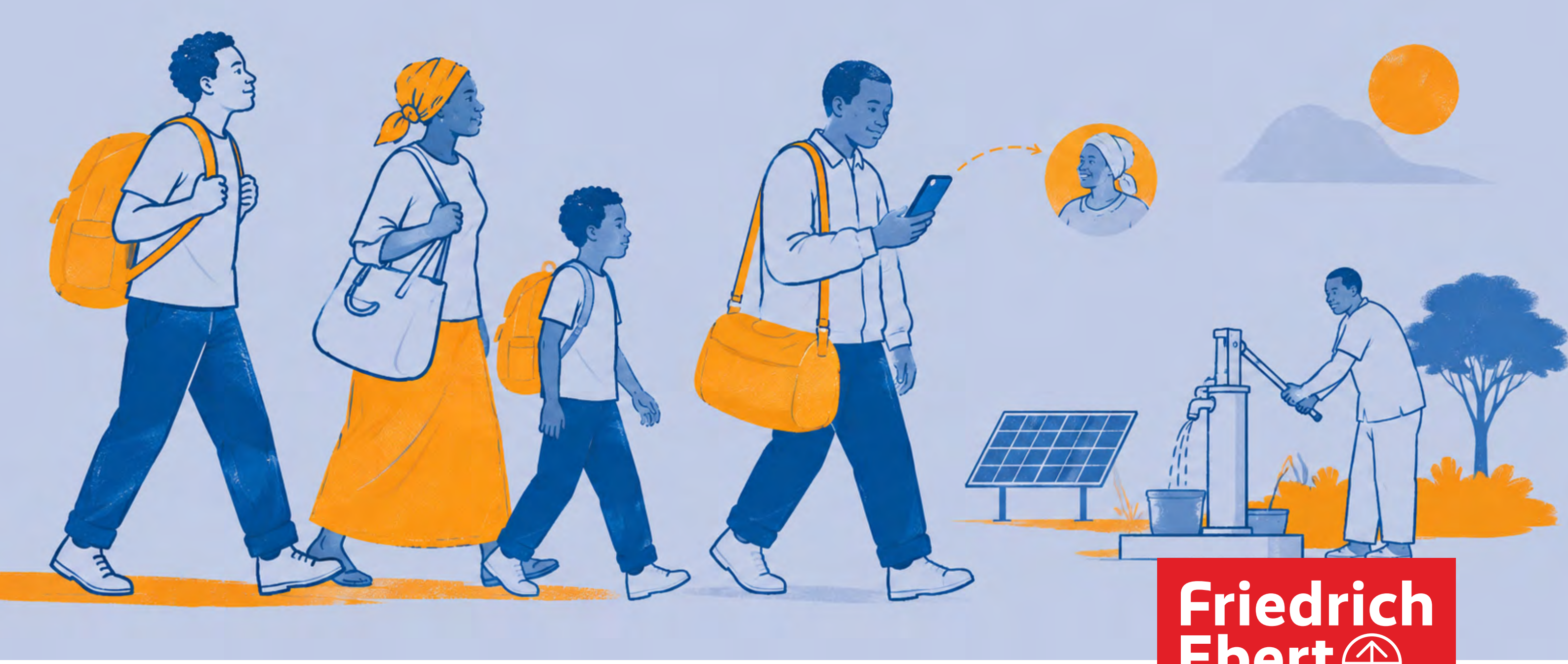
POLICY BRIEF



Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Rethinking Africa's Migration Governance for Climate Adaptation and Resilience Building

Executive summary

Climate-related hazards displaced 7.8 million people across Africa in 2024, continuing an upward trend driven by floods, storms, and droughts.[1] Extreme weather events are converging with conflicts, socioeconomic and structural inequalities to reshape human mobility patterns and deepen vulnerability. While the industrialised nations have a historical responsibility to cut down greenhouse gas emissions, fund adaptation and pay for loss and damage in vulnerable developing nations, the issue of responsibility for the people being forced to migrate because of extreme weather events remains out of discussion. Human mobility is a generic term covering all the different forms of movements of persons, such as internal and cross-border migration, displacement, labour mobility, diaspora, planned relocation, and so forth. [2] In this brief, migration and mobility are used interchangeably.

Migration, both internal and cross-border, is already a widespread coping and adaptation strategy in Africa, allowing households to diversify income, withstand climate shocks, and sustain livelihoods.[3] While majority of climate-related migration is internal, due to continuous loss of agriculture-related livelihoods and growing economic pressures, some young Africans pursue international migration, particularly to the Middle East countries and sometimes to Europe and the United States.[4] Yet migration remains largely absent from climate adaptation policies, and climate risks are equally absent from migration policies. This gap limits the potential of migration to strengthen resilience for climate vulnerable individuals and com-

1 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Global Report on Internal Displacement. 2025. https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2025/

2 International Organization for Migration. Glossary on Migration (International Migration Law No. 34). 2019. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf

3 Melde, S., Laczko, F., & Gemenne, F. (Eds.). *Making mobility work for adaptation to environmental changes: Results from the MECLEP global research (Report No. 42_17).* International Organization for Migration. 2017. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_comparative_report.pdf

4 Nyberg Sørensen, Ninna. *Trespassing Legal and Moral Boundaries: Ethiopian Domestic Workers Returned from the Middle East.* In Governing Climate Mobility in Africa: Explorations of Adaptation in Ethiopia and Ghana, edited by Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, Lily Lindegaard, and Neil Webster. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press. 2025. https://doi.org/10.56687/9781529245417-014.

munities. Planned and regular migration can provide alternative income, and remittances can power both infrastructural and household adaptation to climate shocks. In 2024, remittances to Africa were estimated at USD 96.4 billion, exceeding foreign assistance, including adaptation finance flows, underscoring the crucial role of human mobility in driving real-time resilience.[5]

Instead, governance failures continue to constrain the adaptive potential of human mobility. African migrants face unsafe labour conditions, gendered exploitation, human trafficking, limited legal protection, and high remittance costs as a result of how migration and labour systems are designed and implemented.

At the same time, Africa holds significant but underused leverage in climate diplomacy: a youthful labour force facing unemployment due to climate-related livelihood losses, rising global labour shortages, and the responsibility of high-emitting countries to support adaptation and pay for loss and damage. Continental frameworks exist, including the African Union Free Movement Protocol, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) human mobility provisions, the Kampala Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (KDMECC)[6] and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), but remain under-implemented and under-resourced.

> *This brief argues for a strategic shift: human mobility must be governed intentionally, as, amongst other factors, a climate adaptation instrument, an economic opportunity, and a source of geopolitical leverage, rather than treated as an unmanaged coping response.*

To achieve this, the brief proposes five Africa-led actions:

Negotiate bilateral and multilateral Mobility[7] Compacts that link ethical migration pathways with adaptation finance.
Create an African Climate Skills Passport and Fund to align training with emerging green labour markets.
Establish a Green Visa Pathway to enable fast-track recruitment of climate professionals across Africa and the diaspora.
Institutionalize KDMECC within AU governance to strengthen continental leadership and coordination on climate mobility.
Build a Pan-African Diaspora Climate Finance Ecosystem to mobilize remittances and investment for resilience.

If implemented, these actions would position Africa to govern mobility with dignity and purpose, turning movement into a driver of climate resilience, economic transformation, and political agency.

1. Climate adaptation deficits are reshaping mobility

Climate impacts across Africa are accelerating loss of livelihoods, resource scarcity and youth unemployment, exacerbating existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, while shaping human mobility patterns.[8] For instance, the World Bank projects that Sub-Saharan Africa alone could see as many as 86 million internal climate migrants by 2050 if no actions are undertaken to address, avert and minimise the effects, and the projected number of climate internal migrants for North Africa alone accounts for 19.3 million.[9]

While the Paris Agreement obligates richer nations to provide international climate finance to vulnerable developing nations, funding flows remain bureaucratic, conditional, limited by structural red tape, and far below actual needs. Current flows are at about US$ 26 billion with a financing gap of US$ 310–365 billion annually until 2035.[10] The Loss and Damage funding architecture remains politically contested and structurally inadequate. These failures not only undermine adaptation but also shift the cost of adaptation

5 International Fund for Agricultural Development. "RemitScope Africa". 2022. https://remitscope.org/africa/

6 International Organization for Migration. *Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change*. 2022. https://ehsa.iom.int/kampala-ministerial-declaration-migration-environment-and-climate-change

7 IOM defines climate mobility as the movement of people, temporary or permanent, within or across borders, driven by sudden or gradual environmental changes linked to climate change, encompassing migration, displacement, and planned relocation, aiming to make mobility a choice rather than a forced necessity. https://ehsa.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2706/files/documents/2024-08/glossary.pdf#:~:text=Page%201,international%20borders%20(IOM%202019c).

8 IPCC, *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. 2023. IPCC. pp. 35-115, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647

9 R. Kobusinge. *Claim That Space: A Youth Leadership Guide On Migration, Environment, And Climate Change in Africa*. International Organization for Migration's (IOM). 2025 https://ehsa.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl701/files/documents/2025-08/12082025-youth-guidance-note-on-mecc.pdf

10 Neufeldt, H. et.al. *Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on Empty–The World is Gearing up for Climate Resilience — without the Money to get there.* United Nations Environment Programme. 2025. https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/48798.

onto individuals and households, forcing people to move to sustain their livelihoods.

Moreover, some people, particularly youth, pursue international migration in response to shrinking local opportunities, limited adaptive capacity, and the absence of viable livelihoods, often through irregular and high-risk pathways. This raises a core climate justice question: what responsibility does the Global North bear in ensuring rights to stay, to move, and to protection?

At the household level, these mobility decisions increasingly form part of translocal[11] livelihood strategies[12], that link rural, urban, and transnational spaces to manage risk and finance adaptation. Through remittances, households support agriculture, access healthcare during displacement, rebuild flood-affected homes, and maintain liquidity during shocks. Unlike foreign assistance, which is often constrained by bureaucracy, political conditionalities, and delayed disbursement, remittances are available in real time and directly controlled by households. Remittances to Africa, which surpassed foreign aid and foreign direct investment in 2023 and 2024[13] provide clear evidence that migration could be a crucial adaptation tool, if properly harnessed, especially in the current and future volatile multilateral and geopolitical global context.

However, mobility as adaptation exposes deep inequalities. Migration is more accessible to households with resources, networks, and education.[14] Women face barriers to safe movement and are often channelled into risky labour and informal sectors. Majority of the population, especially the poorest and most climate-vulnerable households, lack the means to migrate at all, creating "immobility traps" where escalating climate exposure is met with no viable exit. Even those highly vulnerable who can migrate internally, such as pastoralists, face immense challenges, including conflicts with other communities and landowners. Mobility, therefore, reflects both resilience and injustice. Particularly, it signals limited adaptation options and denies people's right to stay, especially in the face of rising climate stressors. Policies and programmes must strengthen mobility's adaptive potential while confronting the structural gaps that make movement a necessity rather than a choice. It must therefore include a comprehensive in-situ social protection, build adaptive capacity to ensure the right to stay for those who cannot move and the right to return.

2. African mobility within a global political economy of inequality

African climate mobility unfolds within a global labour hierarchy shaped by restrictive visa regimes, destination-country policies, and border externalization. Existing labour migration channels to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Europe, the US, and parts of Asia predominantly recruit African workers into low-wage sectors such as domestic work, care, construction, and agriculture.[15] These pathways rarely offer skills recognition, meaningful labour protections, a conducive working environment, fair pay or opportunities for career progression, reflecting structural inequalities embedded in global migration governance.

A rapidly expanding border industrial complex, comprising security contractors, surveillance firms, biometrics providers, and private detention operators, sits at the center of these inequities, financially profiting from restrictive migration policies.

Revenue within this multi-billion-dollar sector is rapidly growing at USD 28,287.3 million in 2024 and projected to reach USD 42.02 billion by 2030.[16] The growing socio-economic gaps on the continent also entrench this thriving industry, forcing many Africans to explore migration as a survival strategy or undertake irregular migration and dangerous journeys.

> *Highly educated African migrants frequently experience "brain waste," with their skills undervalued and qualifications unrecognised, pushing many into jobs below their abilities.*[17]

So the issue is not just brain drain but also brain waste. This represents not only loss of human capital for the continent, but also constrains Africa's ability to build and harness the technical and innovative skills needed for climate adaptation and development.

11 Greiner, C. and Sakdapolrak, P. *Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives. Geography Compass*, 7: 373-384. 2013. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12048

12 P. Sakdapolrak, et al. *Translocal social resilience dimensions of migration as adaptation to environmental change,* 2024. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2206185120

13 International Fund for Agricultural Development, (n.d). 2026. https://remitscope.org/africa/#:~:text=4%20billion%2C%20accounting%20for%205.2,or%20investment%20(IFAD%2C%202022)

14 De Haas, Hein. 2023. How Migration Really Works: The Facts about the Most Divisive Issue in Politics. London: Viking (Penguin) .

15 International Labour Organization. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2018. Geneva: ILO, 2018. https://www.ilo.org/media/419001/download .
ILO (2023) Trends & International Labour Organization. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023. Geneva: ILO, 2023. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@inst/documents/publication/wcms_865332.pdf .

16 Grand View Research. *Border Security Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report*. 2024. https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/border-security-market-report

17 Friðriksdóttir, Guðrún Sif. Lost skills and untapped potential: African migration and barriers to labour market integration in Europe. NAI Policy Notes 2025:7. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. 2025. https://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:2016016/FULLTEXT01.pdf .

These dynamics create new vulnerabilities in the context of the green transition. Demand for critical minerals and renewable energy infrastructure is accelerating[18], yet African workers risk remaining confined to extractive or low-wage segments of global value chains. Without coordinated skills mobility pathways and mutual recognition frameworks, Africa forfeits opportunities to participate in high-value green jobs.

At the same time, mobility represents a significant and underutilised diplomatic asset for Africa. With a large and youthful workforce, shifting global labour shortages, and growing obligations on high-emitting states to support climate adaptation, African governments hold bargaining power that is rarely leveraged. Integrating mobility explicitly into climate diplomacy through negotiations on adaptation finance, skills recognition, protection and ethical recruitment could transform Africa from a passive participant into a strategic actor in global climate and labour governance.

Addressing these disparities requires African leaders to treat labour migration as a geopolitical arena in which climate priorities, economic upgrading, and rights protections converge.

3. Mobility as both climate resilience and climate risk

When well governed, mobility strengthens resilience through remittances, risk diversification, skills transfer, and expanded livelihood options. This involves harnessing economic labour mobility as well as providing planned, regular and safe mobility options for at-risk and affected individuals from climate-vulnerable communities. Despite instances of misuse, remittances measurably improve household recovery from climate shocks, support adaptation investment, and strengthen liquidity crisis in real time, particularly when transfers are formal and purpose-specific. Translocal households diversify climate exposure across locations, increasing their capacity to withstand environmental and economic volatility. Returning migrants contribute technical expertise in construction, renewable energy, water management, and enterprise development.

One of the several examples is the Aman–Iman Diaspora Foundation, led by a Nigerien living in the Netherlands, which funded the conversion of Inadougoum village's diesel-powered borehole into a solar-powered water system. Working with local partners, the project installed 125 solar panels, cutting fuel costs, improving reliability, and creating a sustainable, community-managed water supply.[19] Similar projects are found in Somalia, and in Ghana, the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)[20] is undertaking an "Energy Crowdfunding Initiative" to invest in energy access in Africa. It shows how diaspora in Europe can directly drive renewable energy solutions in the communities of origin. Moreover, some of them are already working in sectors that improve adaptation and mitigation in their countries of residence, hence contributing to climate action and adaptation "home and away".

18 IRENA and ILO, *Renewable energy and jobs: Annual review 2024, International Renewable Energy Agency,* Abu Dhabi, and International Labour Organization, Geneva. 2024. https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2024/Oct/IRENA_Renewable_energy_and_jobs_2024.pdf

19 Africa Diaspora Policy Centre, Diaspora engagement in energy access as a catalyst for development. (n.d) https://www.aman-iman.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Diaspora-Climate-Action-Report-12.05.2025.pdf

20 The African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) is an international organisation established in 1994, with a mission "to expand and enhance the contributions Africans in the diaspora make to African development"

However, the cost of transactions in sending and receiving remittances remains as high as between 5-15%[21], diverting resources that could otherwise fund household adaptation, community resilience, and local development. These costs discourage the use of formal channels. Combined with low trust in government, limited credible investment options, and the absence of diaspora-friendly financial products, prevent remittances from being channelled into resilience-building or green enterprises. Mobility thus makes a structurally significant contribution to climate resilience, yet it remains institutionally unsupported.

At the same time, unplanned and irregular migration creates severe risks. Restrictive visa regimes and discriminatory regular pathways largely closed to Africans but open to others combine with inequality, youth unemployment, and climate impacts on agriculture and livelihoods. This pushes a growing number of young Africans into dangerous cross-border journeys or trafficking.[22] Women face sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, confiscation of travel documents, and abuse under restrictive sponsorship systems such as kafala in Gulf countries and Asia.[23] [24] African migrant men endure hazardous jobs in construction, mining, and agriculture, working under unsafe conditions as well as unfair and unpaid wages.[25] When it comes to internal migration, internal migrants are driven into informal urban settlements that are highly exposed to floods and heat. Pastoralists are driven to other community land, competing for water and pasture, resulting in conflicts.

These risks reflect governance failures, not the inevitability of migration or movement. Ethical recruitment systems, accessible labour inspections, regulated intermediaries, portable rights protections, skilling and safe mobility pathways are essential for migration to serve as a reliable form of climate adaptation rather than a generator of harm and vulnerabilities.

4. Africa's governance architecture: promise without power

Africa possesses several frameworks relevant to climate mobility governance, yet implementation remains limited and fragmented. The AU Free Movement Protocol (2018), AfCFTA mobility provisions, and REC-level agreements all provide foundations for intra-African movement as a first-line adaptation strategy. However, bureaucratic barriers, inconsistent implementation, domestic political resistance, and xenophobic attitudes continue to undermine their operationalisation.

The KDMECC, endorsed by over 30 countries and expanded continent-wide in 2023, demonstrates growing political interest in coordinated climate mobility governance. The validated Plan of Action in 2024 and national dialogues in 2025 mark important initial steps. Yet KDMECC still lacks a permanent continental implementation mechanism, a financing strategy, and systematic integration with AU and REC frameworks. Without deeper institutional anchoring, it risks joining the long list of visionary but non-binding declarations.

National governance systems display similar fragmentation. Climate policies and national adaptation plans rarely recognise labour migration as an adaptation strategy. Migration policies remain dominated by securitisation. Labour ministries operate separately from climate and environment ministries despite labour markets being central to resilience. Education and skills systems do not align with emerging climate-relevant employment opportunities.

Africa's governance challenge is therefore not the absence of frameworks, but the lack of coordination, institutional power, and resourcing needed to transform mobility from an unmanaged coping mechanism into a strategic governance instrument capable of supporting adaptation, resilience, and economic transformation.

5. Recommendations to Policy Makers and Actors

Climate Mobility Compacts: Negotiate bilateral and regional Climate Mobility Compacts with destination countries as a recognised contribution towards climate adaptation and minimising loss-and-damage, tied to larger and faster adaptation finance, ethical recruitment, strong labour protections, circular labour mobility for climate vulnerable communities and targeted green investment. This will need to be backed up by data and evidence. Successful examples of such agreements include the Falepili Treaty (officially the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union), a bilateral agreement between Australia and the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu addressing climate change, human mobility, and security. It establishes a legal migration pathway in the context of climate change.

21 Ratha, D., & Riedberg, J. (2005). On reducing remittance costs. Unpublished paper. Development Research Group, World Bank, Washington, DCthe .

22 Human Rights Watch. "You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019. https://resourcentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/nigeria0819.pdf .

23 Cholewinski, R., & Guttman, U. *Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large, with ILO Senior Migration Specialist Ryszard Cholewinski. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs 24*(1), 72-77. 2023. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/gia.2023.a897703.

24 UN Women. *Final evaluation "Making Migration Safe for Women (MMS)" (Project No. 00119034).* 2023. https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=10216

25 International Labour Organization. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2018. Geneva: ILO, 2018. https://www.ilo.org/media/419001/download . & International Labour Organization. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023. Geneva: ILO, 2023. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@inst/documents/publication/wcms_865332.pdf .

African Climate Skills Passport and Fund: Establish an African Climate Skills Passport and dedicated training fund to certify women and youth in climate-resilient and green-economy competencies, creating recognised qualifications that support labour mobility across the continent and align with growing demand in regional and global labour markets.

Green Visa Pathway: Create a fast-track Green Visa Pathway that enables African countries to recruit climate and green-economy professionals from across the continent and its diaspora, strengthening intracontinental mobility for critical resilience and development priorities. Think of the UK's Global Talent Visa route, but fair, just, and Green-tailored.

Institutionalize KDMECC within AU Governance: Establish KDMECC as the permanent AU authority on climate mobility, with a dedicated secretariat, dedicated financing, national and local implementation, and full alignment with the Free Movement Protocol, AfCFTA as national climate and migration instruments and programming.

Pan-African Diaspora Climate Finance Ecosystem: Mobilise diaspora resources through climate bonds, pooled remittance-backed investment vehicles, transfer costs reduced to under 3%, tax holidays, and scaled knowledge-exchange programs in climate and green-economy sectors.

Conclusion

Africa is already adapting through mobility. Each year, Africans send home more money from cities, neighbouring countries, and the diaspora than the entire global climate finance architecture delivers to the continent. Mobility is functioning as one of Africa's most powerful, yet least recognised, adaptation tools. The question is no longer whether Africans will move, but how that movement will be governed: as a threat to contain or a strategic resource for climate resilience, green growth, and economic transformation. The means are within reach: safer internal and regional pathways, skills systems aligned with the global green transition, stronger continental governance frameworks, mobilised diaspora capital, and negotiated mobility agreements that secure protection and opportunity. Transforming survival mobility into a deliberate strategy demands political will, institutional coordination, and bold leadership. African leaders and decision makers now have both the opportunity and the responsibility to make mobility work for the continent's present and future.

About The Author

Rose Kobusinge is a climate mobility, sustainability, and development practitioner, a changemaker, and a postgraduate researcher at the Centre for Peace and Security at Coventry University. Her work focuses on the intersections of climate change, migration, displacement, sustainable energy access, and inclusive development in Africa. Rose also serves as an African Union Migration Youth Ambassador and has contributed to regional and global initiatives on migration, climate change, and sustainable development .She is passionate about advancing youth and women's participation in climate mobility policy, advocacy, research, and decision-making. Over the years, she has worked with communities, civil society organisations, development partners, policymakers, and youth networks to promote climate justice, community resilience, and locally led solutions to climate and development challenges.

Imprint

Publisher

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
African Migration Policy Center
Yeka Subcity, Woreda 05, Block No.03,
House No. 109
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
info.ampc@fes.de

Publishing department

International Cooperation I Africa Department I FES Ethiopia

Author

Rose Kobusinge

Editor

Lukmon Akintola

Contact

Susanne Stollreiter
susanne.stollreiter@fes.de

Design/Layout
Optal Communication and Technology PLC

Published May 2026

ISBN 978-99990-1-211-9

Further publications of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung can be found here:
↗ ampc.fes.de/publications