



Migration and development dynamics in Hopa, Turkey

The opening of the Turkey-Georgia border has introduced economic opportunities through cross-border trade. Yet many young adults feel discouraged by limited opportunities, and increasingly aspire to migrate.

— Much of Hopa's economic development has been built on free trade and border crossings between Turkey and Georgia.

— Despite wealth expansion and improved living standards, there have been limited development interventions in the area.

— Young people and their parents increasingly recognise the professional and educational opportunities of internal out-migration.



Pınar Ensari
Nilay Kavur
Caterina Mazzilli



Photo: Pinar Ensari for MIGNEX.

Hopa is a town on the Turkish–Georgian border, with a population of approximately 28,000 people. With a history of in-migration, its community is diverse, including Laz, Hemshin and Lom people from within Turkey, and Georgian immigrants.

Much of Hopa’s economic development grounds on free trade and border crossing between Turkey and Georgia. It has had a major impact on local livelihoods. Common economic activities include shipping, truck driving, customs clearance administration. In addition, informal activities such as shuttle

trade - where residents of post-soviet countries, primarily Georgia, buy goods in Turkey for resale in their own countries – has been taking place for over 30 years.

Almost all Hopa locals have tea fields, yet very few live on tea production alone; engaged in other activities provided by cross-border trade and/or small-scale businesses. Since the opening of the border, many young adults have seized opportunities to make money through cross-border trade, instead of pursuing higher education in Hopa.

Around one-third (37%) of surveyed young adults in Hopa consider it manageable to earn a living and feed a family, and a further 30% find it easy. Nearly half (41%) consider it difficult to find a good job in the town.

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

Migration from Hopa

Hopa has not experienced much out-migration over recent decades, but young people and their parents increasingly recognise the opportunities that migration can offer.

The main motivations to migrate out of the town are to pursue higher education and/or to find a well-paid job.

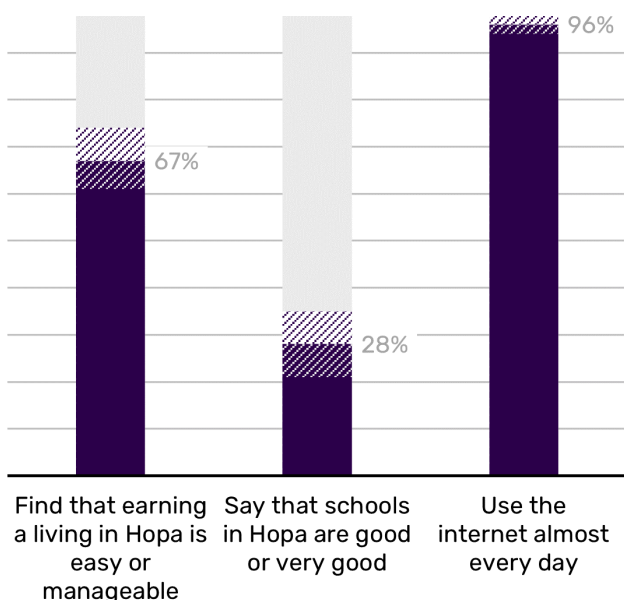


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

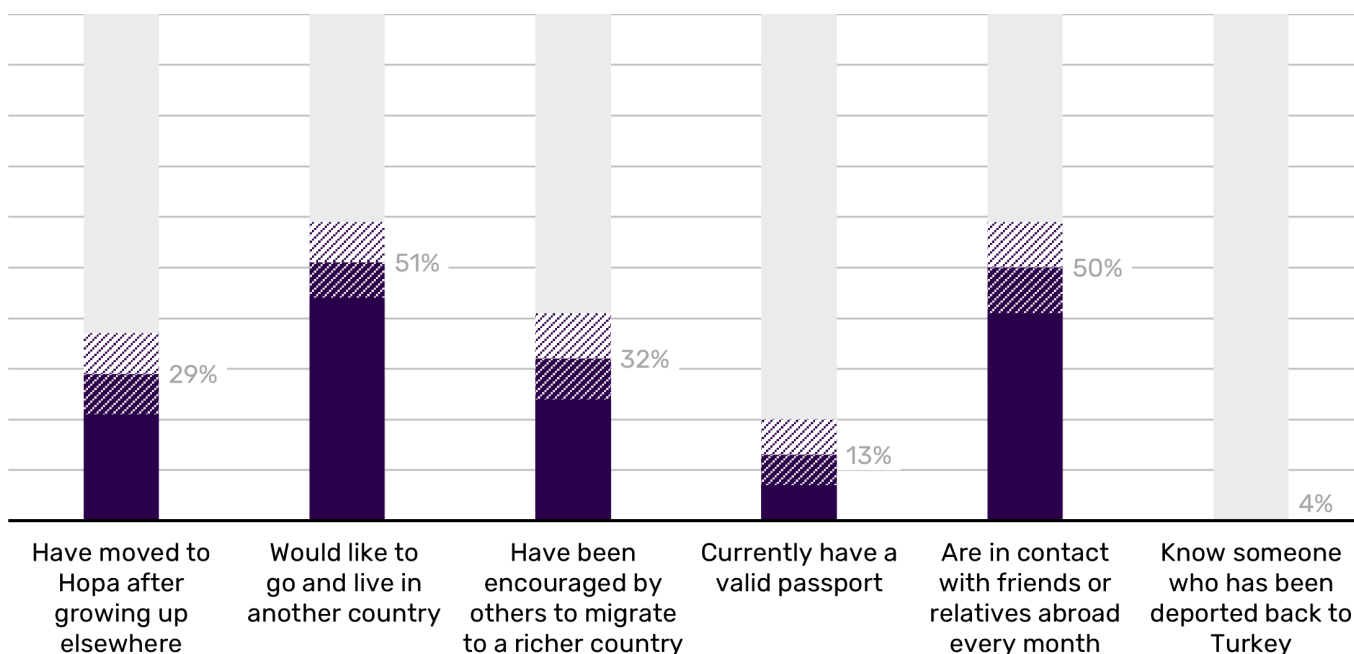


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Over half (58%) of surveyed young adults have family or friends living abroad. However, for many citizens, international migration seems more of an aspiration or dream rather than a possibility. Migration to other Turkish cities is most common, and those who do leave Turkey often travel to Batumi, in Georgia, which is not considered as ‘going abroad’.

In recent decades, chain migration has emerged from Hopa to England, whereby some men have migrated under the framework of the Ankara Agreement.²

Migration aspirations

Hopa’s residents perceive international out-migration in increasingly positive terms. Many feel discouraged by the political and economic instability in Turkey. Equally, as access to economic resources, as well as to new ideas through media have increased, aspirations for a better life have grown too.

Despite the tremendous growth in wealth due to cross-border trade and mobility between Georgia and Turkey, Hopa provides very few educational, social, and cultural opportunities. Many see migration as an opportunity build a better life for themselves and their family - through professional or educational opportunities.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of young adults would migrate to a richer country if given the necessary papers. Over two-thirds of young adults (69%) think their family would approve if they migrated to a richer country. However, over half (52%) of surveyed young adults expect to stay in Hopa in the next five years. Still, aspirations for internal migration are significant. Among those who would prefer to stay in Turkey (51%), over half (55%) would rather migrate internally than remain in Hopa.

In-migration

Several moments in the history of the district marked an increase in migration inflows: the beginning of tea production in 1951, the opening of the Hopa Port in 1972, and the opening of the Georgia-Turkey border in 1988.

People who were born and grew up here are tired of working in the tea garden. There is a desire to escape, they want to go to university instead of work in the factory or agriculture.

Focus group participant

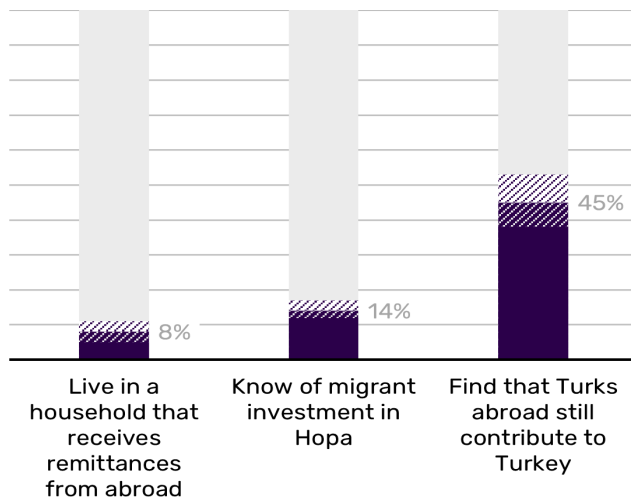


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Today, Hopa remains a migration destination, often for seasonal migration, with circulation between Turkey and Georgia. Georgian men often arrive in Hopa for tea harvesting, while Georgian women pass through for work in domestic and care services, as well as shuttle trade.

Internal in-migration is also common – almost one-third (29%) are internal migrants who grew up elsewhere in Turkey. People often come from the Eastern provinces of Turkey (Kars, Ardahan, Erzurum) for work opportunities. Many internal migrants do not have tea fields as a safety net, and many received social assistance due to unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Links between migration and development

Over half of young adults (58%) have family, relatives, or friends living abroad, some 63% of whom maintain monthly contact.

Around one in ten (14%) of surveyed young adults with migrant family members, relatives, or friends had received remittances in the past year. However, no young adults stated that those remittances were the most important source of income for their household.

Overall collective remittances are not well known in the town: few young adults (14%) know of migrant investment in Hopa. Instead, the main source of investment in Hopa comes from members of the Hopa diaspora running businesses elsewhere in Turkey. Some have financed the construction of new school buildings, student accommodation, a cultural centre, and a tea factory. Others have sponsored cultural activities and festivals in Hopa.

Despite these instances of local development, young adults feel there are too few social, cultural, and educational opportunities and migration aspirations are increasing. Over one third (35%) of young adults have seriously considered internationally migrating in the past year.

Notes

1. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Pinar Ensari and Nilay Kavur in August 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by Frekans Research in August 2021.
2. Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey, Ankara, 12 September 1963. Official Journal of the European Communities.

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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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