



MIGNEX Background Paper

# The determination of migration through focus group data

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**MIGNEX**

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 in Europe, Africa and Asia: the Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, the Overseas Development Institute, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

See [www.mignex.org](http://www.mignex.org).



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**MIGNEX Background Papers**

The MIGNEX Background Papers are scientific papers containing the documentation and analyses that underpin the project results. Selected insights from background papers are also presented in non-technical form in other formats, including MIGNEX Policy Briefs and MIGNEX Reports.

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## Contents

### Introduction

#### Methods, data and analytical approach

Data collection

Analytical approach

What can the MIGNEX focus group data tell us about the causes of migration?

#### Conceptual foundations

Countering seven biases

Reasons for migration

Discourse, narratives, and talking about migration

#### A roadmap to the empirical sections

##### What are perceived as reasons for migrating?

Migrating for security

Migrating to overcome the lack of economic opportunities

Migrating to support the family or community

In search of 'a good life'

Cultures of migration

Climate change

##### What are perceived as reasons for staying?

Staying for the community

Staying for the duty of care

Avoiding risks in destination countries

##### How do risk and feasibility of migrating matter in migration considerations?

Risks of the migration journey

Feasibility of migration

##### How does education intersect with migration considerations?

Migration as a mechanism which enables education

Education as a mechanism which enables migration

Migration at the expense of education

##### How do remittances figure in talk about migration?

What does migration (remittances) enable expenditure on?

Economic gains, human costs?

Migration aspirations or remittance aspirations?

##### Cross-cutting discussion

How do people talk about migration?

What characterises the migration that people talk about?

### Conclusion

### References

## Tables

Table 1. MIGNEX research areas 5

Table 2. Salience of, and attitudes to, international migration as reflected in coding scales from qualitative data collection 10

Table 2. Scores of selected in coding scales from qualitative data collection 11

## Figures

Figure 1. MIGNEX research areas 4

# The determination of migration through focus group data

Discussions in 104 focus groups across the 26 MIGNEX research areas show how people talk about migration, what they perceive as reasons for staying and leaving, and what they think of as migration in the first place.

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Reasons for leaving are discussed in relation to the anticipated local effects of migration.

—

The simple desire to lead a normal or decent life stands out as a major motivation for migration.

—

People associate migration with the most common forms of mobility which are often not international migration to Europe.

## Introduction

This Background Paper draws on the MIGNEX focus group dataset to shed light on causes of migration. We approach the determination of migration by examining *how people talk about migration*. This open approach maximises the value of focus group data as largely participant-driven. Even though the discussions were thematically guided, the data reveal understandings and perspectives that were not anticipated or asked about explicitly. Herein lies the potential for challenging assumptions and changing perspectives, which are gains that our analytical approach pursues.

The paper is one of several MIGNEX deliverables that seek to explain migration outcomes. The title's reference to 'determination' of migration reflects this broader agenda rather than the theoretical or methodological approach of this particular analysis. We return to the question of how

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qualitative analyses of focus group data complements other forms of data and methods in understanding the causes of migration.

The *MIGNEX focus group data* set consists of transcripts from 104 focus groups with young adults (18-39 years of age), collected in 26 research areas across 10 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The discussions centred on the participants' perceptions of young people's livelihood opportunities, at 'school leaving age'. Participants were also invited to share thoughts about the area, on continuity and change there. Questions about migration emerged organically based on experiences and dynamics of mobilities and immobilities in research areas and among participants in particular focus groups. However, migration was also asked directly about in conjunction with livelihoods discussions, and more explicitly regarding the views on migration and its potential impacts both for individuals and for the research area, toward the end of each discussion.

The focus groups were deliberately composed of participants with either strong or weak ties or exposure to migration, as explained in the next section. The focus group data offer unique insights into perceptions, opinions and experiences of migration, as expressed in a group setting. The data combine thematically directed content with an openness that allows for the unexpected. Crucially, they also include reactions from fellow participants and thereby bring out points of contention or agreement.

Given the context of our focus group discussions, the discussions about migration that we analyse, was more skewed toward people *leaving*, although people *coming*, was a topic also discussed in the research areas where it was relevant, based primarily on what was brought up by participants themselves.

Our analysis is guided by a focus on *how people talk about migration*. This down-to-earth entry point has proven valuable for understanding how people may think about, consider and reflect on the possibility of migration, as well as about imagined, hoped for, feared, or experienced impacts of migration. It is also revealing in terms of questioning what we – and potential migrants in different parts of the world – actually understand by *migration*. Indeed, what characterises the directions, durations, distances and purposes of the 'migration' that people talk about?

The focus group data show multiplicity and contradiction in *how* people talk about migration. Nevertheless, we find that there are some striking patterns, across research areas that are different from one another, with varying degrees of heterogeneity within. What we can glean from how people talk about migration matters if we are to make sense of the causes of migration. *First*, we learn what is being said about migration, and *second*, how people talk about migration is revealing of what characterises the migration that they speak of.

While at the outset it might seem obvious what migration refers to, as we show in this background paper, that is not necessarily the case: for the distance, direction, duration and purpose vary, and make the boundaries of what is understood and described as migration blurred. Given the fact that there is no absolute definition of 'migration' this question clearly merits further attention, and reflects previous insights on the often-elusive

boundaries between e.g. temporary – or long-term – or permanent stays, or in relation to the continuum of return mobilities as linked to questions of belonging and locations of ‘home’ for individuals and families. As we develop further, what is referred to as migration – using this word, or its closest translation in various languages, is not always clear-cut. Words such as: travel, shifting, moving, leaving, work-related stays, all make an appearance in discussions that otherwise might be interpreted to be ‘about migration’. We also see that there is a higher degree of slipperiness as regards internal migration – where other words are more often used, as compared to about instances of international migration. Meanwhile, lacking clarity about the nature of the migration we seek to understand the causes of, as this is set within the life-worlds of focus group participants and reflected in how they talk about migration, may detrimentally affect how accurate our knowledge about the causes of migration can be.

This paper has three main parts, each made up of several sections. In the first part we present our methods, data and analytical approach, and our conceptual foundations. The second part presents our empirical analyses and is structured around five questions. The third part contains a crosscutting analysis and discussion of insights; returning to the question of how people talk about migration and the types of migration that emerge. Finally we present our conclusions, with an eye to both future research and policy implications.

The analysis presented here results from a large collaborative effort, including MIGNEX team members and assistants in the ten countries where data were collected (see Erdal et al. 2023 for detailed information on this). In line with MIGNEX guidelines on research ethics and authorship, data collection alone does not qualify for authorship (Carling 2020). The authors of this paper are the team members who have also carried out data processing, coding, analysis and writing. Three of the authors were also directly involved in conducting focus group discussions and thereby have first-hand knowledge of the entire research process, though only from three countries. Taking seriously processes of co-production of knowledge and asymmetries which exist has been an important priority in the MIGNEX project, and for the qualitative data collection, as discussed elsewhere (Erdal et al. 2023).

However, we recognise the obvious limits in how far we have been able to realise our *ambitions* of more genuinely equal, *equitable and inclusive global research collaboration*, especially in the analysis phase. There are different and often structural reasons as to why this is the case. These are in tangible ways related to funding set-ups, institutional arrangements, individuals’ contracts and/or own priorities, and delays caused by the pandemic, to mention a few. Meanwhile, this work has contributed to highlight many of these real and often structural challenges, and thus offers valuable lessons for the future. While these are important lessons for us as researchers, these are equally relevant to consider for research administrators, academic institutions, but also funding bodies, and those making available research funding and managing the mandates of funding bodies.



## Methods, data and analytical approach

This section introduces the data collection, our analytical approach, and based on this: our assessment of what the MIGNEX focus group data set can tell us about the causes of migration. For detailed elaboration of the methodology see Erdal and Carling 2020, and on the implementation of the data collection during fieldwork see Erdal et al. 2023, including sections on focus group methods, research ethical considerations and co-production of knowledge in international collaborative research.

### Data collection

Data for MIGNEX was collected in ten countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In each country, we selected two or three ‘research areas’ in order to have project-wide datasets with theoretically interesting variation between and within countries. The countries and number of research areas were Afghanistan (3), Cabo Verde (2), Ethiopia (3), Ghana (3), Guinea (2), Nigeria (3), Pakistan (3), Somalia (2), Tunisia (2), and Turkey (3). The distribution of research areas is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. MIGNEX research areas**

The research areas are listed in Table 1, with their respective IDs. These research area IDs form the basis of the IDs for particular focus groups, which we use to identify the origin of quotes in this paper. For instance, PAK3A, refers to focus group A in Keti Bandar (PAK3). Table 1 also includes a link to the MIGNEX Case Study Brief for each area. These briefs contain photos, selected survey results, and an account of migration dynamics.

### Qualitative data collection

Data collection in each research area had two main components: survey data collection and qualitative data collection. The qualitative data collection, in



turn, consisted of focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and observation. As part of the mixed methods design, photography was also an integrated part of the data collection.

The qualitative data collection was designed to ensure both depth and comparability within the time constraints (Erdal and Carling 2020). The research teams varied in size and composition to ensure that needs for both linguistic and methodological skills were met. Fieldwork in each research area generally lasted one or two weeks.

Data was collected between February 2020 and December 2021 and was thus shaped by the changing context of the pandemic. Fieldwork was carried out when it was feasible in the particular research area, from both regulatory and ethical perspectives (Erdal et al. 2023).

**Table 1. MIGNEX research areas**

Name	ID	Country	Link to Case Study Brief
São Nicolau	CPV1	Cabo Verde	<a href="https://mignex.org/cpv1">mignex.org/cpv1</a>
Boa Vista	CPV2	Cabo Verde	<a href="https://mignex.org/cpv2">mignex.org/cpv2</a>
Boffa	GIN1	Guinea	<a href="https://mignex.org/gin1">mignex.org/gin1</a>
Dialakoro	GIN2	Guinea	<a href="https://mignex.org/gin2">mignex.org/gin2</a>
Gbane	GHA1	Ghana	<a href="https://mignex.org/gha1">mignex.org/gha1</a>
Golf City	GHA2	Ghana	<a href="https://mignex.org/gha2">mignex.org/gha2</a>
New Takoradi	GHA3	Ghana	<a href="https://mignex.org/gha3">mignex.org/gha3</a>
Down Quarters	NGA1	Nigeria	<a href="https://mignex.org/nga1">mignex.org/nga1</a>
Awe	NGA2	Nigeria	<a href="https://mignex.org/nga2">mignex.org/nga2</a>
Ekpoma	NGA3	Nigeria	<a href="https://mignex.org/nga3">mignex.org/nga3</a>
Kombolcha	ETH1	Ethiopia	<a href="https://mignex.org/eth1">mignex.org/eth1</a>
Batu	ETH2	Ethiopia	<a href="https://mignex.org/eth2">mignex.org/eth2</a>
Moyale	ETH3	Ethiopia	<a href="https://mignex.org/eth3">mignex.org/eth3</a>
Erigavo	SOM1	Somalia	<a href="https://mignex.org/som1">mignex.org/som1</a>
Baidoa	SOM2	Somalia	<a href="https://mignex.org/som2">mignex.org/som2</a>
Enfidha	TUN1	Tunisia	<a href="https://mignex.org/tun1">mignex.org/tun1</a>
Redeyef	TUN2	Tunisia	<a href="https://mignex.org/tun2">mignex.org/tun2</a>
Hopa	TUR1	Turkey	<a href="https://mignex.org/tur1">mignex.org/tur1</a>
Yenice	TUR2	Turkey	<a href="https://mignex.org/tur2">mignex.org/tur2</a>
Kilis	TUR3	Turkey	<a href="https://mignex.org/tur3">mignex.org/tur3</a>
Shahrake Jabrael	AFG1	Afghanistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/afg1">mignex.org/afg1</a>
Behsud	AFG2	Afghanistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/afg2">mignex.org/afg2</a>
Shahrake Mahdia	AFG3	Afghanistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/afg3">mignex.org/afg3</a>
Chot Dheeran	PAK1	Pakistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/pak1">mignex.org/pak1</a>
Youhanabad	PAK2	Pakistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/pak2">mignex.org/pak2</a>
Keti Bandar	PAK3	Pakistan	<a href="https://mignex.org/pak3">mignex.org/pak3</a>

### Focus groups

In each of the 26 research areas, the teams carried out four focus group discussions. Two discussions were with women and two were with men. There was an average of six participants per group. Separating men and women would be the only socially acceptable approach in several research areas, and we decided to do this throughout all research areas for the sake of

consistency. Gender-separated groups also ensured that perspectives of men and women were equally represented in the data.

For each gender, the two groups were differentiated by the strength of migration ties or exposure. A central task for the fieldwork teams in each research area was to operationalise based on local realities what ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ migration exposure or migration ties meant. We used both ‘migration exposure’ and ‘migration ties’ in order to allow for varying contexts of mobility and immobility across research areas.

In effect, what in some areas was ‘weak’ migration exposure – in other areas might mean ‘strong’ – depending on what the full picture of migration dynamics was in each area. For example, in some areas having a migrant family member was considered a ‘strong’ tie to migration, while in other areas having migration in the family, but not having migrated oneself could mean a participant fell into the ‘weak’ ties category, depending on the prevalence of migration there. Meanwhile, for every research area, it meant that a full breadth of types of migration exposure – from very little to a lot – was covered among the participants in the four focus groups.

For instance, in Keti Bandar (PAK3), the operationalisation of a ‘weak ties’ focus group with men read: ‘All the participants live in Keti Bandar and their families belong to Keti Bandar. They did not have any immediate family outside of Keti Bandar’. Whereas the women’s group with strong ties was operationalised as follows: ‘Strong link was categorised to include those whose family members had migrated or those who themselves had migrated.’ In this research area, this involved only internal migration, predominantly within the same part of Pakistan only. Meanwhile in Baidoa (SOM2), the operationalisation of a ‘strong ties’ focus group with men read: ‘As with the women, strong links included both IDPs and refugee returnees, as well as in-migrants who had come to Baidoa for work (who have been living in Baidoa for at least five years).’ The operationalisation of a focus group with weak ties with women in Baidoa read: ‘In Baidoa, weak links with migration for women were people who had no migration experience and no immediate family members (parents and siblings) who had migrated abroad, although they could have other relatives abroad.’

These descriptions of the operationalisation of four of the focus group, indicate the types of variety in exposure and ties to migration which were to be found within and between the research areas. (All operationalisations of the focus group’s migration exposure or ties are available as metadata in Erdal et al. 2023).

The focus groups were conducted by the teams doing MIGNEX fieldwork in each research area and were conducted in a total of 26 different languages, depending on the local context in question. In some areas, different focus groups were conducted in different languages, and a few discussions were conducted in multiple languages. Within the MIGNEX research teams, there was adequate linguistic competence to manage this diversity of languages in a satisfactory manner.

The focus groups all followed the same guide (see MIGNEX Handbook chapter 8 on Qualitative Data collection, Erdal and Carling 2020). This guide has four sections:

1. Building rapport and ensuring everyone's participation, exchanging perspectives on the area and how it has changed over time.
2. Perceptions of livelihood opportunities in the area for youth of school-leaving age (occupations or livelihoods that *exist* – and separately, that are *recommended*).
3. Views on the impacts of migration at the individual level, thereafter at the collective, research-area level.
4. Wrap-up with open question on further points to raise, and a *tour de table* on participants' take-away reflections.

The focus group discussions lasted 90 minutes on average. They were recorded and transcribed into English-language transcripts, following a rigorous quality assurance protocol (see Erdal et al. 2023).

In the transcripts, each statement, narrative, or interjection by a participant is a separate paragraph, but they are not attributed to specific participants. In other words, separate contributions by the same participant are not connected. Confidently attributing statements to specific participants would have required video rather than audio recording, which we for practical and ethical reasons decided not to do.

The 104 transcripts that constitute the raw data stem from a total of 159 hours of discussion with 646 participants. The transcripts total 695,000 words, which corresponds to about 2800 standard book pages.

The MIGNEX focus group data set will be made available for use by students and researchers beyond the project team at the end of the project period (September 2024).

## Analytical approach

The data have been coded in NVivo, using a shared codebook developed for the analysis of MIGNEX data, with an abductive approach, staying close to the data, while attentive to the project's objectives and main research questions (see also Erdal et al. 2023: 54-62). The NVivo codebook consisted of 60 codes, allowing for exploration of data coded to single codes, or to two or more codes simultaneously, as well as for filtering in different ways, e.g., based on research areas.

For this paper, we have followed a three-pronged analytical approach:

1. Gaining an overview of the coded data set as a whole, and on this basis exploring possible codes and code-combinations to investigate more closely. We have looked for both patterns and for anomalies. Given the structure of our data we also systematically considered gender and the differences between focus groups with participants with strong/weak migration ties, for their potential to shed light on what the data could offer for this particular analysis.
2. Carefully reviewing all data coded to the 'Ideas about migration' code across all 104 transcripts, making notes and reflecting on similarities and differences within the research areas, across research areas, and across the ten countries, as well as along other possible axis of similarity or difference. This exercise yielded a lot in terms of a comprehensive

overview and understanding of the ways in which people ‘talk about migration’ in the focus groups overall.

3. Conducting a careful review of the data which in NVivo was coded at the following codes: ‘Reasons for migration’, ‘Reasons against migration’, ‘Failed migration’ ‘Migration journeys’, ‘Remittances’, ‘Disagreement/Conflict’, ‘About this place’, ‘Un-hopeful’, ‘Hopeful’, ‘Worsened’, ‘Improved’, ‘Livelihood recommendations’ and ‘Livelihood opportunities’. Furthermore, the ‘Ideas about education’, ‘Schools’ and ‘Higher education’ codes were cross-queried with the ‘Ideas about migration’ code. The selection of these particular codes in NVivo for further analysis was based on three factors: (1) what the NVivo coding was indicating, including our initial review of ‘ideas about migration’ and in terms of volume of coding to the various codes; (2) a more inductive set of factors in terms of what, based on the former review and the author’s engagement with the material overall, appeared as the most purposeful direction for the analysis; and (3) a more deductive set of factors based on what we might expect, based on prior knowledge of the themes we were exploring, from the research literature.

The three-pronged approach was developed chronologically, based on what we found in the first step, and gradually expanded on thereafter. As we discuss below, our initial pre-conceptions about how to approach the data and what that might yield, as relevant to questions of the causes of migration, and to understandings of local discourses of migration, were challenged by what we saw in the data. This led to a revision of our analytical approach, following the first of the steps above, overall and specifically in terms of the roles of research areas in the structure of our analysis, and presentation thereof in this Background Paper.

### Differences and similarities across research areas

Our point of departure was that we would most likely structure our analysis on one or more of three possible axes of difference in the data: the 26 research areas; the groups with women vs. men; or the groups with participants with weak vs. strong ties or exposure to migration.

We see some differences between research areas, and indeed there are some differences between women’s and men’s perspectives, and the discussions among people with different levels of migration exposure. However, overall, we found that there is a lot of *heterogeneity* discussions about livelihoods prospects and the roles of migration, within research areas, among women and men respectively, and those with weak or strong migration ties, respectively. But more interestingly, we also saw quite striking similarities in the types of ways in which migration is thought about, and discussed, which were present across rather different research areas, and indeed gender and migration exposure. Thus, while these three axes of difference certainly merit attention, and may yield interesting analysis drawing on the MIGNEX survey data set, for this analysis of focus group data – the conclusion was drawn to not compartmentalise and do analysis research area by research area, but instead across the whole data set.

## Research area contexts

The research areas were deliberately selected to ensure diversity, in terms of both migration and development-related characteristics. While our analyses seek to identify broader patterns and distinctions, individual statements reflect particular contexts. For an in-depth background on specific research areas, we refer to the MIGNEX Case Study Briefs (see Table 1).

To provide more of a snapshot overview as context for the focus group data, we use the *coding scales* that were part of the qualitative data collection. Researchers who carried out the qualitative fieldwork were asked to assess their overall impression of 20 different aspects of the research area on a four-point scale (Erdal and Carling 2020). The coding scales included the salience of international migration and the prevailing attitudes towards international migration. Table 2 displays how these two dimensions intersect. In the top-right corner are research areas where international migration is most salient and viewed most positively, which can be interpreted as a strong culture of migration (a concept we return to in later sections.) For reference, Table 2 displays the scores for a selection of other coding scales that relate to the content of this paper.

**Table 2. Salience of, and attitudes to, international migration as reflected in coding scales from qualitative data collection**

		Salience of international out-migration			
		Low		High	
Attitudes towards international out-migration	Positive		Hopa (TUR1)	Behsud (AFG2) Youhanabad (PAK2)	New Takoradi (GHA3) São Nicolau (CPV1)
		Gbane (GHA1) Keti Bandar (PAK3) Yenice (TUR2)	Dialakoro (GIN2)	Batu (ETH2) Erigavo (SOM1)	Enfidha (TUN1) Kombolcha (ETH1)
			Baidoa (SOM2) Boa Vista (CPV2) Boffa (GIN1) Golf City (GHA2) Kilis (TUR3)	Moyale (ETH3)	Chot Dheeran (PAK1) Ekpoma (NGA3) Redeyef (TUN2) Shar. Jabrael (AFG1) Shar. Mahdia (AFG3)
	Negative	Awe (NGA2)	Down Quarters (NGA1)		

Source: Four-point coding scales in the MIGNEX qualitative fieldwork data. See also Table 2. The underlying methodology is described in MIGNEX Handbook Chapter 8 (Erdal and Carling 2020).

**Table 3. Scores of selected in coding scales from qualitative data collection**

Research area		Major infrastructure improvement	Educational expansion	Extent of gender segregation and gender differences	Level of insecurity and violence	Visibility of police/military/security	Environmental degradation	Vulnerability to natural disasters	Overall atmosphere of hope (4)/despair (1)	Salience of international out-migration	Attitudes towards international out-migration	Perceived feasibility of international out-migration	Gendering of out-migration (internal and international)	Strength of transnational ties	Importance of collective remittances
Coding scale letter		A	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	Q	R	S
São Nicolau	CPV1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Boa Vista	CPV2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Boffa	GIN1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dialakoro	GIN2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gbane	GHA1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Golf City	GHA2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New Takoradi	GHA3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Down Quarters	NGA1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Awe	NGA2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ekpoma	NGA3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kombolcha	ETH1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Batu	ETH2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Moyale	ETH3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Erigavo	SOM1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Baidoa	SOM2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Enfidha	TUN1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Redeyef	TUN2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hopa	TUR1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yenice	TUR2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kilis	TUR3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Shahrake Jabrael	AFG1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Behsud	AFG2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Shahrake Mahdia	AFG3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chot Dheeran	PAK1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Youhanabad	PAK2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Keti Bandar	PAK3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

The symbols reflect the four-point scale used by researchers: 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ●

Beyond the differences reflected in Table 2, research areas differed in terms of in-migration (including foreign labour migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, internal migrants, and student migrants) and the



presence of return migrants, internal as well as international. However, and perhaps surprisingly, the kinds of ways of thinking about migration, its promises as well as pitfalls, for individuals, families, and communities, seem to cut-across these differences, rather than in any clear fashion reflect them in our focus group data.

### What can the MIGNEX focus group data tell us about the causes of migration?

Focus group data were purposefully included as part of MIGNEX data collection due to the potential this type of data has for insight into collective migration discourses in research areas. This ambition is one which this Background Paper can realise, as we proceed to present subsequently.

The nature of the focus group data itself allows us insight into how migration is talked about. However, this also means insight into the ways in which these are quite heterogenous, often contradictory conversations, with even the same participant saying very different things about migration during a single focus group discussion.

This heterogeneity of thoughts about migration being expressed, reflects that focus group participants, as people in general, tend to have multiple and contradictory ideas about things, and they react in a conversational style to statements made by others – by reinforcing their own previous statements, or going back on them. Furthermore, it also reflects the diverse experiences of mobilities and immobilities present in the 104 focus groups – whereby different participants come with very different sets of perceptions and experiences. As we expand on in section three – where we address the question of how people talk about migration – there are some insights which emanate from these contradictions in their own right, in terms of how we can understand the ways people consider migration.

A note should also be made about the promises and pitfalls of data containing ‘talk about migration’ from focus group discussions. Of course, there are interpersonal dynamics in each of the focus groups, that affect who speaks more or less, and particular statements or examples which provoke more or less reaction or engagement, thus shaping the discussion. However, due to the sheer volume of our data, with 104 focus group discussions, we are relatively confident that across the data set we are seeing a diversity of types of situations and impacts of conversation dynamics, allowing for quite a comprehensive view.

Furthermore, it is useful to reflect on the nature of the data – we have access to what people chose to say in a group setting – and in the context of our focus group theme guide-based discussion – about migration. Thus, there are likely many things they also *do not say* – which are too personal, too out of tune, too provocative, or that they are too uncertain about themselves. The focus groups were set up taking necessary methodological and research ethical considerations to try to limit such issues, however, that can never fully work. Nevertheless, the overall assessment, also based on the contradictions and views expressed within groups, suggests that this worked relatively well. Therefore, the focus group data allows good insight into how people think about migration, how they perceive it, or understand it,

including both general ideas about migration and actual experiences of migration, and its impacts – or those hoped for.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

In short, the focus group data can in part tell us the sorts of things about the determination of migration that were anticipated. Simultaneously, it also offers insights that had not been anticipated, primarily at the overarching level, with perspectives on how the question of causes of migration may usefully be approached in complementary ways.

## Conceptual foundations

This section positions our analysis in terms of its conceptual foundations and relationships with existing strands of research. First, we engage with a series of trends in the research traditions we are part of – on migration and/or development – which have been identified as problematic. Several are by now widely referred to as ‘biases’ and that is the shorthand term we use for all. We highlight them here because our data are well positioned to provide alternative perspectives. Next, we briefly discuss the notion of ‘reasons for migration’ and its theoretical implications. Thereafter, we position our notion of ‘talk about migration’ within the burgeoning research on migration narratives and related concepts.

### Countering seven biases

Migration research, like all forms of research, is necessarily selective and conducted from particular vantage points. Selectivity does not make individual studies biased, but biases emerge in the aggregate when certain perspectives come to dominate entire research fields while others are marginalised. The biases can become entrenched in research and policy alike. The value of our focus group data lies partly in their potential for challenging several such biases. In the following we describe seven related biases that we seek to counter.

First, migration researchers have pointed to a *sedentary bias* in development research and policy, partly as a remnant of colonialism (Bakewell 2008a, Castles 2009, Ghorashi 2017). Its essence is that being sedentary—leading life in one place—is seen as the natural and desirable state of affairs. Consequently, mobilities are either ignored or framed as problems to be fixed. The counter-argument is that many forms of mobility are well-established, integral parts of societies. Challenges to the sedentary bias involve a recognition of migration as integral to social transformation, rather than as exogenous to it (de Haas 2010; 2021; Standing 1981). Our data collection accommodated attention to diverse forms of mobility, and the focus group data reflect diverse ways in which local societies are constituted by movement as much as by stasis.

The second bias is a corollary of the sedentary bias and affects migration research itself: a *mobility bias* (Schewel 2020). It entails a tendency of seeing migration as the behaviour that requires explanation, while staying put is simply the neutral default. But in societies or contexts where mobilities are widespread, staying can be an equally deliberate choice. This is true in rural areas where the norm for young adults is to leave, as well as in conflict settings where many seek safety elsewhere while others – for various reasons – decide to stay. Explanations of mobility and immobility can therefore benefit from a more balanced approach (Mata-Codesal 2018). Actual mobility and immobility are often affected by forces beyond people’s volition (Carling 2002, Erdal and Oeppen 2018, Van Hear 2014). Consequently, the merits of a balanced approach to mobility and immobility also apply to research on spatial aspirations. Migration aspirations have a counterpart in aspirations to stay (Carling and Schewel 2018). In this paper,

we therefore examine what focus group participants see as reasons for staying as well as what they see as reasons for leaving.

A third bias, in migration research and policy alike, is the relative disregard of *internal* migration (King and Skeldon 2010, Hickey and Yeoh 2016). Urbanisation and other forms of internal migration remain overwhelmingly important, but ‘migration’ has largely come to be understood as ‘international migration’. Our focus group data are a reminder of both the risk of overlooking internal migration and the risk of exaggerating the distinction between internal and international migration. This distinction is obviously important, for a variety of reasons, but from the vantage point of a local community, both entail people *leaving*. Moreover, there are other distinctions that emerge as no less important when people talk about migration.

The fourth bias that we counter is what de Haas (2021) calls the *receiving country bias*, which favours the perspective of destination societies over those of origin societies. A consequence of this bias is that, in migration research, migrants are primarily seen as immigrants rather than emigrants. Even prominent studies of migrants’ transnational ties with the countries from which they emigrated refer to *immigrant* transnationalism (Portes 2001, Waldinger 2013). Our focus group data take societies of origin (and transit) as the starting point and highlight the significance of migrants as people who *leave* rather than people who *arrive*.

Fifth, migration research and policy discourse privilege destinations in the Global North. That is, accounts are biased not only towards international migration, but specifically towards migration to Europe and North America. This partly reflects the uneven distribution of researchers and research funding. MIGNEX itself is a case in point, since the funding from the European Commission reflects an interest in migration towards Europe. Our research contributes to deconstructing preconceived ideas about how migrants and non-migrants envisage migration and mobilities, not only towards Europe but also towards neighbouring countries and within a country. By grounding our analyses in diverse local communities in other parts of the world we foreground migration cartographies that include migration towards Europe and the Global North as one possibility among others.

The sixth bias is an *irregular migration bias*, or the implicit assumption that most migration from the Global South to the Global North is irregular border-crossing. This is partly a corollary of the policy focus on irregular migration. In the context of Europe, it is the arrival of migrants on boats (and the associated loss of life) that has most urgently called for migration policy interventions. However, this is far from the most common form of migration, even in the context of Asian and African migration to Europe.

Finally, there is a less widely acknowledged bias in how the voices of social actors are incorporated in migration research: a *migrant bias*. There is a common assumption that the perspective and experiences of ‘people themselves’ mean the perspectives of migrants. For instance, a state-of-the-art review of research on migration narratives distinguished between narratives *about* migration and narratives *of* migrants, where the former

are generally public narratives in news media, social media, and policy discourse (Boswell et al. 2021). There is no place within this perspective for the grassroots narratives of people who are implicated in migration as a social phenomenon without being migrants—such as many of the participants in our focus groups. This bias means that efforts to democratize or decolonise migration research risk reinforcing power asymmetries that are simply less obvious to researchers in the Global North.

Countering these biases resonates with broader efforts to decolonise migration studies (Collins 2022, Raghuram 2021). The links between migration and development have often been maintained through knowledge, institutions and practices that are dominated by European conceptions of appropriate progress (Raghuram 2020). Coupled with the concentration of research environments and research funding in the Global North, this dominance has contributed to several of the biases discussed above.

Taken together, the seven biases suggest a *particular prevailing perspective* that we can summarise as follows:

Migration is the disruptive movement of people away from the communities where they belong, crossing borders in irregular ways to come to Europe or other high-income countries. Migration researchers must explain what makes people decide to leave. To get a more nuanced perspective from social actors, researchers should accommodate the voices of migrants themselves.

All elements of this perspective *can* be true, but none are the *only* truths, or even the dominant truths. Hence, we adhere to a more open perspective that can be summarised in the following way:

What we, as social scientists and policy makers, refer to as ‘migration’ is one segment of diverse mobilities across and within borders. Migration is shaped by varying combinations of force and constraint, and unfolds with varying degrees of disruption and continuity. Understanding migration requires attention to reasons for staying as well as reasons for leaving—or for being continuously mobile. Migration processes involve multiple social actors beyond the individuals who move, and their perspectives can all contribute to our understanding.

One crucial aspect of our approach is that the concept of ‘migration’ is not taken for granted.

## Reasons for migration

This Background Paper is part of the MIGNEX project’s overall effort to understand how development – in a broad and multi-faceted sense – shapes migration outcomes. The project-wide terminology frames it as a process of *determination* of migration. This wording alludes to ‘determinants’ of migration but also emphasises the *process* rather than the simple relationship between variables.

Our analysis of focus group data reflects the project’s overall approach to the causes of migration (Carling, 2019a; Carling, 2019b) as well as the choices that were made in designing the qualitative data collection (Erdal and Carling 2020). We understand the causes of migration in terms of diverse and interacting drivers, reflecting complex pull and push dynamics whereby

people assess what is possible here vs. what *could be* possible somewhere else (Van Hear et al. 2018; Flahaux and de Haas 2016; Black et al. 2022; Carling and Collins 2018).

Explaining how migration comes about is a challenge that can be approached in diverse ways, each with their particular characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. The role of focus group data in particular, and the concepts that are relevant in the analyses, are worth contrasting with other components of the project. The MIGNEX survey dataset is designed to identify *patterns* in who wants, or plans to migrate, and where actual out-migration is widespread. This in turn can help us understand the processes at work. Such quantitative analyses can aim for concluding that when certain combinations of factors are present – say, a high level of insecurity in the area, the individual respondent having family members abroad, or not being a risk-averse person – specific migration outcomes are likely. Crucially, these relationships do not depend on respondents themselves making the connection or seeing these factors as ‘reasons’ for their wish to migrate.

In other studies, migrants have been asked retrospectively why they migrated (Crawley et al. 2016, Gillespie et al. 2021, Solheim and Parra-Casado 2019). Such answers are entirely different, without being more or less ‘true’. However, they can be shaped by recall biases, social desirability, or reliance on easily accessible standard explanations rather than introspective scrutiny of own motivations. Even for a single migrant, the explanations for migration can lie in the eye of the beholder. A refugee from an oppressive regime might say that he migrated because he feared for his own safety. People around him who stayed might say that he left because he had the money to pay a smuggler, or even that he left because he was more concerned with saving his own skin than with supporting the fight for freedom. The moral hierarchy of explanations is also evident in destination-country discourse, where being a ‘genuine refugee’ elicits different reactions than having migrated for other reasons.

In this paper we approach ‘determination’ through focus group participants’ own understanding of reasons for staying or migrating. The organisation of the text reflects and the formulation of subheadings combines a data-driven approach (i.e. reflecting the issues that participants raised) with analytical concepts from migration research (such as ‘culture of migration’).

Existing research has, in diverse ways, grappled with the question of why people migrate (Black et al. 2022, Carling and Schewel 2018, de Haas 2011, Czaika and Reinprecht 2022, Erdal and Oeppen 2018, Hagen-Zanker et al. 2023, Van Hear et al. 2018). The differences in approach lie partly in how the interplay between structural factors and individual behaviour is understood. But the literature also lays out, or implies, diverse taxonomies of reasons for migration.

The fundamental dichotomy between displacement or ‘forced’ migration on the one hand, and ‘economic’ or ‘voluntary’ migration on the other is challenged in much of the academic literature, but remains persistent in policy debates as well as in some strands of research. The reasons people leave a conflict-affected area may be linked with the erosion of livelihoods as well as with direct threats of violence. Also, in case of displacement from



natural disasters, some people may leave proactively, others may leave reactively, and still others may stay – with some degree of choice, or lack of choice, and based on the information and resources at hand (Richmond, 1993). In the context of displacement linked to climate change, it is similarly possible to ask whether the ‘reason’ for migration is the change in the natural environment or the social and economic structures that undermine resilience to change or approaches to adaptation (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016).

In the context of engaging with policy, it matters that policy-driven classifications of reasons for migration can be of limited analytical value (Bakewell 2008b). The ‘grounds’ on which a migrant is given a visa or residence permit, for instance, does not necessarily correspond to the ‘reasons’ for migration. This does not imply deception on the part of migrants, but rather reflects the different logics of legal categories and migration dynamics. For instance, migration in response to violent conflict or natural disasters can, in similar ways, be driven by the immediate need to survive, but be align very differently with codified protection regimes (Betts 2013).

A salient motivation for migration that defies both policy-driven and common academic categories is the pursuit of a better life, a ‘normal life’, or a decent life. These types of reasoning about migration are often implicitly or explicitly labelled ‘economic’ but also include other dimensions of life. Discussions on the desire for a ‘normal’ or ‘decent’ life, draw on perspectives from diverse sources, including: literature on lifestyle migration (e.g., Benson 2016), East-West migration within the EU (Bygnes and Erdal 2017; Galasińska and Kozłowska 2004; Manolova 2019), research spanning migration categorisations (Carling and Collins 2018), but also more profoundly in perspectives about quality of life from philosophy and development economics (Nussbaum and Sen 1993). In Sen’s essay on ‘capability and well-being’ (ibid.: 270-293) he continues to outline his capabilities approach, including relationships with freedom, and connections between well-being, agency and living standards, which all speak directly to the salient motivation for migration that is captured with the notion of a desire for a decent life.

Compound reasons for migration can also amalgamate at a social level, beyond individual decision-making. The notion of a ‘culture of migration’ captures this phenomenon (Galam 2015, Horvath 2008, Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011). A culture of migration is composed of social practices, institutions, and cultural beliefs that render out-migration natural and desirable. Where a culture of migration develops, there are two important implications for understanding migration dynamics. First, migration tends to foster more migration and, in a sense, become its own driver. Second, the individual ‘reasons’ for migration can become elusive. The notion of ‘culture’ refers to shared practices and beliefs that are taken for granted and unquestioned. In other words, a culture of migration not only makes actual migration flows self-reinforcing, but can have a similarly reflexive effect on the *reasons* for migration: people migrate because people migrate.

A particular component of many cultures of migration is that migration becomes a rite of passage for youth moving into adulthood (Kandel and Massey 2002, Alpes 2012). Scholarship on migration cultures has also more



broadly re-shaped the study of remittances, such as with the concepts of ‘remittance scripts’ (Carling, 2014) and ‘culture of remittances’ (Liang and Song 2018) that refer to the norms and expectations of remittances from the perspective of a migrant-sending community. As pointed out by Wilson (2020:145), a culture of migration ‘is not static, but dynamic, changing in response to both internal developments and external forces’.

In a majority of cases, even in the context of violent conflict, natural disasters, or widespread livelihood collapse, most people *do not leave* (Black and Collyer 2014, Carling 2002, McKenzie 2022). This can be either because they *prefer to stay* or because they are *unable to leave*. In other words, the explanation might lie either in aspiration or ability (Carling 2002, Carling and Schewel 2018). In our analyses, we examine the two kinds of reasons for staying separately: the preference (or aspiration) for staying is examined in the section ‘What is perceived as reasons for staying?’. The constraints on leaving (i.e. limitations on the ability to migrate) are examined in the section ‘How do risk and feasibility matter in migration considerations?’

Reasons for staying and leaving can, in other words, often be reconceptualised as reasons for *wanting* to stay or leave. Different dimensions of such aspirations were identified as preparation for the design of the MIGNEX survey (Carling 2019b). Beyond calling for a balanced approach to staying and leaving, this work drew attention to the role of temporalities and conditionalities. That is, people’s preferences for leaving or staying might have particular timeframes and be tied to particular conditions – for instance, wishing to migrate for a few years only, and not in irregular ways. These dimensions are relevant to our analysis of talk about migration, where the nature of migration itself, the temporal dimensions, and assumed implicit or explicit conditionality all matter.

We follow the approach of using ‘migration aspirations’ to describe the assessment that leaving is better than staying (Carling and Schewel 2018). In other words, having migration aspirations could mean seeing migration as the lesser of two evils, and not as particularly desirable. It is therefore a relevant element of analysis also in contexts of displacement from conflict, repression or natural disasters, where migration might be labelled, or experienced as forced.

The MIGNEX focus group data set covers settings with a diversity of migrants, including internally displaced people, refugees, returned refugees, labour migrants, student migrants and family migrants. The data therefore hold potential for bridging some assumed gaps, shedding light on how people talk about migration across such categorisations.

## Discourse, narratives, and talking about migration

Analytical attention to the idea of ‘talking about migration’ is present in the research literature, although to a relatively limited extent. Much more is written about migration narratives, discourses, representation, labelling, and categorising – all topics in vicinity of our focus on ‘talking about migration’.

‘Migration discourse’ has been broadly defined by Van Dijk (2018) as all discourse genres of or about migrants or migration. In social science and the humanities more generally, ‘discourse’ is often conceived very expansively

as a potential *object of study*. Therefore, analyses of discourse are to a greater degree defined by their *analytical approach*.

Compared to discourse, the concept of narratives is somewhat narrower. Theoretically, narrative is often defined as the representation of an event or series of events, sometimes with additional criteria (Altman 2008, Boswell et al. 2021, Squire et al. 2014). Empirically, narrative also tends to be used in more focused ways than discourse, often with reference to specific *narratives* that reflect understandings of causes and effects, as opposed to the broader notions of meaning reflected in discourse.

Over the past decades, research on narratives has grown in the social sciences, and studies of migration have become prominent in this field. As Boswell et al. (2021) conclude:

migration has become a key site for the study for narratives, given its salience in media and political debate, and the social tendencies and political incentives to construct migration in particular ways.

As this quote implies, narratives *about* migration are in fact integral to the social processes of migration. This is evident in studies of the representation of migration in news media, which is intertwined with the evolution of public opinion and migration policy (see Boswell et al. 2011; Boswell et al. 2021, Scuzzarello 2015). There was a surge in this line of research during and after the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’ of 2015 and 2016 (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Beyond media coverage, researchers have also examined how narrative can be integral to the implementation of migration policy (Pecoud 2015; Ankale 2018). For instance, Carling (in press) uses concepts from narratological theory to examine the narrative dimension of policy on migrant smuggling.

The vast majority of the literature on migration narratives examines contexts in the Global North (see for instance Mamadouh 2012; Manieri et al. 2023). This concentration reflects the general dominance of immigration-side perspectives in migration research. New strands of research on migration narratives in other parts of the world are partly a by-product of the externalisation of immigration policy: as governments increasingly seek to sway migration decisions by means of information campaigns in countries of origin and transit, researchers have examined this highly instrumental form of migration discourse.

Some of this research addresses how the policy-driven messaging intersects with other narratives about migration. For instance, Brekke et al.’s (2023) study on the narratives of (potential) migrants of Gambian and Afghan origin concludes that:

migrants’ narratives tend to differ strongly from the messages communicated in the EU-funded information campaigns, with the partial exception of the message emphasizing the dangers of an irregular migration route.

Brekke et al. (2022) use the term ‘master narratives’ to refer to dominant and common understandings of migration and life in Europe shared by migrants in different local contexts. In both the Gambian and Afghan cases, migration is viewed as a vehicle for positive life change, while Europe, as a destination,

is perceived as a place of opportunity and higher living standards, providing avenues for work, education, and family welfare. While nuances which distinguish the two migrant groups are mentioned, migration aspirations are understood as mainly shaped by a certain vision of Europe, the place of destination.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

This Background Paper contributes to the body of literature on migration narratives, but we have deliberately framed the data and analyses it in terms of ‘talk about migration’. In doing so, we follow Riccio (2005), Tyldum (2021) and others who have used this phrase. Our choice reflects an openness to whatever it is that people say in the focus group setting, regardless of whether it ‘qualifies’ as narrative. In fact, the nature of the data would often make the notion of narrative empirically and theoretically problematic. While there are quotes from individual participants that can be read as narratives, the fragmented and perhaps contradictory totality of the discussion is often neither a cohesive narrative nor a set of distinct narratives. Still, it is a rich source of insights that the phrase ‘talk about migration’ accommodates.

## A roadmap to the empirical sections

The following five sections of the paper examine how migration was talked about in the MIGNEX focus groups, by addressing five questions. These questions are deliberately close to the data, mapping particular aspects of discussions, and showing through many quotes what was being said. The subsequent '[Crosscutting Discussion](#)' section takes a more conceptually-oriented approach, building on the five empirical sections, and the overall analysis of the data set.

The five questions that are addressed are as follows:

- 1) What are perceived as reasons for migrating?
- 2) What are perceived as reasons for staying?
- 3) How do risk and feasibility of migrating matter in migration considerations?
- 4) How does education intersect with migration considerations?
- 5) How do remittances figure in talk about migration?

These empirical questions are derived from our data analysis, as described above in the section '[Analytical approach](#)'. It is worth noting that when we refer to 'Perceived reasons for...' we draw on people's expressed thoughts about what they understand as the reasons 'for...'. The focus group data does not lend itself to assess for whom, under which circumstances, or to what extent, particular 'perceived reasons for...' are more or less applicable. However, the fact that these are perceived reasons for migrating or staying, is valuable knowledge in its own right.

For each empirical question, one or more codes were drawn on, and in each instance, using data from across all 26 MIGNEX research areas. For the question, 'What are the perceived reasons for migrating?' the code 'Reasons for migration' was used to address the question. Similarly, the code 'Remittances' was employed to examine the role of remittances in discussions about migration. To explore the impact of risk and feasibility on migration considerations, the following codes were used: 'Migration journeys', 'Failed migration' and 'Migration experience'. The question on the intersection of education and migration considerations draws on the codes, 'Ideas about education', 'Schools', and 'Higher education, read in conjunction with data cross-coded to the 'Ideas about migration' code.

As discussed in the '[Analytical approach](#)' section above, the code 'Ideas about migration' was foundational for the analysis as a whole. This code was also used to identify similarities and differences within and across research areas together with the codes 'Hopeful', 'Unhopeful', 'About "this" place' and 'About "other" places'. Having a comprehensive overview of the focus group data overall was crucial to the development of the cross-cutting discussion, which ultimately addresses the main research question of this paper: *How do people talk about migration?* across the 26 MIGNEX research areas.

## What are perceived as reasons for migrating?

This section presents data and analysis drawing on our review of the code ‘Reasons for migration’ and contains specific statements made about causes, drivers, or attractiveness of migration in the focus groups. The reasons that emerged for migration are extremely diverse across the 26 research areas, but also across the focus groups in a given area, and within focus groups. Complex combinations of migration drivers are often visible in the discussions, suggesting interaction of multiple factors which ‘facilitate, enable, constrain, and trigger migration processes’ (Czaika and Reinprecht, 2022).

### Migrating for security

Different kinds of societal tension were present in different MIGNEX research areas, prompting questions of security and insecurity to be discussed. The data in Afghanistan was collected in the period before the shift in political power in July-August 2021, where in different ways, fear and uncertainty closely related to the ongoing conflict emerged. The perceived necessity of leaving came across in some of these discussions, in terms of opting to migrate as a way to stay alive.

In Shahrake Jabrael (AFG1A), one participant stated: ‘Everyone will leave if they get the chance to leave’. Recommending that others migrate if they can, particularly the young people, was prevalent in the 12 focus groups conducted in the three research areas in Afghanistan. In this context, migration is often framed as the only way to have peace of mind; to escape the constant mental pressure. As the below quote from Behsud (AFG2A) reflects, the context of what is perceived as an impossible situation ‘here’ is the reason for leaving, which is in this case not seen as desirable, yet might be necessary:

No one is insane [enough] to leave their beloved country and seek migration in other countries when they have security and work opportunities (Behsud, AFG2A).

In Somalia and Ethiopia, conflict – whether past, or more present iterations – was mentioned as a reason for leaving, sometimes anywhere, other times to specific destinations (in Erigavo SOM1; Baidoa, SOM2; Kombolcha, ETH1; Batu, ETH2; Moyale, ETH3).

The biggest challenge that makes most people want to leave the country, is the fear of war breaking out again. Most of us, including myself, have that fear, which holds a lot of people back from settling here permanently. We keep wondering if and when that will happen, which is the main reason why a lot of people are always looking for opportunities to leave the country and settle elsewhere (Baidoa, SOM2B)

As this quote illustrates, insecurity does not matter only in the form of immediate danger spurring migration. Rather, security and insecurity are an element in longer-term reflections on the viability of building a future in a particular area or indeed within the country, relevant across many contexts.

## Migrating to overcome the lack of economic opportunities

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

A lack of local job opportunities – or broadly, perceptions of lacking or inadequate economic and livelihood opportunities – in order for people to make a living, are a very common reason to consider migrating, both internally or abroad, across focus groups. Meanwhile, as is visible below, it is often a wish to *not migrate* which is expressed, while migration is presented in terms of being a last resort strategy.

People had to leave São Nicolau because there are no jobs, so people have to leave the island in order to look for another way of living. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

If you don't have enough food, then you will consider moving from here to Kumasi or from here to Accra, for instance with the idea that you will get a job there. So, this can explain why some will migrate. (Gbane, GHA1D)

This situation encourages people to migrate. With 1000 birr, no one may now cover his living expenses. (Kombolcha, ETH1A)

Absence of job opportunity within their country is the pushing factor for migration. (Moyale, ETH3A)

They decide to move to look for opportunities or escaping some difficult situation, they faced here. (Batu, ETH2D)

People travel abroad because the jobs are not available here. If the jobs are available, people will not migrate. (Ekpoma, NGA3B)

I teach fourteen-year-old pupils. They all think about Harka [illegal migration]. They dream of leaving Tunisia. Why? Because they see how their older relatives are all unemployed. People became desperate. (Redeyef, TUN2D)

I mean, I don't want them to leave, except for their job opportunities. But there is something like this, if there were job opportunities to be offered to Hopa, there are many things to be done, whether it is the state or individuals. But this is not done. (Hopa, TUR1D)

Changes in the labour market locally can contribute to migration becoming a considered or preferred choice, in different ways. For instance, in Kombolcha, Ethiopia (ETH1C) the rapid development of factories appears to have had a negative impact on farming and food production, which is associated with young people leaving. In the case of New Takoradi, Ghana (GHA3), the development of an industrial hub is linked with rapid deterioration in the local fishing industry, and increasing considerations of leaving among local residents, not least youth. They consider either to move to the surrounding cities or to go abroad towards Europe, which given the proximity to Takoradi harbour, is known to be possible as a stow-away on one of the boats. Similarly, in Boffa, Guinea (GIN1), local mining companies are not recruiting staff among the local population, apparently due to a mismatch in skills, and low education levels locally. This in turn, encourages people to consider leaving. (We return to the education-migration considerations interactions in a separate section below).

At first, we used to have a lot of factories around this community and the youth were able to get some jobs to do but it got to a point they all collapsed

and that left them with no choice than to migrate so as to earn a living. (New Takoradi, GHA3D)

Back in the days, we used to have fishes in abundance as well as diesel but that is not the case now. This has encouraged the young men to consider migrating in order to earn a living. (New Takoradi, GHA3D)

If the youth of Boffa was employed in mining firms, irregular migration would not exist here. (Boffa, GIN1B)

I was born in Kismayo and we fled to Kenya during the civil war where I grew up and went to school up to university. I then got a job but as a refugee, the salary one earns is very little, not even enough to take care of the family's needs [...] Since I am educated, I decided to come to Somalia to look for an opportunity. I called a friend from Dadaab who was living and working here in Baidoa and told him what I wanted to do and he encouraged me to come and try my luck. (Baidoa, SOM2B)

Across the 26 research areas, international migration is not always discussed as a preferred option. On the contrary, internal migration – from rural to urban areas in particular – is regularly considered a more reliable option, if there are real possibilities within the country.

There is internal migration too, looking for a job and better life, for example, migration to Butajira. Because currently it is highly developing and has a lot of job opportunities. (Batu, ETH2C)

People can only have limited things here. The money one earns when he practices his profession here is not the same as the money he earns in Istanbul. Since this is a small city, the possibilities it can offer are limited. For example, the opportunities provided by Istanbul are very different. The difference is worlds apart. This forces people to migrate. (Kilis, TUR3A)

The option of migrating to neighbouring countries, similarly, is often presented as more suitable and preferred, as compared to that of migrating far away. As such, international migration towards Europe is often seen as a 'last resort' by those trying to establish themselves, to make a living wage, or to improve their lives, or indeed their children's life prospects. Meanwhile, as the quotes above suggest, the preference is often to not have to leave, if the prospects of good life are available 'here'.

### Migrating to support the family or community

Migrating can be envisaged as a project which aims to either avoid becoming a burden to one's family, or to contribute to the family's (and community's) well-being. Migration as a project is often socially accepted and sometimes even recommended locally when perceived as mainly temporary and beneficial for the development of the family and the community. Migration is often perceived as a good option as it is understood to enable support for the community over the longer-term. Thus, the mindset in discussions is predominantly shaped by ideas of *returning to do something good* for the community. This is often understood concretely in terms of sending remittances 'back home' (as we expand on in the last of the five empirical sections), and/or investing in local businesses too. Migration is also perceived to be about bringing back skills and expertise from abroad and sharing that knowledge with others upon return.



[Participant name] thinks that the benefit of travelling is to get work elsewhere and get money to remit home towards the good of your family members and others in the community. (Gbane, GHA1A)

I think migration is very good because it increases productivity in terms of the labour workforce. When one travels to places like Canada or the US where they are well advanced in skills and expertise and when one goes there to acquire more expertise and skills, he can return to his home country and impart the knowledge to others in the country. It also brings about development to the home country when these acquired skills are used. In addition, it makes one become an expert in whatever field he is trained. (Golf City, GHA2B)

I advise young people to migrate only if they have a good reason to go there, like going to study, to gain experiences and exposure, but after gaining that knowledge and experience they should come back to their country and contribute to the development of their country. (Ekpoma, NGA3C)

I have something to add, because some also migrate to benefit. For instance, some also migrate from down south to this place, they go to the mines, they make some money and then they go back to their community and it will be a positive thing for them. This is how I also see it. (Gbane, GHA1D)

If our young brothers and children were employed, they wouldn't leave. But some of them feel so sorry for their parents, who have raised them, since the day they were born, and now they still struggle to provide for them, even if they are young adults... (Boffa, GIN1D)

During my adventure [period of travelling abroad] my purpose was to find gold. And I found gold! With the money I earned selling the gold I had found, I could build a house, open my garage, invest in cattle-breeding, and give the rest to my brothers, so that they could become traders. (Dialakoro, GIN2C)

With migration Chot Dheeran gets positive impacts collectively because migrants help their relatives in education and even they help their poor relatives to establish small business. In this way, the whole village is making progress. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1D)

Yes, it is a good thing if the person leaves Baidoa, because the people who are doing investment in Baidoa are the people who left before and came back with a reason. They brought many things that were not known in Baidoa, such as businesses. The universities in Baidoa were opened by graduates from other countries who originally are from Baidoa town. (Baidoa, SOM2A)

A lot of families struggling financially encourage their children to migrate in any possible way just so they can send them back money afterwards. (Enfidha, TUN1C)

### In search of 'a good life'

A lack of sufficient and adequate local economic opportunities is a major reason why people consider migrating. However, the desire to improve their lifestyle and experience what is referred to as a 'a good life' – or sometimes a 'decent' or 'normal' life – also emerges as salient in the focus group discussions. The desire for and pursuit of 'a good life' of course is quite universal, and yet can entail a range of different things. These include

pursuing 'life development', looking 'to have fun', 'creating a better future', or some combination of these. In some cases, young people may compare their lives to those of peers who have departed for the city or abroad and seem to enjoy 'a more comfortable life' or 'a free life away from the family'. Young people in some of the research areas in Cabo Verde, Pakistan, and Turkey, considered their localities as 'narrow-minded place[s]'. For them, migrating is also related to expanding their horizons and avoiding being stuck.

In these cases, leaving home is about escaping the constraints and limitations of the household. In some instances, this life *away from home* is made possible by the support of the family back home, who sends money so the young person can 'live the city' (Hopa ,TUR1A).

We have to accept all the difficulties and move forward with this situation and move to some other locations for a better education and future for our children so that we can improve our life, economically and for the future of our children. If migration is for life development, it is good but, if it is a forced migration due to war and poverty, I think it is the worst thing. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

When the people here see this, they also get the desire to travel so they too can improve their lives and that of their families. (Baidoa, SOM2B)

These two quotes are from focus groups held in Shahrake Jabrael in Afghanistan and Baidoa in Somalia, and it is noteworthy that the way migration choices are understood matters hugely. If migration is opted to achieve life development, it is one thing, whereas if it is 'forced migration due to war and poverty' it is another. For these participants, insecurity about the present, as well as the future, relating to conflict and (economic) survival, are quite intertwined.

There's the matter of lack of employment, but I know a lot of people here in São Nicolau who had jobs, youth who earned twenty something, even thirty thousand escudos a month but still left, went to work, not because they lacked employment but maybe looking for fun, parties, there are other aspects. (São Nicolau, CPV1B).

We are desperate. Our sons see how others are doing so well so they also want to have that lifestyle. They want a better future. While a mother wants her son to stay even at the cost of poverty, the son has to create a better future. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1A)

The child actually does not want to go to university. They see the comfortable lives of their brothers and sisters who left here, they have a free life, they are away from the family. Their families also send them money. They provide them comfort. They get scholarships, pay their rents, get by. This is how they want to live the city. (Hopa, TUR1A)

There are some people who not only want to find a job but also dream of improving and progressing. Me, personally, I don't want just to work and spend money. This is not what life is about. I want to work and save money to do more important things. I want to set more difficult goals for myself. That's why some people want to migrate. It's easier to do this abroad... (Redeyef, TUN2D)

As the above quotes illustrate, the present and the future are interchangeably related. Reasoning for migrating also differs, depending on who's future and in which time-frame, is foregrounded. Ultimately, the quest for 'a good life' is about life aspirations, where migration may play the role of a more or less attractive means to an end.

## Cultures of migration

In Dialakoro, Guinea, there is a Maninka proverb that says, 'If you go for the adventure [if you migrate to another place], if you don't get material goods or money, you will at least get experience' (Dialakoro, GIN2A). This signifies that moving between places, is a positive thing, no matter the destination. Migrating brings experience, knowledge, and resources that are valued by members of the local community, as the expectation is that those who leave will gain social status and respect. In this particular context, migrants are categorised as 'adventurers' and migration is key to their personal development, a *rite de passage* – especially for young men – to become respected adults in the community.

In Chot Dheeran, Pakistan (PAK1), some mothers express feeling forced to send their sons on dangerous irregular journeys to Europe. While many seem upset with the situation, some continue to support this, often because they see others doing the same. Other parents are at a loss as to what to do in order for their sons not to try going. As one focus group participant explained, 'People are now becoming competitive. They want to engage in a power show and want what others have. It is not so much about being hand to mouth or being able to afford basic needs, it is also about seeing your neighbour build a house and wanting to do so as well' (Chot Dheeran, PAK1B). In Chot Dheeran, having a relative abroad is not uncommon, with many ties to France. There has therefore developed a form of peer pressure, which some focus group participants discuss, especially in relation to sons – and migrating to Europe. Some participants discuss that this is a very painful experience, with mention of force - either in being forced to make this choice, or forcefully sending sons off. The family or peer pressure or norms around migration – sometimes described in terms of 'cultures of migration' are also referred to in other research areas, in varying ways:

I sent my only son abroad because I had to. I didn't want to, but I had to. He needed a better future. We have lands, but we need our income. I forcefully sent him. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1A)

I think boys should not move to other countries because it is a costly process for poor parents. Sometimes, boys do not act maturely and they do not support their family. In that case, family faces financial problems which sometimes leads to selling their houses and other property. This act affects society as well. Sometimes, prosperity of migrant's family does not set a positive example for the others. There are some boys living in other countries and they are earning well but their families are busy in extravagant habits. Moreover, poor people create problems for others when they get rich in a short time. (Youhanabad, PAK2D)

Even now, there are many people who want to migrate because most of the youth in Baidoa have friends who have already migrated to other countries, and those who are outside the country are encouraging those who are inside the country to follow them. As a result, there are many young people

in Baidoa who have a dream to go or migrate to another country because there are no job opportunities here in Baidoa and Somalia in general, including myself. (Baidoa, SOM2C)

Personally, I think of the following life cycle for people born in mining basins: You grow up here. You ask for your due rights from the Phosphate Company of Gafsa, but they can't do anything. You start thinking about small businesses or projects but the state doesn't provide any solutions. They try to be active in local civil society... They start harassing their parents about their 'need to get out' [need to migrate]. They say they 'have to go abroad' because someone they know did and does appear to be doing good for himself. (Redeyef, TUN2B)

When they see those who migrated come back to visit, they end up being impressed by the seemingly wealthy, well-dressed returning migrants. This has a psychological impact and creates a copy-cat mentality... (Enfidha, TUN1C)

Peer pressure is another reason. I heard a story about two guys whose friends travel to Senegal. They were pressured by their friends and decided to also travel to Senegal. When they got there, they got involved in some illegal business which ended them up in the prison. After serving their jail term, they were deported back to Nigeria. (Down Quarters, NGA3C)

My sister mentioned the fact that those who travel and return gain some respect. (New Takoradi, GHA3A)

As the above quotes indicate, there is a variation in views on migration, even as norms, peer pressure, or a culture of migration appears. Simultaneously, it also emerges that gender influences the perceived reasons for migrating, as well as where people go, the duration of their stay and the resources and networks which they rely on. For instance, women in certain research areas are more likely to travel cross-border to get married. This was mentioned for women travelling between Ethiopia and Kenya, where 'transnational marriage' was discussed:

There are women who migrate from here to Kenya because of marriage. (Moyale, ETH3B)

In other contexts, 'trans-local marriages' were discussed, with women migrating internally within the same country, such as in the Somali research areas:

I was born in another region of Somalia, moved to Baidoa for marriage, had children here, and my husband died here. (Baidoa, SOM2C)

Local-level migration for marriage, especially with women moving, was often not discussed as migrating at all, unless specifically asking about marriage practices, sometimes linked to quite short-distance movement.

In some focus group discussions and research areas, women were perceived to be too vulnerable to travel to Europe. Therefore, it was recommended for them to stay, as they were perceived to be at a higher risk of experiencing exploitation and discrimination if migrating, not least during their journey (we also expand on [risks, feasibility and the journey](#) in a later section). Meanwhile, in Down Quarters, Nigeria - in a focus group with men, the idea of women traveling alone was stigmatised, with the view that women should

stay behind and not 'deviate from their good home training', whereas men were seen to be free to go and try (Down Quarters, NGA1):

No, the females should stay home close to their parents. They should only go if they are certain of something tangible out there waiting for them. The male are free to go and try. It's dangerous for the females, they might deviate from their good home training. (Down Quarters, NGA1A)

Local gender norms thus impact how people talk about migration, shaping certain forms of mobility and migration for men and women, sometimes overlapping, and often diverging, in multiple ways across contexts.

No, I have not thought about migration because all my children are girls and I don't have any reliable resources to think or make decisions about migration. It is very hard to travel with girls through the roadways. I can't imagine what will happen. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

By the way, a lot of girls would choose to go abroad even at the expense of stopping their education, because they want to change in a short time and they don't realize that they can even lose their lives along the way. So, I don't recommend it and would prefer if she just does something here, even a small thing, to make a better life for herself since even her state of mind would be better with less problems for her to face here. (Batu, ETH2B)

The discussion about only men moving out, while the women should stay behind because of their husbands, or parents afraid of their daughters behaving immorally... I really don't support a woman travelling out to earn a living. Whatever she wants to do, she should stay behind and do business or schooling. (Down Quarters, NGA1B)

Migration in turn can also play a role in affecting gender norms locally, which can be perceived and viewed in contrasting ways: as a source of positive change, as a threat to the community, or something in-between. In our analysis of the focus groups with men and with women in each of the research areas, local gender norms were differently present. However, the distinction was not one with a clear-cut male vs. female differentiation, reflective of how gender norms are often dialectic and relational in specific contexts. As the above quotes illustrate, there are mixed and non-linear dimensions to how migration of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, might be perceived as desirable or not.

## Climate change

In some research areas, for instance in Ethiopia and Somalia, impacts of climate change - water scarcity in particular - were mentioned as reasons for migration. This was often internal and temporary migration, sometimes also to neighbouring countries, such as in the case of Moyale (ETH3), a city on the border between Kenya and Ethiopia. Environmental change may influence people's migration aspirations and their decisions to migrate, though as is also well-known, slow-onset environmental change is rarely the sole driver of migration:

At times when there is no grazing, our pastoralists migrate to Kenya in search of grazing and water. People from this town can get medical services in Kenya since there is hospital there. Our people can engage in casual or daily wage work in Kenya since it is a border town. (Moyale, ETH3A)

More people are migrating to Erigavo because people in the rural areas are losing their livestock due to the drought, because of climate change. People who are moving out of Erigavo mostly land in Hargeisa or bigger cities in Somaliland. (Erigavo, SOM1A)

In another research area, Keti Bandar, Pakistan (PAK3) which is on the Sindh coast bordering the Indian ocean, both slow impacts of climate change, and risks associated with increasing frequency of extreme weather events and flooding of the Indus River delta, were pervasive aspects of everyday life and future considerations. While the situation in Keti Bandar was in some ways at one extreme end of this spectrum, with some residents having relocated into Keti Bandar from areas that had already been impacted by the sea encroaching on the land, in other MIGNEX research areas, different impacts of climate change, often interwoven with other factors, contributed to the how reasons for leaving were perceived and discussed.

To sum up, this section discusses the multitude of factors which participants talked about as reasons for migrating. In some areas, seeking safety and security was a key reason for migration, which in turn was linked to seeking economic opportunities, as without a sense of safety people felt unable to invest in their present livelihood. In research areas which were perceived as safe, economic insecurity was nonetheless a fundamental reason for considering migration. Chronic unemployment and underemployment among youth was present or common in a number of research areas, and led to sense of being 'pushed' to seek livelihood opportunities elsewhere.

Meanwhile in some cases, perceived reasons for and against leaving can be of the same vein, as is true with factors such as duty of care to others, or conflict and safety. The notion of finding and providing a 'good life' for oneself and one's family is important for finding livelihoods elsewhere and being able to return or to send remittances, but also in terms of staying put and investing in one's home area. Across the focus groups, finding and providing a 'good life' is talked about as crucial; a goal discussed as something that could or should be achieved either by staying or by leaving.



## What are perceived as reasons for staying?

This section is based on the analysis of the code ‘reasons against migration’, which refers to what focus group participants said about *why* people should stay in a given research area. This includes both voluntary and involuntary immobility. There are various reasons discussed as to why people should consider staying rather than leaving. In some cases, the impossibility of leaving a place can be due to a lack of resources, ending with people having the aspiration to leave but not the ability to. This can also happen when the level of insecurity increases. Conflicts can contribute to making migration routes more dangerous - internally as well as internationally - sometimes effectively forcing people to stay put. However, staying should not be understood as the passive default option. On the contrary, there are multiple specific reasons for staying, often working in combination, which influence both migration aspirations and decisions, at individual as well as collective levels.

Conflict and lack of stability along the road to Djibouti and Saudi Arabia are the key reasons for decline in irregular migration. The routes are dangerous both inside and outside of Ethiopia, and ethnic strife has risen. There was previously a network of brokers and traffickers that included wealthy individuals and government officials. Those government personnel who were involved in or operating the network have now been ousted with their regime, Woyane. The conflict in Yemen, Afar and Somali has discouraged people from migrating. (Kombolcha, ETH1C)

Currently, considering the current situation of the country, it is a bit difficult to move and migrate looking for a job in another region or part of the country due to safety issues. The youngsters fear and have no confidence to move. (Batu, ETH2A)

### Staying for the community

There is a clear ambivalence about migration across many of the focus group discussions. In research areas experiencing tension or protracted conflict, migration is often viewed as essential for survival. However, also in these cases, the potential negative effects of migration on families and local communities are acknowledged. The risks associated with migration are not only related to the dangers, which typically are articulated in relation to the dangers that migrants face when trying to reach Europe, but also viewed through the local lens, which considers the impact migration has on the family and the community.

As young people migrate, widespread fears about demographic shifts arise, reflecting concerns about communities becoming more vulnerable to shocks. Some individuals wonder who will protect those left, especially the elderly. Furthermore, youth migration is often perceived as a threat to the development of the community because young people represent ‘the community’s backbone’, ‘the country’s capital’, ‘the force for change’, and ‘the labour force’ - as referred to in several focus group discussions.



Therefore, calls for staying and investing locally are common, and youth migration raises concerns about the survival of communities.

The risk perceived across different research areas as the greatest in this context, is the potential for a community to become depleted of its people, destabilising its social and economic fabric. In the case of São Nicolau (CPV1), some participants mentioned the paradox of having vocationally trained young people who later left the island, leading to a lack of local investment because the place has experienced an *emptying* of its trained workforce. Questions about who will develop the land, the country, the nation and the community if people migrate were regularly raised in the discussions. Participants talk about migration in terms of ‘good migration’ versus ‘bad migration’ when they refer to the impact it may have on the local community and its sustainability over time.

Some types of migration are talked about in terms of being more acceptable than other kinds, such as migration related to education. In Ghana, participants also referred to ‘good’ migration as regular migration, and also where the ‘aspiring migrant’ is guaranteed a job rather than what was referred to as ‘hustling’ (Golf city, GHA2; New Takoradi, GHA3). Other types of migration, for instance, connected with ideas of making money (also referred to as ‘the quick-money syndrome’ in Ekpoma, NGA3A), were talked about in discouraging ways.

The fear of emptying of an area was talked about in relation to a linked fear of decreased investment in infrastructure and facilities such as hospitals, schools, and roads. This, in turn, might contribute to raising people’s aspirations to leave even further. Across most research areas people express critical and sometimes ambivalent stances towards migration. One reason mentioned relates to what people could be doing in their own area instead of leaving.

Choosing not to leave can be perceived as a sign of patriotism in favour of local or national development, respectively in relation to migration internally or internationally. There are many accounts which people talk about staying as something linked to defending the country or more specifically the area where they live. These kinds of statements are also associated with talking about developing the nation and the community by staying rather than leaving and/or about improving the quality of life locally.

We could gain some rights in Herat city because our population increased, if people migrate and our population decrease again then the people in Herat city wouldn’t recognize us as Hazaras and they won’t give us our rights and what we deserve and the community will be taken from us and will kick us out of this community. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

Migration is not good at all. People should stay in their own country. Young workforce flees the country. Youth are the hope of this country and they should stay here in any situation. We should defend our country until our last breath. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

It is not good for Moyale. This is because; the youth is the force for change. Our land needs us for development. When we migrate and develop other country, who will develop our nation and our community? So it is not good to migrate. (Moyale, ETH3A)

Migration is both good and bad; if we go then we will be safe but the community left behind will be paralysed and if we don't go then we are not safe. If people leave Jabrael before the Taliban comes then there would be no one out there to protect the community against Taliban if they come to attack Jabrael. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

[A friend's] brother who had a factory here with over 250 employees, including 25 girls, also left the country and went abroad. This had negative impacts on the area. If a teacher leaves the country, you need a lot of time to find another person to become a teacher and serve the community. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

I do because the more people leave, the more our population will become less and less, we lose the labour force in the island, that's the reason I think is bad for the island. (São Nicolau, CPV1A)

So, we lost our municipality due to the decrease in our population. We lost the municipality of Pazarköy, we lost our municipality due to out-migration due to the low population. (Yenice, TUR2A)

It is better for people to come here and improve our place than for our people to move out and make for improvement in other places. Besides as women we want our businesses to progress... (Awe, NGA2A)

I do because the more people leave, the more our population will become less and less, we lose the labour force in the island, that's the reason I think is bad for the island. (São Nicolau, CPV1A)

Migration is not good. As he cited there is high conflict within the town. So, if youths migrate to Nairobi, no one protects the people. So the people suffer a lot. Due to this migration is not good for the town. (Moyale, ETH3A)

Again, if those who have vocational skills decide to migrate out of this area to other places, what it means is that there would be a shortage of persons with such types of skill in the community. This mightily negatively impact on our community. (Down Quarters, NGA1C)

People are migrating and it is good thing but it is bad as well when we see in this way that people are migrating and our village is going to be empty. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

We have a kind of paradox here. Sometimes we say that many young vocationally trained youths are leaving, because they cannot find jobs. Which is true. Many have left. But I think almost everyone have left and only those who can't do anything are left here in São Nicolau. Just a few know how to do anything. And those who do know, they are very busy. I am talking about people who have been trained, I don't mean people with higher education. What happens? An employer... you want to invest in the area, it may seem like a paradox, but you don't find people to work. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

It's bad for Keti Bandar sir. If people won't be here, how will Keti Bandar get opportunities then. There won't be any facilities as well, no good hospitals, no education, no electricity, no road will be made. It's bad for Keti bandar. If people leave Keti, it's bad. (Keti Bandar, PAK3B)

if the youth flee from Africa who would be left behind to make the continent a better one. Hence, we the youth of today need to stand firm and work hard to make Africa better through doing business (self-employment) and everything is going to work out well. (Golf City, GHA2B)

Instead of illegally migrating to foreign countries, young generations should work in agriculture. (Behsud, AFG2A).

But I really do not recommend migration as a way to good livelihood. Maybe, if you move in a legal way by airplane that would be fine. But instead of risking your life in the water to go to someone's country, I believe you better stay, work hard here, develop in your own country and live as you want. (Moyale, ETH3C)

## Staying for the duty of care

Migration is an emotional experience, not only for those who migrate but also for those who stay. The feeling of guilt for those who decide to migrate is common, either in the case of adult children leaving their elderly parents behind, or when parents (mothers and/or fathers) choose to migrate with their children staying. Not living together with family is among the main reasons participants discussed *against* the idea of migrating, so as reasons for staying.

Young people express concerns about migrating because they feel responsible for looking after their elderly parents. Similarly, not being part of children's daily lives has an effect on both migrants and non-migrants, for which the benefits of migrating cannot always compensate. Therefore, the impact on those left behind is among key reasons for staying put. Those who think about migrating often face a dilemma; struggling to decide between staying to provide in-person care or leaving to seek to materially improve the lives of family members. Balancing the two through migration is a delicate and challenging matter, which focus group participants across MIGNEX research areas are acutely aware of.

I could go away and look for money elsewhere, doing something else, but as long as my parents live, my duty is to stay by them and to work so that they will not suffer during their old age. (Dialakoro, GIN2A)

It is a loss for Chot Dheeran. He has gone by leaving everything. For example, I leave this place I disconnect with it. Then it's a loss for the place. But if I remain connected then it is beneficial. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1D)

Besides, you are away from the family, relatives, friends and when something happens to your family members such as your father, mother or someone else, you cannot help them and even you cannot attend their funeral if they die. (Behsud, AFG2D)

So, I prefer to stay here, and I am contributing to my country. I am investing in the country, I am developing my country's economy and furthermore I can enjoy the peace, tranquillity, I look after my family in relaxed atmosphere, you can get helped, you can count on relatives and neighbours' help, whereas... I never lived abroad but I heard that there you're by yourself. So, I prefer to stay here, give my contribution. So, emigration is out. Abroad just for holidays, for holidays I always want to. (São Nicolau, CPV1C)

Today we have a generation that mother wants to stay close to her child, you understand.... wants to raise her child wants to be closer to her child so she will see emigration as the last option to give her child education. (Boa Vista, CPV2D)

Because of migration some parents have lost their sons and daughters. Also, most parents do not want their children to go away, they want them to be close to them so they can care about each other. (Gbane, GHA1D)

I could go away and look for money elsewhere, doing something else, but as long as my parents live, my duty is to stay by them and to work so that they will not suffer during their old age. (Dialakoro, GIN2A)

As he said so when you allow your own son to leave here automatically, whatever he is gaining from where he went to you are not benefitting from it so you will not have value on it. So, it is very good to recommend your son to stay with you. (Awe, NGA2D)

As a Pakistani, I wish our system must be better. We must have better opportunities. Why should we go to other countries? The reason is, for example, when I was migrating to Lahore, I did not want to relocate because that was my homeland, I wanted to stay with my family, with my relatives, but I had to come for the opportunities and the job. If we have options there, we do not need to go abroad. (Youhanabad, PAK2C)

One of our fellow villagers has migrated abroad. He told his journey story to his mother. He told me that when he crossed the Iran-Turkey border, there was a mountain called Kohe-Mushkil, we crossed that mountain as well. It means he spent a lot of money, as well as being beaten by the police. I always pray to God to bring peace in our country because a lot of our young people have migrated abroad and suffered a lot of difficulties. But when peace comes to the country, the foreign countries will deport these young people as they will ensure that peace has been ensured in your country and you should go as there is no reason left for not returning to your country. So in this case, they will be deported while they have spent a lot of money migrating abroad. It means they have lost their capital. But if they have invested the money here they spent along the way to abroad, they would now have a good business, as well as they would be living together with their families. (Behsud, AFG2B)

## Avoiding risks in destination countries

Local communities and migrants are often aware of the dangers involved in migration journeys, which can lead to anti-migration discourse at the local level. They are also aware of the challenges experienced by migrants abroad which include deportation risks, discrimination, racism and difficult living and working conditions. Participants also suggest that migrating may not be a good thing, as people become strangers and are perceived as migrants indefinitely. Additionally, migration can lead to a loss of skills as individuals may have to accept jobs they would not do back home. What is worth noticing, is that potential migrants are aware of these costs, which counters the assumption that they are easily enticed by those abroad. To avoid the risks associated with migration, individuals may recommend others to stay in their home country.

Our university lecturer, who was well respected here and had enough salary, went abroad. Someone told me that he is a driver in Russia. One friend told me that all Afghans there gathered for dinner and the finest job holder was a taxi driver. We are ashamed as an employee in our own country but no one will give us a job in the Municipality of other countries. Even if Ashraf Ghani [current president] goes to another country, he will do nothing there. But it is somehow fine for people's children to be raised

there. I recommend that youth should not leave the country and I am sure some good changes will come. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

I agree with what my colleagues said, voting pro, of course it's a fact, Europe or the USA, have greater incomes than Cabo Verde, we will not say it's the opposite. But the reason I voted against is because right now, the majority of emigrants going to Europe, they will go earn the minimum wage, but we know the minimum wage almost everywhere in the world. It only pays the basic expenditures, it's not enough to make great savings or to live a comfortable life. And earning the minimum wage of 13.000 escudos here or the minimum wage of 800 euros in Europe is practically the same at the end of the day. I think that Cabo Verde has opportunities, through tourism or other areas, people can... invest and develop. So, I advise young people to stay here. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

My brother has migrated abroad. He says that they work 18 hours in a day. Besides, their employer tells them that they would give them a salary of 1600 (whatever the currency of that country is) but when the months end, they give them either 1200 or more or less. Because they cut the rent of houses, expense of Wi-Fi and food but when you see only 200 or 300 is left for you at the end of the month. So, they get confused whether to send these 200-300 to their families, however when the young people leave their homes, they promise their families that they would send a specific amount of money to their families. (Behsud, AFG2B)

Two of my cousins migrated to Turkey, however, they were professional mechanics and tractor drivers. When they moved to Turkey, they were not doing as good work as they were doing here, however, they were the team leaders but still were not doing well because they don't make you professional but instead they are recruiting you in odd jobs. (Behsud, AFG2C)

I was weaving carpets in Pakistan. All 7 family members would work from early morning until 9 to 1' o'clock at night. They would only receive 20,000 to 25,000 rupees each month, which was a very small profit. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

For me, based on my own experience, it depends, emigration is hard, now it's hard to place it...for me, based on my experience. I've lived a year in USA, I went to look for better life, people go with the idea that one can earn a lot of money bla bla, but we have some stuff, here in São Nicolau, you don't earn a lot of money, and abroad, you can earn a lot of money. But you cannot have them, like I said at the beginning, safety and tranquillity of living in a place. I ... maybe because my bellybutton is here ...[laughs] ...I don't advise people to emigrate, just for adventure, I prefer to try out here, unless you realise it's not working until the last try, you can emigrate, like, go, finish high school and go. Unless you emigrating to have a degree. Based on my experience, I went for an experimental year, it did not work... In my opinion it's not worth it, it does not compensate, abroad you have different things, it's more developed, yes it is. However, the peace one has by leaving in a place that you can walk, get to another place stress free regarding transport. Leave early and get home at night. While here, you just plan go somewhere in half an hour, then you back home, you can get there indeed in half an hour, whereas abroad you cannot. You work a lot to have a bit of money, you work a lot, you hustle a lot, until late, your health becomes weak, like it's been said, one gets old too early. I don't advise emigration, but it's up to them, I spoke based on my experience. (São Nicolau, CPV1C)

When I was in Pakistan, I was selling bananas in order to run our life, however, we have 20 Jeribs [a land measurement unit, 1 Jerib equals 2,000 square meters] of land here. When we first moved to Pakistan, I was laying mud bricks. I was 13 years old then and I was carrying a box of four bricks, which has created health problems for me and now my lower back is aching. My father and two brothers were working with me and we were laying 3,000 bricks a day at that time and this way, we were supporting our household, which we couldn't do in our place of origin at that time. (Behsud, AFG2C)

Migration to Iran has a lot of negative impacts. People go there out of compulsion. I love my own land. Iranians hit Afghans, they always insult them. I have been there. Now, I regret being there. (Shahrake Mahdia AFG3C)

He went to Germany because his wife was raised in Iran and did not want to live in Afghanistan. He is comfortably living there but does not have a good job. He is an educated man but now working in water supply. He may have been able to find a good and suitable job in Afghanistan. If he was here, he would have trained a lot of boys. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3C)

The Life they have there, I have a lot of relatives in America and I have a cousin and I see how sometimes she's tired... she might earn money but then the fatigue... it's not worth it. There you earn money but the money doesn't stay there.. (Boa Vista, CPV2C)

This is because when an individual migrates that person may suffer a lot in the country where he migrates. Hence any person can work within his locality. (Moyale, ETH3B)

Focus group participants talk about how by moving abroad, there is at risk of losing one's own culture. In particular, the fear of losing one's religion when migrating to Europe is not uncommon. Finding oneself in a new environment can push migrants to reconsider their relationship with their religion. In extreme cases, some people mention that among those who went abroad, some have abandoned their religion. Avoiding these risks, feeds into the ways in which reasons for staying are talked about.

A related theme, that of intergenerational cultural transmission, was also talked about as a reason for staying – in order to avoid any risks of interrupting such transmission. Within this perspective, talking about the future of local culture is often linked to the idea that *people should stay* and invest locally, not only in the place but in its people. As an extension of these kinds of discussions, in research areas which are majority Muslim, for instance migrating to Muslim countries rather than non-Muslim countries might be considered the preferred option, where Islam is an integral part of the local culture, and as an alternative to staying in order to avoid risks.

On the other hand, suppose a person from Achin district is living abroad and he wants to take his whole family to abroad but the elderly people from his family think that if a person moves to France, they change their mind about their religion, for example, leave prayer, leave fasting and so on and therefore they reject going abroad. Instead, they choose to stay and die here in their country. (Behsud, AFG2C)

It is good that abroad there are many facilities for all people, but for me and my children I am afraid that they will lose their cultural identity, and there are people who lose their religion and become atheists affected by



their surroundings. It has its advantages and its disadvantages. You cannot always control your children, as their surroundings will certainly affect them. (Yenice, TUR2C)

There they have no education. The child lives as he wants there and the parents integrate before the children integrate, but the issue is up to education. If a person wants to do what he wants to do in Europe he can do that, but the culture here is close to our culture and customs are similar to ours. There the children control the family and not the other way around. I have one of my relatives who has a child in the kindergarten that prevents us from knowing what is happening there. The children learn things without knowing what these things they teach, and I consider it a bad point and no matter how hard you try to raise your son, he will be more affected by the environment in which he lives, and that the ocean is very different. (Yenice, TUR2C)

This section illuminates the multitude of factors which can be understood as reasons for staying, though gleaned from a code about reasons “against” migrating. Three types of reasons for staying emerged, across research areas and focus groups. First, reasons for staying associated with obligations to the area and community there, and often as a response to a perceived risk of areas becoming *emptied out*. Second, reasons for staying were talked about in relation to the duty of care – toward especially one’s parents and one’s children, though sometimes including other family members or relatives. However, this was one of the areas where reasons for staying – and leaving, overlapped, as the dilemma of how best to care in person or by providing financially for the family, was often at the core. Thirdly, reasons for staying were talked about in relation to avoiding the risks that migration was perceived to entail – specifically in relation to risks associated with international migration, and life in countries far away. These risks, talked about in terms of reasons for staying, included both the risks of discrimination, low or unfair wages, deskilling and doing only lower-end jobs in destination countries, but also risks associated with preservation of culture, tradition and religion. Also in relation to these types of reasons for staying, there were dilemmas, and contention within focus groups. Participants sometimes talked about similar concerns or fears, resulting in arguments made either in terms of reason for staying, or indeed as reasons for leaving, reflecting the complexity and contradictory nature of migration considerations, where individual, subjective assessments, clearly also matter.



## How do risk and feasibility of migrating matter in migration considerations?

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

This section addresses how participants talked about risk and feasibility of migration, in the focus groups. The codes drawn on were ‘*migration journey*’, ‘*migration experience*’ and ‘*failed migration*’. As noted in the above section, participants were often aware of the risks of migration, both in terms of the financial and employment-related hazards, but also personal safety as well as potential impacts on loved ones.

### Risks of the migration journey

#### Death *en route* and deportation

‘Only their dead bodies return.’ (Kilis, TUR3A) This quote from Turkey captures one way in which risks of the migration journey were talked about in the focus groups. In the following, perceptions of risk and feasibility of the migration journey, as these were talked about in the focus groups, will be presented, first with regard to the migrants themselves and secondly in reference to those who have not migrated, family members and local communities.

The most explicit way in which risk and feasibility emerge in focus group discussions is as *death en route or deportation*. One Afghan focus group participant for instance said: ‘Migration also has some risks. They might be killed on the way. They might be deported.’ (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1C). Based on how focus group participants talked about migration, they were highly aware of the risks involved in migrating. A range of scenarios and stories which participants had heard about or experienced themselves, were talked about, across a number of different research areas. The stories of people dying while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea or during their journey through the Sahara Desert sometimes lead to narratives against migration, aiming to discourage youth from migrating in the first place.

It is important that they understand that they will lose their life in this way. The risk is too big. We listen to the news; we know about all those young people dying while they cross the desert or the sea. It is so sad. (Boffa, GIN1C)

[I] have heard 300 people died on the red sea while trying to move to Yemen and then to Saudi Arabia. This is the horrific aspect of migration. (Kombolcha, ETH1A)

Because when youths go to Iran, they will be hit/beaten up or shot at or when they go to Turkey, they may drown at sea. So, a mother in Shahrake Mahdia will lose her sons and it impacts her a lot both mentally and physically. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

I prefer it if people stay in Ekpoma or go to Benin [city in Nigeria]. One of my younger brother told is also complaining that there is nothing but suffering there and that I or anyone I know shouldn’t come over. He said that someone he knows left Nigeria last month, whose wife newly put to bed [given birth to a child] and the man died on the journey. No one knew when he left, he died on his way, inside the river and was buried there too.

My younger brother is always telling me how bad it is over there and that I shouldn't allow my children or anyone go there. (Ekpoma, NGA3D)

When we see media outlets, a number of people are dying when they attempt to migrate via sea and water bodies. (Moyale, ETH3A)

Here, we don't encourage migration. I know a young man who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea and died. He must be 19-20 years old. He was drowned in the Sea and this has discouraged all the other young people who wanted to leave. (Dialakoro, GIN2A)

Going abroad has a lot of difficulties, it is like playing with death, as there is the risk of dying in the ocean, being hunted by wild animals in the jungles. (Behsud, AFG2C)

Those who die are more than those who succeed. (Ekpoma, NGA3B)

Migration is bad because some don't get to their destination. They die on the way. (Ekpoma, NGA3C)

His fiancée waited for him about 15 years but finally she was informed that her husband died in the sea when he wanted to move to European countries from the ocean. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

It happens that you will reach the target area but your wife will reach there after two days or may even not reach there. They may die on the way and sometimes human traffickers take these women as hostages for misuse. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

Most of the time they are not successful in traveling, they are repatriated back. When they come back, they will be returned back to their locality. (Moyale, ETH3B)

The people who migrated, some of them succeeded in reaching where they were going, while others died in the desert and others simply returned to Baidoa. (Baidoa, SOM2C)

Here, we don't encourage migration. I know a young man who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea and died. He must be 19-20 years old. He was drowned in the Sea and this has discouraged all the other young people who wanted to leave. (Dialakoro, GIN2A)

### Being stuck in transit

Another risk of the journey that was commonly talked about was not reaching the intended destination, but instead getting stuck in transit countries on the way. While transit migration is typically understood as a period of waiting in-between the country of origin and the destination, usually in countries neighbouring the EU, in defining the concept, neither a strict time-demarcation nor a clear-cut differentiation between transit and destination country seem appropriate (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). Rather, what defines the transitory character of the migration journey, is a phase of 'immobility in a process of movement' (Schapendonk 2012:579). This is echoed in the following quotes, emphasising the unpredictability in terms of time duration and place as well as the involuntariness of their immobility.

I know a boy [omitted to preserve confidentiality] who left University in second year and went to Turkey. Someone had told him that he would send

[him] an invitation letter from Canada, but he failed to do so. Now, [he] regrets his decision. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

[...] my husband spent almost 9 months in Libya before moving to Italy. When you get there and you do not have money, you will die because when they capture you, they force you to call home and demand for money before they let you go and the connection men are the ones who take the money at every point and we ended up paying 7000 cedis. Hence, if you are able to go quietly then you are on a safer side, which is why I say it is 50-50 and that it is good for both men and women. I know a woman who migrated with my husband and is now doing very well where she is. (New Takoradi, GHA3A)

### Loss of capital and forced return

Another risk of the migration journey much talked about in focus groups was loss of capital and forced return. In addition, people risk being scammed en route. The following quotes illustrate how the possibility of being deported and losing the capital invested in the migration is ever present during the journey.

I always pray to God to bring peace in our country because a lot of our young people have migrated abroad and suffered a lot of difficulties. But when peace comes to the country, the foreign countries will deport these young people as they will ensure that peace has been ensured in your country and you should go as there is no reason left for not returning to your country. So, in this case, they will be deported while they have spent a lot of money migrating abroad. It means they have lost their capital. (Behsud, AFG2B).

One more thing, if someone tells them to sell their house here in return for a direct ticket to London or America, they won't think twice. They'll risk getting scammed too. And it has happened too. I know that they made such a promise to a man to get him to Dubai, got him a seat in a coaster and no one knows what happened after that. They left him in Karachi by the sea. (Youhanabad, PAK2A)

I've heard that a lot of people pawn their houses and properties to be able to go abroad. And then it's not possible to pay back the loan because they can't go abroad successfully. (Youhanabad, PAK2A)

If your family can't pay them, they will kill you by throwing you in the ocean and leave you there to be drawn. So, imagine how your family lost everything and you lost your life so it's better to do what my friend here said [talking about another participant] about staying with her with all the benefits of living in Moyale. (Moyale, ETH3C)

I would not recommend it because the risks outweigh the chances of succeeding in migration; sometimes people get kidnapped and the kidnappers ask for money to release them which is extremely difficult to obtain. I have seen people from Baidoa on social media requesting money from their families to set them free; perhaps the family is poor, and they sell the small plot of land they own. (Baidoa, SOM2C)

### Deteriorating mental health

The risk and feasibility of migration are not only talked about with regard to the physical challenges of moving. Deteriorating mental health as part of the

migration process is another risk that focus group participants talk about. Especially as symptoms of the underlying fear of deportation and the uncertainties of an existence in limbo.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

My father's family is in Iran and they are always afraid of being deported by the Iranian government. My brother works during the day with a troubled mind. He is waiting for the moment that he will be captured and deported. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

But, the most likely outcome of migration is exposure to negative things including death, physical damage, mental and psychological trauma. (Kombolcha, ETH1A)

The other thing is since this kind of migration is illegal, you will always live worried and scared about your future. (Batu, ETH2D)

### Risks of the migration journey for those who stay

The riskiness of the migration journey is often talked about, naturally, in relation to migrants themselves. However, in the focus groups, participants also talk about the risks for those who stay. The evaluation is also made based on the effects that their journey has on the people whom the migrant leaves behind. This speaks to the purpose of migrating in the first place and the kind of decision-making that is involved. The following quotes illustrate that when migrating one does not only risk one's own life but also the financial and mental wellbeing of one's family, often but not always based on a decision which can in different ways be described as collective.

It has been 17 days since my son has migrated abroad. He left secretly from me. After some days, I got informed that my son has migrated abroad and his friends have crossed the river but he is stuck there. I was really shocked and fasted for many days without eating or drinking anything, as well as I didn't speak to anyone for many days. His brothers were also worried. They are metalsmiths and have a shop here. I told them if they wouldn't have assisted him, he wouldn't have migrated. I haven't talked to him yet and I am still worried about him. (Behsud, AFG2B)

So, a mother in Shahrake Mahdia will lose her sons and it impacts her a lot both mentally and physically. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

One of our relatives lost three of their sons in illegal migration to Europe. All of these boys had wives and children. Now, their families live in bad situations in absence of them. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

For instance, if one decided to migrate to Italy through Libya but gets stuck in Libya, he will not be able to make it and effect some changes in the lives of his family members back home. (New Takoradi, GHA3C)

The problem with migration is also that sometimes if you want to travel to Tamale you can get involved in a car accident and perhaps you will die and leave your family hungered and this is what he does not to migrate. Because of migration some parents have lost their sons and daughters. (Gbane, GHA1D)

When I was in my hometown, we had everything such as land and house. When the Taliban took our village in Daikundi, my husband migrated to Iran. It was a difficult time for us, I was left with my children alone. My husband worked in Iran and brought money. So, we could buy land in

Shahrake Mahdia. It has been several years that we have lived here but we lost all our assets in Daikundi and until now, we could not return back. Our village in Daikundi is still insecure. My brothers and sisters are currently in Iran and they are not satisfied with their life. Because they are not comfortable in Iran, they have been harassed, hit, and disturbed by Iranians. Although they can work in Iran. The only good things about living in Iran was that Iran has better security, job opportunities, and it has a cleaner environment. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)

There are several examples of failed migrants. They took loan and moved to European and Gulf countries. They did not work there and their families are facing problems here. (Youhanabad, PAK2D)

[A] lot of money to go in the first place and after you find a way to get the money and pay them, they take you by boats or ships in the unhealthy environment but even after you reach Libya, another story starts since they actually poison and imprison you then ask ransom money from your family who most likely sold everything they had to get you there in the first place. (Moyale, ETH3C)

The considerations of those left behind do not only shine a light on how many lives are affected by one person's migration, but also reveal a certain expectation of migration, as a livelihood strategy that is intimately connected to remittances-sending (as we return to in the next section). Returning empty handed, though alive and well, can be seen as a sign of unsuccessful migration and thereby is sometimes also talked about in terms of posing a risk.

Here in Batu illegal migration is also not common, but I remember one incident where more than 100 people migrated here from Batu to Sudan through Metama, to go to Europe. But they got back here without anything, empty hand. (Batu, ETH2D)

My cousin has migrated to Iran and it has been 1 years since he is living there but he hasn't supported his family yet. Before his migration, his family's economic situation was good but his migration made his family's economic situation worse. (Behsud, AFG2B)

People who travel to other countries frequently face a variety of problems, including death or requests for money from their families, and the family may be forced to sell the family's small plot of land. (Baidoa, SOM2D)

While the risk of unsuccessfully migrating is mostly talked about in negative terms, the exception to this is expressed in this statement from Tunisia: 'If he's willing to take the risk of illegal migration, even if he fails, at least he tried to improve his situation.' (Redeyef, TUN2C)

In sum, risks of the migration journey come to the fore as a migration outcome for the migrants themselves and for those left behind from the perspective of local people (with either strong or weak ties with migration). People are highly aware of the dangers of migrating and death *en route* is one prevalent possibility. However, risks of the migration journey are also talked about in relation to the possibility of deportation or not making it to ones intended destination. Notably, risks are not only talked about in terms of the dangers of the actual geographical relocation, but also concerned with the mental health and financial well-being of both migrants and their families in places of origin.

## Feasibility of migration

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

### Economic constraints and visas

Some participants expressed challenges to migrating due to a lack of economic resources and/or proper documentation. They convey that they are compelled to stay, and if given the opportunity, they would choose to leave. Poverty prevents them from moving, while others with better means can consider migrating.

We can't go because we can't support ourselves if we had money we would have gone. No we don't have passport. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1B)

Visa is very hard to get. I think they haven't understood it properly. Let me tell you, it is not possible here. It is very hard to get visas. (Youhanabad, PAK2A)

Many people desire to move out from here but they can't go due to lack of resources and their economic situation. (Youhanabad, PAK2B)

### Regular vs. irregular migration

When it comes to reflections on the feasibility of the migration journey, participants often strictly differentiate between, what they themselves talk about as 'legal and illegal migration'. While illegal/irregular migration is talked about as dangerous and even morally 'bad', legal/regular migration is thought of and talked about as safe.

As a result, if they migrate through legal ways then 'it's fine but if they migrate through illegal ways and the person should die on the way, then it is not good for the community, as well as their concerned family. (Behsud, AFG2C)

I think that irregular migration is extremely dangerous, and I would never try that. I prefer to die here in poverty than to go and die on the Mediterranean Sea. (Boffa, GIN1B)

The two types of migration that I would distinguish are legal and illegal migration. Embassies are in charge of legal migration, and some migrants have been successful utilizing this route. This group of migrants is safe, and their rights are respected. I recommend that people migrate through embassies. Illegal migrants, on the other hand, put their lives in danger. (Kombolcha, ETH1B)

Here, we don't consider that going to Europe in the irregular way is something good. We consider that when a person goes in a dangerous way, it is risky and sad for the village. We have a young man who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea, but he died in the sea, and we haven't seen his corpse yet. It is sad for us. We don't encourage that for our young people. (Dialakoro, GIN2C)

For me migration is good if it is a legal migration with minimum risk, because, when people migrate it is not only the individual or the family that could get benefit from it but also the country at large. But the illegal one, for example, those who go through Yemen to Saudi Arabia which is full of risk and challenges, where one can even die. In this case, I don't see its goodness. (Batu, ETH2D)



I recommend regular and safe migration. However, unsafe and irregular migration is very difficult both to travel and work there. (Kombolcha, ETH1D)

So, for me, migration is more of 50-50. It is good if they go through legal and safe way, but if it is illegal migration, I don't think it is good because the individual himself, family, and the country at large can be affected. (Batu, ETH2D)

I agree with my friend [referring to another participant] because I believe it's different when done legally or illegally, when it's legal it's safer and you're freer to travel around while if you're traveling illegally, you will fall prey to anyone with bad intentions. (Moyale, ETH3C)

I mean that left the country in legal ways so if anything goes wrong, they can have their papers and return home safely. But if they go illegally, they may face lots of challenges and harsh conditions. So, when I am saying 50-50 the good thing is if it's done in a legal way as an option. (Batu, ETH2B).

I have a bitter experience about illegal migration. I sent one of my brothers through illegal ways abroad. He had a comfortable journey from here till Turkey. I told the smuggler that he should take my brother to the destination country for EUR 8,000. At first, I wanted my brother to go to Turkey and stay there but some people said that Turkey is not a good place and you cannot obtain your residency. Therefore, I borrowed some money and talked to the smuggler to take my brother to France as they grant residency. Along the way, my brother got caught in Bosnia, and he was imprisoned for 3 months there. He called us and we were really worried about him. Illegal migration has all these tensions and is bothersome. When they released my brother, they gave him a green card and told him to leave their country within 2-3 weeks. When he entered Bulgaria from Bosnia, he stayed there for a long time. I sold my land and sent him EUR 4,000 so that he could get himself to France. But there he was chased by muggers and they hit him with a knife and took all his money, however, he was underage. It was 9 PM when he called me and sent me his pictures of his injuries, and when I saw his picture, I was shocked. I asked him what happened. He told me that I cannot speak, just send me some EUR 500 but if you do not send me the money, I might die due to bleeding. And then that night, I called a money dealer to send my brother the requested amount on his ID. And then he sent EUR 400 to my brother and he treated himself. Eventually, I have spent EUR 2,000 on his treatment. All these are the reasons that we advise and tell others that illegal migration is dangerous. It has been 2 years since he was there and now he has reached Romania. Once, someone told me that my brother had turned to drug addiction, as our friend mentioned before that mostly boys who migrate abroad turn to drug addiction. I called his friends and after some time, they told me that he was in prison and someone had beaten him and when I heard all this, I and my family were really worried about him. As a result, I thought that we were really in tension because we sent him in order to work and earn some money. So, when they turn to drugs there, they damage their lives. Therefore, we want our government to send our young people abroad legally so that they could work and earn some money. (Behsud, AFG2C)

From my point of view, they should legally migrate to other countries, such as going for a scholarship or other legal ways. People should not use human traffickers. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

There are no favourable conditions for migration to other countries, and migrants encounter numerous hurdles. The difficulties are, however,



different for irregular and legal migration. The availability of brokers in Kombolcha provides a fantastic opportunity for international migration. (Kombolcha, ETH1B)

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

This section has highlighted the widespread awareness of risk factors and obstacles to feasibility in regard to migration. Contrary to the dominant discourse, which emphasises lack of information about migration risks and realities, participants were highly aware of a multitude of risks: death, getting stuck in transit, forced return, loss of capital, deteriorating mental health and effects on members of the families back home. Furthermore, feasibility to a high extent, and across research areas, is talked about in ways that take very seriously questions of law and regulation, where irregular migration is not talked about as a preferred mode of migrating.

## How does education intersect with migration considerations?

This section addresses the relationship between education and ideas about migration. The section draws on all the focus group data coded to *'ideas about education'*, *'higher education'*, and *'schools'* in combination with *'ideas about migration'*. Any discussion relating both to education and migration was thus captured and reviewed in-depth.

Evident from the data is the implicit connection between livelihoods and education. In the focus group discussions, notions of and motivations for education were intrinsically tied to and inseparable from those of finding adequate livelihood opportunities. So, while the question here is directed towards education, it is worth noting that ideas about livelihoods, whether explicit or implicit, are present within conversations about education and migration, and relate to those considerations.

The code *'ideas about education'* was described in the codebook as: 'Opinions about education in general, alternative types of education e.g. learning from travelling. Changing perceptions of education'. The conception of education included was thus not limited only to that of formal education, but also that which could be considered alternative education, and life experiences which were described by the participants as educational.

One of the main findings from this analysis is the centrality of education in migration considerations. Our data demonstrates that education represents a main focal point and may be a central motivation for migration. In many cases which were talked about, migration was a secondary outcome of the drive to gain an education, and migration had varying degrees of relevance depending on research area and individual preference.

### Migration as a mechanism which enables education

In the focus group discussions, formal schooling, particularly up until secondary education, is broadly seen as something which is inherently beneficial for the individual and which is assumed to have a positive impact on their families, as well as wider society. It is talked about as an essential pre-requisite for finding adequate livelihood opportunities and a good standard of living.

In the world today without education whatever you do will not be beneficial to you. (Down Quarters, NGA1C)

I want that my daughter at the age of 8, should go to secondary school here, but I think we should leave here for the high school because Yenice has nothing offer to her, there is no job potential. We say that for the opening of her horizon. (Hopa, TUR1D)

Our ambition is for them to study, then even after the studies there is often no work. This is one of the reasons why women leave Awe and migrate elsewhere to look for a means to sponsor their children in school. (Awe, NGA2B)

As exemplified in the quote above, the pre-requisite of education often involves considerations about migration. While in almost all the research areas, primary schooling was available, though of varying quality and varying levels of enrolment and attendance, secondary education was less universally accessible. In several areas, attending secondary school would entail moving to another town or village, and in some cases moving across international borders. This requirement carries the additional financial burden of transportation and accommodation on top of school fees.

Those who can afford let their children to attend [high school] in Kenya. (Moyale, ETH3B)

We came from Daikondi just because of my children to get education and make their future brighter. However, leaving our original place was very hard but there was not any job and educational opportunity. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1B)

In regards to school, there are many schools in this area and the education level has improved in this area in comparison to other provinces. For example, there are schools only in the centre of the city in other provinces; but here in Herat, Jabrael has a very high number of students at schools and even there are students from other provinces coming to Jabrael for Kankor [university entrance exam]. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1D)

While secondary education is seen as crucial, and for achieving which migration is a worthwhile risk, higher education is discussed in more nuanced and contradictory ways within and across focus groups. Considerations involving higher education and education intersect to a greater degree with ideas about feasibility, safety, and livelihood opportunities. Some of those interactions can be seen in the following quotes:

I would not advise a young person to emigrate, but you know what's funny? When you tell a young person from São Nicolau to look for training, to get a certificate, to have a degree, [...] at the end of the day, we're telling them to emigrate or migrate [...]. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

I still recommend migration for everyone. If you are an undocumented immigrant in France, you can still sign up at a national library and learn there. Whereas the national library here requires you to have a master's degree at the very least in order to have access. (Redeyef, TUN2A)

And in this exchange between two participants:

You chose to study abroad when you could have studied here...

I didn't choose to. My speciality isn't available here... (Enfidha, TUN1C)

A lack of educational institutes at the vocational or university level means that often a recommendation or desire for education is inherently linked to migration. Even for participants who are opposed to migration for young people in their community, the recommendation for those young people to pursue education *instead* of migration presents a paradox, since due higher educational institutes, vocational training opportunities or other specific training opportunities may be unavailable in their area. This was true in several areas, where migration was broadly recommended against, and

participants preferred to emphasise the necessity and importance of education for the individual and for the research area.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

When there is security and there are employment and education opportunities in an area, migration will not be a wise option. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3D)

I will not recommend the youth to travel to other countries if they're not seeking higher education. (Erigavo, SOM1D)

I will migrate only where I can improve educationally. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

Yet, they were nonetheless obliged to recommend migration if it provided the only way to acquire an education. In this way, migration can be seen as a mechanism which *enables* education, regardless of whether migration is a favourable element of that consideration or not.

### Education for return

In reaction to the conflict in considerations between education and migration, moving for education was often talked about as positive as long as the person returns. Return was often seen as an implicit element of migration.

I can say that it is a good thing if the person is leaving for education, so that he/she will come back with a good qualification, such a person later will get a good job with good salary. (Baidoa, SOM2A)

Let him study, yes, go abroad if necessary, but the place he will come back to is his father's home. (Hopa, TUR2C)

Yes, people have migrated, and their number is little. Most of them have migrated on temporary basis and the purpose of their migration is education. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

Normally after finishing 12<sup>th</sup> grade, if you don't... you have to leave straightaway, if you want to have something for the future, to learn something, to come back and have a job, you must leave, you must continue your studies. (Boa Vista, CPV2A)

I would say that migration has another benefit, for example, when there are no facilities such as technology in your hometown but when you move to another place or country, you can learn many skills and crafts there, which is a plus point of the migration. For example, someone told me that he learnt the brickwork in Pakistan, another person said that he learnt plasterwork in Karachi, Pakistan or another person has learnt the construction work in Iran. (Behsud, AFG2C)

In particular, the connection between education, adequate livelihoods and migration was emphasised across the research areas. Education and migration were thought of as having the potential to improve the research area, as the person who returns will bring skills and knowledge to the area. There is a general understanding that a person who obtains some education outside their own geographic area will contribute to the development of the community, and that migration specifically for education should be valued for that reason.

As a result, I would say that if we do not migrate abroad, we will not be able to develop in any sector. In the educational sector, if we consider the scholarship, when a person moves abroad on a scholarship for education, he becomes a doctor, a master or a bachelor when he returns back. As a result, I can say that development has a direct relationship with migration. (Behsud, AFG2D)

I advise young people to migrate only if they have a good reason to go there like going to study, gain experiences and exposure but after gaining that knowledge and experience they should come back to their country and contribute to the development of their country. (Ekpoma, NGA3C)

In my point, I would only recommend young people to go to well-developed countries only to get education, do innovation, and bring new technology to the country. (Behsud, AFG2A)

People who had migrated in the past either for education or business purposes, they are returning back [here]. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

I request young people to get higher education in foreign countries and return back in order to help develop their communities. (Behsud, AFG2A)

I would also recommend young people to migrate, however it has some negative points but it also has positive points as well. For example, for education, learning new skills and crafts. Therefore, I recommend young people to migrate in order to learn education and new skills and crafts there because the education level is lower here. (Behsud, AFG2A)

However, the extent to which both the migration itself, and the return, was perceived as feasible differed greatly, even within individual focus group discussions. With regard to return, two key issues emerged: firstly, those who migrate for education do not return, which was experienced as a loss to the area.

Even here in Cabo Verde, we send 10 young people for Hospitality and tourism School in Praia, none of them come back. (São Nicolau, CPV1C)

But those who go abroad to study don't come back to Boffa. They stay in Conakry and we don't see them anymore. So, they are not really useful for the development of this town. (Boffa, GIN1C)

Some people are migrating for education as they want to learn technology as those countries are equipped with technologies, therefore, they migrate and even some of them are granted with residency permit but this is a benefit for that country and a loss for our country because we lose our youths who should work here and develop country but unfortunately they are granted there with residency permit and stay there. (Behsud, AFG2D)

And secondly, those who did return after gaining an education were quite often unable to find livelihood opportunities in line with their qualification. Often, people found that they were overqualified for the local labour market.

Yes, people in Boffa suffer a lot, some people have been away to study, but they can't find a job when they come back. (Boffa, GIN1A)

It has been five years since we have returned from Pakistan, and my sons are all educated. They have completed their education in Pakistan, but they don't find any work opportunities here, so we have problems living here. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1D)

You will be surprised with the number of university and diploma certificate holders we have from down quarters, but none of them are employed. (Down Quarters, NGA1A)

We do not want to live in this country. Because we have no role here. They announce some vacant posts, when we apply, they reject us under the claim that we are overqualified. (Redeyef, TUN2B)

Let me speak for friends who have children who have graduated from university and returned. For example, one of them graduated from psychology but when you look here, there is no job opportunity. (Kilis, TUR3A)

Young people are stuck at one point. I think our young people are wasted in this country. In my opinion, we are actually doing something wrong. We direct our children only to education. We are obsessed with their education. In my opinion, we have a tremendous occupation loss. (Kilis, TUR3B)

We see that educational attainment is talked about as absolutely necessary for the individual and their community. Return migration of educated community members is highly valued, however the hoped for outcomes often did not materialise.

## Education as a mechanism which enables migration

When returnees find themselves overqualified, this can lead to a renewed need for migration. It is not uncommon for focus group participants to talk about (themselves or others) having to re-migrate to find livelihood opportunities in line with their acquired skills.

Many engineers are unemployed. So, if they find an opportunity abroad, in Europe, they have to go. I personally encourage them to leave. If they stay, they'll be ruined. (Redeyef, TUN2B)

Even girls who finish their studies and stay at home feel humiliated. There's the guilt of disappointing your family who made sure you receive proper education so you end up wanting to do anything. (Redeyef, TUN2C)

I am talking about our young brothers, who secretly think about leaving. They do that because they have studied, but they can't get a job. (Boffa, GIN1B)

I believe that the population left also because before, it was more linked to the sea and agriculture. And now, the population is more skilled, it's not interested in those areas. I think that what kept people here before was the fisheries and agriculture, but now they are more skilled and they do not want to work in those areas, so they end up going, for example, to the island of Sal, to work in the hotel business and tourism, because it's a different and better paid job. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

Most of the graduates have moved out of Down Quarters. You can't be a graduate and remain [here]. (Down Quarters, NGA1A)

In this way, education, whether acquired at home or away, also becomes a mechanism which enables migration. Alternatively to migration being a necessary step in accessing educational opportunities, education is a means by which migration aspirations can develop, or be actualised. Similarly,

being offered a scholarship or place in at a university abroad enables migration aspirations to become reality.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

Due to the conditions of the region, higher education is the only way to get out of here. One should finish high school and go to university elsewhere, in order to better understand life. (Redeyef, TUN2B)

I have applied for a scholarship and if I passed the exam, my family would definitely let me go on scholarship alone. (Behsud, AFG2A)

Among the focus groups where international migration was a relevant topic of discussion, having a university diploma in particular was seen to increase the chance of being able to migrate abroad and find livelihood opportunities in that new place.

My brother has moved abroad, as soon as he got his degree. (Redeyef, TUN2D)

Most of the people who go abroad are good people. They either have a lot of money or have enough education. Ordinary people are not leaving. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

I will advise that people should travel even when they are still in school. Like a senior colleague of mine got a scholarship to Canada while still in school. She was in medical laboratory science but she transferred to nursing and she is doing well. (Ekpoma, NGA3D)

However, if you do migrate with a good level of education and qualifications like doctors, or engineers, you'll have a much better lifestyle than what you'd have here. (Redeyef, TUN2C)

In this sense, the significance of education comes back around to the point that education is understood as indispensable good livelihood opportunities, and as such, migration is one key means for achieving that. For some, education can be the key which opens up the livelihood opportunities which international migration can facilitate elsewhere.

### Migration at the expense of education

Contrary to the education-migration considerations discussed above, migration had come to be associated with negative educational outcomes for children for some research areas. Particularly in the three research areas in Afghanistan, where research involving the focus groups was conducted in June - July 2021, just before the Taleban took over power in Kabul. Participants reported that children faced severe discrimination in schooling in Iran and Pakistan. Many were unable to attend school either because they lacked permits or because of the fees imposed on Afghan students there.

The situation for migrants was divided into legal and illegal, those who were legal had a blue card and the illegal migrants didn't have any ID cards which was making the situation difficult for them. For example, we didn't have the blue card so we could get education at all. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> year that my family is in Iran but they are not satisfied with their migration. My small brother cannot go to school because he is an Afghan migrant and he is not eligible to get the admission of Iranian school. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3B)



For some, return to Afghanistan meant that children were able to continue education, while others experienced that their opportunities were limited even back home as a result of missed school years abroad. In these areas, initial migration can be understood as mostly driven by factors other than children's education, but became an important driver in return considerations.

The future of their children is ruined because they are left behind in education. Because there are no schools for migrants. (Behsud, AFG2B)

I don't think we would have been able to improve as much as we did today if we were still in Iran. Because we were discriminated against there as Afghans for example, in education. I myself had to quit school because I was Afghan migrant to Iran and they asked for payments from whoever Afghans wanted to attend school and we couldn't afford to pay for my siblings. We quit schooling back then. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1A)

The potential and realised impact of absent family members on the education of children was also talked about as a factor to consider when migrating.

Young people have an influence on their households. For example, I am a young person and I have influence on my household, children, nephews and younger brothers because I am mature and I can differentiate between good and bad. Therefore, I take them to the school, madrasas and I guide them in every aspect of life but if I migrate abroad, then they will become vulgar and ignorant people as there will be no person to guide them. It has both negative and positive aspects. The negative aspect is that when a young person moves to abroad, their younger family members choose bad ways, for example, they get drug addicted as they will have communication with drug addicted people, as well as they will be left behind in education and thus they will become illiterate but if that young person should not migrate to abroad, he will take care of his family. (Behsud, AFG2D)

By contrast, in Chot Dheeran in Pakistan (PAK1C), migration was seen to have taken preference over education for some youth, who would drop out of school at a young age, or choose not to attend university, in order to pursue international migration.

Yes, we can say that education has improved because people are financially stable and they can afford private schooling. But still people are sending their kids in foreign countries instead of sending them in colleges and universities. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

The ratio of education is decreasing. Our young people move abroad and hence we have to face this low ratio of education in our area. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1D)

Our children see other kids aren't going to school, so they refuse. This is a big drawback here unlike in the cities where it doesn't concern you what others are doing. Here, kids don't study. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1B)

As discussed in the section *Cultures of migration*, in Chot Dheeran there was a social norm of migration. We see here that despite the availability of schooling in the area, migration takes precedence over education - and was thought of as a better way of attaining livelihood opportunities and a good standard of living than finishing school.

This section has highlighted the complex interplay between education, livelihoods, and migration. In many MIGNEX research areas, being educated increases the opportunities for earning a livelihood. However, educational opportunities are not always available locally, which can therefore push people – either directly or indirectly – to consider migrating. Migration is therefore in many cases a channel through which individuals secure access to education. From migration being a means of accessing educational opportunities, education can also become a means by which migration aspirations can develop and be actualised.

Overall, the focus group data provide insights to disentangle the nexus between migration, education and livelihoods. Education can be the key to increasing local livelihood opportunities via migration, or it can become a key which opens up livelihood opportunities held by international migration itself. Migration can also disrupt the education trajectories of children and youths, especially in cases of protracted conflict situations and of forced return. In some cases, migration has become so attractive to the point that young people come to consider it more important than their education.

## How do remittances figure in talk about migration?

This section answers the question ‘how do remittances figure in talk about migration?’ drawing on an in-depth review of all the focus group data coded to the code ‘*remittances*’. This was a code we described as follows in our codebook: ‘Collective or individual, doesn’t need to be sent from abroad - can come with returned migrant’.

The content coded was thus not limited to being ‘sent’, nor only coming from abroad. The data coded to ‘remittances’ was in many cases cross-coded both with other codes related to migration, and often also specific codes such as related to health, education, construction, or business. The code for ‘money’ which we described as: ‘*Comments on wealth or lack of, finances, money, economy, investment, poverty, debt, brokerage*’ was also cross-coded with remittances, when relevant. For instance, remittances sent back to relatives to re-pay debt incurred in order to finance the migration journey would be coded to *money + migration journey + remittances*.

The question ‘how do remittances figure in talk about migration?’ is addressed under three sub-headings: What does migration (remittances) enable expenditure on?; Economic gains, human costs?; and Migration aspirations or remittance aspirations? Each section also includes reflections on insights gleaned about the migration that people are talking about.

### What does migration (remittances) enable expenditure on?

We propose that what remittances are recognised to be spent on - or planned, or hoped to be spent on - offers relevant perspectives on how to understand the causes of migration. A first component of this is financing migration itself:

He continued on his journey and is now working and earning money in Germany, where he usually sends money back to his family and has already paid off the debt that his parents incurred while he was in Libyan jail. (Baidoa, SOM2D)

Those who succeed in their migration journey help their families by sending money, supporting children’s education, and making investments or starting businesses to support their families’ income. (Baidoa, SOM2C)

The quotes above illustrate the point that debt, remittances and migration projects are highly intertwined, as well as quite risky projects. This means that if something does not work to plan – whereby no migration = no remittances, this means further debt and impoverishment for families. By contrast, *if* migration does go to plan, the benefits financially in terms of remittances are often quite significant.

Across research areas, the things that people mention as remittance-expenditures are typically reflective of the types comments made about reasons for migration. However, it is noteworthy that unexpected costs are also salient, such as payment for health-related expenditure for surgery, medicine or equipment. A majority of statements refer to money being spent

and invested for livelihoods, education, housing, investments in business specifically, and then often explicitly linked to migrants' return. Many statements include aspects that are both emotional and material. Sometimes statements reveal whether they are referring to international or internal migration. Many times this remains unclear, and could be either. Certainly, remittances are much-discussed in relation to international migration, but also remain salient in the case of internal migration.

Those who live abroad dedicate their whole life to provide for their parents. They buy cars for their brothers. They help them start businesses. They would rebuild their parents' houses. (Redeyef, TUN2D)

My brother is living in [European country]. He does not usually send money. He only sends money for my studies. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3A)

Some of these families who are receiving money from abroad are establishing a clinic or another small business. (Shahrake Mahdia, AFG3D)

Many Kombolcha residents support their families while working in different parts of the world, including Ethiopia. (Kombolcha, ETH1D)

Yeah, some even may buy a home or piece of land and construct a home, which is good for a person and the town. (Batu, ETH2C)

The benefit I got from traveling abroad is the money I returned to Ghana which I used in setting up my business. (Gbane, GHA1D)

For instance, if they find jobs in the destination areas they can help with the education of others at home or they can also find employment for them too. (Awe, NGA2B)

From there he came to our house [in Awe] and bring a car, a car that nobody in our house can be able to afford to buy it. So, we observe that leaving from our place to another place is a good thing, a welcome development, when you have a mind to do that. (Awe, NGA2B)

Some migrants come back to invest here in Ekpoma thereby providing jobs for people at home. (Ekpoma, NGA3B)

I will use my mother-in-law as an example, she used to live in the mud house with some other people in a room. One of her daughters who travelled abroad has been able to build a 3-bedroom flat in Ekpoma for her. Her standard of living has improved because one of her daughters travelled abroad. (Ekpoma, NGA3C)

The rich ones have gotten richer, but created local employment opportunities here by investing the money they have earned here. (PAK1B)

People who could not host two-hundred people at wedding ceremonies, now they can afford one-thousand guests. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1B)

Mostly, if someone has a brother abroad. He would help his brother [here] to establish some small business here. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1D)

First, those people who are living abroad give resources to their families. They construct their houses, take care of their children that they may have left there, their parents and they help their siblings who remained here raise their children by supporting them financially. When the people here see this, they also get the desire to travel so that they too can improve their lives and that of their families (Baidoa, SOM2B)

I used to have a grandmother who is always ill. The money that our uncles used to send us helped us to take care of her. (Redeyef, TUN2D)

For example, one of my family members has moved to [a European country]. Of course he makes money in euros, and when he sends it here, we get more money. He was sending scholarships to me and one of my cousins during my university years. (Hopa, TUR1B)

They build houses here, something, they invest here. (Redeyef, TUR2D)

## Economic gains, human costs?

In the focus groups participants were asked about their perceptions of migration and how it was seen for the individual migrating, and for the broader community. Across research areas, participants are acutely aware of the human costs at which remittances often come, as well as the integral obligation to one's own closest family members that steers many remittances priorities. The human costs, meanwhile, are more explicitly articulated in relation to migration abroad, and to Europe:

Yeah, they send money back to their family. But they get hurt physically and psychologically to get that money. So if we look just in terms of the money, they support family, but the issue is how they get that money to send back to their family... (Batu, ETH2A)

For me, my husband has relatives abroad who send to their families, but not to us. (Kilis, TUR3C)

It's also good for São Nicolau because, being abroad one can help relatives back home, however, it can have a negative impact for the island because São Nicolau is losing its population, mostly young ones. If it's good for the person, it's also positive for São Nicolau. (São Nicolau, CPV1A)

People do not go to Europe only for themselves, but they try to uplift their relatives as well. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

It is only beneficial for the family whose member is abroad. There isn't any direct impact on Youhanabad. (Youhanabad, PAK2A)

We see that research participants in focus groups across research areas reflect the same understanding of both the (potential) human costs involved in making migration work in order to be able to send money, as well as the primary obligation to one's own closest family members. The following three quotes from two different focus groups in Behsud (AFG2) underscore the human costs, not just for migrants, but for their relatives 'back home', on the ways in which migration often is seen to *not* have impacts beyond the immediate families of the migrants, and furthermore also reflecting broader concerns about the choices made around migration, and how the cost/benefit analysis really boils down to *the money being sent home*:

If a single person migrates abroad, it doesn't impact the family too much, because his parents will be upset as their son will not be with them, but when he sends them money, they will feel a little comfortable. (Behsud, AFG2D)

People who work and earn in foreign countries are only good for their family, because it won't have any impact on Behsud, rather it would have negative consequences. (Behsud, AFG2A)

But nowadays, the people migrate abroad and leave behind their wives for many years, which is a kind of oppression with their wives. But the money sent home is a plus point of their migration. (Behsud, AFG2D)

The notion of potential for conflict within families was also recurring, in relation to the balance of human costs and economic gains of migration:

Another issue is the fact that when someone travels, it tends to benefit the entire family but in some cases, selfishness and self-interest sets in and that makes you think that you are of a higher class than the person who has not travelled before. (New Takoradi, GHA3B)

Migration was talked about in relation to ‘here’ in the locations of the focus groups and return to the research areas was often an implicit backdrop, but at times was also more explicitly discussed, specifically in relation to remittances. In these cases, migration, was mainly talked about in terms of having the purpose of enabling business investments:

One positive point can be that the person who migrated may become rich and return to the town and investment which will be good for the two [another participant interrupts that the possibility of this is very low, and laughs]. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1B)

As this quote from Shahrake Mahdia illustrates, in many of the 104 focus groups, there were competing views, and local understandings which were often plural, came to the fore. In many cases, several competing viewpoints might also be backed up with examples, underscoring the diverse knowledge of migration that informs how people talk about migration, and the perceptions of causes of migration that underlies this.

The following quote, is revealing of how the frame of reference for *talking about migration* is return – ‘until I come back’:

Europe is good. As I said, I would like to go to Europe, but I will never forget my *fadala* [birthplace, ancestral place, of the father] and I will always send money to my parents here, until I come back. (Dialakoro, GIN2B)

The emphasis on Europe in this quote from Dialakoro is striking and revealing of the link to the purpose of migration being seen as *investment*, given the income opportunities associated with migration to wealthier countries. Yet is worth noting the latter half of what the focus group participant says – about sending money to parents and return. The other dimension of this perspective, was that for migrants, whatever their initial purpose with migration – *perspectives may change* – causing potential conflicts with expectations from broader communities ‘back home’ – or even at times with their own families, causing inevitable tension:

The main reason they travelled was to assist their families and communities, but they became concerned about only themselves when they get there. Some of them just send money for their young ones to join them there and that’s how they keep asking people to join them and at the end of the day, there is no improvement in the community. (Ekpoma, NGA3D)

Sometimes boys do not act maturely and they do not support their family. (Youhanabad, PAK2D)

In some cases, notably in data from two research areas in Ethiopia, we see that migration is discussed in terms of *enabling* business investments, and the ways in which remittances were managed (or mismanaged) in migrants' absence is crucial:

They return being patient and their families do not save remittances.  
(Kombolcha, ETH1A)

I know a female returnee who remitted money to be saved in order to open up her business, but when she returned, she couldn't find a penny and had to start working as a domestic worker in Kombolcha. (Kombolcha, ETH1A)

The main issue for the people who migrated is their family. If the family doesn't need much support from you, and you just work for yourself, then you have a chance to get improved. But if you support your family or have some expenses you have to cover here in the country, in that case, you will just count a year without a significant benefit. (Batu, ETH2C)

Some of the MIGNEX research areas have a more longstanding history of international emigration than others, São Nicolau, for instance, as the quotes from focus groups held there illustrate. As for many other areas, there are nuanced reflections and diverse views on migration – and in this case the value of migration – weighing the human costs and economic gains, also over time – across generations, and as for so much of our data, really foregrounding a sense of the local place mattering within the ways in which migration is being thought and talked about:

Nice houses...hm... back in the day people used to say, I am going to emigrate to build a house. In my case, I think I should go abroad in order to build my house because here you don't earn enough, the salary is just enough to eat... (São Nicolau, CPV1A)

Abroad you have more opportunities, a chance for you to come help here... though most of the people they go they just think about themselves and their family. However, they complain that the island is not developing, that we don't have this and that. They can, for instance, found an association to... look for investors, help the island, send some sort of support, they don't do that, they only complain by saying it's not like that elsewhere. The point is 'What are you guys doing for the island?' (São Nicolau, CPV1C)

We also see that migration is discussed in relation to the impacts people are seeing of *past* migration – supporting the argument for seeing causes and consequences of migration as highly interrelated.

In terms of how migration is thought about, the three below examples – from three different research areas – all referring to ambulances, may serve as illustrations:

He sends stuff to Santo Antão, he started in Santo Antão and then other islands. He has been helping Cabo Verde in different areas and sometime ago he sent an ambulance, so when you're young, if you have opportunity here, but you want to emigrate and come back, even if you don't want to return, you want help your fellows back home, well, emigration is...I am in favour of emigration. (São Nicolau, CPV1B)

[Migration] has positive impact because people who migrate abroad can financially help their relatives and neighbours. In this way, Chot Dheeran gets help from whenever people feel this need. People are donating in



welfare works in the village and as a result there is an ambulance available in Chot Dheeran which is bought with the donation of migrants. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1C)

We do not really see any benefit from those who have migrated aside the ambulance and jerseys. The ambulance tends to benefit both genders and the jerseys benefit the males, and like he mentioned that they come and take their relatives along, it tends to be a personal and family issue. Hence, we have not really had any benefit from those who have migrated because they are mostly focused on their families than the community. (New Takoradi, GHA3B)

In all three cases migrants who had left the research area were instrumental to securing an ambulance being available there – and yet the ways in which migration overall – and migrants impacts beyond their close families – was seen and talked about, varied quite substantially. As may be expected, within each of the focus group discussions, we could also find quotes which would be respectively, more negative or more positive, underscoring the plurality of ways in which migration is thought and talked about.

And yet, it is worth noting, that all three quotes also underscore the role of thinking about the place ‘here’ – the research area - in how migration is conceived of. While the causes of migration may lie ‘here’, and the means to overcome these obstacles lie ‘elsewhere’, the idea of where the purposes of those solutions are located – at least initially – is quite clear, it is ‘back home’. This illustrates a point made for many emigration contexts previously, namely, that the migration of some, serves the purpose of others being able to stay.

The human costs and economic gains of remittances (and hence, migration), were also discussed in relation to the expectations and perceptions, of both migrants and those staying in research areas:

The community does not always benefit because some people migrate only for personal reasons so they only have thoughts about their life. Some also remember the community in which they came from, and so they tend to help the community in some ways. (New Takoradi, GHA3D)

Although there was a plurality of views in focus groups, including awareness of the human costs for migrants – as well as for their close ones, and of the differences in what might be possible – across research areas migration was talked of more of as a potential ‘common good’ than perhaps analytical frames foregrounding the individual and household, quite allow space for. This quote from Kilis, illustrates an upbeat variant of similar ideas reflected in many of the focus groups across different research areas:

People who go there will help their relatives. Even if they send the money they have saved, I think it will revie the trade of Kilis. For example, what are they doing, he saves money there, sends it to his parents here, tells them to buy a house, land vineyard or garden for him. So if they make their savings and invest here, it’s a perfect thing for this country. (Kilis, TUR3B)

### Migration aspirations or remittance aspirations?

Lastly, we now turn to the ways in which remittances *as the purpose of migration* come to the fore in the focus group data.

That's why we say let them go. The minimum wage here, when you calculate it with exchange rate, it makes a lot of money. They make a living there but help their family here a lot. (Yenice, TUR2D)

We live in such poor society that one cannot aid one's family while still living with them. (Kombolcha, ETH1D)

This purpose is here explicitly linked with the potential earnings elsewhere, and this is in particular relevant for international migration – and more so to Europe (or North America and Australia), but also to the Gulf, and less so for internal migration.

Lacking adequate and sufficient income and livelihoods opportunities are the reason for migrating which is most clearly articulated in statements about the promise of remittances:

A lot of families struggling financially encourage their children to migrate in any possible way just so they can send them back money afterwards. (Enfidha, TUN1C)

We are desperate. Our sons see how others are doing so well, so they also want to have that lifestyle. They want a better future. While a mother wants her son to stay even at the cost of poverty, the son has to create a better future. (Chot Dheeran, PAK1A)

A lot of families struggling financially encourage their children to migrate in any possible way just so they can send them back money afterwards. (Enfidha, TUN1C)

Based on the above quotes, the promise of (potential) remittances can be understood as 'the' cause of migration – and as the mechanism through which the underlying reasons why migration is necessary can be adequately addressed. In this sense, it might in some instances be more precise to describe migration aspirations in terms of remittances aspirations – from a relative's perspective or a research area view.

Another observation which can be made based on what emerges about how people talk about migration, when also speaking about remittances, are both implicit and explicit 'staying aspirations', which some people's migration – but here more accurately their remittances – enables the hope of, for other people:

I agree with what is said. That those who are migrants abroad send money for their families to support their life, to have a better life here. (Shahrake Jabrael, AFG1D)

Because some people leave and send back money, that may enable others 'to have a better life here'. Sadly, for the research area of Shahrake Mahdia in Afghanistan where this quote originates, that may be due to developments since the data collection in June 2021 not be true. Yet it is of interest both more generally, and arguably also that even in June 2021, this was a perspective on life 'here' which was possible in the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan – as a reminder of immobility, including the more voluntary variants of immobility – in particular places, even in countries that may be described as 'conflict-affected'. The following quote, from Behsud (AFG2) similarly underscores the importance when discussing migration – of the possibility of staying that someone else's migrating enables:

The one thing that I learned in this discussion is that when there are 6 people in a family and one of them arrives abroad suffering all these difficulties and problems... So, when he arrives there, he starts work and sends money to his family. The money he sends to his family changes the life of his family and other household members, as they will be able to learn education or start a business with the money he sends from abroad. Thus, it changes the situation of that family. (Behsud, AFG2D)

Notably, at the time of writing in 2023 – we are acutely aware that the situation in Afghanistan is of course very different to that in the summer of 2021. However, the points raised in these discussions were also articulated in other MIGNEX research areas, and merit sharing.

Considering one of the research areas with longer history of international emigration, ambivalence about the role of migration – and remittances was clear – with other perspectives on the balance of leaving vs. staying perhaps, and maybe with less faith in the promise of remittances being one that can affect the *desired change* for those staying (any longer):

If we look around here, it's fair enough to wait for help from abroad for sure, however, we who live here, lately we're not doing much to change the status quo. (São Nicolau, CPV1C)

The changing needs that migration 'for remittances' can also drive, was mentioned in a focus group in Chot Dheeran (PAK1) where remittances are perceived to be driving further aspirations for migration – to enable further remittance-sending, to meet growing demands, again of family members 'here' in the research area.

We have more requirements now. With change and money, come more needs. For example, dowry needs. We need a breadwinner! (Chot Dheeran, PAK1A)

This is also reflective of the ways in which considering the causes of migration, needs to be understood holistically in relation to the dynamics of past and ongoing migration – and remittance-dynamics within and beyond households in a research area, in inherently interrelated ways, as the below quotes illustrates:

The good news is that if a person succeeds in their path, they will support their family by investing money back into their city, helping their siblings and sisters with their school fees, and occasionally helping relatives. As a result the family will be able to see that their child has achieved success in life. (Baidoa, SOM2D)

As show above, the focus group data gives a rich picture of what the money sent or brought by migrants is – or might be – spent on. This largely reflects existing knowledge about the main purposes' remittances are sent for – and indeed spent on. Meanwhile, it underscores the salience of the *promise of remittances* as a driver of migration. The awareness of these realities through existing migration networks in research areas, makes such promises very tangible and apparently achievable.

Second, we discussed the tensions that lie at the intersection of the individual and the collective: whom are remittances (as the direct result of migration) good for? A question which arguably also shapes how migration

is seen. This pertains both to the sender (migrants) and receivers (stayers) within the same households, but also to families beyond households, and speaks to how multiplicity and contradiction in the assessment of migration projects' value is negotiated and understood.

MIGNEX  
Background  
Paper

Finally, we considered how remittances in parts of our data *are the purpose* of migration – and seen as the vehicle for realising the potential of migration projects. This is illustrative of the inextricable connection between causes and consequences of migration, in how people talk about migration – with remittances as the key mechanism. This is the case, to the extent that it might perhaps be more precise to discuss *remittance aspirations*, more than migration aspirations. Considering the existing literature on remittances, this is not very surprising, yet the way this very basic insight emerges in our data is quite powerful.

## Cross-cutting discussion

In this section we return to the question *how do people talk about migration?* and to the extension of this question, *what characterises the migration that people talk about?* We do so with the aim of offering analytical generalisations, based on the breadth of the analysed focus group discussions, across the 26 MIGNEX research areas.

The purpose of this analytical generalisation is to cast light on the foundational issue of how migration is understood and perceived by people living in these research areas. We propose that this has relevance, on the one hand, for conceptual and methodological efforts, and on the other, for policy making and implementation among those concerned with migration and development, from different topical, sectoral or geographical vantage points.

Below we discuss how people talk about migration, drawing on data from research areas that experience varying degrees of out-migration and in-migration. While our main emphasis is on people living in these areas, whether or not they have in the past moved there, or returned there, we are attentive to the potential impact this might have on how they might talk about migration as compared to others.

### How do people talk about migration?

Across the focus group discussions, we identified similarities in how people talk about migration, wherein many discussions involved *ambivalence and certainty, perceptions and experiences, agreement and disagreement*. In some cases, these were in a dialectic relationship, ebbing and flowing through a focus group discussion, depending on the participant speaking, and the specific issues raised. We discuss these three pairs of ways of talking about migration, before expanding on some aspects of differences between research areas in relation to how people talk about migration.

The focus group participants as young adults, women and men, with particular forms of exposure/ties to migration, offer a glimpse into how a cross section of *people* living in the MIGNEX research areas talk about migration. These people refer to the research areas as ‘here’, as an implicit contextual and spatial reference frame for the exchanges in the focus groups.

Across the focus groups, we found a basic similarity: statements relevant to the question of staying or leaving often emanated from a primary concern about, and a desire, to *live a decent life*. This was usually centred around the individual and their loved ones, but was also expanded to the local area as such. In other words, the idea of living a decent life, was not only relationally articulated, but also located spatially, ‘here’ in the research areas we were working in. These areas therefore were reference points, *somewhere* that either enabled or hindered a (more or less realisable) prospect for living a decent life, in the present, or looking to the future.

## Key contrasts and similarities

In our analysis of people's talk about migration we could discern three key contrasts. These do not necessarily represent contradictions or divergence between individuals or research areas, but rather dimensions of variation that characterise the data.

*Ambivalence and certainty* come to the fore in how migration is talked about as participants spoke of the pros and cons of either leaving or staying. These pros and cons were often articulated in ways resembling a 'cost-benefit analysis' echoing economics literature on wage differentials as a main explanation for migration. Simultaneously, such statements were often relationally and emotionally anchored within the specific places where people live their lives. This reveals an ambivalence in how people talk about the experience of loved ones leaving and being absent, and how this shapes lives 'here'. Thus, ambivalence – here, often emotionally, as well as certainty about migration – here often cast in terms of economic gains – are often intertwined. This also reflects an important temporal point: for many people, there is no 'before' vs. 'after' migration. Instead, migration is present – varyingly – as a part of social processes and lived experiences, over the long term.

*Perceptions and experiences* were referred to implicitly and explicitly across discussions, sometimes with clarity as to what might be a stance or opinion that was based on conviction as such, or building on specific experiences, but more often not. Views of migration as (inherently) good or bad, for instance, could both be presented as a view or perception, or backed up with experiences. Variation here reflected different degrees of ambivalence and certainty. Most focus group discussions included examples based on experiences, which were actively described and drawn on. These could be the experiences of participants, their family members, people they knew well, or at times, experiences that were *known about* in the area. The way perceptions and experiences came to the fore in talk about migration was more often than not blurred. This could be due to specific details of experiences being sparse, as time was limited, or the proximity of the person re-telling experiences (if not the participants' own) to these experiences was not always clear. Furthermore, how these experiences were narrated, apart from obviously not being a full account, could also be more deliberately chosen or not by the person talking.

*Agreement and disagreement* about migration was an ingredient in many discussions – reflecting the above two pairs, with *ambivalence and certainty*, *perceptions and experiences* – but also in how individuals reflected on migration, illustrating the dilemmas that migration poses for individuals, families, in local areas, as well as at aggregate national levels. In this context it is worth stressing that neither ambivalence nor dilemmas, nor indeed the consensus and contestation present in discussions, were necessarily seen as negative or problematic. Agreement and disagreement, simultaneously, were quite *matter-of-fact*. For instance, that migration is financially helpful for those receiving remittances was often universally agreed upon in discussions, while the impact of remittances beyond remittance-receiving families in an area, could be the topic of heated debate, with examples pointing to conflicting conclusions.

## Contextual differences

The 26 research areas were different from each other, although in the focus group data systematic patterns of difference in *how migration was talked about* were not discernible. Nevertheless, three types of differences, which appear to be contextual, merit mentioning. These are differences in *how migration was talked about* – sometimes in counter-intuitive ways – which had to do with: (1) sense of insecurity, (2) with risks and dangers associated with reaching Europe, especially across the Mediterranean, and (3) with how common different types of mobilities were (perceived to be) in each research area.

Across research areas experienced or perceived *insecurity* was present, but to differing degrees and varying in nature. For instance, a sense of insecurity might be associated with political instability or violent conflict, that might be at a national level, or with different proximity to the research area. Both short-term and long-term insecurities were also linked, often implicitly, with impacts of climate change locally. Other insecurities were focused on the opportunities to get by, for livelihoods, and living a decent life, in the present or looking ahead. While different in terms of urgency for immediate survival, these are nevertheless quite fundamental insecurities, where the difference between people's experiences may be less categorical, in terms of *insecurity*, than might be assumed. This is particularly the case if assuming a (false) binary and categorical divide between voluntary vs. involuntary migration, seen as economic vs. safety-driven migration. *How* people talk about migration is associated with a *sense of insecurity*, where context matters, though the scope for acting in response will vary, and the urgency in (perceived) need for action will also differ.

In some of the research areas, but not all, *how* people talked about migration was shaped quite evidently by experiences – as well as perceptions of – (attempted) migration toward Europe, and the *risks and dangers associated with trying to reach Europe* by crossing the Mediterranean. As we turn to below, this is one specific type of migration present in how people talk about migration, and in some of the focus group discussions, this was an overshadowing aspect. Meanwhile, in many other research areas or specific focus group discussions, it was one among many aspects, and in others, not central, or even discussed at all, contributing to differences between research areas in how migration was talked about. The notion of risk in relation to migration came up not only in relation to migrant journeys, as might be expected and as discussed above, but was also a concern about risks that migrants face in destination countries. This was often more of a concern for destinations abroad, e.g., in Europe, and for risks of experiencing racism and discrimination, but also for internal destinations at times, in relation to dangers and challenges that migrants may face. Furthermore, risk was also talked about in conjunction with migration when discussing the risks to the community that migration can pose – e.g., emptiness, risk to the survival of the community, and as the risk that migrants might fail to care for those 'back home'.

Examples were often drawn on in the focus group discussions, hence the types and *commonality of mobilities and immobilities* in each research area, shaped how migration was talked about. The differences here were not



systematic or categorical, but rather about variation, and sometimes also level of engagement or interest in questions of migration at all. In other words, in discussions in some research areas, migration was only a marginal component of exchanges about opportunities for school-leaving age youth, looking ahead. Or put more bluntly, in many cases migration was just not that important, reflecting the fact that the prism of discussions was very much 'here', often as an implicit default, illustrative of strong sedentary norms.

In many research areas, there was in-migration, from close by or further afield. This included people coming in conjunction with work, education, or marriage, for instance, and included international migration, as well as internally displaced people. Returnees, both international and national, were also part of the picture of mobilities and immobilities, which shaped talk about migration. In research areas where there were more diverse experiences with mobilities and immobilities, this also shaped *how* migration was talked about, to different extents, and in non-linear ways. We now turn to what *characterises the migration* that people talk about.

### What characterises the migration that people talk about?

Taking a birds-eye view across the 26 research areas and 104 focus group transcripts, we asked how migration is differentiated when people talk about migration. Which durations, distances, directions and purposes emerge when exploring what characterises the migration that people talk about? We find that across the data – migration – whether or not common in different iterations in a research area, is talked about mostly *as an exception to a norm of staying*. Sedentarism *as an idea*, appears to prevail – for most people, if not throughout life, then for most periods of their lives.

Hence the pros and cons of migration are mostly discussed focusing on the relevance of migration 'here' and prospects of people *leaving*. This is reflected in comparisons in discussions about pros and cons of migration, for instance as the multifaceted impacts of 'emptiness' in specific research areas are juxtaposed with the similarly multifaceted impacts of remittance-receiving. But also, in relation to migration as 'good' and/or 'bad' where prospects for migrants being 'corrupted' (either in the big city or abroad) are countered by the chances that migrants become prosperous. In both cases, there would be an implicit idea of *return* as inherent to migration, and therefore a concern with what different types of migration might do to migrants as people, and specifically as people who will – is the assumption – come back *here*, as full members of local communities.

Overall, we find that the migration people talk about is characterised in essence by being *temporary and short distance*. It is often understood to be directed to the next town, or internally within the country elsewhere. This can in some cases be quite far away, and involve quite different contexts, in terms of language, culture or even climate. Going to study or work elsewhere internally within countries is often *not* talked about as migration at all, but rather as traveling, moving, or just going somewhere.

The migration that is talked about incorporates mobilities of differing durations and distances, from the perspective that people are leaving from

'here'. As the section on journeys above reveals, talk about migration can be differentiated when it comes to the risks associated with migrating – with the journey and getting to the places migrants are trying to reach. The data contains examples and experiences, from focus group participants and their family or friends, which characterise migration (toward Europe) as incredibly dangerous – with explicit calls for legal pathways for safe international migration.

The directions of the migration that is talked about, of course varies from one research area to another, although internal mobilities to the next small town – as is to be expected – are common. When migration abroad is discussed, questions on papers and permits, and about skills and the documentation of skills in required ways, occur. Where migration to the Gulf states is common, there is generally also awareness of requirements, and perceived good strategies and tactics for prospective migrants to reap the benefits, and for how to avoid dangers in the destination. Migration to Australia, North America or Europe, with visas in order, is also part of talk about migration – though this is a minor aspect of how migration is talked about in our focus group data.

Leaving is more often than not discussed in terms of an active decision, by individuals as part of family and household entities, and as set within an overall assessment of prospects here vs. elsewhere. Herein, risks, vulnerabilities and insecurities - here and in potential other places - are considered, based on the types of information available and found trustworthy. Despite variation, and a continuum from more spontaneous to highly planned, the migration that is talked about is largely something that appears to be chosen. That is not to say it is necessarily preferred, but rather that it is the best available option, all things considered, and often from a collective view of a family or household, rather than the individual themselves only.

This is significant as how we find migration talked about brings together migration that might be associated with conflict-related determinants, as well as those related to climate change, and other determinants more generally connected with perceptions of increasing insecurities in livelihoods prospects.

The analysis and discussion in this Background Paper is primarily concerned with the determination of migration. We have presented the reasons for staying and for leaving, which were discussed in focus groups as illustrative of how people talk about and arguably also think about migration. The data and discussion has mainly centred on people leaving – not people coming. However, across the MIGNEX research areas, there was a high degree of variety of in-migration and out-migration, in the present, as well as in the past. Thus, in some research areas, focus groups were also composed of participants who themselves had moved into the research areas, either from abroad, or from other parts of the same country.

In some research areas return migration was a significant factor discussed in relation to migration. In others internal displacement, both out of the area, but also into the area, was an important feature – though one that was not necessarily discussed in-depth by participants. Internal displacement into

the research areas was both due to conflict-related dynamics and to climate change impacts, and could be relatively recent, but also decades back in time. Research areas also included those with universities, with student mobilities important to the local economy, and others with industrial plants and investments, sometimes bringing in workers from neighbouring areas.

Thus the migration that was talked about, was not solely about people leaving, but also included talk about people coming. People coming, whether from abroad or internally, was a topic discussed in varying ways, and quite often with a degree of scepticism and concern with impacts on livelihoods prospects 'here' – in ways that echo immigration debates well-known in many European contexts. Simultaneously, the data also contains examples of diversity due to a mixing of IDPs from different origins within the country, seen as an asset, and a focus on the opportunities that may arise economically, also from people *coming*. Meanwhile, new work opportunities, from investments, being taken up by people from outside the local area, were more generally frowned upon, in the sense that the assumption was that the livelihood opportunities created 'here' had been anticipated as firstly offering new chances for people already 'here'.

## Conclusion

The migration that is talked about in MIGNEX focus groups is in many instances short-term and short distance, predominantly to destinations *internal* to the countries which people live in, or to neighbouring countries. Migration is spoken about, while attention remains squarely on developments ‘here’. Thus, the goals of migration projects are also seen as being anchored in what happens ‘here’ more than ‘elsewhere’. We find what can be described as ‘a sedentary view of migration’, which reflects the fact that in the midst of various forms of mobilities, immobility remains the norm for most people, if not throughout life, then for most of life. Nevertheless, migration further afield is also talked about, to Europe, the Gulf states, and elsewhere. Despite the realisation that this may not be short-term, talk about migration centres on what migration achieves or does ‘here’, with due recognition of ‘the migrants’ in the process.

Based on our bottom-up analysis of what people say when they talk about migration, we suggest that there is a need to interrogate some of the ways in which ‘migration narratives’ and ‘discourses on migration’ are predominantly presented and discussed in existing research. Mostly, our contribution is to offer complementary perspectives, but perhaps also a corrective, reflective of the seven biases discussed in the conceptual foundations. Our data and analyses foreground the need for further attention to perspectives on ‘life here’ – listening to people, as local inhabitants, who are predominantly, though not exclusively, ‘non-migrants’ – and what they have to say.

Set within the universes of meaning of individuals, families and local communities, leaving and staying are interconnected as options and as choices. In other words, following the mobilities turn in the social sciences, stasis and mobility are co-constitutive, and thus need to be understood jointly (Adey 2006; Cresswell 2006; Erdal 2021). By paying attention to what people – not confined to particular notions of ‘migrants’ – have to say, it is possible to start to make a contribution to overcome a ‘migrant’ bias which is at times inevitable in migration research, yet produces skewed knowledge (Dahinden 2016; Hui 2016). This means that there is need for closer attention to the interdependence of immobility and mobility, and an awareness of both these as potential biases (Bakewell 2008a; Schewel 2020). This is particularly salient in relation to the links between migration and development. This is because while the migration-development nexus is a topic of concern within migration studies, this is often less the case within development studies. The *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees and Societies* is among examples that suggest further interest in migration from the development field, continues to be warranted.

Rather unsurprisingly, we find that *the migration which people talk about*, reflects the types of migration that are most common in given areas. These mobilities often intersect with rapid urbanisation processes, whereby small towns across Africa, Asia and the Middle East are growing faster than megacities. Thus, *internal migration*, even when not discussed *as* migration at all, and perhaps seen as temporary travel, is the most common kind of migration in the world today (King and Skeldon 2010; Hickey and Yeoh 2016). The bias toward international migration in research (published in English), whereby

migration is taken to mean international migration – necessitating the prefix internal, speaks volumes, and furthermore reflects a significant asymmetry in knowledge production focusing on ‘destination countries’ (de Haas 2021). In turn this is associated with a policy bias, where research not only seeks to inform policy, but is often required to engage with policy frameworks through funding, at times via required formats of outputs, or more substantively with analytical frameworks which take policy foundations as points of departure. Relatedly and contrary to the volume of international migration which is regular, there is a research bias to irregular migration.

To reiterate, individual studies producing new knowledge are valuable in their own right. There is certainly need for both documentation and critical scrutiny, also from an analytical perspective, of irregular migration and human suffering at Europe’s borders. Meanwhile, the cumulative effect of the seven biases discussed, entails a significant skew in the perspective that existing research offers, as compared to the view on migration reflected in how *people talk about migration* in the focus group data analysed and presented in this paper. Hence the proposed complementary perspective which this paper offers.

The determination of migration as reflected in focus group data is revealing of how causes and effects of migration are perceived as interdependent. The reasons why people leave are often directly linked to how people talk about migration and to the goals they see for migration projects ‘here’. These are goals which they do not feel can be achieved by staying, therefore – in order to achieve them, leaving may be considered an option. The causes and effects of migration are often reflected on in collective ways. Both in relation to the individual as set within the household and family context, and in terms of the accumulated experiences of migration in an area, and what has already been achieved by others through migration, including risks and costs associated with migration.

Determining migration – and understanding how people might perceive of reasons for migration – without also taking into account perceived, as well as hoped for or feared effects – appears close to impossible. Given that mobility and immobility are both integral to social process - with people leaving and staying, coming back and leaving again, or staying, or never returning - across local areas around the world, this interdependence of causes and effects of migration appears to be universal. While the role of ‘social networks’ has been seen as part of the landscape of migration drivers, there seems to be reason to consider the impacts of past and present migration more generally in analyses of the causes of migration further.

The focus group data analysed and presented in this paper illustrate the ways in which opportunities that migration might offer, are considered in ways that are both very subjective and involve emotional and interpersonal aspects, as well as very clear-cut calculations of the costs and benefits, and of risks involved. Many focus group discussions listed good and bad dimensions to migration – for migrating individuals, their families and the local communities which people leave. The degree of awareness of different costs and benefits, as well as risks of different kinds associated with different types of migration, comes across as high, and reflects the types of migration that are more common in particular localities. For further investigation of

migration-decision making, this might indicate a need for continued attention to individual level factors, pertaining to risk-taking and personal preferences, as well as to more aggregate and long-term factors, in relation to how perceptions of specific types of migration may *change over time*.

What then are the implications for knowledge-production and for policymaking, of the findings presented in this background paper on the determination of migration through focus group data? First, decisions about leaving and staying are interdependent, therefore understanding both, could further enhance the precision of the determination of migration. Second, the desire – and prospects for – *living a normal life or a decent life* appear central to a better understanding of the causes of migration. Finally, defining exactly what is meant with ‘migration’, when asking about the causes of migration, may yield improved analytical precision, for the benefit of policy and practice.

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