Slow Fertility Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa: What Implications for Europe’s Development Aid and Migration Policies?

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SLOW FERTILITY TRANSITION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE’S DEVELOPMENT AID AND MIGRATION POLICIES?

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ABSTRACT

Point of departure for this essay is the existing literature stressing the high fertility rate that—in spite of the remarkable decline in infant mortality—still characterizes Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), whose anomalously slow demographic transition does not seem to replicate the experience of other regions of the developing world. It emerges from this discussion that socio-economic and cultural factors reinforce each other in determining this phenomenon, thus making plausible that the choices concerning the number of offsprings are also the result of a specific “Africa effect”, associated to pronatalist social norms and to the peculiar structure of the African family. We then assess the possibility that SSA can fully enjoy the benefits of the so-called demographic dividend: we expressed a note of skepticism about this possibility, based on the unsatisfactory past performance of both the agricultural and the manufacturing sector in most SSA countries, and on the pattern of urbanization—dubbed “urbanization without growth”—that has emerged in a period of rapid increase in the number of people living in SSA cities. We also explore two channels through which the speed at which SSA’s demographic transition is likely to take place has important consequences for the rest of the world: climate change and migration. In particular, we state that the more rapid growth of income per capita that the acceleration of the demographic transition may bring about in SSA is not going in the short-to medium run to reduce its migration pressure on other regions of the world (and on Europe in particular). This is because—consistently with the “mobility transition” theory and the related cross-country evidence—we claim that a higher income per capita will raise both Africans’ aspirations and capabilities to migrate overseas. It follows from the latter conclusion that international development aid—even if effective—cannot reduce SSA migration pressure on Europe in the predictable future (in contrast with what most commentators and politicians keep claiming). This does not mean, however, that Europe should not be committed to assist and support socio-economic development in SSA. It may rather imply a sort of decoupling between advanced economies’ strategies concerning development aid to SSA and their migration policies. Hence, we select three objectives to which the advanced economies should give priority if they want to support SSA’s development: fertility reduction, rapid productivity gains in agriculture, and transformation of urban agglomerations in dynamic drivers of growth. Finally, we propose a comprehensive research agenda aimed at investigating the medium to long-term effects of massive SSA migration to Southern Europe.

Key words: demographic transition, development process, informal sector, dualistic labor market, fertility rate.

JEL classification numbers: J11, J13, J15, J61, O15.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the United Nations (UN) has repeatedly revised upward the projections of world population levels for the rest of the 21st century (see table 1 and figure 1) essentially because the population of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is increasing faster than it was previously predicted. As a result of this rapid increase, it is expected that Africa’s population—which has already more than doubled over the last 3 decades—will double by 2050 and that more than half of the growth in the world working-age population (aged 20-64 years) from now to then will be due to SSA (see table 2).

The working-age population boom that is predicted in SSA sharply contrasts the big fall in working-age population that is anticipated in Europe (and in East Asia) for the rest of this century. Although long-term demographic predictions should be taken with caution, as in the past fertility and mortality have evolved in various regions of the world at quite different pace than projected, it is time to seriously examine what are going to be the likely consequences and policy implications of these trends both for Africa and for Europe. This essay intends to contribute to this assessment with a synthetic and selective overview of some of the issues raised by this acute demographic imbalance.

TABLE 1. POPULATION OF THE WORLD AND REGIONS, VARIOUS YEARS, ACCORDING TO THE MEDIUM-VARIANT PROJECTION*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region, country or area</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>2 536 275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>228 670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>1 404 062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>549 375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>168 918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>172 603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>12 648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The UN makes 4 basic projections: the high and the low variant are obtained by, respectively, adding 0.5 and subtracting 0.5 to the fertility rate used for the medium variant, and the constant-fertility variant, which is obtained by keeping the fertility rate at its current level.

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017)

TABLE 2. Projected change in population aged 20–64 years in major world regions 2015–2050

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population 2015 (millions)</th>
<th>Population 2050 (millions)</th>
<th>Absolute change (millions)</th>
<th>Percent change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>+684</td>
<td>+164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>−230</td>
<td>−21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-central Asia</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>+458</td>
<td>+44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-east Asia</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>+88</td>
<td>+24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Asia/North Africa</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>+161</td>
<td>+61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>+83</td>
<td>+23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>−85</td>
<td>−19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td>+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>+41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>4,235</td>
<td>5423</td>
<td>+1,188</td>
<td>+28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The essay is organized as follows:

Section 2 explores the literature that seek to explain why, in spite of a remarkable decline in infant mortality, SSA’s fertility rate is still high and its slow demographic transition does not seem to replicate the experience of other regions of the developing world.

Section 3 discusses the possibility for SSA to fully benefit from the so-called “demographic dividend”, namely the positive impact on economic growth and living standards that the increase in the workforce to total population ratio may bring about over the next decades.

Section 4 is dedicated to the possible consequences of SSA fertility transition for the global environment and for SSA extra-continental emigration.

Section 5 treats the implications of what discussed in the previous sections for the international community and the European Union (EU) in particular, selecting a few policies to which they should give priority if they want to support SSA’s development.

In section 6 we deal with the research agenda that should be put forth in order to shed light on the effects of SSA migration that are peculiar to Southern Europe (SE), the region that for its geographical proximity is more directly exposed to the growing SSA migration pressure.

Section 7 summarizes the main conclusions of this essay.

2. High fertility rate and the “Africa effect”

The amazing SSA population growth is the result of a remarkable fall in mortality—especially infant mortality—(see figure 2), which has been accompanied by a decline in fertility that is particularly slow in comparison with the experience of other regions (see figure 3): in East Asia, for
instance, fertility declined from 5.6 children per woman in 1950-55 to 1.6 in 2005-10, while in SSA it declined from 6.5 to 5.4 over the same period.¹

FIGURE 2. Life expectancy at birth (years) by region: estimates 1975-2015 and projections 2015-2050

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017)

FIGURE 3. Total fertility rate by region, 1960-2014

Source: Bongaarts (2017)

¹ Optimism about a rapid fertility decline in SSA was still widespread among experts in the 1990s and dissipated when evidence steadily accumulated through the 2000s showing that declines that had begun in the 1980s and early 1990s were slowing down, and in the case of some countries in Middle and West Africa were stalled.
The drastic reduction in mortality recorded in SSA has been achieved in spite of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and more recently of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Foreign donors, aid agencies and international organizations have crucially supported the SSA governments in financing and implementing those vaccination campaigns, distributions of insecticide-treated nets for preventing malaria, supplementation programmes providing essential micronutrients, investments in health facilities and systems which have all contributed to this reduction. To explain how the latter could be compatible in SSA with persistently high fertility rates, it has been argued (Fox, 2017) that the scientific knowledge, medical technologies, hygiene standards and health arrangements that has made possible this sustained mortality decline have been transferred from the developed world and applied in contexts where both broad-based economic development has not yet occurred and pre-existing social norms, family structures and mentalities are resilient and particularly pronatalist. This contrasts with the experience of the West, where the medical and hygiene revolution needed to increase life expectancy was the gradual result of a long endogenous process in the course of which both industrial revolutions took place and traditional cultural values and social structures were eroded. This contrasts also with what happened in other parts of the developing world (especially in East Asia), where the application of Western medical technologies and practices permitted a rapid decline of mortality, but dominant cultures were less pronatalist, and above all where authoritative developmental states had the capabilities to undertake effective population control policies, thus accelerating the demographic transition.

One could argue that the slow pace of fertility decline characterizing SSA can be only partially explained by its levels of social and economic development. This hypothesis is corroborated by Bongaarts (2017), who shows that at a given level of development (as captured by indicators measuring GDP per capita, education, life expectancy, and urbanization) Africa’s fertility is higher, contraceptive use is lower, and desired family size is higher than in non-African less developed countries. The importance of ancestry and descent in African traditional society and religion, the
diffusion of polygyny (especially in West and Middle Africa), the prestige attached to men who
father many children, the reliance on communal land and kinship networks, and the role of the
extended family and village community in child rearing are among the factors emphasized to
explain this peculiar “Africa effect” (see Caldwell et al., 1992). Although invoking a sort of
“African exceptionalism” may appear at odds with the reality of a vast continent whose sub-regions
are diverse with regard to natural endowment, culture and political experience, this explanation is
consistent with a narrative according to which “Homo Africanus is not a homo economicus in the
strict sense of the expression. His choice are, among other things, motivated by principles of honor,
redistribution, subsistence, gifts and counter-gifts, ritual gifts, and so forth. A great many activities
take place off the market or in a setting of primary sociability (family, social relationships) or
secondary sociability (social system that includes an injunction to generosity)” (Sarr, 2015: p. 343).

Actually, economic and culturalist explanations of high fertility in SSA are not mutually
exclusive, since economic factors, such as the lack of decent job opportunities that discourages
female labor force participation and lowers the opportunity costs of children, and cultural factors,
such as social norms that hinder women’s empowerment, reinforce each other. This is what makes
plausible that some SSA countries are entrapped in a high fertility socio-economic equilibrium,
where pronatalist beliefs are widely shared, use of contraceptives is discouraged, female education
is low, and economic growth is anemic (Prettner and Strulik, 2017). As argued by Bloom et al.
(2017), escaping such traps requires the coordination of policy interventions across many areas
(health, education, family planning), whose long-term results can be magnified by the fact that,
once a demographic transition gets under way, feedback loops tends typically to accelerate the
process.

With regard to the possibility that SSA governments undertake a comprehensive and non-transient
policy aimed at accelerating the demographic transition, it has been often noticed that African
leaders’ attitudes toward fertility are framed by their relationship with their constituencies and
cannot but reflect the social norms and cultural values that are most influential among their people.
This notwithstanding, SSA governments’ stance has not been homogenous, since it has ranged from Uganda (where until recently the government has opposed any measure to reduce fertility) to Rwanda (where family planning has been considered a national priority by the country’s political leadership), thus showing that also in SSA one may have committed local political elites willing to conduct effective policies for reducing fertility. This is even more relevant if one recognizes that the possibility for the international community (foreign governments, international development agencies, NGOs) to make pressure on SSA countries for the adoption of policies to curb fertility is limited by the risk of being perceived as imperialistic and tainted by Western values (May, 2017).

3. Demographic dividend or urbanization without growth?

The most appealing argument for convincing SSA audiences of the urgency of implementing consistent strategies for accelerating the reduction of fertility is the so-called “demographic dividend”, namely the positive impact on economic growth and living standards that the decrease of the dependency ratio (i.e., the ratio between those too young or too old for working and the working-age population) due to the demographic transition may bring about. Indeed, it is widely believed that also SSA economic growth could benefit from the significant shift in the age composition of the population that was among the drivers of the East Asian “economic miracle” (Mason, 2001; World Bank, 2015). This shift is associated with the propensity of parents and communities to limit the number of children in order to invest more in the health and education of each of them (the so-called quantity/quality trade-off), thus improving the quality of the workforce (Becker and Lewis, 1974; Galor, 2011). Moreover, smaller family sizes tend to enhance female labor market participation and to increase per capita income, which—together with the rise in life

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2 It is significant that Rwanda’s fertility rate—which in 1975-80 was one of the highest of the world (8.43)—is expected to be 3.78 in 2015-20, while Uganda’s fertility rate—which was 7.10 in 1975-80—is expected to be 5.46 in 2015-20.
expectancy—boosts households’ savings and capital accumulation. Hence, labor productivity grows rapidly, raising wages and giving rise to a cumulative process characterized by further reductions in fertility and improvements in productivity and standards of living.

Estimated effects of reductions in fertility in SSA vary. Ashraf et al. (2013) apply their simulation model to data from Nigeria and find that a decline of 0.5 children per woman phased in over 15 years can lead to an increase in GDP per capita of 5.6% after 20 years and of 11.9% after 50 years (implying an increment of 0.2% in the average annual GDP per capita growth over the 50 years period). According to Ahmed et al. (2004), the demographic dividend brings about an increase of 0.4% in average annual GDP growth (0.42 in the high-growth scenario and 0.37 in the low-growth scenario) over the 2011-2030 period. Estimates by Karra et al. (2017) are more optimistic: lowering total fertility rate by one child per woman over 15 years almost doubles income per head by 2060, where this large positive impact on income growth is mainly due—in the short to medium run—to the larger fraction of the workforce that enters the high-productivity modern sector of the economy.

The recent experience of many SSA countries give reasons for caution in assessing their possibility to seize the opportunity of falling fertility and dependency ratios for expanding high-productivity activities and speeding up their economic and social progress. As a matter of fact, Africa’s longest continuous period of buoyant GDP growth that began in the mid 1990s was mainly propelled by the extractive industries, which typically create few jobs and generate limited positive spillovers. The performance of the manufacturing sector was quite disappointing: the contribution of manufacturing to GDP declined in SSA from nearly 11 percent in the 1980s to 8.5 in the 2000s (see table 3); SSA’s (excluding South Africa) share of global manufacturing value added fell from

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3 Investment (gross fixed capital formation) in Africa was 17.7% of GDP in the period 1990–1999 and 18.7% in 2000–2011, whereas the average for all developing countries for the more recent period was 26%. Notice that Africa is supposed to have an investment rate of 25% if it wants to sustain an GDP growth rate of 7% per annum.

4 Between the mid 1990s and 2012, SSA has had the longest continuous expansion in over 50 years. Annual GDP growth averaged about 4% per annum among upper-middle income SSA countries and about 6% among low income SSA countries. These growth rates surpass those of middle and low income Asia over the same period (Fox et al., 2013).
2% to 1% between 1992 and 2012, whereas East Asia’s (including the Pacific) share raised over the same period from 30% to 58% (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2013). Also, the fraction of the workforce that is employed in the industrial sector is much smaller in Africa than in low and low-middle income countries located in other parts of the world.\(^5\)

Table 3. Level of Industrialization, by Region, manufacturing as a % of GDP, 1960s–2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>East Asia and the Pacific</th>
<th>Europe and Central Asia</th>
<th>Latin America and the Caribbean</th>
<th>Middle East and North Africa</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank

As Rodrik (2011, p. 29) points out, Africa has experienced “growth-reducing structural change during 1990-2005,” namely labor has shifted away from higher productivity activities such as manufacturing and towards lower productivity activities. This shift largely coincides with the phenomenon dubbed “urbanization without growth” (Fay and Opal, 2000; Fox, 2017), which is the fact that the unprecedently rapid increase in the number of people living in cities that has taken place in SSA over the last few decades (see table 4) has not been part of a Lewis’s transition process, namely the process whereby labor moves away from traditional (mainly rural) low-productive occupations and towards modern higher productivity (mainly industrial) activities. By contrast, the fast growing labor force residing in SSA urban settings has been predominantly absorbed into the informal sector, in the form of self-employment, family employment or micro-enterprises, undertaking low-productive activities in services (commerce, or petty trading, accounts for 50–70% of non-agricultural activities), typically based at home or on the street. This growth model is closely related to the pattern of urban expansion that has emerged in SSA, largely based on

\(^5\) In low income Bangladesh and Cambodia, 11% of the workforce is employed in the industrial sector, whereas in low income African countries the equivalent is 2.3%. In low-middle income countries this fraction is 2% in Africa, compared with a range from 5.4% in Laos to over 14% in Vietnam (Fox et al., 2013).
an informal housing development that has given rise to immense shanty towns. In this context, reforms aimed at establishing a formal and regulated urban housing market would be crucial to improve housing quality and have healthier urban environments, especially considering that—according to UN projections—Africa’s urban population is expected to triple between 2016 and 2050. Furthermore, these reforms can generate opportunities for currently informal micro-enterprises to grow and create decent jobs, thus contributing to that upgrading of entrepreneurship in the informal sector which is essential to enhance labor productivity in SSA (Collier, 2017).

Table 4. Urban growth, urbanization and GDP per capita growth by major world region, 1970–2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban growth rate</td>
<td>Urbanization rate</td>
<td>GDP per capita growth rate</td>
<td>Urban growth rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>−0.32</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Urban growth rate is the rate at which the absolute number of people residing in urban areas increases, while urbanization rate denotes the increase in the proportion of the population residing in urban areas. Source: Fox (2017)

The process of urbanization without growth mentioned above has not been paralleled by significant productivity improvements in agriculture, where still more than 60% of the SSA workforce is employed (or underemployed). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the reasons for the lack of progress in Africa’s agriculture and to discuss what are its future prospects. However, following Cleland and Machiyama (2017: pp. 274-275)—and without pretending to be exhaustive—we can coincide identify three major obstacles to progress in this crucial field:

6 As Collier and Venables (2013: p. 2) remark, “In Africa the process of formal investment in housing for ordinary urban households has not got underway: the typical household lives in a low-cost shack. The shack is likely to have been self-built; it will not comply with official building standards; rights of occupancy, though probably robust, will be informal, and the building will have been self-financed. The shack will be located in a shanty town which itself is informal: the local government will not have provided roads, electricity, street lighting, water or sewage.”
“First, the rural population will continue to increase, leading to further declines in arable land per farmer in countries lacking virgin land that can be brought under cultivation [...] About two-thirds of arable land suffers from degradation and lowered soil fertility, and increased production depends on organic or mineral additions [...] Population pressure poses an obvious risk of over-cropping and over-grazing of fragile ecosystems, leading to further soil degradation and erosion.

Second, about 95 percent of African agriculture is rainfed and thus extremely vulnerable to climate change. Little is known about the nature and threats of future climate change in sub-regions of Africa, but the strongest prediction of climate scientists is that extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, will become more frequent [...] Better water capture and storage are essential but the scale of needed investment is daunting, and, at least in the short term, vulnerability to erratic rainfall will persist. In addition, many crops in Africa are grown close to their limits of thermal tolerance. Most estimates of the effects of temperature rise predict serious losses in production [...] Third, farm sizes are small and security of tenure often lacking. Average farm size in Africa is 1.8 hectares and falling [...] Small farms tend to have higher yields per hectare but lower productivity per worker than larger units. In many settings, small units are insufficient for subsistence, let alone the production of a surplus for sale, and economies of scale, such as attained through mechanization, are difficult to achieve [...] A related concern is insecurity of ownership or tenure. It is estimated that that ownership of only 10 percent of land is registered, leaving many farmers open to land expropriation and abuse by corrupt officials [...] Moreover, insecurity of tenure acts as a disincentive to investments for the long term, such as terracing or tree planting.”

In spite of the serious problems that affect the SSA agricultural sector and the uncertainties due to climate change, labor-intensive crops such as cocoa, coffee, cotton and groundnuts—that are already important source of income for many SSA countries—can become much more than they are now drivers of export-led growth and jobs creation (Golub and Hayat, 2015). Obviously, product quality improvements and research aiming at making crops less vulnerable to extreme climatic conditions, together with organizational and managerial upgrading, are required to fully exploit this
comparative advantage. In contrast, it is more questionable whether SSA can become globally competitive in light manufacturing (Dinh et al., 2012). Indeed, skepticism about the possibility that Africa can gradually replace Asia as the world’s center for labor-intensive manufacturing is motivated by the fact that nowadays most SSA countries appear to have lower productivity, higher cost of raw materials and worse institutional quality compared to their cheap-labor competitors of South-East Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) and Southern Asia (including Bangladesh, India, and Nepal), without enjoying any clear wage-cost advantage with respect to these Asian economies (Cleland and Machiyama, 2017).

It follows from the brief overview outlined above that, without structural transformation, it will be hard for Africa to create the millions of higher-productivity jobs needed to offer decent living conditions to its young population. To this regard, we can share the concern expressed by Cleland and Machiyama (2017: p. 277): “The clear danger, however, is that the large increase in the labor force will simply swell the ranks of the self-employed with precarious livelihoods on farms and in petty trading.” If this pessimistic (but not unlikely) scenario will materialize, people’s aspirations—particularly of the young SSA population—are going to be frustrated, especially considering that these aspirations are on the rise as an effect of the higher education levels of a larger number of Africans. The implications of this scenario in terms of social unrest and political instability should be obvious, with inevitable repercussions on the rest of the world. Further consequences for other regions of the speed and modalities of the SSA’s demographic transition will be discussed in the next section.

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7 Also Gelb et al. (2013) conclude, by comparing labor costs and productivity in selected African countries relative to non-African low-cost competitors, that industrial labor costs are far higher in Africa than one might expect, given its levels of GDP per capita.

8 The proportion of adults with at least some secondary schooling is projected to grow in Western and Middle Africa from about 35% in 2015 to about 65% by 2050 and from 25% to 45% in East Africa (Wittgenstein Center for Demography and Global Human Capital, 2017)
4. The impact of fertility transition on environment and migration

It is apparent that in an integrated world both costs of overpopulation and benefits of population control are externalized to all countries through various channels. Two of them are briefly treated in this section: environment and migration.

The speed at which SSA’s demographic transition is likely to take place will affect the entire world through its impact on climate change. Although to be taken with great caution, model-based estimates of the long-term effects of lower world fertility on CO\(_2\) emissions indicate that a decrease of 0.5 births per woman can lead to a reduction of carbon per year by 2050, which is equivalent to 16-29% of the emission reductions deemed necessary for avoiding warming of more that 2 °C (O’Neill et al., 2010).\(^9\) Given the growing share of SSA on total world births, it follows from these estimates that the contribution of a more rapid fall of fertility in SSA on climate change mitigation would not be negligible, especially considering that SSA’s greenhouse gas emissions per capita (inclusive of land-use change and forestry)—which are relatively low nowadays—will rise with the increase in Africa’s living standards.

Estimates of the number of people that have migrated in the last decades because of weather anomalies in SSA give support to the fear that the effects of greenhouse gas accumulation may add up to the consequences of excessive human pressure on fragile ecosystems, thus raising future rates of migration in SSA.\(^10\) In general, however, data show that SSA migration is increasingly motivated

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\(^9\) The Population-Environment-Technology (PET) model adopted by O’Neill et al. (2010) is a nine-region dynamic computable general equilibrium model of the global economy. To test the effects of alternative variants of the UN demographic projections on CO\(_2\) emissions, O’Neill and his coauthors use different baseline scenarios of future emissions, patterned after two scenarios considered by the Special Report on Emissions Scenarios (SRES) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

\(^10\) Existing studies containing estimates and predictions of people displaced by environmental stresses generate very different numbers, since they even lack a consensual definition of “environmental migration” (for a critical review of many of these studies, see Demenne, 2011, who underlines that they often lack robust methodological foundations and are affected by flaws and biases, with some of them that appear to have been put forward to attract media attention). Among the predictions regarding SSA, one may mention that—according to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2014)—60 million people could move from the desertified areas of SSA towards North Africa and Europe by 2020 because of desertification. Marchiori et al. (2012) estimate that a minimum of about 5 million people migrated between 1960 and 2000 because of anomalies in local weather in sub-Saharan Africa (128,000 people every year). Projecting the impact of weather anomalies on the future rates of migration, they conclude—on the basis of the moderate IPCC climate scenario and on the medium variant of the UN population projections—that towards the end of
by economic considerations: the flow of refugees represents only 1/10 of total SSA migration within and outside the region in 2013, while it represented about half of total SSA migration in 1990 (IMF, 2016).

Following IMF (2016), it is also worth to notice that over the period between the early 1990s and 2013: i) SSA migration has increased as rapidly as its population (the migration rate—migration-to-total population—has remained stable at about 2%); ii) SSA migration outside the region—mainly to the industrialized countries (by 2013, 85% of SSA migrants outside the region were in countries belonging to the OECD, i.e., the Organization for Co-operation and Development)—has represented a rapidly increasing share of total migration, shrinking the share represented by those who migrate within the region (the latter were 75% of the total stock of SSA migrants in the early 1990s, whereas they became about 2/3 of this stock by 2013, see figure 4), and iii) SSA migration to Europe has increased much faster than to other industrialized countries (see figure 5). The trend outlined above is expected to continue: according to IMF (2016), SSA migrants in OECD countries are likely to increase from about 7 million in 2013 to about 34 million by 2050. Given this increase and the slow population growth projected for OECD countries, SSA migration as a share of OECD population could rise sixfold, reaching 2.4% by 2050 (figure 6).

the 21st century every year an additional 11.8 million inhabitants may move in SSA as a consequence of climate anomalies.

Source: IMF (2016)

FIGURE 5. African migration flows to selected OECD countries by continent of destination

Source: Flahaux and De Haas (2016)
Would the massive adoption of effective policies for reducing fertility in SSA relieve the migration pressure that this region will exert on the advanced economies in the next years? Theory and evidence indicate that, were these policies successful in accelerating economic growth thanks to their contribution to a faster demographic transition, SSA migration pressure on the advanced economies would be stronger in the short to medium term. As a matter of fact, it takes time (at least 15 years) before that the smaller size of the young cohorts can start exerting a moderating impact on the number of people willing to migrate, while it is very likely that in the meantime higher levels of income per capita will make more Africans capable to migrate overseas. Indeed, SSA’s levels of income per capita are within the range in which rising incomes are associated with larger emigrant stocks and higher net emigration rates (Hatton and Williamson, 2011; Clemens, 2014). Consistently with the “mobility transition” theory (Zelinsky, 1971), and the related cross-country evidence showing that the relationship between overall economic development and emigration has typically the shape of an inverted-U curve, one should expect in relatively poor SSA that the disincentive effect on migration of higher income levels in the home country is still going to be outweighed for many years by the increased ability to incur the costs needed to migrate overseas and the rising aspiration to migrate brought about by higher development levels. As stated by Flahaux and De Haas (2016: p.4), “To understand why development is generally associated to more migration, it is
important to move beyond views of (African) migrants as objects which are passively pushed around by external ‘push’ factors such as poverty, demographic pressure, violent conflict or environmental degradation, analogous to the way physical objects are attracted or repelled by gravitational or electromagnetic forces. Such ‘push-pull’ views, however, ignore that people will only migrate if they have the ambitions and resources to make this happen. We can see migration as a function of people’s aspirations and capabilities to migrate […] Yet increased migration capabilities do not automatically lead to migration if people do not aspire to do so. Migration aspirations depend on people’s more general life aspirations and their perceptions of the extent to which these aspirations can be fulfilled ‘here’ and ‘there’. Both these aspirations and perceptions about geographical opportunities are highly subjective and likely to change under the influence of social and cultural change. Improved access to information and exposure to other (wealthy and/or ‘Western’) lifestyles conveyed through education, media and advertising tend to change people’s perceptions of the ‘good life’ alongside increasing material aspirations and a growing appetite for consumer goods. The crux is that when ‘development’ occurs in poor and marginal countries and areas, aspirations and capabilities to migrate tend to increase simultaneously, explaining the paradoxical phenomenon of development driven emigration booms.”

The peculiar modalities governing the evolution of aspirations and capabilities to migrate in SSA countries call for an approach that goes beyond a strictly neoclassical paradigm centered on fixed individual preferences and atomized households. Indeed, the latter is inadequate to account for the role played by the extended family, the village or other communitarian ties in financing the investment necessary to permit to an increasing number of young Africans to go to school and to migrate in search of higher earnings and better lives. It tends to neglect the importance of pre-existing migrant networks, associations and NGOs in providing information, support and assistance in the host countries to incoming migrants. Similarly, the neoclassical approach can hardly explain

11 “The person who leaves his/her country represents the hope as well as collective investment of those who stay at home, the journey is an economic endeavour for the entire extended family, which hopes to benefit from the remittances. Labour migration is thus intended to be both an individual and a familial process of financial and professional enrichment.” (Morone, 2017: p. 135).
the processes whereby aspirations and perceptions related to migration emerge and change amongst young Africans, for example what determines the systematically over-optimistic perceptions that many of them appear to hold concerning their prospects in case of migration to Europe. In sum, any sound prediction and policy on SSA migration should be founded on a more accurate and realistic assessment of the determinants of people’s choices in the matter.

5. What policy implications for the international community (and Europe in particular)?

As seen in the previous section, available data contradicts “conventional interpretations of African migration being essentially driven by poverty, violence and underdevelopment,” thus showing “that recent increases in African emigration should rather be explained from processes of development and social transformation which have increased young Africans’ capabilities and aspirations to migrate, a trend which is likely to continue in the future” (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016: p. 23). In the light of this evidence, it seems illusory that massive international aid packages for SSA countries can reduce migration pressures on Europe in the next two or three decades by improving their socioeconomic situation, as politicians and commentators keep claiming.12 On the contrary, if effective in accelerating economic growth in SSA, they may even accentuate these pressures.13 This does not mean, however, that Europe should not be committed to assist and support socio-economic development in SSA. It may rather imply a sort of decoupling between advanced economies’ strategies concerning development aid to SSA and their migration policies.

Beside altruistic motives, Europe’s main interest in favoring rapid improvements in SSA’s standards of living derives from the closely-interdependent nature of today’s world, where the

12 As a recent example of this widely held belief, one can take the statement of Italian prime minister Gentiloni at the conference “G20 Africa Partnership - Investing in a Common Future” held on June 12-13, 2017, in Berlin: “We believe that to combat migration we must support sustainable development and invest in migrants' countries of origin as well as in transit countries through specific partnerships” (see http://www.adnkronos.com/azienda/2017/06/12/italy-germany-urging-investment-africa-combat-migration-gentiloni_1wFpOd54L4UDdgl5YSf9VJ.html?refresh).

13 Econometric results showing that international aid has positive and statistically significant effects on migration outflows from SSA countries are presented by Belloc (2008).
strains and conflicts that are fed in Africa by the poor prospects of its booming young population have repercussions everywhere, and especially in regions such as SE that are geographically proximate to it. Possible positive spillover effects for the European economy of more robust economic growth in SSA appear less important in comparison.

It comes out from the previous sections of this essay that, in order to sustain socioeconomic progress in SSA, the international community—and Europe in particular—should promote and support a faster demographic transition in the many SSA countries in which it is too slow or even stalling. As already argued, speeding up the decline of the fertility rate is not sufficient to accelerate economic and social progress in these countries. Nevertheless, it is a necessary condition to activate and make more rapid that cumulative process of structural change which is essential for substantial improvements in the living standards of most Africans. Even more than this, for some countries a drastic reduction of fertility is both strictly necessary and extremely urgent to avoid humanitarian disasters and further people’s suffering: for instance, in very poor Sahel’s countries such as Chad, Mali and Niger—subject to chronic malnutrition, desertification and political instability—it will be simply impossible to handle the almost three-fold population increase which is expected by 2050 if their very high fertility rate will follow the slowly declining trend that is currently underway. Efforts to raise female education levels and to empower women, whose effects in terms of slower population growth materialize gradually over time, have to be complemented by effective and extensive family planning programs, that should operate both by influencing fertility desires and by making modern birth control methods more known and easily available. Existing initiatives in this area on the part of the international community are not sufficient.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, supranational organizations and governments, but also NGOs and private donors, should abandon their past reluctance and prioritize this issue, convincing local elites—even if necessary by making

\textsuperscript{14} Recent initiatives for promoting family planning and reproductive health in Sahel countries include World Bank’s program “The Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend,” and “The Ouagadougou Partnership,” targeting nine francophone countries of Middle and Western Africa.
international aid conditional on the implementation of consistent policies to curb fertility—that responsible parenthood is essential to escape undevelopment traps.

The discussion contained in the previous sections identifies a second strategic area needing more determination and commitment on the part of the international community, namely SSA agriculture, whose productivity must be substantially improved in order to increase SSA’s production of food and cash crops. Such improvement, indeed, can be achieved by large investment, intense research efforts and all comprehensive technical assistance, that require stronger support than in the past on the part of supranational institutions and developed countries.

In section 3 it was underlined the importance of a different model of urban expansion in SSA for triggering a process of structural change that may lead to rapid productivity improvements and develop a modern service sector, thus multiplying the number of decently paid occupations. Again, the huge investment and advanced expertise that would be needed for improving urban agglomerations and transform them in dynamic drivers of growth are beyond the financial and technical capacities of most SSA governments. This calls for systematic financial aid and assistance by the international community.

6. A research agenda for investigating the desirability for Southern Europe of massive African migration inflows

Because of their geographic proximity, Southern European countries are particularly exposed to African migratory pressure, both as final destinations and transit countries along the route to Central and Northern Europe. Given that this pressure, rather than been temporary, is likely to intensify in the predictable future, it is urgent to provide the public opinion and the policy makers with economic analyses that account for aspects of the phenomenon that are specific to the Mediterranean members of the EU, or at least that are more relevant for these countries than for their Central and
Northern European counterparts. Thus, in this section we suggest some economic themes for a research agenda aimed at contributing to the public debate on the African migration to SE.

As a preliminary remark, it is useful to recall three features that are peculiar to Greece, Italy and Spain and are important for any assessment of the short and long-term effects of SSA migration on these countries: in comparison with the other advanced economies, Greece, Italy and Spain display low employment rates with very high fractions of their youth population that is out of employment (as a result of high structural unemployment and low rates of participation to the labor market), large shadow economies, and low fertility rates.

The first issue that deserves attention is the impact of African migration on public finances, which is of special interest for Greece, Italy and Spain because of their problems of public debt sustainability. In general, the existing literature on the net fiscal effect of migration on host countries (for a survey see OECD, 2013; Preston, 2014) emphasize that the extent to which migrants are integrated into the formal labor market is the single most significant determinant of their net fiscal contribution. This is particularly true in countries that—guaranteeing universal access to publicly-provided basic goods such as health and school services—make the estimated present value of future net fiscal contributions of newly arriving households crucially dependent on the expected stream of taxes and social contributions that these households are going to pay over their lifetimes. Hence, measuring the impact of new African migrants on the public finances of the above mentioned countries requires a realistic assessment of the chances that these migrants have to enjoy prolonged employment spells in the formal economy, rather than being occupied in marginal and precarious activities as employee in the underground economy or as self-employed in some

15 In 2017 (first quarter), Greece, Italy and Spain were—together with Croatia—the countries of the EU with the lowest employment rate (persons employed as a percent of population aged 15-64 years): the employment rate was 52.0% in Greece, 57.2% in Italy and 59.9% in Spain, whereas the average employment rate in the EU was 66.7%. In the same period, Greece, Italy and Spain had the lowest employment rate of the EU among the persons aged 15-39 years (46.3% in Greece, 47.6 in Italy and 54.2% in Spain, whereas the average rate in the EU was 61.8%).
16 Among 21 OECD countries considered by Schneider and Williams (2013), in 2012 Greece was estimated to have the largest shadow economy (24% of its official GDP), Italy the second (21.6%), Portugal the third (19.4%) and Spain the fourth (19.2%).
17 In 2015, total fertility rates of Greece (1.33), Italy (1.35) and Spain (1.33) were—together with those of Cyprus, Poland and Portugal—the lowest of the EU, whose average fertility rate was 1.58.
low-productive micro-enterprise. In a long-term perspective, this assessment is important also because—together with some informed guess about the fraction of these new migrants that will remain in the host country when they will get old—it allows to estimate the public subsidies that will be needed to integrate the low or extremely low pensions that will be received by those migrants who have paid little or zero social contributions during their working life.\[^{18}\] In its turn, any assessment of the possibility for African migrants to have access to the formal economy should account for the evidence showing that—in SE’s highly dualistic labor markets—large numbers of native young workers are queuing for entering some form of decently paid formal employment, while the work opportunities of African migrants are strongly dependent on their willingness to accept informal occupations that are unattractive for the native workers (notice that this tends to hold also for those African migrants who attained secondary or even higher levels of education in their native country, which apparently have no market value in SE).

It follows naturally from what discussed above that a related issue to be properly investigated is the contribution that African migrants can give to raise SE’s GDP per capita. The existing literature on the impact of migration on income per capita in the advanced economies (see Jaumotte at al., 2016, for a recent survey) is generally stressing that low skilled migrants can increase average GDP per capita by raising the employment rate and/or labor productivity. The positive effect on productivity is linked to the tendency of low-skilled migrants to take up manual-intensive tasks, or occupations such as childcare and elderly care, thus leading the native workforce to move away from these occupations and toward higher value-added activities (Farré et al., 2011; Foged and Peri, 2016). However, it has been noted that such complementary is inexistent whenever low-skilled migrants swell the ranks of those undertaking low-productive traditional activities in recipient countries that already have large numbers of low-skilled native workers who are out of employment. In this case, the net long-term effect of immigrant inflows on labor productivity and

\[^{18}\] The long-term impact on public finance of migrants is also affected by the portability rules that regulate the possibility for the migrants to have their pensions paid in their native country in the case in which they return home (Italian legislation, for instance, prescribes that non-EU retirees can have their Italian public pension paid in their native country over the age of 65, or earlier in the presence of bilateral agreements between Italy and their native country).
income per capita is likely to be negative. Consistently, it should be of some interest to test the hypothesis that the flows of low-skilled migrants in countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain—that until the early 1990s still had limited numbers of foreign-born inhabitants—have negatively influenced these countries’ performance in terms of labor productivity and total factor productivity over the last 25 years. Along the same line, one may ask whether the inflow of low-skilled migrants has lowered the overall productivity level of these countries by stimulating the enlargement of their informal economy and by exacerbating those problems of law enforcements, rule compliance and tax evasion that already affect large areas of SE. In other words, the research question here is to what extent in this region informality tends to stuck the migrants in a stagnant productivity trap, thus reproducing in Europe certain features of that SSA phenomenon known as “urbanization without growth”. There are signs, indeed, that a sort of “lumpenproletariat”, mainly consisting of migrants (many of them coming from Africa), is growing in SE: should it be considered a temporary phenomenon or is it going to become a permanent feature of the urban and rural landscape of this part of Europe? The risk that also a large share of second-generation immigrants can remain entrapped in these marginal segments of the labor should not be underestimated, in countries where economic mobility across generations tends to be low even for the native population. This prospect is not reassuring, considering that second-generation immigrants usually have aspirations very similar to those of the native population and that their frustration may feed among them feelings of discrimination and antagonism toward the host countries' institutions and culture (Algan et al., 2012).

Looking forward, it is worthwhile to try to understand whether an abundant supply of cheap low-skilled labor coming from SSA and other developing countries will favor or disincentive in SE that process of structural change necessary to fully benefit from technological progress. This assessment should take into account that quick disinvestment from technologically backward activities and

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19 Kangasniemi et al. (2012) show that in Spain, during the decade preceeding the global financial years when low-skilled migrants found employment in rapidly growing low-productivity sectors such as construction, migrants’ contribution to the country’s labor productivity is negative.
rapid reallocation of inputs to more dynamic sectors are essential aspects of this process. Furthermore, one should be aware that especially in service sectors such as retail, but also in agriculture and construction, long-run productivity gains depend on costly labor-saving investment that will eliminate low and medium skilled labor. How these trends can be reconciled in SE with the migration pressure exerted by developing countries is an open issue that requires careful examination.

It is often argued that immigration is necessary for Europe in order to outweight the reduction of its workforce consequent to the decline in the size of its native population. This argument cannot be applied to the Southern European countries: their low—or very low in large areas such as Southern Italy—employment rates give ample room to offset any projected fall in the number of native Southern Europeans by simply approaching the employment rates that currently characterize Central and Northern Europe. Let us take, for example, the case of Italy. According to the UN’s projections, in the absence of any migration, its current population of 60,665 thousand people will shrink to 51,014 in 2050. In spite of this decline, if Italy had in 2050 the same employment rate that Germany has now, Italy would increase its total number of employed persons from 22,158 thousand (which is the number of people that were employed in 2016) to 24,232 in 2050 (an increase of more than 2 milions!) even with zero net migration. Therefore, the real question is whether a substantial increase in SE’s employment rate, to be achieved by appropriate structural policies and in particular by reforms involving the welfare system and the labor market, is compatible with large migration inflows. It is questionable, indeed, that it would be realistically possible to integrate in the formal labor market these new migrants and at the same time to offer decent job opportunities to those large components of the Southern European native population (in particular women and young people resident in depressed areas) that currently are unemployed or prefer to remain out of the labor market. The terms of this trade off need to be better clarified, if one wants to to have more elements for assessing what migration policy is preferable from the viewpoint of the native populations in countries characterized by very low employment rates.
The previous point was discussed taking as given the fertility rates of the native populations in the host countries. However, in a long-run perspective, fertility rates are not invariant with respect to the job opportunities available for the young cohorts, the characteristics of the welfare system and the entity of the migration flows. Making easier for the Southern European population below 35 years old to enter stable employment would contribute to remove the main underlying cause of the very low fertility rate that characterizes the countries of this region in comparison to other developed countries. A fertility recovery in SE would be probably helped also by reforms making the welfare system less unbalanced in favor of the old cohorts and more supportive of the young people that desire to rear children (for instance by providing childcare services for all at subsidized prices or for free). Less studied has been the relation linking migration inflows and fertility of the native populations in the host countries. The notion of impure or congested public goods “for which consumption is non-rival at low population size but becomes increasingly rivalrous as population grows” (Preston, 2014: p. F571) can be of some help for shedding light on this relation. We are referring to the congestion diseconomies that large inflows of migrants may generate by reducing the utility obtainable from childcare facilities, schools, parks, hospitals, transport infrastructures etc., thus making more costly and less pleasant for the native population to rear children (Azarnert, 2017). Obviously, governments can invest resources for expanding the supply of these congested public goods. By contrast, they can do very little to increase the availability of land. Hence, the long-term trend of residential land prices, which is the main determinant of house prices and rents, can be pushed up by migration inflows. In its turn, this tends to raise the house-price to income ratio, thus making harder for young adults to gain access to affordable housing arrangements that are suitable for rearing children (Malmberg, 2012). Further research should assess the importance of this channel through which migration may affect the native population’s fertility rate, especially in densely populated countries such as Italy, whose population has been increasingly concentrated in

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20 One may wonder whether this rebalancing of public policies in ageing societies in favor of young parents would be possible without altering the electoral process by increasing the weight of a citizen’s vote in function of the number of his/her underage children (Campiglio 1997). For a discussion of this and similar proposals, see Van Parijs (1998).
its congested and highly trafficked flatlands, that have been intensely built-up in the last decades and constitute only a relatively small fraction of a fragile and predominantly mountainous territory. In this way, such research can also contribute to understand if restrictive migration policies may help European countries to get out of the low fertility trap in which they are currently stuck (Lutz et al., 2006) and approach in the long run replacement levels of fertility.

7. Conclusion: a summary of the main points stressed in this essay

We started this essay by discussing the existing literature on the high fertility rate that—in spite of the remarkable decline in infant mortality—still characterizes the SSA, whose anomalously slow demographic transition does not seem to replicate the experience of other regions of the developing world. It emerged from this discussion that socio-economic and cultural factors reinforce each other in determining this phenomenon, thus making plausible that the choices concerning the number of offsprings are also the result of a specific “Africa effect”, associated to pronatalist social norms and to the peculiar structure of the African family. It is not surprising, therefore, that in many cases local political elites tend to reflect the pronatalist attitudes of their constituency, doing little to help their people to escape the high fertility trap in which they are stuck.

We then assessed the possibility that SSA can fully enjoy the benefits of the so-called demographic dividend, reporting some estimates of the long-term impact on GDP per capita of a faster fertility transition. However, we expressed a note of skepticism about this possibility, based on the unsatisfactory past performance of both the agricultural (still the source of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the SSA population) and the manufacturing sector in most SSA countries, and on the pattern of urbanization that has emerged in a period of rapid increase in the number of people living in SSA cities. Indeed, during this process of “urbanization without growth”, the fast growing population residing in SSA urban settings has been predominantly absorbed into the informal sector, in the form of self-employment, family employment or micro-enterprises, undertaking low-productive activities in services (mainly commerce, or petty trading),
typically based at home or on the street. In sum, we argued that there are few signs in many SSA countries of a structural transformation that would allow to create the millions of higher-productivity jobs needed to offer decent living conditions to its fast growing young population. We also observed that, if this transformation does not begin soon to unfold, the rising aspirations of SSA’ young population are going to be frustrated, with obvious implications in terms of social unrest and political instability.

The speed at which SSA’s demographic transition is likely to take place has important consequences for the rest of the world: in an integrated world both costs of overpopulation and benefits of population control are externalized to all countries through various channels. We explored in this essay two of these channels: climate change and migration. Although current greenhouse gas emissions per capita are relatively low in SSA, the benefits of lower human pressure on fragile ecosystems due to a faster fertility decline in SSA is not negligible. By contrast, the more rapid growth of income per capita that the acceleration of the demographic transition may bring about in SSA is not expected in the short-to medium run to reduce its migration pressure on other regions of the world (and on Europe in particular). This is because—consistently with the “mobility transition” theory and the related cross-country evidence—we claim that a higher income per capita will raise both Africans’ aspirations and capabilities to migrate overseas.

It follows from the latter conclusion that international development aid—even if effective—cannot reduce SSA migration pressure on Europe in the predictable future (in contrast with what most commentators and politicians keep claiming). This does not mean, however, that Europe should not be committed to assist and support socio-economic development in SSA. It may rather imply a sort of decoupling between advanced economies’ strategies concerning development aid to SSA and their migration policies. Hence, in this essay, we selected three policies to which the advanced economies should give priority if they want to support SSA’s development. First, we suggested that the international community—and Europe in particular—should abandon its past reluctance and shyness in the support of fertility reduction in developing countries, promoting a
faster demographic transition in the many SSA countries in which it is too slow or even stalling. As argued in this essay, speeding up the decline of the fertility rate is not sufficient to accelerate economic and social progress in these countries. Nevertheless, it is a necessary condition to activate and make more rapid that cumulative process of structural change which is essential for substantial improvements in the living standards of most Africans. Even more than this, for some countries a drastic reduction of fertility is extremely urgent to avoid humanitarian disasters and further people’s suffering. Second, we emphasized that another fundamental policy priority for the international community should be the substantial improvement of productivity in the SSA agriculture, since this is essential for feeding the African population and increasing their export of labor-intensive cash crops. Third, we advocated systematic financial aid and technical assistance on the part of the international community in order to rehabilitate existing urban agglomerations in SSA, build modern infrastructures for new urban expansion and transform them in dynamic drivers of growth.

Finally, we proposed a comprehensive research agenda aimed at investigating the medium to long-term effects of massive SSA migration to SE. The issues included in this agenda comprise the impact of these migration inflows on public finances; their contribution to the growth of productivity and GDP per capita; the possibility that most migrants will remain entrapped in the informal segment of the labor market with the risk of forming a sort of socially immobile underclass; their impact on structural change and on the evolution of the sectoral composition of the host countries’ economy; the possibility that they will replace over time the shrinking native workforce, and—last but not least—their impact on the fertility rate of the native population.

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