

From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Aligning Gambian Training Needs with Circular Migration for Sustainable Development

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The Gambian Paradox: A Youthful Population at a Crossroads

- According to the Gambia Labor Force (2022 - 2023) figures
 - Over 77% of the Gambian population is under 35 years of age.
 - 45.3% are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)
 - 10.3% of the same group are unemployed
- Additionally,
 - Over 50% of Gambian youths consider migration a viable option due to unemployment
- These figures present a summary of the socio-economic situation in the Gambia. Potentially showing a dividend for growth when managed properly, but can also become an impetus to various socio-economic challenges, such as irregular migration, which can lead to trafficking in persons.

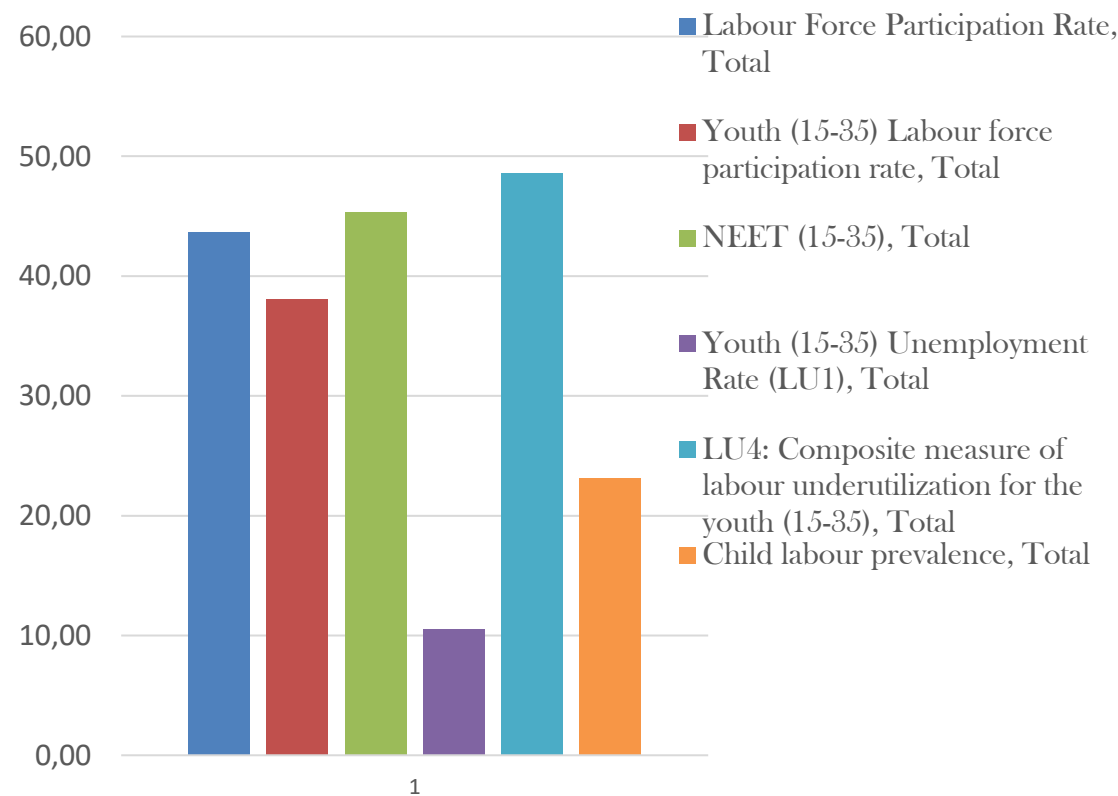
Need Vs. Reality

Triad: Need, Opportunity, & Expectation

Drivers of Emigration in GMB

- Limited job creation and industrial growth lead to high youth unemployment
- Economic stagnation (over 50% below the poverty line)
- Desire for upward mobility and financial independence.
- Social pressure (high propensity to migrate)
- Inadequate domestic solutions to unemployment.

Labor Market Outcomes



Need for Migrants abroad

- Labor shortages in key sectors (healthcare, agriculture, construction) across Europe, North America, and the Gulf.
- Aging populations in developed countries create demand for young, productive workers

Why The Gambia?

- Over 60% under age 25 - energetic, adaptable, and eager for opportunities.
- Long history of mobility; Gambians are well-networked abroad, especially in Europe and the U.S.

Realities, Hoaxes, & Manipulation

- Youth face limited job options and social pressure to “make it” abroad.
- Social media and informal networks exaggerate success stories of diaspora members, often omitting hardship and precarity.
- Messaging from the EU often fails to resonate with local realities and aspirations of potential migrants
- Thus, without addressing these narrative distortions, any policy or training program will struggle to gain trust and therefore adversely affect its effectiveness.

A Crisis of Trust & Data

- Migration data often lacks granularity: few insights on returnee outcomes or reintegration.
- The policy framework and support governing migration, return, and reintegration of migrants are still weak
- Official figures show high rates of irregular migration despite legal pathways.
- Absence of transparent data on wages, working conditions, and long-term impact fuels skepticism.
- Real incidents of contract violations and absconding (e.g., 33 workers in Spain, 2025) fuel skepticism and risk of exclusion from programs (Bloomberg, 2025).
- Data gaps distort the perceived **opportunity** and weaken trust in circular programs

Blueprint for Gambian Skills Development

- **Foundation:** Adult Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Literacy, Soft Skills
- **Sector-Specific TVET:** Agriculture (Modern Techniques, Agro-Processing), Tourism (Hospitality, Eco-tourism), Construction (Skilled Trades, Solar Technicians), Fisheries (Sustainable Practices, Boat Building and Repair)
- **Future-Forward:** Entrepreneurship, Digital Marketing, ICT, Green Economy, Creative Industries
- These form the basis for a national strategic plan to make the Gambian workforce competitive

Reframing Circular Migration as a Skills Partnership

- The Spain-Gambia Circular Migration Framework
 - Spain-Gambia MoU offers a pathway for legal seasonal work abroad.
 - Structured contracts with return obligations.
 - Potential for income generation and skills acquisition.
 - Viewed as a safer alternative to irregular migration.
- This MOU can be a pilot for a **Global Skills Partnership** to enhance its effectiveness and appeal. Such a Partnership
 - Allows the Gambia to get support for its broader development goals
 - Spain (or other potential partner countries) gets to manage migration in a safe, legal, and ethical way
 - Trainees get access to safe migration pathways, new opportunities, and better lives
- This pilot not only aims to send farm laborers, but to co-design training so that returnees come back as agri-tech specialists, agro-processors, and modern farm managers

Virtuous Cycle

- **Co-Design:** Gambian youth, universities, and Spanish partners define Skills needed in Spain and for The Gambia's Development (e.g., solar installation, agro-processing)
- **Targeted Training:** Gambians receive training based on the “Blueprint”, co-certified by both countries.
- **Ethical Migration:** Legal, temporary migration with transparent contracts and clear rights.
- **Skill & Investment Abroad:** Migrants earn income, gain advanced skills, and build professional networks.
- **Empowered Reintegration:** Returnees invest remittances and use their skills to start businesses, train others, and drive sectors like agriculture and tourism
- **Sustainable Development:** The cycle strengthens the Gambian economy, making migration a choice, not a necessity.

The Way Forward: Recommendation

- Use data to illuminate realities
- Co-create narratives with youth
- Promote transparent stories from returnees
- Broaden the circular migration beyond agriculture to tourism, fisheries, construction, and so on
- Universities on both sides can serve as
 - hub for evidence-based research and innovation
 - Bridging gaps between data, policy, and practice
 - Engaging stakeholders for sustainable migration governance
 - Pilot a GSP with Spain in 1-2 sectors (agriculture plus solar tech, for example)
 - Task the University of The Gambia with leading independent monitoring and evaluation of returnee outcomes
 - Launch a “True Stories” campaign featuring returnee entrepreneurs to combat hoaxes
 - Revise the Spain-Gambia MOU to include joint certification and guaranteed reintegration support

Conclusion: Seizing the Opportunity

- Strategically aligning honest narratives, targeted training, and ethical migration can transform The Gambia's youth bulge from a driver of brain drain into the foundation for a sustainable brain gain
- The MOU presents an opportunity not only to pursue short-term goals but also to effectively provide a base to draw from for the long-term prosperous path and continued friendships of Gambia and Spain.

Thank you for your attention!

¡Gracias por su atención!