



Youth on the Move:

Harnessing Migration for Africa's Climate Resilience and Development

Executive Summary

This brief examines the impact of climate change on migration in Africa, highlighting the role of young people in enhancing climate resilience and development. As climate change increasingly influences migration patterns on the continent, this brief argues that migration can be a vital adaptation strategy rather than a challenge, if meaningfully managed. It maintains that young people, either on the move or in place, can enhance local resilience through innovative solutions, and provide diverse skills and talents to both communities and countries. This brief presents three key recommendations, including integrating migration into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), enabling youth ecosystem for innovation, and strengthening whole-of-society approach to adaptation; In essence, the brief emphasizes the crucial role of migration in enabling Africa's climate resilience priorities, focusing on the agency of African youth, who are significantly impacted by climate mobility yet well-positioned to drive the continent's green transition and advance its climate adaptation and development agenda.

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, migration has been an integral part of people's lives in Africa. From pastoralists seeking green pasturelands to merchant trade routes, from young people pursuing knowledge to locals escaping conflicts and disasters; migration is both a response and an adaptation strategy to a wide range of socio-economic challenges in Africa, including climate change.¹

In recent times, climate stressors are increasingly shaping human mobility patterns on the continent, causing forced displacement and influencing people's migration decisions. Climate risks are particularly posing multiple threats to people's socio-economic well-being and shaping population distribution both within and across national boundaries. The number of internal displacements triggered by climate-related disasters has risen by nearly six fold across the continent over the last 15 years, from 1.1 million in 2009 to 6.3 million in 2023.² Floods triggered more than three-quarters of Africa's disaster displacements, and even with notable data gaps, droughts account for another 11 per

¹ Kira Vinke et al., "Migration as Adaptation?" Migration Studies 8, no. 4. December 1, 2020. 626–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnaa029>.

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). Internal Displacement in Africa an Overview of Trends and Developments (2009-2023).2024. <https://doi.org/10.55363/idmc.vyil2669>

cent.³ By 2050, up to 113 million people are projected to be on the move internally due to climate change, while nearly 1.2 million are expected to move across borders in Africa.⁴ These figures signal the increasing impacts of climate change on Africa's human mobility patterns and may continue to do so if necessary mitigation and adaptation efforts are not put in place.

Climate mobility significantly impacts young people⁵ in Africa. As a threat multiplier, climate change is exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges on the continent, putting young people in vulnerable situations and forcing many to explore migration for survival.⁶

With young people accounting for over 60% of Africa's population, climate risks increase the possibility of African youth seeking to move from high-risk areas to safe areas, whether by regular or irregular means.⁷ On the contrary, it also exposes young people to an additional layer of challenges, including exploitative labour, human rights abuses, environmental challenges, and so on.

2. Climate Mobility and its impact on African Youth

Impacts of Climate Mobility on Youth

Climate change is impacting the lives of millions across Africa, with children and young people bearing the heaviest burdens. Climate shocks are triggering socio-economic

crises in different parts of the continent, including violent conflicts, food insecurity, water shortage, health concerns, and forced displacements, all of which are putting young people in vulnerable conditions⁸

Nearly four million people across the Sahel region have been forced to flee due to a volatile mix of conflicts, extreme hunger, and climate stressors.⁹ The figure represents a two-thirds increase in displacement over the past five years, with Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger at the epicentre of these overlapping humanitarian emergencies.¹⁰ In addition, an estimated 2.9 million people have been displaced in the Lake Chad Basin as a result of the shrinking of the Lake Chad caused by rising temperature and rainfall variabilities.¹¹ These realities highlight the devastating human toll of overlapping climate pressures on the continent, especially for young people. Nearly 8.8 million children have been displaced by weather-related disasters in Eastern and Southern Africa between 2017 and 2023, with floods and droughts accounting for the majority of these displacements.¹² Such displacement disrupts communities' stability and leaves children struggling to maintain their identity and puts them in vulnerable situations. In countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan, families are on the move in search of water or arable land for survival, prioritizing food and shelter over education, and limiting opportunities for young learners.¹³ Together, these realities highlight how climate change intersects with other socio-economic challenges to enable forced displacement and migration, while also undermining young people's access to quality education, food security and quality lives.

Young Africans are increasingly embracing migration as a pathway to growth and adapting to climate impacts, whether by moving from rural areas to cities or across borders in search of job opportunities, quality education, vocational training, or seeking safety. In particular, young people are exploring migration to unlock their potential and contribute to the developmental priorities, including climate adaptation, of their home and host communities. For

3 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). "Global Report on Internal Displacement". 2024.

<https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC-GRID-2024-Global-Report-on-Internal-Displacement.pdf>

4 Kamal Amakrane, et al., "African Shifts: The Africa Climate Mobility Report, Addressing Climate-Forced Migration & Displacement". February 1, 2023.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367965451_African_Shifts_The_Africa_Climate_Mobility_Report_Addressing_Climate-Forced_Migration_Displacement

5 Aligning with the African Union Charter, this paper defines 'youth' as any person between the ages of 15 and 35. It uses both 'youth' and 'young people' to refer to persons within this age range.

6 Africa Climate Insights. "The Unseen Toll of Climate Migration in Africa". March 25, 2025.

<https://africaclimateinsights.org/the-unseen-toll-of-climate-migration-in-africa/>

7 Kithinji, B., N. Mainye, P. Thini, P. David, and I. Nyamu. Policy Brief No. 25 of 2023–2024 on Building Resilience for Youth Climate Mobility in Africa. Nairobi: Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis. 2023. <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/handle/123456789/4697>.

8 Jorge Cuartas et al., "The Climate Crisis and Violence Against Children," The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health 7, no. 9. September 2023. 605–7, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(23\)00137-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(23)00137-2).

9 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "UNHCR Calls for Urgent International Support to Advance Solutions for Sahel's Forcibly Displaced". 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-calls-urgent-international-support-advance-solutions-sahel-s-forcibly>

10 United Nations (UN). 2025. "In Africa's Sahel, Conflict and Climate Change Force Millions from Their Homes". October 10, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166076>

11 Mixed Migration Centre. 2025. "Keeping Track in Africa". November 20, 2025. <https://mixedmigration.org/publications/mmr/2025/keeping-track-migration-africa-2025/>

12 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "Children Displaced in a Changing Climate". October 3, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/children-displaced-changing-climate>

13 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Minimizing Risk of Displacement and Preparing for Climate Mobility in Eastern & Southern Africa". September, 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/16146/file/UNICEF-Children-Displaced-Changing-Climate-Report-2025.pdf>

instance, a youth-led company in Cameroon called DeWise Energy is leveraging AI and Solar technology to improve quality healthcare for over 3000 people, including climate-displaced persons, in Etoug Ebe Community in Cameroon.¹⁴

In light of this emerging reality, this policy brief explores the growing intersection between climate change and migration in Africa. It particularly unpacks the crucial role of young people in harnessing migration to advance Africa's climate adaptation and developmental priorities. This brief not only positions the youth as critical actors in enhancing climate resilience on the continent, but also emphasizes their agency in achieving Africa's Agenda 2063.

3. Challenges to Migration in Africa

Migration has long been a pathway for young Africans seeking socio-economic opportunities, whether in cities or across national borders. Yet the realities of migration are shaped not only by ambition but also by systemic gaps that limit young people's ability to move safely or integrate into their destination areas. These gaps, rooted in governance, policies, and infrastructure, highlight how much work remains to ensure migration becomes a key indicator in our developmental playbook, rather than vulnerability.

As legal pathways to migration become extremely difficult, many young Africans are exploring irregular pathways, which continue to expose young people to dangerous journeys without legal documentation, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and even death across land and sea routes in Africa.¹⁵ At the same time, a profound skills gap undermines their prospects in destination areas, with only 9% of youth enrolled in technical or vocational programs.¹⁶ This mismatch between skills and labour market demands often results in underemployment, preventing the continent from fully harnessing its demographic dividend. Beyond these challenges, weak migration governance denies young migrants sufficient legal protections for safe mobility. Compounding this is the lack of climate-resilient infrastructure, which forces families to migrate under duress when floods, droughts, or other disasters strike, rather than through planned and supported relocation. Together, these factors illustrate that migration is not simply a matter of movement; it is shaped by structural barriers that limit young people's ability to move with dignity, to stay with security, or to contribute fully to the continent's climate resilience agenda.

4. Leveraging Migration as a Resilience Strategy for African Youth

For many young Africans, migration is a strategic choice that enables livelihood diversification, income generation, skills acquisition, and risk reduction. In the same vein, migration can play a vital role in Africa's climate adaptation priorities by providing young people with opportunities to advance transformative, sustainable ideas.



Innovation for Green Transition: Young Africans, either at home or diaspora, are critical actors in advancing the continent's green priorities. Leveraging their innovative ideas and enthusiasm, young people are at the forefront of promoting ground-breaking green solutions, advocating for adaptation policies, and enabling resilience in fragile communities. Migration further enables young people to access better opportunities and to positively contribute to the adaptation and development agendas of their home and host communities.



Economic Diversification: With the increasing access to young talents due to migration, host communities and/or countries are able to diversify their economic activities, through exploring non-climate sensitive sectors and embracing climate-resilient approach to advance their economic prosperity. Similarly, migration provides a unique opportunity for young people to diversify their sources of livelihoods, significantly reducing overreliance on climate-sensitive sectors, such as agriculture



Access to Young Talents: Migration also opens up unprecedented opportunities for host communities and/or countries to access young talents that are not readily available to them. Primarily, a well-governed migration process is likely to attract young talents to support fragile communities in enabling their adaptation priorities. It also creates a vibrant youth ecosystem where young people with diverse skillsets work together to advance climate resilience and enhance overall development agenda. With migration providing young people with access to quality education and training, countries can firm up its talent base in the sustainability sector, which will advance in resilience and promote economic growth. In essence, young people who move with the relevant green skills can transform countries adaptation playbook.

¹⁴ Seka, Jean Blaise. "WiseCool." Global Solutions Initiative. April 16, 2025. <https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/article/wisecool/>

¹⁵ United Nations (UN). "Refugees, Migrants Face Violence, Abuse and Death on Routes across Africa, New Data Shows." July 5, 2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/07/1151796>

¹⁶ Ecofin Agency. 2025. "The World's next Talent Pool? Africa's Youth and the Skills Gap." Ecofin Agency. 2025. <https://www.ecofinagency.com/news-services/0310-49277-the-world-s-next-talent-pool-africa-s-youth-and-the-skills-gap>

Recommendations

Stakeholders across Africa must reimagine the agency of young people, either those in place or on the move, as critical players in advancing climate resilience and sustainable development. In particular, youth migration should be perceived as an opportunity, rather than a challenge to be managed. By creating enabling policies and infrastructure, youth migration can be a transformative tool for innovation, skills transfer, and inclusive growth at all levels.



Integrating Migration into Adaptation

Plans: Climate adaptation policies should integrate migration as part of national adaptation resilience strategy. A country's National

Adaptation Plans (NAPs) need to explicitly recognize youth migration as a viable adaptation effort. This would not only allow countries to anticipate population shifts due to climate shocks but also enable effective planning across several sectors of the economy, including housing, urban infrastructure, job creation, education, and so on. Mainstreaming migration into climate policies also provides the blueprint to protect rights of climate migrants, strengthen local adaptation, and ensure that mobility contributes to long-term sustainability rather than short-term survival. ¹⁷



Building Youth Ecosystem: Youth networks are inherently enablers of implementing global policies at the local level. As part of national adaptation efforts, countries must

provide an enabling environment for young people to incubate, innovate, and implement sustainable ideas. This is possible through investing in a local community hub and facilitating school clubs where diverse youth (including young migrants) can exchange knowledge and enhance adaptive solutions for minimizing climate risks.



Strengthening Inclusion and Partnerships:

Policies must prioritize a whole-of-society approach to building climate resilience, bringing together young people, including migrants,

to collectively advance people-centered adaptation on the ground. Governments can integrate young people into national climate adaptation committees, exposing them to crucial opportunities to learn, while also contributing their unique insights to national agenda. More importantly, countries can create specialized funding for young people to implement their innovative solutions, which also allows them to be a part of national adaptation agenda.

5. Conclusion

Migration has emerged as one of the crucial components of Africa's adaptation strategies, particularly for youth, who are essential to fostering resilience and driving development. By embracing youth's right to migrate or remain, African governments and stakeholders can harness the transformative potential of young people as critical actors in addressing rising climate impacts on the continent. This includes creating policies that enable safe mobility, recognizing youth as key players in climate adaptation efforts, and integrating migration considerations into national adaptation planning. By doing so, Africa will not only enhance its climate resilience but also empower its youth to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development, ultimately building a more resilient and prosperous future for the continent.

About The Author

Seka Jean Blaise (Seka JB) is a Cameroonian sustainability architect, business analyst, and social entrepreneur committed to advancing clean energy, digital innovation, and youth empowerment across Africa. As President and Co-Founder of DeWise Foundation, he leads transformative initiatives such as WiseBox, which converts e-waste into solar units providing light to conflict-affected households, and WiseCool, a smart solar cold storage system that safeguards vital medicines and food supplies in off-grid regions.

Currently serving as a Business Analyst at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Seka drives ICT governance reform and digital transformation strategies that strengthen institutional capacity across the continent. Recognized as Africa's Young Talent of the Year 2025 and listed in Forbes Afrique 30 Under 30 Powerlist 2026, he continues to champion scalable solutions that advance Africa's energy independence and digital future.

¹⁷ Kelkar, Kavita. "Green Skills That Empower Youth for a Sustainable Future." Dr. D. Y. Patil College of Nursing, Pimpri. December 20, 2024. <https://nursing.dpu.edu.in/blogs/green-skills-sustainable-world>

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