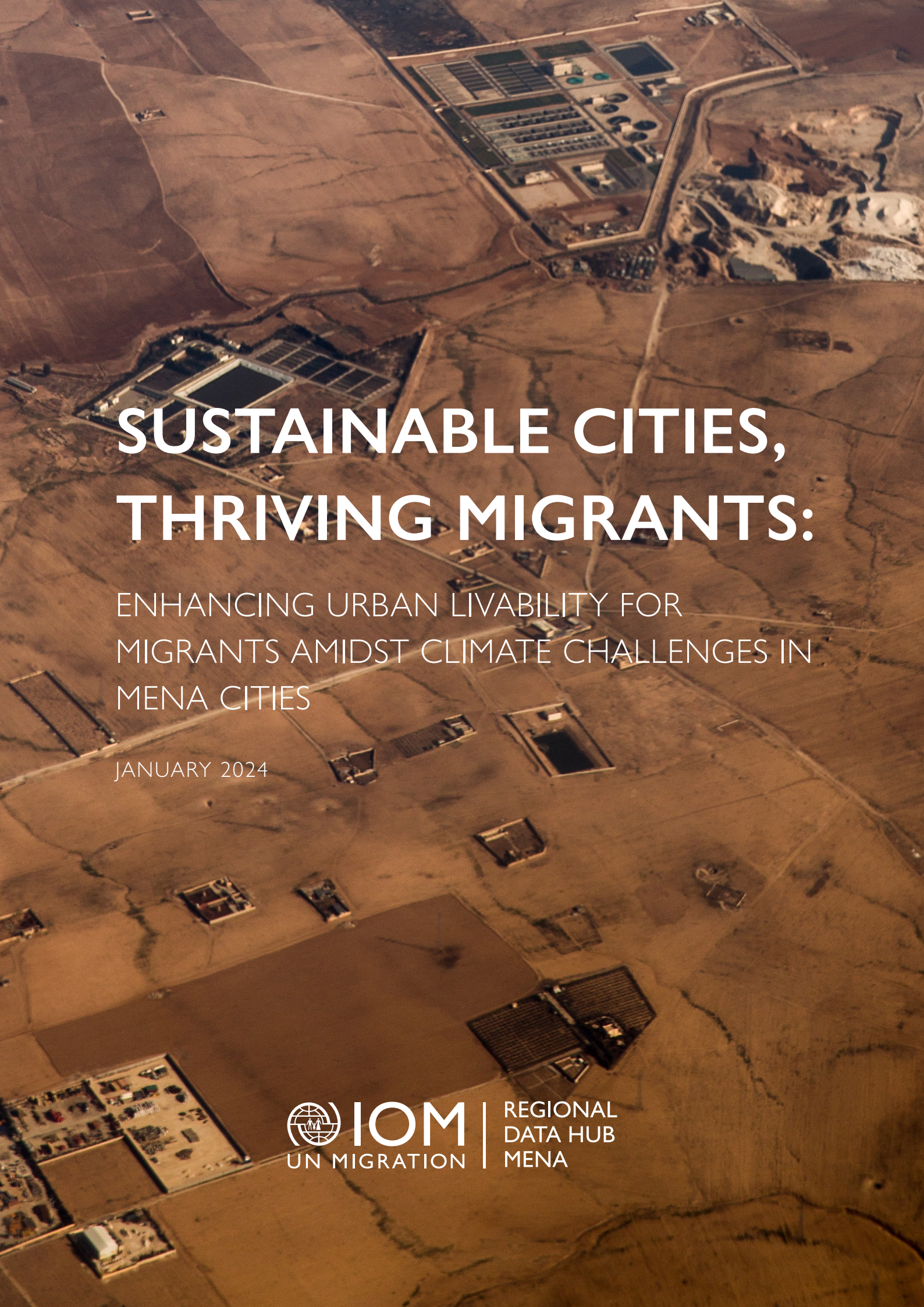

SUSTAINABLE CITIES, THRIVING MIGRANTS:

ENHANCING URBAN LIVABILITY FOR MIGRANTS AMIDST CLIMATE CHALLENGES IN MENA CITIES

JANUARY 2024

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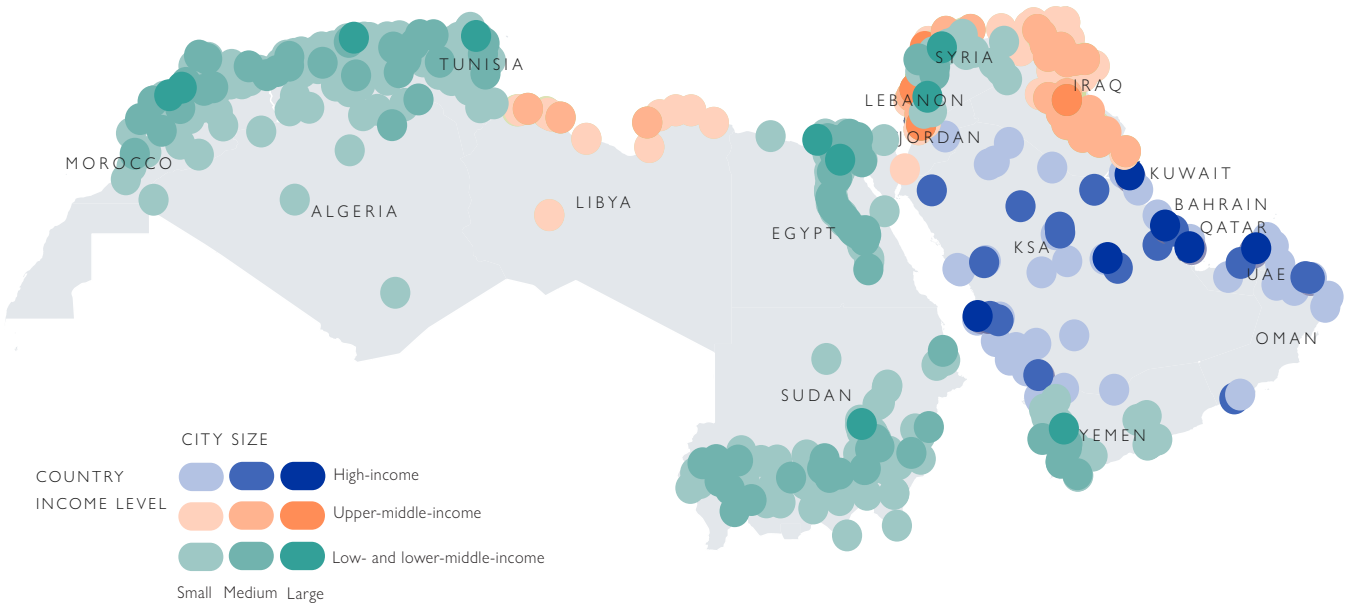
INTRODUCTION

The cities of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have garnered global recognition as significant hubs for migrants and displaced populations. This distinction arises from the MENA region's multifaceted role as an origin and destination, as well as a crucial transit region for people on the move. Recent years have seen rapid urbanization in MENA cities, creating substantial challenges for their environmental and economic resources and available services, as well as to the overall well-being of their residents.[1] These challenges are exacerbated by conflicts, food insecurity, disasters, governance challenges, and weak social infrastructure.

Failure to allocate resources towards climate resilience, adaptation, and responsive governance, coupled with the absence of opportunities for regular migration as an adaptive strategy, has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities and social tensions. This could further escalate fragility, food insecurity, conflicts, and displacement in the region.[2] This policy brief will identify actionable measures and investments to address binding constraints to climate-ready urban development for migrants, now and in the future. Given the limited scope and exclusive focus on cities, it is important to note that this policy brief refers to migrants as individuals on the move, including those who are internally displaced. This encompasses primarily international migrants, internal migrants, and refugees living in the cities.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF MENA CITIES BY SIZE AND COUNTRY INCOME LEVEL



Source: Map based on data from the European Commission's Global Human Settlement (GHS) Urban Centre Database R2019 https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ghs_stat_ucdb2015mt_r2019a.php and World Bank calculations using Global Typology of Cities classification https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/7d290fa9-da18-53b6-a1a4-be6f7421d937

Note: Cities are defined as urban centers following the European Commission's degree of urbanization methodology (Dijkstra et al. 2021; Dijkstra and Poelman 2014). Small, medium, and large cities are those that in 2015 had a population of 50,000–199,999; 200,000–1.4999 million; and 1.5 million or more, respectively. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

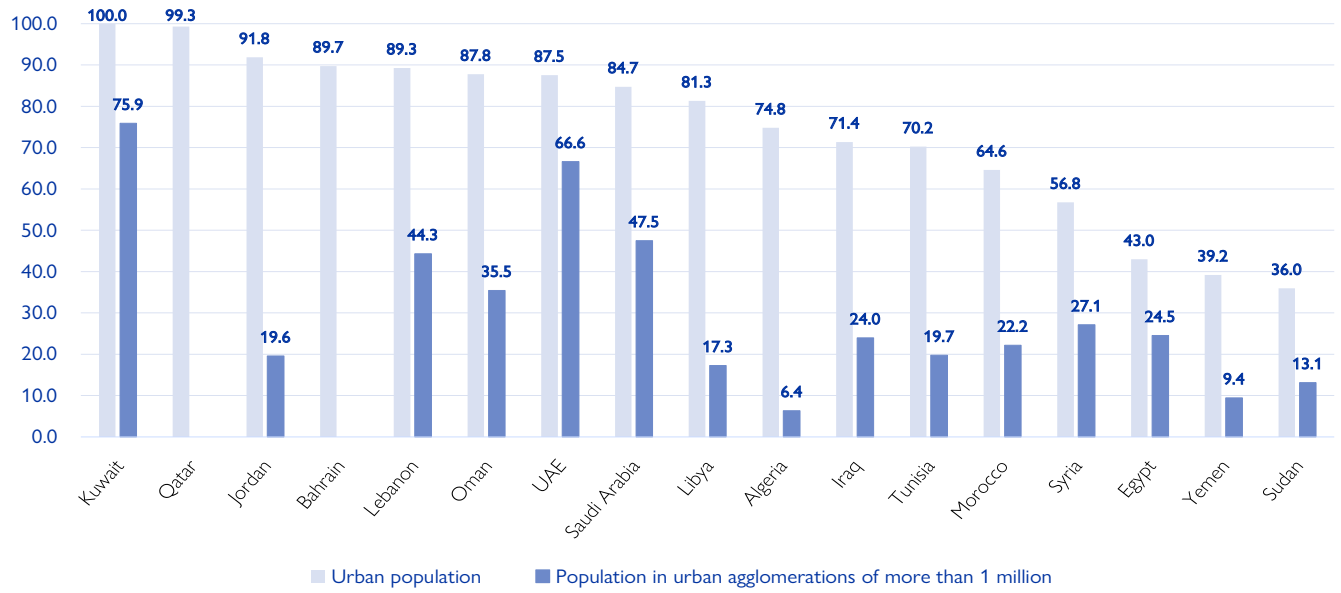
1 Jaad, A., and Khaled Abdelghany, K., (2021) The story of five MENA cities: Urban growth prediction modeling using remote sensing and video analytics, Cities, Volume 118, 2021, 103393, ISSN 0264-2751, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103393

2 Norman, K., (2023) Migration and Displacement in the Arab World Demands a More Equitable Response. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/03/migration-and-displacement-in-arab-world-demands-more-equitable-response-pub-89520

Over half of the population in Arab countries reside in urban areas.[3] Most urban areas in the MENA region have rapidly expanded to accommodate population growth and migration from rural or politically unstable regions in recent decades. For instance, in Beirut, the ratio of refugees to the local population is estimated at one to four,[4] while approximately 30 per cent of Amman's 4 million inhabitants describe themselves as foreign-born.[5] In terms of size and country income level, mapping of 758 cities in the MENA region using the World Bank global typology of cities classification reveals that most of the cities are concentrated in the coastal areas (see Figure 1).

The urban population in the MENA region[6] comprises an estimated 74 percent of the total regional population.[7] Kuwait boasts the highest urbanization rate, with 100 percent of its population living in urban areas, while Sudan falls in the lowest category, with only 36 per cent residing in urban areas (see Figure 2). It is noteworthy that some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, such as Kuwait (76%), UAE (67%), and Saudi Arabia (47%),[8] have the highest percent of their population living in urban agglomerations of more than one million people.[9] While rural-to-urban migration in search of employment is a phenomenon commonly observed especially among young people,[10] leading to urban conglomeration in low-income countries, the region is also witnessing an unprecedented increase in urban population due to migratory flows resulting from conflict and environment-related push factors.

FIGURE 2. URBAN POPULATION AND POPULATION IN URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS OF MORE THAN 1 MILLION (PER CENT OF POPULATION)



Source: United Nations Population Division. World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision.

Strengthening the resilience and livability of MENA cities is important for mitigating climate risks, improving food security, increasing service provision, developing a robust human capital base, and fostering agglomeration economies. These efforts, in turn, will enhance living conditions for both internal and international migrants and other mobile populations. This policy brief will delve into urbanization trends and challenges exacerbated by climate crisis in MENA cities. Following this, the paper adopts a people-centered approach to recommend policies for planned development in MENA cities, aiming to establish low-carbon and resilient urban forms crucial for achieving regional mitigation and adaptation goals.

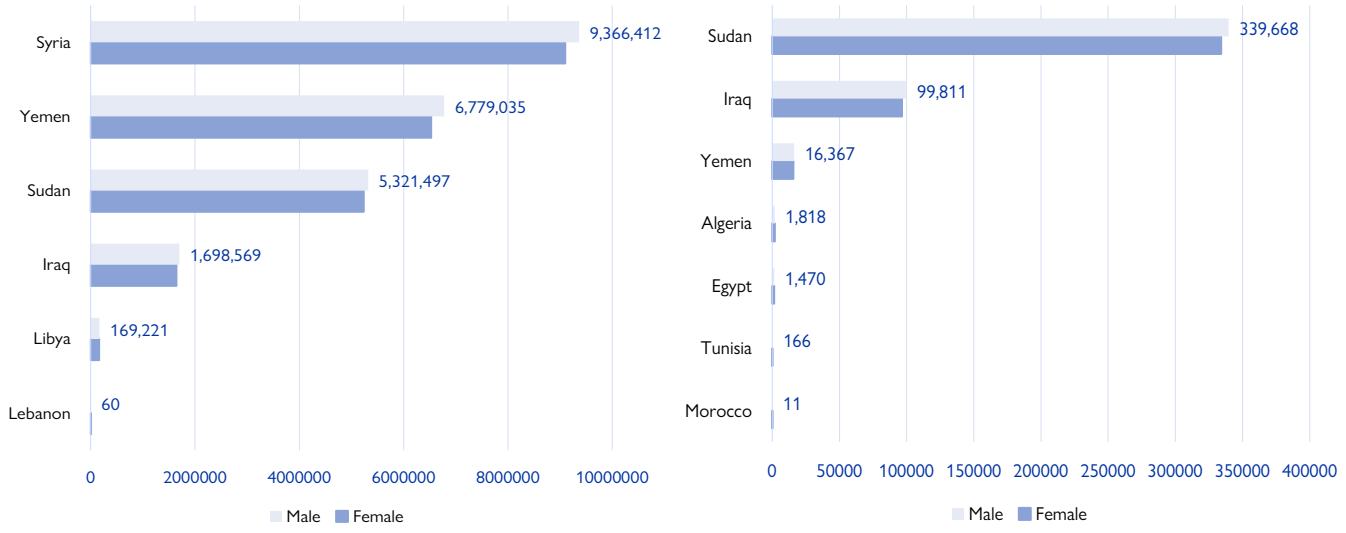
3 Dababseh, A (2012). Urban Areas in the Arab Region: Time for Adaption to Climate Change. https://www.boell.de/en/2012/11/21/urban-areas-arab-region-time-adaption-climate-change
4 UN Habitat (2018). Migration and Inclusive Cities: A Guide for Arab City Leaders.
5 Alamoush, H. (2019). Amman, A Welcoming City for Migrants and Refugees.
6 This estimate is calculated for IOM MENA countries (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)).
7 World Bank (2023) Urban Population indicator https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS
8 Ibid.
9 World Bank (2023). Urban population (% of total population). United Nations Population Division. World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision.
10 FAO (2018). Rural Migration in the Near East and North Africa http://www.fao.org/3/ca4751en/ca4751en.pdf

URBANIZATION TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Cities serve as central hubs for economic development, and they are the preferred settlement choice for many individuals, particularly migrants and other mobile populations. Despite rapid urbanization in the MENA region, urban areas face challenges in capacity particularly for migrants, due to environmental, socio-economic, and urban governance issues. A study focusing on five MENA cities[11] reveals that rapid urbanization imposes significant pressures on the ecological and financial resources of these urban areas, impacting the overall well-being of their residents.[12] The surge in urban population has strained both residential and service infrastructure, including health and safety provision. Governments in the MENA region struggle to expand infrastructure systems, deliver public services, and promote livelihood opportunities for migrants.[13] The prevalence of informal settlements further complicates effective urbanization.

Conflicts and violence have led to more than 12 million being internally displaced in the MENA region.[14] The recent migratory outflows from MENA countries are driven not only by conflicts but also by increased food insecurity, social injustice, and exclusion.[15] In Syria, urban sieges and transport blockades have been commonplace since the onset of the conflict, leading to acute food insecurity and mass displacement.[16] Similarly, conflict, displacement, and food insecurity have converged in Yemen, particularly evident in urban conflicts in Hodeidah and the surrounding area. These conditions have compelled people to relocate in search of safety, services, and humanitarian aid, including food, prompting migrations to other cities such as Sana'a, Aden, and Taiz.[17] Other socio-economic factors such as urban poverty and fragile labour markets, also contribute to migration trends in MENA cities.

FIGURE 3. IDPS DUE TO CONFLICTS (LEFT) AND DISASTERS (RIGHT)



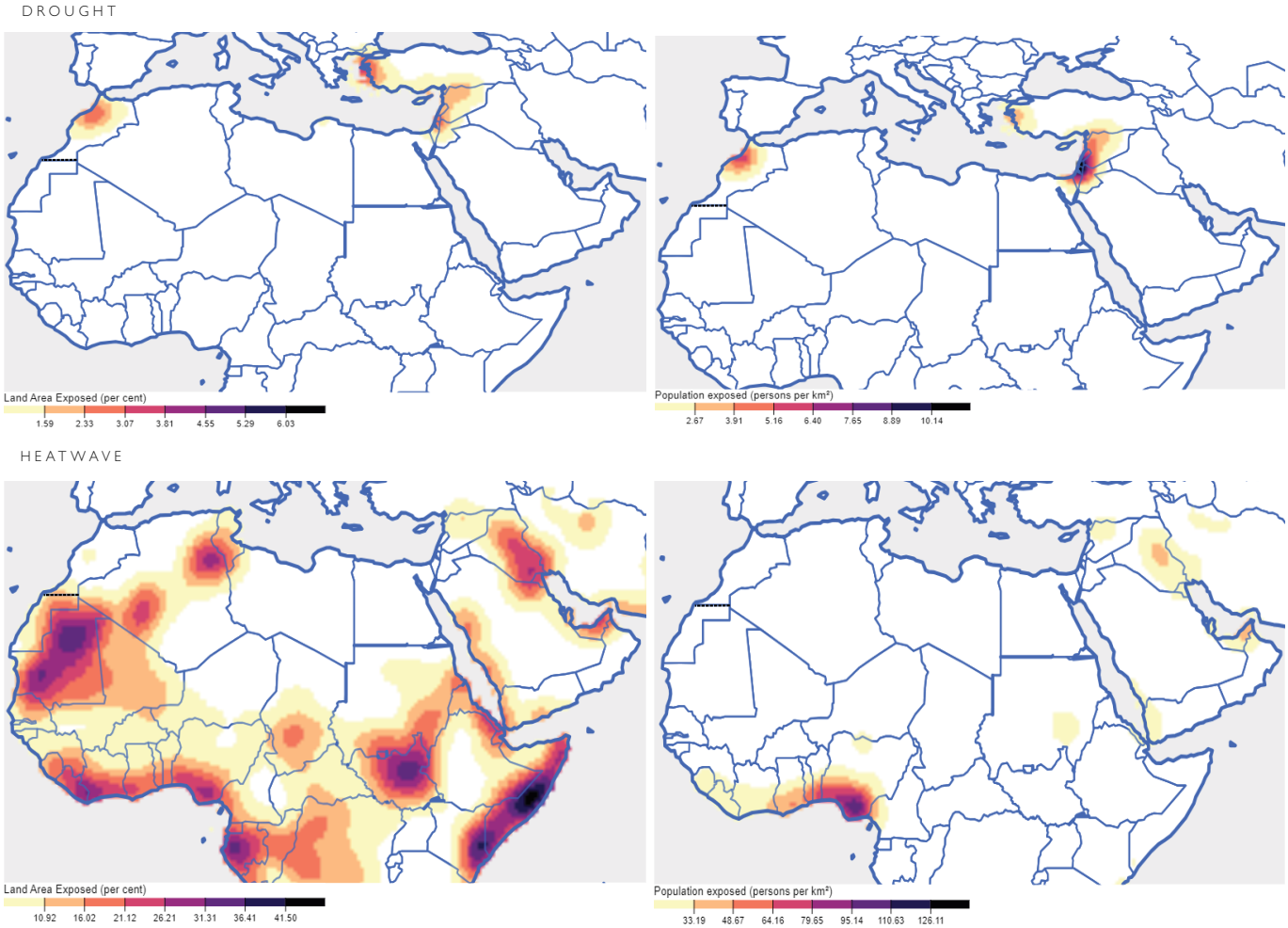
Source: Global Internal Displacement Database, IDMC 2023.
Note: This graph is drawn for greenhouse gas concentration trajectory of Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 2.4 to study climate change scenarios. RCP 2.4 implies a relatively stringent mitigation effort, likely keeping global temperature rise below 2°C by 2100.

City infrastructure and services such as waste collection, water and sanitation systems, and transport, in many MENA countries is marked by inadequate planning and insufficient funding. With a growing emphasis on the circular economy in the MENA region, countries aim to transition from traditional waste disposal to more smart waste treatment focused on resource efficiency.[18] Moreover, both small and large cities in less-developed countries in the MENA region face challenges from extreme hot and dry weather events due to their limited adaptive capacity.[19] The climate crisis has the

11 Dubai (United Arab Emirates (UAE)), Cairo (Egypt), Doha (Qatar), Casablanca (Morocco), and Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA))
12 Jaad, A., and Abdelghany, K. (2021). The story of five MENA cities: Urban growth prediction modeling using remote sensing and video analytics. Cities, 118, 103393
13 Elgendy, K. & Abaza, N. (2020) Urbanization in the MENA region: A Benefit or a Curse? https://mena.fes.de/press/e/urbanization-in-the-mena-region-a-benefit-or-a-curse
14 IDMC (2023). Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) Internal Displacement and Food Insecurity
15 UN Habitat (2018). Migration and Inclusive Cities: A Guide for Arab City Leaders.
16 IDMC (2023). Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) Internal Displacement and Food Insecurity.
17 Ibid.
18 Hemidat, Safwat, et al. Solid waste management in the context of a circular economy in the MENA region. Sustainability 14.1 (2022): 480.
19 Mukim, M & Roberts, M (2023). Thriving: Making Cities Green, Resilient, and Inclusive in a Changing Climate. © Washington, DC: World Bank. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/38295

potential to deepen food insecurity and existing inequalities, particularly in urban slums located in precarious areas. Urban residents in hazard-prone areas often face a trade-off between better job access and services and environmental risks due to a lack of affordable housing.[20]

FIGURE 4. LAND AREA AND POPULATION EXPOSURE TO DROUGHT (TOP) AND HEATWAVE (BOTTOM)



Source: Climate Mobility Impacts Dashboard, 2023 https://www.migrationdataportal.org/climate-mobility-impacts

Note: This graph is drawn for greenhouse gas concentration trajectory of Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 2.4 to study climate change scenarios. RCP 2.4 implies a relatively stringent mitigation effort, likely keeping global temperature rise below 2°C by 2100. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

The MENA region, warming twice as fast as the global average, faces challenges from climate crisis and conflicts, amplifying existing migration pathways.[21] The World Bank predicts up to 19 million individuals in North Africa could internally move by 2050 due to the impacts of slow-onset events such as water scarcity, sea level rise, or crop failure.[22] Low- and lower-middle-income country cities are anticipated to bear the effects of highest climate change-related hazards.[23] Changes in precipitation patterns exacerbate water scarcity in the MENA region, where 14 out of 25 countries[24] rank among the most water-stressed globally.[25]

License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

20 Ibid.

21 Gowayed, H (2022). Climate Change and Migration in the Middle East and North Africa. Arab Center Washington DC https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/climate-change-and-migration-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/

22 Clement, V et al (2021). Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. © World Bank, Washington, DC. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/36248 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

23 Mukim, M & Roberts, M (2023). Thriving: Making Cities Green, Resilient, and Inclusive in a Changing Climate. © Washington, DC: World Bank. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/38295 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

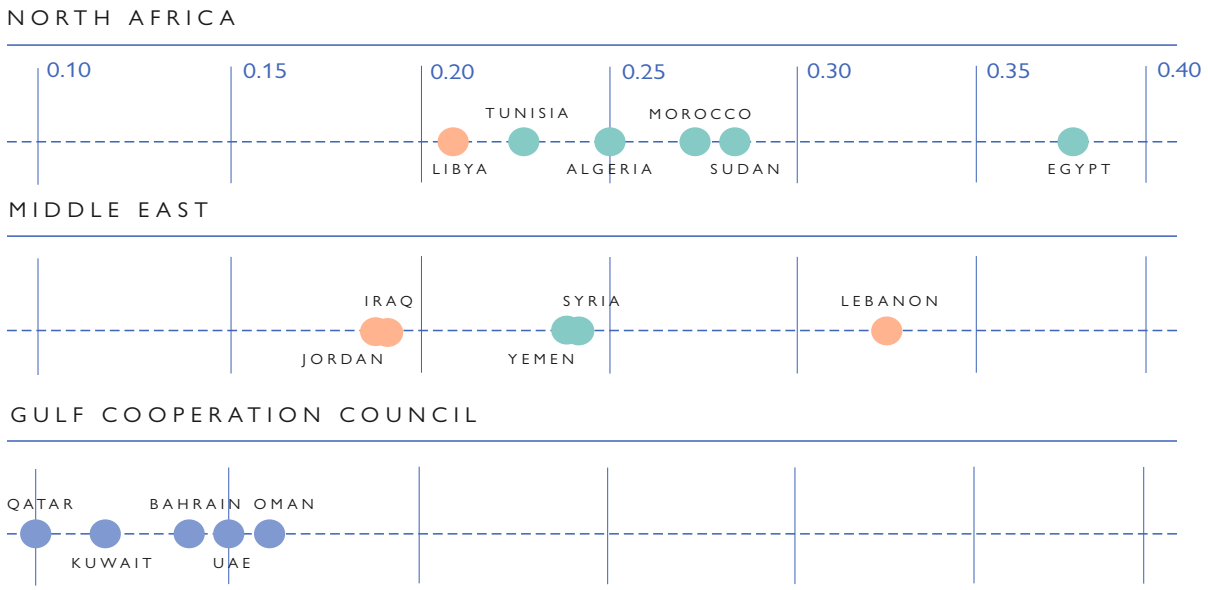
24 Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq, and Syria

25 World Resources Institute (2023). 25 Countries, Housing One-quarter of the Population, Face Extremely High-Water Stress

Projections highlight severe impacts on Syria, Iraq, and Jordan from droughts, and Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, and Sudan from heatwaves (refer to Figure 3). Areas with better water availability, including major urban centers such as Algiers, Cairo, the Casablanca-Rabat corridor, Tangiers, Tripoli, and Tunis are projected to become climate migration hotspots.[26] These trends interact with climate change-related stressors, shaping the resilience and inclusiveness of urban development.

Cities in GCC countries, as shown in Figure 4, tend to have lower greenness levels. In contrast, cities in Egypt and Lebanon exhibit higher greenness levels with averages of 0.37 and 0.33, respectively.[27] The lack of greenery, especially noticeable in large cities and upper-middle-income countries, combined with suboptimal urban design, can exacerbate the impact of extreme heat events.[28] Factors such as urban street design, vehicle heat, and excessive air-conditioning use further contribute to the urban heat island effect. Migrant workers living in GCC cities, engaged in outdoor labour, face increased vulnerability to extreme heat due to prolonged exposure.[29] There is a need for labour practice reforms and comprehensive regulations to ensure the health and safety of migrant workers exposed to heat stress, especially as extreme heat events become more frequent.

FIGURE 5. AVERAGE LEVEL OF GREENNESS IN MENA CITIES BY COUNTRY AND SUBREGION



Source: Map based on data from the European Commission's Global Human Settlement (GHS) Urban Centre Database R2019

Outdated urban planning, inadequate management systems, and a lack of cohesive policies pose obstacles to urban growth and development. Privatization policies and the withdrawal of institutions from their responsibilities toward migrants have impacted the access to decent urban infrastructure and services, thereby increasing vulnerabilities among urban dwellers in MENA cities.[30]

26 Clement, V et al (2021). Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. © World Bank, Washington, DC. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/36248 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.
27 European Commission's Global Human Settlement (GHS) Urban Centre Database R2019 (https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ghs_stat_ucdb2015mt_r2019a.php).
28 Mukim, M & Roberts, M (2023). Thriving: Making Cities Green, Resilient, and Inclusive in a Changing Climate. © Washington, DC: World Bank. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/38295 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.
29 Human Rights Watch (2023). Gulf States: Migrant Workers at Serious Risk from Dangerous Heat. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/31/gulf-states-migrant-workers-serious-risk-dangerous-heat
30 UN Habitat (2018). Migration and Inclusive Cities: A Guide for Arab City Leaders.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ACKNOWLEDGE MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUDE MIGRANTS IN THE DECISION MAKING FOR URBAN AND CLIMATE ACTION PLANNING

Recognizing the invaluable contributions of migrants to urban development and fostering their involvement in decision-making processes for urban planning and climate risk mitigation measures is essential for building resilient and inclusive cities.[31] Migrants bring diverse perspectives, skills, and cultural richness that significantly shape the dynamic fabric of urban environments. To achieve this, it is crucial to establish inclusive platforms that allow migrants to actively participate in discussions related to urban development. By promoting diversity in decision-making bodies and providing education and training to migrants, we empower them to contribute meaningfully to the planning and implementation of sustainable urban strategies.

2. PROVIDE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON CLIMATE RISKS AND RESILIENCE

To comprehensively understand the intricate links among climate change, fragility, and conflict at the sub-national level in the MENA region, there exists a crucial requirement for accessible, detailed, and inclusive data specifically at the city level. People, Small and Medium Enterprises, and local governments need timely and credible information that helps to better understand climate risks in MENA cities, promoting both mitigation and adaptation.[32] Concurrently, it is imperative to gather data at the sub-national and district levels to identify and model various environmental risks, including droughts, floods, and other hazards. This comprehensive approach will enable a vulnerability analysis of both internal and international migrants across diverse MENA cities within the climate crisis context.

Furthermore, it is vital to emphasize the significance of pursuing and disseminating data and information through city-to-city cooperation. This collaborative effort aims to assist cities and residents in assessing and mitigating climate risks, ultimately enhancing resilience. The modeling of current and future urban climate risks at the sub-city/neighborhood level is essential as it establishes mandates for climate-smart planning, encourages urban farming practices, and promotes the construction of low-carbon buildings.

3. FOSTER CLIMATE-FRIENDLY URBANIZATION AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Launching tailored urban development initiatives is crucial for generating income opportunities for both local communities and migrants. This involves supporting small businesses led by vulnerable urban dwellers, including migrants, and promoting innovative entrepreneurial initiatives. City municipalities can prioritize programs such as urban agriculture, solid waste collection and recycling, and renewable technologies to address environmental challenges, enhance city livability, and provide necessary skills trainings and create employment. Leveraging the skills of migrants and other people on the move, especially in secondary and tertiary cities, is essential for stimulating economic development. By providing economic incentives to attract businesses and migrants, cities can foster economic growth and create sustainable job opportunities.[33]

4. INCORPORATE INFORMAL ECONOMIES IN GREEN GROWTH FRAMEWORKS

Encouraging the formalization of informal economies in MENA cities is essential, recognizing their vital role in alleviating urban poverty and contributing significantly to urban economies. Despite often having a smaller carbon footprint,[34] informal workers and enterprises face stigmatization and overlooked contributions. Policymakers should prioritize good urban management and regulatory mechanisms to organize informal traders. A green growth framework, involving the provision of green skills and jobs to migrants and displaced people, has the potential to address challenges in the informal economy.[35]

By offering access to high-quality green employment, this not only appreciates migrants' role in fostering environmentally friendly local economies but also contributes to climate action. Crucial steps in this endeavor include facilitating access to microloans, clarifying regulations, and supporting the formation of associations. Given the prevalence of women migrant

31 ESCWA, UN-Habitat and UN-Women (2023). Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) Meeting Note on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities https://afsd-2023.unescwa.org/sdgs/pdf/documents/3-background-notes/23-00116-BackgroundNote-SDG11-SustainableCities-E-WEB.pdf.

32 Mukim, M & Roberts, M (2023). Thriving: Making Cities Green, Resilient, and Inclusive in a Changing Climate. © Washington, DC: World Bank. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/38295 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

33 The social and employment impacts of decarbonization and green industrial growth scenarios for the Middle East and North Africa region, Geneva: International Labour Office and Islamic Development Bank, 2023. © ILO & IsDB.

34 WIEGO. 2012. Urban Informal Workers and the Green Economy. Fact Sheet

35 Lopez-Acevedo, G., Ranzani, M., Sinha, N., & Elsheikhi, A. (2023). Informality and inclusive growth in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank Publications.

workers in the informal sector across the MENA region, it is essential to focus on empowering women in the informal economy. This entails addressing gender-specific barriers through measures such as enhanced access to training, financial support, and the development of regulatory frameworks sensitive to gender dynamics. These measures protect the rights of informal migrant workers and foster collaboration between local governments and traders, addressing collective needs and mediating conflicting interests in shared urban spaces.

5. DEVELOP SPATIAL INCLUSIVE CITY PLANNING FOR URBAN POOR

A people-centered approach emphasizes improved access to basic services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities through spatial inclusion in MENA cities. Agglomeration economies offer increased opportunities for economic livelihoods and inclusion through access to services. However, apart from the GCC countries, relative income levels in MENA countries remain low despite stable but varied progress over the years. Spatially coordinating investments across cities can help reduce regional disparities, support inclusion, and achieve resilience. Focusing on the distributional and employment impacts of climate risks and transition opportunities is vital for climate financing for cities[36] and policy priorities for city governments, with a central focus on investment for decarbonization pathways.

Ensuring the right to adequate housing, universal access to health care and services, water and sanitation, and equal access to other services such as education is crucial. In many MENA cities, both formal and informal self-help housing is considered a solution to the affordable housing problem, as seen in Lebanon and Iraq.[37] Government recognition and support are essential to improve services and ensure secure tenure. Governments should address eviction threats and land tenure issues by considering alternative tenure types such as collective land ownership and community land trusts.[38]

6. PROMOTE JUST AND INCLUSIVE GREEN TRANSITION FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN GROWTH

Just green transition for sustainable urban growth involves better urban planning and increased green areas. Strategic spatial planning and urban management are crucial for coherent urban development, especially in displacement-affected contexts. Integrating sectoral interventions and national authorities can guide development strategies. Recognizing the significance of urban greenery, such as trees and vegetation in parks, is vital for mitigating the urban heat island effect, particularly in larger cities in GCC countries with lower greenery levels. The MENA region's vulnerability to climate crisis highlights the growing interest in Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) to address water stress and high temperatures sustainably.

7. ESTABLISH OPPORTUNITIES FOR URBAN AND PERI-URBAN AGRICULTURE (UPA)

Urban and peri-urban agriculture is a promising livelihood strategy for migrants, local population, and other people on the move, providing collaboration opportunities between local municipalities, international organizations, universities, and micro-credit institutions.[39] To address skill gaps, it is crucial to focus on knowledge transfer, investment opportunities, and upskilling initiatives. Establishing dedicated offices or centers for urban agriculture, as seen in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, can introduce migrants, including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), to practices like roof gardening and wastewater treatment.[40] Local governments can scale up such initiatives, providing sustainable economic opportunities, especially for disadvantaged local and migrant women, and fostering direct access to consumer markets.

The integration of migrants and mobile populations into both high-tech and low-tech agricultural practices is essential, contributing to advancements in precision agriculture in high-income countries and sharing traditional techniques in low-income countries.[41] Recognizing migrants as a vital part of sustainable urban food production can foster community resilience against food insecurity and offer safe green spaces for cultural exchange, contributing to collaborative efforts for integration challenges.[42]

36 Belaïd, F., Amine, R., Massie, C. (2024). Smart Cities Initiatives and Perspectives in the MENA Region and Saudi Arabia. In: Belaïd, F., Arora, A. (eds) Smart Cities. Studies in Energy, Resource and Environmental Economics. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35664-3_16.
37 UN Habitat (2018). Migration and Inclusive Cities: A Guide for Arab City Leaders.
38 Ibid.
39 Gordon-Smith, Henry (2023). Towards a Sustainable Food System: The Critical Role of Migrants in Agriculture
40 UN Habitat (2018). Migration and Inclusive Cities: A Guide for Arab City Leaders.
41 Gordon-Smith, Henry (2023). Towards a Sustainable Food System: The Critical Role of Migrants in Agriculture
42 Ibid.

8. INTEGRATE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN URBAN PLANNING

In the context of increased climate risks and extreme weather events especially affecting migrants and populations in vulnerable conditions in cities, planning out an urban disaster risk reduction agenda is critical. As temperatures rise and water scarcity intensify in MENA cities, structural investments play a vital role in climate change adaptation and disaster preparedness especially in coastal cities.[43] Morocco, facing the expansion of coastal cities, highlights the need for climate-resilient and inclusive urban planning.[44]

Promoting community-based assessments and integrating early warning systems, accurate risk information, hazard mapping, and incentives are essential to foster informed decision-making by both individuals and businesses. Insurance policies and reforms play a crucial role in mitigating financial impacts from climate-related disasters. Additionally, there are UN initiatives focused on strengthening the understanding of urban resilience and promoting regional cooperation. Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030)[45] enhances local resilience by providing a three-stage roadmap, tools, and technical support for cities to reduce risks and build resilience.

43 World Bank GFDRR (2019) Disaster Resilient Cities in Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
44 Megevand, C., & Diaz Cassou, J. (2023). Morocco-Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR): Background Paper-Water Scarcity and Droughts.
45 UNDRR, 2023. Making Cities Resilient 2030 https://mcr2030.undrr.org/

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