

## Addressing Urban Food Security Challenges for South-South Migrants

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### Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the growing phenomenon of South-South migration, with a focus on the challenges of urban food security faced by migrants moving from one Global South country to urban areas in another. South-South migration has become increasingly significant, yet it remains under-researched, especially regarding the food insecurity that many migrants face in their host cities. The brief highlights the unique vulnerabilities of these migrants, who often find themselves in precarious employment, facing xenophobia, and excluded from formal social protection mechanisms, all of which exacerbate their food insecurity. The case study of Cape Town, South Africa, underscores the severity of these challenges. Migrants in Cape Town are significantly more food insecure than local populations, often relying on informal networks and precarious employment in the informal food sector to survive. This brief outlines several key findings and proposes policy recommendations aimed at improving food security for South-South migrants. These recommendations include enhancing social protection for migrants, improving urban planning to support migrant food vendors, and promoting inclusive policies that recognize migrants' contributions to urban food systems. Additionally, further research is necessary to better understand the dynamics of food insecurity among South-South migrants and to develop targeted interventions.



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### Introduction

South-South migration, involving the movement of individuals from one Global South country to another, is an increasingly important but under-explored aspect of global migration. This migration is often driven by a variety of factors, including economic opportunities, political instability, environmental pressures, and the search for better living conditions. As a result, many migrants from the Global South relocate to urban areas in other Southern countries, where they encounter a host of challenges, particularly related to food security. While there is extensive literature on South-North migration and its impact on food security, there is a significant gap in understanding the food security challenges faced by South-South migrants in urban settings. For South-South migrants in urban areas, achieving food security is particularly challenging due to a range of factors, including limited access to formal employment, exclusion from social protection programs, and xenophobic attitudes that can limit their access

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to food markets and other resources. These urban areas, already struggling with high levels of poverty and unemployment, are ill-prepared to absorb large numbers of migrants. Consequently, South-South migrants are often forced to live in informal settlements, where access to basic services, including food, is severely limited. Moreover, the exclusion of migrants from formal social protection mechanisms exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them with few options to secure adequate and nutritious food.

## Key Findings

### Scale of South-South Migration

- South-South migration has been growing rapidly, with significant implications for urban food security in host countries. According to UNDESA (2017), the global stock of international migrants increased from 153 million in 1990 to 258 million in 2017. Of these, approximately 43 percent lived in the Global South, and 87 percent originated from other countries in the Global South. In Africa, 81 percent of South-South migrants move to other

countries within the continent, with many settling in rapidly growing urban areas.

- The data on South-South migration at the urban level is limited, but available figures indicate that many cities have seen significant increases in their foreign-born populations. These migrants often find themselves in precarious situations, with limited access to formal employment and social protection, which significantly impacts their food security. The challenges of integrating large numbers of migrants into urban areas are compounded by the fact that many African cities are already grappling with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity among their local populations. This creates a complex and often hostile environment for migrants, who are frequently perceived as competitors for scarce resources.
- In Cape Town, for instance, migrants from Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, and other African countries have formed substantial communities. However, these migrants often experience difficulties in securing stable employment and housing, which are critical to achieving food security. The informal sector becomes the primary avenue for income

### Major South-South Migration Destination Countries

	No. of Migrants	No. of Origin Countries
1. Saudi Arabia	9,842,647	17
2. UAE	7,922,240	27
3. India	5,123,283	26
4. Thailand	3,888,426	29
5. Pakistan	3,625,927	8
6. Jordan	3,096,575	27
7. Hong Kong	2,727,819	14
8. Kuwait	2,719,395	28
9. Iran	2,479,202	5
10. Malaysia	2,285,220	18
11. Singapore	2,225,098	11
12. South Africa	2,133,355	107
13. Côte d'Ivoire	2,095,575	16
14. Lebanon	1,993,878	21
15. Oman	1,741,924	15
16. Qatar	1,642,319	28
17. Nigeria	1,076,442	9
18. Bangladesh	1,066,223	14
19. Kenya	1,023,927	13
20. Ethiopia	1,033,041	10

Source: UNDESA

generation, but the precarious nature of informal work means that many migrants struggle to afford sufficient and nutritious food. Additionally, the high cost of living in urban areas like Cape Town further exacerbates the financial pressures on migrant households, leaving them highly vulnerable to food insecurity.

### Urban Food Insecurity among South-South Migrants

- Urban food insecurity is a critical issue for South-South migrants, who are often among the most vulnerable populations in their host cities. In Cape Town, for example, research shows that migrants are significantly more food insecure than the local population. One study found that 60 percent of migrant households in Cape Town and Johannesburg were severely food insecure, with many relying on monotonous diets consisting primarily of inexpensive staples such as maize porridge and offal. These diets are often nutritionally inadequate, leading to malnutrition and related health problems.
- The reasons for this high level of food insecurity are multifaceted. Migrants often face discrimination and exclusion from formal employment, which forces them into low-paying and precarious jobs in the informal sector. In addition, many migrants lack access to social protection programs, such as food assistance or social grants, which are often reserved for citizens. This exclusion exacerbates their vulnerability to food insecurity, as they have few resources to fall back in crises.
- Furthermore, the informal nature of their employment means that migrants often lack job security and are subject to exploitation, with little recourse to legal protection. This precarious economic situation leaves many unable to afford regular, nutritious meals, leading to high levels of food insecurity. In addition, the lack of social networks and support systems in the host country can further isolate migrants, making it difficult for them to access the resources they need to achieve food security.
- The impact of food insecurity on migrants' well-being is profound. Malnutrition and hunger can have severe consequences for physical and mental health, reducing migrants' ability to work and support themselves. This creates a vicious cycle, where food insecurity leads to poor health, which in turn exacerbates economic vulnerability, further entrenching food insecurity. For children in migrant households, food insecurity can have long-term developmental impacts, affecting their growth, cognitive development, and educational outcomes.

### Migrants Roles in Urban Food Systems

- Despite their vulnerability, South-South migrants play a crucial role in urban food systems, particularly in the informal food sector. In Cape Town, for example, a significant proportion of the city's informal food vendors are migrants from other African countries. These vendors provide essential services by making food available and affordable in low-income areas, thus playing a vital role in the city's food security.
- Migrant food vendors often sell a variety of foods, including fresh produce, prepared meals, and staple foods, at prices that are lower than those found in formal retail outlets. This makes food more accessible to low-income households, who might otherwise struggle to afford adequate nutrition. Moreover, migrant vendors are often more willing to operate in underserved areas, such as informal settlements, where formal retailers are reluctant to establish businesses due to the perceived risks.
- However, migrant food vendors are also vulnerable to a range of challenges, including xenophobic violence, crime, and harassment from authorities. These challenges not only threaten the livelihoods of the vendors themselves but also undermine the food security of the communities they serve. Xenophobic violence, in particular, can have devastating effects, leading to the destruction of migrant-owned businesses and forcing vendors to flee their homes. Such violence disrupts the flow of food to vulnerable communities, exacerbating food insecurity in already impoverished areas.
- In addition to physical threats, migrant food vendors often face legal and regulatory challenges. Many operate without formal permits, making them vulnerable to fines, confiscation of goods, and even arrest. The lack of legal recognition also means that migrant vendors are excluded from formal support systems, such as business training, financial services, and market access programs, which could help them improve their businesses and contribute more effectively to urban food security.
- The role of migrants in urban food systems is often overlooked in policy discussions, despite their significant contributions. Recognizing and supporting migrant food vendors is essential to ensuring that urban food systems are inclusive and resilient. This includes protecting migrant vendors from violence and harassment, as well as providing them with the support they need to thrive in the informal food sector.

## The Impact of Remittances on Food Security

- Remittances are a key aspect of South-South migration, with many migrants sending money and goods back to their families in their countries of origin. Remittances can improve the food security of recipients by providing them with additional resources to purchase food. For many families in the migrants' countries of origin, remittances are a vital source of income, allowing them basic necessities, including food. This flow of resources can help reduce poverty and improve food security in rural areas, where economic opportunities are often limited.
- However, the relationship between remittances and food security is complex. While remittances can improve the food security of recipients, the act of sending remittances can exacerbate the food insecurity of the migrants themselves. Migrants often have to sacrifice their own consumption to support their families back home, leading to a trade-off between the well-being of the sender and the recipient. This dynamic is particularly challenging for migrants who are already living in precarious conditions, with limited income and high living costs.
- In Cape Town, many Zimbabwean migrants report that remitting negatively impacts their own food security, as they struggle to make ends meet while fulfilling their obligations to their families. This is compounded by the high cost of living in the city, where food prices are often higher than in rural areas. Migrants face difficult choices between spending their limited income on their own needs or sending money back home to support their families. For many, the decision to remit is driven by a sense of duty and obligation, even when it means going without sufficient food themselves.
- The impact of remittances on food security also depends on the economic conditions in the migrants' home countries. In countries experiencing economic instability, high inflation, or food shortages, remittances may be insufficient to meet the basic needs of recipients. In such cases, the pressure on migrants to increase the amount they remit can further strain their own resources, deepening their food insecurity.
- Given the dual role of remittances in both supporting and undermining food security, there is a need for policies that support migrants in both their host countries and countries of origin. This includes providing social protection and support services for migrants in the host country, as well as ensuring remittances can be used effectively to improve food security in the home countries.

## Policy Recommendations

### Enhancing Social Protection for Migrants

- One of the most critical steps in addressing urban food insecurity among South-South migrants is to enhance their access to social protection. This could include expanding eligibility for food assistance programs to include migrants, as well as developing new forms of social protection that are specifically tailored to the needs of migrant populations. For example, governments could introduce food vouchers or cash transfers that are accessible to both citizens and non-citizens, helping to ensure that migrants have the resources they need to meet their basic food needs.
- In addition to direct food assistance, social protection programs could also provide migrants with access to healthcare, housing, and education, which are essential for achieving food security. For example, access to healthcare can prevent the health-related costs that often force migrants to choose between buying food and paying for medical treatment. Similarly, access to affordable housing can reduce the financial pressures on migrant households, allowing them to allocate more resources to food.
- Social protection programs should also be designed to address the specific challenges faced by migrant women, who are often disproportionately affected by food insecurity. Women migrants are more likely to work in low-paying and precarious jobs, making them particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Programs that provide targeted support to women migrants, such as childcare services, job training, and access to reproductive healthcare, can help improve their food security and overall well-being.

### Supporting Migrant Food Vendors

- Given the important role that migrant food vendors play in urban food systems, it is essential to develop policies that protect and support these vendors. This could include measures to prevent xenophobic violence, such as public education campaigns to promote tolerance and inclusion, as well as legal protections for migrant-owned businesses. In addition, local governments could work to formalize the informal food sector, providing migrant vendors with access to secure trading spaces, training, and financial support to help them grow their businesses.

- Formalization of the informal food sector can provide migrant vendors with greater security and stability, enabling them to contribute more effectively to urban food security. This could involve issuing business permits, creating designated trading zones, and providing access to financial services, such as microloans and savings accounts. Formalization can also help improve the safety and quality of the food sold by migrant vendors, benefiting both the vendors and the consumers.
- In addition to formalization, local governments could support migrant food vendors by providing them with access to training and capacity-building programs. These programs could help vendors improve their business skills, such as financial management, marketing, and customer service, as well as their knowledge of food safety and hygiene. By enhancing the skills and knowledge of migrant vendors, these programs can help them succeed in the informal food sector and contribute to the overall food security of the city.

### Promoting Inclusive Urban Planning

- Urban planning processes should take into account the needs of migrant populations, particularly in relation to food security. This could involve designing urban spaces that facilitate access to food markets and services for migrants, as well as ensuring that housing policies do not inadvertently exclude migrants from affordable accommodation. In addition, urban planners could work to integrate migrant communities into broader food security strategies, recognizing the contributions that migrants make to the urban food system.
- Inclusive urban planning could involve the creation of community food hubs or markets that cater to the needs of migrant populations. These hubs could serve as spaces where migrants can access affordable and culturally appropriate foods, as well as social services and support networks. By providing a safe and inclusive space for migrants, these hubs can help reduce food insecurity and promote social cohesion in the city.
- Urban planning policies should also address the specific challenges faced by migrant women, who often bear the primary responsibility for feeding their families. This could include creating safe and accessible spaces for women to buy, sell, and prepare food, as well as providing childcare services and other support to help women balance their work and family responsibilities. By addressing the needs of migrant women, urban planning can play a crucial role in improving food security for migrant households.

### Conducting Further Research on Migrant Food Security

- There is a clear need for more research on the food security challenges faced by South-South migrants in urban areas. This should aim to provide a detailed understanding of the factors that contribute to food insecurity among migrants, as well as the strategies that migrants use to cope with food shortages. Such research could inform the development of targeted interventions that address the specific needs of migrant populations, helping to ensure that no one is left behind in efforts to achieve food security.
- Research could focus on the different types of food insecurity experienced by migrants, such as chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food anxiety, as well as the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to these conditions. In addition, research could explore the role of gender, age, and migration status in shaping the food security experiences of migrants, providing insights into how these factors intersect to create unique vulnerabilities.
- Further research is also needed to understand the impact of remittances on food security, both for the migrants themselves and for their families in their countries of origin. This could include studies on the trade-offs that migrants make between their own food security and their obligations to remit, as well as the ways in which remittances are used to purchase food and other necessities. By shedding light on these dynamics, research can help policymakers develop more effective strategies to support migrants and their families.

## Conclusion

South-South migration is an increasingly important phenomenon with significant implications for urban food security in Africa. Migrants who move from one Global South country to another often find themselves in precarious situations, facing high levels of food insecurity and limited access to formal social protection. However, these migrants also play a crucial role in urban food systems, particularly in the informal sector, where they help to make food accessible and affordable in low-income areas. To address the challenges of urban food insecurity among South-South migrants, it is essential to develop inclusive policies that protect and support these vulnerable populations. This includes enhancing access to social protection, supporting migrant food vendors, promoting inclusive

urban planning, and conducting further research to better understand the food security dynamics of migrant populations. By taking these steps, governments can help ensure that South-South migrants are able to achieve food security and contribute fully to the economic and social life of their host cities.

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