

# BRICS immigration policies and visa regimes, strategic cooperation for a future BRICS African agenda

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## Abstract

Africa is a geostrategic point of interest for the BRICS. However, the BRICS have been severely criticised for how Africa is engaged; that the manner replicates the low levels of growth that other western partners had engaged in. It is up to the BRICS to act in accordance with the narrative that has been crafted in that it is a global partner for reform. This paper explores how the BRICS may make a meaningful contribution to its Africa outreach project and global economic reform through the analysis of BRICS' immigration policies such as visa regimes to African countries in the context of a poly-pandemic world. The paper explores the international arena attempting to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of immigration policies and visa regimes as power levers, the BRICS' position on migration and their strategic engagement with Africa.

**Keywords:** immigration; visa regimes; emerging powers; BRICS; Africa

## Introduction

The Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) partnership, which exists in the context of international asymmetries but is vested in the multi-lateral system (Abdeneur, Folly, Moura, Jordao, & Maia, 2014), are an opportunity to show international leadership on contentious issues like migration<sup>1</sup> and make an impact on their own interests while pushing for reform and diffusing global power through the movement of people through immigration policies and visa regimes. This is particularly important as critics question the relevance of BRICS, and the practical traction it can manifest, as well as the utility of the partnership in the future. While the benefits from cooperation are quantified more directly when compared to free trade arrangements between countries, it is anticipated that the free movement or ease of movement of people should receive as much prominence as the liberalisation of international trade (Di Battista, Doherty, Drzeniek Hanouz, & Geiger, 2014). However, as trade and finance has increased exponentially, labour flows have lagged substantially (Advan, 2019).

Africa holds a unique geostrategic placing for the BRICS. Since South Africa was included in the partnership in 2010, it has been hypothesised as a gateway to Africa in promoting closer cooperation and linking three continents that are home to the countries of the global South, Africa, Asia and South America. The focus for African governments in their engagement of the BRICS is dominated by the potential growth in economic activities. Visa regimes and the promotion of BRICS economic activities in Africa should go hand in hand because ease of movement across borders have an impact on economic benefits between the countries, although it is not a clear direct link from trade and investment to migration, the statistics available on remittances are clearer on the direct impact of migration.

This paper explores how the BRICS have approached immigration policies and visa regimes to African countries. While there is little data available on migration statistics, it is possible to link understanding

<sup>1</sup> This paper refers to 1) migration as the movement of people, and 2) immigration as a long-term relocation of people to another country, and 3) the rules and policies regarding the movement of people are located in immigration policy.

to remittances from the BRICS countries to African countries. The BRICS as an emerging partnership express that they want to achieve reform of global power asymmetries; power diffusion through easing migration may send a powerful message on the BRICS ability to change power asymmetries. What is the orientation of the BRICS to migration in Africa, what kind of discussion are facilitated through available platforms like the BRICS-Africa Outreach on the movement of people. This will be discussed in the following sections: the politicised impact of globalisation on immigration policies and visa regimes as power in migration; the role of the BRICS in power diffusion through migration; BRICS and migration; and the BRICS-Africa Outreach platform.

### Immigration policies and visa regimes as power levers

Globalisation should engender more openness and interdependence impacting on more open borders and there is some evidence of freer movement internationally. Moreover, the anticipated added benefits of tourism, trade and investment revenue should encourage governments to remain optimistic. Yet the reaction of governments to tighten controls over the freedom of movement because of perceived threats shows deep contradictions in how countries apply the benefits of globalisation (Czaika & Neumayer, 2017); mobility is selective and seems to be more skewed towards privileged countries from the global North. With globalisation, security threats have also become more prominent and debates surrounding how do countries facilitate the movement of material gains with increased security threats and impacts on a country's grand strategy, however migration is not often discussed as such. It is important to acknowledge the impact of economic incentives and commercial partners in the opening of borders to labour strokes insecurity and ideas about nationhood, which is an additional threat to national social cohesion (Advan, 2019, pp. 2,8-9) (Czaika, De Haas, & Villares-Verla, 2018, p. 589). Before the advent of the Covid-19 outbreak globalisation and the multilateral system was already under attack; globally a rising nationalist trend has impacted governments, they face immense pressure from state and non-state actors to apply more protectionist measures. In a Covid-centric reality, migration controls have tightened and there is a large degree of uncertainty how cooperation facilitated by globalisation may recover and how this will impact migration for employment purposes in the future (Yaya & Labonte, 2020, p. 2). In spite of changing trends, immigration policies and visa regimes are complementary and will continue to hold immense value. Both are used to control the movement of people, which is inherently driven by political interests are governed by codified rules as to who has permission to access the territory and what kind of activities can be engaged in. Moreover, it has an important role in driving economic growth and development (Skrentny, 2013, p. 139).

In a Covid-centric reality, migration controls have tightened and there is a large degree of uncertainty how cooperation facilitated by globalisation may recover and how this will impact migration for employment purposes in the future (Yaya & Labonte, 2020, p. 2). In spite of changing trends, immigration policies and visa regimes are complementary and will continue to hold immense value. Both are used to control the movement of people, which is inherently driven by political interests are governed by codified rules as to who has permission to access the territory and what kind of activities can be engaged in. Moreover, it has an important role in driving economic growth and development (Skrentny, 2013, p. 139).

A visa, can be used as a tool, and serves a number of purposes: 1) catalogues and tracks migration through official documents, applications and border control; 2) controls migration and immigration, also through official documents, applications and border control; 3) demonstrates the level of closeness in political relationships; 4) reward or punish a bi-lateral partner, and 5) can determine how wealth can be accessed, and validate who has access to wealth (Czaika, De Haas, & Villares-Verla, 2018). Immigration policies and visa regimes are politically inclined.

There are a number of categories ascribed to visas, or rather levels of permissions that individuals are granted when moving across borders; however, this paper will only focus on: 1) whether a visa is required for a particular period and therefore the entry approval is required from an embassy, consulate, or other official representative, before entering the receiving country; 2) a visa is granted on arrival for a particular period that allows the traveller to obtain a visa when entering the country, which includes filling out immigration forms and paying a fee if applicable; 3) an e-VISA can be obtained from an official source through an online application before arrival for a particular period; and 4) if no visa is required then the traveller does not need to apply before or on arrival, but they are still required to present valid identification, receive an entry stamp and fill in immigration forms (Visa Openness Index, 2018). The formalisation of migration through visas can have a balanced effect as visas can both reduce immigration but also encourage long-term settlement, the emphasis is placed on the formality of arrangements. However, the challenge of short-term visas is the risk of irregular immigration and overstaying visas and therefore there is a reluctance to relax visa regulations (Mau, Gulzau, Laube, & Zaun, 2015, p. 1196). While there is commercial competition to attract highly skilled migrant workers, much migration tensions originate with the movement and local employment of low-skilled migrants who may often gain access to a country through a tourist or short-stay visa (Skrentny, 2013, p. 148).

As travel has increased substantially over the years, visa-free travel and waivers has not increased in corollary as anticipated to allow for greater ease in movement of people. The trend of increasing visa-free travel and waivers do not necessarily get relaxed over time due to increased demands in movement (Mau, Gulzau, Laube, & Zaun, 2015, p. 1199). And with the ease of travel, the visa regime has evolved over time to become increasingly complex and country specific according to perceived and potential risks. Moreover, "the perception of a North-South mobility divide may reflect a western or Eurocentric perspective" (Czaika, De Haas, & Villares-Verla, 2018, p. 1), which is important because of the legitimacy that is attached to multi-layered geopolitical dynamics between the global North and South and one-sided visa entry and exit requirements that are linked to broader bi-lateral or bloc diplomatic asymmetries. For example, Mau et al. (Mau, Gulzau, Laube, & Zaun, 2015, pp. 1203-1205) describes the trend of global visa distributions in different regions over 40 years, from 1969 – 2010, and explains that travel restrictions have not improved for Africans due to fears of irregular migration and where passports of particular nationalities have strengthened in the ability to gain visa-free access, African passports have stagnated in strength. There are clear winners and losers, which are drawn further to compare North-South dichotomies. While the North-South dichotomy is a simplistic narrative and it does not leave room for the challenge for global South solidarity in visa regimes, as this is not necessarily guaranteed either, and determined by bi-lateral political and diplomatic relationships.

For example, where a country may choose to remove visa restrictions this may be seen as a positive or constructive boon to the bi-lateral relationship, and the receiving country may respond mutually or open bi-laterally, alternately the receiving country may choose not to reciprocate. Or in the case where a country may choose to introduce a visa, which can be seen as a negative turn around in the relationship; the receiving country may similarly retaliate and respond bi-laterally or uni-laterally by placing harsher restrictions (Czaika, De Haas, & Villares-Verla, 2018, p. 8). This is another example of how power dynamics can be analysed in bi-lateral visa regimes. First, the ease of obtaining a visa shows what kind of legitimate power dynamic exists between two countries. Secondly, if countries wish to upgrade their diplomatic relations by improving migratory regulations it is anticipated that there are political and/or economic expectations of other countries or that economic benefits may follow or be part of the agreement. Next, if countries choose to renege on existing visa agreements, this could impact negatively on bi-lateral diplomatic relationships, politically and economically. While migration and visa studies are focused on the North-South relationship (Czaika, De Haas, &

Villares-Verla, 2018, pp. 5,8-9), it is important to explore the role of emerging powers in the power diffusion through migration formalised in the form of visa access. The mobility of people is a marker of power, and the ease of mobility the ability to access mobility can determine the degree of power countries can yield.

### **BRICS and positions on migration**

The BRICS share a number of views on migration issues; 1) the link between transnational migration and development, 2) an openness to work with other countries while highlighting the importance of safety and order in the process of migration, and 3) emphasising the pragmatic importance of mobilising skilled workers to and from the BRICS (BRICS, 2015b). The 2015 summit hosted by Russia, in Sochi, was the first time that the BRICS had discussed migration Round table on “New strategies of managing migration as the key to a successful development of society” (BRICS, 2015a). The Agenda for BRICS cooperation on population matters 2015-2020, the ministerial discussion focused on a number of socio-economic indicators for population growth and development. More specifically, the migration and urbanisation agenda rooted in social sustainability and that international migration to emphasise the economic growth through effective immigration policies (BRICS, 2015c)

Immigration between the BRICS has been focused on achieving technical cooperation and development through skills transfers, student exchanges and bursaries, and cooperation in technical and higher education, academic development, science, technology and innovation. This kind of cooperation is pitched to developing BRICS countries but may also act as a justification for the mobility of unskilled workers for migratory work. Although the BRICS are easing travel restrictions and improving access to education opportunities, the existing challenge of brain drain is supposed to be addressed through other means of the BRICS partnership. Another challenge is that the BRICS are a transit gateway for migrants seeking access to the global North, where the BRICS need to make their countries attractive enough to potential skilled workers. And lastly, the high numbers of humans trafficked, transnational and organised crime and increasing corruption within the BRICS countries is of immense concern (Korobkov, 2015, pp. 10-19). However, these are highlighted as additional areas to improve cooperation and further deepen the quality of cooperation. Following the seventh BRICS Summit, the eight summit held in 2016, in India, noted “the importance of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people” and welcomed the new addition to ministerial meetings (BRICS, 2016).

The following occasion to focus on migration was the 2018 BRICS summit that South Africa hosted under the theme “BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution”. The Agenda for BRICS cooperation on population matters 2015-2020 was reemphasised as the policy framework to guide engagement among the BRICS with a specific emphasis on “gender inequality and women’s rights, youth development, employment and the future of work, urbanisation, migration and ageing.” (BRICS, 2018). Although the BRICS partnership highly values the people-to-people cooperation element that further deepens the ties through persons embracing and sharing BRICS cultures, they have stayed away from issuing specific statements on the migration of countries surrounding BRICS regionally. This may be due to the respect for BRICS’ sovereignty, but it also allows the BRICS greater flexibility when interacting bi-laterally with other countries of the world.

In order to facilitate the numerous trade and investment, education and exchange projects underway, the BRICS have aimed to streamline visa policies in order improve the work being done. And while the inter-BRICS visa regimes are not the same across the BRICS and still dependent on the bi-lateral relationships of the respective countries, the visa regimes have actioned more political and diplomatic reciprocity among the BRICS. Moreover, ministers have worked to create more Fourth

Industrial revolution-friendly methods of visa application and screening through e-visas, where the visa may be obtained electronically.

**Table 1.** Inter-BRICS visa arrangements, as of 2020

		Country of destination				
		Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Country of origin	Brazil		Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application	Visa application required	Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)
	Russia	Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)		Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application	Visa-free travel	Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)
	India	Visa application required	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application		Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application
	China	Visa application required	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application	Visa-free travel	Tourist, business or medical e-visa or digital visa application
	South Africa	Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)	Visa issued on arrival (up to 90 days)	Consulate application required	Visa application required	

Source: Author's own

While these arrangements were noted before the outbreak of the Covid-19 outbreak and a number of border closures were issued following the announcement of the global pandemic, it is very likely that these visa arrangements will not be altered once border restrictions are lifted. There is indeed a high degree of reciprocity among the BRICS as most partners return the arrangement, the most popular is the visa that is granted on arrival, which means more relaxed travel among BRICS citizens. This generates more income through tourism and it is anticipated that doing future business is facilitated with greater ease once the people-to-people link is established. Although partners like China may still require a visa application in some cases; it is progressive to see the possibility of visa free travel between China and Russia, and the increased frequency of an e-visa or digital visa application.

If the spirit of cooperation among the BRICS is to be facilitated in earnest, the BRICS should be committed to liberalising their migratory policies and extending a number of courtesies to the BRICS' regional partners too, namely South Africa's regional partner, Africa. The BRICS have expressed an interest in Africa as a geostrategic point; the following section will discuss how the BRICS has engaged Africa through the Africa Outreach platform and bi-laterally since South Africa joined the partnership and how migration links to the BRICS vision of cooperation with Africa.

## BRICS-Africa relations

The BRICS dialogue about Africa and African issues like development and conflict does not go as far as to present a specific BRICS-Africa strategy other than its support for African solutions, development and institutions. While engagement has promoted economic partnerships as well as education, in general; and barring summit invitations, BRICS-Africa engagements reflect bi-lateral engagements.

## BRICS-Plus platform and the BRICS' Africa outreach

South Africa was the first to invite more countries to the BRICS summit. In 2013, during South Africa's hosting of the fifth Summit in Durban, a number of African countries serving leadership roles in African institutions were invited; Rwanda (as AU Chair), Senegal (as NEPAD chair), Gabon (ECOWAS Chair), Uganda (EAC Chair), Ethiopia (IGAD Chair), Togo (ECOWAS Chair), Burundi (COMESA Chair), Namibia (SADC Chair), Angola (SADC Organ Chair), and the then Chair of the AU Commission, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat (Tralac, 2018: 5). Although South Africa is also part of the BRICS-Africa engagement as an African country, South Africa is discussed as a BRICS partner to Africa. Africa features strongly on South Africa's Africa agenda and an added advantage to the BRICS is geostrategic leverage, where the BRICS status as emerging powers is boosted and their leverage it improved internationally.

This trend was continued as the BRICS followed by inviting close regional partners to subsequent summits. The BRICS-Plus Platform was expanded upon by China in 2017, which created opportunities for greater regional interaction with countries of the global South. While BRICS countries China's hosting of the ninth summit At the 2018 BRICS Summit, Egypt (AU Chair), Rwanda, Ethiopia, Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Senegal, Gabon, Togo, Uganda, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zimbabwe were invited (DIRCO, 2018). The BRICS-Africa Outreach and second BRICS Plus Cooperation with Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs) during the Johannesburg Summit was an opportunity to improve BRICS-Africa opportunities to boost economic ties (BRICS, 2018). A prominent factor in the BRICS partnership is the importance of strengthening and promoting economic growth through trade, investment and development assistance, as well as a strengthening partnership between the public and private sector of the BRICS (UNECA, 2013).

In addition, the BRICS emphasise the importance of working within the existing institutions that support infrastructure development, job creation, education, and human security, like the African Union and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the highly anticipated African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as well as the AU's Agenda 2063, the AU silencing the guns agenda and further collaboration between the UNSC and AUPSC (BRICS, 2018). All which ultimately contribute to regional and continental economic integration by addressing intra-African trade and continent-wide free movement that ultimately contribute to addressing socio-economic challenges. The BRICS are very specific in emphasising the principle of respecting sovereignty of nations, which is the underlying BRICS approach to Africa. This translates into a conundrum for the BRICS who may not be at liberty to critique another BRICS partner on the nature of bi-lateral relationships that the countries enter into. For example, South Africa is considered as the gateway to Africa, but it is severely critiqued for allowing external countries to access Africa and make preferential agreements that may not be in the continent's best interest.

The initial meeting of ministers dealing with migration issues was to discuss potential best practices among the BRICS while acknowledging potential regional risks. While, Africa is a major cornerstone of South African foreign policy and each of the BRICS have regional interests, Africa's opportunity for investment, resources and geographical positioning makes it a geostrategic point of interest for

the BRICS. Since South Africa joined the partnership in 2013, Africa has featured prominently on the BRICS agenda and embraced by all BRICS partners.

In terms of material gains, trade between BRICS and Africa is focused on energy based and commodities exports and manufactured or value-added product imports into Africa, which tells a similar story of how the rest of the world engages Africa. Moreover, the growing trend is to diversify engagement in Africa by improving access through investment in physical infrastructure and higher-production or manufacturing services, which could be extended to the movement of people. In terms of investment, the approach of Russia, India and China has been to incorporate or bundle these three activities, while Brazil and South Africa have kept these separate, and improve on key industries. And lastly, development assistance to Africa is disseminated in the form of concessional loans, linked to china's particular instrument of engagements; as well as technical cooperation and skills transfer in education, health and ICTs from all BRICS (UNECA, 2013).

The BRICS ardently express that there is scope for expansion of relations with Africa, and consistently link common histories to their geopolitical interest in Africa. For example, all BRICS consider themselves developing countries and lean more towards global South narratives in achieving global reform. In addition, Brazil and Africa share Portugal as the common colonial link; Russia was an ardent supporter of decolonisation and liberation movements of Africa; India's engagement in Africa too shares in its anticolonial movement and has a large diaspora living in Africa, having been a British colony; China, also a former British colony, quickly established itself as an equal partner to Africa and showed ardent support for similar movements that admired the communist ideology; and South Africa's share in the fight for liberation was much more closely followed and supported by African countries, as well as the other BRICS members.

In addition to economic returns, Russia's interest in Africa is also diplomatic as "Russia seeks votes in support of its position at the UN or other political gestures that uphold Moscow's diplomatic posture internationally" (Faleg & Secrieru, 2020). While this strategy aims to show that Russia values all diplomatic partners, it is also to counter an anti-Russian narrative in international relations and show that it cannot be isolated diplomatically and that its allies need not be traditional dominant powers in order for Russia to have relevance in the world.

India's engagement in Africa. Following engagements on multilateral platforms, India has become an important economic partner for Africa; for example, the India-Africa Forum in 2008, announcing the Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme for Least Developed Countries, scholarships for African students, credit line, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. In addition, the Africa-Asia Growth Corridor (AAGC), India's partnership with Japan and Africa established to rival the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Chakrabarty, 2016, pp. 267-268). India is viewed as a development partner by Africa and much of the engagement is driven by South-South cooperation principles and has grown to encompass commercial engagements in agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, ICT services. The focus of India's economic diplomacy has been to provide: 1) grants that are geared to launching a Pan-African e-Network to support education and medical capacity building; 2) technical assistance in the form of the Indian Technical and Economic Programme that has specialised in training and technical assistance; and 3) making lines of credit available to the continent that are geared towards developing agriculture and energy infrastructure projects. This, in addition to India's global governance aspirations to gain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, would gain traction with support from African countries (Lucey, Schoeman, & Grant Makokera, 2015).

China's engagement in Africa has risen substantially over the last 20 years, most of it being a strong encouragement from the Chinese government; through various tax breaks, concessional loans and credit to companies operating in Africa. China is the largest trade, investment, and development

assistance partner to Africa. China's investment strategy has been to optimise resources and target the development of key industries. China has actively sought to give more prominence to its relations with Africa by formalising its engagement through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which was established in 2000, and quickly developed a number of consultation mechanisms and sub forums (FOCAC, 2020). This platform aimed to create more sincere engagements between China and Africa, in comparison to traditional partners like the US and Europe, through the creation of a special interest free loan fund aimed at the construction of infrastructure, promotion of technology transfer, addressing trade imbalances, and cancelling African debt totalling RMB 10 billion to 31 Heavily Indebted Poor countries. In addition to FOCAC, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), holding both a continental and maritime dimension, was launched in 2013 and became popularised among African countries that has also been incorporated as a development assistance and investment vehicle to dovetail with FOCAC (Evangelista Medeiros & Martucci Benvenuto, 2020, p. 3).

South Africa's positioning in the BRICS in relation to its regional role is contentious. While South Africa advocates that its role in such clubs is to build effective clubs that can also promote Africa on an equal footing through its prioritisation of its African Agenda, other countries in Africa disagree with its status in representing African interests at international institutions and other platforms like BRICS. South Africa's African footprint has increased dramatically since democratisation, playing a bridge building role across institutions in the form of its peacebuilding, mediation and peacekeeping, as well as trade and investment engagements. However, South Africa's identity and reputation abroad still holds weight as a stakeholder for countries external to Africa. But in Africa, its identity is critiqued severely for its inability to actualise the image it communicates: 1) South African commercial competition standards are more developed and businesses are often cited as having an expansionist or at times predatory approach to local African enterprises; 2) Politicking by ANC leaders to gain favour at the AU 3) waves of xenophobic and anti-African violence towards African foreign nationals raise questions for how South Africa promises to make good on its commitment to human rights when it cannot uphold its high standards for respecting Africans on South African soil.

While all of the BRICS too have similar criticisms of commercial interests, politicking, and issues with human rights interpretation, South Africa is more severely critiqued for its geographic positioning and history in the continent as well as incohesive image and performance in Africa question its role and privilege as a gateway into Africa.

### **Migration as a new area for strategic cooperation**

Migration among the BRICS is easily facilitated within the ministerial framework and relevant government departments, there is political will among the partners. While critics may express that the partnership is dwindling in relevance, there are also opportunities for growth in migration oriented towards Africans. World Bank data collection on migration has improved since 2010, where previously there would be no data reported for several African countries. While it is not possible to have an accurate comparison of how migration figures have increased over the years, the 2017 dataset provides a clearer picture of approximate bi-lateral estimates of number of people. From BRICS countries, India received 207,493 migrants from Africa, next China received 195,974, South Africa received 161,288, Brazil received 123,017 and the Russian Federation received 39,708 (World Bank, 2017). Reports about migration are still colloquial and therefore may impact the policy direction of official immigration positions.

For example, in previous years, Africans' migration to Brazil has increased dramatically over the years due to past years of relaxed regulations for African travellers from Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. Some of which is irregular and potentially dangerous for the immigrant, especially noting the increase in asylum seekers over the years from Africa. However the general push factor

towards migration is due to the general perception that opportunities are better and plentiful in the country of destination and Brazil is an attractive destination because entry is easy and a large number of the Afro Brazilian population share cultural ties and common history. However, in spite of the diverse population, Brazil's African asylum seekers are stigmatized due to existing Brazilian racial divisions and added risks of being drawn into illicit activities like drug trafficking back to Africa. The relationship between Brazilians and migrant Africans is further strained because there is unawareness of socio-economic hardship in many African communities. In various cases, Africans seeking asylum are able to reach Brazil and migrate across South America through asylum seeker status. Moreover, migrants who are at risk of overstaying their visas are predominantly exposed to unskilled or low skilled labour and therefore their exposure to learning additional skills and contributing to the economy through skilled labour is not always possible (Cowie, 2014); (World Politics Review, 2018).

However, Brazil's Africa strategy, the formation of the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) dialogue forum in 2003, has been complimentary and South Africa's role as a key African ally signalled ramped up diplomatic engagement. The South Atlantic is a key to Brazil's maritime and intercontinental security strategy, which is complimented by its 'overseas border' with Africa (e Pavia, Bravo e Pavia, Monfredo Mendes, & Carniero Correa, 2020), as seen with visa exemptions granted to Morocco, Namibia and South Africa that share the Atlantic ocean. Yet, Angola and all other Lusophone countries are still required to apply for visas (Itamaraty, 2020), which shows a division in how access and movement of people is not solely determined by cultural similarities, such as language.

Russia's engagement in comparison to the other BRICS is smaller due to the "capacities and diplomatic infrastructure to engage with local communities and politico-ethnic groups across Africa" (Faleg & Secieru, 2020). This is a growing diplomatic opportunity to communicate indirectly with local populations through migration to and from Russia. Russia has large numbers of resident migrants, as well as migrants abroad, and is remittance sending (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). While Russia does not see Africa as an irregular migratory threat as other western countries do, it is important to demonstrate more care towards the Africa diaspora, including those who are victims of human trafficking, and address racial stereotyping in society. Feedback from the African diaspora in Russia will impact on their relationships with African countries. In the meantime, Russia has become a popular destination for non-English higher education noting approximately 17,000 students from Africa, an increase from the 6,700 in 2011 (Foy, 2019).

African migrants in Russia can be linked to the following categories; academic migrants, transiting migrants, and those who have fallen victim to human trafficking. There is room for growth in Russia's education diplomacy with Africa as noted in *State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025*, and while the strategy should dovetail with investment in soft infrastructure in Africa like education and health facilities, Russian schools need to be more receptive to such an internationalist vision when promoting Memoranda of Understanding with African institutions. The Russian Federation has increased the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions from 6 700, in 2010, to 16 700, in 2019 (Statista, 2019). A prevailing challenge is to reduce transiting migrants, who aim to reach third countries through Russia; however, in such a case, the Russian government needs to be increasingly proactive in communicating its immigration policies (Balytnikov, et al., n.d.).

While China has been severely criticised for bringing a large unskilled workforce to construction projects, it has become actively involved in international educational cooperation and subsequently passed immigration laws that allow skilled professionals to easily access China in order to attract more talented students and professionals, and in various cases retain them (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). African students make up the second largest population of students living in

China; as 59.9% are from Asia, 16.57% come from Africa, and the remainder are from Europe, North and South America and Oceania (Statista, 2020). and much interest has been encouraged because of the heightened economic relations and growing relationship between African countries and China as many self-funded students were also accepted to Chinese universities. Moreover, China has exhibited a readiness to receive masses of students through its Chinese government scholarships, and public and cultural diplomacy (Li, 2018). In addition, Li (Li, 2018) notes that cultural shocks for both Africans and Chinese are a significant barrier, which still contributes to racial discrimination or racial stereotyping, and African students have generally encountered Sporadic flareups of discrimination against Africans.

The BRICS approach to regional relations notes that South Africa should be able to take a lead in Africa, South Africa's engagement and reception of African migrants has been most controversial and impacted on African academic migration. While South Africa on of the largest African recipients of African immigrants due to its diverse economy and infrastructure, and relative political stability, Anti-African violence and xenophobic attacks due to limited employment opportunities have marred people-to-people relations (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). The Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) and the Further Education and Training Colleges Act 2006 (Act 16 of 2006) are two particular policies that encourage skilled workers to come to South Africa through critical skills visas or permanent residence permits (Immigration Act 13 of 2002). However, opportunities to retain permanent employment remain scarce because South African policies are centred on reducing historical socio-economic imbalances that manifest in race relations.

## Conclusions

The immigration policy and complementing visa regime are very much a part of economic relations. The BRICS partnership and its activities in Africa are mostly limited to elite interactions. Benefits through visa regimes are likely to reach those who can afford to travel; and therefore, African government employees, business people, academics, press, and holiday makers are likely the ones to benefit going to the BRICS countries. More likely, Africans are to engage BRICS countries locally. While the BRICS narrative was an exciting prospect to rewrite African development stories, BRICS trade in Africa that has focused on export of mineral wealth and import of manufactured goods still "replicates the low-quality growth model" that benefits African elites and very little development trickles down. Visa regimes are important because they are a key instrument of migration, but also promoting diplomatic relationships. The BRICS are ambitious as emerging powers and academic migration may promote this agenda because of the links to global South Solidarity and policy of promoting the migration of skilled professionals, but there is also a dilemma to get students to return to their country of origin.

Although the emphasis of regional leadership in BRICS plays a major part in education or academic migration and South Africa needs to develop rapidly to facilitate this demand, South Africa can play a greater role in negotiating more expressive engagements on the BRICS Plus and Africa Outreach platforms in how the BRICS can be accountable partners to Africa.

The BRICS have well established policies on academic migration, which have a direct impact on economic growth trajectory of a country. However, this needs to be mobilised at summit level on the BRICS Plus Platform and BRICS Africa Outreach, as well as at ministerial level by the BRICS Heads of Migration Authorities. Due to the prevalence of Anti-Africa sentiments, there is an impact on image that BRICS wish to portray of their countries and academic migration potential, which still a long way to go in appreciating BRICS-African people-to-people engagements.

Visa regimes are under studied in international relations and there is further scope for explore the BRICS' relationships with African countries in relation to how far the BRICS have opened visa regimes to African countries and if there is bi-lateral reciprocity, and to what extent this has improved on closer cooperation and economic growth. Current engagements have shown that the BRICS in general are focused on their pragmatic economic growth, while acknowledging issues of historical implications in international development. In general, solidifying relationships in the form of immigration and visa regimes, may improve the BRICS's relationship with African countries, especially if the BRICS are looking at consolidating their message as a reform partner, their approach to migration needs to be considered too.

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