



Migration and development dynamics in Batu, Ethiopia

Foreign-owned agribusinesses have led to increased employment and rural-urban in-migration in Batu, yet well-paid jobs and development interventions are limited.

Major development interventions are limited in Batu, most changes in the town are tied to foreign private investment.

International migration aspirations are low, with most young adults (56%) preferring to remain in Ethiopia, whether this be in Batu (55%) or elsewhere in the country (45%).

International out-migration is often perceived as a 'last resort' when other livelihood options have been exhausted.



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Photo: Camille Kasavan for MIGNEX.

Batu (formerly Ziway) is a small town in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, built on the shores of Lake Ziway, with a population of 86,234.¹ Batu has fertile land primed for agriculture, with large exports of fruit and vegetables to nearby Addis Ababa and other towns across Ethiopia.

While local produce is mostly exported from private farms in the area, Batu is also the centre of several international flower farms and other large-scale agribusinesses. This includes Sher Ethiopia, a branch of the Dutch

Afriflora conglomerate, one of the largest producers of roses in the world.

Industrial farming is a key source of livelihood support and internal in-migration. Nearly one-third (30%) of young adults surveyed for this MIGNEX study are employed and receive a salary. Yet, it has been the source of recent tensions due to the displacement of local farmers, low wages and water pollution in Lake Ziway - allegedly due to chemicals from Sher Ethiopia. Jobs at the industrial farm are considered a last resort, largely taken up by low wage workers - mainly women - who have no other way to feed their family. Over two thirds of young adults (68%) in Batu consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Kombolcha and Moyale and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Ethiopia.¹

Migration from Batu

Around half of young adults (51%) surveyed in Batu have family and friends living abroad, predominantly in the United States (36%), Saudi Arabia (22%) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (18%).

International out-migration is often perceived as a last resort when other livelihood options have been exhausted.

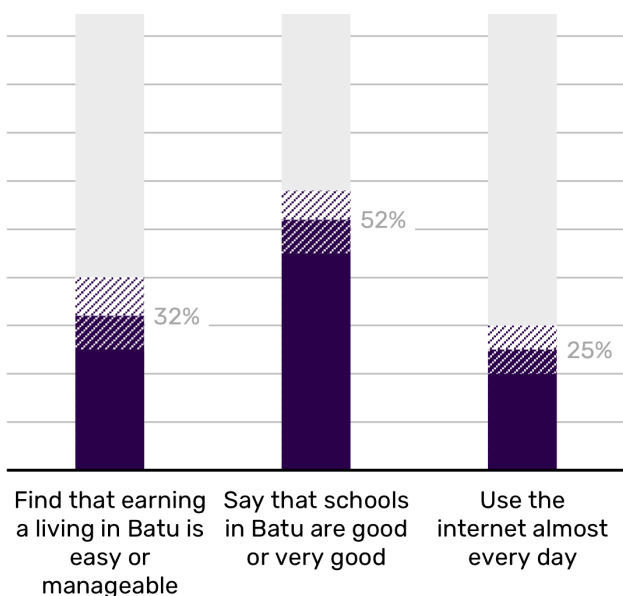


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

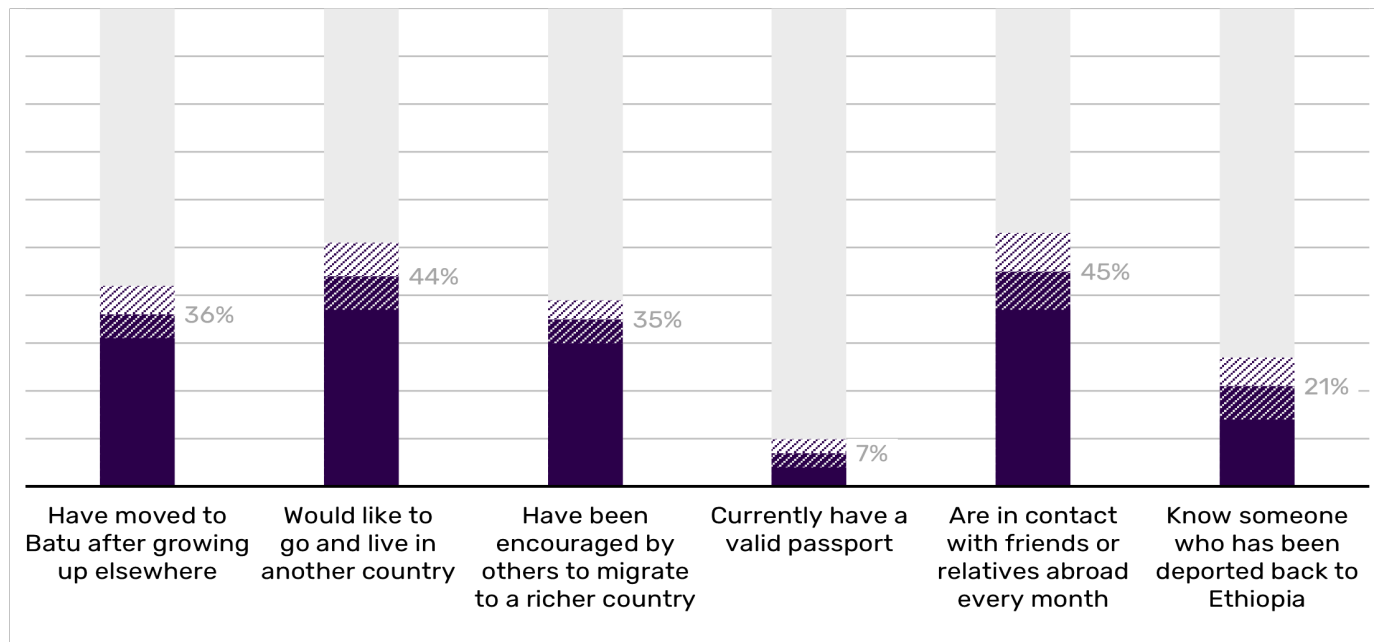


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Many highlighted the dangers and cost of the journey – in cases of irregular migration – but also the challenges and social isolation faced once abroad.

Despite this, international out-migration is a prospect for many. Of those young adults surveyed, one-quarter (26%) have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year.

Migration aspirations

Many surveyed young adults highlighted their growing sense of fear, anxiety and stress. Ethnic tensions in Ethiopia have affected the atmosphere and feelings of security in Batu, with increased distrust between neighbours; this was true for participants of all ethnicities.²

While many agreed that current times were difficult, many hold hope for the future of Batu – some grounded in religious hope or in prospects of the June 2021 general elections. Others noted improved infrastructure and developments as a reason for optimism and expressed a certain level of hope that things would get better.

Overall, international migration aspirations are low, with most young adults (56%) preferring to remain in Ethiopia, whether this be in Batu (55%) or elsewhere in Ethiopia (45%).

Most young adults surveyed were strongly in favour of internal migration, since it is easier to maintain social ties, create friendships, and visit friends and family back home often. Some 44% of young adults know of someone from Batu who has migrated internally in the past five years. Often, to other major towns such as Addis Ababa, Hawassa or Adama for work opportunities or to continue college or university education.

Gender and migration

While both men and women migrate, the forms and destinations of migration tend to differ. Women are more likely to leave Ethiopia than men. Most often, women travel for domestic work in Gulf countries – primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The construction of buildings and roads doesn't show the development of the town. We should consider the availability of jobs or the opportunities, and how much the residents have benefited.

Focus group participant

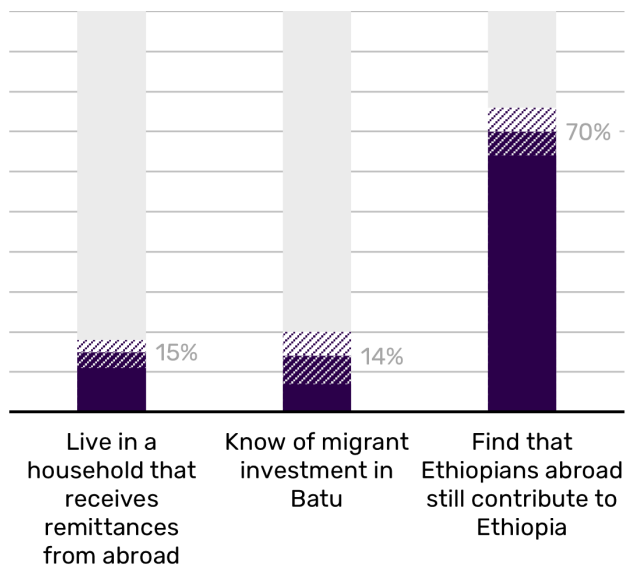


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

In Batu, some 9% of young women have lived abroad for at least one year compared to 2% of young men. However, only 57% of young women would migrate to a richer country if given the necessary papers, against 70% of young men. This might suggest unfulfilled migration aspirations among men, who lack the opportunities for migration that women have. Men are more likely to migrate within Ethiopia, often to Hawassa, Adama or Addis Ababa, to start a business or find employment.

Internal in-migration

In-migration is a prominent feature of Batu, a historically diverse town with mixed ethnic groups. Around two-thirds of surveyed young adults (64%) grew up there and the rest (36%) are internal migrants.

International foreign investment has led to significant levels of rural-urban in-migration

from surrounding rural areas and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). Most workers at the flower factory are from the Wolaita ethnic group in the SNNPR. Some come from the Gurage area to open businesses in Batu, though on a much smaller scale.

Links between migration and development

Transnational ties are strong. Two-thirds (66%) of young adults have monthly contact with migrant family or friends. Around one quarter (29%) of young adults' households with migrant members, relatives or friends had received remittances in the past year.

Beyond an improvement in road infrastructure - led by the government and the World Bank - major development interventions are limited. Most changes in the town are tied to private investment, which is actively promoted by the government as a means towards development. This had led to a significant increase in livelihood opportunities, material development and rural-urban migration. However, livelihood expansion has been limited. The resulting jobs are low paid and chemical pollution of Lake Ziway is a widespread concern for health and livelihoods in Batu.

Notes

1. Based on data by the Ethiopian Statistics Service, 2021.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Camille Kasavan and Tewelde Adhanom in June 2020. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39) was conducted by 15 enumerators from the Oromia State University in July 2021.
3. Tensions have increased since the [assassination of Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020](#), which resulted in protests, violence and displacement in Batu and the wider region.

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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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