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# Foreword

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Africa has the fastest urban growth in the world. The continent's population is projected to double between now and 2050. Two-thirds of this growth will be absorbed by urban areas and, in the next 30 years, cities will be home to an additional 950 million people. This offers great opportunities, but also challenges for African citizens, businesses, governments and their partners. The political development agenda needs to be revamped as policy decisions taken today will have lasting consequences for generations.

At the continental level, the ongoing transition towards a mainly urban Africa is part of the African Union's Agenda 2063. At the global level, the strong interplay between urbanisation and development has been acknowledged and put at the heart of the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda. The emphasis on urbanisation in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflects the pivotal role of cities in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Moreover, cities are becoming key actors in combating climate change and ensuring sustainability, and African urban centres will be instrumental in this regard.

The OECD is supporting this transition through a wealth of new knowledge and the world's first continent-wide comparable database on urbanisation produced by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) through Africapolis.org, a unique platform that portrays Africa's urbanisation dynamics. By including all agglomerations with more than 10 000 inhabitants, Africapolis has identified over 7 600 agglomerations in 50 countries so far, depicting a vivid image of Africa's rapid

urban growth. The platform also contributes to a new and more realistic vision of existing urbanisation trends on the continent and the challenges they present for sustainable urban development in the future.

*Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2020* analyses the drivers, trends and forms of urbanisation based on Africapolis data. It proposes more inclusive and targeted territorial policy options that integrate the social and environmental impacts of urban development and acknowledge the determining role of cities as economic drivers. It notably finds that Africa is already largely urban, with more than 50% of Africans living in agglomerations. It also finds that, in the coming decades, existing cities will continue to grow and many new ones will emerge through processes that defy common assumptions about urbanisation.

The spatial dimension adopted in this analysis helps to identify unprecedented, multiscale territorial transformation processes: the development of metropolises and intermediary cities, the merging of villages into mega-agglomerations and the formation of new transnational metropolitan regions. These processes are unique and diverse, and they call for tailored policies connected to the realities of urban Africa.

These realities are reflected in the staggering urbanisation numbers that Africapolis has revealed. Specifically, it identifies 67 national metropolises, accounting for one-third of the total urban population (183 million) and 74 urban agglomerations with more than 1 million inhabitants (equivalent to the United States and Europe combined).

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Ninety-seven percent of Africa's urban areas have fewer than 300 000 inhabitants. Many of these are not officially recognised as urban areas, highlighting the very fragmented nature of African urbanisation.

These realities also reflect a persistent imbalance, particularly in terms of wealth and resource allocation, between metropolitan agglomerations and intermediary agglomerations, both of which play a key role in shaping the social agenda and reducing inequalities.

Many intermediary agglomerations are unaccounted for in major international databases. However, they represent a major opportunity to consolidate urban networks and connect local communities to continental and global economies. Still, much data and knowledge gaps — at local and national level — exist and hinder effective policy making. Time has come for policymakers and development partners to harness the potential of these spectacular urban

dynamics for policymaking. We must invest in intermediary agglomerations and seek to unleash their potential for sustainable urban and economic growth.

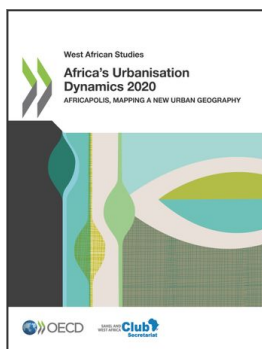
Africa's urban transition offers tremendous opportunities to develop new social, economic, environmental and political development models and to address critical challenges, such as digital transformation and climate change. In order to contribute to shaping an inclusive African urban future together, to improve countries' abilities to manage the urban transition and to help build better cities for better lives, we must provide improved data for better decision-making, innovative tools for stronger qualitative analysis and the leveraging of new technologies. *Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2020* sets the foundation on which these important policy decisions and necessary changes can be made.

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