

Working Papers

Paper 194, September 2026

Social Transformation, Social Protection, and (Im)mobility Aspirations in Six African Cities

Dominique Jolivet, Simona Vezzoli, Zoulikha
Benkaakaa, Mariá-Jesús Cabezón-Fernández,
Ismail Misbahu, Filip Savatic,
Juan David Sempere Souvannavong

PACES Project Working Paper No.15



This paper is published by the International Migration Institute (IMI). IMI does not have an institutional view and does not aim to present one. The views expressed in this document are those of its independent author. The IMI Working Paper series receives funding from Duke University.

The IMI Working Papers Series

The IMI working paper series presents current research in the field of international migration. The series was initiated by the International Migration Institute (IMI) since its founding at the University of Oxford in 2006. The papers in this series (1) analyse migration as part of broader global change, (2) contribute to new theoretical approaches and (3) advance our understanding of the multilevel forces driving migration and experiences of migration.

Abstract

How do urban and economic expansions shape people's (im)mobility aspirations (i.e., the desire to stay in a locality or migrate elsewhere)? By comparing similar processes of social transformation in six African cities (Mostaganem and Sétif (in Algeria), Adama and Kebri Beyah (in Ethiopia) and Abuja and Osogbo (in Nigeria), we demonstrate how economic development and urban growth are perceived by longstanding local residents and influence their desires to stay or leave their homes. We first explore how residents understand and experience shifts in social protection and their ability to achieve what they believe to be a 'good life' given changes to their urban environments. We then analyze how these perceptions and interpretations shape (im)mobility aspirations. Through a comparative qualitative content analysis of 120 semi-structured interviews and a descriptive quantitative analysis of 244 survey responses collected in the six cities, we identify both similarities and variation in how residents perceive urban and economic transformation, how it impacts their livelihoods and well-being, how it shapes what they value, and, ultimately, how it influences their (im)mobility aspirations. We find that the pace of socio-economic development shapes residents' understanding of social protection, what 'the good life' means, and what they can reasonably expect in the future *in situ* or through migration. Aspirations to migrate are strongest when local conditions do not permit people to achieve what they have come to value. By contrast, aspirations to stay tend to dominate when they can achieve a fulfilling life locally, or when uncertainty about their ability to do so leads them to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude. The perceived and expected pace of change, the economic models adopted, and the migration histories of local populations all shape perceptions of economic and urban dynamism, social welfare, and (im)mobility aspirations.

Keywords: urbanization, economic expansion, immobility, migration decision-making, social transformation, social protection

Authors: Dominique Jolivet (Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS))
Simona Vezzoli (Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS))
Zoulikha Benkaakaa (University of Alicante)
María-Jesús Cabezón-Fernández (University of Alicante)
Ismail Misbahu (Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS))
Filip Savatic (Université Sorbonne Paris Nord)
Juan David Sempere Souvannavong, University of Alicante

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Marivi Pérez Mateo, for her contribution to the analysis and to Oliver Bakewell for his review.



The PACES project has received funding under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme, grant agreement N 101094279.



The contents of the document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Union and the granting authority are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

This work © 2026 is licensed
under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Suggested citation

Jolivet, D., Vezzoli, S., Benkaakaa, Z., Cabezón-Fernández, M.J., Misbahu, I., Savatic, F., Sempere Souvannavong, J.D., (2026) Social transformation, social protection, and (im)mobility aspirations in six African cities. IMI Working Paper No. 194/ PACES Working Paper No. 15. International Migration Institute.

Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Theoretical framework.....	7
3	Methodology.....	10
3.1	Country and city selection	10
3.2	Data and analytical approaches	13
4	Results.....	15
4.1	Dynamics of urban and economic transformation	15
4.2	The impact of social transformation on people's lives	19
4.3	Transforming ideas of social protection and the good life	22
4.4	Social transformation and (im)mobility aspirations	25
5	Concluding remarks	28
6	References	29
7	Annex	33

1 Introduction

As societies are transformed through human development and economic expansion, internal and international mobilities diversify in volume, direction, nature, and timing (Hägerstrand, 1957; Ravenstein, 1885; Zelinsky, 1971). Yet, within the same changing contexts, most people prefer to stay. What encourages some people to aspire to migrate and others to stay? This paper unpacks how similar processes of social transformation unfold in various ways and at different speeds, and how they are interpreted by individuals and shape their aspirations to stay or migrate¹.

Social transformation can be defined as ‘big change’ that involves all social dimensions (Schewel et al., 2025). To understand the growing diversity of mobilities emerging from social transformation, it is essential to examine continuities and fundamental change, capturing shifts in how societies are organized, and how people adapt their livelihoods to changing opportunities and aspirations (Schewel et al., 2025; Vezzoli et al., 2024). It is also important to bear in mind that political, economic, technological, demographic and cultural change does not unfold simultaneously or at the same pace; it is precisely these unequal processes of transformation that can spark migration aspirations (de Haas et al., 2020). In the Todgha valley in Morocco, for example, life aspirations and values have shifted at a higher pace than political reforms and economic changes, creating a mismatch between what people expect, for instance, in terms of access to labour rights, and what they can actually get in some sectors of the economy where formal labour contracts are the exception rather than the norm (Jolivet, 2023). Social transformation has unequal and unintended consequences across different layers of society, influencing migration decisions. For example, when governments restructure the economy away from small farming to large agribusinesses, industry and services, the livelihoods of small farmers suffer, leading many to migrate within their country or abroad (Vezzoli, 2024). Social reform can also trigger migration: when access to formal education improves and societies become more educated, individuals often develop job aspirations (e.g., working as an IT engineer) that are unattainable in local economies transitioning at a slower pace (Schewel & Fransen, 2018).

Three interrelated elements explain variation in how social transformation shapes mobilities at the local and individual levels (Schewel et al., 2025). First, the mismatch between aspirations and opportunities to achieve them, as illustrated in the examples above. Second, migration and non-migration policies that increase capabilities to stay or migrate for some groups but represent a barrier for others (what Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) have called ‘regimes of mobility’). The third element is social protection², that is, the combination of actors, policies, programmes, and institutions that provide for and protect people within and across national borders in situations related to (un)employment, education, housing, family, health, incapacity, old age, and death (Levitt et al., 2017, p. 5). In this definition of social protection, which encompasses both formal and informal aspects, we include norms and values, reciprocity obligations, expectations, and ideas about what secures the well-being of individuals and the community (Jolivet, 2024). We propose that well-being can be understood via people’s definitions of what constitutes a ‘good life’.

An increasing body of research shows that social transformation reconfigures opportunities, values, and expectations regarding social protection and ideas of the good life, with consequences for both

¹ We use (im)mobility aspirations to refer to aspirations to stay and aspirations to migrate.

² Social protection and social security are often used interchangeably and there are not clear definitions of their difference. In this paper we prefer the concept of social protection that encompasses informal aspects that are sometimes silenced in the social security concept, more often associated with formal institutions. See for instance ILO (2024).

aspirations to stay and to migrate (Jolivet, 2020, 2026; Osburg, 2020). How these reconfigurations shape migration aspirations for some and immobility aspirations for others under similar structural conditions remains an open question. Here, we aim to identify patterns through which social transformation shapes both migration and stay aspirations in a global context shaped by regimes of mobility that constrain international migration. We explore variation in how residents across six African cities interpret social protection considerations and aspiration-opportunity gaps.

Our starting point is that urban and economic expansion transform opportunities to secure livelihoods (Polanyi, 2001). This process of structural transformation often involves the state, which may be more or less committed to providing protection or allowing other agents to support its population. Structural transformations are associated with various meso- and micro-level shifts, including changes in social and individual norms, values, and behaviours (Greenfield, 2009). This leads us to expect a wide array of shifts in cities undergoing significant transformations, including those related to people's feelings about social protection and their understanding of what constitutes a good life.

We seek to answer the question: *How does urban and economic transformation alter understandings of social protection and the good life, and in turn shape (im)mobility aspirations?* To answer this question, we examine the perceptions of residents in Mostaganem and Sétif (Algeria), Adama and Kebr Beyah (Ethiopia), and Abuja and Osogbo (Nigeria), through a comparative qualitative content analysis of 120 semi-structured interviews and a descriptive quantitative analysis of 244 surveys collected between 2024 and 2025. We combine two interdisciplinary frameworks: Greenfield's Theory of Social Change and Human Development (Greenfield, 2009), which offers an analytical framework to understand dynamism in human development and how social change shapes social and individual values and behaviours, and the Temporal Multilevel framework (TMA), which focuses on the decision-making process in (im)mobility aspirations (Vezzoli et al., 2024). We focused on two sub-questions:

How do processes of social transformation shape individuals' perceptions and ideas of social protection and what constitutes a good life?

How do these perceptions and understandings conditioned by values, expectations, and life aspirations shape individuals' aspirations to stay and to migrate internationally?

By comparing six urban environments transforming at different speeds, with distinct migration histories, and a differentiated role of the state and other actors (such as international organizations) in the provision of formal social protection, we uncover: (1) patterns in how individuals perceive the impact of urban and economic expansion on their livelihoods; (2) how personal ideas and values regarding social protection and the good life evolve with social transformation; and (3) in which ways these perceptions, ideas and values shape aspirations to stay or migrate.

Our study expands our understanding of how social transformation shapes (im)mobility aspirations by integrating dynamics across macro-, community, family, and individual levels in two ways. First, previous studies on social transformation and migration have largely focused on communities transitioning from agrarian subsistence-based systems to industrial societies and on how perceptions of the past shape migration processes at the macro level (Schewel et al., 2025). Here, we examine the interplay between social transformation and migration in communities that have rapidly shifted from agricultural systems to post-industrial, service-oriented economic systems, either with a limited industrial presence or completely bypassing the industrial phase. This links perceptions of the past, experiences in the present, and future expectations to capture change and continuity in perceived opportunities, social and individual expectations and values, and life aspirations that shape aspirations to stay or to migrate.

Second, the study unpacks how shifts in understandings of social protection and a good life play a role in aspirations to stay and to migrate considering the dynamic interplay between entangled informal and formal aspects of social protection across countries of origin. It pays particular attention to continuity and change in values and aspirations concerning livelihoods that people value and seek to secure as well as their aspirations to stay or migrate. Our findings challenge the classic assumption that formal aspects of social protection are crucial in shaping (im)mobility (Borjas, 1999). People may have access to state-provided social protection but may consider this support insufficient and less important than informal social protection facilitated by interpersonal relationships, social networks, and community support; a type of protection that individuals may lose if they migrate. Furthermore, independence and self-sufficiency may be considered more important than relying on other actors to secure one's livelihood. We also uncover unintended migration feedback mechanisms that emerge from international organizations' interventions to strengthen social protection.

The next two sections present our analytical framework and methodology. We then examine how individuals perceive urban and economic expansion, how these transformations shape their livelihoods, and how they influence their ideas regarding social protection and the good life. Building on these insights, we identify four patterns in how people interpret these changes and continuities that shape both aspirations to stay and to migrate, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2 Theoretical framework

Economic expansion and social protection are deeply intertwined. As economies evolve, so do informal and formal social protection arrangements. The links between economic expansion and social protection can be examined through the lens of capitalist development, comparing two theoretical models of society. In the first type of society, people's livelihoods mainly depend on reciprocity and redistribution. Reciprocity is a moral norm according to which 'what one party receives from the other requires some return, so that giving and receiving are mutually contingent' (Gouldner, 1960). Redistribution refers to the reallocation of resources 'performed by an influential family or an outstanding individual, a ruling aristocracy or a group of bureaucrats' (Polanyi, 2024, p. 59).

The opposite ideal type corresponds to a self-regulating 'market society' where livelihoods are purely based on market exchanges and society is 'an "adjunct" to the market' (Polanyi, 2024, p. 66). In this model of society, the market is more important than societal well-being and individual choice dominates, altering practices of redistribution and reciprocity. In Malawi, for example, evidence suggests that market expansion reduced people's ability to help others as they did not have sufficient income or food for themselves. This development partially explained perceptions of increased individualism (Devereux, 1999, p. 62).

Societies shift between these two ideal types, where states significantly contribute to shape social protection, alongside markets and civil society. These ideal types provide a heuristic device to understand shifts in social protection linked to social transformation, and their impact on livelihoods, autonomy, and who benefits from growth (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2007), which may shape migration decision-making. It is well established that migration is one way through which people navigate transformations and market failures, secure livelihoods, and increase well-being (Bebbington, 2004; Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Stark, 1991; Zoomers & Otsuki, 2017). Existing work on aspiration-opportunity gaps in societies undergoing transformations in social protection highlights the importance of examining how these changes and continuities are perceived and interpreted at the individual level. This focus is crucial to fully explain how shifts in social protection linked to broader social

transformation affect (im)mobility aspirations (Jolivet, 2024). Building on this work, we integrate Greenfield's theory of Social Change and Human Development (2009) and the Temporal Multilevel Analysis (TMA) framework (Vezzoli et al., 2024) to uncover how individuals interpret and make sense of shifts and continuities in social protection and how these interpretations shape (im)mobility aspirations.

Grounded in developmental and cultural psychology, Greenfield's theory connects macro-level transformations with meso-level shifts in community, family and household relations, and micro-level change in norms, values and behaviours across generations. Greenfield explains the cultural and psychological implications of structural change through four broad categories of change: socio-demographic, values, learning environment/socialization, and developmental/behavioral. Each category comprises a set of factors that can shift along a continuum in either direction. At the socio-demographic level, for example, living together and living alone represent two ends of a continuum (Greenfield, 2016). When taken together, these factors explain how, across diverse world regions, societies tend to become more urban, economically complex and affluent, as well as more formally educated, interconnected, and more focused on market exchanges (i.e., becoming increasingly 'commodified' (Polanyi, 2024). In reaction to these transformations, families and households become smaller, and values and behaviours change (Greenfield, 2016). Communities become more individualistic and materialistic, whereas individuals' choice, curiosity, and competitiveness increase.

Alongside these shifts, values and behaviours related to collectivism, cooperation, kinship obligations, and social expectations may change (Greenfield, 2016). Nevertheless, while some values and expectations may be rapidly transformed, others change at a slower pace or remain unchanged. Being aware of the importance of avoiding oversimplified, deterministic, and linear perspectives of social change, Greenfield's theory remains useful to emphasize the dynamic relationship between the macro-, meso-, and micro-level dimensions of social transformation. It provides a frame to study change and continuity; reconfigurations between old and new, formal and informal, commodified and non-remunerated provision of social protection; as well as tensions and overlaps between social and individual values, expectations and behaviours.

In Guadalajara (Mexico), for example, both income and time have become more constrained as the region developed (Gonzalez De La Rocha, 2020). People became less able to provide informal support without monetary compensation. However, receiving payment for caregiving contradicted social expectations of altruism, especially from women and particularly within families. Subsequently, those asking or accepting payment for caregiving could find themselves excluded from social support networks, eventually leading them to have to pay for support themselves. Overall, Greenfield helps us understand how the move away from the more 'traditional' societies to a more urban, nuclear family, or individualistic model may be associated with a departure from informal forms of social protection towards more state-organized forms of the 'welfare state'.

While Greenfield's theory disentangles social transformation and highlights what shifts can be expected in the social realm, the TMA framework is useful to understand how these macro-, meso- and micro-level processes of social change involving shifts and continuity in opportunities, norms, values, and behaviours shape aspirations to migrate and to stay. This framework was designed to explore people's perceptions and interpretations of both long term societal and personal life course-related change, how these changes shape life aspirations and capabilities, and their role in migration decision-making. In this framework, migration decision-making is a dynamic and iterative process that extends beyond rational choices and cost-benefit calculations (Vezzoli et al., 2024). Points of reference over time (past, present, future) and in different places (in the place of residence and elsewhere), as well as social norms and values are key factors. They are crucial to understanding the formation of perceptions and

expectations about life in the community, how people position themselves in the world, and how perceptions, expectations, and self-positionings play a role in aspirations to stay and migrate. For example, a study in Tangier (Morocco) following the 2008 economic crisis revealed that individuals tended to compare past economic opportunities with the present unemployment crisis in Spain. They also weighed good living conditions in Europe against the discrimination Moroccan migrants experienced there, and the freedom of religion they enjoyed in Morocco but might lose if they migrated to Europe. Many considered living according to their moral values and with dignity more important than any economic opportunities abroad, shaping their preferences in favour of staying in Tangier (Jolivet, 2025).

Fundamental shifts in the broader social context (in our case in terms of urban and economic expansion) trigger processes of (active and passive) adaptation that involve (partial) change in what people do and what they find important regarding securing livelihoods and the good life at the community, family and individual levels. How macro- and meso-level shifts and continuities are interpreted is contingent on (Figure 1.):

Perceptions of change and continuity in the place of residence, in other places, and about oneself and others.

One's own life circumstances, such as losing a job, entering the labour market, or prioritizing the care of children or elderly relatives during certain life stages.

Individuals' personal values (i.e., what they consider important at the individual level) which may or may not align with broader societal values.

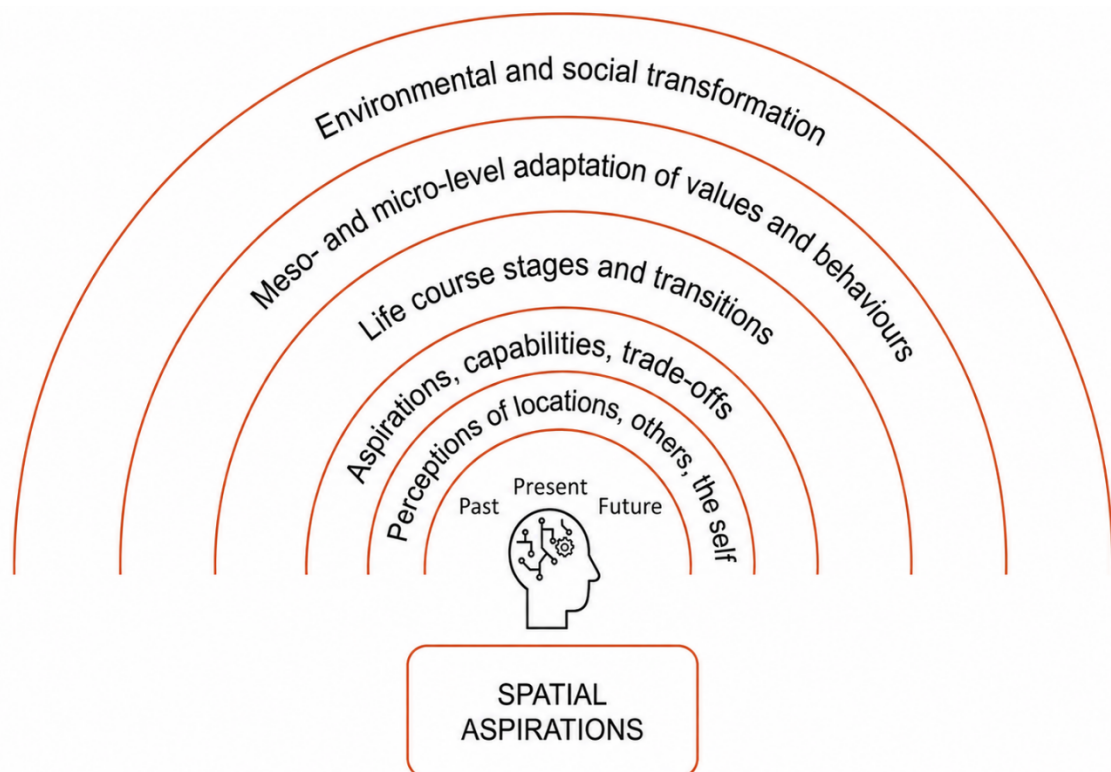


Figure 1. Social mechanisms through which social transformation shapes individual (im)mobility aspirations.

Rather than social transformation itself, it is what social transformation means for people, that translates into life aspirations and related capabilities, shaping aspirations to stay or migrate. Life aspirations and capabilities emerge from both material and immaterial elements, including people's perceptions of their social context and opportunities, as well as the internal trade-offs that individuals make when assessing their life circumstances and balancing social expectations with their own values, priorities and expectations.

These interpretations help explain why some individuals may view change as progress and feel optimistic about the future and therefore aspire to stay in their place of residence, while others may interpret societal change as a deterioration compared with perceptions of the past, feel excluded and experience unfulfilled aspirations that can spark aspirations to migrate (Jolivet, 2024). However, it would be a mistake to think that someone perceiving the local context in a positive way automatically prefers to stay, and those with negative perceptions aspire to migrate. For example, individuals who feel optimistic about the future may still perceive migration as offering better economic opportunities or a lifestyle more aligned with their values. Conversely, those experiencing exclusion may perceive that their situation would not improve elsewhere, or that migration would prevent them from living according to their values abroad (e.g., inability to wear religious clothing or symbols) and would therefore prefer to stay (Jolivet, 2025).

While these mechanisms of adaptation and interpretation explain how individual aspirations are shaped by social transformations, it remains unclear whether we can identify patterns in this deeply personal and internal process of interpretation through which social transformation shapes migration decision-making. Do similar processes of urban and economic expansion across diverse contexts, although at different speeds, lead to comparable patterns in how individuals interpret social change? Do these patterns shape aspirations to stay or migrate in similar ways across different locations? Our study sets out to provide answers to these questions.

3 Methodology

3.1 Country and city selection

The data used for this study comes from a large research project on migration and migration policy decisions that collected data in eleven countries in Africa and Europe. In this paper, we rely on data collected in Adama and Kebri Beyah (Ethiopia), Mostaganem and Sétif (Algeria), and Abuja and Osogbo (Nigeria) (Figure 2). These six cities have distinct characteristics in terms of their populations, economies, infrastructural development and social structures, but their inhabitants share similar perceptions of the profound impact of development and urbanization processes in their lives and in their communities.

Across these six cities, we observe variation in migration aspirations that may be partly explained by their diverse migration histories, including distinct migration corridors in terms of destinations, formal and informal migration practices and migration policy frameworks. These different dynamics offer an opportunity to compare and identify whether urban and economic development and shifts in social protection explain diverse (im)mobility aspirations.

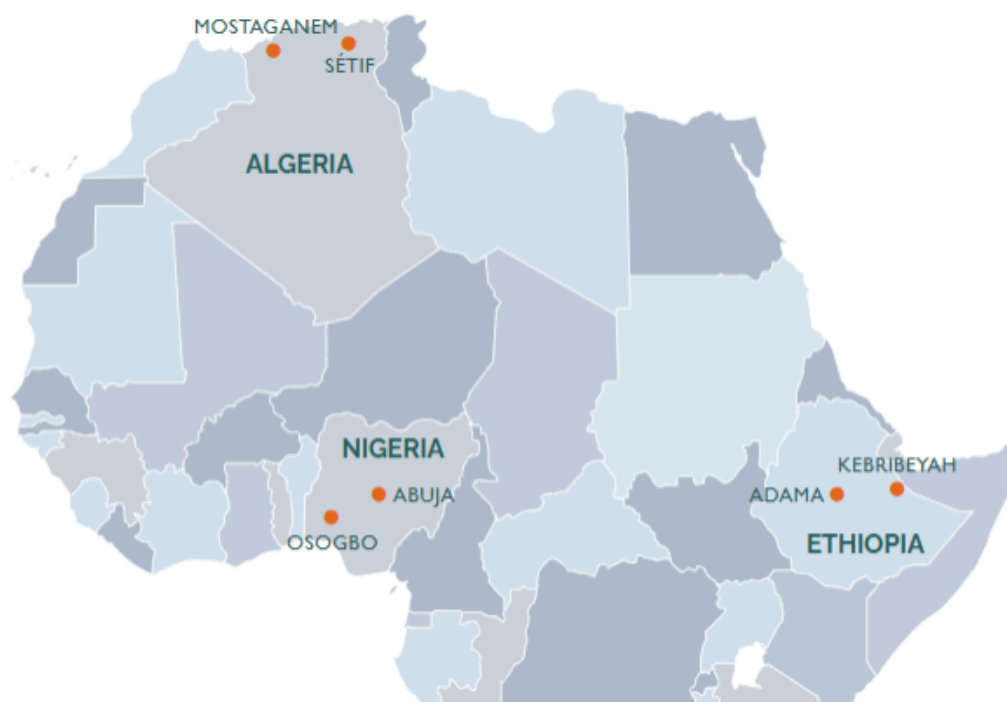


Figure 2. Map with location of six cities in Algeria, Ethiopia and Nigeria

The selection of the six cities was based on a research design that sought to compare perceptions of social transformation, including urban and economic development, across cities that were more central and dynamic and others that were more peripheral and undergoing a slower pace of socio-economic development. A scoping study led to the selection of six cities which, following data collection and analysis, can be roughly aligned as depicted in Figure 3. Kebri Beyah (Ethiopia) represents the most peripheral and the least dynamic socio-economic structure, while Adama (Ethiopia) is characterized by rapid socio-economic change.

Algeria

Algeria is the largest country in Africa and occupies a strategic position between the Mediterranean and the Sahel. Since the beginning of the 21st century, revenue from hydrocarbons has enabled the state to play a central role in improving infrastructure, expanding public services, and implementing social policies aimed at sustaining the population's well-being. These transformations have helped improve living conditions and increase educational and consumer opportunities, although challenges remain with respect to employment, purchasing power, and economic development.

Mostaganem is a medium-sized coastal town located in north-western Algeria, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and some 360 kilometres west of Algiers. The city has a population of around 150,000, whilst the wilaya (province) has over 730,000 inhabitants. Traditionally linked to agriculture and fishing, it has undergone significant changes in recent years thanks to improved infrastructure and the development of tourism.

Located in north-eastern Algeria, approximately 300 kilometres from Algiers, Sétif is one of the main urban centres in the country's interior. Its wilaya has a population of almost 1.5 million, making it one of the most populous in Algeria. Regarded as one of the country's main commercial and industrial hubs, its economic dynamism is driven by cereal farming, as well as plastics, textiles, and trade industries. These activities have reinforced its role as a regional economic centre and as a destination for internal migration.

Migration has been part of the social experience of many Algerian families for several generations. Traditionally directed towards France, Algerian migration has been supported by extensive family and social networks built over time. In recent decades, destinations have diversified to include other European countries, particularly Spain, while migration remains an important objective for part of the population, especially among young people. Migration keeps playing a significant role in both cities. Mostaganem receives internal migrants from rural areas and other regions of the country, while also attracting people because of its coastal, peaceful, and residential character. Its Mediterranean location and proximity to Spain make it one of the Algerian coastal areas associated with irregular departures to Europe. In Sétif, the population has historically been more inclined to circulate, rather than migrate, to other parts of the country and abroad (particularly to Lyon in France) for commercial reasons. At the same time the city attracts workers, investors and foreign residents, particularly Tunisians, drawn by its commercial and industrial dynamism.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has witnessed significant development efforts since the 1990s. The Ethiopian government has been firmly committed to moving the country from a low-income to a lower-middle-income level and its recent 10-Year Development Plan (2021–2030) seeks to address economic, social, and institutional reforms to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth (Planning and Development Commission, 2021). Development projects have been implemented across various cities, often bringing ‘modernity’ forcefully into societies where traditions, including religious practices, have played an important social role. For instance, the Corridor Development Project, an urban development initiative across more than 50 Ethiopian cities, aimed to improve infrastructure and housing, and generate investment and employment. However, it has in many cases resulted in forced evictions with as little as 72 hours prior notice and without compensation, leading to demolished homes, displacement and disruption of livelihoods and social support (Amnesty International, 2025a).

Ethiopia and Eritrea have been in conflict for years. In 2020, war erupted in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, causing extreme violence and displacing populations. Ethiopia is a country where migration has historically been associated with forced movements, including internal displacement, the flight of Ethiopians as international refugees, and the arrival of asylum seekers from neighbouring countries (Carver, 2020). Migration to the Middle East and the Gulf countries has also been important over the past decades, particularly for women. Overall, emigration from Ethiopia remains low compared to other African countries.

The city of Adama, located only 99 km from Addis Ababa, was home to more than 500,000 inhabitants in 2018 (File & Dinka, 2020). It has become a satellite city of the capital, and is now a popular location for training centres, government meetings, as well as a holiday destination for the residents of the capital. At the other end of the spectrum, Kebri Beyah is a small city with 52,000 inhabitants and 16,000 refugees in 2023 (UNHCR, 2023) in the Somali region, located 70 km from the border with Somalia. Its peripheral location within the country means that residents identify with their ethnicity and proximity to Somalia much more than with the central government and its (ethnic) politics. The pace of social change in Kebri Beyah is much slower and mainly linked to the presence of a large refugee camp and refugee aid from international organizations and Ethiopian agencies.

In terms of migration, Adama's rapid growth is associated with the arrival of many internal migrants, both from nearby rural areas and other regions and cities in Ethiopia. Small numbers of international migrants have also taken residence in Adama, primarily from war-torn Yemen and from Eritrea. Concurrently, a strong trend of female migration towards the Middle East and Gulf countries has dominated international emigration in the last 15 years. In Kebri Beyah, migration has been largely associated with the departure of refugees from this region to Somalia (late 1970s) and their return along

with the arrival of Somali refugees since the 1990s. Over the past three decades, the resettlement of refugees primarily to North America has captured the imagination of the local population.

Nigeria

Over the course of Nigeria's 27 years of democratic rule, the country has been following an ongoing quest for national transformation. Yet, economic reforms, especially under recent administrations, have led to inflation, subsidy removal, and a depreciated national currency (naira), resulting in widespread hardship for the average Nigerian. There has been a marked youth disillusionment amidst high unemployment rates, rising costs of living and limited opportunities. In 2025, despite the administration's efforts to improve the lives of Nigerians, their reality included deepening poverty (with over 133 million citizens living in multidimensional poverty), widening inequality, poor healthcare and education services, and growing insecurity. Amnesty International (2025b) reports that more than 10,000 Nigerians have lost their lives in security crises since the current administration took office.

Nigeria has long been a destination for migrants especially from West Africa (IOM, 2009). More recently, however, more people have emigrated from Nigeria than have immigrated to the country (UN, 2024). Internal migrants tend to move from rural areas to major urban centres such as Abuja and Lagos, as well as to secondary cities such as Osogbo. While Abuja is a more common destination for internal migrants, Osogbo has a culture of international migration. Abuja is also a destination for asylum seekers from neighbouring Cameroon, Niger, and Chad due to the presence of refugee settlements and the opportunities the city provides as a transit point for international migrants aspiring to migrate onwards.

The city of Abuja, situated in Nigeria's Middle Belt region, has significantly changed over the last 25 years. It is characterised by relatively dense populations of migrants from different parts of Nigeria with diverse skills and education levels. Given the expansive geographic size of Abuja, we selected a highly central neighbourhood (Wuse and surroundings) and a peripheral one (Dei-Dei), each reflecting different levels of economic development and public intervention. Wuse has become a destination for many internal migrants and migrants from West Africa, due to the presence of its market at Zone 5, one of Nigeria's busiest and most diverse shopping destinations. Wuse is also a focal point for middle-class public officials, local traders, and visitors. Dei-Dei is becoming Abuja's growing informal market. Both neighbourhoods represent the Nigerian entrepreneurial spirit, attracting traders and buyers from within Nigeria and Ghana, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

Osogbo, the capital of Osun state (created in 1991), has also changed significantly in the last 15 years. The city is home to many middle-income residents, often civil servants, which is associated with high living costs. The city also attracts internal and international migrants, who mainly use it as a transit point between Lagos and Abuja, or en route to international destinations. Its favourable weather and recent infrastructural developments (healthcare, education, and housing) linked mostly to a change in leadership at the state level keep boosting its growth and development. Nevertheless, net migration is negative. Despite significant growth in commerce and self-employment, both residents and migrants complain about the lack of job opportunities due to low industrial growth.

3.2 Data and analytical approaches

The main analysis of this paper is based on 120 transcripts, 20 for each city (out of a total of 40 per city) capturing the perception of younger (aged 18 to 35) and older (36 years old or older) residents (see Table 1).

			Men	Women
Algeria	Mostaganem	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5
	Setif	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5
Ethiopia	Adama	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5
	Kebribeyah	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5
Nigeria	Abuja	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5
	Osogbo	Younger	5	5
		Older	5	5

Table 1. Distribution of transcripts analyzed across the six cities in our sample. Younger group: aged 18-35; Older group: 36+

The interviews included both open- and close-ended questions. Open questions were asked first, followed by a request to summarize the response with a close-ended question. For instance, the question: ‘Can you please tell me about general life in this community? Think of a combination of factors such as quality of life, social connections, and its pace of life. You can refer to one group, several groups, or in general,’ was followed by the closed-ended question: ‘Would you say that your life in this community today is...’, which was answered using a five-point Likert scale.

The interview included questions about (im)mobility aspirations. One question asked about (im)mobility aspirations within the next five years, specifying participants to answer considering what they could realistically do: ‘Ideally, would you like to go somewhere else to live or work during the next five years, or would you prefer to stay here? Please answer this question thinking about what you can realistically do. Consider what you hope will happen and what you are aiming for in the next five years.’ To close the interview, participants were asked to reflect on the interview and indicate again what their (im)mobility aspirations were: ‘After having asked all these questions, could you please indicate where you stand right now in your aspiration to stay or migrate (or return for migrants)?’. Finally, participants were asked to rate the strength of their aspiration to stay or migrate on a five-point Likert scale (from ‘very weak’ to ‘very strong’ aspirations). The interviews were conducted in Derja in Mostaganem and Sétif; Afan Oromo and Amharic in Adama; Somali and Amharic in Kebri Beyah; Pidgin English and Hausa in Abuja; and Pidgin English and Yoruba in Osogbo. The idea of ‘aspirations’ was translated as ‘desire’. In Nigeria, however, participants tended to associate aspirations with ‘hopes’ rather than only ‘desires’.

For this paper, we combined a descriptive quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questions answered by 244 participants and a qualitative content analysis of 120 transcripts using the framework technique (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002) taking an interpretive approach. Rather than using a matrix solely to structure the raw data according to themes, we used it to generate insights from participants’ full narratives. We used guiding questions to complete the matrix. These questions first focused on perceived changes in the community and everyday life, including specific changes in infrastructure and services (schools and education, healthcare, clinics and hospitals, etc.). We then examined aspects of social protection in greater depth, paying particular attention to what participants identified as contributing to the protection of their livelihoods and well-being, whether current social changes were affecting social protection arrangements and, if so, how. We also sought to capture feelings and emotions that

accompanied perceived changes in social protection arrangements and whether these were in any way associated with changes in (im)mobility aspirations. Finally, our analysis aimed to identify similarities and differences across cities and countries, including the role of gender and age in shaping different perceptions of change and (im)mobility aspirations.

4 Results

To understand the internal process of interpretation through which social transformation shapes (im)mobility aspirations, we first assessed how people perceive urban and economic development and dynamism, and what shapes such perceptions. We then explored the impact of structural change and continuity in people's lives and at the community level. Building on these perceptions and expressed impacts, we identified a typology to better understand how people make sense of social transformation in their locality and elsewhere, with a focus on participants' ideas of social protection, the good life and migration. Finally, we explored to what extent this typology can be associated with (im)mobility aspirations at the individual and city levels.

4.1 *Dynamics of urban and economic transformation*

Perceptions of urban and economic expansion and dynamism vary across the six cities. Based on residents' perceptions, we classified the cities according to their perceived dynamism. It appears that the two Ethiopian cities are the least (Kebri Beyah) and most (Adama) dynamic cities (Figure 3).

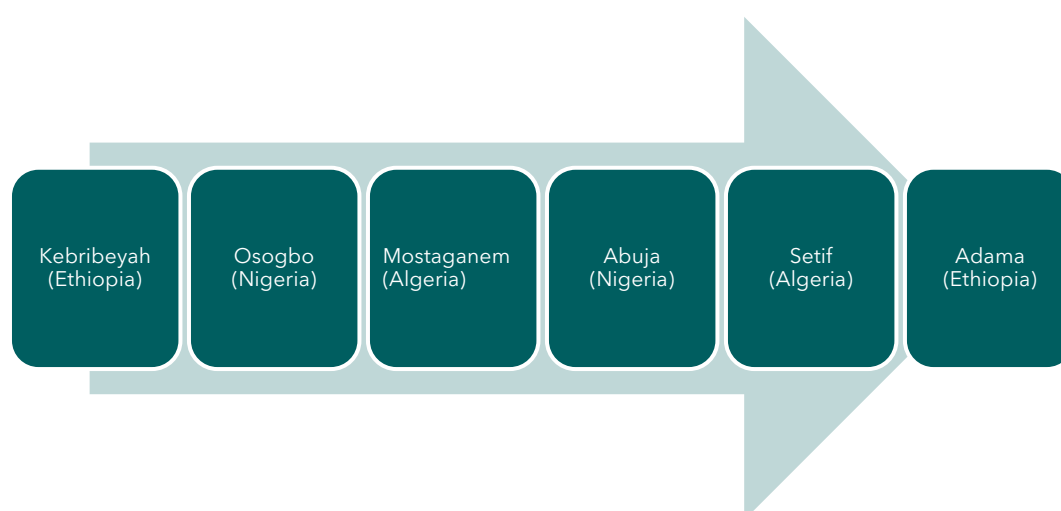


Figure 3. The six cities in our sample positioned along a continuum of perceived socio-economic expansion and dynamism

Our analysis reveals that, when fundamental change unfolds, three elements shape perceptions of dynamism: (1) the perceived pace of change, (2) the expected pace of change, and (3) the economic model.

The case of Abuja illustrates the first point. Urban and economic transformation was triggered when the city was designated to replace Lagos as the new capital of Nigeria in 1979 to find a more geographically central location that would better represent the cultural diversity of Nigeria. Social change accelerated in the 1990s, a period of profound economic transformation driven by privatisation policies, private investment – especially in land and infrastructure – and rapid urbanisation. Perceptions of rapid urban and economic change are particularly strong among people from diverse backgrounds who had migrated to Abuja before it became the capital in 1991. Nevertheless, change is also perceived

by younger generations, such as a 22-year-old student, who considers that ‘everything’ has changed in Abuja, from its infrastructures to its economy and standard of living. However, the pace of change is not uniform across neighbourhoods: ‘For locations like Asokoro [an affluent and prestigious neighbourhood], we don’t face as many challenges as compared to people living in other places. We have electricity, we have water, in general it’s ok. It’s not a hundred percent but it’s getting there.’ (AJ01R: Abuja, woman, 22, stay aspirations).

In Osogbo, a relatively small city by Nigerian standards, economic development has advanced at a significantly slower pace than in Abuja. Although self-employment has increased among the youth, participants tend to view investments in commercial and industrial services insufficient and progressing at a very low pace.

‘(...) I sell perfume. (...) Unlike before, if you are selling something, those mamas would not buy anything from you. (...) We don’t have companies, big companies that can pay [well] that kind of money (up to N500,000). So, you know, like, Lagos and Ibadan they have all these big, big companies, but here in Osogbo we don’t have any company. The only companies we have are IBM TV, and Osun mall. So, they cannot afford that.’ (OA14R: Osogbo, man, 49, migration aspirations)

Thus, the two Nigerian cities vary with respect to both perceived and expected pace of change, as well as the form of economic interventions advanced by the state. While Abuja was established as a new city by the national government and has benefited from the creation of new infrastructure, Osogbo has seen less state-led economic intervention and, at the same time, less transformation. The resulting differences in perception are tied to these variable socio-economic developments.

The contrast between Adama and Kebri Beyah is even greater. On the one hand, the current pace of change in Adama is overwhelming, reflecting the rapid infrastructural development that started a decade ago and has intensified over the past five years: ‘You can see the phases of change with the naked eye. Every morning you see new buildings laid their foundation or an opening ceremony of a completed hotel.’ (AZ9R: Adama, man, 41, stay aspirations)

Conversely, in the small city of Kebri Beyah, residents express a desire for more rapid structural change to meet their basic needs. Roads have improved, as has the provision of education and healthcare, with new schools and a hospital with ultrasound and X-ray facilities and sufficiently equipped to perform minor surgeries and assist with childbirth. Even so, some participants were not satisfied with these new facilities. Furthermore, the supply of water and electricity was poor and unsustainable:

‘We don’t have water, we don’t have taps, we didn’t have taps in the past, and now it’s worse. I am a businesswoman and I pour water for 400 birr per day, which is 12,000 birr per month. Everything I earn is spent on water purchase. It is a loss. As you can see, we have no electricity and have been without power for the past three days. The meat we slaughter is stored in the refrigerator, but it spoils due to the lack of electricity. We are forced to discard it, resulting in a complete loss.’ (KA6R: Kebri Beyah, woman, 45, stay aspirations)

Finally, we find examples of how economic policies and diversification play a role in perceptions of dynamism in the two Algerian cities. In the 1970s, during the Boumediene era, the Algerian state promoted the industrialization of various cities, including the formerly agricultural Sétif. Today, the city is considered the industrial and commercial hub of Algeria. In becoming an economic capital, it has become highly connected with other national and international localities through its import-export activities: ‘Sétif is somewhat of an exception in Algeria (...) there have been many investments. (...)’

There is a lot of money flowing in, a flow of investors that not only makes the city bigger but also creates job opportunities.’ (SZ29R: Sétif, man, 41, stay aspirations).

In contrast, a lack of economic diversification tends to be associated with a lack of dynamism even in contexts of highly rapid change. For instance, in the 2010s, Mostaganem rapidly transitioned from a traditional fishing and agricultural city to a tourist destination without undergoing significant industrialisation. However, study participants frequently aspire to broader economic opportunities beyond the tourism sector.

‘If there were more job opportunities for young people, the city would improve. If there were more cleaning staff and more workers in the health and education sectors, things would improve. It wouldn’t take much to see a positive change.’ (MZ04R: Mostaganem, woman, 38, migration aspirations)

Overall, perceptions of change and life opportunities over time vary across all six cities, as shown in Figure 4, which reflects responses to survey questions regarding perceptions of the past, present, and future in each city. These responses reveal that perceptions of urban and economic dynamism do not necessarily lead to optimism regarding the opportunities these changes bring in the present and in the future. Participants rate the present and future significantly more favourably than the past in the two cities where perceived dynamism is the lowest: Kebri Beyah and Osogbo. In Mostaganem, Abuja and Sétif, there are no significant differences in how participants assess how good life in the community is in the past and in the present. Instead, in the city we classified as the most dynamic according to participants’ perceptions, Adama, positive perceptions of life in the community in the present drop significantly compared to the past. Perceptions of ‘quantity’ versus ‘quality’ (the availability versus the type/quality of and access to jobs or services) are key to understanding these contrasting perceptions of dynamism and assessments of the community.

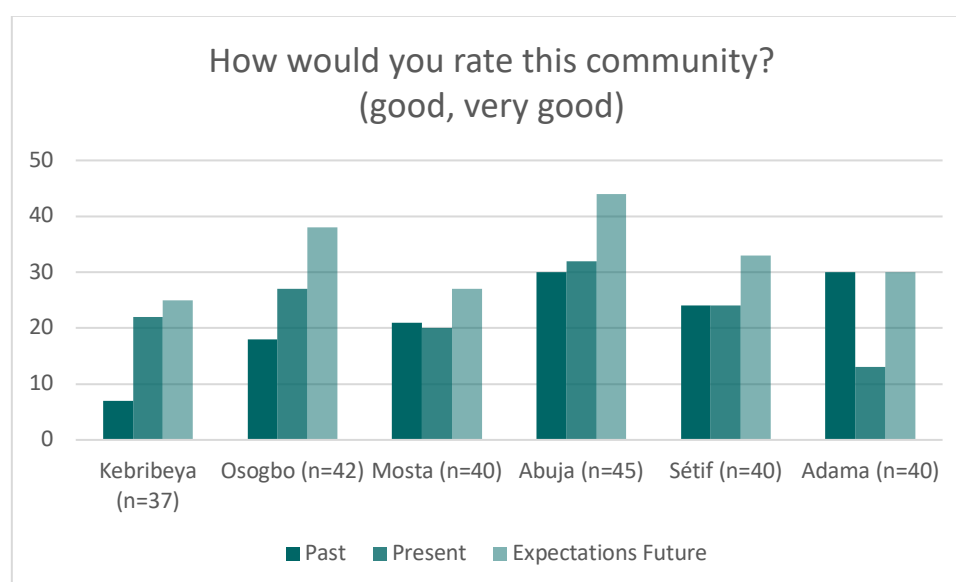


Figure 4. Assessment of the community in the past, present, and future

Perceived dynamism does not necessarily translate into improved social welfare or a positive assessment of life in the community. In fact, there is a strong contrast between perceptions of change in infrastructure and services and perceptions of social welfare³.

Participants perceive that infrastructure has significantly improved in all cities except in Kebri Beyah, where only 8 out of 37 participants rate local infrastructure as (very) good. This contrasts with Osogbo, also among the least dynamic cities (always based on a comparison of participants' perceptions), where 30 of the 42 participants considered local infrastructure to be (very) good.

'I'm talking about construction, road construction. Road construction, schools. Then generally, people are doing a whole lot, residents too. There is so much improvement in a whole lot of things. You can see places like Adolak Hotel, Adolak Hall, you have Finger Licking. You have a whole lot of things going on. These are infrastructure developments. When I came to Osogbo, we had just one bank in that area. But today we have Diamond, we have GT, we have Fidelity, we have FCMB, we have UBA, we have Unity Bank, we have erm... Those days when I came, it was only Unity Bank.' (OR14R: Osogbo, man, 49, migration aspirations)

Although healthcare services have become more available, participants tend to consider their quality insufficient. New healthcare services are often private businesses, especially in Adama, Sétif and Mostaganem. Whereas private clinics remain affordable for many in the two Algerian cities, many people cannot afford private services in Adama and there is a persistent need for more qualified doctors and nurses, and medical facilities in Osogbo. In addition, in Kebri Beyah, medicines are considered inaccessible as participants often expect to receive them free of charge at the hospital, but are instead directed to the pharmacies, where they must pay for them.

The provision of education has also increased. However, in the two Nigerian cities, participants consider improvements to be insufficient. In the Ethiopian cities, participants describe a decline in education quality, which they attribute to several factors. These include language policies that favour Afan Oromo instead of Amharic (Adama). A change in state exams, which many local students failed (Adama and Kebri Beyah), reveals, according to participants, the weaknesses of the system associated with the prevalence of underpaid, careless, or bad teachers. Public education has been widely available in the two Algerian cities since independence, with a curriculum similar to the French system and diplomas recognised in France. However, in recent years, the state has stopped providing diplomas in a timely manner, which participants interpret as a way to stem emigration to Europe, notably for graduates of certain disciplines, such as medicine. While some experience these delays as an obstacle to their professional careers, others adopt an understanding attitude towards the state that has invested in its students.

Perceptions of job prospects and the extent to which people believe that available jobs match career goals are strikingly negative even in the most dynamic cities. In the three least dynamic cities, job prospects are considered particularly low (even absent in Kebri Beyah). Overall, the results suggest there are fewer opportunities than in the past, except in Sétif, where most participants consider job prospects to be (very) good. However, in Sétif too, available jobs do not necessarily correspond with people's aspirations.

'Those who study finish their studies, but most go into commerce because commerce is very successful here. We always come back to industry, industrial areas, factories and

³ We analyzed social welfare through participants' assessments of past and present job opportunities, access to health care and education, and whether authorities listen and address people's issues (Annex).

such; whatever you do, if you are good at what you do, your business will be successful.’ (SZ08R: Sétif, man, 38, migration aspirations)

State intervention is considered absent or insufficient to address people’s concerns. State intervention in the present is particularly negatively perceived in Osogbo, Adama and Kebri Beyah. Corruption, nepotism, or ethnic favouritism are considered widespread.

‘A project assigned from the top with 10 billion naira, but in the Nigerian procedure of delegating power, sharing jobs, it becomes 10 million automatically by the time it gets down. That down, too, they have their own power. It’s like kings with subjects. The subjects do, the king takes his own, the subjects do take their own before it goes to the citizens. Now the citizens will be arriving at 10,000 from 10 billion.’ (OR13R: Osogbo, woman, 53, migration aspirations)

The state is much more present in Mostaganem and Sétif than in the cities in Ethiopia and Nigeria, especially through the provision of housing. However, state support is not perceived as addressing everyday challenges that people face, and many complain, for example, about the lengthy bureaucratic procedures necessary for setting up or expanding a business.

‘They hinder you in everything, they complicate things just to get a piece of paper. Now with the biometric card, you have to go and get a whole file of paperwork just to get the card. You apply for housing and you have to wait ten years, they investigate you, if you have previously benefited from a piece of land, or if you have another property in your name; and that is your right.’ (MZ06R: Mostaganem, woman, 41, migration aspirations)

4.2 The impact of social transformation on people’s lives

Change in the urban and economic environment is perceived to have a mixed impact on people’s lives. Social change tends to disrupt livelihoods and social protection at the individual and community levels.

At the individual level, increases in the cost of living are among the most consistently reported challenges associated with urban and economic transformation. Economic pressure is perceived as especially intense in Abuja, Adama, and Mostaganem. In Adama, the pressure is so great that participants provide evidence of how it is changing their social relations. For example, many do not attend funerals or other traditional ceremonies anymore because of a lack of money.

‘People really care for each other at this time of difficulty. There is a strong culture of helping each other in this community. The quality of life in the community is not good nowadays with the very harsh economic situation. Inflation is hurting many households, especially the poor. The old social connections and gatherings are declining because of the economy. Many social events which used to be celebrated together are now becoming things of the past.’ (AZ11R. Adama, woman, 23, migration aspirations)

There is often a high degree of uncertainty regarding what the observed changes in the economy and infrastructure will mean for the population. In the two Algerian cities, participants link these concerns to fluctuations in the global economy, often pointing to the depreciation of the Algerian dinar and its consequences for their purchasing power. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial opportunities and international exchanges in Sétif seem to partially mitigate these economic pressures: ‘[Sétif] has become Algeria’s market, where everyone comes, because they import from China and Taiwan and distribute to the rest of the country. Everyone comes here to buy.’ (SZ02R: Sétif, man, 61, stay aspirations)

In Kebri Beyah, where most residents are ethnically Somali, the high cost of goods is compounded by other challenges, such as the national government's restrictions on imports from Somalia, including clothing, electronics, grains, and sugar. By contrast, although the cost of living is also high in Osogbo, participants consider it lower than in cities such as Lagos or Abuja.

In the two Ethiopian cities and Mostaganem, the number of participants who consider their present socio-economic situation to be (much) better than others in the community is relatively low compared to the other cities (Figure 5). By contrast, in Osogbo – another of the least dynamic cities – the share of participants rating their present socio-economic position as (much) better than other people in the community significantly increases compared to the share of participants being positive about their situation in the past: ‘since the implementation of the minimum wage, I think people are now laughing [smiling] at home, getting [what they want] because I think the wage is big enough for people now to live or to survive with.’ (OR10R: Osogbo, man, 48, stay aspirations)



Figure 5. Ratings of Socio-economic Standing (243 Respondents)

Apart from disruptions in livelihoods, urban transformation also results in the relocation of inhabitants, especially in Adama, Mostaganem, and Sétif, although for different reasons. In Adama, forced eviction and demolition are part of the city's urban restructuring and 'beautification' and subsequently inhabitants are obliged to move to other parts of the city: 'People here are now in panic because there is no guarantee whether their houses are safe or not from getting demolished for the planned projects.' (AZ5R: Adama, man, 40, stay aspirations). Authorities are thought to be indifferent to the consequences of this gentrification on people's lives. In Mostaganem and Sétif, relocation is also explained by the intervention of the state, in this case through the provision of housing to citizens, although not necessarily in the same neighbourhood or city. The authorities allocate new housing anywhere within the same wilaya. Nowadays, housing is often allocated far from people's previous place of residence because of housing shortages in urban centres. For example, authorities could allocate housing in Oran, located 70 kilometres away, to someone living in Mostaganem.

Relocation and economic pressure associated with high living costs have consequences for social support networks and community life. Participants criticize the loss of contact within the community often framing it in terms of moral concerns.

'Say, you walk from an Iya shola [elderly woman] shop and you don't greet her. She will even report me to my parents if I don't greet her. So, they value respect. If I'm going, I will

be greeting from one shop to another.’ (OA14R: Osogbo, woman, 26, migration aspirations)

It is especially in Mostaganem that respondents describe increasing individualism and nostalgia for stronger community ties, especially in newly built neighbourhoods: ‘There was no one who didn’t have enough to eat or who went to bed without dinner. We were all together; if one person cooked, they would share with the others. Now, that’s not the case. (...) Now there’s no contact between the neighbours.’ (MZ25R: Mostaganem, woman, 26, migration aspirations)

Kebri Beyah and Abuja differ from other cities in terms of community homogeneity, with Kebri Beyah characterized by a more homogeneous community and Abuja by a more heterogeneous one. In Kebri Beyah, the clan system within the predominantly Somali community remains very strong and is key to the success of people’s businesses, as people support the businesses run by their clan. In Abuja, people consistently emphasize their strong family ties, and although they may feel that society has become more individualistic, our comparative analysis suggests this perception is less pronounced than in other cities. This difference could be explained by Abuja’s unique profile as a newly established city populated by migrants from diverse regions and traditions, without a long shared community history. Of the 43 participants we interviewed in Abuja, 28 (65%) were born outside the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (i.e., greater Abuja) and its districts.

Participants express concern about the rise of individualism in most cities, especially among younger generations. Whereas older generations are often depicted as patient and content with what they have, the youth are perceived as more materialistic, even by themselves:

‘We, the younger generation, see a good life to be having money to solve all our problems. You need a house, a car and other properties. [The older generation], they see good life to be having peace of mind. My father says that he does not need money in his old age, what he needs now is peace.’ (AP22R: Abuja, man, 41, stay aspirations)

Young people are also perceived as more ambitious and impatient than older residents: ‘they want to get everything quick and that doesn’t speak good of them, they don’t want to bend themselves, they don’t want to subject themselves to farming’ (AP19R: Abuja, man, 33, stay aspirations). However impatience has different meanings across cities. For example, while in Adama, impatience is often associated with young male graduates who waste their time drinking and chewing khat (traditionally chewed leaves with effects similar to amphetamines), in Osogbo, the youth are more often described as entrepreneurial and hard working. In Kebri Beyah, impatience is considered a characteristic of Somalis. These examples illustrate that people aspire to more rapid development and better job opportunities, which they perceive as unlikely to emerge in a context of slow socio-economic change.

Especially in Mostaganem and Sétif, where participants tend to criticize growing materialism, they nevertheless aspire to the same material possessions, such as a car and a house. They tend to perceive changing values in others rather than in themselves, suggesting that ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ values coexist, and can create tensions and contradictions at the personal level. Not surprisingly, participants tend to perceive the youth as aspiring more strongly than older residents to independence and self-sufficiency. However, many young people still express a desire and a sense of obligation to give back to their parents and care for them as they get older. Social change involves shifts in personal values; it does not mean that more ‘traditional’ values are replaced by ‘modern’ ones. In sum, our analysis illustrates how what are often considered more ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’ values, aspirations, behaviours, and expectations are deeply intertwined. The next section describes in which ways desires of self-sufficiency and independence are not in contradiction with moral norms of reciprocity.

4.3 Transforming ideas of social protection and the good life

It would be too simplistic to conclude that those who are more inclined to more collectivist aspects of social protection (e.g., considering it particularly important to maintain community life and social support in neighbourhoods) prefer to stay in their community, while those more inclined to an individualist lifestyle (e.g. having their own house instead of sharing it with relatives) are the ones who aspire to migrate.

To examine this relationship further, we first describe three distinct patterns that demonstrate the diverse and complex ways in which people make sense of social transformation, and how social change shapes what they consider important to secure livelihoods and achieve the good life: (1) individualism and independence as social protection; (2) materialism to increase opportunities and reduce power imbalances; and (3) resistance to change and continuity. What follows is based on our analysis of participants' interpretations of disruptions and opportunities associated with perceived transformation and stagnation of urban and economic environments, as well as at a more personal level. The common starting point for the three patterns is that social support and reciprocity within the family and the community coexist with aspirations for independence and self-reliance.

Individualism and independence as social protection

Individualism and independence observed in others, especially among the youth, are often judged as selfish behaviours. However, analysing these behaviours and aspirations from the perspective of social protection and well-being, participants' narratives reveal a different view. We find that seemingly individualistic aspirations, such as pursuing a successful professional career or achieving self-sufficiency, are closely linked to perceptions that neither the state nor community support provides adequate social protection, leaving one to rely solely on oneself. This self-reliance is perceived as increasingly necessary to secure livelihoods and achieve a good life at both the individual and family levels in a changing and uncertain local and global environment.

Both uncertainty and certainty regarding future developments influence this mindset. In Sétif, for example, where the local economy is strongly influenced by global developments, the state's strong intervention in the provision of social protection appears to mitigate perceptions of inequality in the distribution of the benefits of social transformation. However, it is insufficient to reassure residents about the effects of present and future global economic fluctuations on the value of the local currency, and, consequently, on what individuals can do and afford.

'Nothing comes easily to anyone. You have to rely on yourself. Nothing is certain in this life: you might be doing very well financially and then lose everything. You have to be a fighter at work, in any sector. You must keep up to date; you don't need to be able to work in every sector, but you do need to have an idea, because nothing lasts forever.' (SZ28R: Sétif, 25, woman, stay aspirations)

In Kebri Beyah, a national strategy that promoted access to education in Ethiopia combined with local interventions by international organizations to provide education mainly to the refugee population residing adjacent to the small city, has shaped individual aspirations of professional and economic advancement and raised expectations of their place of residence. Individuals tend to believe that the structural change needed to develop sufficient local opportunities to fulfil their aspirations will not take place in their lifetime. Young and old talk about the lack of jobs for the educated young. The focus on individual careers by those with a university diploma may seem very individualistic. However, this appears to be embedded in a society where communal support is still strong. It seems that people would

expect young people to have careers while still being community orientated and deeply embedded in values of community and kinship support.

‘I need an economic change. Since our economy is limited, our livestock have perished, and my people are experiencing significant needs, I am compelled to support and help my people. (...) The reason is that whether I have resources or not, I want to go abroad to contribute to my community. Therefore, I want to migrate, whether legally or illegally. (...) There is widespread unemployment and unmet needs. Therefore, I have decided to change my life and leave.’ (KA14R: Kebri Beyah, man, 40, migration aspirations)

Materialism to increase opportunities and reduce power imbalances

Similarly to how feelings of uncertainty seem to fuel self-reliance and the need to be independent, observations of materialism should be interpreted critically. A few specific instances that are often considered an excess of materialism, especially among the youth, are ambitions to set up and expand a business (such as a restaurant or a fashion design workshop) and aspirations to become famous or to become an influential politician. However, these seemingly materialistic or social status goals are often underpinned by aspirations to secure livelihoods, increase the well-being of parents with a modest background, and reduce perceived inequalities by increasing opportunities for oneself and others in the community. For example, as one participant in Osogbo illustrates, aspiring to own a car is not merely about its material value. Car ownership can enhance how others perceive and position an individual in society. In this example, aspiring to own a car is linked to a desire for more recognition and, consequently, more opportunities and power to pursue one's goals.

‘With my own [...] Prado Jeep, or to be someone in life, they will respect... They can even come and give me a post because of that. They can give me a post because I am wealthy, I can do, and I can meet their needs at that present time. So, they will respect me in the future, they will respect me in the future like that.’ (OR8R: Osogbo, man, 31, migration aspirations)

Material aspirations are often linked to immaterial ones. In Adama, for example, participants express their aspirations to provide the best education for their children and obligations and expectations of reciprocity towards their parents:

‘With help of God within a short period of time I want to build my house. I want to help my mother and my family. I also want to send my child to a very good school. I’m working really hard to realize my goals. I’m doing very well personally. I’m working two different jobs. I’m hired in a private company where I work on shift. I do also have my own small retail shop where my wife works in my absence.’ (AZ13R: Adama, man, 33, stay aspirations)

Business ambition and material successes are also linked to immaterial qualities like perseverance and self-improvement.

‘To be very frank with you, seriously, life has been so good for me. Because, if I can remember, the last time I came to Ogo Oluwa, I came from Niger state to serve. I didn’t really have anything then. I think I was doing Okada [motorcycle taxi service] from the start. So, before I came to Ogo Oluwa, I’m already into fashion designing, but the issue I had is that I don’t have capital to start up the business. So, I ventured into Okada, doing Okada. So, from there, I was able to raise some funds. So, from there, I bought a small [sewing] machine. From the small machine, I keep grinding [working hard to achieve success]. From there, I buy my industrial machine. So, and as time goes on, I’m still

looking forward to improve the business, to take it to greater height. So, and God is giving me, as you can see now, at least, the business is doing, is developing small, small. And I'm very sure with time.' (OB3R: Osogbo, man, 36, migration aspirations)

Resistance to change and continuity

Urban and economic transformation and the subsequent disruptions to livelihoods, community support, and understandings of the good life trigger a tendency to romanticize the good old days, when social ties and mutual support were stronger in the community, and individuals were more content with what they had. This nostalgia for a lost lifestyle is present in both older and younger participants, as the observations of this 19-year-old participant, who was most likely not yet born when life was allegedly easier, show:

'Back then there was humility. All I wanted was to eat, drink and sleep. Living in a small, ordinary house. The most important thing was just to have a home, to eat and drink whatever was available, to live a normal life. Do you see what I mean? I had no problem using public transport or living with my extended family (even when I would marry) in a small house. It was normal. The most important thing was to live peacefully [...] Now young people have other demands. They have become, eh, materialistic.' (MZ16R: Mostaganem, man, 19, migration aspirations)

This illustrates reflexivity and resistance in relation to the complexities of 'modernity' and the rising cost of living. In Abuja, where the community's social fabric is more fragmented because of the diverse origins of its residents, many of whom are internal migrants, this resistance to the complexities of urban and economic transformation does not translate into nostalgia for the past. Instead, there is a tendency to romanticize the future return to the more rural regions of origin, perhaps as a way to combine 'traditional' lifestyles with more 'modern' business-oriented mindsets.

'I want to go into farming proper, I don't want to work for anybody. If I can get a loan, even from the government, sincerely speaking, I'm going to face my farming, I have a vast land in my community, I will leave Abuja completely, I rather go to village, farm and then supply food for Abuja people to buy, I want to go into domestic rearing. I'm still searching, I mean I'm still working towards saving some money, you understand? So that I can use them to start something small at home, but for now I'm still doing some small farming. I will go myself and my family. [I want] to travel back home, to migrate to my locality [in Awkanga].' (AP03: Abuja, man, 50, migration aspirations)⁴

Nevertheless, alongside this resistance to change, some individuals also perceive the social pressures associated with traditional tight-knit communities as constraining individual freedom and self-expression. In contexts where traditional community norms conflict with personal values, this can lead people to reject local lifestyles.

'They say that our children will have it better, but they still have the mentality that the mother-in-law is in control, and the father-in-law takes you places. They ask, "Where are you going? And why are you going?" (...) They still have the same mentality, but they still retain their modesty, unlike in Oran and Algiers.' (SZ03R: Sétif, woman, 39, migration aspirations)

In sum, we observe three ways – corresponding to three archetypes – in which ideas of social protection unfold amid social transformation: stressing self-reliance, pursuing materialistic goals, and resisting

⁴ In this case, migration aspirations refer to internal migration.

change and maintaining existing forms of social protection. Our analysis shows that these archetypes should not be taken at face value, because the mechanisms that underpin them reveal how people seek to retain elements of their old ways of life, while adopting new traits associated with social change and adapting and reacting to what feels suitable to their situation. The analysis above also draws our attention to a surprising finding: participants who express contentment or even appreciation may still aspire to migrate, and others who appear more dissatisfied may express aspirations to stay. We explore this point further in the next section.

4.4 Social transformation and (im)mobility aspirations

Having examined how the transformation of various aspects of society influences perceptions of social protection, this section explores the final link in the chain: how changing ideas about social protection shape (im)mobility aspirations. First, we focus on the micro-level to explore how the three archetypes may be linked to (im)mobility aspirations. We then turn to the macro-level to examine how macro-, meso- and micro-level dimensions of social change, and their impacts on social protection, shape migration aspirations across the six cities, which are situated at different points along a continuum of urban and economic expansion, and are characterized by different speeds and expectations of change.

At the individual level, the first two archetypes (self-reliance and materialistic goals) may be more likely to shape aspirations to migrate than the third archetype (resistance to change and holding on to existing social protection). However, this is not always the case, as two participants in Adama show. Their profiles align with the materialist archetype. They both have entrepreneurial aspirations, which are frequently thought of as a way for people to create their own employment opportunities. For these two participants entrepreneurship is also associated with contributing and helping the community as a job creator. The same entrepreneurship aspirations lead to different (im)mobility aspirations. One participant aspires to stay, while the other aspires to migrate.

One of these two participants, a 42-year-old internal migrant who had been living in the city for 16 years, was married, and had a child, and aspired to contribute to the community expanding her restaurants. She was a return migrant from Dubai, where she had spent 10 years. She was satisfied with her life, felt accepted in her community, and was optimistic about the future: ‘Adama will become one of the cities of the developed world. I expect Adama to be like Dubai and many people from different parts of the world will visit and even live here.’ She aspired to stay:

‘Working hard and owning many restaurants to create jobs for the youth. I want to help my community and my country to grow. I want to leave a good mark for the future generation. I want to change others' lives for good. I want to reach for the orphaned and the poor in the future.’ (AZ12R: Adama, woman, 42, stay aspirations)

The other participant, single (33), without children and with family members abroad, including his mother, was positive about the infrastructural developments of the city. However, he considered that people were suffering from the negative consequences of economic development. Life had become unaffordable, making it impossible to secure a job, a house, or a car. He also perceived high living costs as an obstacle to getting married and having children: ‘I don't follow most of it [the life script]. I dropped out of school earlier. I'm not doing well in life right now.’ Like the previous participant, he also aspired to start a business and create opportunities for young people, but in his case this position contributed to his migration aspirations:

‘A good life for me is living a decent life by having the necessary knowledge and enough money by which you can get materials required to have a happy and joyful life. I also want

to help people who need assistance in their lives by creating opportunities for them in my future business world.’ (AA10R: Adama, man, 33, migration aspirations)

The two participants’ past migration histories at the individual and family levels, as well as their perceptions of themselves based on their interpretations of social change, play a role in shaping their (im)mobility aspirations.

At the city level, our analysis suggests that in the three less dynamic cities, individuals’ expectations and aspirations have evolved faster than the cities themselves. This mismatch may contribute to aspirations to migrate when people do not expect structural change to occur within the next 10-15 years.

It is more difficult to draw the opposite conclusion: that there is a tendency to aspire to stay in the three more dynamic cities. People tend to perceive greater future opportunities, but the pressure from rising living costs, uncertainty about long-term livelihood security, and strong aspirations to provide for parents and children (for instance, by ensuring the best education for children and improved housing for parents) result in more mixed preferences between staying or migrating.

Two factors appear to be crucial at the city level to understand the interplay of social transformation, social protection, and (im)mobility aspirations in regimes of mobility that tend to constrain international migration:

1. Mobility/migration histories (linked to trade; resettlement and recruitment programmes; irregular migration routes; or cultures of migration).
2. The general ‘mood’ in the community regarding what the future will bring in terms of opportunities, security, and safety.

What follows describes the general mood in the six cities and how it relates to their histories of migration and mobility.

In Adama, urban, economic and political environments are changing fast. Higher levels of education are preparing people to hold important roles in the city’s development, but ethnic politics and discrimination exclude many young people, even those who belong to the same ethnic group as the party in government. Concurrently, the speed of economic change has outpaced changes in cultural values, creating tensions as people can visualize the benefits of a modern life, but are unable to take part in it. International migration is not perceived as attractive, because it tends to be associated with women, often with low levels of education and mainly from rural areas who migrate to the Gulf countries to face situations of abuse. There is a generalized ‘wait and see’ attitude as a reaction to these mixed perceptions of social change and their impact on people’s lives. We associate this mood with aspirations to stay and weaker migration aspirations. (Im)mobility aspirations tend to be put on hold, to see what the future will bring in terms of opportunities, security and safety, and to see whether the state will provide sufficient protection to contain and reduce feared conflict from reaching the city.

In Sétif, residents are proud of its economic dynamism, which brings many opportunities for those with business aspirations. There is a sense of urban activity despite the city’s relatively small size, which is seen as beneficial for its affordability. Its export-import activities create opportunities for mobility both within Algeria and abroad. This openness to the outside world coexists with a relatively conservative society compared with other parts of Algeria. Perceptions of increasing empowerment of women and improved social services coexist with perceptions of decreased respect and discipline, particularly among youth, as well as with forms of oppressive social control that limits autonomy and self-expression, especially for women. People in Sétif balance their attachment to family, local traditions and religion with their frustrations with bureaucratic obstacles and a fragile currency in global markets. Mobility (instead of migration) offers the best of two worlds. People prefer temporal international

migration or circulation (both internal and international) to long-term migration. Industrial and commercial activities make it almost unnecessary to migrate, allowing people to maintain their preferred local lifestyles.

In Abuja, major infrastructure projects have accelerated urban development across virtually all sectors of the economy. The presence of the Nigerian government and its resettlement policies have facilitated access to land, particularly for Nigerians from other regions. While there has been a massive influx of private investors and internal migrants, including government workers on transfer, many indigenous Gbagyi residents, often farmers, have moved out to settle in satellite villages in response to economic pressure and land dispossession. Both in Wuse and in the informal settlement of Dei Dei the cost of living has become unsustainable, with significant increases in housing rents, basic needs, transportation, education, and healthcare services. When discussing migration people tend to think more often of internal migration – to Lagos or to their state of origin – than of international migration. Aspirations to migrate are linked with desires to live in a more affordable place with greater opportunities and a better quality of life. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to prefer to stay, especially among men. Despite the rising living costs, there is an expectation that things will continue to improve in the future.

In Mostaganem, residents acknowledge that the city has changed in recent years. These changes are reflected in improved infrastructure, the construction of new housing, the expansion of trade, and the development of tourism. The city is perceived as a peaceful coastal area, increasingly attractive to visitors and people from other regions of Algeria. However, these changes do not always translate into more opportunities for the local population. Many residents continue to mention the lack of stable employment in their fields, especially for young people and university graduates. Furthermore, the proximity to Spain and existing networks linked to irregular migration to Europe reinforce a strong orientation towards Europe. Migration aspirations are strong, particularly among younger people, often influenced by social media and the example of other young people who have already left and are seen as role models. In this context, migration appears as a way to respond to the mismatch between individual aspirations and local opportunities, rather than as a direct rejection of the city.

In Osogbo, road construction, electricity, affordable and accessible healthcare and education, as well as the city's cultural and art industry (Osogbo has been one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 2005) have improved people's lives. These developments are mostly associated with a change in leadership since 2015 and have continued to attract migrants from within the Southwest Yoruba region and from northern Nigeria. The presence of the UNESCO cultural site, a rich art scene and a yearly festival that draws Yoruba people from abroad make Osogbo an attractive city. However, the livelihoods of both residents and migrants often revolve around small-scale businesses, while unemployment is high and rising living costs are felt by families. Internal outmigration is common, especially to Lagos and Abuja, where people perceive greater opportunities. Osogbo also has international connections linked to historical migration to the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, which participants mention as the most desirable destinations. Osogbo's culture of migration is related to the belief that migration can enable people to make a difference, which triggers strong aspirations to become famous or to contribute to the community.

Despite perceptions of positive improvements, Kebri Beyah offers limited economic diversification, well-paid employment and government jobs. In participants' minds, having a business seems to be the most promising economic activity. The city's population includes a large refugee population and continues to grow through new arrivals from nearby rural areas and other parts of Ethiopia. Residents often claim that people, not the government, have promoted local growth. The process of integrating the refugee population into the general population, which means that services are no longer provided

separately to refugees by humanitarian agencies, has made it more difficult for authorities to meet the needs of all groups. Locals and newcomers compete for the same limited jobs (as drivers or in agriculture), while young people, both refugees and locals, have attained higher levels of education, especially men, but are unable to find suitable jobs. Resettlement possibilities for refugees have allowed their families to rapidly improve their situation and have in turn increased migration aspirations among residents, who have also engaged in resettlement, family reunification, and irregular migration. Kebri Beyah's residents appreciate their welcoming and peaceful community, but young people show a certain impatience, making it clear that migrating would give them access to opportunities and earnings that would benefit the family members left behind and the community overall. In fact, the strong emotional attachment to stories of rapid financial improvement among those with family abroad is connected to those returning to invest, build houses, and improve the lives of family members who stayed. Residents are aware that 'a better life' is possible elsewhere, often shaping bold migration aspirations. Some aspire to stay, but would also migrate without hesitation if they obtained a visa, while expressing some aversion to irregular migration. International migration has become the expected way to improve livelihoods for both refugees and residents.

These six cities provide rich cases for observing perceptions of social transformation and the contexts they provide for residents. Together, these cases show the importance of what is changing and the pace of these changes – slow in Kebri Beyah and fast in Adama – but also how people perceive these changes and whether the pace of change meets people's expectations and aspirations.

5 Concluding remarks

We conducted a comparative qualitative content analysis of 120 semi-structured interviews and a descriptive quantitative analysis of 244 surveys collected in two neighbourhoods in six African cities. The analysis identifies similarities and variations in how residents perceive urban and economic transformation, how these changes impact and shape what they value for securing their livelihoods and their understanding of the good life, and ultimately how these structural as well as personal changes shape their (im)mobility aspirations.

Our theoretical starting point was that urban and economic expansion at the structural level is linked to processes of change and continuity in what people do and in what they consider important for securing their livelihoods and a good life at the community, family and individual level. How people interpret macro-, meso- and micro-level changes and continuities depends on (1) perceptions of change and continuity in their place of residence, in other places, and among themselves and others; (2) personal circumstances and priorities closely linked to life course transitions; and (3) personal values, namely what they consider important at the individual level, which may or may not align with values and expectations prevailing in the community.

By comparing processes of social transformation in Mostaganem and Sétif (in Algeria), Adama and Kebri Beyah (in Ethiopia) and Abuja and Osogbo (in Nigeria), we identified three elements that shape perceptions of urban and economic dynamism: the perceived pace of change, the expected pace of change, and the economic model in the city. Based on these three elements and regardless of city size, we classified the six cities according to participants' perceptions of urban and economic dynamism. Kebri Beyah appears to be the least dynamic city, followed by Osogbo, Mostaganem, Abuja, Sétif, and Adama, where the pace of change is perceived as the most overwhelming. Based on these premises, we identified patterns through which deeply personal processes of interpreting social transformation shape migration decision-making in cities perceived as more or less dynamic.

First, perceptions of urban and economic dynamism do not necessarily lead to optimism about the opportunities it creates. Overall, there is a mismatch between perceptions of the development of infrastructure and services (the ‘quantity’ of change) and perceptions of social welfare outcomes (the ‘quality’ of change). Positive structural change does not necessarily translate into positive personal and community change.

Second, structural change tends to cause disruption in livelihoods and social protection at the individual and community levels. Increases in the cost of living are widespread, with consequences for households and for the ability to provide social support within the community. Therefore, the benefits of economic and urban expansion are not necessarily redistributed among urban residents.

Third, as societies transform, community support, reciprocity norms and expectations, as well as individualistic and materialistic values and behaviours increasingly coexist, shaping what people consider important to secure livelihoods and what they consider the good life. We identified three ways in which more ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ values and behaviours interact: (1) self-reliance through individualism and independence become a way to secure livelihoods and well-being for individuals and their families; (2) materialism becomes a way to increase opportunities and reduce power imbalances; and (3) tensions emerge between desire for change and continuity.

Fourth, our analysis suggests we can group the six cities into two main categories. Those with higher dynamism (Abuja, Sétif, and Adama) and those with lower dynamism (Kebri Beyah, Osogbo and Mostaganem). We observe greater disruption in people's lives in the three more dynamic cities. Change appears to have occurred too rapidly in the highly dynamic cities, but not fast enough in the less dynamic ones.

Finally, our analysis suggests a preference for staying in the three more dynamic cities, where people perceive that the city has changed faster than their own lives have. Rather than leaving, they adopt a wait-and-see approach, hoping for better opportunities in the future, and hoping to benefit more directly from structural change in times to come. Instead, in the three less dynamic cities, people seem to have changed more rapidly than the city itself has. As a result, we observe stronger migration aspirations among individuals who perceive that their life aspirations are impossible to achieve in their city in the future.

6 References

Amnesty International. (2025a). *Ethiopia: Federal government must pause the Corridor Development Project and end forced evictions*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/9098/2025/en/>

Amnesty International. (2025b). *Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups*. Retrieved June 19, 2026, from <https://www.amnesty.org.ng/2025/05/28/nigeria-mounting-death-toll-and-looming-humanitarian-crisis-amid-unchecked-attacks-by-armed-groups/>

Bebbington, A. (2004). Livelihood transitions, place transformations: Grounding globalization and modernity. In R. Gwynne & C. Kay (Eds.), *Latin America Transformed* (pp. 173–192). Routledge.

Benson, M., & O'Reilly, K. (2009). Migration and the search for a better way of life: A critical exploration of lifestyle migration. *The Sociological Review*, 57(4), 608–625.

Borjas, G. J. (1999). Immigration and welfare magnets. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 17(4), 607–637.

- Carver, F. (2020). *Refugee and host communities in Ethiopia. 2018–2019 integrated national study*. https://media.odi.org/documents/Refugee_and_host_communities_in_Ethiopia_20182019_integrated_national_study.pdf
- de Haas, H., Fransen, S., Natter, K., Schewel, K., & Vezzoli, S. (2020). *Social transformation* (IMI Working Paper No. 166). International Migration Institute. https://www.migrationinstitute.net/_files/ugd/31c2fc_2ef7d3014ea2467c952191bd4831dd25.pdf
- Devereux, S. (1999). *Making less last longer: informal safety nets in Malawi*. *IDS Discussion Paper* 373. https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/Making_Less_Last_Longer_Informal_Safety_Nets_in_Malawi/26483893?file=48229276
- File, T., & Dinka, H. (2020). A preliminary study on urban malaria during the minor transmission season: the case of Adama City, Oromia, Ethiopia. *Parasite epidemiology and control*, 11, e00175.
- Glick Schiller, N., & Salazar, N. B. (2013). Regimes of mobility across the globe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(2), 183–200.
- Gonzalez De La Rocha, M. (2020). Of morals and markets: Social exchange and poverty in contemporary urban Mexico. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 689(1), 26–45.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 161–178.
- Greenfield, P. M. (2009). Linking social change and developmental change: Shifting pathways of human development. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(2), 401–418.
- Greenfield, P. M. (2016). Social change, cultural evolution, and human development. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 8, 84–92.
- Hägerstrand, T. (1957). Migration and area. In D. Hannerberg, T. Hägerstrand, & B. Odeving (Eds.), *Migration in Sweden: A symposium*. Gleerup.
- International Labour Organization. (2024). *World social protection report 2024–26. Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition*. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/WSPR_2024_EN_WEB_1.pdf
- International Organization for Migration. (2009). *Migration in Nigeria: A country profile 2009*. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/nigeria_profile_2009.pdf
- Jolivet, D. (2020). *Welfare and migration: Unfulfilled aspirations to “have rights” in the south-Moroccan Todgha Valley* (IMI Working Paper No. 170). International Migration Institute. https://www.migrationinstitute.net/_files/ugd/31c2fc_6995c18e82d3489d9a5e4e7c98e3cb76.pdf
- Jolivet, D. (2023). *Revisiting the role of welfare in migration: The case of Moroccan migration towards Europe* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam]. <https://dare.uva.nl/id/88fb20d7-c5d0-49fa-9593-88ca00639bdc>
- Jolivet, D. (2024). Subjectivity in welfare mobilities: Rethinking welfare as a structure, a process, and an experience. *International Migration Review*, 58(4), 2204–2238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241275564>

- Jolivet, D. (2025). Integrating lifestyle and welfare aspirations in (im)mobility decisions: Perspectives from a relatively disadvantaged group in Tangier, Morocco. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 13(1), 78. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-025-00466-8>
- Jolivet, D. (2026). Aspiration gaps and ambivalence in onward immobilities within the European Economic Area. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-025-01317-2>
- Levitt, P., Viterna, J., Mueller, A., & Lloyd, C. (2017). Transnational social protection: Setting the agenda. *Oxford Development Studies*, 45(1), 2–19.
- Osburg, M. (2020). *State Expansion, mobility and the aspiration to stay in Western French Guiana*. (IMI Working Paper No. 168). International Migration Institute. https://www.migrationinstitute.net/_files/ugd/31c2fc_99fdecf213f942c685ba7420a44bd06b.pdf
- Planning and Development Commission. (2021). *Ten years development plan: A pathway to prosperity 2021-2030*. https://www.nepad.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/ten_year_development_plan_0.pdf
- Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Beacon Press.
- Polanyi, K. (2024). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Penguin Classics.
- Ravenstein, E. G. (1885). The laws of migration. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 48(2), 167–235.
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (2002). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 173–194). Routledge.
- Sabates-Wheeler, R., & Devereux, S. (2007). Social protection for transformation. *IDS Bulletin*, 38(3), 23–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2007.tb00368.x>
- Schewel, K., de Haas, H., & Vezzoli, S. (2025). Theorising mobility transitions and social transformation: Evidence from five case studies. (IMI Working Paper No. 186; PACES Working Paper No.8). International Migration Institute. https://www.migrationinstitute.net/_files/ugd/31c2fc_d042cd5eeb6241ec9a378557867e8216.pdf
- Schewel, K., & Fransen, S. (2018). Formal education and migration aspirations in Ethiopia. *Population and Development Review*, 44(3), 555–587. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12159>
- Stark, O. (1991). *The migration of labor*. Blackwell Publishers.
- United Nations (2024). World Population Prospects 2024 (Department of Economic and Social affairs. Population Division. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). *Kebribeyah Inclusion Roadmap (2023-2027). Building resilience together* <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/kebribeyah-inclusion-roadmap-2023-2027-building-resilience-together>
- Vezzoli, S. (2024). Understanding rural migration in the mid-twentieth century: Examining dimensions of social change and their effects in Cisternino, a Southern Italian town. *Journal of Migration History*, 10(1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23519924-10010001>

Vezzoli, S., Mýtna Kureková, L., & Schewel, K. (2024). Researching decisions to stay and migrate: A Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework. (*IMI Working Paper No. 178; PACES Project Working Paper No. 1.*) International Migration Institute.

https://www.migrationinstitute.net/files/ugd/31c2fc_eea80fdb33ef4f38b6a6e63869763458.pdf

Zelinsky, W. (1971). The hypothesis of the mobility transition. *Geographical Review*, 61(2), 219–249.

Zoomers, E. A., & Otsuki, K. (2017). Addressing the impacts of large-scale land investments: Re-engaging with livelihood research. *Geoforum*, 83, 164–171.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.01.009>

7 Annex

Figure A1 – Perceptions of social welfare. Based on participants’ assessments of past and present job opportunities, access to health care and education, and whether authorities listen and address people’s issues (this last question was not asked in Mostaganem and Sétif).

