



# Migration and development dynamics in Boffa, Guinea

Boffa is increasingly affected by the international mining industry. Dynamics of internal migration are changing - now a common coping mechanism for the collapse of traditional livelihoods.

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The environmental impacts of industrial mining threaten local livelihoods. Some 82% of young adults consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family in Boffa.

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Migration aspirations are equally high for women and men. Women mostly migrate for marriage, though trading offers an opportunity for financial independence and mobility.

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Boffa hosts African and Chinese in-migrants who work in mining and fishing, mostly living in segregated communities with little interaction with locals.

Photos of doors (above) are taken during fieldwork but are unrelated to the research participants.



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Photo: Abdoulaye Somparé for MIGNEX.

Boffa is a town and subprefecture located on the Atlantic Ocean, on the banks of the river Fatala. The town, with an estimated 27,000 residents, is well connected to Conakry.<sup>1</sup>

Artisan farming and fishing were once major livelihood activities in Boffa and residents are considered skilful artisans, often migrating across Guinea to make a living.

Since the development of the mining industry in 2010 there have been significant

socioeconomic, environmental, and demographic changes in the town.

Livelihoods have collapsed as industrial mining and fishing have impacted artisan agricultural production. Fishing in the estuary is now impossible due to low yields, environmental degradation, and many farming fields and traditional harbours have been acquired by mining industries.

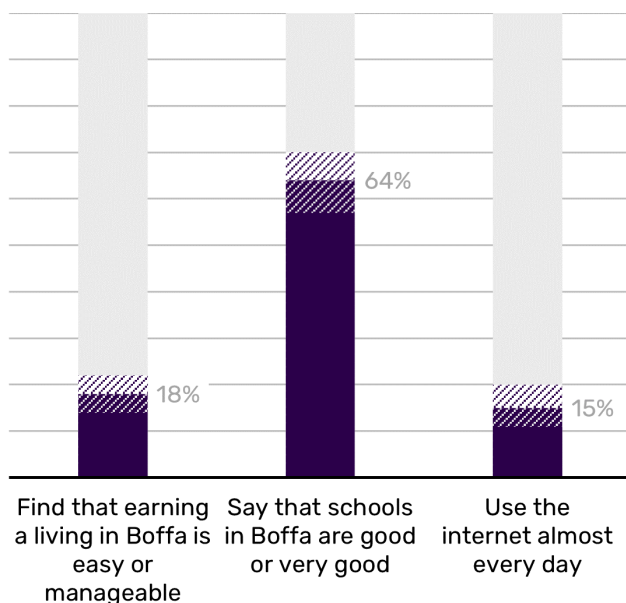
Only 22% of young adults surveyed for this MIGNEX case study are engaged in - mostly subsistence - agricultural production. Furthermore, most young adults surveyed consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family (82%).

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Dialokoro and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Guinea.<sup>2</sup>

**Migration from Boffa**

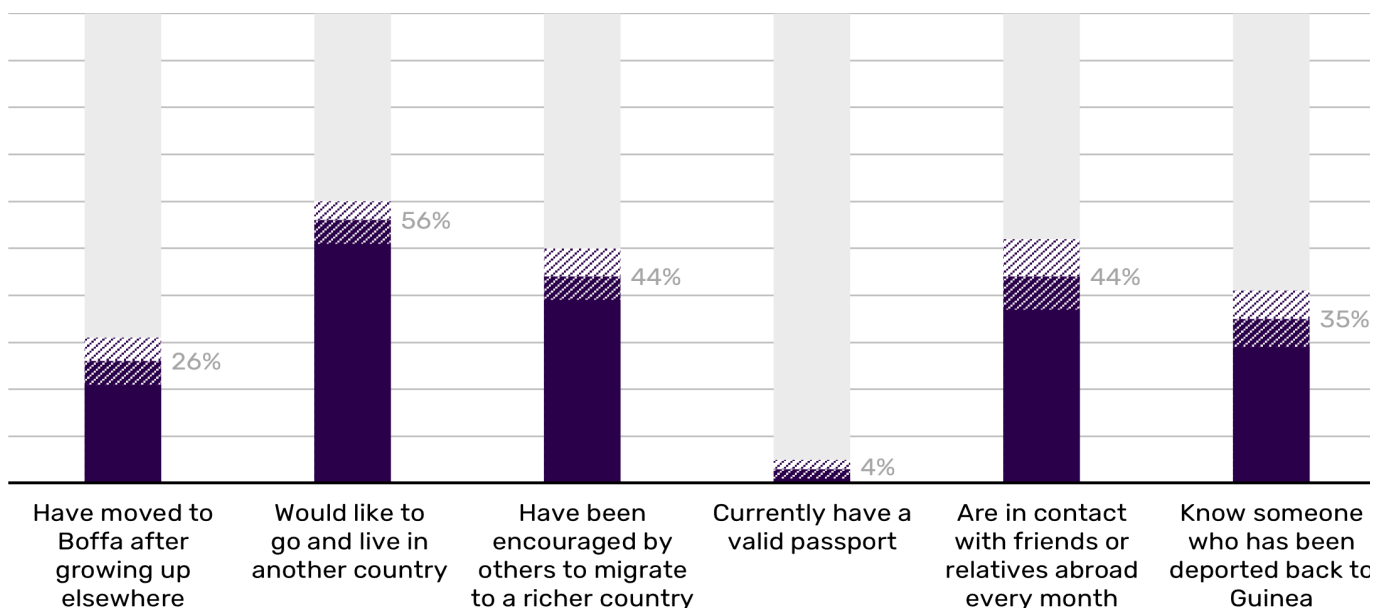
The majority of surveyed young adults (75%) in Boffa have family or friends living abroad, predominantly in France (55%) and the United States (9%).

Many young people hold a positive attitude towards regular migration. It is widely perceived as a way to improve employment,



**Figure 1. Indicators of development**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.



**Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics**

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

education and livelihood prospects. However, regular migration is considered to be very difficult, with a low likelihood of success.

Irregular migration is increasingly regarded as too dangerous. Some young people from Boffa have migrated irregularly to Europe via Libya and the Mediterranean Sea. Over one-quarter of surveyed young adults (29%) know of someone who has died on their way to another country.

Despite this, a lack of livelihood opportunities for young adults in Boffa and the need to provide financial support for retired parents can motivate out-migration. Indeed, the majority of 18–39-year-olds (85%) would migrate to a richer country if given the necessary papers.

Due to the increased difficulty of international migration, more are choosing to migrate to the capital city of Conakry or other Guinean cities instead. Over two-thirds of young adults (69%) know of somebody who has migrated internally in the past five years.

### Migration aspirations

The failure of the mining industry to support local livelihoods has led to feelings of frustration and despair among young adults in Boffa. Initial hopes for the mining industry to bring about prosperity and development,

as in neighbouring mining towns, have been lost.

This is a major factor for migration aspirations as many young adults desire to escape their difficult economic situation and participate in vocational training, in other cities in Guinea or abroad.

Over half of young adults (53%) have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year. For those who prefer to stay in Guinea, nearly half (47%) would rather migrate internally than remain in Boffa.

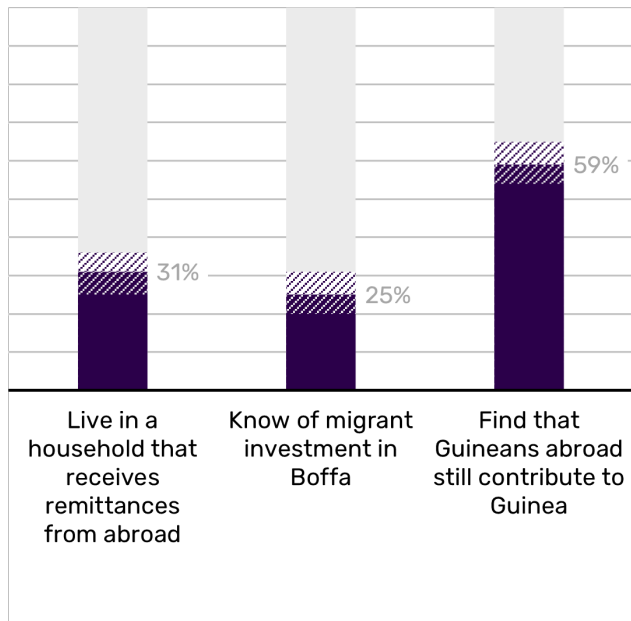
### Gender and migration

Men and women differ in how they migrate. Women's mobility in Boffa is highly connected with marriage as they are expected to move to their husband's house.

Women also move for work – some run successful enterprises and are financially independent from their husbands. Others move to fishing villages, where Senegalese

*Boffa is full of potential, but unfortunately people struggle to make a living. We do have mining companies here, but what are their impacts?*

Focus group participant



**Figure 3. Migration–development interactions**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

and Sierra Leonean immigrants practice small commerce and prostitution.

International out-migration amongst women is not common; it is perceived as too risky and instead for men to seek new experiences and chances for a better life for them and their families. In Boffa, 6% of surveyed young women have lived abroad for at least one year, compared to 11% of young men. However, if given the necessary papers, most young men (86%) and young women (84%) surveyed would migrate to a richer country.

### In-migration

One-quarter (26%) of young adults surveyed in Boffa are internal migrants. These are mostly labourers and traders who come to work for the mining firms or are attracted by new opportunities. This led to rapid demographic

expansion with new demands on education, services, and the formation of new urban areas.

One group of international in-migrants are fishers from neighbouring Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, who work on international fishing boats.<sup>3</sup> These in-migrants tend to reside in temporary camps and tensions exist between them and local people.

Other international in-migrants are employees of mining firms and a Chinese fishing firm. There are few social ties with Chinese in-migrants as they live separately to the local communities and import most goods.

### Links between migration and development

Around one-quarter (26%) of surveyed young adults know of migrant investment in Boffa. This rarely involves collective initiatives for the development of the area. More often, individual donations are made by members of the diaspora who wish to become notables in the locality.

The construction of a new harbour by French NGO Charente-Maritime Coopération has improved the working conditions of local fishers and wholesalers. Despite this, industrial mining threatens local trade and out-migration is a serious prospect for many.

### Notes

1. Based on data from Institut National de la Statistique de Guinée (2014) 'Population census 2014'.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Ester Botta and Abdoulaye Somparé in September–October 2021, collaborating remotely with Jessica Hagen-Zanker. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by West African Field Services (WAFS), PD Consult and ODI in July 2021.
3. The survey did not capture any international in-migrants, who tend to live in segregated areas, potentially because the hamlets where they live were not sampled.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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