

# Impacts of South Africa's 2023-2024 Immigration Policy Reforms on Socio-Economic Relations with Kenya: Trade, Labor, and Cultural Exchange

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## Abstract

As the two largest economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa and Kenya have long had complex economic ties. Through these partnerships, both countries benefit from trade, investment, tourism, and other forms of growth and development. Immigration laws have a significant impact on these economic relationships. Workers, wealth, and goods are easily moved by immigrants. There have been recent modifications to South Africa's immigration policy. The socio-economic ties between South Africa and Kenya are mainly disregarded, even though these shifts are extensively recorded. Preliminary findings indicate that these policy adjustments could have a significant impact on labor mobility, bilateral commerce, investment flows, and other economic linkages. The nature, scope, and long-term consequences are still unknown. The purpose of this study was to analyze the implications of South Africa's immigration policy change of 2023-2024 for socioeconomic relations with Kenya. The objectives of the study were to analyze the implications of South Africa immigration policy change of 2023-2024 on the bilateral trade, bilateral labor relations and bilateral cultural exchange with Kenya. In conclusion, the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has had a positive influence on enhancing trade relations, increasing exports, and expanding business opportunities, despite challenges in achieving a more favorable trade balance for Kenya. While the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has facilitated professional mobility and engagement in career development activities for Kenyan professionals, it has not significantly improved hiring rates, working conditions, or bilateral labor agreements. While the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has enriched cultural exchanges and improved mutual appreciation of cultural heritage, additional initiatives are required to enhance student exchanges and joint cultural events. This study sheds light on how immigration policy changes can either foster or hinder socioeconomic growth between two major African economies.

**Key Words:** *Immigration Policy, Bilateral Trade, Labor Mobility, Cultural Exchange, Socio-Economic Relations*

## Introduction

Immigration is a national issue and a federal responsibility (Su, 2012). For many years, the United States has drawn foreign nationals due to its economic opportunities, religious freedom, and civil and political rights. This lengthy history of immigration has been advantageous to our nation, maintaining and advancing our economic production and boosting the vitality of our diversified community (Kim, 2010). America has observed a steady pattern of immigration with the nation accounting for over 20% of the global immigration population. While the state and federal states have historically conflicted on regulation on immigration (Merrit, 2013; Miller, 2002; Elias, 2014). Morales (2013) advise that Reformers should devise original, democratically acceptable strategies to change the demands made by citizens, as opposed to concentrating on ways to overturn anti-immigrant measures that are responsive to popular will

According to Zimmermann (1996), Europe has seen waves of push and pull migration in recent decades. While push migration is thought to worsen the employment situation, pull migration has historically been viewed as economically advantageous (Jenkins, 1977; Parkins, 2010; Shrestha, 2017). This idea's theoretical foundation takes controlled migration into account, along with diverse labor and monopoly union conduct. Recent econometric studies indicate that business cycle impacts (supply-push) and chain migration (demand-pull) were the main drivers of immigration from the nations targeted for recruitment; however, these dynamics were altered when recruitment stopped in 1973. Contrary to popular belief, the relative economic circumstances in the receiving countries also have an impact on the lows of asylum seekers and refugees (supply-push) (Urbanski, 2022).

As FDI increased, so did support for free immigration in the United States, according to Peters (2014). Businesses that relied on the labor of immigrants faced greater competition and the risk of failure as trade opened up and other states became more welcoming to foreign capital. A decline in local workforce led to the closure of several businesses or the relocation of manufacturing abroad. Support for unrestricted immigration then declined as a result of these companies allocating their political capital to non-immigration-related causes. The absence of support gave officials the ability to impose immigration restrictions (Peters, 2014).

Lupak (2014) contends that migration can contribute to the socio-economic development of recipient territories by increasing human resources, urbanization, and stimulating the integral index of socio-economic development. A small scale of migration and other stronger factors may prevent immigration processes from having a significant impact on socio-economic development, according to Lupak (2014). According to Czaika and De Haas (2011), migratory origin and internal composition, as well as total volume and long-term trends, are more successfully impacted by immigration policies' overall efficacy than they are by their selection and composition. It is their contention that the available data indicates the importance of particular policies for particular groups of migrant flows that they are intended to regulate. The objectives of public discourses surrounding migration, however, appear to differ significantly from the real migration trends and patterns.

## Literature Review

According to Peters (2015), researchers should examine trade and immigration policy from an integrated perspective rather than studying them as distinct foreign economic strategies. Immigration and trade policies can be substituted. Trade policy decisions have an impact on immigration laws in nations with a labor shortage by affecting businesses. Trade closure results in lower average firm demand for immigration, which leads to restricted immigration, while trade opening results in higher average firm level demand for immigration, which leads to immigration openness. Trade and immigration have become important policy concerns again in the modern era, and with good cause. According to Jacks & Tang's (2018) long-panel analysis, there is a positive correlation between the bilateral exports of the US and Canada, which together accounted for the majority of immigrants and goods during this period, and inward migration from those trade partners, indicating complementarity based on factors of production. On the other hand, a significant shift in US immigration policy during the interwar years combined with the study's meticulous examination utilizing a triple differences paradigm suggests otherwise. Although Jacks & Tang (2018) attribute this to unreported changes in immigration law, it does highlight the need for more rigorous empirical research in this field. Borjas (2018) draws a comparison between immigration and global trade in the document. The author contends that although both involve flows across international borders, immigration and commerce are not always equivalent in terms of their perceived benefits and contributions to the economy. Human migration is a component of immigration, as noted by Borjas (2018), and its effects have the potential to negate or even reverse the net economic benefits that such flows can produce for the receiving nation. Therefore, Borjas (2018) suggests reconsidering immigration from the perspective of economic efficiency rather than redistribution.

One may make the case in Genc et al. (2012) that immigration raises output and aggregate demand, which in turn raises the demand for imports. If immigrants work in export-related businesses where unit production costs are reduced or if immigration generally improves the host country's global competitiveness, exports may also rise as a result. According to Genc et al. (2012), there is a possibility that immigrants will maintain ties to their home country on a micro level. These ties could aid firms in the host nation in creating networks that will enable them to import or export goods to and from the migrant's country of origin. According to Genc et al. (2012), having migrants engage in trade can also increase trust in the home and host nations' commercial connections. Homegrown products are frequently preferred by migrants (especially food items, but not entirely). Due to a "demonstration effect," the demand for these products eventually rises within the host community as well (e.g., ethnic eateries).

According to Boucher & Cerna (2014), governments' policy preferences for skilled immigration have increased over the past ten years. Skilled immigration strategies aim to fill labor market gaps caused by structural aging and economic trends by bringing in new immigrants. Simultaneously, skilled immigrants—including those coming through family reunification streams—are frequently perceived as less government dependent and more prepared for the labor market than other types of immigrants. Skilled immigration is becoming more and more significant globally, according to numerous international organizations. According to Ferrer et al. (2014), the points system has prioritized the selection of highly skilled immigrants from its inception, particularly in the last few years. Immigration policy has changed recently, favoring admitting more people into the economic class and fewer people into the family reunification and refugee classes. Including the primary applicants and their spouses and dependents, around 60% of all immigrants to Canada currently fall into the "economic" category.

According to Muyambo & Ranga's (2020) research, the primary driver of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa was the lack of work in Zimbabwe. Migrant households' consumption of commodities increased and their purchasing power increased as a result of the migration. Remittances covered household expenses, but they weren't enough. As a result, some neglected to consume balanced diets, seek medical attention when ill, and pay their children's school fees on time. According to Muyambo & Ranga

(2020), migrant workers' children do not always automatically enjoy a better life when they choose to relocate to South Africa. Some of them don't send money home on a regular basis, and the sums they do send may be modest. Notwithstanding this difficulty, migrant households relied on remittances to support them in hard times. According to Muyambo & Ranga (2020), the government should regulate labor migration to South Africa by generating jobs and making sure the offspring of low-income labor migrants attend school. Immigration can replace institutions that don't exist or don't produce the desired results, claim Afonso & Devitt (2016). Education and skill sets are an excellent example of this: when institutions of vocational training do not produce enough workers to meet the demands of businesses (for example, in the fields of carpentry, bricklaying, or plumbing), there is a skills mismatch and a possible need for hiring foreign labor. In this situation, immigration can take the place of educational institutions by allowing businesses to hire talented individuals from other countries. Additionally, as was the case with early training in the United States, a huge supply of personnel with foreign training could impede or replace training institutions. A consistent flow of skills created "for free" overseas can deter domestic businesses from investing in educating employees to produce these abilities domestically (Afonso & Devitt, 2016).

According to The Alps and Carpathians (2017), "welcoming cultures" are social settings that encourage the growth of ties between newcomers and long-term locals. It entails forming integrated communities, identifying chances for cross-cultural exchange, and identifying areas of shared interest. The goal of a welcome culture, according to Gretter et al. (2017), is to reduce resistance to changes in social interactions, encourage community members' empowerment and engagement, and improve the allure of areas as places to live and work. Gretter and colleagues (2017) underscore the significance of a nurturing social milieu, the involvement of community members who serve as intermediaries between disparate socioeconomic and ethnic groups, and the accessibility of suitable sites for the relocation and provision of assistance to recently arrived individuals. Gretter et al., (2017) found that there has been a counter process of increasing immigration into mountainous regions in the Alps and Carpathians, which have traditionally experienced outmigration and abandonment.

Language and cultural difficulties, according to Liaqat, Axtell, and Munteanu (2021), pose a serious threat to the social relationships that grandparents and grandchildren have in immigrant families. Activities involving cultural interaction, such as storytelling aloud, help strengthen these vital bonds. According to Liaqat et al. (2021), families find it difficult to manage these seemingly ordinary exchanges because of the hurdles that are in place. Grandparents are more vulnerable to long-term social separation from their families as a result of the ensuing intergenerational drift. Previous studies that offered technology-mediated assistance for the social contacts between grandparents and grandchildren in non-immigrant households discovered that these treatments did, in fact, strengthen the bonds between grandparents and grandchildren in both physically close and distant multigenerational families. According to Liaqat et al. (2021), technology-mediated support for intergenerational immigrant cultural exchange needs to be planned for this triologic process, take into account the importance of expressing values as a kind of meta-commentary on a narrative, and change the way that we view current "barriers" in order to see how they might encourage more engagement.

## Methods

This study has examined the implications of immigration policy changes for socioeconomic ties with Kenya through the use of a broad theoretical framework that incorporates the ideas of liberalism in international relations and the Push-Pull Theory of migration. The two theories provide two different perspectives to explain the complex dynamics of immigration policy impacts at the micro and macro levels, respectively. Liberalism is derived from the enlightenment theories of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke, further developed by modern-day scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. It aids in understanding the international relations aspect of this article and works on the principle that there is an interplay of political, social, and economic links between states and other non-state actors through which cooperation and stability can be achieved. It strongly emphasizes democratic governance, economic interdependence, and international institutions as determining causes in the behaviors of states and policy outputs. This research, within the context of the debate, shall be informed by liberalism in understanding how changes in South Africa's immigration policy affect its bilateral trade, exchanges of skilled workers, and cultural integration with Kenya, with emphasis on the possibility of gain and collaboration.

The study was carried out in Nairobi, Kenya. The city hosts the Embassy of South Africa, which is pivotal in diplomatic relations and will offer primary data on the implications of South Africa's immigration policy change. Foreign Affairs and Immigration offices are in Nairobi. These institutions play a significant role in shaping and responding to international policies, making them key points for data collection regarding the study's objectives. A wealth of information about Kenya-South African trade dynamics can be found at the Kenya Chamber of Commerce Offices (KCCOs) on Kenya's capital city's streets.

The population of this study encompasses: Officials and personnel in the Embassy of South Africa in Nairobi (ESAiN) who were best placed in understanding the details of the immigration policy changes, including what this meant in respect to the bilateral relations between the two countries. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration offices of Kenya based on the importance of

having those personally dealing with the South African affairs or those who have been part of the discussions and negotiations that have taken place regarding the adjustment of immigration policy. These representatives, executives, and members of the Kenya Chamber of Commerce Offices are aware of recent changes to South Africa's immigration policy that might have affected trade dynamics, patterns, and shifts. Some of these programs or initiatives at cultural exchange levels between Kenya and South Africa are driven by individuals or groups in Nairobi.

It applied the mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative research methods that together provided an extended view of implications brought forth by the immigration policy variation in South Africa. This is beneficial because numeric data and insight can be combined in-depth to provide a full view of the issue at hand. The design used in this study is descriptive because it looks to describe the characteristics of the situation or phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive research is one form of scientific methods of research and is rather good at giving detailed descriptions of existing conditions without interfering or manipulating the variables, as would be the case in experimental research. Means, medians, modes, standard deviation, and frequency distribution are descriptive statistical measures were computed on quantitative data to give a general overview of the data. Qualitative data responses were categorized by common themes and patterns. Thematic analysis was conducted where identification and reporting of patterns within the data are done.

## Results

### Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Trade

The first objective sought to answer the question, what are the implications of South Africa immigration policy change of 2023 – 2024 on the bilateral trade with Kenya?

Table 1: Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Trade

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Has the recent South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime positively influenced trade agreements between South Africa and Kenya?	256	3.82	1.326
Has the policy change led to an increase in Kenyan exports to South Africa?	256	4.18	1.144
Has South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to diversification in the types of goods and services traded between the two countries?	256	3.77	1.360
Has the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime facilitated easier movement of goods between South Africa and Kenya?	256	3.59	1.419
Has the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to a more favorable trade balance for Kenya?	256	2.22	1.349
Have Kenyan businesses expanded their operations in South Africa due to the agreement?	256	3.59	1.397
Has the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime positively impacted trade relations between South Africa and Kenya?	256	4.16	1.238
Valid N (listwise)	256		

Source, Researcher (2024)

On whether the recent South-Africa visa free travel regime has positively influenced trade agreements between South Africa and Kenya, the study got a mean of 3.82 and a std deviation of 1.326. This shows that participants agreed that the visa-free travel regime positively influenced the trade agreements for both South Africa and Kenya. The overall perception was positive, with a mean of 3.82, correlating to the expectation that the eased travel requirements should facilitate closer business interactions, accessing new

markets and trade processes. On whether the recent policy change led to an increase in Kenyan exports to South Africa, the study got a mean of 4.18 and a std deviation of 1.144 indicating that respondents supported the notion that the recent policy change has led to increased Kenyan exports to South Africa. This is consistent with the hypothesis that positive liberalization measures, such as visa-free travel and reduced negative tolerance, increase export activity because business is accessible to conduct business and trade between countries. On whether South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to diversification in the types of goods and services traded between the two countries, the study got a mean of 3.77 and a std deviation of 1.360. The mean shows that the visa-free travel regime has made an average respondent agree on the brought-out diversification in terms of goods and services traded between the two countries.

On whether the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime facilitated easier movement of goods between South Africa and Kenya, the study got a mean of 3.59 and a std deviation of 1.419. With a mean score of 3.59, the participants would agree with the fact that the visa-free traveling policy facilitates relatively easy movements of goods between South Africa and Kenya. This means that the policy may have instigated ease in logistics and administrative procedures in cross-border trade. On whether the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to a more favorable trade balance for Kenya, the study got a mean of 2.22 and a std deviation of 1.349. mean score, From the mean of 2.22, one perceives that this visa-free travel regime has done little to improve Kenya's trade balance with South Africa. On whether Kenyan businesses expanded their operations in South Africa due to the agreement, the study got a mean of 3.59 and a std deviation of 1.397. On average, participants agree that the visa-free travel regime opened the ways for the expansion of Kenyan businesses in South Africa. It is positive that the visa-free regime drove companies in Kenya to expand into South Africa. On whether the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime positively impacted trade relations between South Africa and Kenya, the study got a mean of 4.16 and a std deviation of 1.238. This indicates that the visa regime has positively impacted trade relations between South Africa and Kenya. This implies that the policy has transformed easy process interactions into more bi-lateral trade activities and economic solid ties between the two countries.

### Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Labor Relations

The second objective sought to answer, what are the implications of South Africa immigration policy change of 2023 – 2024 on bilateral labor relations with Kenya?

Table 2: Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Labor Relations

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Has the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime made it easier for Kenyan professionals to work in South Africa?	256	3.58	1.506
Has the participation rates of Kenyan professionals in South African job fairs, conferences, or training programs increased post South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime?	256	3.96	1.241
Have South African companies increased their hiring of Kenyan workers due to the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime?	256	2.27	1.356
Has the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to improved labor relations and collaborations between the two countries?	256	3.41	1.516
Has the visa free travel regime resulted in better working conditions for Kenyan workers in South Africa?	256	2.46	1.449
Has there been a significant increase in bilateral labor agreements between South Africa and Kenya since the visa free travel regime?	256	2.53	1.490
Valid N (listwise)	256		

Source, Researcher (2024)

On whether the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime made it easier for Kenyan professionals to work in South Africa, the study got a mean of 3.58 and a std deviation of 1.506. This indicates that, on average, there is a likelihood that respondents agree

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that the visa-free travel regime has facilitated the working environment in South Africa for Kenyan professionals. This shows that it improved the perception that the visa-free regime facilitated professional mobility among Kenyan professionals. On whether the participation rates of Kenyan professionals in South African job fairs, conferences, or training programs increased post South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime, the study got a mean of 3.96 and a std deviation of 1.241. A 3.96 average score indicates that there is a belief among the respondents that the visa-free travel regime has occasioned higher participation of Kenyan professionals in job fairs, conferences, or training programs in South Africa. This means that the policy decreased some of the travel barriers so that it became easier for professionals to engage in cross-border professional development opportunities, networking, and skill enhancement activities.

On whether South African companies increased their hiring of Kenyan workers due to the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime, the study got a mean of 2.27 and a std deviation of 1.356. In general, the respondents do not believe the visa-free travel regime has upped the hiring of Kenyan labor by South African firms. This means that other factors, such as job market dynamics, employer preferences, and regulatory barriers, may lock Kenyan workers out of employment opportunities even when the restrictions on travel are relaxed. On whether the South-Africa-Kenya visa free travel regime led to improved labor relations and collaborations between the two countries, the study got a mean of 3.41 and a std deviation of 1.516. The mean average score of 3.41 shows that the participants agreed that better working relations and collaborations occurred between South Africa and Kenya due to a visa-free travel regime.

On whether the visa free travel regime resulted in better working conditions for Kenyan workers in South Africa, the study got a mean of 2.46 and a std deviation of 1.449. There having been a mean score of 2.46, which is a scale equivalent to their disagreement that the visa-free travel regime has indeed appreciated and improved working conditions for Kenyan workers in South Africa. This implies that even though there have been eased travel restrictions, workplace regulations, employer practices, and enforcement of labor standards may be other factors that continue to cause difficulties in the improvement of the working conditions. On whether there been a significant increase in bilateral labor agreements between South Africa and Kenya since the visa free travel regime, the study got a mean of 2.53 and a std deviation of 1.490. This shows that participants tended to disagree with the statement that under the visa-free travel regime, there has been a remarkable increase in bilateral labor agreements between South Africa and Kenya. This reflects the perception that there has not been a significant uptick in bilateral labor agreements between South Africa and Kenya under the visa-free regime.

### Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Cultural Exchange

The third objective sought to answer, how does South Africa’s immigration policy change of 2023 – 2024 impact the bilateral cultural exchange with Kenya?

Table 3: Immigration Policy Change and Bilateral Cultural Exchange

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Has the visa free travel regime facilitated a richer cultural exchange between South Africa and Kenya?	256	3.98	1.213
Has there been an increase in cultural events and programs between the two countries since the visa free travel regime?	256	3.32	1.477
Has the visa free travel regime led to an understanding and appreciation of each country’s cultural heritage?	256	3.40	1.427
Has the visa free travel regime led to an increase in student exchange programs between South Africa and Kenya?	256	2.45	1.473
Has there been a rise in collaborative cultural projects between South African and Kenyan artists since the visa free travel regime?	256	3.39	1.402
Since the implementation of the visa free travel regime, has there been a marked increase in joint arts and music festivals celebrating both South African and Kenyan cultures?	256	2.45	1.399
Valid N (listwise)	256		

On whether the visa free travel regime facilitated a richer cultural exchange between South Africa and Kenya, the study got a mean of 3.98 and a std deviation of 1.213. The mean score of 3.98 reflects that participant agreed that the visa-free travel regime made culture exchange richer between South Africa and Kenya. This means that the policy has allowed people to journey with, share cultural experiences, participates in cultural activities, and enhance mutual understanding and appreciations of the culture between the two different cultures. On whether there been an increase in cultural events and programs between the two countries since the visa free travel regime, the study got a mean of 3.32 and a std deviation of 1.477. The mean score of 3.32 indicates that most respondents agreed that cultural events and programs between South Africa and Kenya increased with the introduction of the travel regime. This reflects a moderate perception whereby a visa-free regime has facilitated the increase in cultural events and programs.

On whether the visa free travel regime led to an understanding and appreciation of each country's cultural heritage, the study got a mean of 3.40 and a std deviation of 1.427. A mean score of 3.40 reflects the participants' stance that the visa-free travel regime has been an indicator of an enhanced understanding and appreciation of each other's cultural heritage. This suggests that the policy might have facilitated closer interactions, exchanges, and exposure to aspects of cultural heritage from both countries for better mutual appreciation. On whether the visa free travel regime led to an increase in student exchange programs between South Africa and Kenya, the study got a mean of 2.45 and a std deviation of 1.473. The mean score of 2.45 indicates that members disagreed with the fact that under the visa-free travel regime, there have been increased student exchange programs between South Africa and Kenya. A low average of 2.45 generally indicates the perception that the increase in student exchange programs between South Africa and Kenya has not been one of very significant impact as a result of the visa-free regime.

On whether there been a rise in collaborative cultural projects between South African and Kenyan artists since the visa free travel regime, the study got a mean of 3.39 and a std deviation of 1.402. The mean score of 3.39, therefore, indicates a mean tendency of agreement on the side of the participants that the visa-free travel regime has leaked into increased cooperation of cultural projects among South African and Kenyan artists in the past ten years. This indicates a mean perception that there has been increased cooperation of cultural projects among artists from the two countries. On whether since the implementation of the visa free travel regime, has there been a marked increase in joint arts and music festivals celebrating both South African and Kenyan cultures, the study got a mean of 2.45 and a std deviation of 1.399. This shows that they are likely to disagree that the visa-free travel regime has significantly increased the number of joint arts and music festivals that celebrate both South African and Kenyan cultures. Generally, This implies that, despite the relaxation of the existing travel restrictions on the use of visas, lack of operational funds, organizational challenges, and under-collaboration are likely to limit the development of such joint arts and music festivals.

## Discussion

One such issue that has been the focus of scholarly interest is the relationship between immigration policy and trade. The notion among prominent scholars, such as Peters (2015), has always been a forcible articulation: policies across these regimes are deeply intertwined. For example, Peters (2015) proposes that immigration policies and trade policies are parallel subjects of study since changes in one relate directly to the other. This agrees with the result of the study, since it shows that generally, indicators were positive on issues that pertain to how the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime had an effect on the trade agreement between the two countries, as represented by a mean score of 3.82. This would mean that the recent policy change has been seen to serve the purpose of facilitating the actual trade agreements and aligning with Peters' argument that open immigration policies increase trade by enabling the movement of goods and services in an easier way. The study also found a strong positive perception of the visa-free travel regime's impact on increasing Kenyan exports to South Africa at a mean score of 4.18. This agrees with the assertion made by Jacks & Tang (2018) who showed that immigration and trade move positively, particularly in the area of export. The overwhelming agreement of the respondents suggests that the visa-free regime has actually promoted the export activities of Kenya, perhaps by reducing market access friction and rendering Kenyan merchandise more competitive in the South African economy. Furthermore, the response on the impact of the visa-free travel regime on diversification in the range of goods and services traded between the two countries is generally positive, giving a mean score of 3.77. This corroborates what Çağatay et al. (2014) found, where immigration can result in an increase in the variety of goods traded, especially for sectors such as food and machinery. This would indicate moderate agreement among participants and, therefore, a wider range of products and services being traded, hence making the trade relationship between South Africa and Kenya more dynamic and diverse.

However, the general poor perception of the visa-free regime from creating a more favorable trade balance for Kenya's balance in terms of a mean score of 2.22 is also revealed under the study. Such findings lie on the same thrust of the warnings given by Borjas (2018) of net indications that the impact may not always mean the receiving country will get a good net impact. While the visafree regime indeed has indeed eased trade and improved exports, it almost seems that these benefits are yet to benefit the overall trade balance of Kenya with South Africa more than one may think any other factor could possibly be in play in this instance. Literature indicates an increasing importance of the policies about skilled immigration as a tool for filling labor market gaps and counteracting the challenges that structural aging and economic transformations issue. According to Boucher & Cerna (2014), policies of skilled immigration have been preferred by governments globally as such policies are viewed to be necessary for labor market needs and promoting economic growth. The findings of this paper align with much of this literature inasmuch as while participants view the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime on an average to ease the process under which Kenyan professionals work in South

Africa, with a mean score of 3.58. This may suggest that the visa-free regime managed to encourage more professional mobility in bringing the skilled Kenyan workforce closer to South Africa's opportunities. The survey also has reflected a very strong positive perception about the increase in participation rates of Kenyan professionals participating in job fairs, conferences, and training programs in South Africa with a mean score of 3.96. This finding supports the belief that skilled immigration policies can help boost the professional development of students and provide networking opportunities, as suggested by Chassamboulli & Peri (2020), who still argue that skilled immigrants often create networks that facilitate further migration and employment opportunities. The fact that the high proportion of the respondents support this issue indicates that, actually, visa-free regime has succeeded in opening doors for professional Kenyans to become more active in professional and educational events of South Africa, from where comes the possibility of long-term career growth and cooperation.

On the other hand, the results indicate an overall perception of the visa-free regime as not having a significant effect in improving employment granted by South African companies to Kenyan employees, as depicted by the average score of 2.27. This goes contrary to expectations created by Afonso & Devitt (2016), who postulate that immigration is able to devise ways for replacing the deficits in home training with imports of skilled workers. The disagreement among the respondents implies that Kenyan professionals will still suffer some level of employment barriers into South Africa in terms of recognition of qualifications, competition with the local workforce or even possible biases in hiring practices despite the increased mobility. Also, the state of the visa-free regime for improving labour relations and collaborations between South Africa and Kenya was viewed as positive currently at a mean score of 3.41. This corroborates the argument by Kahanec & Zimmermann (2011), who observe that immigration policy has the potential to give rise to cross-cultural collaborations and, therefore, to improve labor relations. In their opinions, the responses indicated above-average confirmation that the visa-free regime indeed brought about better communication and cooperation of the labour markets of the two countries, which might culminate in better professional ties and mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

Offsetting these positives, the results also indicate that the improvement of working conditions for Kenyan workers in South Africa is generally viewed negatively under the perceptions of the visa-free regime, standing at an average score of 2.46. The outcome tends to validate the skepticism of Holzer (2011) and Reitz (2013) regarding immigrants struggling to access decent working conditions in competitive or saturated job markets. This disagreement suggests that Kenyan professionals may still face challenges in securing equal treatment and favorable working conditions in South Africa, which may be barriers toward reaping overall dividends from the visa-free regime. Lastly, participants perceive a negative impact brought about by the regime of visa-free on increasing bilateral labor agreements between South Africa and Kenya, with a mean score of 2.53. This points to a missed policy implementation opportunity since the bilateral labour agreement could form the basis upon which protection of migrants' rights needs to be stressed, as elaborated by Reitz 2013. Participants disagreed on this matter, underlining that while such movement is not problematic, there has been little progress in signing of labour formal agreements which could strengthen job security and conditions for Kenyan professionals in South Africa. The conclusion from this study therefore gives a more balanced view in the impact of the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime on the exchange of workers at skilled levels. Whereas the regime succeeded in facilitating professional mobility and taking part in career development activities, many challenges are still to be overcome with respect to enhancing employment opportunities, working conditions and bilateral labor agreements. These findings will have implications for targeted policy interventions in addressing these challenges and ensuring full exploitation of benefits from the visa-free regime for the skilled workforce from Kenya.

The literature also reveals that it is expected that immigration policies facilitate the cultural exchange and integration process in the context of the host country. In relation to this point, Gretter et al. (2017) further present that "the welcoming cultures" allow the development of relationships between newcomers and long-term residents by means of a series of integrated communities and cross-cultural exchanges. These findings from this study support that perspective since the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime was said to have a strong positive impact on making cultural exchanges between the two countries richer. The mean of 3.98 expressed significant agreement among participants. This means that the visa-free regime has been instrumental in facilitating mutual cultural understanding and interactions that promote the development of a more cohesive socio-cultural space between South Africa and Kenya. In regard to increased cultural events and programs between the two countries, the study also throws up a relatively positive view with an average score of 3.32. This is not at variance with expectations, since the aspect of immigration policies could create avenues through which the cultural events and programs could be captured, as depicted by Kim & Streich, 2020, while discussing the role of cultural exchange centers in Japan. If a slight agreement among the participants is anything to go by, then one may suppose that though there has been an increase in the number of cultural events, the increase might just turn out to be pretty minimal probably due to logistical challenges, resource constraints, or varying levels of interest in and participation during such programmes.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has had a positive influence on enhancing trade relations, increasing exports, and expanding business opportunities, despite challenges in achieving a more favorable trade balance for Kenya. While the



South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has facilitated professional mobility and engagement in career development activities for Kenyan professionals, it has not significantly improved hiring rates, working conditions, or bilateral labor agreements. While the South Africa-Kenya visa-free travel regime has enriched cultural exchanges and improved mutual appreciation of cultural heritage, additional initiatives are required to enhance student exchanges and joint cultural events

The study, therefore, concludes by recommending that South Africa and Kenya must continue to consolidate the visa-free travel regime while addressing the challenges identified in this report. To deepen the trade relationship, both governments have to look at concrete efforts that will ensure a balanced trade climate contracted, either through joint ventures or export diversification. In the field of labor, each country needs to agree on bilateral labor cooperation that, besides enabling professional mobility, also enhances rates of hire and working conditions for Kenyan professionals in South Africa. To further enrich this cultural exchange, more initiatives on student exchange programs should be drafted with joint cultural events aimed at deeper appreciation of the heritage of each nation, which is able to give much more longevity in socio-economic collaboration.

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