Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity
City profile: Dakar, Senegal

Population: 1,252,786 (2016)

GDP per capita: $2,355 (2018)

Major industries: banking, telecommunications, tourism

Percentage of migrants: 4% (2013)

Mayor's name: Soham el Wardini | **Next election date:** 2021
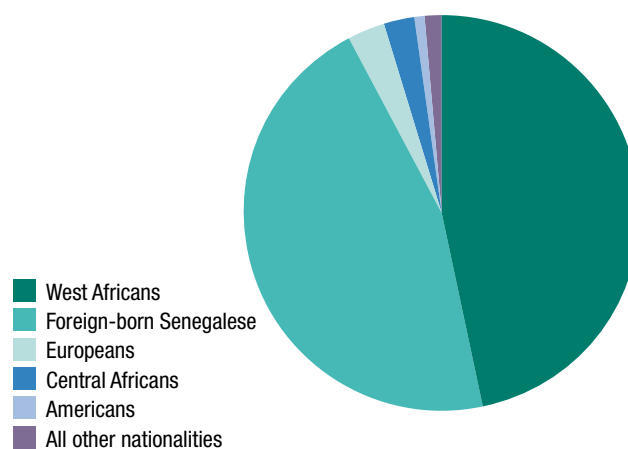
Socioeconomic profile

Dakar is the capital and largest city in Senegal, a busy port city located on the west coast of Africa. It consists of four departments, one being the city proper, which in turn spans four arrondissements. In 2016 there were 1,252,786 people living in the city (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie, 2016). The region is growing even faster than Dakar city (3.4% versus 2.5% annually) and was home to 3,429,370 people in 2016, around 23% of the country's entire population (ibid.). Population density is extremely high at 15,858 inhabitants/km², as the city is packed into 83 km².[1] This rapid population growth has led to the proliferation of slums and shanty towns; more than one-third of residents live in such areas (UN Habitat, 2013). Infrastructure provision is challenging; for example, the city averages 12 power cuts per month and half the population lacks solid waste collection (Urban Resilience Hub, n.d.). The Dakar region is very young: more than 40% of the population is under 20 years old (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie, 2020).

Dakar's economic growth has not kept pace with its population. Unemployment is high at 16.8% (higher than the national average of 15.7%) and over 26% of the population lives in poverty (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie, n.d.). At the same time, the city's GDP per capita ($2,355) (Metropolis Project, n.d.a) is well above the country average ($1,446 in 2019) (World Bank, n.d.). Senegal's economy relies heavily on agriculture, and Dakar is the hub for both export and processing. Major economic actors include the port of Dakar, Sandaga market and financial/banking institutions. The retail sector accounts for approximately 72% of microbusinesses and 42% of informal employment in the region (Urban Resilience Hub, n.d.).

Migration profile

The 2013 census counted 244,949 international immigrants in Senegal (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie, 2014). Dakar was the most popular destination, welcoming 57% of these migrants, implying around 4% of the population of the Dakar region may be made up of migrants (ibid.). As the graphic illustrates, the majority of incomers are foreign-born Senegalese returnees and migrants from other West African countries, who benefit from freedom of movement under Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) rules. Internal migration from rural Senegal, which has accelerated since the 1970s, is also a major factor driving Dakar's population growth. Nearly half of current Dakar residents were born elsewhere in the country (Urban Resilience Hub, n.d.). Senegal has traditionally hosted refugees, with approximately 14,000 Mauritanians previously recorded by UNHCR, of whom 2,000 resided in Dakar (Stone, 2005).

Migrant profile in Dakar

- West Africans
- Foreign-born Senegalese
- Europeans
- Central Africans
- Americans
- All other nationalities

Source: Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (2014)

The city's international immigrants demonstrate high levels of employment specialisation, mainly within the retail sector: Guineans sell fruits and vegetables, Nigerians automotive equipment, Malians dyed fabrics, and Ghanaians cosmetics (Demba Fall et al., 2010). This occupational clustering is mirrored in residential locations: French and Lebanese immigrants mainly live in coastal residential areas, while Guinean and Cape Verdean residents can be found in dense central areas and outlying suburbs. The relationship between native Senegalese and international immigrants is relatively peaceful, which some attribute to the lack of labour market competition (ibid.). The main exception is the relatively recent arrival of Chinese traders, which has sparked protests from both local companies and residents (Cisse, 2013).

Governance structure

The Dakar city municipal government consists of its mayor, municipal assembly and municipal council. Elected every five years, the municipal council represents Dakar's 19 sub-municipalities and selects the mayor as its head (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2017). Local elections are decided by proportional representation. A recent decentralisation law condensed the number of sub-national political entities from three to two (the department and the commune) (University of Florida, n.d.). Although intra-municipal coordination is high, responsibilities across territories remain fragmented (Metropolis Project, n.d.b). For example, national and municipal governments have overlapping mandates in major sectors such as sanitation and energy (Urban Resilience Hub, n.d.). Dakar's annual budget is approximately $70 million (International Observatory of Mayors, n.d.), most of which comes from federal government transfers. The budget is partly decentralised: a portion goes to the 19 sub-municipalities for use in matters of public health, education and culture (Sustainable Cities Collaboratory, n.d.). Dakar has faced challenges collecting municipal taxes, including difficulties identifying taxpayers, delays in key tasks and low enforcement capacity (World Bank Group, 2015). The city recently developed an Urban Master Plan for 2035, in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Major areas of focus include enhancing transportation infrastructure, sustainably strengthening economic activity and improving water and sanitation systems (Ministry for Urban Renewal, Housing and Living Environment and Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2016).

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