

Rural-Urban Migration in Africa

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENT N. 10

Mar 2021



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"This background document has been realized in the framework of the project, to spread data and information based on a scientific analysis. If you want to know more about this project and be part of its activities, please feel free to contact the leading partner Diaconia in Czech Republic (email: nozinova@diakoniespolu.cz), as well as Focsiv in Italy (email: f.novella@focsiv.it)."

¹ This background paper has been realised in the framework of the "Faces of Migration" project (Migrant and SDGs, contract number CSO-LA/2018/401-798), co-financed by the European Union. The paper has been elaborated by Aurora Ianni and Mattia Giampaolo, researchers at the Centro Studi Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), with the coordination of Andrea Stocchiero (Focsiv). This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN AFRICA

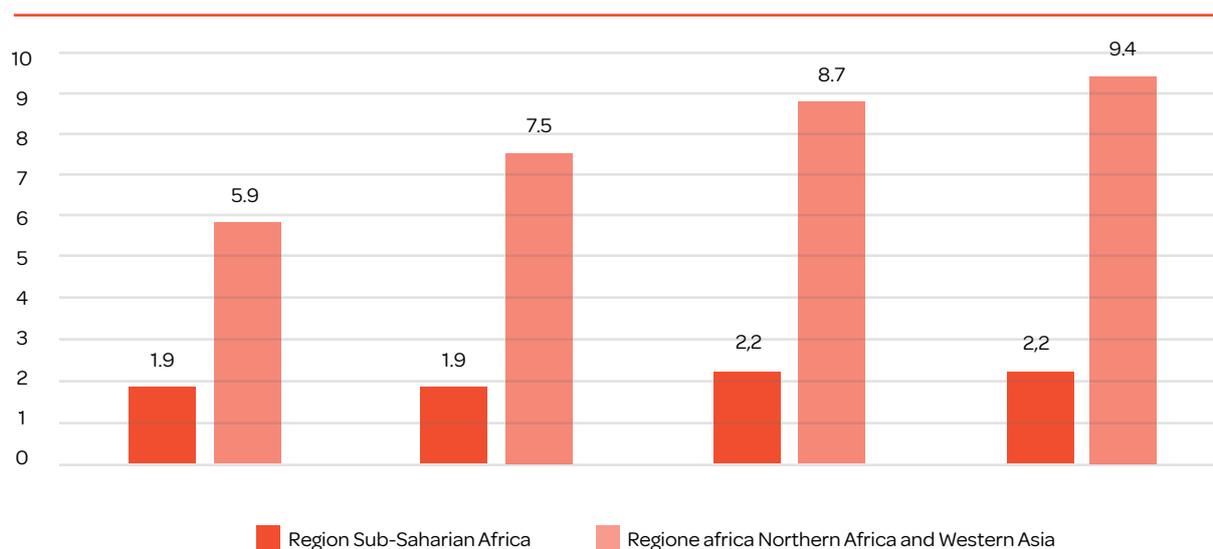
Introduction

Migration is often seen as a movement from poor countries (Africa or Asia) to rich ones (Europe). However, in analyzing figures on migrants in different countries of the globe, we see that most migration movements occur within African or Asian countries. Indeed, according to UNHCR and UN DESA data only in East Africa international migrants are about 7,7 millions and 3,6 are refugees¹. Among them, more than 63% intend to move towards the Gulf countries, only 2% want to travel to North Africa and Europe and the rest remain in the Region². Despite this great human mobility among neighbor countries, Africa is witnessing a great wave of intra-country migration, notably from rural to urban areas. This kind of migration usually involves the poor

rest individual of societies who decide to move to the small, medium and large cities in their country³.

The lack of basic services, job opportunities as well as the usual insecurity of the peripheral areas pushed many individuals to leave rural zones in order to find better living conditions in the cities. Despite more possibilities and services offered by urban centres, rural-urban migrants have to face challenges: due to their low skill background and their low education level they do not have access to the labour market, ending up to be employed in the informal sectors.⁴ In addition, the enlargement that African cities witnessed during the last decade did not result in a real human development, bringing to private investments at the expenses of the public ones.⁵

Graphic 1 - International migrants as a percentage of total population by major area of destination.



Source: UN, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimate-sgraphs.asp?1g1>.

¹ <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/eastern-africa>.

² Ibid.

³ Corrado Fumagalli, Katja Schaefer, Migration and urbanization in Africa, in AFRICA MIGRATION REPORT, International Organization for Migration, 2020, 41-9.

⁴ Ibid.

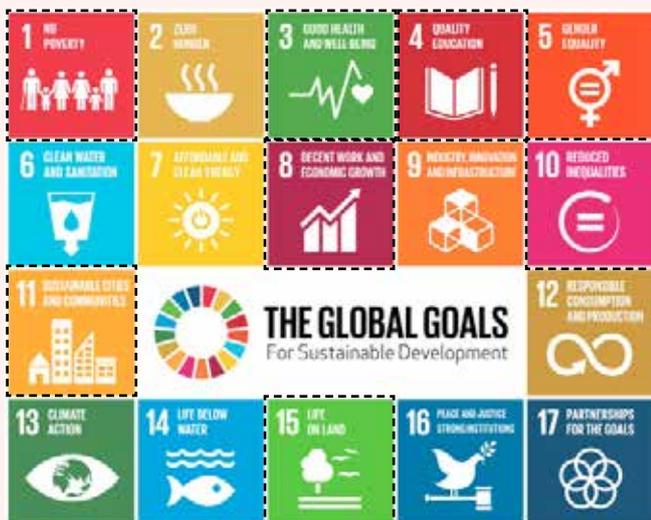
⁵ Julians Amboko, Kathomi Gatwiri, Darius Okolla, The implications of Neoliberalism on African economies, health outcomes and wellbeing: a conceptual argument, Soc Theory Health. 2020;18(1):86-101.

1. SDGS AND THE AGENDA 2063 FOR AFRICA

Goal (Sustainable Development Goal – SDG) 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) of 2030 Agenda considers the development of sustainable cities in order to guarantee to all the individuals a good and safe housing and services. However, when it comes to developing countries, wherein inequalities are more spread than in Western ones, the provision of services should be considered in a larger framework by including other goals of the Agenda.

As we outlined above, the lack of basic services (health, education and a stable income) and job opportunities prevented people to be included within the society.

In this context, **goal 1** (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), **3** (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) **4** (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), **8** (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), **10** (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and **15** (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss) are crucial to curb poverty and inequalities.



Ph. Global Goals for Sustainable Development



The environmental degradation, floods and droughts, the industrial predominance over agriculture are all causes that, as we will see in the next paragraphs, pushed people in some

African countries to migrate from rural areas to big towns but also to small and middle cities in circular ways.

In parallel with UN SDGs, African Union⁶ put in place its own agenda (Agenda 2063) in order to reach by 2063 a “shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth are realized, and with freedom from fear, disease and want”⁷. The agenda contains ‘seven aspiration’ points related to both political and economic and development issues. The document, at least at its first ‘aspiration’ seems to reflect the SDGs in tot⁸:

1. A high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all
2. Well educated citizens and skills revolutions underpinned by science, technology and innovation
3. Healthy and well-nourished citizens
4. Transformed economies and jobs.
5. Modern agriculture for increased proactivity and production

6. Blue/Ocean Economy for accelerated economic growth

7. Environmentally sustainable climate and resilient economies and communities

Although the high aspirations of the Agenda (as for that of SDGs), what is important to underline is the necessity to connect altogether such issues as environment, education, health services and social rights. Indeed, if we look at the main causes which push migrants to leave their country or their region of origin, we will see that all these issues are tightly connected with both SDGs and Agenda 2063.



Ph. Avel Chuklanov

⁶The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).
at: : <https://au.int/en/overview>.

⁷<https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations>.

⁸Ibid

2. ROOT CAUSES OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN AFRICA.

According to IOM report on Africa Migration, “generally speaking, migrants tend to move to cities where they expect to find better opportunities resulting from the concentration of economic activities or safer environments compared to their current location”⁹. The main causes which push a person to leave his/her household and the area wherein he/she lives, according to IOM report, are fourfold: “(a) diversify household income; (b) respond to environmental shocks; (c) as a consequence of social and political unrest in rural areas; or (d) as a response to loss of livelihood opportunities due to climate change and increasingly difficult access to tenure security, or to act as a casual or low wage urban workforce”¹⁰.

The development of some African counties, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Gambia remained problematic with a rapid modernization of some manufacturing and resources extraction sectors, while the agricultural sector (the main activity of some of these countries) stood sidelined from this wave of modernization¹¹. The main driver of this modernization process was, at the time, the State, however, the failure of public intervention in the economy opened the door to the liberalization of the economy and to foreign investments. The presence of giant companies within key economic sectors, such as natural resources and agriculture, provoked an increasing impoverishment of the local population.

While the big cities developed as administrative centres in this new path of modernization, the rural areas remain linked to traditional modes of production or are subject to the outbreak of land grabbing by foreign and national companies.



Ph. Eduard Tamba

⁹ Africa Migration Report, op. cit. pp. 41.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ana Paula F. MendesI, Mário A. Bertellall, Rudolph F. A. P. Teixeirall, Industrialization in Sub-Saharan Africa and import substitution policy, Brazilian Journal of Political Economy, vol.34 no.1 São Paulo Jan./Mar. 2014.

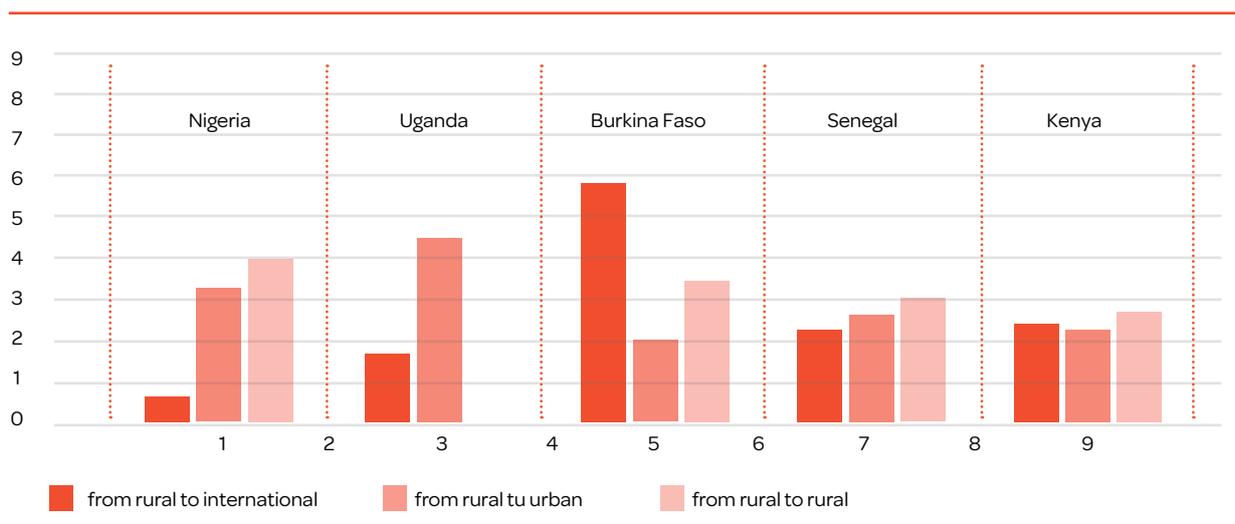
In addition, the big cities, now in the liberalized global market economy, import basic products from abroad at lower prices at the expenses of the local market.

Ghana for example, as outlined in Stefano Liberti's investigation¹², in the early 2000, was one of the most flourishing tomato producers. Tomato is one of the most used food in the country, but due to the importation of tomato from Europe and China -cheaper than the national one- the sector was struck by a deep crisis. In addition, the modernization process brought with it an increasing destruction of the environment and eco- system. The land grabbing practices¹³ and the lack of adaptation infrastructure made rural populations less resilient to climate change.

As described in IOM report, cities are centres of population and economic activities and accounts, at the global level for 80% of global GDP and, as for Africa, urban employment grew by an average of 6.8% over the last decade¹⁴.

Cities are also essential to the political economy of African countries: all countries below the Sahara – except Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho and Mozambique – have primacy rates (the percentage of urban population living in the largest city) above 30 per cent and several above 50 per cent like Angola, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Somalia¹⁵.

Graphic 2 - % of total migrants moving from and to rural-urban and outside the country of origin



Data elaboration from Atlas FAO–Cirad, spread 2 – Mercandalli, S and Losch, B., eds., 2017.

¹² Liberti, Stefano, The dark side of the Italian tomato, Internazionale, 2018, in <https://www.internazionale.it/webdoc/tomato/>.

¹³ Land grabbing is an impetuous economic phenomenon accelerated in 2008 that gave life to massive investments and foreign capital flows in the south of the world. Mainly spread in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, it consists in acquiring large portions of land to develop monocultures. The acquisitions are made by governments, big companies or privates, at : <https://www.lifegate.com/land-grabbing>.

¹⁴ Africa Migration Report, op. cit. pp. 43.

¹⁵ ibid.

Even though these movements are mainly towards medium and little cities (less to metropolis) in recent times, they provoked overcrowding and traffic congestions problems. It is not surprising that these factors caused in the last years increasing CO2 emissions in the air and the spread of breathing diseases.

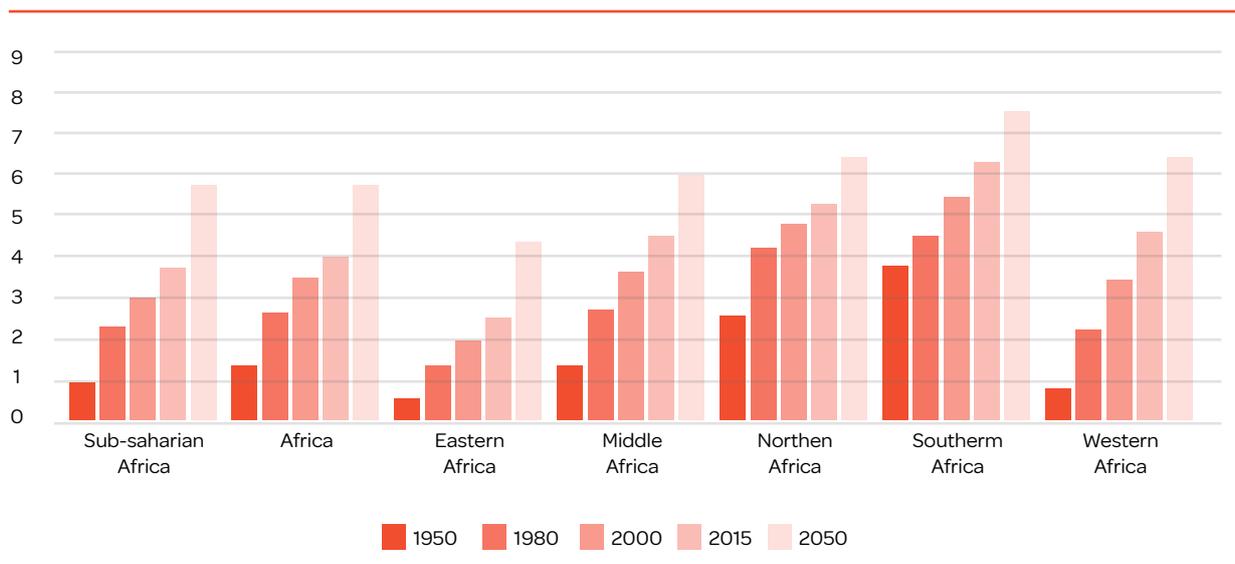
If on one side the rural-urban migration could be considered as a potential resource for both the city and the migrants, on the other, given the lack of job opportunities, many rural migrants have to deal with social and economic exclusion. Indeed, while youth migrants, once settled in the urban environment with their families may enjoy a higher level of education, adults have to deal with unstable jobs within the informal sector or seasonal ones. This prevents them to afford the basic services as health treatment within hospitals or economic subsidies by the state.

This is also due to the fact that many of them are settled within informal places in the peripheries of these cities having problems of housing, water scarcity and food security¹⁶.

According to IOM report, “these problems may translate into the violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including freedom from discrimination, right to life, liberty and personal security, right to social security, right to education and the right to participate in the cultural life of one’s communities”¹⁷.

In this context health care is the core for a full improvement of social conditions in the cities and for the development of the country. In analyzing the impact of neo-liberal policies on African health care, Kathomi Gatwiri, Julians Amboko and Darius Okolla underlined that a good health care system could impact the economic progress of a country¹⁸.

Graphic 3 - Rate of Urbanisation in Regions of Africa (Regional Variations)



¹⁶ Ivi, 44.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Julians Amboko, Kathomi Gatwiri, Darius Okolla, The implications of Neoliberalism, op. cit. Introduction.

Indeed, the main critical point of these movements from rural areas to urban ones is the living conditions of those migrants. According to IOM¹⁹, slums are still a large problem throughout Africa, with countries such as Zimbabwe, which has 17.9 per cent of people living in slums, and Niger, which has 81.9 per cent of people living in slums.

The relative economic growth made prices higher within the cities and did not improve the quality of services. In this respect, basic goods as vegetables, fruit, eggs and chicken are more expensive in cities than in the peripheral areas.

It is not surprising that Africa nowadays is witnessing a rural return migration from urban areas. Problems, economic difficulties and vulnerability pushed people, once migrated to cities, to return to their birth towns and villages. For this reason, as we outlined above, in order to avoid a return (that could be considered as a failure) rural-urban migrants chose to move towards medium and little cities instead of moving to capitals or metropolis.

In this sense, circular mobility (repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas) is especially critical. Seasonal workers are very important for multilocal households as they diversify livelihoods and are vital for the household in the rural areas²⁰. Indeed, as IOM reported, migrants who live in rural areas closed to urban ones enjoy some advantages.

Being not so far from their villages and having, more likely, linkages with the host community (maybe some friends or relatives) they are less vulnerable at the moment of migration. Their linkages could help them find a room to share or provide for some jobs (even informal)²¹.



Ph. Eduard Tamba

¹⁹ Si veda Africa Migration Report, op. cit. pp. 45.

²⁰ Ivi. 46.

²¹ Ibid.

3. URBANIZATION AS A POSITIVE EFFECT, IF SUSTAINABLE.

In order to limit problems and social exclusion, as well as security deterioration, local social associations, linked also to the church and missionaries, are playing a central role. These associations bring on activities to respond to specific incumbencies such as housing and first shelter for new arrivals. They provide migrants with a basic education as well as food distribution. They operate especially at the peripheries of the big cities wherein the great part of those migrants is settled²².

In addition, for example in Kenia, more precisely in Nairobi, Dignitas is one of the local associations with the aim to provide for children and adults living in the slums education and a shelter to live in²³. Or, in Nigeria, JEI is an NGO which provides services to people living in the slums and informal settlements of Lagos.

This last example is very interesting as they combine solidarity and empowerment activities and, at the same time, they support sustainable initiatives aiming at serving and empowering the poor, promoting equality and non-discrimination activities. In addition, they created a network with other movements and associations in the country, as Cities Alliance, which promotes sustainable development in the country²⁴.

Due to the spread of slums, insecurity and criminality, African States in the last years, as well as continental authorities, have focused their ini-

tiatives on the management of urban migrants. First of all, notably the African Bank, the African Union and UNECA “have acknowledged the positive impact of urbanization on the continent’s development²⁵.

A recent UNECA report states that “Africa’s rapid urban growth is both an opportunity and a challenge”²⁶. In order to reach a full effectiveness of cities, economic, social and human development should be taken on together. According to UNECA, “the forces of agglomeration economies give cities a productive advantage, making African cities crucial players in economic transformation.

They are at the center of the emergence and growth of industries, high productivity services and value-added linkages to agriculture and other rural commodities”²⁷.

In order to exploit this potential, IOM underlines the importance of national governments for an effective management of migration in urban areas. The provision of basic services as well as a major role of sub-national and local governments should be promoted. A central prominence should be covered also by civil society organizations. This requires a localization of general programs such as SDGs and Agenda 2063 and their application in local institutions. This means to empower local infrastructures and services and it should be the core target for both national and local governments.

²² Ibid.

²³ More information at: <https://dignitasproject.org/our-story/>.

²⁴ To have more information on the initiative see: <https://www.justempower.org/about-jei>.

²⁵ Ivi. 48.

²⁶ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Economic Report on Africa 2017: Urbanization and Industrialization for Africa’s Transformation, United Nations, Addis Ababa, 2017.

²⁷ Ibid.

Tab 1 - Infrastructure: electricity, internet, water and roads by African regional grouping

Region	Access to electricity (% of population) 2012	Secure internet servers (per 1 million people) 2015	Improved water source, urban (% of urban population with access) 2015	Classified paved road network in good condition (% classified paved networks)
Central	46.9	4.7	88.7	58.7
East	31.1	42.8	88.3	49
North	79.2	4.9	92.7	Non disponibile
Southern	43.5	35.6	92.2	47.8
West	41.1	6.2		43.2

Source: UNECA, 2017 based on World Development Indicators; Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic; International Road Federation.

Africa lags behind the rest of the world in access to electricity, Internet penetration and access to improved water, and has large road maintenance needs, all with subregional differences .

A more effective internet connection within a given country means to empower both urban and rural communities, as well as availability of roads and drinkable water.

These aspects correspond, according to UNECA, to a quicker development which should be implemented with an economic strategy. Indeed, for UNECA, “investment should target the value chains at the heart of industrial job creation, including support to skill building within cities, as well as the transport links within and between cities”²⁹.

If on one side this may be a path to walk in, on the other, we have already witnessed that this kind of development did not work in all the African countries. For example, looking at the Egyptian government policies of development, one can observe that the way the government is taking on these policies is not bringing development but more poverty. The investments in new bridges and roadways to connect the core industries of the countries are clashing with the incapability of the government to invest in basic services and inclusive policies for the poor population³⁰.

In this respect, if on one side the building of new infrastructure could allow a given country to be integrated in the global market, on the other disparities and inequalities are still overspread.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/road-instability-impact-covid-19-egyptian-economy-27495>.

The document published by OIM suggests 4 policy points³¹:

- Efforts to respond to labour market failures include community-based sanitation, urban waste-picking cooperative, as well as start-up grants and business development services for self-employment, innovation challenges to scaling-up of employment programmes for the most vulnerable youth.
- Improving life conditions of migrants in African cities also requires financing frameworks that enable local administrations and citizens to manage migration while capitalizing on the economic and natural assets of their towns and cities.
- Planning for sustainable urbanization also requires attention to rural–urban linkages, population growth, employment opportunities, governance mechanisms and international migration patterns. As a general rule, successful approaches will be people-centric, including civil society groups and associations working together and trying to find a common ground for social inclusion.
- It is important to move towards standardization, collection, analysis and dissemination of migrant data at the local level. Systematic and timely inputs can bolster the impact of migration policy in urban areas of all sizes, where stakeholders are fully involved in the analysis and planning of project implementation and infrastructure improvements.

Furthermore, the document calls for a strict collaboration between local and national institutions and to move migration policies to the top priorities of urban governance in order to fully deploy the potential of cities, both as hubs that catalyze people and as nodes in an increasingly connected world.

Finally, at the European level, the EU Trust Fund takes on programmes to support displaced persons and urban migrants. Interventions in the Horn of Africa are particularly important. They aim to respond to the challenges of the rapid urbanization in Africa³². The initiative has two main objectives related to:

- 1.** Strengthen inclusion and participation of displaced persons in the economic and social life in urban settings across the region.
- 2.** Improve livelihoods and greater access to quality basic services for refugees and host population in selected urban settings.

This initiative lies within a broader program supported by UN, the New Urban Agenda adopted in October 2016 by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). At the core of the programme there are the SDGs and particularly goal 11 aimed to set the grounds to improve the living conditions of millions of refugees and migrants living in the African cities (the programme brings on activities in Uganda, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia).

³¹ Africa Migration Report, op. cit. pp. 48.

³² https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/regional/crrf-inclusive-urban-development-and-mobility_en.

³³ <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>.

In order to reach these objectives, EU Trust Fund supported local municipalities by creating spaces for communal dialogue, living conditions and opportunities for refugees and migrants. The social and economic inclusion is the main goal, mitigating conflicts and tensions within societies. Indeed, according to the EU Trust Fund project document³⁴, the main expected outcomes are:

- Strengthened participation of host communities and displaced persons in urban policy development and implementation.
- Understanding of and better skills for addressing urban displacement, e.g. with regard to perspectives for solutions on social protection, basic services, housing, employment, and environment.
- Social cohesion and conflict prevention promoted between host communities and migrants/refugees;
- Targeted city/ local authorities' and other stakeholders are supported in creating concrete partnerships and alliances for advocacy and exchange.
- Greater inclusion of migration and displacement-related challenges and opportunities in urban strategies and planning.
- Strengthened public, private and civil society service delivery capacities, resources and infrastructure in host communities for responding to specific needs and vulnerabilities of displaced persons³⁵.



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³⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/eutf/files/bt05-eutf-hoa-reg-67_-_crrf_urban_development_and_mobility_incl_rider.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Focsiv and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

This document is part of the SDGs and Migration – Multipliers project and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens project funded by the European Union's Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme