

# DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIETAL PATTERNS OF URBAN POPULATIONS IN ETHIOPIA



The urban demographic profile of Ethiopia has undergone dramatic changes since the millennium began. In 2000, only 15.5 percent of the population was urban. Today that percentage is 20.2 percent, and official figures from the Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency project that the urban population will nearly triple, from 15.2 million in 2012, to 42.3 million in 2037, a growth rate of 3.8 percent a year.<sup>1</sup> Another World Bank analysis indicates that the rate of urbanization will even be faster, at about 5.4 percent per year. This would mean a tripling of the urban population by 2034, with 30 percent of the country's people being urban by 2028.<sup>2</sup> According to UN estimates, Ethiopia's percent urban will be 31.0 by 2030. At about 4.7 percent for the period 2000–2030, Ethiopia has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world.

Generally, in Ethiopia, the rate of urbanization is higher than the national population growth rate (2.5 percent). Over time, as the shift toward urbanization occurred, a distinct divide between the demographics of urban and rural populations in Ethiopia became apparent. The EDHS 2016 report indicates that the total urban fertility rate was 2.3 while the rural fertility rate was 5.2, with a national average of 4.6 children.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, populations living in cities are having fewer children than those residing in rural areas. The total fertility rate in urban Ethiopia dropped by 30.3 percent between the 2000 and 2016 EDHSs, which is significantly faster than the rate of reduction for rural and national averages, at 18.8 percent and 22.0 percent respectively.

Labour migration is a huge reason for the rapid rates of urbanization. Poor rural living conditions, including poverty, political, and environmental/climate factors like persistent draught are fuelling this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> One of the aims of the 1993 National Population Policy in Ethiopia was to address several future stressors on the

<sup>1</sup>Central Statistical Agency. 2013. Population Projection of Ethiopia for All Regions: at Woreda Level from 2014–2017. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

<sup>2</sup>World Bank. Ethiopia Urbanization Review.

<sup>3</sup>Central Statistical Agency (CSA) [Ethiopia] and ICF. 2016. Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016: Key Indicators Report. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Rockville, Maryland, USA. CSA and ICF.

<sup>4</sup>Atnafu et al. 2014. Poverty, Youth and Rural-Urban Migration in Ethiopia. Working Paper 17, Migrating out of Poverty.



rate of socio-economic development including ensuring the rural-to-urban migration patterns. Reasons for rural to urban migration among youth ages 10–19 years are looking for educational opportunities (44.9 percent of boys and 51.4 percent of girls); work opportunities (28.6 percent of boys and 32.4 percent of girls); and escaping an early marriage (22.7 percent of girls). Even after migration, however, 13 percent of girls and 21 percent of males do not attend school, and 19 percent of females who migrated for work did not have jobs.<sup>5</sup> The opportunities for work are limited to informal work such as domestic work, coffee shop assistant, or bar girl. There is huge disproportion between the number of rural-urban migrants and those who have waged jobs. Across urban households in Ethiopia, 15 percent report having an unemployed adult; in Addis Ababa this rises up to 23.5 percent. Usually, female migrant domestic labourers receive lower wages than their urban-born counterparts. Unfortunately, opportunities for rural migrants are limited and often do not meet expectations.

Hard-to-reach populations such as temporary or seasonal migrants, refugees, squatter settlers, daily laborers, domestic workers, and people who are homeless continue to be a neglected demographic in the health strategies of many government, policy, and urban planning organizations.<sup>6</sup> In general, urban housing quality in Ethiopia is lower compared to neighbouring countries. About 70–80 percent of the urban population lives in slum conditions in the context of the commonly accepted international definition. This is because the majority of houses lack durability, adequate space, access to safe water and sanitation, and security of tenure. Around 80 percent of dwellings in urban areas are made from wood and mud. This gives Ethiopia one of the highest slum residence rates in sub-Saharan Africa. The main contributors to the urban housing shortage are low incomes, an insufficient supply of serviced land, and unrealistically high and costly standards for housing that increase the rate of informal settlements, especially in big towns or cities in the country.

Urbanization has also had a negative effect on the lifestyles of city dwellers. The introduction of diets high in saturated fats, sugar, and salt, excessive consumption of alcohol, tobacco use, and physical inactivity compound various social determinants of health to heighten the risk of non-communicable disease.

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<sup>5</sup>Erulkar, A. S., Mekbib, T. A., Simie, N. &Gulema, T. (2006).Migration and Vulnerability among Adolescents in Slum Areas of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9(3), 361–374.

<sup>6</sup>Ezeh A, Oyebode O, Satterthwaite D, Chen YF, Ndugwa R, Sartori J, Mberu B, Melendez-Torres GJ, Haregu T, Watson SI, Caiaffa W. The history, geography, and sociology of slums and the health problems of people who live in slums.*The Lancet*. 2016.

These risk factors contribute to increased rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory illness, mental illness, and other maladies.<sup>7</sup> Although there is a general lack of information on mortality rates in urban Ethiopia, many fragmented facility- and community-based study findings show that non-communicable diseases are posing huge burden in urban areas. For instance, a study finding showed that cardiovascular disease accounted for 24 percent of deaths in Addis Ababa, and cancer up to 10 percent of deaths in the urban settings in general.

On the other hand, overcrowding and congestion put a huge strain on urban social services through rising food costs, unplanned with limited safety and security, rising unemployment rates, housing problems, worsening air pollution, and water-borne diseases.<sup>8</sup> Urban residents influence their environment through their consumption of food, energy, water, and land. Their habits, combined with a tremendous lack of infrastructure and regulation, pollutes the environment and negatively effects residents' health and quality of life. Energy consumption for electricity, transportation, and cooking is much higher in urban areas than in rural villages. This inflated energy consumption also has a negative effect on the urban environment.<sup>9</sup>

Other urban environmental problems that reduce health and quality of life include inadequate water and sanitation, lack of waste disposal, and unbridled industrial pollution.<sup>10</sup> These problems contribute to respiratory infections and parasitic diseases. But the resources needed to mitigate these problems are expensive.

Evidence suggests that indicators of health problems, such as rates of infant mortality, are higher in cities that are growing rapidly than in those where growth is slower.<sup>11</sup> In Ethiopia's context, there is critical lack of evidence on the effects of urbanization on the environment. Priority must be placed on availing data and conducting research in urban Ethiopia to inform local and national governments and force them to take action to control the pace and outcomes of rapid urbanization.

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<sup>7</sup>Debebe, B., Konwiarz, R., &Wugalter, T. The Changing Burden of Disease: Canada's Role in Bringing Non-communicable Disease to the Forefront. (2017) Turbulent Present, Uncertain Future. Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)

<sup>8</sup>Bimerew, H. 2015. Rural-Urban Migration and its Consequence on Urban living: the case in Hawassa City Southern Ethiopia. Global Journal of HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: E Economics. 15(4) Ver. 1, 2015

<sup>9</sup>Torrey, BB. Urbanization: An Environmental Force to Be Reckoned With.<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2004/UrbanizationAnEnvironmentalForceToBeReckonedWith.aspx>

<sup>10</sup>Kolsrud and Torrey, "The Importance of Population Growth in Future Commercial Energy Consumption": 268.

Ethiopia has rich culture and history rooted in strong families. While the rural family, in general, has maintained its composition, the forces of urbanization have profound effects on the family unit and Ethiopia will be no exception to this phenomenon. The way individuals choose to live and with whom have an important role in the measurement of our quality of life. Historical conventions of marriage, domestic roles, generational relationships, and relations within households are currently being turned upside down within urban Ethiopia.

Collectivist societies tend to value communal stances on issues of politics, society, education and families. However, with rises in development and urbanization, individualistic values tend to emerge as new norms. Typically associated with capitalistic societies, individualism posits the notion that the self is paramount. Within the home, these shifts often create divisions across lines of income, status, and capital. Once tightly-knit families can begin to turn inward and splinter, especially across generational lines.<sup>12</sup> Low and delayed marriage rates, divorce, and single parent homes are all facets of a more urbanized environment.

The impact of urbanization on geriatrics and care for the elderly is also yet to be witnessed in Ethiopia. The shift from rural-based farming, which allowed families to reside near each other, to plantation, mining, and factory-based labor operations has forced families to migrate to more urban environments. Elderly family members may at times struggle to adjust to urban environments. In addition, urban housing conditions may prohibit elderly family members from living in the city. Car accidents, slips, and falls are hazards that further burden families caring for elderly persons. In tandem with these forces, exposure of younger generations to Western education has built-in ideologies on life, money, and success that run contrary to traditional views of family and kin.

The current rate of urbanization of Ethiopian cities has resulted in numerous challenges and opportunities for intuitive policymakers to confront. The gaps between rural and urban communities are both a testament to the success of many interventions and an indication of how much more work is needed. For cities in Ethiopia, the future will challenge the capacity of health systems to treat the multiple burdens of health. All levels of government and health systems must be prepared to consider all possible avenues for solutions including prevention, treatment, and new care models

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Brouckerhoff and Ellen Brennan, "The Poverty of Cities in Developing Regions," *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 1 (March 1998): 75–114.

<sup>12</sup>Apt, N. A. (2016). Rapid urbanization and living arrangements of older persons in Africa. *Population Bulletin of the United Nations*, (42-43), 30.