



Migration and development dynamics in Moyale, Ethiopia

Moyale is rapidly becoming a market centre and major destination for transit and in-migration. Yet informal cross-border trade, drought and renewed conflict threaten livelihood expansion and development.

Crossing to border towns in Kenya, where many have family members, is a daily activity in Moyale.

A new 'one-stop' border post for trade between Ethiopia and Kenya, expected to boost trade and tariff relations, has increased in- and transit migration to Moyale.

One fifth (21%) of young adults would prefer to leave Ethiopia in the next five years. However, beyond regular travel to Kenya, migration aspirations are low.



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Photo: Tewelde Adhanom for MIGNEX.

Moyale is a rapidly growing town in south Ethiopia on the border with Kenya, with a population of around 74,000 people. The town is divided into two administrations: Moyale Somali and Moyale Oromo.

Moyale has a culture of migration, with strong socio-cultural, economic and ethnic ties with the border towns of Kenya. To boost and legalise historic relations, the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments jointly launched a 'one-stop' border post to foster tariff and trade relations in December 2020.¹ Moyale has since become a destination for transit and in-

migration. It is also rapidly becoming a market centre due to its proximity to the dry port of Moyale, Lamu Corridors, Kenya's border towns, and the airport in nearby Labelo that is currently under construction.

However, the expected boost to trade and the local economy has not yet materialised. Some 64% of surveyed young adults consider it very difficult to find a good job in Moyale. Most (71%) consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

Since 2018, Moyale has also experienced severe security challenges due to renewed conflict on the Oromo and Somali border.² This continues to be a source of tension that impacts the development of the town. Periodic drought is further impacting development and local conflict in Moyale.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Batu and Kombolcha and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Ethiopia.³

Migration from Moyale

Migration forms part of everyday life in Moyale. Crossing to nearby towns in Kenya, where many have family members, is a daily activity. Nearly one-third (31%) of surveyed young adults have family or friends living abroad, many of whom are in Kenya (67%) or the United States (US) (21%).

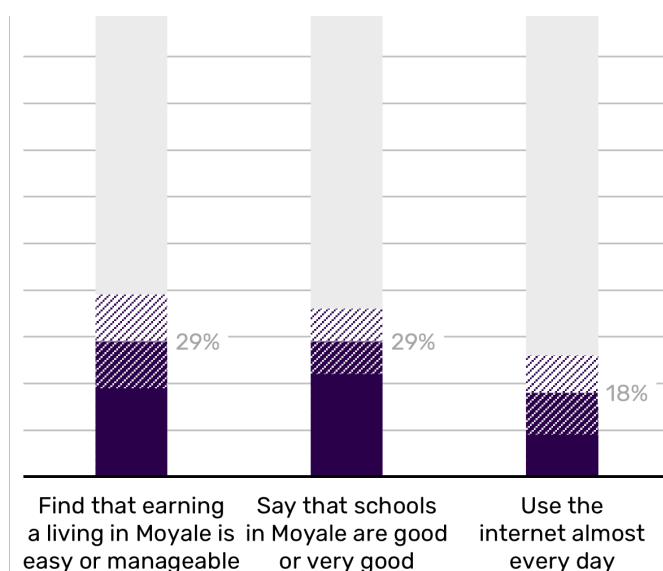


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

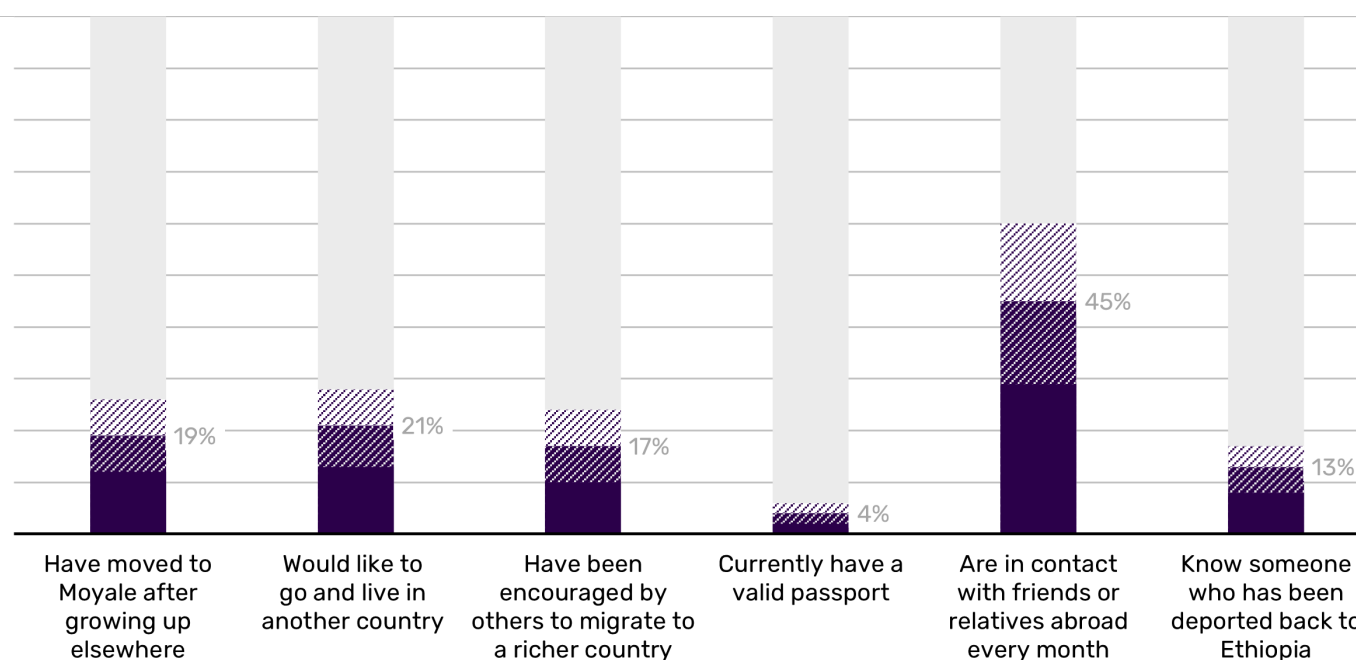


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

The community – predominantly the Borona Oromo and Geri Somali clans – have strong ties with their respective clans in the border towns of Kenya. They also have both Ethiopian and Kenyan national identity cards for easy movement across the border.

Migration to Kenya for education and employment is common and perceived as positive. Many send their children to nearby Kenyan towns for schooling; others migrate seasonally due to farming practices and as a resilience strategy during drought.

The US is the preferred (32%) international destination for young adults, followed by Kenya (25%) and the United Kingdom (8%). Yet beyond regular travel to Kenya, outflows are not high – most young adults (75%) expect to stay in Moyale in the next five years. Regular migration to Europe and the US relies on family ties and the Diversity Visa Lottery (in the case of the US), making feasibility low. Irregular migration is perceived as an unpleasant and risky choice.

Migration aspirations

Border issues along the Oromo and Somali border has led to ethnic tensions and security challenges in the community. Many respondents expressed despair about the traumatic communal conflict they faced two

years ago and are fearful of the current tensions.

Overall, migration aspirations (beyond travel to Kenya) are low. Less than half (47%) of young adults surveyed would migrate to a richer country, even if given the necessary papers. And only one-fifth (21%) of young adults would prefer to leave Ethiopia in the next five years. Even fewer (14%) have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year.

Many were hopeful that if the security situation stabilises, border trade could boost the local economy. Some respondents hoped Moyale could become an ‘East African Dubai’: a Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA), connected to Lamu port in Kenya.

In-migration

Many internal and international migrants arrive in Moyale every day from the South

For people to have hope and a better future, it is dependent upon peace. We can talk about development if there is peace. We can talk about trade and education if there is peace. The prime need of this town is peace.

Focus group participant

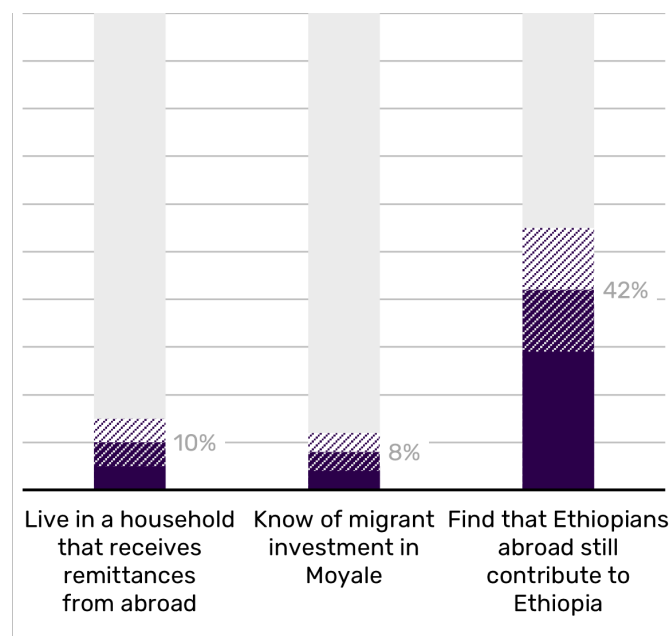


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

National Nationality and People's Region (SNNPR). The war in northern Ethiopia has also led to increased in- and transit migration by Ethiopian migrants and Eritrean refugees.

Some stay in Moyale for the labour market, as private investment increases livelihood opportunities in the wider region. Others continue on their journeys to border towns in Kenya or embark on the risky journey to South Africa via Tanzania.

Most do not stay. Just 1% of surveyed young adults are international migrants who grew up in another country; some 18% are internal migrants.

Links between migration and development

Given the longstanding connections with Kenyan border towns – for example, Moyale Kenya and Marsabit – there are strong transnational ties. Two-thirds (66%) of young

adults have monthly contact with migrant family or friends. Unlike other areas in Ethiopia, most of the community in Moyale use two SIM cards – one to communicate with relatives locally and another to communicate internationally in Kenya.

The economic impact of migration is clear in Moyale. Some 33% of young adults reported that their household with migrant family, relatives or friends had received remittances in the past year. There is also some investment in private schools and homes by Kenyan relatives, yet these instances are few. Yet just 8% of young adults are aware of migrant investment in the development of the town.

The 'one-stop' border post with Kenya was expected to boost trade and the local economy of Moyale but this has not yet materialised. Instead, it poses a continued threat to the security of the area amid contraband trade and human trafficking. However, hope remains for improved economic and social relations with cross-border trade and free movement of people.

Notes

1. Kenya–Ethiopia one-stop border post at Moyale opens, June 2021. See: <https://www.theeastafrikan.co.ke/tea/business/kenya-ethiopia-one-stop-border-post-at-moyale-opens-3430514>
2. Reuters. 'Ethnic violence in southern Ethiopia kills 21, wounds 61 – state news', 15 December 2018. See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-violence-idUSKBN10E090>
3. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Tewelde Adhanom in July 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by Samuel Hall in July–August 2021.

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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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