



Gender-Responsive and Socially Inclusive Responses to Climate-Related Migration in Urban Settings: Freetown's Case

Climate Mobility Context

In Sierra Leone, climate change is accelerating rural-to-urban migration, while increasing the vulnerability of those arriving in rapidly expanding cities, creating a compounding cycle of climate and social risks ([World Bank, 2023](#)). As the primary destination for rural-to-urban migration, Freetown is particularly exposed to these intersecting pressures. The city faces rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, and landslides ([FCC & C40, 2022](#)). Urban expansion and deforestation have exacerbated the urban heat island effect, flooding and landslide risks ([Sam-Mbomah et al., 2025](#)). In 2017, extensive reliance on informal settlements in precarious areas contributed to a landslide that killed more than 1,000 people ([WEF, 2023](#)). Freetown's largely informal and labor-intensive economy is highly vulnerable to extreme heat and humidity: over 90% of working hours occur outside of climate-controlled conditions, threatening productivity, incomes, and health ([Climate Resilience Center, n.d.](#); [World Bank, 2023](#)).

These risks are unevenly distributed, with greater impacts on vulnerable groups, including women and children, particularly in informal settlements. Displaced women and girls face heightened risks of violence and discrimination, alongside increased responsibilities for food, water and childcare during disasters ([RWI, 2023](#)). Migrant women, the majority of informal traders across Freetown's markets, are especially vulnerable to climate-related economic and health impacts ([MMC, 2025](#)).

Recognizing these realities, Freetown City Council (FCC) treats climate-related rural-to-urban migration and informal settlement growth as features of the city to plan *around* rather than *against*. FCC aims to improve conditions and opportunities for migrants and transform informal settlements into assets for shared prosperity, making migration a choice rather than a necessity ([MMC, 2025](#)).

Approach

- FCC has been implementing the [Transform Freetown](#) agenda since 2018 and launched the [Climate Action Strategy](#) in 2023. Both aim to improve climate resilience and livelihoods through inclusive, participatory approaches focused on women, youth, migrants and residents of informal settlements.
- To address land degradation associated with rural-to-urban migration and urban expansion, FCC launched [Freetown the Treetown](#) in 2019. This nature and community-based initiative links reforestation, settlement upgrading, and landslide and flooding risk reduction. It thereby provides green jobs, capacity-building and opportunities for participation in urban planning for women and youth in informal settlements.
- The [Freetown Waste Micro-Enterprise](#) project, launched by FCC in 2019 and expanded with support of the Mayors Migration Council (MMC), links waste management to the creation of green jobs and livelihood opportunities for migrant youth in informal settlements, enabling business creation while contributing to public health.
- Launched by FCC in 2025, the [Climate Resilient Market Hub](#) aims to make Freetown's markets more climate-resilient, circular, and inclusive for migrant women. It introduced technologies that convert waste into energy to power refrigerators and provides training to strengthen livelihoods and incomes while reducing emissions.

“Over 90% of businesses in Freetown’s 42 markets are women-led, and most of these are migrant women. Heat stress causes spoilage of goods, leading to economic losses and health risks. The strategy of the city is to get a Climate Resilient Market Hub where a complete circular loop system provides sustainability to the efforts these women undertake.”

Andruga William

Former City Adviser on Waste and Methane, Freetown City Council

Impact to Date

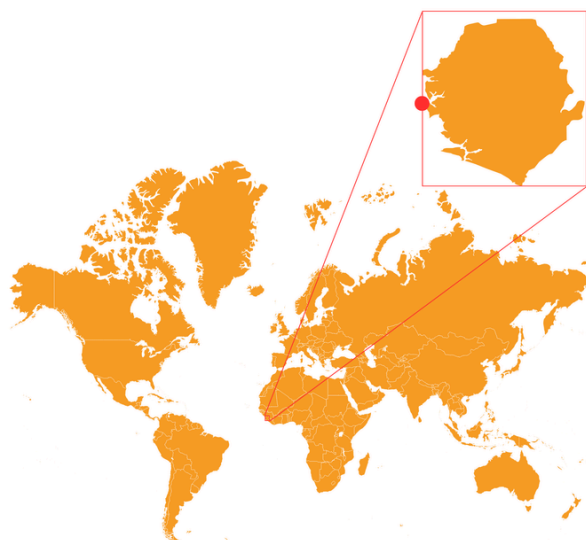
- As part of the Transform Freetown agenda and the Climate Action Strategy, FCC aims to create 120,000 green jobs for women and youth by 2028 ([MMC, 2025](#)). While recent data is not yet available, the Strategy commits to better reporting and evaluating demographic indicators for migrants, informal workers, and co-benefits such as health and job creation ([FCC & C40, 2022](#)).
- Thanks to the Freetown the Treetown Initiative, 977,000 trees were planted, and the city committed to planting an additional 4 million by 2028 to reduce the urban heat island effect and prepare for continued urban expansion ([FCC, 2024](#)). IOM supported the participation of 92 returned migrants during the tree planting and donation campaign, enabling community involvement and participation in local initiatives ([IOM, n.d.](#)).
- The Freetown Waste Micro-Enterprise project employed 240 youths from informal settlements in green jobs. Of those, 75% were migrants and internally displaced persons and 30% were women. The project further improved waste collection services, sanitary conditions, and reduced water contamination ([MMC, 2021](#)).

Funding

- The Freetown Waste Micro-Enterprise project was initially funded by the European Union and IOM and expanded in 2021 through the MMC's [Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees](#) (GCF). FCC also contributed directly, covering 50% of the tricycles purchased for the expansion ([FCC, 2022](#)). The participating beneficiaries repaid 80% of the cost of the waste collection tricycles. The success of this project unlocked an additional USD 1.5 million investment to expand the project and finance future activities ([MMC, 2021](#)).
- The Climate Resilient Market Hub is also funded through an MMC GCF grant, awarded in 2025, and it builds on complementary investments, including the African Urban Heat Resilience Grant Program by Climate Resilience for All for heat-resilient market infrastructure ([MMC, 2025](#); [HERA, 2025](#)).
- Freetown the Treetown is financed by a network of partners and funders, including the World Bank, Catholic Relief Services, and UNDP ([Freetown the Treetown, n.d.](#)).

Learnings

- Freetown the Treetown's participatory urban greening and settlement upgrading approach shows the value of working with informal communities and is designed to mitigate the risks of gentrification and displacement of lower-income residents often associated with slum upgrading ([Schoonman and Bockarie, 2026](#)).
- Freetown's experience shows that inclusive climate resilience initiatives cannot substitute for the mandate, data, and tools local authorities need to govern land use and manage the city's growth ([Flint, 2022](#)).
- Embedding gender and migrant inclusion directly into livelihoods infrastructure – markets, waste systems, green jobs – can be more durable than treating inclusion as a separate track from climate adaptation. Because the same women and migrant workers who power Freetown's informal economy are also those most exposed to climate risk, resilience investments that strengthen their livelihoods directly deliver adaptation and inclusion gains at once.



This case study was presented as part of the South-South-Dialogue Series organised by the [GIZ Global Programme on Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change](#) and facilitated by [Clima Trust](#) (formerly SLYCAN Trust). If you want to learn more about HMCCC please check [here](#).

For specific questions and further inquiry on the case study, please contact eugeniakargbozt@gmail.com, andrugan@gmail.com or augustine.kamara85@gmail.com.

Imprint

Published by: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices: Bonn and Eschborn
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36 53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 61 96 79-0, F +49 61 96 79-11 15
E info@giz.de, I www.giz.de
Bonn, 2026

Global Programme: Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change
Head of Programme: Björn Euler
Case Study: Eugenia Kargbo, Andrugan William, Augusti Kamara
Author: Clima Trust
Editors: Amina Schild, Clara Engelsleben
Design and layout: Clara Engelsleben
Photo Credits: Abdulai Sayni



implemented by:

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH