



# Russia's Return to Africa: Strategy and Prospects

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# Summary

The year of 2019 is the Year of Africa in Russia. The first Russia–Africa Summit, scheduled for October 2019, will mark a turning point in Russia’s new strategy to return to Africa and promote major initiatives to facilitate development on this continent.

It is important to note that through its African strategy Russia does not seek to compete against other outside forces, focusing instead on bringing added value to Africa in the form of projects it has to offer. Together with the African countries, Russia can carry out this strategy alongside other cooperation initiatives converging with other development assistance projects. The level of political trust among BRICS states makes this convergence especially important and achievable between Africa’s main non-Western partners. Cooperation between Russia and Africa is solidly rooted in shared values, which include:

- Commitment to *decolonization*. Unlike Western and a number of Asian countries, Russia has never subjugated Africa, neither politically nor economically, and does not carry the burden of slave trade.
- *Afro-optimism*. Russia does not view Africa as an insurmountable challenge, as a source of a migration threat, or as a failed continent. Historically, Russia has been supportive of the aspiration by the African countries to develop independently.
- *Afro-intellectualism*. Russia does not see Africa or Africans as ‘inept students’ who do not know anything and are unable to learn. On the contrary, Russia is committed to unleashing the intellectual, technological, and creative potential of the African population and builds its education policy for Africa accordingly.

Russia is proactively stepping up its contribution to various formats and channels of cooperation with Africa. Business partnerships, civil society initiatives, and expert-level cooperation are gaining momentum on top of established diplomatic and state-to-state channels. These new formats include:

- Increasing participation of Russian companies in Africa’s security services market as follows – protection of high-ranking officials, training local security forces, and cybersecurity services.
- Political technology sphere with Russians being employed in organizing election campaigns and developing strategies for a number of African politicians.
- Proactive contacts of a number of Muslim regions in Russia with Africa’s Muslim communities, including the spheres of peacebuilding and conflict settlement.
- Cooperation in the religious sphere.

Accordingly, Russia and Russians have gained a comprehensive and multi-faceted footprint in Africa, which helps strengthen trust towards Russia among the African elite and among the public in general. All this opens new opportunities for Russia's economic cooperation with Africa, including both large corporations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Promising sectors include:

- minerals extraction and technologies;
- energy (including hydroelectric and nuclear power generating);
- military-technical cooperation and maintenance of military assets;
- agricultural sector;
- aquaculture and fisheries production and technologies;
- medical technologies and equipment;
- cyber security and e-services;
- new education technologies.

However, there is a number of challenges and objectives for Russia's African strategy.

1. Ensuring that Russian companies engaged in economic projects in Africa, primarily in raw materials extraction, act in the spirit of corporate social responsibility. This includes training local staff and offering career opportunities and social upward mobility. It could be advisable for companies to open corporate training centres in Africa similar to Russian vocational schools, as well as training Russian faculty and recruiting local teaching staff. Otherwise, Russia will inevitably face accusations of acting as a neo-colonialist power with the sole objective of controlling mineral resources.
2. Combining implementation of purely commercial projects with development assistance programmes in African countries (both on state and business levels). In this sphere, Russia's position looks much weaker – at least, from the public relations point of view – than that of the West, or Gulf States, or China, or India. Development assistance makes up the major part of many African countries' economies, and it is assistance projects of this kind that will form local public opinion on whether Russia has or has not contributed anything good to Africa.
3. Countering Western anti-Russia *clichés* that are spreading in Africa and shaping a narrative whereby only dictators and outcasts partner with the Russians. Therefore, efforts to improve Russia's image must target not only the continent's elite, but also a broader public opinion. It would be advisable to create and develop appropriate media tools to this effect.
4. Being receptive to the left-leaning liberation discourse that is common among Africa's elites and public opinion at large. China's success in Africa is largely attributable to the fact that the ideology of the Communist Party of China relies on the same discourse, which means that the Chinese and the Africans are guided by the same notions. It has to be

taken into consideration, however, that a left-leaning discourse is far from prevalent in Russia's domestic policy.

5. Displaying an attentive and caring attitude towards the African diaspora in Russia, including helping the victims of human trafficking who find themselves in Russia and disrupting human trafficking flows. Another objective is to overcome racist stereotypes that persist in marginal segments of Russian society.
6. Intensifying scholarship and grant programmes aimed at African students in Russia both at public and private levels to provide an adequate standard of living in Russia during their staying.
7. Expanding the range of bachelor's and master's programmes for African students in English, French, and Arabic, which should become an overall objective in terms of education policy. Removing the language barrier would clearly help African students learn better, making Russia a more attractive education destination.
8. Promoting Russia's new African strategy within the country to shape a positive public opinion and overcome fears that Russia will simply 'feed Africa' the way it does for Eurasia, considering the fallout from the tragedy in Central African Republic and the way it affected Africa-related topics in Russia's domestic political struggle.

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# Introduction

Russia must aim to take central stage in the battle for Africa – in the sense of not imperialism, but rather humanism or even idealism.

*Vasily Aksyonov<sup>1</sup>*

In terms of Russia's foreign policy, 2019 could be called the Year of Africa. In October, Sochi is hosting the first Russia–Africa Summit alongside a business forum and initiatives to step up civil society, youth, and university cooperation. If all these plans materialize, this would signal Russia's return to Africa. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia scaled back significantly its involvement in development assistance programmes for Africa, and it is high time to catch up.

It should be noted that the president of Russia invited senior officials from the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) to attend the Summit. The EEC has already carried out a number of events and conferences to prepare for the event. There is steady progress in the dialogue between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Africa's regional integration associations, as well as the continent's leading countries, including Egypt, on signing agreements. All this makes Russia's cooperation with Africa the driver force for drawing its Eurasian integration partners into these processes and could produce a cumulative effect for Eurasia in general.

Russia has always respected the sovereign choices of African countries regarding the development path they want to take. This commitment to independence and self-reliance offers both Russia and Africa an opportunity and incentive to promote their bilateral and multilateral business interests. However, the Summit should not be viewed as a goal in itself but rather a powerful tool for outlining future strategies. Faced with a new economic reality, it is critical that Russia proceed in its relations with the African countries in the spirit of a free market economy. Overall, promoting a people-centred partnership with proactive input from Russian and African civil societies will be one of the key aspects of further efforts to develop cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Vasily Aksyonov: Molyus' za Afriku' [Vasily Aksyonov: I Pray for Africa], 2002, Interview with Igor Sid, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 20.

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# Chapter 1.

## The Key Factors in Russia's Return to Africa

### Political Factors

The current political stage and the geopolitical situation as a whole call for developing solid and comprehensive relations with loyal and friendly countries that are open to cooperation with Russia, the countries that do not wholly depend on the global political environment. It is increasingly important to expand the list of potential foreign economic partners and so to reorient Russia's foreign policy not only towards the East but also towards the South, more precisely, Africa. African countries still see Russia as their most likely ally in protecting their interests on the international stage and as a natural counterbalance to the hegemonic aspirations of one or several world powers. Africans also agree with Russia on issues of respect for state sovereignty, peace, and security, which are especially important at present.

In his article *Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective*, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov wrote as follows: 'The modern globalizing world is characterized by unprecedented interdependence of countries. [...] One cannot but take into account ongoing dynamic processes in the Asia-Pacific region, in the Middle and Near East, Africa, and Latin America.' He also noted, 'As international relations go through a period of turbulence, Russia, as many times before, has found itself at a crossroads of key trends that will determine the direction of global development in the future.'

In this context, Russia should take a look and pay more attention to Africa. Russian–African relations have large and ever-growing potential for helping Russia attain its priority national goals. Russia should promote international cooperation with the African countries that hold similar or identical views on the new world order and other key international issues, which will strengthen Russia's position as an independent and influential centre of global politics. In the light of the serious policy pursued by those African leaders who share Russia's views on dialogue on foreign policy and foreign economic relations,

it is important to accelerate Russian turn towards Africa and take practical action to reinforce it. Moscow's structural policy must be complemented with fundamental changes in its approach to Russian–African relations as a whole.

There is very little time left for restoring Russia's positions in Africa. We must act now, for tomorrow might be too late. The old African elite who studied in the Soviet Union are giving way to new officials, educated in the US, the EU, or China. Therefore, we must make the African vector a key foreign policy priority, which will benefit both Russians and Africans.

## Economic Factors

African markets offer attractive conditions, including price, for Russian industrial goods, equipment, and defence products, as well as innovative, research, technical, education, healthcare, and other services, which can boost the implementation of Russia's reindustrialization and modernization policy. At the same time, closer trade and economic cooperation with Africa could become a source of relatively cost-effective raw materials for Russian industry, materials that are in short supply in Russia but abound in Africa. Russia could join nuclear power projects designed to ensure Africa's energy security. Russia has considerable experience in the construction of nuclear power plants and modern nuclear technology with post-Fukushima safety enhancements. To ensure their countries' sustainable economic growth and help it fully explore their potential, African governments must supply reliable and affordable energy to industry and to the people, as well as gain access to modern power generating technology.

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**There is very little time left for restoring Russia's positions in Africa**

Russia is a major energy power with strong positions in several spheres, especially oil, gas, coal, and nuclear power engineering. Russia's multifaceted energy strategy, which stipulates transitioning from fossil fuel to new power generating programmes, can produce a powerful economic result. Now that oil is no longer the only source of energy and the world is taking a closer look at renewable energy sources, Russia and Africa could coordinate a new form of cooperation based on long-term strategies.

Russia is an experienced player in the global energy market with historic potential in the sphere of power plant management, including hydroelectric, nuclear, and thermal power plants, as well as in energy exports

and transportation. Experience in implementation of energy programmes and construction of power grids across huge territories (which Africa needs above all now) is a major competitive advantage for Russia. More importantly, the potential of Russian–African cooperation must be considered in the context of today’s Fourth Industrial Revolution, global digitalization, and cyber security. Africa can provide a venue for the joint creation and testing of innovative Russian technologies in various fields, possibly together with our partners from other countries.

And lastly, trade with Africa in the context of anti-Russia sanctions has become a major source of new demand that is developing because of changes in the structure of the Russian consumer market.

Africa can become a *target market* for Russia if we properly organize our foreign economic activity. Given the African countries’ loyalty and trust, as well as the huge development leap some local sectors have taken, we could find target clients in Africa, including favourable pricing, who will be satisfied not only with our defence products but also with many other Russian goods.

In other words, the African markets could become a basic element in Russia’s cooperation system with international and regional economic and financial organizations, which could open a new page in the development of global economic collaboration, as well as serve as a venue for the implementation of Russia’s priority national projects, in particular, the International Cooperation and Export project, under which 320 agreements on support for industrial competitiveness programmes are to be signed by the end of 2024.

As for the priority countries in Russia’s strategy on Africa, it would be unwise to highlight this issue. There are large economies and markets in Africa, such as South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria. Some countries could become comfortable hubs in terms of financial and business infrastructure, for example, Mauritius, Rwanda, and Ghana. Other countries have been our traditional partners since the Soviet period (Angola, Mozambique, and the Seychelles). Some countries today are more interested than others in developing political, military, and technical, as well as economic cooperation with Russia (Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic). And lastly, there are those which are not eager to enhance cooperation. But this is only the political and economic background, and it would be unwise to give priority attention to some countries while neglecting others. The main message of the Russia–Africa Summit should be Russia’s openness to cooperation with any country on the continent.

## Technological Factors

Africa has not yet developed a solid technological base but, being a region with a dynamically growing population and potential, it is a major consumer of new technologies. African governments are interested in the latest science-intensive technology, IT, and telecommunications infrastructure. Russia, which has set a course for modernizing and boosting these areas in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, could become one of Africa's main partners because its products and services are typically less costly than the West's, and also because African countries consider Russian products more reliable and have more trust in them, unlike Chinese ones.

## Resources

Both old and rising global economies will continue to fight for access to African fuel and raw materials despite falling prices and the redirection of national priorities from a resource-based to a technology-based economy. The West is already losing its position as the largest importer of resources from Africa and the main supplier of finished goods to Africa. The continent ranks first in the world for reserves of manganese ore, chromium, bauxite, gold, platinum group metals, cobalt, vanadium, diamonds, phosphate rock and fluorite; and second – for copper, asbestos, uranium, antimony, beryllium, and graphite ores; and third – for oil, gas, mercury, and iron ore. It also has considerable reserves of titanium, nickel, bismuth, lithium, tantalum, niobium, tin, tungsten, precious stones, etc. Importantly, African countries have a wide choice of partners, including China, India, Brazil, and other rapidly growing economies.

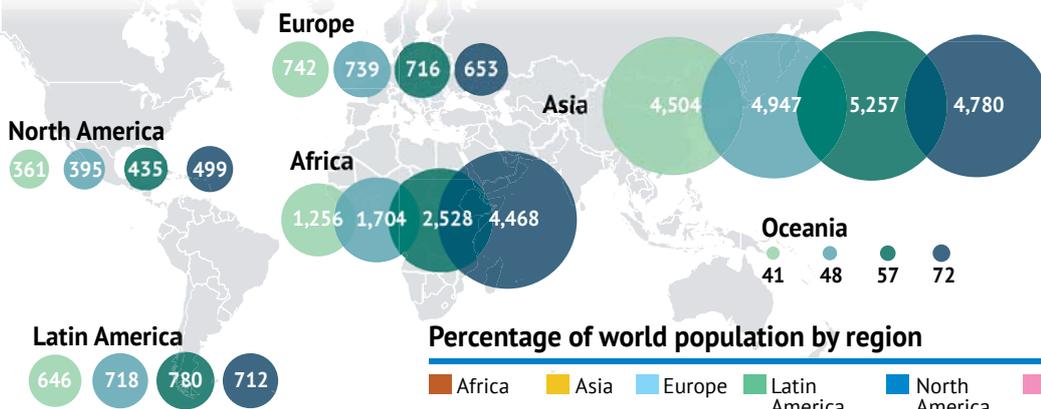
Africa's resources, combined with stable economic growth in the past decade, when GDP continued to grow in the majority of African countries despite the global crisis, have increased the continent's influence on the global situation and allowed Africa to demand better conditions in the international division of labour.

## Social Factors, Education, and Culture

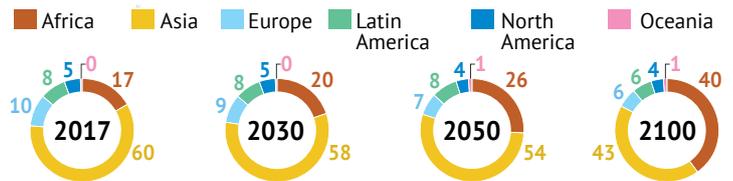
There are other aspects of how the African human factor influences global economy. An aging society and a relative decrease in the working-age population have become, or will soon become, a major problem in Europe (including Russia)

## WORLD POPULATION TRENDS

### The rise of Africa

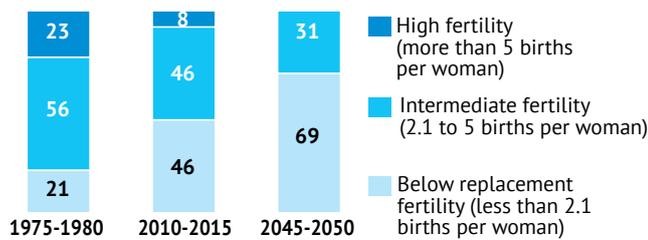


### Percentage of world population by region



### Decline in fertility rate

(Percentage of world population)



### Burdens and dividends (Percentage of population in age groups)

	0-14	15-24	25-59	60+
World	26	16	46	12
Africa	41	19	35	5
Asia	24	16	48	12
Europe	16	11	49	24
Latin America	25	17	46	12
North America	19	13	46	22
Oceania	23	15	45	17

### New leaders to emerge? (million people)

Year	Country	Population (million)
1950	China	554
	India	376
	USA	159
	Russia	103
	Japan	83
	Germany	70
	Indonesia	70
	Brazil	54
	Great Britain	51
	Italy	47
2017	China	1,410
	India	1,339
	USA	324
	Indonesia	264
	Brazil	209
	Pakistan	197
	Nigeria	191
	Bangladesh	165
	Russia	144
	Mexico	129
2050	India	1,659
	China	1,364
	Nigeria	411
	USA	390
	Indonesia	322
	Pakistan	307
	Brazil	233
	Bangladesh	202
	DR Congo	197
	Ethiopia	191
2100	India	1,517
	China	1,021
	Nigeria	794
	USA	447
	DR Congo	379
	Pakistan	352
	Indonesia	306
	Tanzania	304
	Ethiopia	250
	Uganda	214

Source: UN World Population Prospects 2017.

and, to a lesser degree, in North America and part of Asia (including China). In 20 or 30 years, Africa will account for 60% of growth in the global workforce. Africa's rapidly growing middle class largely determines the demand for many groups

of industrial goods. According to UN forecasts, the African middle class will exceed 1 billion people by 2025. In several decades, the demographic and social picture of the world and the volume and structure of the global consumer market will largely depend on Africa. Moreover, Africa has the largest number of young people, who look at the world with open eyes and are ready for cooperation with partner countries. This is a good opportunity to bring young people from Russia, Eurasia, and Africa together. It is also a unique opportunity to launch a peaceful socioeconomic collaboration between the civil societies of a new type.

Education, which has a major role to play in this, is a priority in Russia's relations with Africa. We must stimulate our youth policy on the international stage and ties between international youth organizations, because young people are a strategic reserve in any nation and international youth cooperation is a vital factor in global economic and political stability. Russian–African youth cooperation is vitally important for promoting friendship and partnership worldwide since Africa has always held leading positions in the international youth movement.

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**The old African elite who studied in the Soviet Union are giving way to new officials, educated in the US, the EU, or China**

## Competition

Obviously, Russia's return to Africa is not proceeding in a geopolitical or economic vacuum. Many countries are implementing large-scale comprehensive projects in Africa, including Western countries (primarily the US and France), the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, India, and Turkey. China has become a key external actor in Africa. In other words, Russia has serious external rivals many of whom take precedence over Russia in investment, aid, and technology. Russia's African strategy must take this into account and focus primarily on those economic and political spheres where Russia has competitive (including price) advantages. To succeed, Russia's new strategy of involvement in Africa must offer an added political, economic, and cultural value to the existing African programmes.

At the same time, Russia's African strategy is not a zero-sum game. In this interdependent world, many projects can be implemented through international cooperation and the complementarity of resources, technologies, and social capital. This above all concerns Russia's BRICS partners. The atmosphere

of political trust among BRICS states as well as the experience of aligning the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will help to find mutually acceptable methods for transforming competition into cooperation and convergence, which would benefit both African countries and their external partners.

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## Chapter 2. Channels for Interaction with Africa

As of now, Russia has several channels for interaction with Africa.

*The diplomatic channel:* the top national leaders and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. This is the most effective and professional channel from the point of view of addressing international (Russian–African) diplomatic issues.

*Interaction at the state level via intergovernmental commissions (IGC):* importantly, IGC efforts should not be one-off events. They must be supported and promoted. At this point, not all IGCs are fully effective.

*Various business channels* and resources developed under the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, including business councils for working with individual African countries, committees, etc: The leading Russian companies have much potential for promoting corporate ties in Africa. Alliances of Russian businesspeople engaged in Africa play an important role in this context. Today, Russia has a group of business representatives who have the necessary knowledge of Africa, including the general situation on the continent, its needs and prospects, as well as what companies need to do to establish firm and mutually beneficial economic ties. By pooling these people's efforts and knowledge, other companies and organizations will be able to enlist their support at the necessary levels.

*The expert channel:* this potential is very important both for analysing optimal development models for African countries and for testing the strategy and roadmaps of their interaction with Russia. A significant positive factor in Soviet heritage is that Russia has strong

expert centres at some leading universities and research institutions that focus on African problems. Importantly, they need to build up practical approaches with well-conceived and feasible recommendations that prevail over abstract good wishes. The 2019 Year of Africa in Russia has already resulted in the emergence of new working groups and ad hoc expert centres involved in preparing the Summit. It is important to ensure that they continue functioning after the Summit.

*The political strategies channel:* in recent years, many African countries have been increasingly active in cooperating with Russian political consultants and strategists on running election campaigns or image policy-making. These processes perceivably facilitate the strengthening of trust between the African elite and Russia and can create a long-term cumulative effect. However, early experiences in this area (Madagascar, etc.) have shown how important it is for Russian consultants to have preliminary cross-cultural training. It is also obvious that they need positive image support both in the African countries and in Russia itself. This aspect of their work should be prioritized.

*Security market cooperation channels:* the dynamics in the past few years has highlighted both contacts in the area of military-technical cooperation and the growing interest of a number of African countries in enlisting Russian organizations to create security arrangements to protect top officials, retrain members of local security agencies, streamline operations, and develop cybersecurity systems. Thus, Russia is entering and establishing a foothold in a potentially vast African market of security services. This is also motivating the political and military elite in the African countries to feel more trustful of Russia. But, as demonstrated by certain developments, positive image support for these Russian organizations may be of key importance in this area as well.

*Regional channels:* a number of regional leaders from the Russian Federation have proven their efficiency in African countries while working in its national interests. This refers, in particular, to peace initiatives advanced by the leaders of the Chechen Republic. Their effort to settle conflicts and establish dialogue in a number of Islamic countries of Africa (such as Libya) has emerged as an important factor in enhancing efficiency of Russia's policy as a whole.

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**The West is already losing its position as the largest importer of resources from Africa and the main supplier of finished goods to Africa**

## RUSSIA AND AFRICA

## Development of trade and economic relations



Extraction/purchase  
of mineral resources  
in Africa



Increase of fruits and vegetables  
exports to Russia, which largely replaced  
the products from the EU countries



Exports of tropical  
agriculture products  
(coffee, cocoa, citrus fruits)

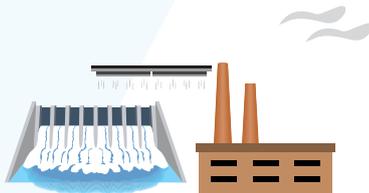


Delivery to Africa of agricultural  
products from Russia  
(for example, grain)

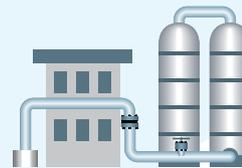


Deliveries to Africa of different  
goods such as fertilizers, engineering  
products, weapons, equipment etc.

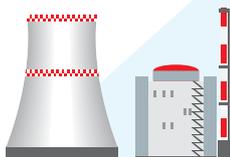
## Export of Russian services and technologies



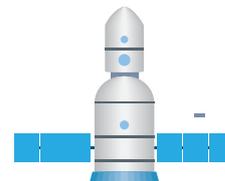
Construction of other infrastructure facilities  
(hydroelectric power plants, light industry factories,  
agricultural raw materials processing)



Technologies in the field  
of oil refining and pipeline  
construction



Construction of nuclear power plants



Launch of satellites of African countries

*Civil channels and development assistance:* Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are stepping up their activities in Africa, for example African Business Initiative, have much potential for development. This is due to many areas of Russian society showing an increased interest in Africa. Various cultural initiatives are ongoing, including Russian tourism in Africa, which contributes to 'Afro-optimism' among Russians and makes it possible for people in Russia and Africa to better know and understand each other. Russian NGOs (as well as government and business agencies) should pay more attention to projects that promote development assistance in Africa. In terms of image, Russian efforts in this sphere still appear inferior to that of the West and China, or India. It must be understood that allocating funds to implement development assistance projects is an important segment for many African economies. This is stark reality, and it should be dealt with. It is not uncommon for African countries to later regard their development assistants as key political and economic partners. This is why Russia's strategy in this sphere should be more efficient and conspicuous in terms of image at the continental level.

*Religious channels:* under current geopolitical conditions, there is much potential for promoting cooperation between Russia and African countries in the religious sphere. The Russian Orthodox Church is strengthening its dialogue with Orthodox churches on the continent, and cooperation between Muslim communities seems no less important. Most Islamic countries in Africa are concerned with the growth of religious extremism that is undermining their own security. This is why cooperation with the Russian Federation's Islamic centres and Muslim regions, their joint effort to master best practices in the fight against extremism at the intra-Islamic level, and the use of experience amassed by Russia's Muslim spiritual boards could be quite fruitful.

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## Chapter 3. Shared Values and Their Effective Use

The ideas and values Russia has to offer to its African partners as a foundation for its undertakings are essential for ensuring the success of Russia's return to Africa. These include the global values promoted by Russia,

as described earlier, including a just world order, sovereignty and the closely related idea of the uniqueness of any nation that should not have to conform to one-size-fits-all universalist models, as well as the value of historical memory and efforts to prevent any attempts to distort this, the right to choose its own path, etc. Most African countries share these values, which creates a solid foundation for a positive perception of Russia in African public opinion. However, apart from these shared values that are the same for any region of the world in Russian policy, there is a number of values and notions that are specific to Russia's relations with Africa. These values were shaped by Russia's long-standing relations with African countries throughout the pre-1917, Soviet, and contemporary periods in its history.

*The commitment to decolonization* is an essential value for Russia, since this is something the Western countries clearly lack and is much less relevant for the Gulf countries (involved in slave trade), China, or India (involved in creating ethnicity-based trade chains, monopolizing wholesale and retail trade in Africa) – compared with Russia. Russia has never sought to subjugate Africa, neither in political or economic, nor cultural terms. On the contrary, Russia has always been a key ally for African countries and people in their national liberation struggles against colonial rule or neo-colonialism. Russia has remained true to this position throughout these struggles, beginning from the Boer and the Italo-Ethiopian wars and through to the fall of apartheid and international actions to stabilize the Horn of Africa.

It is for this reason that cooperation with African countries must be underpinned by decolonization, a popular notion in Africa implying the commitment to fighting the negative consequences of centuries-old colonial rule by Western states. This should be supplemented by efforts to promote intercultural and civilizational dialogue to ensure through joint action by Russia and African countries that the unique African culture is recognised as equal to the leading civilizations in today's globalized world. This could serve as a core principle for some of the key joint documents to be concluded between Russia and Africa in order to clearly articulate the objectives of a civilizational dialogue. These objectives should include building a just world order for sustainable and harmonious human development with consideration for the diversity and unique nature of cultures (the Global South paradigm that includes Africa).

Western cultural and geographical expansion in Africa was often hostile and almost inevitably led to colonial subjugation and sometimes even

the genocide of the indigenous people. The only exception was Russia with its explorers and cultural studies researchers, often the same people, especially before 1917. This situation gives Russia a unique advantage in the form of friendly ties with the African civilization in the context of past contacts in geographical and cultural exploration.

*Afro-optimism* is another essential value for Russia's approach to Africa. This helps focus on the positive elements and sources of inspiration in communication and cooperation between the Soviet Union, and then Russia, with Africa. Russia does not view Africa as an insurmountable challenge, or a failed continent, or a demographic and epidemiological threat for the rest of the world. On the contrary, Russia firmly believes that the African countries have a lot of development potential and is committed to helping them unlock it. In this context, it would be advisable to be guided by people who believe in Africa's future and prospects for cooperation with Russia. Dreaming big and being committed to the African continent, especially in the part of Russian civil society, could be fruitful.

*Afro-intellectualism* is another value Russia shares. Traditionally, Russia does not tend to treat Africa or Africans as inept students who do not know anything and are unable to learn. This applies to all aspects of cooperation with Africa, including education. Those who treated Africa as an inept student insisted on importing and imposing knowledge, practices, and technology. Russia adopted a different approach prioritizing Africa's intellectual achievements and seeking to assist African students in Russia to uncover their high potential.

Russia needs to promote an *Afro-community* of sorts in order to make these values reality. This effort could include consolidating Russian communities and subcultures that are interested in Africa and want to develop deeper ties with it, as well as studying Africa and gaining a better understanding of it. African diasporas could contribute to these efforts, even though they are quite isolated from one another, alongside Russians who love and value Africa, its tourist resources, and its diverse cultural heritage. The strategy for reviving Russia's friendship groups with African countries could serve this purpose as well. It is also critical that former participants in USSR–Africa cooperation and their family members join this process.

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**The ideas and values  
Russia has to offer  
to its African partners  
are essential for ensuring  
the success of Russia's  
return to Africa**

Compiling an Afro-archive could be another step in this direction. This would include gathering, sorting, and analysing information on all the aspects of Soviet/Russian cooperation with African countries to get a 360-degree view of this history. This archive could be an asset in terms of Russia's return to Africa, including creation of a database on projects and key figures. An *Afro-media* project could be another important element, i.e. establishing an illustrated general news magazine on Africa with an open web-archive and a wide range of television shows on Africa.

Another project, *Afro-graduates*, would be aimed to consolidate African graduates from Soviet and Russian universities, holding conferences and debates, developing social media in this context, and other undertakings. This is where the 'nostalgia as an asset' approach makes sense. A number of Russian universities are already moving in this direction, but there is a need to step up these efforts. It is also essential that these graduates be invited to take part in the activities of Russian cultural centres and other Russian initiatives in African countries.

Naturally, all these activities must be carried out with tact and be free of politics. For instance, local context has to be taken into consideration when working with graduates in Africa. Foreign media outlets that are active in Africa tend to portray Russia negatively, making it harder for graduates to form associations by instilling fear that it could affect their political careers. This calls for an integrated effort by the Russian media in African countries. It would be easier to support associations of graduates from Soviet universities if dedicated television networks (for example, Russia Today–Africa) or radio broadcasting operators for African countries could better articulate Russia's current vision of its ties with Africa. Russia needs to promote its historical track record of relations with Africa, since Russia has never acted as a colonial power. Instead, assistance from the Soviet Union helped many countries obtain independence and develop and promote their culture. Media could also be used for spreading unbiased information on the decline of racism in Russia over the past decade.

Opening an *Afro-centre* in Moscow is another possible option. This kind of Centre for African Cultures could cover the main arts, both traditional and contemporary, offering a museum space, entertainment, education, and other services. Partnering with a Russia–Africa trade house could be a way to ensure the success of this initiative (taken together, they would form an *Africa House* in Russia). Setting up an African culture museum in Moscow could be part of this project along with efforts to promote the African collections from

St. Petersburg's Kunstkamera. Using the Russian diasporas in African countries (present in almost all countries from Egypt to South Africa) to promote Russia's image and actions across the continent could be another step in this direction, and one which should also include some tact and a politics-free approach.

The issue of the *left-leaning liberation discourse* in African countries, not to be confused with the liberal left, is a prominent element in coordinating the values Russia and Africa share. In fact, the anti-imperialist and left liberation discourses (at times with certain revolutionary pathos) continue to feature prominently in the political mindset of many African countries in the context of decolonization. This understanding is also important for Russia's new Africa strategy since success will largely depend on the ability to 'speak with one voice' with African leaders and echo the political concepts and values that guide them.

For instance, China's success in Africa is partly attributable to the fact that for China the left-leaning liberation discourse is perfectly in tune with what the Communist Party of China preaches and reflects its values. Accordingly, the Chinese and Africans are speaking the same ideological language in the first place, which paves the way for political and economic interaction. It has to be noted in this context that Russia has to be receptive to this left-leaning liberation discourse on modernization in order to be effective in Africa. Obviously, unlike China, Russia has left communist ideology behind, and that left-leaning discourse is far from prevalent in Russia's domestic policy. Yet, can Russia adapt itself to the ideological landscape in Africa and elsewhere?

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**Russia does not view Africa as an insurmountable challenge, or a failed continent**

The World Festival of Youth and Students held in Russia in autumn 2017 is an interesting example in this connection. It was organized as usual by the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), known for its left liberation and anti-imperialist views. Hosting this festival in Russia offered an opportunity to understand how this discourse and values correlate with the political values that dominate today's Russia. Elements of the left liberation discourse are also reflected in BRICS ideology and during its summits make their way into the outcome declarations. In any case, positioning itself as an alternative to the West and a new centre of gravity, Russia needs to come up with an effective way to ensure that it is receptive to the left-leaning liberation discourse that is widespread in developing countries. This could require Russia to look beyond the right-leaning alternative to the neo-liberal mainstream that is more common for Russia's domestic policy, unlike China.

*Building a positive public opinion* within Russia regarding the new African strategy is another domestic objective. It must be noted that there have been articles in the Russian media and on social networks (even if they were politicized and somewhat marginal) lamenting that Russia's involvement in African affairs could evolve into investing in the continent for geopolitical reason, just as in the Soviet times. This part of public opinion believes that Russia's current and future investment in Africa must be safe and generate returns. Consequently, the government should create a dialogue with the public on this important element of its African strategy by working proactively with the public not only in Africa, but also by promoting a positive public opinion in Russia towards Africa and Russian projects there.

The public debate on Russia's involvement in Africa is similar to the discussion on Russia's relations with its partners in the post-Soviet space and offers a new reference point. Should Russia assist other countries for political purposes only? Will the recipient countries be willing to lend Russia their political support and can they be trusted? Or should Russia build its partnerships exclusively based on the principle of economic expediency? Russia will have to answer these questions as it moves towards implementing its African strategy. Its experience in working with public opinion and governments across Eurasia to shape public perceptions will come in handy in Africa.

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## Chapter 4. Russian Economic Cooperation with African Countries

Closer economic cooperation is a logical basis for Russia's return to Africa that has become a key source of raw materials in the 21st century. Russian consumers are interested in cocoa beans, coffee, cotton, tea, oilseeds, nuts, hardwood, phosphates, bauxites, rare earth metals, etc. Russia exports grain to South Africa (over 500,000 metric tons), Nigeria, Kenya, and Sudan.

Russia's priorities are the production of hydrocarbons and other raw materials, power generating, geological prospecting and exploration, as well as infrastructure projects. In the light of the growing competition

for African markets between the US, China, the EU, Brazil, Japan, India, and Arabic Gulf countries, Russia has become one of the first to revise its relations with Africa to stipulate preferential tariffs for the import of goods produced in developing African countries. Russian legislation does not impose import restrictions, anti-dumping, compensation, and other protective measures on goods made in the least developed countries.

The import of tropical farming and primary products from Africa is designed to make up for the shortage of products which cannot be produced in sufficient amounts in Russia for climatic or economic reasons. In the 1990s, Russian–African ties focused on trade, while today they promote investment cooperation. Up to 90% of investments go into exploration and mining.

Although Russia is a major exporter of mineral resources, it is becoming increasingly dependent on imports for many types of resources that are in short supply in the country. The largest investors in African production assets are Russia's oil and gas majors Gazprom, Rosneft, Tatneft, and Stroytransgaz. Lukoil has acquired exploration rights to 11 offshore blocks in the Gulf of Guinea. Rosatom's subsidiaries are implementing uranium mining projects in Botswana, Namibia, and Tanzania. Gazprombank's GPB Global Resources is implementing uranium exploration projects. In 2001, Russian aluminium producer Rusal took over the management of Compagnie des Bauxites de Kindia (CBK) in Guinea, which was launched with Soviet assistance and became a state-owned company in 1975. As much as 25% of Russian aluminium is made from Guinean bauxite. Evraz is producing vanadium ore in Africa, Severstal – gold and iron ore, and Renova – manganese and ferroalloys.

Russia has recently started developing research and technological ties with African countries, including in the high-tech spheres of nuclear power generation, astrophysics, and the peaceful exploration and use of space (Nigeria and South Africa). The governments of Angola and Russia are implementing an agreement on the creation of the AngoSat geostationary communications satellite. Russia's State Space Corporation Roscosmos and Nigeria's National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA) have signed a memorandum of understanding on the joint exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes and the launch of African satellites by Russian carrier rockets.

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**The largest investors  
in African production  
assets are Russia's oil  
and gas majors**

# RUSSIA'S FOOTPRINT IN AFRICA

## Russian Nuclear Diplomacy



NPP construction



Construction of the Nuclear Research Centers

## Development and extraction of natural resources



Diamonds



Gold



Platinum



Gas



Oil

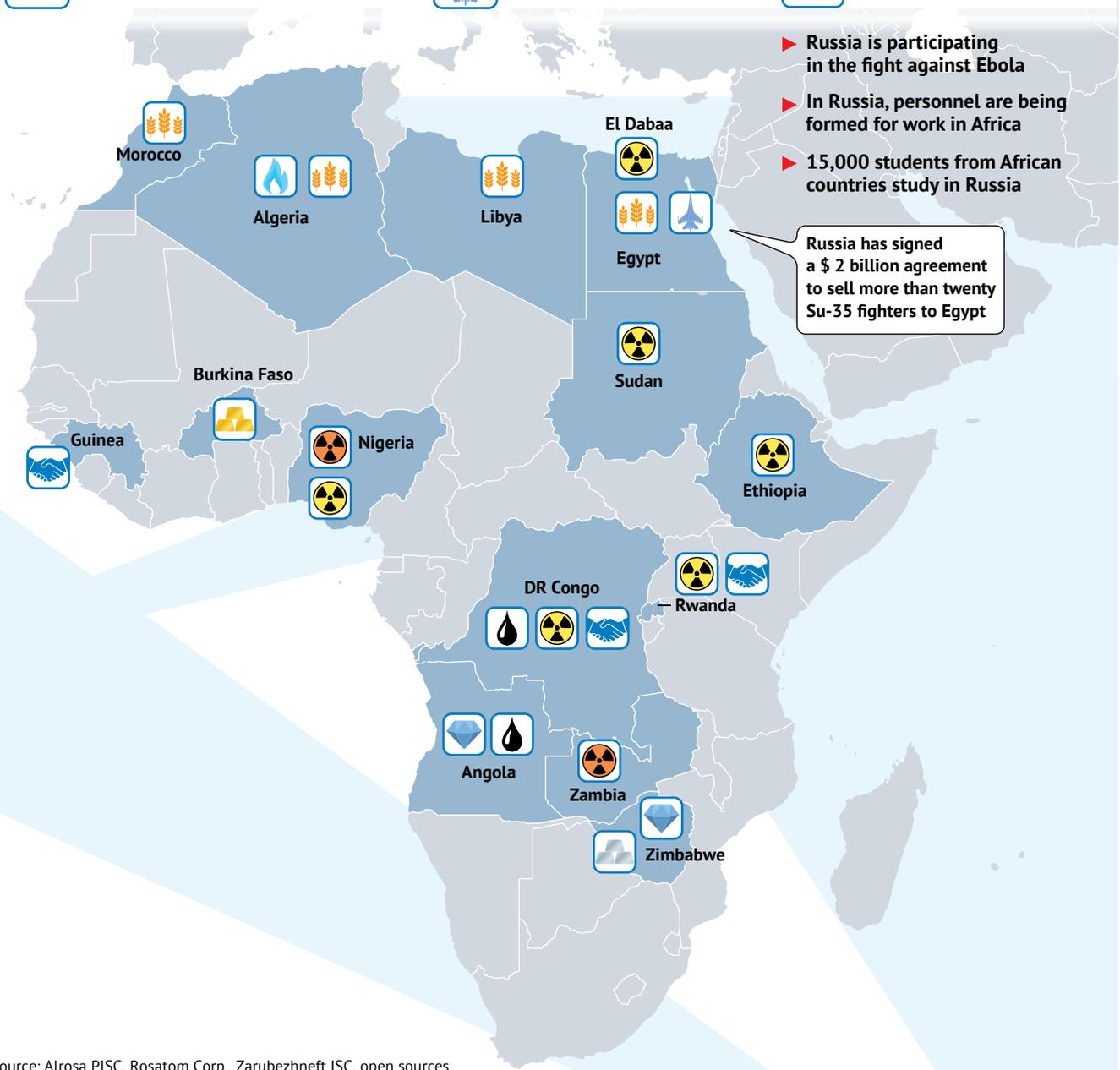
## Russian grain export



## Export of Russian weapons



## Humanitarian cooperation



- ▶ Russia is participating in the fight against Ebola
- ▶ In Russia, personnel are being formed for work in Africa
- ▶ 15,000 students from African countries study in Russia

Russia has signed a \$ 2 billion agreement to sell more than twenty Su-35 fighters to Egypt

Source: Alrosa PJSC, Rosatom Corp., Zarubezhneft JSC, open sources.

Financial cooperation is a new element in Russian–African relations. Russian and South African banks have established close business ties under an agreement on strategic partnership, which is focused on the joint financing and support of investment projects in various industries and on the stimulation of export-oriented sectors. With the participation of Angolan partners, VTB Bank established VTB Africa, a subsidiary bank based in Angola, to co-finance the emergence of Russian companies in Angola and neighbouring countries.

One of the biggest problems in the post-Soviet period was settling African debts due to Soviet loans. The problem was first addressed in 1988, when the sides coordinated a five-year programme to revise the debt repayment schedule. New methods of settling the problem appeared after Russia joined the Paris Club in 1997. Talks with African creditors helped clarify the size of debt and possible repayment prospects. Africa's debt to Russia was reduced through restructuring based on the Paris Club principles, which Russia sees as part of its official support for African development. Russia also supported the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC Initiative) of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to help reduce the debt burden in some African countries. Russia has written off over \$20bn worth of African debt, and part of African countries' commercial debts have been converted into investments.

Military and technical cooperation holds special place in Russian–African relations. According to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), by the early 1990s, 70% of tanks, 40% of aircraft, and 35% of helicopters in African armed services were of Soviet make. At that time, Russia almost completely withdrew from the African weapons and military equipment markets for political reasons, as well as because former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact countries were selling Soviet-made weapons and military equipment at dumping prices, which is why poor African countries re-oriented to the new suppliers.

The sub-Saharan countries became attractive to Russia again only in the 21st century. At present, Russia maintains military and technical ties with 25 of the 39 sub-Saharan countries. Rosoboronexport, Russia's only state intermediary for the export/import of military and dual-purpose products, technologies and services, has permanent representative offices in Angola, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Russia has signed intergovernmental

agreements on military and technical cooperation with the majority of African countries. Russia's largest partners in this sphere are Angola, Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia. When it comes to the value for money, Russian-made weapons can satisfy the African countries' military needs at acceptable prices. However, today, after-sale services have gained priority because the service life of modern weapons is as long as 30 years. The US identified this problem back in the 1970s, while Russia has only used this approach in the past few years.

Based on the above, Russia's priority goals for the near future should be assistance for Africa's industrialization and economic modernization, implementation of the concept that Africa is a target market for Russia and vice versa, infrastructure projects, cooperation in medical and high technologies, as well as alignment of economic programmes and development projects.

The future of Russian–African economic cooperation depends on identifying economic and related sectors of mutual interest and Russia's economic achievements and price advantages.

- Investment in extraction and mining technology, with Russia's assistance for the development of the local workforce and the establishment of training centres and technical colleges.
- Defence and security (including the sale and after-sale servicing of weapons and military equipment).
- Power generation (including hydroelectric and nuclear power).
- Agriculture and related technology, including aquafarming and fish processing, since many African coastal and island states are implementing the strategies of the 'ocean economy' ('blue economy') and hence would welcome any assistance in this area along with related economic and environmental mechanisms.
- Medicine (including telemedicine), where Russia has huge potential, at least at the human potential level, which enjoys considerable demand in the developed countries of Southern Africa and the Maghreb.
- Digitalization and the development of a digital state (electronic governance): Russia's potential in this sphere can be widely applied for the digitalization of law-enforcement (security) services and for cybersecurity.
- Modern education technologies (both remote and traditional mass education technologies).

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## Chapter 5. Feedback: African Diaspora in Russia

Feedback – how Africans feel about Russia – will largely influence the success of Russia's policies in Africa. Of much importance in this regard, apart from the above mentioned civil and cultural measures, will be a respectful and constructive attitude towards African diasporas in Russia itself.

Africans in Russia fall into three main and numerically heterogeneous groups. The first and largest group is academic migrants. The second and relatively small group includes so-called transiting migrants, who were migrating to a third country through Russia but failed to reach their destination for one reason or another (financial problems, problematic documents, restrictions on entry to a third country, etc.). The third and smallest group consists of victims of human trafficking and is the one that inspires the most anxiety. In addition, there are certainly businesspeople, international corporate and other organizational staff, and married people living in Russia with a Russian spouse, etc., but their number is modest.

African immigrants are inconspicuous in research and where labour rights protection is concerned. There is no periodic research in this area, which makes it hard to analyse the qualitative estimates of different African groups in Russia. This, on the one hand, is caused by the paucity of Africans in Russia by comparison with people from countries of the former USSR, while, on the other, by their remaining together within their inner circles and almost never venturing outside in public.

Putatively, Africans in Russia number at least 20,000, which is the number of academic migrants,<sup>2</sup> the most numerous African group. It is also necessary to take into account naturalized Africans who have

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<sup>2</sup> 'Eksport Rossiyskikh Obrazovatelnykh Usług: Statisticheskiy Sbornik' [Russian Educational Exports: A Statistical Collection], 2018, Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, Issue 8, Moscow, Center of Social Forecasting and Marketing.

Russian citizenship, a residence permit, or a temporary residence permit, while at the same time originating from Africa, something that makes a considerable number of Russians associate them with the African diaspora. In 2018, for example, some 1,767 citizens of African countries lived in Russia with residence permits, 3,714 with permanent residence permits, and 356 were granted Russian citizenship. In 2018, 150,815 citizens of African countries were registered as migrants and 116,141 were deregistered as such (considering all entries and exits, including cases of the same person entering and exiting several times a year). Thus, the simultaneous African presence in Russia probably does not exceed 35,000–40,000 persons.

## Academic Migrants

First, it is important to distinguish between the principles that governed the selection of African students in the USSR and those used today. In the USSR, academic migration had a function of selecting and training young activists, children of party leaders, and future leaders. By virtue of initial selection, the Soviet-era students stood a high chance of joining the elite in their countries and today some of them, all aged 45–50 years and older, are indeed part of the elite. The first African students were enrolled at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. Later the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), the symbol of academic migration, was opened, but there were African students at other Soviet universities as well. Experts have mixed feelings about the steadily growing numbers of foreign students in the USSR. In their view, greater numbers mean lower quality of education. But, along with specialist training, the education of foreigners performed an important political function by inculcating loyalty towards the USSR and establishing new economic and political contacts in the African countries.

Currently, the lack of ideological agendas, characteristic of the Soviet period, make it possible for Russia to select students from African countries more openly and with no political strings attached. This gives applicants a wider choice of opportunities. Some additional opportunities opened after Russian universities adopted a two-stage system (bachelor's degree and master's degree programmes), because the latter is more popular

with foreigners than the bachelor's programme. As for broader outreach to African students, popularizing the existing and devising new bachelor's and master's programmes in foreign languages should play its role. This will make the learning material easier to grasp and better digested.

Yet another task is to make Russian higher education more affordable for African applicants. The key role in this regard is likely to be played by public or corporate scholarship and grant programmes that would cover, fully or in part, the cost of tuition and ensure African students a decent standard of living while in Russia. This seems to be an investment in human capital and development assistance programmes that can pay off handsomely in the future.

## Transit Migrants

There are different categories of Africans among transit migrants who are stuck in Russia for various periods and reasons. Some of these are former academic migrants who, while fresh from Africa and having a dim idea of Russian realities, are under the delusion that they can pay one year's tuition and then easily earn the money for subsequent studies or move to the EU after one or two years of university training in Russia. Thus, they originally see an education in Russia as a first step towards moving to a third country. A portion of the African transit migrants are refugees who have failed to obtain Russian citizenship or reach a third country. They are also unable (or unwilling) to return to their country of origin.

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**The simultaneous African presence in Russia probably does not exceed 35,000–40,000 persons**

## Victims of Human Trafficking

African victims of human trafficking in Russia are mostly victims of sexual slavery and differ in this regard from Central Asian labour slaves. Experts point to an insignificant but steady inflow of young women from Nigeria, who are forced to engage in prostitution in Russia. African intermediary businesses trading in Russian visas at home are also a source of concern, since their operations are instrumental in increasing the number of transit migrants and victims of human trafficking.

## African Children in Russia

In 2018, the Center for Migration Research carried out a case study into the condition of children of migrants living in Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Among other groups, the Center's questionnaire-based survey covered African parents (3.2% of the sample) and included detailed interviews with African children.

The study showed that far from all Africans in Russia know that regardless of their status they can send their children to a Russian school. It has also been revealed that African students at Moscow schools face major problems and make little progress in adapting to the local environment because their command of Russian is inferior to that of other migrant children, whereas their parents are often reluctant to strike root in Russia and are not motivated to intensify adaptation. Many African parents see their stay in Russia as a short-term affair, but often they would spend several years in this country (particularly the transit migrants or refugees). Their intention to leave for a third country as soon as possible becomes an illusion that does not reflect reality. Their children are not thinking of integrating into the Russian culture either. Even if African children have a job, their employers are usually friends of their parents (unlike children of migrants from other countries).

## Recommendations

To reduce the number of transit migrants, it is necessary to intensify information campaigns in African countries to explain the details of Russian migration laws, including the status of academic migrants and the chances of moving to third countries.

To reduce the number of victims of human trafficking, it is also necessary to enlist the media and Russian embassies and consulates in African countries to conduct a preventive awareness-building effort and intensify control over African intermediary businesses offering help in obtaining Russian visas.

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<sup>3</sup> Poletayev, DV, Zaionchkovskaya, ZA & Mikhailov, DA, 2018, 'Problemy Zashchity Prav Detei, ne Imeyushchikh Grazhdanstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii, v Gorode Moskve' [Problems Involved in Protecting the Rights of Children without Russian Federation Citizenship in the City of Moscow], Commissioner for Human Rights in the city of Moscow, Center for Migration Research, Moscow, 180 p. Available from: <https://clck.ru/F4KZY>. The questionnaire-based survey involved 529 migrant parents from countries of the former USSR and elsewhere with children aged 0 to 17 years having no Russian citizenship and residing in Moscow.

Academic migration to Russia can grow if the government signs bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of diplomas with an increasing number of countries. The record shows that this can boost the number of academic migrants with Russian diplomas who will then be able to find employment in their countries, which strengthens international ties. A strategy is required for training Africans in advanced and high-demand disciplines like medicine, nuclear physics, agriculture, technological sciences, etc., where Russia has a head start.

Training programmes should be adjusted and adapted to the specific conditions in different African countries. For example, agricultural training programmes must take into account the climate and agricultural specifics in African students' countries of origin. Africans are enrolled in numerous universities, both central and provincial, and so it seems expedient to launch an exchange of best educational practices between them.

An academic migration strategy for Africans should dovetail with plans to build Russian education, medical, and other centres in African countries. African students will use Russian-made equipment during their pre-graduation practical training in Russia and this will help promote Russian equipment in their countries of origin.

The Russian State Migration Policy Concept 2019–2025<sup>4</sup> reflects the importance of promoting academic migration not only for Russian universities but also for vocational schools. Training skilled workers is important for Russia in connection with their serious shortage. Internationalizing Russian vocational schools would give new impetus to their development and help to intensify cooperation with African countries that also need skilled labour. Russia has yet to establish a comprehensive system of courses and schools to teach skills that cater not only to African but also to Central Asian migrants. With the inclusion of vocational schools as its main component,<sup>5</sup> this system could be created in the mid or long term based on the existing infrastructure. So far, Russian vocational schools are not ready to admit large numbers of foreign students, particularly from African countries. The schools' heads lack an

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<sup>4</sup> 'Executive Order on Russia's state migration policy concept for 2019–2025', 2018, President of Russia, October 31. Available from: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58986>

<sup>5</sup> Poletayev, DV, Dryga, SV, Giniyatova, YV, Loiko, OT & Dementyeva, YY, 2018, 'Razvitiye Obrazovatelnoi Migratsii v Sredniye Professionalnye Uchrezhdeniya Rossii (Na Primere Moskvyy, Tomska, Yekaterinburga, Sankt-Peterburga)' [Promoting Academic Migration to Russian Secondary Vocational Establishments (On the Examples of the Cities of Moscow, Tomsk, Yekaterinburg, and St. Petersburg)], *Vestnik Nauki Sibiri*, no. 1 (28), Humanities, p. 114–127.

international vision and so they train skilled workers mostly for local cities and regions. Nevertheless, there are good prospects for academic migration from African countries, because companies and industrial businesses in Africa need skilled mid-level personnel trained by Russian vocational schools in addition to university-trained engineers.

Yet another promising area of Russia–Africa cooperation is Russian assistance in devising demographic policies. Demographic forecasts both for Africa as a whole and for individual African countries, such as Nigeria, are truly awe-inspiring. Africa’s further development will involve the risk of interethnic, interstate, and regional conflicts unless demographic regulation measures are drawn up and implemented. As is clear, these conflicts will hamper any cooperation with Russian participation.

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## Conclusion

Russia is increasingly focusing on Africa. The Russia–Africa Summit in Sochi should be a turning point in efforts to implement the strategy for Russia’s return to Africa and Russian development assistance programmes. For African leaders, Russia remains a main force in world politics. The key problem for them now is how to draw Russia’s attention to the advantages available in their countries rather than fall victim to the ‘geopolitical chess game’ played by other powers on the continent.

In this connection, any approach to relations with Africa in any area should imply ‘fine-tuning’ based on shared partnership interests, maintaining peace, security, and the sovereignty of all states involved in this cooperation, and a willingness to introduce all new mechanisms and approaches to provide for a dynamic equilibrium and structuring of geo-economic, geopolitical, and social processes.

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