



# PACES

Making migration and migration policy decisions  
amidst societal transformations

## Migration between Europe and Africa in 2045: How decision making will shape future migration

Scenario-Building Workshop Report

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PACES (Making migration and migration policy decisions amidst societal transformation) is a 40-month research project (2023-2026) that examines decisions to stay and migrate over time and space, researches the politics of knowledge in migration policy and seeks to use its insights to inform future migration policies and governance. PACES is carried out by a consortium of 14 partners in Europe and Africa.

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# Synopsis

**“Migration is not self-emerging; it is always the response to social change and social dynamics. Henceforth, anticipating those dynamics can give indications on future migration trends.”**

- Workshop participant, November 2025

What might migration between Europe and Africa look like in 20 years? What migration policies would be best placed to govern those forms of migration? And, more urgently, what may be important policy initiatives to implement in the short-term to prepare for possible longer-term changes in migration? This report presents insights gained from a migration scenario-building workshop held in November 2025 which set out to explore these questions.

It brings to the fore a set of ‘relative certainties’, which participants were reasonably confident will impact future migration dynamics. Among these are increasing economic competition and exploitation, technological advancement and the rise of surveillance technology, and increasing climate vulnerability. Much of the scenario workshop, however, focused on identifying ‘relative uncertainties’, which will have major implications for migration, but are highly uncertain in terms of how they will evolve. Participants identified four uncertainties as central for their high potential to shape the future of migration between Africa and Europe: possible conflict and global-scale wars in Europe and beyond;

the growth of autocratic governments in Africa and beyond; the availability and access to essential services; and the role of AI in the labour market, specifically whether AI will complement or substitute human labour. A set of other uncertainties – from shifts in education and the expansion or shrinkage of the EU, to the rise or decline of xenophobia and climate adaptation – were part of rich discussions that led to the emergence of eight scenario narratives which are sketched in this report.

Overall, the scenarios presented in this report should be used not as a template for decision-making as we do not expect them to unfold as narrated. Scenarios are helpful tools for reflection as they help us see unexpected possibilities of change and possible challenges to common assumptions about the future. Thus, we do not present final answers, but a set of valuable insights that have emerged during discussions. In addition, readers may react with their own insights as they review the relative certainties, relative uncertainties and the scenarios sketched in this report.

The outcomes of the scenario workshop are condensed into recommendations for migration research, policy and practice. For research, the top recommendation underscores the need to move beyond linear and single-driver explanations of migration and its possible future developments. For policy, the insights suggest that policy-makers should design migration policies that are robust across multiple possible futures. Similarly, practice-focused actors ought to build flexibility or adaptive management features into their migration program design.

# Introduction

This report presents the key elements and insights that emerged during the PACES scenario workshop, which focused on the future of migration between Europe and Africa. The workshop was a complementary co-participatory activity of the PACES project, a 40-month research project designed to gain insights into the decision-making processes of migration policy-makers and of people making choices about whether to move across international borders and how, both before and during their migration journeys (see Vezzoli, Mýtna Kureková and Schewel 2024).

Over two-and-a-half years into the project, the PACES partners have conducted insightful research and generated valuable findings that help us think further about what is relevant in people's mobility decision-making processes as well as when and how knowledge is used in policy decisions. These insights are finding their way into academic articles and outputs suited to the world of policy-makers and for general audiences (Bakewell, Mýtna Kureková and Kováčová 2024; Dimova and Fromell 2025; Ike and Van Assem 2024; Natter and Welfens 2024; Natter et al. 2025; Pécoud and Savatic 2026; Jung, Vezzoli and Woldemichael Yemisrach forthcoming; Schewel and Vezzoli forthcoming).

As a further step in employing the projects' findings for strategic thinking, on November 19-21, 2025, the Institute for Social Studies (ISS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam convened a scenario-building workshop to identify key 'uncertainties' and to generate plausible scenarios of future migration between Africa and Europe in 2045. Over two-and-a-half days, participants discussed factors and trends that have shaped historical African and European migrations before identifying certain and uncertain factors once we turn our gaze to the future.

The next section provides more information on the methodology that guided the scenario workshops. The report then continues by presenting the materials generated by the participants – the relative certainties and uncertainties and the core elements of the scenario narratives – encouraging readers to consider how migration between Africa and Europe may develop in the close to mid-term future. The report concludes with recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

# Methodological background

The PACES scenario-building workshop relied on the Global Migration Futures (GMF) Scenario Methodology developed at the University of Oxford's International Migration Institute (IMI) (Vezzoli et al. 2017).<sup>1</sup> It brought together 16 participants from four sectors: academia, policy/local authorities, business, and international organisations/civil society (see Annex). Participants were selected because of their diverse professional and personal backgrounds and engagement in research or activities that either directly or indirectly concern migration between Africa and Europe, e.g., a deacon or a Save the Children representative.

Among the participants were six PACES partners<sup>2</sup> and two migrants who had previously participated in PACES research activities. In combination, all participants ensured that research insights and expertise from various sectors were brought into the discussions throughout the workshop.

The scenario-building workshop started with an introduction of the GMF Scenario Methodology. An explanation of the value of qualitative scenarios was contrasted to the use of forecasts, which rely heavily on historical data to predict the future on the basis of a computational logic. Forecasts allow for variations in variables that are uncertain, e.g., high versus low economic growth or open versus closed migration policies; and variations are used to model likely future developments. Qualitative scenarios, which are a foresight method, make use of historical data as well as participant-driven information about uncertain factors that are not easily quantifiable and therefore excluded from forecasts – such as ideological shifts, geopolitical influence or adaptations to climate change.

Forecasts differ from qualitative scenarios as they seek to predict future developments by identifying *likely* futures, while scenarios aim to create narratives of *possible* migration futures. Scenarios refrain from *likelihood* because they explore futures that are *unlikely but possible*, offering stakeholders visions of futures that they are least prepared to address. Scenario-building is also a participatory method that allows for the input of a variety of actors who contribute distinct perspectives and experiences of migration and who, together, create challenging future developments that deserve further reflection.



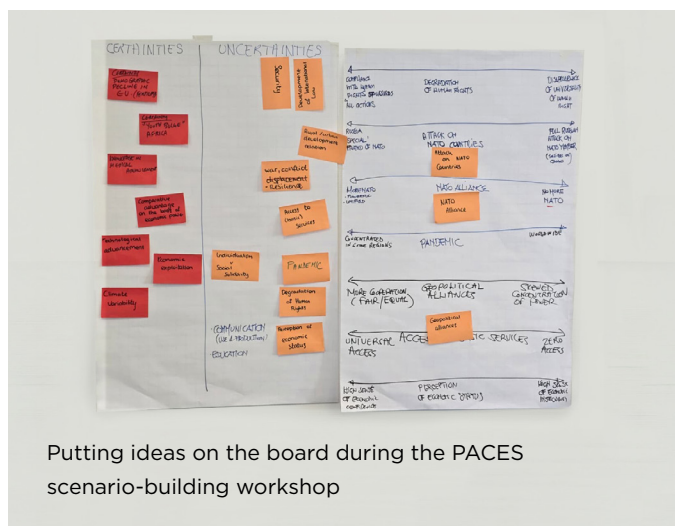
Group work during the PACES scenario-building workshop

During the scenario-building workshop, facilitators organized a structured event to share research insights, participants' knowledge and lived experiences, and to stimulate discussions and brainstorming sessions that used knowledge and imagination to think constructively about possible future changes. Participants took part in a set of exercises that made them more aware of their own knowledge and blind spots, acquire new (and often unfamiliar) knowledge from other

<sup>1</sup> This report focuses on the main findings arising from the scenario-building workshop. For more information about the GMF Scenario Methodology, see Vezzoli, S., et al. (2017). Global Migration Futures: Exploring the future of international migration with a scenario methodology. IMI Working Paper Series. University of Oxford. Oxford, International Migration Institute: 1-32.

<sup>2</sup> PACES partners were Simona Vezzoli (ISS) and Ayla Bonfiglio (MMC) as facilitators, Dominique Jolivet (ISS, as notetaker), and María Jesús Cabezón Fernández (University of Alicante), Lucia Mýtna Kureková (SAVBA), Katharina Natter (Leiden University) and Ashenafi Woldamichael Yemisrach (national research in Ethiopia, Samuel Hall) as workshop participants.

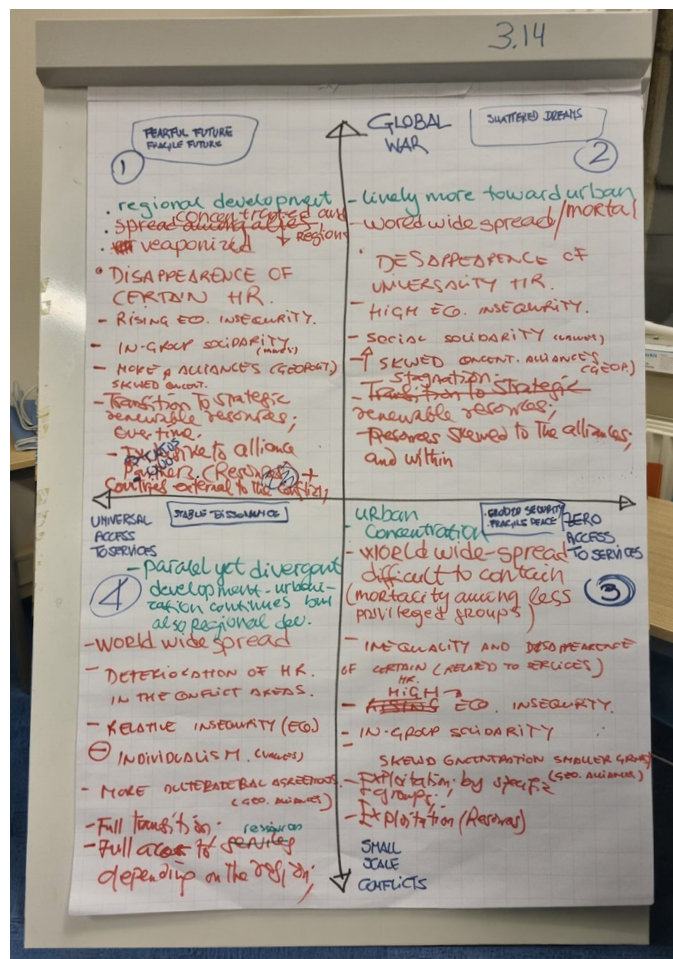
participants, and build new understandings of the societal and migration changes that may be possible over the next 20 years. Participants were encouraged to think beyond the conventional political and economic drivers of migration and to consciously reflect that future migration changes may be associated with other social dimensions such as demographic, legal, technological, environmental, and cultural factors.



Putting ideas on the board during the PACES scenario-building workshop

In practical terms, participants first reconstructed historical migration drivers and patterns in Europe and Africa. Then, they were coached to identify relative certainties and relative uncertainties (see Sections 4 and 5). In the last exercise, participants were asked to select the two most important and most unknown uncertainties, which provided the two key dimensions in the scenario matrix, with each quadrant resulting in one scenario (see Section 6) (see Vezzoli et al. 2017).

In the PACES scenario-building workshop, participants were organized into two groups: one group bringing to the fore African perspectives and the other zooming in on European perspectives. As a result, the workshop produced two scenario matrices and eight scenarios. Regardless of the geographical perspective, the groups were asked to think about all forms of migration - internal and international, within and across continents, and along the forced-voluntary migration continuum.



This report outlines the insights emerging from the workshop. It presents the two groups' materials and workshop findings: the main 'certainties' or trends that participants were relatively sure would impact future migration in a predictable way; the main 'uncertainties' that participants perceived as having a high potential to shape future migration, but in different possible ways; and two sets of scenarios. It is important to stress that the ultimate goals of the PACES scenario-building exercise were for participants to bring their own knowledge to the discussion, learn from others, think out-of-the-box by considering the interplay among a wide variety of factors and global developments and, ultimately, become aware of the significant changes that may be coming our way over the next decade and be better prepared for such changes. The aim was not to develop future migration scenarios that participants wanted to pursue or avoid, or that they thought were likely to occur.

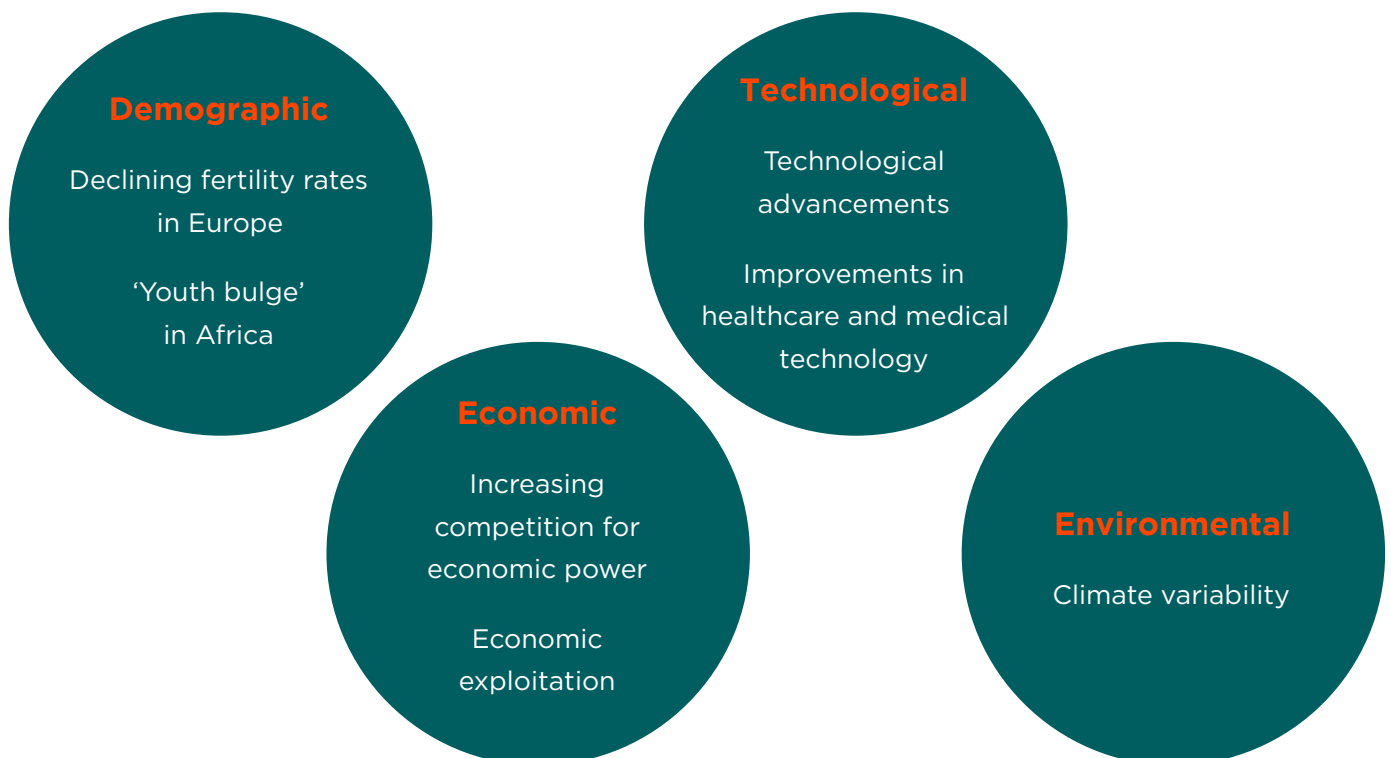
# Relative certainties

**Relative certainties** are factors that are fairly sure to take place in the future, based on the knowledge and data that exist about them. For instance, population ageing in Europe is relatively certain to continue in the coming decades because there is presently a large cohort of working-age adults in Europe, while only a relatively small cohort of children, and every year we know that these individuals will get older. Identifying relative certainties is a key step in the scenario-building process because such certainties form the inner architecture of each scenario; they remain relatively stable and constant across the scenarios. Identifying relative certainties is also important because it prompts participants to reflect on the factors that they assume to be certain. Consequently, this process often leads to the identification of numerous uncertainties that are examined in later stages of scenario building.

Excerpt from IMI (2013) *Pacific Region: Drivers Processes, and Future Scenarios of Migration*. Global Migration Futures Project Report. University of Oxford. Oxford, International Migration Institute: p. 10.

## European perspectives on Europe-Africa migrations

Figure 1. Relative certainties from European perspectives



## **Declining fertility rates in Europe**

European countries have experienced fertility rates below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) for several decades, with total fertility rates consistently around 1.5 and little evidence of a structural rebound. This trend is associated with population ageing and shrinking working-age cohorts, as policy responses have had limited impact on fertility levels. Migration has been a way to offset demographic decline (KCMD 2024).

## **‘Youth bulge’ in Africa**

Africa is home to the world’s youngest population, with more than 60% of its population under the age of 25, a result of sustained fertility combined with declining child mortality. This demographic structure is expected to persist over the coming decades, creating both developmental potential and demands on labour markets, education systems, healthcare, infrastructure and political institutions (ACSPR 2026).

## **Increasing competition for economic power**

The global political economy is increasingly characterised by intensified competition among major powers and emerging economies over markets, resources, technologies, and strategic supply chains. This shift toward economic rivalry is reshaping trade and international cooperation, with implications for global inequality, development pathways, and migration governance (Hurrell 2024).

## **Economic exploitation**

Global economic integration continues to rely on unequal power relations that expose workers and communities, particularly in lower-income countries, to exploitative labour conditions, wage suppression, and limited social protection. Such structural inequalities persist within global supply chains and contribute to uneven development outcomes, which in turn shape migration aspirations and constraints (The Econosphere n.d.).

## **Technological advancements**

Digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven systems are all features of rapid technological change which are transforming economic production, communication, and governance worldwide. In the migration field, these developments are reshaping information access, mobility decision making, and state capacity to monitor and manage migration, while also raising new ethical and regulatory challenges (Triandafyllidou 2025).

## **Improvements in healthcare and medical technology**

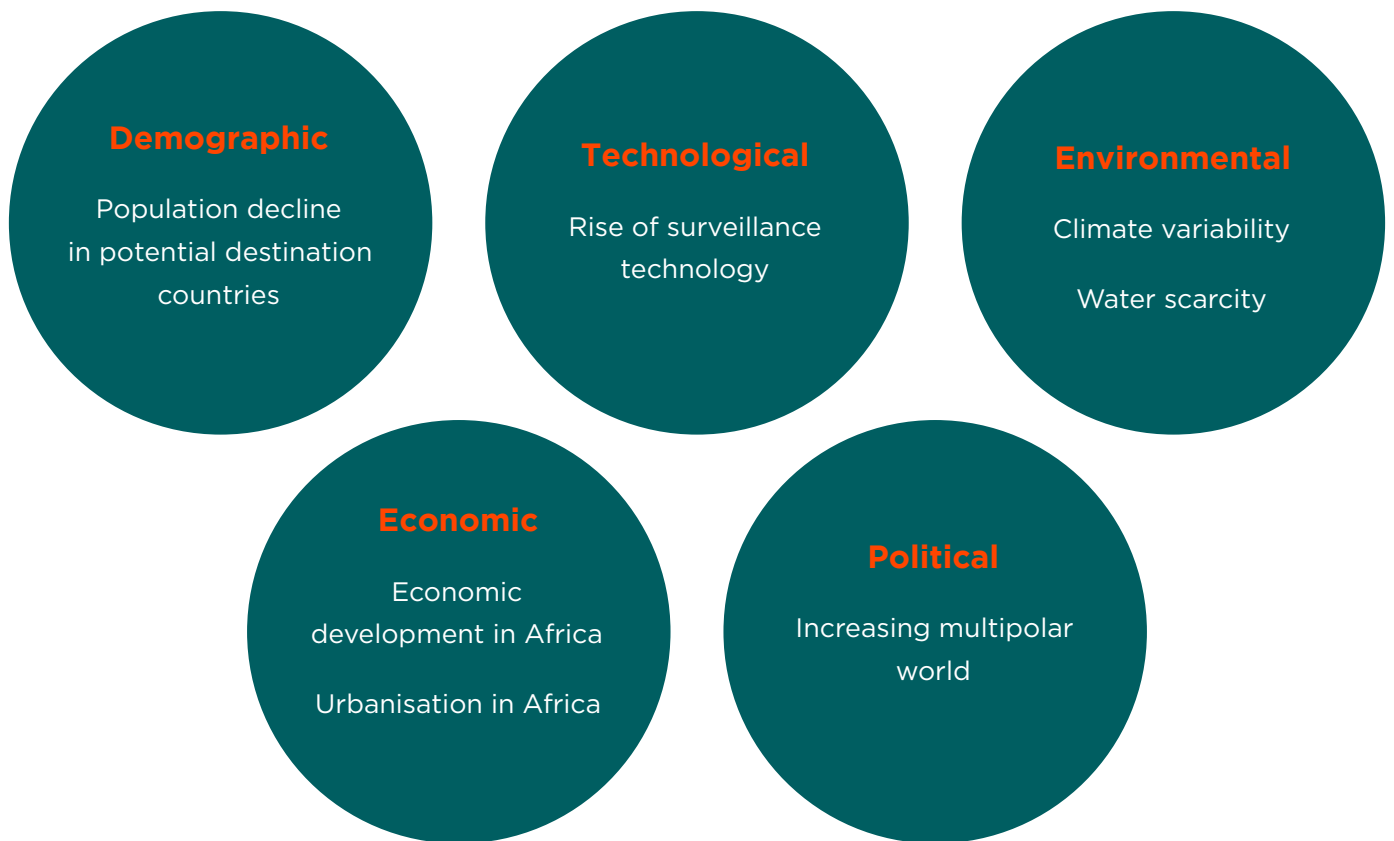
Advances in medical technology, digital health, and healthcare delivery have contributed to rising life expectancy and declining mortality rates across much of the world, including in low- and middle-income countries. These improvements, and people’s access to them, are expected to continue unevenly, influencing population growth, age structures and other demographic factors, and even telemedicine or healthcare-related mobility (Hamoodi 2025).

## **Climate variability**

Changing temperature and precipitation patterns and more frequent extreme weather events are key features of climate variability, which are increasingly affecting livelihoods, especially in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and pastoralism. While climate factors rarely act as a sole driver of migration, evidence shows that they interact with economic and political conditions to shape both mobility and immobility over time (MMC 2025).

## African perspectives on Europe-Africa migrations

Figure 2. Relative certainties from African perspectives



To avoid repeating the relative certainties related to population decline and climate variability identified by both the European and African perspectives groups, only unique relative certainties are described here:

### **Economic development in Africa**

Despite persistent vulnerabilities and uneven performance across countries, Africa is expected to continue experiencing positive economic growth over the coming decade, driven by demographic momentum, expanding consumer markets, and regional integration efforts such as the African Continental Free Trade Area. While growth rates remain insufficient to rapidly close development gaps, the overall trajectory points toward gradual economic expansion rather than stagnation (ADB 2025).

### **Urbanisation in Africa**

The growth of urban centres in Africa is a long-term process, with the continent's urban population projected to reach 60% by 2050 as rural-to-urban migration and natural population growth continue. This rapid urban expansion is reshaping economies, labour markets, and service provision, while also concentrating both opportunities and vulnerabilities in African cities (UNECA 2024).

### **Rise of surveillance technology**

Surveillance technologies such as biometric systems, drones, and large-scale data

infrastructures processed by artificial intelligence, are expanding rapidly across both public and private sectors worldwide. These technologies are increasingly embedded in security, border management, and migration governance, enhancing state capacity to monitor and control mobility while raising significant concerns related to privacy, accountability, and rights (Privacy International 2024).

### **Water scarcity**

Water scarcity is intensifying globally and particularly across large parts of Africa due to climate change, population growth, and unsustainable water management practices. This trend is increasingly structural rather

than episodic, with long-term implications for agriculture, livelihoods, urban development, and displacement (UN News 2026).

### **Increasing multipolar world**

The global order is increasingly characterised by the diffusion of power across multiple state and non-state actors, marking a shift away from post-Cold War unipolarity toward a more fragmented and multipolar system. This reconfiguration is expected to persist, with heightened geopolitical competition, shifting alliances, and selective cooperation shaping global governance and international mobility dynamics (George et al. 2025).



Building new homes in Adama, Ethiopia

# Relative uncertainties

**Relative uncertainties** are factors which may develop in varied directions in the future. They reveal a lack of knowledge, imperfect data, and complex cause-and-effect mechanisms that require further attention. For instance, political violence following elections is highly uncertain. Even if we know that political violence in a country has occurred in the past, it is difficult to say with certainty whether it will necessarily follow future elections.

‘Identifying and examining relative uncertainties stands at the centre of the scenario-building process as uncertainties drive the scenario narratives and it is often the uncertainties for which planners are least prepared.

Identifying uncertainties is also important for it reveals to experts and stakeholders involved in the scenario-building the great extent to which migration futures are bound up in multiple layers of uncertainty.’

Paraphrased excerpt from IMI (2013) *Pacific Region: Drivers Processes, and Future Scenarios of Migration*. Global Migration Futures Project Report. University of Oxford. Oxford, International Migration Institute: p. 15.

The participants identified relative uncertainties that were important to shape the future of Africa-Europe migration and which they felt were uncertain because of a lack of data or knowledge, their complexity, or their volatility. The relative uncertainties identified fit within five broad categories: Governance, rights and political order; Economics and development; Labour, technology and education; Social cohesion and values; and Environment, energy, and systemic shocks. The dominance of the political and economic factors reflects general tendencies of thinking about migration within these sectors. Out of the relative uncertainties identified, the participants selected two – in grey in the two upcoming tables – that were the most uncertain and most important in shaping the future of migration and that would go on to form the basis of the scenario matrices (see Figures 3 and 4).

## Relative uncertainties from European perspectives

Uncertainty	Theme	Definition
<b>Stronger, more united EU vs. weaker, more fragmented EU</b>	Governance, rights and political order	The EU may consolidate political cohesion and collective capacity or face deepening fragmentation that weakens joint decision making.
<b>Powerful, unified NATO vs. dismantled NATO</b>		NATO may remain a central, cohesive security alliance or lose relevance through internal divisions and declining commitment.
<b>Attack vs. no attack on NATO countries</b>		The possibility of direct military confrontation involving NATO members may materialise or continue to be deterred.





<b>Small-scale conflicts vs. global war</b>		Armed conflict may remain localised and contained, even within the EU, or escalate into broader, global warfare.
<b>More cooperation between countries vs. skewed concentrations of power</b>		International relations may evolve toward cooperative multilateralism or toward asymmetrical power concentration among a few dominant actors.
<b>Strengthened protection vs. erosion of human rights</b>		Human rights protections may be reinforced or progressively undermined, impacting citizens, migrants and displaced people.
<b>High sense of economic confidence vs. weakness</b>	Economics and development	Economic outlooks may foster confidence and investment or be dominated by stagnation, insecurity, and pessimism.
<b>Universal vs. zero access to services</b>		Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and energy may expand to universal coverage or deteriorate to be granted only to some groups within society.
<b>Access vs. no access to natural resources of EU countries</b>		The EU's control over and access to key natural resources may be secured or increasingly constrained by scarcity and geopolitics.
<b>Rural vs. urban development in EU countries</b>		Development trajectories may prioritise balanced rural urban investment or further concentrate opportunities in urban centres.
<b>Shifting educational systems</b>	Labour, technology, and education	Education systems may adapt towards flexible, skills-oriented models or retain a wide scope that includes attention to labour market and societal needs, but not at the cost of humanities, social sciences and arts and culture.
<b>Shifting educational values</b>		People may continue to value formal education or perceive it has lost its value given its inability to promote social mobility.
<b>Individualism vs. solidarity</b>	Social cohesion and values	Social norms may prioritise individual self-interest or shift toward collective responsibility and solidarity within and across societies.
<b>Full transition to renewable energy vs. no transition</b>	Environment, energy, and systemic shocks	Energy systems may undergo a comprehensive transition toward renewables or remain reliant on fossil-based infrastructures.
<b>Pandemic 2.0</b>		A new global pandemic may emerge or be avoided, testing health systems, governance, and societal preparedness.

## Relative uncertainties from African perspectives

Uncertainty	Theme	Definition
<b>Autocracy vs. democracy</b>	Governance, rights, and political order	Political systems may evolve toward greater democratic participation or toward more authoritarian forms of rule, with implications for rights, accountability, and mobility.
<b>Sovereignty vs. interference in/ among African countries</b>		Norms may shift toward stronger respect for national sovereignty or toward greater political, military, or economic intervention by regional and external actors.
<b>Increasing vs. decreasing corruption</b>		Corruption levels may decline through reform and accountability or increase, weakening institutions, trust, and equitable development.
<b>Strengthened protection vs. erosion of human rights</b>		Human rights protections may be reinforced or progressively undermined, impacting citizens, migrants, and displaced people.
<b>EU expansion vs. fragmentation</b>		The European Union may deepen integration and expand or face growing internal fragmentation, shaping coherence of its society and of migration regimes and changing EU mobility dynamics.
<b>Interdependence vs. autonomy of global powers</b>		Global powers may remain highly interdependent or pursue greater strategic autonomy, reshaping global governance, and migration regimes.
<b>Rebound of international aid vs. decline</b>	Economics and development	International development assistance may recover or continue to contract, affecting state capacity, service provision, and development outcomes.
<b>Trade competition vs. cooperation among African countries</b>		African states may prioritise regional economic cooperation or engage in intensified competition, shaping economic integration, growth, and intra-African mobility.
<b>Increasing vs. decreasing infrastructure in Africa</b>		Investment in physical and digital infrastructure may accelerate or stagnate, affecting connectivity, economic opportunity, and mobility.
<b>AI's transformation of labour market needs</b>	Labour, technology, and education	Artificial intelligence may substantially reshape labour demand and skills requirements, either generating new opportunities or deepening job loss, displacement, and inequality.
<b>Shifting educational systems</b>		Education systems may adapt towards flexible, skill-oriented models or retain a wide scope that includes attention to labour market and societal needs, but not at the cost of humanities, social sciences, and arts and culture.
<b>Shifting educational values</b>		People may continue to value formal education or perceive it has lost its value given its inability to promote social mobility.





<b>Increasing vs. decreasing xenophobia in Africa</b>	Social cohesion and values	Attitudes toward migrants and outsiders within African societies may harden or soften, influencing social cohesion and mobility patterns.
<b>Anti migration vs. pro migration narratives in Europe</b>		Public and political discourse in Europe may become more hostile or more supportive of migration, shaping policy responses and migrant opportunities.
<b>Increasing vs. decreasing water conflicts</b>	Environment, energy, and system shocks	Competition over water resources may intensify and fuel conflict or be mitigated through cooperation, governance, and adaptation measures.



World Food Programme delivery in Kebribeyah, Ethiopia

# Scenarios for migration between Africa and Europe in 2045

**Scenarios** are stories about possible future drivers and patterns of migration. They explore potential changes in the broader context within which migration takes shape, for instance opportunity structures or political stability, to understand possible migration outcomes.

Scenarios are different from predictions or forecasts. They reveal what 'might' occur, rather than what is perceived as 'likely' to take place in the future. The primary distinguishing feature between scenarios and forecasts is that scenarios focus on highly uncertain variables for which there are little or no data, and use expert knowledge and intuition to explore how such variables may take shape. In contrast, forecasts focus on analysing relatively certain variables [for which quantitative data are available] and hold more uncertain variables constant along their present trajectories.

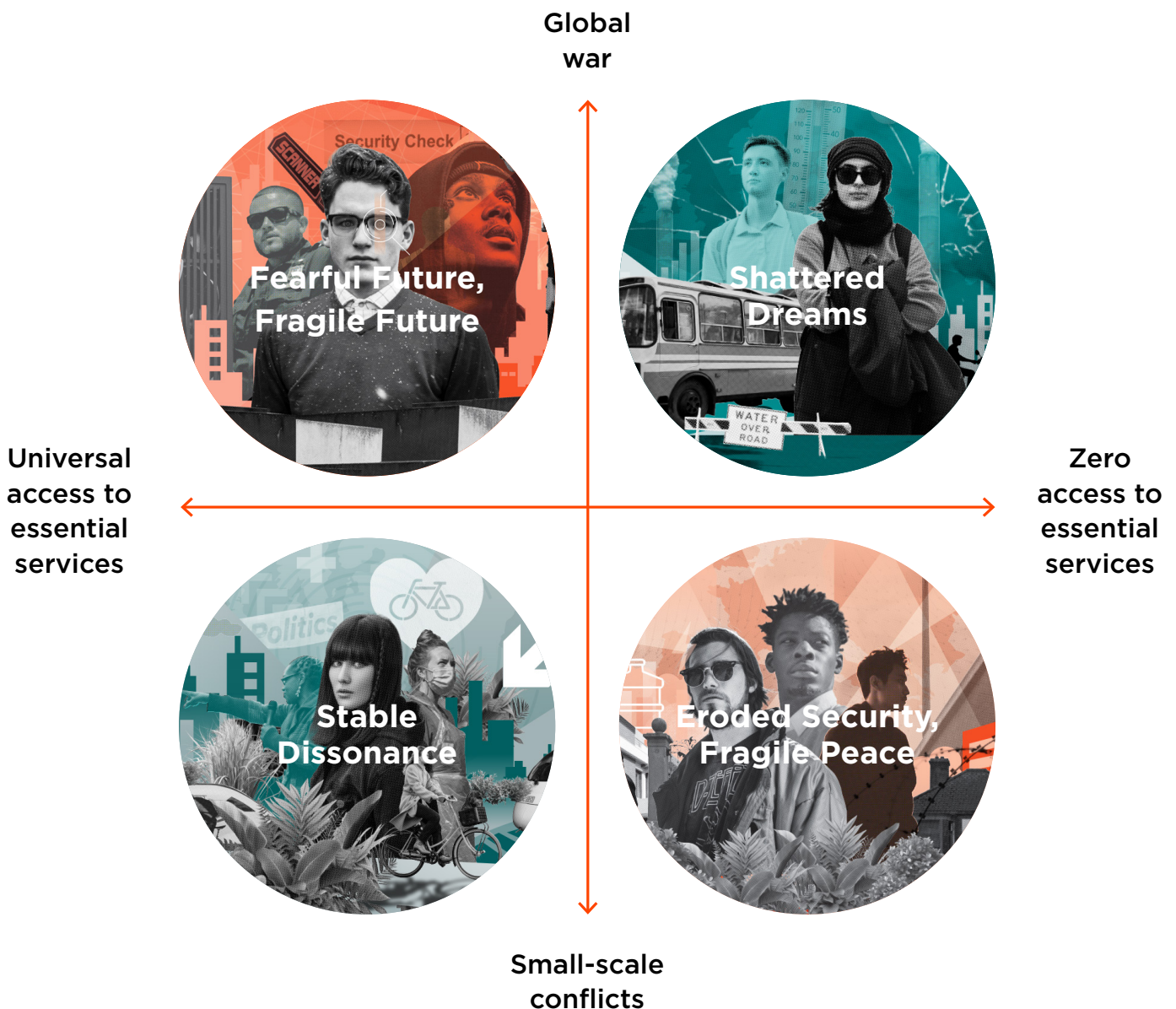
Effective scenarios must therefore be creative and challenge the status quo, while remaining plausible and convincing. Scenarios should be used as tools to prompt innovative thinking about future opportunities and challenges as well as potential insights as to how to move forward. No single scenario attempts to get the future 'right'; instead a collection of scenarios may present a range of insights for the future.

Excerpt from IMI (2013) Pacific Region: Drivers Processes, and Future Scenarios of Migration. Global Migration Futures Project Report. University of Oxford. Oxford, International Migration Institute: p. 19.

## Europe-Africa migration scenarios from European perspectives

Participants in the European perspective group identified ‘**global war vs. small-scale conflicts**’ and ‘**universal vs. zero access to services**’ as the two relative uncertainties with the greatest potential to impact future migration dynamics and, at the same time, with the highest level of uncertainty related to how they will evolve in the future. The **global war vs. small-scale conflicts** uncertainty and a few other uncertainties identified by this group were greatly influenced by the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Israel-Palestine. The **universal vs. zero access to services** was identified as very important for shaping future migration, particularly within Europe, as changes would provide more or less security for the population – residents and migrants. Moreover, universal service provision would rely on healthcare workers from outside the EU. These two uncertainties, and the different possible directions they can evolve into, formed the axes of the scenario matrix, producing the basic parameters of the four scenarios (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Europe-focused scenario matrix



# Scenario narrative

# Shattered Dreams



It is November 2045 and a multi-theatre global war has pushed Europe past a breaking point. Major alliances fracture and martial law and emergency decrees proliferate. Basic services collapse in large areas from infrastructure sabotage, militarised rationing, pandemic flare-ups, and resource blockades. What remains of universalism is selective and transactional, delivered where loyalty and leverage dictate.

**Political and social landscape: Information ecosystems are highly controlled.** Warring blocs weaponise narratives and fact and fiction are indistinguishable in many jurisdictions. Some EU members double down on the war effort, while others drift or defect. Having failed to develop a stronger EU identity and strategy in the face of great geopolitical pressure, the political class of the EU and in most Member States has lost its foothold in the Union. Public trust erodes as emergency powers **curtail civil liberties**. Counternarratives survive only in encrypted messages and whispered networks. Within this highly constrained environment, aspirations to leave the Union have increased among the residents of many Member States. However, for many people it has become very difficult to emigrate because of limited resources and barriers to migration.

**Water, climate and resource management: Climate shocks serve as a threat multiplier.** Heat waves trigger grid failures, northern floods wipe out critical transport and housing, and southern fires and droughts force triage between agriculture and drinking water. Resource allocation is based on alliances and leads to the

emergence of oligarchic intermediaries and war economy contractors who control fuel, water, and food corridors. Local water conflicts spread across basins as monitoring and coordination collapse. While some people are temporarily displaced by severe floods, fires, and droughts, most movement is temporary and intra-regional. However, we observe more permanent movements by people who are facing dire living conditions and exclusion from access to food and water, and who are looking for better security.

**Economy, labour and inequality:** Wartime requisitions impact supply chains and innovation concentrates on defense and cyber industries. 'Work' means service to the war economy or survival in the informal market. The middle class implodes. Military recruitment expands beyond Europe, attracting fighters from proxy theatres. Remittances reverse direction as families abroad sustain relatives inside Europe's hard hit zones. Many migrants with connections to their country of origin decide to return, while a large number of EU citizens with relatives abroad seek their support to join them in more secure areas of the world.

**Services, governance and corruption:** Services, once a defining feature of Europe, are almost universally collapsing. Vaccination campaigns falter and **old diseases resurface alongside new variants**. Schools close or become indoctrination nodes. Housing systems fail in heavily populated regions, and documentation backlogs strand people outside entitlements, particularly because access to water and power is often brokered by non-state actors. **Rights frameworks persist on paper but wither in practice.** A growing number of EU citizens and migrants aspire to leave – in the remaining pockets of safety in Europe as well as abroad – in search of places where access to water, electricity, housing, and more secure living conditions are guaranteed.

**Regional and global order: EU institutions are weakened and divided. NATO is strained** by attrition and divergent political wills. External actors leverage **Europe's fragmentation** to compel concessions over trade, data, and territory. The continent's strategic posture is defensive and inward. What was once seen as a leading region, both for social and economic development, is now a shadow of its past. As a result, not only has Europe lost its attractiveness for potential migrants, but it is losing its own people to regions that are more secure and offer better living conditions.

**Mobility and migration:** Forced displacement dominates. Intra-EU flight from combat-adjacent regions surges, but mobility is increasingly curtailed by the frequent interruption of air and land public transportation. Those who seek to travel rely on private transport if available or affordable; however, increasingly people travel on bicycles, scooters and motorbikes, which are more accessible and offer flexibility of movement. Some Europeans seek safety beyond the continent for the first time in generations, while those with fewer resources seek the remaining pockets of relative safety and services within the region, which are quickly becoming overburdened. Border policies toggle between securitised closures and *ad hoc* evacuations. Recruitment pipelines draw in foreign fighters and a workforce under emergency compacts and extremely precarious conditions. The distinction between *refugee*, *evacuee*, and *relocated worker* blurs in the fog of war.



Scenario narrative

# Fearful Future, Fragile Future

It is November 2045 and Europe lives with the steady drumbeat of **global confrontation** in the form of resource wars in Asia, proxy fights on multiple continents, and a cyber shadow war. Despite these difficulties, the regional bloc has, so far, kept a core promise at home: **basic services for everyone on European soil**. The result is a continent that is safe and resilient in terms of service delivery, but afraid about future security and permanently mobilised for contingencies.

**Political and social landscape: Emergency governance** is the new normal. Parliaments still legislate, courts still adjudicate, and elections still occur, but civil protection statutes, **disinformation countermeasures**, and **cyber security protocols** frame everyday life. Public opinion oscillates between pride in continuity and anxiety about ‘overstretch’ in which the government is challenged by its commitment to provide services universally and the increased need to regulate information and protect the population. Schools teach ‘digital hygiene’ and crisis literacy as standard. The atmosphere is tense, but people’s ability to secure their livelihoods keeps them in place. From the outside, Europe still looks like a desirable place in comparison to other areas of the world, making it a good migration destination, particularly from Asian countries caught up in resource wars and crises.

**Water, climate and resource management: Drought cycles and heat stress** hit southern Europe hard while flood regimes reshape the Atlantic facade and parts of central Europe. Spain and Portugal prioritise potable water over export agriculture. Coastal microgrids

harden critical infrastructure against blackouts. **Climate investments** are framed as national security assets. Governments’ proactive stance has encouraged people affected by floods and droughts to find local solutions, but the Spanish and Portuguese economies are suffering greatly under the collapse of the agricultural sector. Their economic restructuring stimulates strong internal movements and the departure of migrants employed in the agricultural sector towards other EU and non-EU destinations.

**Economy, labour and inequality: Ageing and labour shortages** intensify reliance on migrant workers in health, logistics, construction, and care. **Strategic sectors** (energy transition, critical manufacturing, healthtech) expand, while just in time models give way to ‘just in case’ inventories and near shoring. Climate mitigation measures, such as the potable water priorities set in Spain and Portugal, have important economic consequences as water-intense agriculture – e.g., avocados and rice – has to be abandoned. **Inequalities widen between regions** that can finance resilience to conflict and climate change and those trapped in defensive maintenance and are in proximity of warfare.

While the movement of EU residents is relatively low, despite the challenges in some countries, migrants, particularly youth and those who benefit from extensive social networks spanning the EU, become very mobile, seeking opportunities in other EU countries. They join the inflow of other non-EU migrants who arrive to contribute to the expansion of the strategic sectors.

**Services, governance and corruption: Universal access holds**, though rationing occurs. Hospitals run redundancies and municipalities keep shelters and heating/cooling centres open regardless of citizenship and migration status. **Procurement scrutiny improves after early scandals**; still, private **tech providers gain outsized influence** as emergency partners. For instance, management systems introduced to help government agencies align service recipients and demand of services have been ‘hijacked’ by intermediaries, primarily private companies and informal facilitators. This development, in the context of insecurity and violence in nearby countries, has led intermediaries to use predatory tactics against the population, e.g. pay a high fee to get an appointment, while the population receives fewer services and becomes increasingly disgruntled. While on paper universal access to services is guaranteed, in practice the system is showing deep faults. For the time being, this has had limited impact on the emigration aspirations of residents and migrants who cope with predatory tactics. At the same time, evidence of these faults in governance and services have had little impact on the attractiveness of the EU as a place of destination.

**Regional and global order: Europe is ring-fenced by turmoil**, including a persistent ECOWAS region pandemic, periodic shipping interruptions and cyber shocks, and a long Asia crisis that never reaches Europe’s territory yet reshapes every supply chain. NATO endures, EU decision making is slower but functional in security critical domains, and city-to-city networks quietly solve what supranational and national politics cannot.

To a certain extent, the population feels closer to local decision-makers and there is more room for people’s needs to be heard. For this reason, participation in local politics grows with many bottom-up initiatives to address issues within the EU and in neighbouring countries. These participatory aspects make up for some of the economic and governance challenges and help to retain the population – citizens and migrants alike – within the EU. In fact, it is this participation that makes people feel that change is possible.

**Mobility and migration:** Migration into and within Europe is structured, continuous, and contentious. While all EU countries still require labour from outside the Union, there is some regional specialization: Southern countries manage first reception, central and northern countries absorb labour, while eastern states have developed a good model to handle transit and screening. The ability of Southern countries to employ agricultural workers has become very uncertain, making these countries increasingly countries of reception and onward migration. Asylum remains accessible but slower, labour pathways expand, and regularisation schemes – which are given a low profile – stabilise essential workforces. The political contest is not about *whether* people move, but *how Europe keeps services universal* while the world burns.

# Scenario narrative

# Stable

# Dissonance



It is November 2045 and Europe has stabilised the essentials, providing **universal access to health, schooling, water, shelter, and connectivity**, while living with **persistent low level conflicts**. Maritime standoffs, sporadic border incidents, and sub national disputes characterize Europe today. The union is **functionally fragmented yet cooperatively effective** where it matters most: **keeping systems running, even as political actors dissonantly argue about everything else**.

**Political and social landscape:** Democratic contestation is fierce, but institutions hold. Public opinion sways between an appreciation of universal service provision and the inability of the political class to deal with the tensions that underpin divisions and conflicts. Some regions push for autonomy (e.g., Catalonia and Scotland independence debates resurface), and historical grievances flare in parts of the Balkans. These old grievances are contained, tragic, but not system breaking. Publics oscillate between **individualism** and **solidarity** around **climate disasters and health crises**. These tensions have no effect on the movements of people in these specific regions, in the EU more generally, or on the arrival of migrants from outside of the EU who watch curiously at the flaring up of these identity-based tensions within Europe.

**Water, climate and resource management:** Climate impacts are uneven, with southern countries experiencing droughts, and northern and central countries facing flooding. States invest in **dykes, diversions, and other environmental management systems**. Regions with similar risk profiles form cross border compacts. **Energy transition accelerates** driven by security logics

and price stability rather than ideology. Moreover, increasingly long, very cold winters and very hot summers put pressure on governments to make energy affordable. **Supply chains for critical minerals remain fragile**, but grid integration improves. The strong push towards sustainable systems – environmental management and energy transition – has ushered a wave of labour recruitment of specialised workers from within and outside the EU. New migration pathways have been established for these specific categories of workers, who are given special benefits such as fast-track family reunification.

**Economy, labour and inequality: Economic confidence is moderate but rising.** Green industrial policies and care economy expansion create steady employment. Seasonal ‘climate comfort’ mobility grows among higher income groups. Firms adopt remote first models, which blend the needs of workers to have flexibility and of companies to have some face-to-face time to build a shared work culture and vision, to smooth disruptions. **Demographic decline continues, due to low fertility rates and out-migration to other world regions**, but is partially offset by targeted labour mobility and small successes of

family planning policies. The expansion of the ‘Danish approach’ to gender-sensitive workforce policies and care services has been particularly effective: it has included not only the provision of appropriate and affordable childcare for working mothers from early childhood, but also financial compensations to offset the long-term costs of maternity on women’s long-term earnings. Women’s participation in the workforce has increased with surveys suggesting greater work and personal satisfaction among working women who report much healthier and balanced personal and family lives. Nevertheless, labour shortages have continued to be an important obstacle for employers, who have lobbied for policies to boost fertility rates and are including fertility treatments within healthcare packages as a long-term investment in the future workforce. In the short term, however, employers have lobbied governments to create regular migration pathways for specific categories of migrants in sectors of great labour scarcity such as healthcare and personal care services, where EU countries are in competition with non-EU countries to secure the top skilled professionals.

**Services, governance and corruption: Universal access is *the* priority.** Where national capacity lags, inter municipal compacts and EU backstops fill gaps. **Procurement transparency improves** as digital identity and payments enable portable entitlements across regions. It is particularly the portability of pensions that has resulted in stunning results on the mobility of retirees who choose to reside in places where cost of living is lower and healthcare services are similar as within the EU. Turkey is such a destination. While it has abandoned the idea of entering the EU, it has capitalized on its proximity, high level of security and living standards to specialise in healthcare services for the elderly. **Rights protections** decline in some conflict adjacent regions, but are litigated and restored as watchdogs retain bite. We observe the high mobility of healthcare and personal service professionals, some of whom are moving to non-EU locations where EU retirees are settling, where they also can reduce their costs

of living. Concurrently, they are being replaced by new – lower-cost – recruits of healthcare and personal care professionals from EU and non-EU countries. While this is lowering the cost of healthcare in many EU countries, the substitution of large numbers of experienced professionals with early-career personnel is lowering the quality of healthcare.

**Regional and global order: Europe is ‘fragmented yet more connected within fragments’:** clusters of states cooperate deeply on climate, health, or energy without full political convergence. **NATO remains credible** and the EU’s external posture is firm but calibrated. Selective partnerships with neighbours expand around resilience, mobility corridors, and green supply chains. Such a fragmented continent has clustered migration within Europe, while still retaining important migration corridors with select non-European countries. For instance, Spain has been establishing recruitment programs in Latin America, while the UK has rekindled relations on the basis of attracting high-skilled workers from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

**Mobility and migration:** Border management is tighter for third country nationals yet pragmatic. Humanitarian admission mechanisms coexist with expanded skills matching and circularity schemes. Intra-EU mobility grows for work, caregiving, and climate seasonality. Motivations to come to Europe shift in relation to skills and service anchored mobility. We also observe strong emigration motivations among skilled professionals who benefit from leaving Europe and working in the improved healthcare systems in countries around Europe, where they can benefit from higher standards of living overall. Within this landscape, some of the EU ‘fragments’ have pursued a more selective approach, while others have been more pragmatic and receptive. We see a softer shift among the fragments where efforts to regulate migration have largely failed, and which are adjacent to non-EU countries that have also adopted a more pragmatic approach.

Scenario narrative

# Eroded Security, Fragile Peace

It is November 2045 and Europe has avoided a great power war – but the efforts to prevent a war have bled out the countries through a thousand cuts. **Micro-conflicts over water, energy corridors, land use, and illicit markets simmer across the map. Large territories become service deserts, with no reliable water, power, healthcare, or secure digital IDs, while closed enclaves maintain partial service provision supported by microgrids and private security. The continent is a patchwork of parallel futures coexisting unequally.**

**Political and social landscape:** State authority wanes, leaving municipal coalitions, enclave councils, and neighbourhood cooperatives to deliver what they can. **In-group solidarity grows, while formal solidarity collapses.** Trust flows inward to kin, co-religionists, and co-ops, and outsiders face exclusion or predation. **Journalism retreats** and **information is hyperlocal** and often partisan. This fragmented landscape has provided space for some historical migrant communities to forge coalitions and secure a place in these tight-knitted groups, but more newly arrived migrant communities face exclusion. Feedback information to communities of origin has not resulted in reduced migration, but lower expectations of integration and social participation among newly arrived migrants.

**Water, climate and resource management:** Iberian and Italian basins see **recurring water clashes** and canalised rivers in Central Europe become strategic choke points. Moreover, aquifers are over extracted without monitoring. **Climate adaptation exists, but as private goods** in the form of rooftop capture, gated microgrids, and pay-per-litre water kiosks. Agricultural

belts fragment and food sovereignty becomes an enclave project. Amidst these competing management systems, we observe a deterioration of living conditions in some areas and stability in others. Areas with more financial resources are stable, if not prospering. And it is in these areas where activities are still requiring the arrival of a technical labour force to secure the efficient management of resources.

**Economy, labour and inequality:** The **formal economy shrinks** and black markets and casual work expand. **Big firms pivot to selling ‘access packages’ for energy and vital goods and services.** Some rural renewable energy hubs thrive as exceptions of functionality, as most other rural areas hollow out. As a result, we observe growing unemployment of local and migrant labour with movement towards the thriving energy hubs. The competition for work mirrors that of resources, resulting in a growing informal economy through which locals, older, and newer migrant communities eke out a living. In this deteriorating environment, growing numbers of Europeans look for ways to leave the continent, but not everybody who wishes to emigrate has the resources to do so.

**Services, governance and corruption:** In **service deserts**, births go unregistered, children miss schooling and vaccines, and deaths go uncounted. Reduced tax revenues have led governments to reduce their services. Private security mediates access to clinics and water points. **Criminal syndicates** control logistics and profit from staged blackouts. **Rights become zonally contingent.** At the same time, governments seek alternative ways to fill state coffers: the issuance of fines is very lucrative, but the public is disgruntled as minor violations such as a broken bicycle light or a late payment have dire financial consequences. The public is feeling great pressure from the government and legitimate and illegitimate actors. While in society a narrative is emerging of the need to look for 'greener pastures', there is also a lingering feeling that better times are coming, and it is wise to wait out this dark period. From the outside, Europe remains an attractive destination but much less than in the past. Some regions are now seen as less desirable amongst potential migrants.

**Regional and global order:** The **EU and NATO persist symbolically** but cannot coordinate energy, water, health, or security at scale. **New alliances are granular and opportunistic** and take the form of city-to-city energy deals, enclave trade pacts, and *ad hoc* water compacts. External actors support favoured enclaves to secure influence and access to key trade ports. It is in these enclaves that migration is particularly attractive among EU residents and migrants, and through which migrants from outside Europe enter.

**Mobility and migration:** Migration becomes survival-driven segmentation. People move from service deserts to enclaves, from failing urban peripheries to functional cores, and from Europe to North Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas in unprecedented numbers. Still, not all Europeans who want to leave the continent are able to do so. And while Europeans leave, some migration to Europe continues, primarily directed to the few prosperous enclaves. Those with resources and networks navigate the patchwork, while those without are stuck in the gaps between maps.



Aerial view of Somali Region, Ethiopia

**“We really don’t know how AI is going to shape the future of work and the repercussions this will have on politics, economy, society, nature etc.”**

- Workshop participant, November 2025

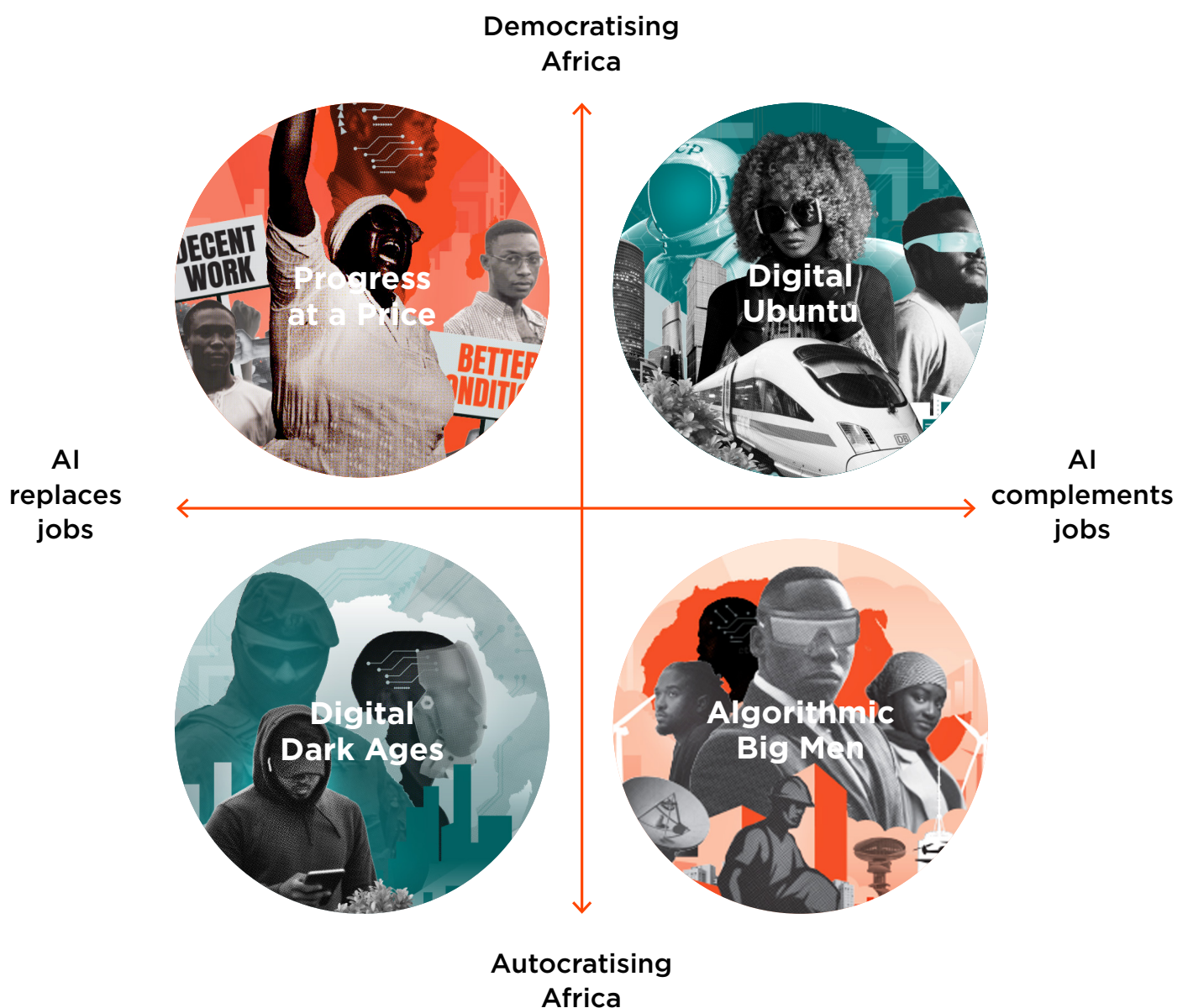
**“African-European migration may be even more intertwined in both directions in the future than I had guessed.”**

- Workshop participant, November 2025

## Europe-Africa migrations scenarios from African perspectives

Participants in the Africa-focused group identified ‘**autocracy vs. democracy**’ and ‘**AI’s transformation of labour market needs**’ as the two relative uncertainties with the greatest potential to impact future migration dynamics and, at the same time, with the highest level of uncertainty related to how they will evolve in the future. The group identified **autocracy vs. democracy** as a key uncertainty based on the persistence of autocratic governance within some countries on the continent, the continued uncertainty surrounding elections and political stability in many countries, as well as the considerable efforts made by countries to strengthen their democratic institutions. Moreover, participants felt that a country’s approach to migration governance would be directly impacted by their overall governing structure. The second uncertainty on **the role of AI in the labour market** was triggered by participants’ shared belief in the potential of AI to shape lower-and mid-skilled work combined with the fact that youth represent the largest share of the population on the continent, and they are already integrating AI as an educational and professional tool. These two uncertainties, and the different possible directions they can evolve into, formed the axes of the scenario matrix, producing the basic parameters of the four scenarios (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Africa-focused scenario matrix



Scenario narrative

# Digital Ubuntu



It is November 2045 and across much of Africa, **strong democratic institutions have taken root, shaping societies in which AI is used to complement human labour rather than replace it.** People have repeatedly voted to prioritise human dignity, social welfare, and ecological balance. The result is a model described as ‘Digital Ubuntu’: a system where technological progress enhances collective wellbeing and reinforces democratic values.

**Political and social landscape:** Democratic institutions are robust and widely trusted. Elections are competitive, and policy debates are vibrant, particularly around technological development. Some people champion accelerated AI adoption; others argue for safeguards.

**Human rights protections are strong.** Freedom of expression and information are foundational values. Yet the dense digital environment brings new vulnerabilities: individuals willingly share data to access personalised services, enabling **governments and private actors to accumulate vast information with limited oversight.** This has sparked ongoing conversations about privacy, digital citizenship and the boundaries of state power. Although the democratic framework protects rights, **social divisions around identity and belonging** become more pronounced. **As a result, nationalism and xenophobia have risen,** driven by tensions over welfare distribution and competition for high-quality jobs. Nevertheless, this stable and dynamic environment is very attractive for young tech professionals from Africa and the EU. They find work in the private sector and increasingly in the public sector as some governments seek to regulate AI adoption.

**Economy, labour and inequality:** AI complements human work, improving productivity while preserving employment. In sectors where displacement occurs, **universal basic income and universal basic services** cushion the social impact. Overall **poverty declines,** and education and **healthcare are widely accessible.** However, **corruption persists** in new forms, especially through the commodification of personal and commercial data. Access to certain datasets or privileged digital services can create competitive advantages, generating quiet inequalities beneath the egalitarian rhetoric. **Urbanisation** remains dynamic but is guided by principles of inclusion and sustainability. **High-quality infrastructure** extends into rural areas, preventing the emergence of extreme territorial divides. Universities, innovation hubs, and cooperative enterprises thrive, supported by free movement within the region. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of multiple hubs that have brought infrastructure, services and technology closer to peripheral areas, increasing circulation and commuting.

**Services, governance and corruption:** Public services have become more efficient through AI-supported administration. Tax collection is more reliable, reducing loopholes and corruption that once undermined state capacity. This allows governments to sustain generous welfare systems **without heavy dependence on donors**. At the same time, the growing commercial value of data creates vulnerabilities. **Corporations and political actors attempt to shape information flows** or influence digital governance frameworks. All in all, several African countries have become very attractive for potential immigrants, who arrive from within and outside the continent, primarily Europe, where long-term migrants are slowly returning to the continent.

**Regional and global order:** Africa's democratic bloc asserts itself as a coherent political and economic actor. **Regional partnerships** extend beyond aid, emphasising mutual investment, shared technological development, and ecological resilience. Countries coordinate on AI governance, digital rights frameworks, and industrial policy. **Foreign aid is rejected** as part of a broader commitment to autonomy. While the region maintains international partnerships, it does so on its own terms, **prioritising equal cooperation rather than dependency**. Over the years, this has resulted in the departure of large numbers of humanitarian and development actors, their personnel, and consultants. Specialists from within the continent have taken leadership, supported by international investors who are willing to partake on more equal terms.

**Water, climate, and resource management:** Climate governance has become a shared regional priority. AI supports water monitoring, drought response, and ecological planning, contributing to **reduced water conflicts**. **Collective awareness of scarcity is deeply embedded in public education** and local governance. Governments aim for growth that respects natural limits. Industries are encouraged to adopt low-impact production. These choices slow development relative to

regions that prioritise rapid growth but **strengthen long-term resilience**. As a result, entrepreneurs, investors, and residents seeking fast change and quick returns have left these initiatives. These departures have been used by remaining cells of neoliberal capitalists to stir up opposition to slow-growth approaches with little impact so far.

**Mobility and migration:** Free mobility within the democratic bloc is a defining feature of Digital Ubuntu. Talent circulates fluidly between cities and sectors, and regional programmes encourage cross-border apprenticeships, research partnerships, and cultural exchanges. Externally, borders are more restrictive. The region emphasises self-reliance and rejects foreign aid in favour of horizontal partnerships. Migration policies prioritise the arrival of diaspora members and high-skilled workers. This selective openness reinforces debates about who belongs in the democratic project and who is excluded. Even with these tensions, migration remains regular and rights-based, supported by transparent governance and shared regional norms.

# Scenario narrative

## Progress at a Price



It is November 2045 and most African countries are **functioning democracies**. Elections are competitive, parliaments active, and courts have real power. Yet under sustained pressure for rapid economic development, these democracies have embraced AI and automation in ways that have **displaced huge segments of the workforce**. The continent has grown richer and more connected, but at the cost of **deep social strains**.

**Political and social landscape:** Across the continent, voters have repeatedly chosen parties promising growth, jobs, and modernisation. This mandate has justified efficiency-driven policies that prioritise investors and technological upgrading, even when workers are put at risk. Democratisation has brought a **strong human rights framework**. Constitutions guarantee labour rights, social protection, and freedom of association. NGOs and unions are active and often well resourced, strengthened by improvements in education and communications technologies, but trade unions have not found fertile ground among the population. As a result, workers' rights are protected on paper but less in everyday practices. In this moment of great uncertainty, especially in AI-augmented sectors, workers face long hours and constant monitoring, leading to widespread burnout and mental health issues. While these health consequences are discussed in national fora, in practice employers have not taken any measures to prevent them as it is more cost-effective to hire new personnel from the pool of unemployed national and foreign workers.

**Economy, labour and inequality:** Many tasks that once employed millions have been automated or offshored into virtual platforms. The private sector is thriving, with spectacular growth in AI-intensive industries, logistics corridors, and digital services. However, **regulation has lagged** and labour standards are weak. A new middle and upper class of tech, finance and professional workers enjoys high incomes but suffers from poor work-life balance and intense performance pressure. Below them, large populations of displaced workers rotate through temporary jobs, retraining schemes and informal economic activities. **Cities have experienced mushroom-like growth**. Booming metropolitan cores and specialised corridors sit next to sprawling peri-urban zones and informal settlements. Although these urban conglomerates offer increasingly undesirable living conditions, they provide opportunities for informal activities which are the only lifeline for the large numbers of jobless people. In the meantime, those who can – high-income residents and high-skilled workers – seek 'greener pastures' outside of the continent, where similar AI-induced struggles are present, but where government control has attempted to contain its negative effects on the labour market.

**Services, governance and corruption:** Overall, access to social services has improved. Digital identity and payment systems allow governments to roll out cash transfers, health insurance, and **schooling** more widely. But as governments encourage private actors to provide and manage services, new forms of **corruption** emerge: selective commercial and residential development zoning, politically connected concessions, and unequal access to high quality schools, clinics and transport. Democratic systems have enshrined civic rights, but labour rights are often prioritised only for nationals. Rising economic anxiety has **fuelled xenophobia**, especially in areas with high unemployment. Migrant workers are tolerated as long as they fill gaps in the labour market, but remain vulnerable to political backlash. Regardless, the stability of African countries has made them attractive destinations for foreigners who come from conflict areas and seek asylum, hoping to be able to start a new life in Africa.

**Global interdependence and foreign influence:** Africa's democratic economies are now deeply embedded in global trade and data flows. Trade competition has intensified, and a 'winner takes all' mentality shapes both business and politics. Countries compete to host AI data centres, logistics hubs, and regional headquarters.

**Multilateralism is increasingly interest based.** Regional and global fora still exist, but agreements are often transactional and project driven. They offer investment and technology in exchange for market access, votes in international organisations, and alignment on digital governance standards. **Aid has become largely transactional and opportunistic**, often tied to trade and migration deals. Investments, projects and aid activities are accompanied by people's movements, mainly workers of various skill levels, both national and foreign, needed to implement and manage these initiatives who are reshuffled depending on need.

**Water, resources and conflict:** To attract investment, governments have granted **long term extraction and management rights over water**, minerals, and land to national and international private companies. AI is central in monitoring flows, predicting scarcity and allocating resources, but these systems are configured around corporate contracts and profit, not equity. As climate change bites, **water-based conflicts intensify**. Cross-border tensions flare where rivers and aquifers cross national boundaries. Democratic governments are caught between their obligations to citizens, the power of investors, and the fear of losing competitiveness. The result is that some areas experience recurring droughts, the loss of agricultural production, and the loss of a sustainable livelihood for these areas' residents. After waiting for years for the government to support its citizens rather than powerful investors, residents of these areas have abandoned the rural land for urban centres.

**Mobility and migration:** By 2045, hypermobility within the continent is normal. People move frequently between cities and countries in search of work, training, and better services. The democracies' relative openness, combined with the disruptions of AI, has created a pattern of constant circulation. High-skilled workers in sectors like healthcare, education, and tech emigrate to destinations offering better work-life balance and social protections. Workers displaced by AI in factories, back office services, and some public sectors also seek to leave, pursuing opportunities in other African countries and beyond, although their movement is greatly constrained by highly selective migration policies. This is largely due to the fact that AI has replaced workers in these same jobs across the globe. At the same time, some sectors that remained labour-intensive or strategically protected (certain industries, care sectors, resource management, regional tech hubs) attract high-skilled immigrants, both from within Africa and from other regions. The continent's stability offers a safe place for people leaving areas of conflict.

# Scenario narrative

## Digital Dark Ages



It is November 2045 and across much of Africa, **autocratic governments preside over societies which have been transformed by sweeping automation. AI has replaced large sectors of the workforce, stripping millions of meaningful employment and concentrating economic and political power in the hands of those who control the technological infrastructure. This is a world defined not by digital progress but by digital extraction, repression, and an expanding divide between those with access and those without it.**

**Political landscape: Human rights have sharply declined.** Autocratic regimes maintain power through **AI-driven surveillance systems** that monitor biometric data, communication patterns, and online activity. **Civil registration** — once an administrative necessity — has evolved into a deeply intrusive form of governance. Every movement, every transaction, every post or message feeds into government models that assign individuals an ‘obedience score’, shaping access to basic services and opportunities. Penalties rarely take the form of open violence; rather, individuals lose access to mobility permits, digital services, or food subsidies. The state uses these invisible levers to compel conformity. Trust from traditional development partners has evaporated, leaving governments **increasingly dependent on new donors who impose no human rights conditions.** These partnerships reinforce autocratic control while reorienting national priorities toward data extraction and resource exploitation. Residents look for ways to find refuge in African countries where governments have fewer intrusive practices. Increasingly, refuge is sought in other parts of the world, like South America where democratic governments have

taken a strong position to protect people from the most negative technological developments. The tight surveillance adds major obstacles to exit. Governments are proposing to introduce exit visas.

**Economic landscape and urbanisation:** The economic landscape is polarised. Automation has produced pockets of extreme technological sophistication, surrounded by large stretches of economic stagnation. Emerging donors invest heavily in these industrial enclaves, accelerating technological advancement without generating broad-based employment. **Urbanisation** continues but is increasingly concentrated in a few megacities that absorb state investment and house elite or politically favoured populations. These cities are highly segregated: gated technological hubs coexist with overcrowded districts where access to digital systems is minimal. **Secondary cities and rural areas experience deep decline** as public investment recedes. Local economies collapse, prompting environmentally induced migration toward already stressed urban centres.

**Social control and civil society:** NGOs operate as extensions of the state, their agendas aligned to government narratives. Independent journalism is extinct. Political unrest is contained through **constant monitoring and quiet sanctions**. An underground digital rights movement persists, developing tools to **subvert surveillance and distribute uncensored information**. However, these networks are small and fragmented. Alongside them, a **nativist backlash** has emerged: groups that channel their frustration not toward the regime but toward perceived external threats or **scapegoated minorities**. While many people seek to leave, their ability to do so is thwarted by the surveillance measures in place. Moreover, those who want to emigrate the most are also those who have scarce financial resources as they have been left behind by the thwarted economic growth.

**Regional and global order: Regional cooperation has weakened.** African states, now heavily reliant on non-value-based foreign investors, compete intensely with one another for industrial contracts. Deals are crafted bilaterally and confidentially, eroding trust among neighbours. **Infrastructurally**, the continent is more connected than ever, but through channels defined by extraction, technological dependency, and migration control. African countries are more technologically advanced than ever, yet their societies are more closed and divided. Selected people – specific workers, businesspeople, and investors – travel, work, and reside across the continent, but while on paper the region upholds freedom of movement, border controls, and exit checks have become the norm.

**Water, climate and resource management:** Powerful foreign-backed industries like data-mining farms are major consumers of already **scarce water supplies**. The result is heightened competition for water, particularly around industrial corridors and megacities. **Resource-based conflicts have become more frequent** in rural regions, where communities face displacement driven by environmental

degradation and state-backed industrial expansion. **Climate stress** is framed as a threat requiring stricter control rather than community resilience, and AI models are used to allocate scarce water in ways that prioritise industrial zones over domestic use. Rural livelihoods are rapidly unsustainable, augmenting the movement of people from rural areas and the concentration in large urban sprawls around gated technological hubs and districts, where people hope to find formal or informal employment. Concentration of national and foreign jobless workers in these areas creates social tensions and growing xenophobia.

**Migration and labour under autocracy:** With AI having displaced much of the workforce, states no longer rely on domestic labour for development. Instead, labour is either automated or imported selectively through arrangements with emerging donors. Workers who remain active do so in unregulated informal sectors or government-controlled service roles. Motivations to flee have grown, but mobility is heavily restricted so that autocratic leaders can maintain control over their populations and prevent their citizens from being exposed to new ideas and systems of governance while abroad. Civil registration systems are tightly integrated with border management: an individual's social media activity, digital history, and obedience score determine whether they are considered a 'flight risk'. This makes successful irregular migration rare. Attempts to exit the country often trigger pre-emptive interventions long before reaching physical borders. Yet migration remains a powerful aspiration. Diaspora networks provide vital support, circulating information back home through encrypted channels, helping people navigate digital repression, and mobilising international attention where possible.



## Scenario narrative

# Algorithmic Big Men

It is November 2045 and across much of Africa, a new generation of *Algorithmic Big Men* governs. Autocrats have not only captured state institutions; they have woven AI into the core of their rule, using it to control markets, mobility and minds. Migration and labour have become carefully calibrated levers to secure power at home and influence abroad.

**Political landscape:** Two decades of incremental measures have normalised population-wide **surveillance**. **Civil registration**, once a basic administrative tool, has evolved into a continentwide web of biometric IDs, movement histories, and employment records. **Human rights protections have eroded**, and dissent is managed through predictive policing, targeted disinformation, and administrative sanctions rather than mass violence. At the same time, the regimes use the same data tools to **reduce everyday corruption and visible abuse of power**, making the system look 'cleaner' to citizens and international partners. With controlled media and AI-curated public narratives, **xenophobia declines**, and cross-border labour is framed as patriotic contributions to continental strength. Regimes actively promote a 'stable Africa' brand, underpinned by their own **cooperation**. The mix of government-led efforts have aided these leaders in securing strong supporters who hail them as benevolent visionaries. Citizens feel that, while highly imperfect, their livelihoods have overall improved. Lower corruption and abuse of power are seen as particularly important achievements. However, the African regimes seek ways to facilitate labour migration to sectors experiencing severe labour shortages in Europe. Concurrently, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) professionals from around the world have been attracted to this curated

image of these leaders and their regimes. For many of them, stability and access to permanent jobs are worth giving up some personal freedom and control as better conditions are rare to find in other parts of the world.

**Economic landscape and urbanisation:** The economic map of the continent has been redrawn by AI models used by technocratic teams aligned with the Big Men. Once peripheral, **secondary cities have been deliberately grown** into industrial and logistics hubs. Forced resettlements and 'planned internal displacement' are justified as necessary for climate adaptation and economic efficiency. People are moved out of high-risk rural zones and low-productivity areas into expanding urban corridors. In these cities, **AI largely complements labour** by matching workers to tasks that machines cannot do at scale or at acceptable political cost. **Economic growth has accelerated** across much of Africa due to **tight cooperation between autocratic governments and large trade corporations**. Streamlined regulation, predictable (if repressive) governance, and disciplined labour pools make these states attractive for global supply chains seeking stability. Aspirations to enter and work in Africa have significantly increased over the last decade. World leaders remark on the success of the African model of adopting AI in the labour market and workers worldwide see Africa

as a good migration destination where your skills are augmented, rather than replaced, by AI. The accolades of world leaders are broadcasted widely within the African continent and used as information campaign to discourage the emigration of African STEM workers who are constrained by Big Men surveillance tactics.

**External actors and aid:** The **EU has deepened its partnerships** with these autocratic regimes, driven by its own **ageing population and labour needs**, and by fears of uncontrolled migration. **Aid has increased** in exchange for labour agreements and border control. In a more **multipolar world**, this has further entangled Europe with Africa's Big Men. AI tools for labour matching, skills certification, and mobility control are often co developed with European and Asian partners, reinforcing global interdependence around the management of people. These partnerships have been contested in the EU as EU citizens lament the lack of human and civil rights in African countries, while also observing keenly how the Big Men have controlled AI adoption in the labour market to much greater benefit of their populations in comparison to the EU. While initially EU fears were of uncontrolled migration to the EU, in practice the EU has been losing needed workers to its African partners and has had to establish generous labour recruitment agreements that provide professional training, housing, and benefits to migrants who agree to work at least five years in the EU. Overall, border controls initially set up to prevent immigration from Africa to the EU are now used to control the exit of EU citizens and long-term migrants.

**Regional and global order:** Within Africa **cooperation increasingly happens bilaterally**, built on personal relationships between strongmen and corporate elites. **Pan-African regional organisations have weakened**, as bilateral favouritism and selective deals undercut collective bargaining and regional solidarity. Relations with the EU are not without tensions, but cooperation ensues among strong leaders and with corporate elites across the two continents. As a result, some countries in Africa develop more dynamic economies than others, leading to greater concentration of trade and intra-African and international migration towards those dynamic hubs.

**Water, climate and resource management: Climate shocks and water scarcity have intensified**, but overt **water conflicts are rarer** than expected. Autocratic leaders, assisted by shared AI based forecasting tools, coordinate dam operations, water transfers, and emergency responses. This cooperation is elite-centric and opaque, but it delivers enough stability to reinforce their legitimacy. Many rural areas are vulnerable to droughts and floods, but government planning helps to avoid severe disasters and enables rural livelihoods to endure through climate and water crises. Rural youth, however, are sceptical of governments' commitments to resource management in the long-term and prefer to establish themselves near urban areas. Occasionally, these young farmers establish peri-urban farming enterprises, where they feel access to water is more secure and they can benefit from higher levels of protection from extreme climate events.

**Migration and labour as instruments of power:** Demographic decline in destination countries in Europe and parts of Asia has created chronic labour shortages which has been filled only partially by AI technology. African autocracies exploit this, turning labour exports into a strategic asset. AI enhanced population registries allow regimes to identify, train, and deploy workers abroad with high precision. Lower skilled workers are sent abroad through bilateral labour agreements, designed to plug gaps in care work, agriculture, construction, and basic services. High-skilled workers, especially in STEM and AI-related sectors, are actively prevented from leaving through a mix of incentives, surveillance, and exit restrictions, and are concentrated in key domestic hubs. These controlled labour corridors generate remittances, leverage, and diplomatic goodwill. European and Asian countries that accept workers are expected to provide aid, technology, and political support in return. However, the worker exchanges, particularly among the diaspora, are allowing the infiltration of information and subversive ideas that create pockets of resistance. The Big Men are watching closely, always keeping a close grip on the balance between allowing in necessary workers, enabling emigration of surplus work, and maintaining a functional economy.

# Discussion

**The relative certainties and uncertainties and the two sets of scenarios presented in the previous sections provide numerous elements meant to be used for brainstorming, sparking questions and discussions, and further elaborations and research. We bring to the fore three specific ways in which we can learn from creating and reading scenario narratives.**

First, **each of the four scenarios in each of the matrices relies on the same set of relative uncertainties**, which have been bundled into five broad categories. For the African perspective scenarios, the five dimensions are: political landscape, economic landscape and urbanisation, external actors and aid, regional and global order and water, climate and resource management. The uncertainties in these bundles unfold in different ways and directions depending on how the narrative develops. **By focusing on one dimension across the set of four scenarios, we learn about possible, unexpected shifts.** Visualising these changes through a narrative helps us challenge our assumptions and break down mental barriers of what we believe is unlikely or impossible to occur in the future.

Second, **each set of scenarios seeks to strike a balance between more and less desirable developments in an attempt to depict real-life situations.** Yet, some individual scenarios are more desirable than others. Our task is not to focus on the scenario that is most desirable, use it for decision-making, and discard the rest. Rather, **we seek to learn from reading all scenarios and the different insights that emerge.** For example, in the scenario titled Fearful Future, Fragile Future, we observe how in a situation of conflict, European governments make great efforts to provide basic services for all on European soil. This scenario encourages us to reflect on the social developments that would enable this combination of factors, what economic structure would be required, how environmental issues would be addressed, and ultimately what kind of migration we would expect based on existing knowledge on migrant decision-making and migration policy decision-making.

Third, in **each scenario we show how each dimension would bring about specific forms of movements** – internal or international, temporary or permanent – **involving different segments of the population.** At the end of each scenario, we provide a paragraph summarising in broad strokes the migration patterns and policies that emerged.

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**Having explained how best to read the scenarios and their components, we would like to offer a few insights gained through this scenario exercise:**

- We emphasise that the European and African perspective scenarios followed different

priorities because they were identified by two distinct groups with different participants; both groups included European and African participants, but more Europeans were in the European perspective group and more African participants in the African perspective group. This had important consequences, such as

the areas of focus and the level of detail. For example, it is evident that the **geopolitical context at the time of the workshop** – with the wars in Ukraine and Palestine – **provided a strong background that influenced the participants** who focused on European perspective scenarios, where conflict played a significant role. Yet, putting conflict at the centre was a valuable starting point for in-depth discussions on possible shifts at national and supranational levels, including further changes in the EU and NATO, and reflections about conflicts around the world and their influence on Europe and Africa. It was also valuable to reflect on how these conflict-related changes would impact various forms of migration.

- While political and economic factors are generally perceived as the strongest social forces that influence migration, we sought to present how these two dimensions are often greatly intertwined with other social factors. Moreover, **migration** is rarely driven by a single driver; rather, it **responds to configurations of factors that are not always readily identified**.
- Migration may be associated with the presence or the absence of a certain factor. **Only when we know how a potential migration driver interplays with other factors, can we understand how migration dynamics may unfold**. Thus, government intervention in climate change adaptation may be associated with certain forms of migration, for example the movement of workers on infrastructural projects, while a lack of intervention would trigger other forms of migration, such as internal displacement. Similarly, whether in the future we will have more positive attitudes towards migration or more xenophobic tendencies depends on a set of broader societal conditions.

- We identify the **constant presence of various forms of mobility**. This reveals the complex ways in which people make migration decisions which are **often insufficiently explored in simplistic policy categories** that group people as refugees, workers, family members, and so on. This also critiques simple divisions of countries as ‘origin’, ‘transit’, and ‘destination’.
- The scenario narratives and their migration outcomes show how **migration patterns often follow their own dynamic, with great influence of non-migration policies and more limited reactions to migration policies**. In fact, when we read across the scenarios, we gain greater understanding of how migration is omnipresent – as much in the past and present as in the future.
- When we think specifically about **future migration between Africa and Europe**, we observe that it **could take a wide variety of forms and directions**. While today’s migration patterns within Africa and from Africa to Europe may continue, we also identified possible new patterns, such as the large-scale departure of foreign humanitarian and development aid professionals and the desire of international migrants, including Europeans, to live and work in African countries where living conditions were better than in Europe.

It is easy to see how these insights present a challenge for policymakers who may prefer clear future predictions and more concrete policy suggestions to turn into practical policy tools. Yet, these scenarios provide valuable insights that invite policymakers to design and test policies that enable governments to adapt their approach according to the changes identified in the scenarios. To facilitate this process, in the concluding section, we provide a set of recommendations for policy, practice and research.

# Insights for future migration research, policy, and practice

The insights generated through this scenario-building workshop conducted within the framework of the PACES project highlight that future migration between Africa and Europe will not emerge from linear trends or isolated drivers. Rather, migration will continue to be shaped by complex socioeconomic dynamics, political decisions, and technological and environmental change, as well as interactions between what is known, uncertain, and currently unthinkable. The methodology's structured set of exercises underscored the fact that 'migration is not self-emerging; it is a response to social change and social dynamics', and that anticipating these transformations requires engaging with uncertainty, blind spots, and divergent perspectives (Workshop participant, November 2025). The following recommendations build on these insights and are intended to inform migration research, policymaking, and practice.



Local transport buses in Adama, Ethiopia

# Recommendations for policy

## Design migration policies that are robust across multiple possible futures

The scenarios illustrate that policies optimised for a single expected or even desired future may perform poorly under alternative conditions, such as conflict, technological change, or prolonged instability. Policymakers may benefit from stress testing migration policies against a range of plausible futures, asking not which policy works best in ideal conditions, but which ones fail least when conditions change. Similarly, policymakers may consider the broad range of sectors that intersect with migration issues, stressing the importance of stakeholder collaboration and consultation during policy development and implementation.

## Avoid treating access to basic services as separate from migration governance

Across multiple scenarios, access to services such as healthcare, education, water, housing, and digital infrastructure emerges as a factor shaping mobility, stability, and social cohesion. This is not to frame the provision of core services, or lack thereof, as a major migration driver. Research shows it is not. Instead, the scenarios show how basic services can better facilitate mobility and circularity, structure migration patterns, and impact the integration experiences of migrants. Migration policymaking that treats service provision as external to migration governance risks underestimating how the two are intertwined. This point has emerged in PACES papers which examined the role of migration, non-migration policies and particular welfare generosity and access on migration strategies (Bakewell, Mýtna Kureková and Kováčová 2024; Guzi and Kureková 2025).

## Recognise that migration futures are shaped as much by inaction as by action

Several scenarios highlight how delayed, fragmented, or symbolic responses, either at the state or regional level, can cumulatively shape migration outcomes over time. PACES research in Algeria, Ethiopia and Nigeria came to similar conclusions when it highlighted that both change and lack of change may act as important triggers of mobility aspirations<sup>3</sup>. Policymakers may wish to reflect on how policy gaps, coordination failures, or deferred decisions can become decisive in shaping migration decisions in the long run.

## Prepare for shifting public narratives and value frameworks

The scenarios suggest that public attitudes toward migration, solidarity, and human rights may evolve in divergent directions depending on broader societal conditions. In some regions, we are already seeing 'weak signals' of such change. Policymakers should be cautious about assuming stable public preferences<sup>4</sup>, and instead invest in adaptive communication strategies that can respond to changing narratives without amplifying polarisation.

## Strengthen anticipatory governance capacities

Rather than relying solely on crisis-driven responses, policymakers may benefit from institutionalising anticipatory action, that allows migration governance to engage proactively with uncertainty and long term change. In the field of environmental and climate change, we see some countries already investing in early warning and early action systems and disaster management capacities. Similar approaches could be taken to proactively engage with the possible repercussions of conflict in Europe or of AI taking jobs from large segments of the workforce.

<sup>3</sup> The PACES partners are currently working on publications comparing social transformation in these three countries which show people's responses to (lack of) change and the relations to aspirations to stay and migrate.

<sup>4</sup> Readers can consult the article "Understanding Public Ambivalence about Immigration: The Role of Legal Heuristics" by Anne-Marie Jeannet and Marcela Rubio (2026) on current public opinion on migration policies in six European countries to gain insights on how people's policy preferences cross-cut conventional political agendas.

# Recommendations for practice

## **Build flexibility into migration programmes**

Across the scenarios, rapid shifts in political contexts, funding availability, security conditions, and service capacity repeatedly reshape what is feasible on the ground. Migration programmes that are overly rigid risk becoming obsolete or counterproductive. Flexible designs, adaptive management, and contingency planning are of critical importance.

## **Prepare for working with sub-national authorities**

Several futures depict settings where national frameworks weaken while local, municipal, or informal actors take on greater roles in service provision and mobility management. Practitioners may need to strengthen their capacity to work across different or local governance landscapes, including with non traditional partners and sub national authorities.

## **Avoid assuming stable categories of 'migrants', 'refugees', and 'hosts'**

The scenarios show how people may move in and out of different legal, social, and economic categories over time, sometimes within the same country or region. Category-based policies may fail to reach their target groups, while programmes that rely on fixed categories risk excluding those who fall between them. More fluid, 'mixed', and needs based approaches may be better suited to uncertain futures.

## **Avoid assuming countries are either 'origin', 'transit' or 'destination'**

Social changes and the concurrent variations in various forms of mobility confirm the irrelevance of these categories as population exchanges are in constant flux reflecting distinct social groups, special coverage and time periods. When looking towards the future and noticing shifts in migration over time, the limited value of these categories becomes particularly visible.

## **Invest in organisational learning and reflexivity**

Participants emphasised that scenario building helped them recognise their own assumptions and blind spots. Migration organisations may benefit from embedding similar reflective practices, such as after action reviews or scenario discussions, into routine programming, rather than reserving them for moments of crisis and conflict. Organisations might also consider in bringing in diverse stakeholders into programme planning and future strategy workshops and design processes.

## **Use scenarios as engagement tools rather than advocacy instruments**

Consistent with the GMF Scenario Methodology, scenarios are most effective when used to stimulate dialogue, reflection, and preparedness, rather than to promote specific agendas or predictions. Practitioners may find value in using scenarios to engage policymakers, communities, and partners in conversations about uncertainty, trade offs, and long term choices.

# Recommendations for migration research

## **Move beyond linear and single driver explanations of migration futures**

Future migration dynamics will emerge from the interaction of multiple, interdependent forces, rather than from any single driver. Migration research would benefit from approaches that explicitly examine these interactions, resist linear causal narratives, and remain attentive to feedback loops. This way of explaining migration aligns with the approach taken in the PACES project to study how people make decisions to stay or migrate, which combines analyses over time, space and across analytical levels (see Vezzoli et al. 2024)

## **Use scenario methodologies as a complement to empirical and predictive research**

Participants highlighted the value of starting from 'extreme but still thinkable' futures to expand analytical horizons. Scenario-based approaches can complement quantitative modelling and trend analysis by making uncertainty explicit, challenging implicit assumptions, and surfacing futures for which little or no data yet exist. Greater methodological pluralism can strengthen the relevance of migration research in times of rapid change.

## **Pay greater attention to intra regional and reverse migration dynamics**

Several scenarios point to futures characterised by movements within Europe, within Africa, into Africa and out of Europe. Migration research has often privileged South-North trajectories; future work should devote greater attention to intra-regional mobility, circular movements, and shifting directions of migration as structural conditions evolve.

## **Integrate decision-making processes into analyses of migration outcomes**

A central insight of the PACES project, reinforced by the scenarios, is that migration futures are shaped not only by structural conditions but by how decisions are made by governments, institutions, communities, and individuals under uncertainty. Research that explicitly examines how knowledge is used, contested, or ignored in migration related decision-making can help explain why similar conditions lead to different migration outcomes across contexts.

## **Invest in collaborative, cross sectoral research processes**

Participants noted that engaging actors with diverse professional backgrounds and levels of expertise helped surface blind spots and challenge disciplinary assumptions. Migration research that is co produced across academia, policy, practice, and affected communities may be better equipped to grapple with complex and uncertain futures than research conducted within disciplinary silos.

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## Annex

The scenario workshop involved 12 participants who were representatives of:

- Universities, including faculty and PhD students (Leiden University, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Philipps Universität Marburg, University of Alicante, and University of Amsterdam);
- Regional and national governments (German Federal Office, Predictive Migration Analysis; Kenya's National Coordination Mechanism on Migration; and the African Union Commission's Labour, Employment, and Migration Unit);
- International organisations (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Vienna and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD));
- Civil society and religious organisations (Save the Children Netherlands, Diaconie, and Here to Support);
- Private sector (The Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC)); and
- People with a direct migration experience in Germany, Slovakia, and the Netherlands.

# PACES

Making migration and migration policy decisions  
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