid increases.

The Ghana-South Africa corridor illustrates how quickly suppressed demand can be unlocked when entry friction falls. A 2017 UNCTAD report on tourism in Africa found that intra-African travellers already constitute the primary growth driver for the sector, and that tourism contributed an estimated 8.5 per cent to Africa's GDP while supporting over 21 million jobs.³⁸ Those figures predate much of the continent's recent air-services liberalisation and the full operationalisation of the AfCFTA, suggesting that the potential economic contribution of

easier intra-African travel is now larger. When high visa fees, mandatory surcharges, and unpredictable processing deter regional tourists, conference delegates, and business visitors, the losses are concrete: hotel bookings not made, flights not filled, restaurants not visited, and local suppliers not contracted.

Recent reforms also show that change is administratively feasible. Kenya now exempts most African citizens from both visas and electronic travel authorisations. Zambia's January 2025 reform broadened visa-free access significantly. After the report's 31 December 2025 data lock, Ghana announced free e-visas for African travellers from 25 May 2026. Together, these cases show that states can lower mobility costs through different legal and administrative pathways.

Kenya and Zambia chiefly demonstrate reform feasibility. Ghana demonstrates affordability reform where entry remains authorisation-based rather than visa-free.

Rwanda shows how visa liberalisation can be integrated into a broader national strategy around conference business, tourism, services, and hub positioning.

The strongest policy lesson from Rwanda is that easier African entry can be framed as destination competitiveness policy.

Liberalisation is therefore not only a concession to travellers. It is a tool of destination growth.

5.3 The AfCFTA Missing Link

The mobility logic of AfCFTA is narrower and more specific than the broader tourism or travel argument. Many forms of longer-term economic engagement begin with temporary movement by business visitors, consultants, specialists, and other service-linked actors.

The same applies to skills circulation and knowledge exchange. Universities, firms, and public institutions benefit when

students, researchers, consultants, and specialised professionals can move quickly across the continent. Where visa systems are costly or cumbersome, African talent circulates outward more easily than inward.

The AfCFTA covers goods and services, including transport, finance, communications, tourism, and professional services. Those sectors depend on technicians, consultants, investors, and business visitors being able to move without prohibitive short-stay barriers.

By early 2026, 49 AU member states had ratified the AfCFTA, while the Free Movement Protocol still had only four ratifications. Africa has therefore moved much faster to liberalise trade than to ease the movement of the people who make that trade work in practice.

The contradiction is operational. Traders, service suppliers, investors, logistics professionals, and technicians cannot use the continental market as easily as the legal architecture assumes if mobility remains a separate or secondary agenda.

Visa affordability is therefore an AfCFTA delivery issue. Until lawful intra-African movement becomes materially easier and cheaper, the agreement's promise will remain only partially realised.

Box 5.1. The global mobility asymmetry in figures

- a) ~US\$180–200 million: estimated total Schengen visa application fees paid by African nationals in 2023, based on Africa's share of the more than 10.3 million Schengen short-stay applications lodged worldwide (about 24 per cent) and the then-prevailing €80 application fee.
- b) ~US\$60 million: estimated non-refundable fees paid in 2023 by African applicants whose Schengen visas were refused, representing approximately 42 per cent of the €130 million in lost fees attached to rejected Schengen applications globally that year.
- c) 54 vs. 1: the African Union has 54 member states. Collectively, they represent a market of more than 1.4 billion people. Negotiating as a bloc would transform their bargaining position on mobility access.
- d) 29 vs. 1: Europe's Schengen short-stay visa covers 29 countries, while comparable or higher costs can attach to entry into a single African destination.

5.4 Income-Based Exclusion: Who Gets Left Behind

Visa cost excludes most sharply at the margin of affordability. It weighs heaviest on travellers with low working capital, narrow margins, limited time, and weak access to formal channels. That burden falls on women informal cross-border traders, youth entrepreneurs, first-time exporters, small firms, and travellers moving for family or livelihood reasons rather than corporate business.

UN Women estimates that around 70 per cent of informal cross-border trade in Africa is conducted by women.³⁹ These traders often already face harassment, extortion, confiscation of goods, limited access to finance, poor information, and long delays at borders. High visa fees, hidden surcharges, and document-heavy procedures add one more layer of exclusion. A visa cost of roughly US\$100 to US\$200 can amount to several weeks of trading profit and, in some

corridors, the difference between legal travel and irregular crossing.

The exclusionary effect of high visa costs concerns who is excluded and where the development gains from easier movement are most needed. A 2022 study on tourism development in Sub-Saharan Africa found that the sector's positive impact on human development indicators, including health, education, and living standards, is strongest in countries with the lowest development scores.⁴⁰ In other words, the countries whose citizens are most burdened by high visa fees are also among those where easier intra-African travel could generate the largest development returns. Costly mobility therefore carries a double penalty: immediate hardship for the traveller and a foregone development dividend for the country left behind.

The visa barriers documented in this report impose costs that no GDP model can fully capture. They erode the human ties on which Pan-Africanism depends. Campaigners who drove 40,000 kilometres across the continent in the name of African unity found that the system they were challenging had already cost them US\$11,800 in visa fees alone.⁴¹ In some cases, it is easier for a West African to secure a Schengen visa than to obtain visas for parts of Southern Africa.⁴² African schools have organised cultural exchange camps in the Netherlands rather than in neighbouring African countries because moving children within Africa is too costly and cumbersome.⁴³ Such examples show how costly mobility weakens the lived idea of a shared African identity.

That human loss is also strategic. High visa costs thin out the everyday encounters through which continental integration becomes real: students discovering other African societies, artists and athletes building audiences across borders, researchers and professionals forming networks, families sustaining ties, and first-

time travellers learning to see the continent as a lived common space.

Research consistently shows that contact reduces prejudice and strengthens social trust, while African evidence suggests that citizens living closer to borders are more likely to support free movement than those farther away.⁴⁴ Yet Africa continues to price many of these encounters out of reach, starving itself of the informal exchanges that build solidarity, soften stereotypes, and generate internal soft power. Europe has invested for decades in schemes such as Erasmus+ to turn mobility into identity. Africa, by contrast, still makes it too difficult for many of its own people to meet one another.

The same logic applies to SMEs and youth-led enterprise. Large firms can sometimes absorb high fees and administrative friction. Smaller actors usually cannot. High mobility costs therefore tilt the benefits of regionalisation towards better-capitalised incumbents and away from constituencies whose participation would make integration broader, more competitive, and more inclusive.

Mobility affordability also has an institutional dimension. Agenda 2063, the African Passport initiative, the Single African Air Transport Market, and the Free Movement Protocol all assume that movement is part of the infrastructure of integration. Citizens are more likely to believe in regionalism when they can experience it through study, trade, conferences, tourism, family visits, and professional exchange. Costly and opaque entry systems weaken the credibility of one of integration's most visible promises.

The cost of inaction is an active subsidy to non-African hubs and a steady erosion of Africa's own service corridors and commercial networks. The same 2022 study that found tourism's development impact strongest in lower-human-development countries also implies that those economies

are most vulnerable to being bypassed when intra-African travel remains expensive and cumbersome.⁴⁴ A regional trader who cannot afford multiple visa fees, or a conference organiser who routes an event to a visa-free external destination, contributes to a pattern in which less developed African economies lose visitor spending, business formation, and market integration. The strategic erosion scenario is therefore also an inequality scenario. Delaying reform locks in a mobility architecture in which citizens of lower-income African countries pay the highest relative price to move while their economies forgo the development gains that easier travel could help unlock.

Research consistently shows that contact reduces prejudice and strengthens social trust, while African evidence suggests that citizens living closer to borders are more likely to support free movement than those farther away. Yet Africa continues to price many of these encounters out of reach, starving itself of the informal exchanges that build solidarity, soften stereotypes, and generate internal soft power.

5.5 External Mobility Politics and Leverage

The consequences documented above also have an external dimension. Africa's internal visa fragmentation does not end at the continent's borders. It weakens collective bargaining power in a global mobility order where African travellers already face some of the world's highest external barriers.⁴⁵

The contrast is striking. While African governments debate whether to reduce or eliminate visa fees for fellow Africans, their own citizens are subjected to the world's most restrictive and sometimes humiliating visa regimes when seeking to travel beyond the continent.

Independent analysis of European Commission visa statistics and data compiled by the LAGO Collective indicates that in 2023, African nationals lodged approximately 24 per cent of the more than 10.3 million Schengen short-stay visa applications submitted worldwide. At the then-prevailing application fee of €80, with African applicants paying in the region of US\$180 to US\$200 million to Schengen consulates in 2023 alone. Of that amount, approximately US\$60 million was paid by African applicants whose visas were ultimately refused, representing about 42 per cent of the €130 million in non-refundable fees attached to rejected Schengen applications globally in that year. In 2024, following the increase in the application fee to €90 on 11 June, the global cost of refused Schengen applications rose to approximately €145 million, with African applicants again accounting for a disproportionate share.⁴⁶ None of these figures captures the ancillary costs borne by applicants, including travel to embassies and visa centres, document preparation, biometric appointments, courier and agency processing fees, legal advice, or lost economic opportunity.

The pattern represents a direct wealth transfer from African individuals, businesses, and families to European consular services. It is a mobility tax levied disproportionately on the citizens of a continent that already faces significant development financing gaps, and one that operates without guarantee of entry and without refund where entry is refused. The European and North American visa systems together extract hundreds of millions of dollars annually from African applicants on this basis, while the rejection rates faced by African nationals remain among the highest of any global region.

Africa's self-inflicted competitive disadvantage

This global context reframes Africa's internal visa fees as a self-inflicted competitive disadvantage in a world where mobility is increasingly a form of capital. The continent's entrepreneurs, academics,

artists, and professionals are not only constrained by European and North American barriers; they are also taxed and delayed by their own governments when attempting to travel, trade, and collaborate within Africa.

The result is a double penalty. African travellers face some of the highest external barriers of any global region while also navigating a fragmented and expensive internal mobility landscape. Few other regions impose comparable cumulative costs, combining high Schengen visa rejection rates with significant internal visa fees.⁴⁶ This is a structural impediment to Africa's competitiveness and integration into global value chains.

The case for collective bargaining

This asymmetrical relationship between Africa and its external partners is not, however, an immutable fact of international relations. It persists in part because African states negotiate visa and migration matters individually, bilaterally, and from a position of relative weakness. A single African country seeking to improve visa access for its citizens to the Schengen area has limited leverage. But a bloc of 54 African Union member states negotiating collectively would possess immense bargaining power.

The European Union operates a formal visa leverage mechanism under its Visa Code, which explicitly links visa facilitation and visa-free access to third countries' cooperation on readmission, the acceptance of deported migrants. This mechanism is applied unilaterally and often without meaningful reciprocity. African states are expected to accept the return of their nationals (and in some cases third-country nationals) as a precondition for even discussing improved visa access for their citizens.⁴⁷

A coordinated pan-African strategy could fundamentally rebalance this dynamic. But, how can a continent that has not demonstrably liberalised internal mobility possess the moral and political authority to demand reciprocal treatment from external

partners. Internal reform and external bargaining are mutually reinforcing.

This section points to a dual external strategy that complements internal reform. African states need to liberalise intra-African mobility for economic reasons, and they also need a stronger collective platform from which to negotiate fairer treatment for African travellers beyond the continent.

The current system leaves the continent paying twice: once through self-imposed internal friction, and again through weak external leverage.

5.6 The Strategic Erosion Scenario: The Cost of Inaction

The "do-nothing" scenario is not one of static inconvenience. It is one of active strategic erosion, in which the continent's integration gains are steadily undermined by the gravitational pull of more accessible and affordable global hubs.

5.6.1 The subsidy to non-African hubs

High visa costs and cumbersome procedures function as an unintentional subsidy from African economies to non-African aviation and business centres. Consider the case of a Ghanaian entrepreneur seeking to source textiles for her fashion business. She identifies potential suppliers in Egypt and in Dubai. The Egyptian option requires a paid visa, an uncertain processing timeline, and additional travel costs before she can even enter the market. The Dubai option is visa-free for Ghanaian passport holders, offers streamlined online arrival registration, and is served by frequent, competitively priced flights. The visa-cost and requirements differential alone, may be sufficient to tip the commercial decision toward Dubai, even if the Egyptian supplier offers a slightly better product price.

This is not an isolated anecdote. It is a systematic feature of the current mobility architecture. Every dollar an African

businessperson spends on an intra-African visa is a dollar not spent on an African hotel, an African restaurant, or an African supplier relationship. Conversely, every dollar saved by choosing a visa-free external hub represents a transfer of African economic activity, business meetings, trade fairs, financial transactions, and tourism spending, out of the continent. The AfCFTA's ambition to create a single continental market is directly undermined when the cost of accessing that market is higher than the cost of accessing a competing market 5,000 kilometres away.

5.6.2 The hollowing out of regional service corridors

The immediate risk is corridor erosion. Professional services, finance, logistics, and technology expand through repeated short business travel: site visits, client meetings, troubleshooting, trust-building, and contract maintenance. If those trips remain expensive and cumbersome, firms will service African markets from easier external hubs, and regional service corridors will thin before they fully form. The loss is not only to movement. It is to the commercial ecosystems that the AfCFTA is supposed to deepen.

5.7 Conclusion: From Cost to Strategy

The evidence now defines the reform task. The costs identified here are cumulative rather than isolated: weaker market discovery, thinner service corridors, reduced destination competitiveness, and a narrower social base for integration because lower-capital actors are excluded first.

The recommendations that follow operationalise this finding by translating the cost-of-closure evidence into national, regional, and continental reform options.

Chapter 6 Recommendations

الضيف يأتي برزقه — *Ad-ḍayf yāti bi-rizqihi* "The guest comes bearing his own provision."

This chapter translates the report's findings into policy recommendations for member states, Regional Economic Communities, AU organs, and implementation partners.

The evidence points to a practical policy conclusion. For many Africans, the binding constraint on lawful intra-African travel is not only the existence of an entry route, but the cost, opacity, and administrative burden attached to that route.

Mobility affordability should be treated as integration infrastructure, not as a minor consular detail.

The decision facing the African Union is whether member states and continental institutions will address mobility frictions with the seriousness applied to trade facilitation, air connectivity, customs modernisation, and digital public systems.

The continent's own experience shows that reform is possible. ECOWAS demonstrates that reciprocal visa-free movement can be normalised through collective rules. The East African Community shows that even partial convergence can reduce friction when states align administrative practice. The lesson is not that every region is at the same stage. It is that mobility improves when governments treat movement as part of integration policy rather than as a residual consular function.

This chapter proposes a sequenced reform agenda. It begins with immediate national measures that can lower cost and uncertainty quickly, then turns to corridor-based, REC-level, and inter-REC reforms that can widen waiver coverage and improve convergence, and ends with continental actions that strengthen accountability, comparability, and implementation support.

Africa does not need to wait for perfect continent-wide treaty implementation before reducing the price of lawful movement. It does need sequencing that is politically credible, operationally useful, and consistent with legitimate state interests in security and border management.

Table 6.1. Guiding principles for the reform agenda

Principle	What it means in practice
Affordability	The total official cost of lawful travel for African nationals should fall, not merely be reclassified or shifted onto digital platforms and service intermediaries.
Transparency	Travellers should be able to see the full price, documentary requirements, processing time, and permitted stay before starting an application.
Proportionality	High-friction tools should be reserved for higher-risk cases. Low-risk, high-value travel should move through lighter, faster channels.
Reciprocity and convergence	Member states and RECs should widen waiver coverage in ways that build collective confidence, deepen reciprocity, and are harder to reverse.
Implementation realism	Recommendations should match the tools actually available: national adoption, REC coordination, AU guidance, peer review, and technical support.

6.1 Immediate national actions

The first reform layer should focus on measures that can materially reduce cost and uncertainty under existing national authority. This is where the report's diagnosis is strongest. Many of the burdens documented in the dataset are not products of unavoidable legal obligation. They are administrative design choices about pricing, disclosure, payment architecture, documentary requirements, and processing practice.

6.1.1 Publish complete fee schedules and eliminate hidden mandatory charges

Every member state should publish one authoritative short-stay visa schedule for African nationals. That schedule should

state, in one place, the visa fee, all mandatory processing or platform charges, the ordinary processing time, the permitted length of stay, the required supporting documents, and the applicable channel for submission. The same information should appear on immigration websites, foreign ministry websites, and embassy pages in a consistent format.

Uncertainty is part of the burden. Where travellers discover compulsory charges, extra service fees, or additional documentary conditions only at the final stage, the state imposes discretion and avoidable delay as well as cost. The first practical test of reform should be simple: no African traveller should encounter a mandatory official charge or document condition late in the process that was not clearly disclosed at the start.

No African traveller should encounter a mandatory official charge that cannot be seen, explained, and justified before the application begins.

6.1.2 Adopt a transitional cap for ordinary short-stay visa charges

Member states that still maintain paid short-stay visa regimes for African nationals, especially those charging above US\$50 once compulsory surcharges are included, should consider moving towards a transitional US\$50 ceiling. The report's cost distribution supports US\$50 as a reasonable interim benchmark. It sits well below the median paid-destination burden and below the lower quartile, yet several states already meet or improve on it. The benchmark is transitional; it does not replace the long-term objective of zero-cost short-stay access. It gives governments an immediate, measurable target for fee reduction while broader liberalisation is phased in.

6.1.3 Make digital systems cheaper, faster, and clearer

Digitisation should remain part of the reform package only where it reduces friction rather

than repackaging it. E-visas, electronic travel authorisations, and online pre-clearance systems can reduce processing time and consular visits. They become regressive when they raise the total cost, force applicants through paid intermediaries, limit payment options, or reproduce the same documentary burden in a more confusing form.

For African nationals, a digitised process should shorten time to authorisation, reduce physical attendance, improve payment accessibility, and make the full cost easier to understand. It should not shift cost and complexity onto the traveller.

6.1.4 Create simplified channels for low-risk, integration-relevant travel

Member states should create simplified mobility channels for categories of travel that are central to continental integration and generally low-risk in immigration terms. These include business visitors, conference participants, accredited students, researchers, artists, sports delegations, medical travellers, and registered cross-border traders. For these groups, the default should be visa-free entry, visa on arrival, or a light-touch digital authorisation with minimal documentation and a short processing window.

This recommendation is strategically important because the clearest gains from easier movement arise in precisely these categories. They carry contracts, services, networks, visitor spending, cultural exchange, and market information. An AfCFTA business meeting, research collaboration, or regional trade fair that still requires a slow and expensive pre-travel visa process exposes the gap between continental ambition and administrative design.

6.1.5 Use the report's typology to target reform more intelligently

Immediate reform should not proceed through a one-size-fits-all script. The report's own typology implies differentiated intervention. Open but expensive states should prioritise cutting fees and mandatory surcharges. Restrictive but relatively low-cost

states should prioritise widening exemptions. Restrictive and expensive states need both. A fifth cross-cutting problem, opacity and administrative heaviness, should trigger transparency reform because without full disclosure governments cannot credibly demonstrate progress.

This differentiated approach allows governments to start where the marginal reform gain is largest rather than treating every state as if it faces the same problem in the same form.

6.1.6 Mandate transparent pricing and eliminate deceptive digital architectures

As identified in Chapter 3, digitisation has often failed to deliver affordability because opaque pricing models hide mandatory surcharges until the final stages of payment. Member states should therefore require all digital visa platforms to meet two minimum standards.

- a) **All-in pricing:** The final cost displayed at the point of payment initiation should include all mandatory platform, biometric, bank, and service-provider fees. Additional compulsory charges should not appear only at the final step of the application.
- b) **Zero-surcharge channel:** Where a government chooses to outsource visa processing to a commercial partner that imposes a service fee, it should also maintain a direct state payment channel for applicants who cannot or do not wish to pay the premium.

6.1.7 Align visa and aviation charge reform

The evidence in the report shows that high visa costs and high passenger taxes or fees often concentrate in the same corridors. Reform should therefore not stop at the visa counter. Member states should task their transport, finance, and interior authorities to review the combined entry-cost stack for key regional routes, with the explicit goal of reducing the total fiscal barrier to intra-African travel rather than only one component of it.

6.2 Medium-term reforms by member states and RECs

The second reform layer should widen actual mobility corridor by corridor and region by region. This is where Africa can move from administrative repair to structured convergence, and where credible political bargains can be built because governments can liberalise first in settings where trade, transport, and social ties are already dense.

6.2.1 Inter-REC visa handshakes: build the missing bridges

A substantial share of the continent's most restrictive and costly corridors lies not within the established free-movement blocs but between them. Mobility often improves inside a REC and then breaks down at the regional boundary. Inter-REC visa handshakes are a practical way to address that gap.

Under such arrangements, a traveller lawfully admitted to one participating Regional Economic Community would receive streamlined, low-cost, or visa-free short-stay access in another participating REC, subject to agreed safeguards. The purpose is not to replace border management. It is to reduce repeated screening, duplicated cost, and unnecessary uncertainty on trusted regional corridors.

Why handshakes are now feasible

The technical and institutional conditions for such arrangements are far stronger today than they were a decade ago. Several RECs now have working biometric identity systems, regional travel documents, and more mature border-management platforms. The question is increasingly political and administrative, not conceptual and technical.

- a) First, identity assurance is improving. Regional passports, biometric identity cards, and interoperable border systems create a stronger basis for mutual recognition than existed when earlier free-movement debates were framed largely in abstract legal terms.

- b) Second, security cooperation is becoming more practical. Shared or comparable watchlist practices, better identity verification, and closer cooperation between immigration, police, customs, and aviation authorities reduce the case for treating every traveller from another African region as an unknown risk.
- c) Third, the legal form can be flexible. Inter-REC handshakes can begin through memoranda of understanding, pilot arrangements, or limited category-based schemes rather than waiting for universal ratification of the Free Movement Protocol.

Why bloc-level bargains are politically easier

Inter-REC handshakes address a central political economy problem identified in the report: governments fear opening their borders without reliable reciprocity. Negotiating between blocs rather than between dozens of individual states changes that calculus.

First, it bundles reciprocity. A single agreement can deliver reciprocal gains to millions of citizens at once, reducing the fear that one government is moving first alone.

Second, it leverages existing density. Airline links, trade flows, business networks, and family connections between regions already exist. Liberalisation on those corridors therefore has an immediate constituency and clearer economic logic.

Third, it creates a pathway to continental convergence. Once two or three major REC bridges operate credibly, the pressure on others to join or replicate them will increase.

A practical starting sequence

The most plausible early handshakes would connect regions where traffic demand, business exchange, and administrative readiness are already relatively strong, including EAC-ECOWAS and EAC-SADC corridors. Such arrangements can start with business visitors, conference delegates, investors, and recognised professionals

before widening to ordinary short-stay travel.

This phased approach allows governments to test service standards, verify security cooperation, and build political confidence before expanding the beneficiary pool.

Inter-REC handshakes are not a substitute for full implementation of the AU Free Movement Protocol. They are a credible medium-term bridge towards it.

6.2.2 Expand bilateral and plurilateral visa-waiver corridors

Before continent-wide treaty implementation is achieved, the fastest way to widen real mobility is to multiply bilateral and plurilateral waiver arrangements on high-value routes. Priority should go to land-border neighbours, major trade and aviation corridors, regional hub connections, and routes with strong business, educational, medical, or tourism demand.

This approach is administratively light, politically manageable, and already proven in multiple African settings. Waivers negotiated directly between two or a small group of states can often be designed and implemented much faster than continent-wide instruments, especially where travel demand is already visible and politically defensible.

Target the reciprocity debt first

One of the most actionable uses of bilateral waiver diplomacy is to narrow the reciprocity net identified in the report. A number of African states benefit from the openness extended by leading open states while offering little or no comparable access in return. That asymmetry is politically fragile and should be addressed directly.

Restrictive states should therefore prioritise waivers for the countries that already exempt their citizens. A phased route can begin with diplomatic and service passports, move to business travellers and conference delegates, and then expand to ordinary passport holders. The administrative burden is limited, but the diplomatic signal is strong. Unreciprocated openness weakens the domestic coalition for continued

liberalisation in the very states that have chosen to open first.

Unreciprocated openness should be converted into waiver diplomacy, not allowed to become a reason for retreat.

Reciprocity as a confidence-building measure

Beyond the specific corridors involved, reciprocity-based waiver expansion helps build trust that openness is a shared continental commitment rather than a one-way concession. That confidence matters for every deeper reform that follows.

6.2.3 Harmonise REC short-stay rules and build inter-REC bridges

Regional Economic Communities should now become the principal bridge between national reform and continental mobility. The immediate task is to harmonise short-stay templates for business, family, tourism, conference, and cultural travel, including baseline documentation, minimum service standards, and clearer stay-duration rules.

Once those internal rules are clearer, RECs are in a much stronger position to negotiate inter-REC bridges. A continent in which mobility works inside sub-regions but collapses between them will still fall well short of Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA expectations.

6.2.4 Replace blanket restriction with interoperable risk management

Security remains one of the most common reasons states give for resisting easier movement. That concern should be taken seriously, but the evidence also shows that high blanket visa costs are a poor security instrument. They do not distinguish well between low-risk and higher-risk travellers, and they impose broad economic cost on legitimate movement.

The better alternative is interoperable risk management: advance passenger information, passenger name record systems

where lawful and feasible, stronger identity assurance, proportionate biometric verification, watchlist cooperation, and joint training among immigration, customs, police, and aviation authorities. As states are already strengthening these tools, they should be encouraged to widen waivers and lower fees in parallel.

6.2.5 Converge around an African short-stay visitor standard

Africa also needs a common ordinary short-stay visitor standard. Travellers currently face excessive variation in permitted stay, document logic, fee structure, and processing rules from one country to the next. Member states and RECs should converge around a standard that includes a clear 30- to 90-day option, limited baseline documentation, published service times, and a presumption that the cheapest lawful route should be the normal route rather than the exception.

Such standardisation would not remove sovereignty. It would make sovereignty less arbitrary and reduce the transaction costs created by fragmentation.

6.2.6 Launch an AfCFTA Trusted Business Travel Card (ABTC)

While the continent works towards universal short-stay visa-free travel, there is a strong case for an interim instrument that decouples business mobility from the slow pace of broader protocol implementation. The report therefore recommends development of an AfCFTA Trusted Business Travel Card.

The scheme should be designed as a controlled facilitation instrument, not as a substitute for wider liberalisation. Its core features should include the following.

- a) *Eligibility*: The card should be available to *bona fide* businesspersons who are citizens of an AfCFTA State Party and who are registered through credible national verification channels such as chambers of commerce, industry associations, or designated AfCFTA implementation structures. Eligibility should depend on a clean

immigration and criminal record verified through national systems.

- b) *Pre-clearance and reciprocity:* Cardholders should undergo a single background check in their home country. Participating states would then grant reciprocal pre-clearance, allowing cardholders to access visa on arrival or equivalent fast-track treatment for short-stay business visits. The card should not confer residence, employment, or establishment rights, which would remain governed by national law.
- c) *Operational governance:* The scheme should be coordinated through the AfCFTA Secretariat in close collaboration with the African Union Commission, member states, and RECs. A limited pilot among willing states would allow the governance, data-protection, and border-operations model to be tested before wider rollout.

6.2.7 Address the reciprocity debt through targeted diplomatic engagement

The AU Commission and REC Secretariats should convene a focused diplomatic track with the most restrictive outlier states identified in the report. The immediate objective should be modest but concrete: secure at least one new non-neighbouring African waiver or simplified-arrangement corridor from each priority outlier. This turns a broad continental impasse into a set of measurable diplomatic tasks.

6.3 Continental action by AU organs and partners

Continental organs now need to create the incentives, visibility, measurement tools, and implementation support that make progress harder to ignore and easier to sustain.

6.3.1 Make mobility visible in AfCFTA implementation reviews

Mobility should no longer be treated as peripheral to AfCFTA implementation. Goods do not move themselves, and neither do service providers, technicians, buyers, sellers, investors, logistics managers,

conference delegates, or dispute-resolution teams. A continental trade agenda that neglects the movement of people who make markets function is incomplete in operational terms.

AfCFTA implementation reviews should therefore include mobility-enabling indicators as part of the practical trade-facilitation environment. This does not require making market access legally conditional on Free Movement Protocol ratification. It requires making mobility visible as an implementation condition rather than a side conversation.

6.3.2 Measure affordability, not openness alone

The AU, the African Development Bank, and partner institutions should add visa affordability to the AVOI. The Africa Visa Openness Index remains indispensable because it captures the formal legal route of access. This report shows why legal form is not enough: a country can appear relatively open while making non-exempt travel expensive, opaque, or administratively heavy.

The most practical option is either to incorporate an affordability pillar into the existing AVOI architecture or establish a companion African Mobility Affordability Monitor. The purpose is to reduce the policy temptation to replace genuinely easier travel with expensive pre-clearance systems while still claiming reform.

6.3.3 Establish a transition support facility for early movers

Because some governments fear revenue loss or implementation cost, the AU and its partners should establish a transition support facility for early movers. The facility should not subsidise restrictive regimes indefinitely. It should help willing states manage the transition from high-fee, low-volume movement to lower-fee, higher-volume movement backed by better systems, clearer payment channels, stronger border practice, and better analytics.

Eligible support could include system redesign, direct-payment digital channels, border-official training, data-protection and

biometric safeguards, waiver implementation support, communications, and mobility-demand analytics. The focus should be practical implementation, not the assumption that fiscal compensation is always required.

6.3.4 Move the African Passport from symbol to operational instrument

The AU should move the African Passport from symbolism to operational relevance. The passport's launch was politically important, but a continental travel document that does not reliably confer practical entry advantages will remain resonant in principle and thin in effect.

The next phase should therefore focus on a phased operational roadmap, common technical standards, mutual-recognition rules, secure integration with national passport and identity systems, and a defined minimum entry entitlement. Even if operationalisation begins with diplomats, officials, or other accredited categories, the strategic destination should remain clear: ordinary African citizens should ultimately benefit from predictable, low-friction short-stay entry across the continent.

6.3.5 Leverage private-sector data for accountability and advocacy

The interaction between visa costs, aviation levies, and suppressed travel demand creates a strategic opportunity for broader accountability. Airlines, airport operators, hotel groups, and tourism bodies are direct economic losers when intra-African travel is priced down or priced out. They also hold granular operational data that can strengthen the public case for reform.

The African Union Commission should therefore work with relevant industry bodies to assemble a practical mobility-affordability evidence platform that brings together three streams of information.

1. Visa cost data from this report and its successors.
2. Passenger tax and charge data from aviation-sector sources.

3. Aggregated travel-demand and load-factor indicators from member airlines and related operators.

Used well, this combined evidence can help policymakers see the full cost stack faced by the traveller before any spending on accommodation, food, or local transport even begins. That strengthens both advocacy and policy design.

6.4 Sequencing towards continent-wide short-stay visa-free travel

The long-term objective should now be stated more plainly than it often is. For ordinary short-stay travel within Africa, the strategic baseline should be visa-free entry for African citizens, implemented gradually but pursued deliberately. That is the most coherent reading of the Union's integration ambitions, and it is the endpoint that gives coherence to the shorter-term measures proposed here.

6.5 What must change before full free movement becomes durable

Four policy shifts are especially important. First, security policy must move from generalised restriction to intelligence-led management. High fees do not distinguish high-risk from low-risk travellers; better systems can. Second, governments should stop treating visa revenue as a self-contained gain without counting the wider economic activity it deters in aviation, hospitality, trade, services, education, and events. Third, reciprocity should move from a narrow wait-for-the-other-side logic to a continental public-goods logic. If every state waits for every other state to move first, reform stalls. Fourth, continental monitoring should measure usability, not legal form alone. A route that is technically available but prohibitively expensive remains restrictive.

These shifts affect trade costs, tourism, business travel, labour-market matching, educational exchange, professional services, and the credibility of African integration itself. A continent that proclaims mobility while pricing it out of reach weakens both its economic project and its political message.

6.6 Conclusion

The core recommendation is clear. Africa should govern visa cost as a measurable barrier to integration, reduce mandatory charges, widen waiver coverage, and make entry systems transparent, predictable, and proportionate.

Endnotes

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APPENDIX 1: Government entry-cost evidence for paid and non-zero entry-cost destinations

Rank	Country	Cost treatment	USD	Conf.	Primary source basis	Publication note
1	Angola	Paid visa or authorisation fee	200.00	H	http://www.smevisa.gov.ao (e-Visa / SME portal)	
2	Ghana	Paid visa or authorisation fee	200.00	H	https://gis.gov.gh (Ghana Immigration Service)	
3	Nigeria	Paid visa or authorisation fee	198.00	M	https://evisa.immigration.gov.ng (official e-visa portal); https://www.sa-nigeriachamber.co.za/visa-info/nigeria	Medium-confidence composite entry. Portal and service-provider components should be read together.
4	Cameroon	Paid visa or authorisation fee	194.00	H	https://www.evisacam.cm (mandatory e-visa portal); https://cameroon-visa.info/cameroon-visa-fees/	
5	Mozambique	Paid visa or authorisation fee	160.00	H	https://evisa.gov.mz/	
6	Tunisia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	160.00	M	https://tunisia-e-visa.com ; non-government/secondary visa information site, eVisa not operational, consular fee source requires verification.	Medium-confidence entry. Fee basis requires final official consular confirmation if available before publication.
7	Niger	Paid visa or authorisation fee	155.00	H	No official e-visa portal; visas via embassies	
8	Sudan	Paid visa or authorisation fee	154.00	H	No official e-visa portal; visas via embassies; Sudan Embassy entry visa guidance	
9	Central African Republic	Paid visa or authorisation fee	150.00	M	https://evisa-centrafrique.com/faq	Medium-confidence entry based on available e-visa/official-facing source evidence.
10	Liberia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	102.00	H	https://lis.gov.lr (Liberia Immigration Service)	
11	Algeria	Paid visa or authorisation fee	100.00	M	Official website does not offer specific visa fee information; fees handled under reciprocity	Medium-confidence entry because published fee information is handled mainly through reciprocity or consular channels.
12	DR Congo	Paid visa or authorisation fee	100.00	H	https://www.ambardcusa.org (Embassy of DRC)	
13	Libya	Paid visa or authorisation fee	100.00	H	https://www.evisa.gov.ly (official e-visa portal)	
14	South Sudan	Paid visa or authorisation fee	100.00	H	https://www.evisa.gov.ss (official e-visa portal)	
15	Gabon	Paid visa or authorisation fee	98.00	H	https://edgdi.dgdi.ga/#/home	
16	Burundi	Paid visa or authorisation fee	90.00	H	https://www.migration.gov.bi (Migration service)	

Rank	Country	Cost treatment	USD	Conf.	Primary source basis	Publication note
17	Guinea-Bissau	Paid visa or authorisation fee	90.00	H	No official e-visa platform; visas via embassies	
18	Côte d'Ivoire	Paid visa or authorisation fee	85.00	H	https://snedai.com/e-visa (official e-visa platform)	
19	Morocco	Paid visa or authorisation fee	84.00	H	https://www.acces-maroc.ma (official e-visa / ETA portal)	
20	Guinea	Paid visa or authorisation fee	80.00	H	https://www.paf.gov.gn/visa (official e-visa platform)	
21	Mali	Paid visa or authorisation fee	80.00	H	https://www.diplomatiemdc.gouv.ml/vitrine (official digital visa platform)	
22	Somalia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	80.00	H	https://evisa.gov.so (official e-visa portal)	
23	Equatorial Guinea	Paid visa or authorisation fee	75.00	H	https://equatorialguinea-evisa.com (official e-visa)	
24	Eritrea	Paid visa or authorisation fee	73.00	H	https://us.embassyeritrea.org (Embassy of Eritrea)	
25	Namibia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	70.00	H	https://eservices.mhaiss.gov.na (online visa on arrival / e-visa)	
26	Benin	Residual paid e-visa after exemptions	69.00	H	https://evisa.gouv.bj (official e-visa platform)	Near-universal zero-cost regime after exemptions. The amount shown applies only to the remaining non-exempt/residual paid e-visa scenarios.
27	Madagascar	Paid visa or authorisation fee	69.00	H	https://www.evisamada.gov.mg (official e-visa); https://evisatravel.org/madagascar/n/visa-fee/visa-fee	
28	Congo	Paid visa or authorisation fee	64.00	H	https://www.ambacongofr.org (embassy visa processing)	
29	Chad	Paid visa or authorisation fee	62.00	H	https://evisa.td (e-visa platform launched 2024)	
30	Ethiopia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	62.00	H	https://www.evisa.gov.et (official e-visa portal)	
31	Lesotho	Paid visa or authorisation fee	60.00	H	https://www.homeaffairs.gov.ls (Ministry of Home Affairs)	
32	Comoros	Paid visa or authorisation fee	60.00	H	No official e-visa portal; visa on arrival for most nationalities	
33	Senegal	Paid visa or authorisation fee	55.00	H	https://www.visasenegal.sn (official e-visa portal)	
34	Zambia	Paid visa or authorisation fee	50.00	H	https://eservices.zambiaimmigration.gov.zm (e-visa / visa application portal)	
35	Malawi	Paid visa or authorisation fee	50.00	H	https://www.evisa.gov.mw (official e-visa portal)	
36	Tanzania	Paid visa or authorisation fee	50.00	H	https://visa.immigration.go.tz (official e-visa portal)	
37	Uganda	Paid visa or authorisation fee	50.00	H	https://visas.immigration.go.ug (official e-visa portal)	
38	Eswatini	Paid visa or authorisation fee	48.00	H	https://www.gov.sz (Government immigration portal); https://visas.nac-travel.org/learn_more.php?country_id=55	
39	Togo	Paid visa or authorisation fee	44.00	H	https://voyage.gouv.tg (official e-visa portal)	

Rank	Country	Cost treatment	USD	Conf.	Primary source basis	Publication note
40	Mauritania	Paid visa or authorisation fee	41.00	H	https://anrpts.gov.mr (National Agency for e-visa)	
41	The Gambia	Visa-free, non-zero border charge	40.00	H	https://gambia.gov.gm (Government immigration info)	Corrected to US\$40, reflecting mandatory Securiport entry and exit charges. It is not a zero-cost case.
42	Cabo Verde	Paid visa or authorisation fee	36.00	H	https://www.ease.gov.cv (pre-registration / e-visa)	
43	Sierra Leone	Paid visa or authorisation fee	35.00	H	https://www.evisa.sl (official e-visa portal); https://www.visitsierraleone.org/online-visa/	
44	São Tomé and Príncipe	Paid visa or authorisation fee	33.00	H	http://www.smf.st/evisa (official e-visa platform)	
45	Kenya	Residual paid authorisation after exemptions	30.00	H	https://www.etakenya.go.ke (Electronic Travel Authorisation)	Near-universal zero-cost regime. The amount shown applies only to the remaining non-exempt/residual paid-authorisation scenarios. While in this Report, Libya and Somalia require visa to Kenya, Somalia on https://www.passportindex.org/country/kenya/ does not require visa.
46	Zimbabwe	Paid visa or authorisation fee	30.00	H	https://www.evisa.gov.zw (official e-visa portal)	
47	South Africa	Paid visa or authorisation fee	26.00	H	https://www.dha.gov.za (Department of Home Affairs)	
48	Egypt	Paid visa or authorisation fee	25.00	H	https://www.visa2egypt.gov.eg (official e-visa portal)	
49	Djibouti	Paid visa or authorisation fee	23.00	H	https://www.evisa.gouv.dj (official e-visa portal)	
50	Botswana	Paid visa or authorisation fee	22.00	H	https://evisa.gov.bw (e-visa portal)	
51	Seychelles	Paid travel authorisation	12.00	H	Visa-free in legal sense, but all travellers must obtain paid Travel Authorisation: https://seychelles.govtas.com	Visa-free in legal form, but all travellers must obtain a paid Travel Authorisation before departure.

“ A visa fee of US\$200 is not a transaction cost. It is a de facto travel prohibition. ”

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Continental average **US\$82 per visa**
- ▶ 9 countries **Visa cost > 100% monthly income**
- ▶ 20 countries **Grant zero visa waivers**
- ▶ 1 in 10 scenarios **Affected by hidden fees**

Highest visa costs for African travellers (US\$)

Angola	200
Ghana	200
Nigeria	198
Cameroon	194

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Cost map Passport map

Scan to open interactive data