MIGNEX

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New insights on the causes of migration

MIGNEX

MIGNEX Reports

MIGNEX Reports are flagship publications written at the end of the project period to synthesise insights from across the more specific and technical analyses.

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Contents

As people navigate challenges and opportunities in their lives, some see migration to another country as their best next step. MIGNEX data from 26 communities across Africa, Asia and the Middle East sheds light on what prompts this conclusion. There are influences that matter almost across the board, but a more striking finding is the remarkable variation in the causes of migration.

1 Migration is a multifaceted and stepwise process

The causes of migration span a stepwise process. It includes the formation of migration aspirations as well as their various consequences. Planning and preparation play a part in determining migration outcomes, but are not necessarily decisive.

2 Migration is shaped by many factors, all at once

Migration can only be understood by looking at the interplay of multiple drivers. Individual perceptions and experiences can matter as much as what is experienced collectively in a community or country. Personal traits and other invisible factors such as risk appetite play a role alongside more visible ones such as unemployment levels.

3 Each migration determinant can work in contrary ways

The same determinants that increase migration aspirations in some communities can lower aspirations in others. They can work in contrary ways for several reasons, including contextual differences and their interaction with other factors.

4 Migration means different things in different contexts

Long-distance international migration receives the most attention in research and policy, though it only makes up a small part of actual mobilities. Short-distance and temporary migration is the most common, with varying risks associated with different types of migration.

5 Wealth and livelihood opportunities have opposing effects

People are more likely to want to leave if they see limited local opportunities to earn a living and feed a family. However, people who are poorer, or live in poorer communities, are less likely to want to leave.

6 Corruption is a major driver of migration

People who live in communities with widespread corruption are much more likely to want to leave. Corruption is not merely a nuisance and an obstacle to development, but it often reflects a deeper sense of societal dysfunction and hopelessness.

7 Migration fosters migration, at multiple levels

Migration experiences and transnational networks are key predictors of migration aspirations and preparations at the individual level. At the community level, social norms surrounding migration drive aspirations and aid in translating those aspirations into migration outcomes.

Introduction

Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door![1]

The lines from this famous poem, written by Emma Lazarus in 1882, are immortalised on a plaque on the Statue of Liberty in New York. Almost 150 years later, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, had a similar gloomy outlook on the causes of migration in her 2023 State of the Union address: 'Every day, we see that conflict, climate change and instability are pushing people to seek refuge elsewhere'.[2]

Residents in Shahrake Jabrael (Afghanistan) face multiple threats including insecurity, unemployment, discrimination and water shortages. Najia Alizada for MIGNEX.

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1   The full poem can be found here: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus.
2   von der Leyen (2023).

One reason why Lazarus' poem remains so relevant is because academics, policy-makers and the general public continue to be preoccupied with understanding who migrates, why and under what circumstances. Are they the tired and poor who migrate, or are they fleeing conflict and climate change, or are they others altogether? Scores of academic papers continue to be published on the causes of migration. Meanwhile, major policy agendas on 'migration management' and 'tackling the root causes of migration' show that politicians and policy-makers are searching for how to stop migration.

This report provides insights on the causes of migration, based on extensive analyses of data from 26 communities across 10 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.[3] Our analyses contribute to the scientific understanding of migration processes, which in turn can also inform policy.

The study of the causes of migration has long arisen from simplified models of the economic drivers[4] and 'laws' describing key patterns of migration,[5] in an effort to better understand the complexity of migration decision-making. Most existing research has either been based on aggregated national, regional or global data, or has comprised hyper-focused analyses of particular groups or locations.

In contrast, MIGNEX research builds on advances in recent decades to show that migration is a multifaceted and stepwise process, responding to broader life aspirations. Our data and approach connect the specificities of local dynamics with the broader patterns of variation across locations.

The European Commission's wish for a better understanding of the links between migration, development and policy mobilised the research funding that, in turn, enabled the MIGNEX project. In carrying out the research, we have responded to this wish while maintaining a critical distance from some of the assumptions and objectives that underlie migration policy.

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3   As explained in the Research design section, some of the analyses cover only 25 areas.
4   Harris and Todaro (1970).
5   Ravenstein (1889).

The next section summarises the research design, which is essential background for the insights we present. Thereafter follows a more technical section on methodology, which can be considered optional reading.

The heart of the report comprises seven chapters with key insights. Each chapter focuses on a specific and substantive insight on the causes of migration, distilled from the extensive quantitative and qualitative research undertaken by MIGNEX. This is where we invite our readers to learn more about the factors that drive migration and migration processes. These core chapters are followed by policy implications, a selection of concluding remarks and a presentation of MIGNEX publications and data.

This is one of three concluding reports
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MIGNEX

New insights on the causes of migration

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April 2024

MIGNEX

New insights on the development impacts of migration

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Towards migration policy coherence

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Zina Weisner

April 2024

Research design

The foundations for our insights

MIGNEX aims to produce new knowledge on migration, development and policy (Box 1). The research has been designed according to strategic choices that laid a path towards this objective.

The non-technical elements of the research design that follow provide important background for the core chapters of this report. The design for the MIGNEX project as a whole contains additional elements that have enabled analysis of the developmental impacts of migration and the various roles of policy.

Box 1. The MIGNEX project
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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a collaborative research project funded by the European Commission and carried out independently by a consortium of research institutions. The three core lines of research examine: (1) how development affects migration – which is the topic of this report; (2) how migration affects development in countries of origin; and (3) how migration-related policy shapes these two-way effects.

The project was originally planned to be carried out between 2018 and 2023, but this was extended to 2024 as a consequence of delays and disruptions stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. The MIGNEX consortium comprises:

Peace Research Institute Oslo, Norway (coordinator)
Danube University Krems, Austria
University of Ghana, Ghana
Koç University, Turkey
Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan
Maastricht University, The Netherlands
ODI (formerly Overseas Development Institute), United Kingdom
University of Oxford, United Kingdom

These core partners were supported by various subcontractors, of which Samuel Hall played the largest role. Throughout the project, the team has engaged with a broad End-User Panel and a small End-User Board.

Local communities

The causation of migration plays out in local communities, often in different ways within the same country. Therefore, most MIGNEX research is structured around 26 communities, which we refer to as *research areas*. This is a unique aspect of the project.

The research areas are scattered across 10 countries (see Figure 1), which were selected because they are key origin or transit countries for migration to Europe. While there are 26 research areas, many of our analyses are restricted to 25 areas because survey data collection had to be halted for security reasons in one area (Kombolcha, Ethiopia).

Figure 1. MIGNEX research areas

Source: The authors.

Afghanistan

Shahrake Jabrael

Shahrake Jabrael is a peri-urban area near Herat, where most residents are internally displaced people or return migrants. Unemployment is high and state and international support is limited.

Behsud

Behsud is a peri-urban area near Nangahar city. An influx of internally displaced people and return migrants has led to urban growth, livelihoods and educational expansion.

Shahrake Mahdia

Shahrake Mahdia is an unplanned neighbourhood in Kabul. Built after the arrival of internally displaced people and funded by the diaspora, migration has been integral to its development.

Cabo Verde

São Nicolau
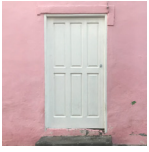
São Nicolau is an island that is poorly connected to the rest of the country. After decades of migration, transnational ties are weakening.

Boa Vista

Boa Vista is an island that relied on international remittances for decades. International tourism has brought new opportunities and spurred in-migration.

Ethiopia

Kombolcha

Kombolcha is a long-standing manufacturing town that has seen significant external investment. International migration is fairly common, especially among women.

Batu

Batu is a small city where foreign-owned agribusinesses have led to increased employment and rural–urban in-migration.

Moyale

Moyale is a town bordering Kenya where cross-border mobility is common. A new 'one-stop' border post for trade has increased in- and transit migration to Moyale.

Ghana

Gbane

Gbane is a rural farming and mining community. A lack of job opportunities and severe land degradation are severely impacting livelihoods. Internal out- and in-migration are common.

Golf City

Golf City is an urban centre in Greater Accra. It has seen significant investment in industrial, infrastructural and utilities projects, resulting in high levels of internal in-migration.

New Takoradi
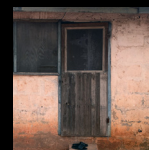
New Takoradi is a small town built for those displaced by the expansion of an industrial port. Livelihood opportunities are scarce and international out-migration is high.

Guinea

Boffa

Boffa is a costal town where traditional livelihoods are increasingly impacted by the international mining and fishing industry. It has a long history of international migration, but internal migration is now more common.

Dialakoro

Dialakoro is a rural district at the border with Mali where cross-border mobility is common. Mining is a factor for both in-migration and out-migration to nearby countries.

Nigeria

Down Quarters

Down Quarters is an informal neighbourhood in Kaduna city, located close to the railway and a new dry port. The area has a long history of in-migration, while internal out-migration is common too.

Awe

Awe is a rural town and a long-standing migration destination for agricultural workers. Such livelihoods and mobility are increasingly impacted by conflict and environmental shocks.

Ekpoma
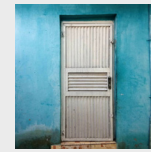
Ekpoma is a town known for its university and educational institutions. Given high international migration outflows in the State, migration interventions and campaigns are common.

Pakistan

Chot Dheeran

Chot Dheeran is a village where agriculture and brickmaking are the predominant livelihoods. Transnational ties are strong after decades of migration and these ties shape local development.

Youhanabad

Youhanabad is a neighbourhood in Lahore undergoing major educational expansion. Having the largest Christian-majority in the country, it has seen decades of internal in-migration of Christians.

Keti Bandar

Keti Bandar is an old port town where the impacts of climate change and debt in a global, fishery-based economy are pervasive. Despite this, all forms of migration are uncommon.

Somalia

Erigavo

Erigavo is a town in Somalia that has seen sustained improvement in security and infrastructure. After decades of high out-migration during the civil war, migration aspirations are now low.

Baidoa

Baidoa is city that is the focus of many development, humanitarian and stabilisation initiatives. It hosts large numbers of internally displaced people.

Tunisia

Enfidha

Enfidha is a town that has seen rapid development, including the construction of a park zone and airport. Yet local people don't feel they have benefited from this and they have high migration aspirations.

Redeyef

Redeyef is a marginalised mining town with high levels of unemployment. It has a long history of migration to Europe and out-migration remains high.

Turkey

Hopa
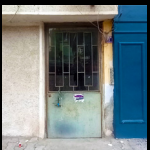
Hopa is a town close to the Georgian border. It has benefited from cross-border economic activity and mobility, as well as from the construction of highways and dams.

Yenice

Yenice is a rural town and district that has seen some major infrastructure developments, but most people still work in agriculture. Migration is mostly internal.

Kilis

Kilis is a town near the Syrian border, hosting many refugees. The increased population and the closing of the Turkey–Syria border brought about major spatial, cultural and demographic transformation for Kilis.

Selection of research areas

The project funding required a focus on countries of origin and transit for migration to Europe. Within this scope, we identified 10 countries that allow an examination of a range of migration drivers in different combinations. This involved working in insecure settings while ensuring feasibility and safety for the team.

Within each country, two or three research areas were systematically selected with the same objective of *theoretically relevant diversity*. For instance, some areas are in stagnation while others are flourishing, even within the same country. The selection considered differences in security, livelihoods, infrastructure and other factors relevant to development and migration. Each research area is a reasonably well-defined local society such as an island, a town, a rural community or a distinct neighbourhood of a city, generally with a population of 10,000–100,000 people. They are not necessarily administrative units.

Our analyses mostly seek to draw general conclusions based on the variation across research areas. The local migration dynamics are presented in greater depth in 26 MIGNEX Case Study Briefs.[6]

Potential migrants

MIGNEX focuses on areas of origin and transit for international migration. This means that we see the individuals who live there as potential migrants, i.e., people who may or may not (want to) migrate. Some are also internal or international migrants, who have migrated to the research area at some point in the past. In these cases, it is their potential onward migration that is of interest to the project.

In the research design, migration features in two ways as an object of explanation. The first is the potential future migration of research participants, which we mainly analyse in terms of migration aspirations and preparations. The second is the past migration of other people from the community. This information is used to identify areas with high migration intensity and to examine possible causes.

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6   See mignex.org/publications for all MIGNEX Case Study Briefs.

The project responds to a demand for knowledge about *international migration.* Consequently, we often use 'migration' as a shorthand for migration to another country.

Several types of data

In each research area we collected data in four ways: (1) a sample survey of 500 individuals, (2) focus group discussions, (3) key informant interviews and (4) observations by researchers in the field. Details about the data collection and analyses are presented in the Methodology section.

Young adults

The people who responded to the survey or participated in focus group discussions are young adults between the ages of 18 and 39 years. This choice removed the challenges of interviewing minors and allowed us to use our resources on the life stages in which the issue of migrating or not is most prominent. Our shorthand references to 'people' in the research area generally reflect data from people in this age range.

Research collaboration

The research design relates closely to the creation of a consortium of partners and collaborators in 14 countries – the 10 where the research is focused, plus four European countries. Most data collection and analyses were conducted by participants from two or more institutions.

Methodology

Techniques for data collection and analysis

Methodology concerns the technical aspects of how the research was carried out. This section is not required for understanding subsequent chapters but can serve as a reference, particularly for readers with an interest in methodology.

Table 1 summarises the data used in the analyses that underlie this report. As with the research design, the methodology does not cover the entirety of the MIGNEX project.

Table 1. Overview of data

Form of data collection	Target population/ features	Sampling/ recruitment	Number of research areas	Extent of data per research area	Type of data produced
Quantitative					
Survey	Resident young adults (aged 18–39)	Random	25	519 respondents on average[1]	Survey data file (N=12,973)
Qualitative					
Focus group discussions	Resident young adults (aged 18–39)	Purposive, with four segments	26	4 audio recorded discussions with 6 participants on average	Complete transcripts (695,000 words)
Key informant interviews	Residents	Purposive, maximising diversity and insight	26	20 interviews on average, with written summaries of varying length	26 Research Area Interim Reports with coding scales
Researcher observation	Features of the physical and social environment	–	26	Notes on 27 topics, of which 19 were coded numerically[2]	

Notes: (1): Not including Kombolcha (Ethiopia), where survey data collection was halted for security reasons. (2) The topics were assessed on the basis of observation and key informant interviews.

Survey data collection

The MIGNEX Survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews with young adults and was carried out in 23 languages.[7] It was pilot-tested in three countries in early 2020, and then carried out in full over 15 months from late 2020 onwards, as Covid-19 restrictions eased.

In each research area we aimed to reach a target sample of 500 respondents aged 18–39 years. The sampling strategy was designed to be workable in all research areas, across extremely diverse conditions. In most areas, geographically specific population data were not available to create a sampling frame. We therefore developed a procedure to calculate population estimates from satellite images. Within each area, clusters were sampled on the basis of probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) with stratification. In each cluster, 20 households were sampled by means of a systematic random walk procedure. When enumerators visited a household and it had one or more members in the 18–39 age range, a target respondent was selected through a randomised procedure. If the individual was not available at that time, an appointment was scheduled or the household was revisited up to three times.

The consent rate among selected individuals was 98.5%, in stark contrast to the low levels that are common in surveys conducted by phone, online or intercept modes. The interviews were conducted on tablets using SurveyCTO software and had an average duration of 33 minutes. The survey instrument (questionnaire) was developed over a one-year period, with particular attention to combining accuracy with a conversational format that could reduce respondent fatigue.[8] Continuous data monitoring and extensive quality control measures during fieldwork helped ensure data quality.

The numbers that explain migration
MIGNEX Video
mignex.org/ numbers

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7   See Hagen-Zanker et al. (2020) for guidelines and procedures for survey data collection, and Hagen-Zanker et al. (2023a) for documentation of the process and the data.
8   See Hagen-Zanker et al. (2020) for the survey instrument.

Qualitative data collection

Fieldwork in each research area generated qualitative data. This data collection was carried out by one or two MIGNEX researchers in collaboration with research assistants, interpreters and local facilitators.[9] Fieldwork in four research areas was conducted in 2020 and served to fine-tune procedures, strategies and advice. Data collection in the remaining 22 research areas took place between February and November 2021.

The team carried out four focus group discussions in each research area, with groups separated by gender and the extent of experience or connection with migration. The discussions offered opportunities for exchange and reflection at a collective level, bringing out agreement, disagreement and complementary perceptions of reality. The discussions were moderated according to a guide that solicited reflections on the community and how it had changed over time, as well as a discussion about the existence or feasibility of various livelihood opportunities for school-leavers. To facilitate connections across research areas while leaving room for local interpretation, this discussion was guided by cards that illustrated an array of opportunities, including migration (Figure 2). The focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

Figure 2. Example cards used to facilitate focus group discussions

Tourism

Factory

Mining

Education

Source: MIGNEX fieldwork material (design by Jørgen Carling).

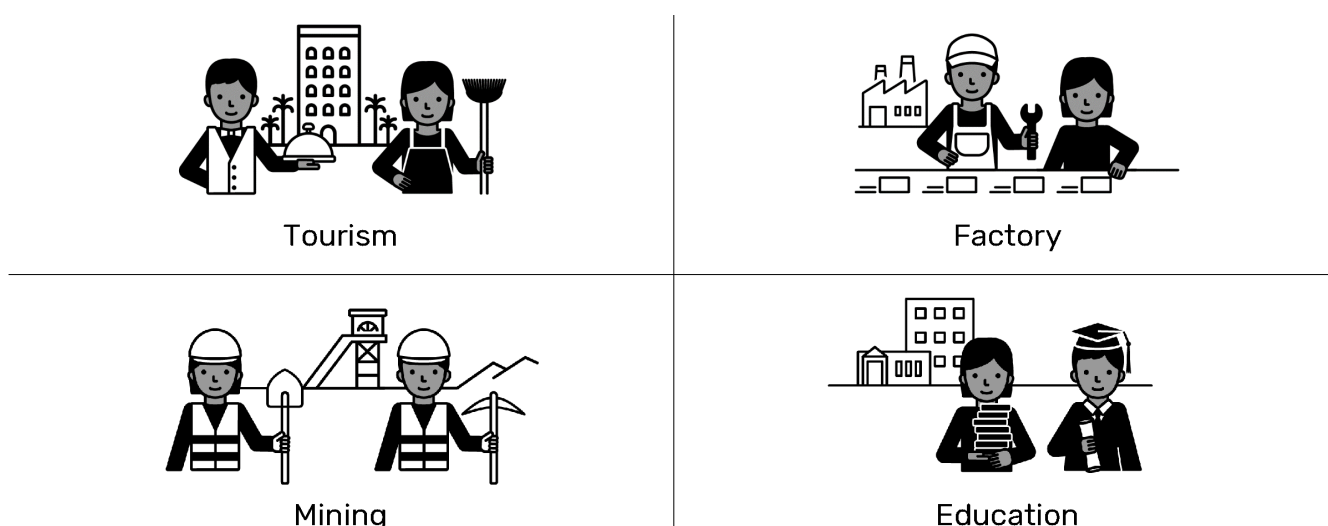9   See Erdal and Carling (2020) for guidelines and procedures for qualitative data collection, and Erdal et al. (2023a) for documentation of the process and the data. Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, fieldwork in Guinea and Nigeria was carried out by locally based researchers who were brought into the team, accompanied remotely by core team members.

Researchers in the field also interviewed key informants – a category that we broadly define as anyone with insights, perspectives and experiences that can broaden our understanding of the local community. With a clear goal of ensuring diversity, the interviews included, for instance, local officials, civil society activists, shop keepers, itinerant vendors and other residents. The fieldwork teams then used these interviews, combined with impressions from the focus group discussions and observations during their time in the field, to report on 27 topics of interest to the MIGNEX project. Coding scales were used to generate systematic comparative data on 19 of these topics.[10]

Box 2. Transparency for quality and sharing
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All methodological procedures are compiled in the MIGNEX Handbook, which was written chapter by chapter as the project progressed. For instance, the instructions and guidance for survey data collection are contained in Chapter 7 that serves the needs of country leads, supervisors, enumerators and data managers, and that also serves as a record to accompany the data. A later chapter, Chapter 10, documents how the data collection unfolded and how the data were processed and organised in advance of analyses.

All MIGNEX Handbook Chapters are published online as a separate publication series. Formalising the preparation of planning documents in this way required additional effort but ensured better management of the project life cycle. Moreover, publishing the fine details of methodology and project management is valuable from the perspective of open science. The broader returns to our investment in methodology are evident in the volume of downloads of several methodology chapters.

See mignex.org/publications for all MIGNEX Handbook Chapters.

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10   Fieldworkers reported on the following topics, of which some were also assessed with a coding scale (marked *): Development interventions; Characteristics of public social protection; Characteristics of infrastructure development*; Mobile phone network*; Prominence of international tourism*; Prominence of micro-level international aid*; Prominence of international investment*; Educational expansion*; Gender relations*; Culture and traditions; Religious context; Level of insecurity and violence*; Visibility of police/military/security*; Environmental degradation*; Vulnerability to natural disasters*; Change over time; Overall atmosphere (hope/despair)*; Characteristics of out-migration; Characteristics of in-migration; Characteristics of return migration; Salience of international out-migration*; Attitudes towards international out-migration*; Perceived feasibility of international migration*; Presence of migration information campaigns*; Gender aspects of migration*; Strength of transnational ties*; Importance of collective remittances*.

Analyses

The various forms of data were used alone or in combination to enable diverse analysis (see Figure 3).[11]

The most basic use of the survey data was to generate descriptive statistics. These yield valuable insights in their own right, as illustrated in later parts of this report. In the more advanced analysis of survey data, we examined patterns among the 13,000 respondents across research areas by means of regression models. We used multilevel models where appropriate to understand how features of the research area worked in combination with individual characteristics to affect migration outcomes. We also ran regressions in parallel for each research area to see where the overall effects played out locally, or not. When results from survey analyses are presented in the text, they are always weighted to reflect the survey design and sampling process. Analyses were carried out in Stata.

Figure 3. Overview of analyses
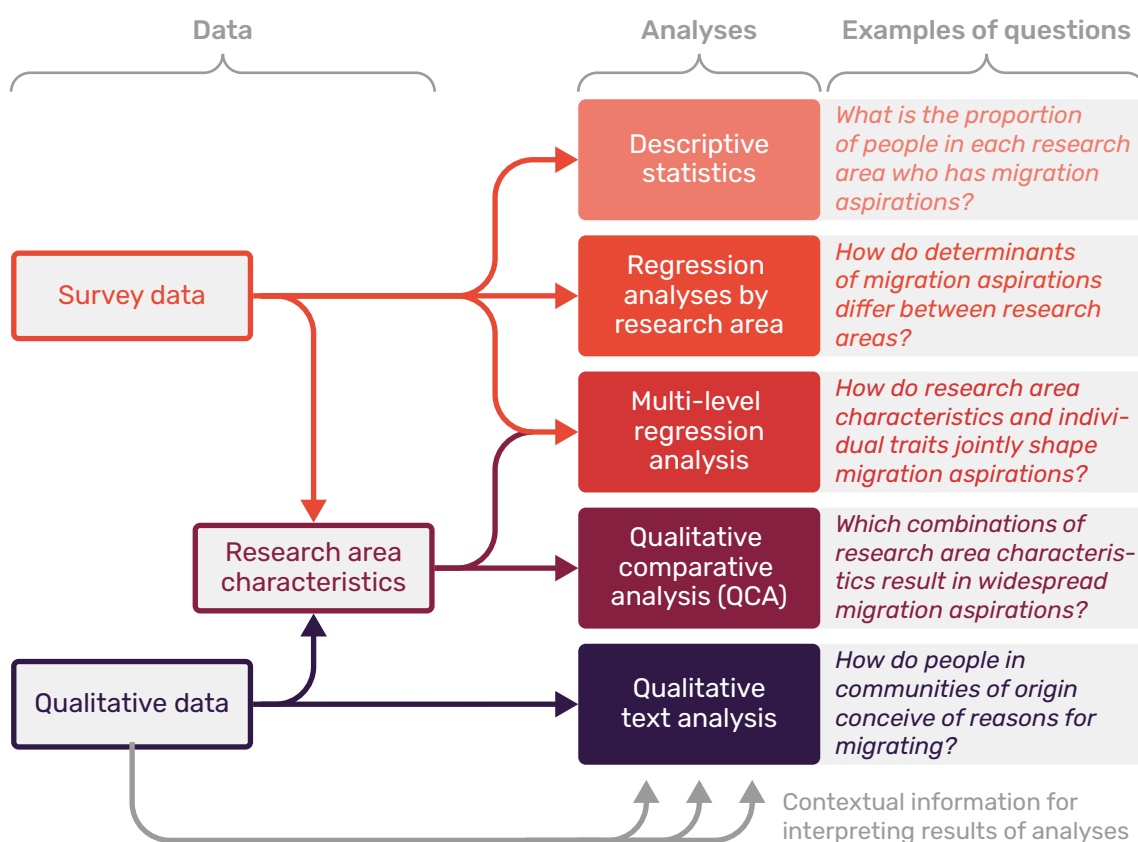
Source: The authors.

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11   Additional details on analyses are included in the relevant publications, primarily in the MIGNEX Background Paper series.

18   **New insights on the causes of migration**

Survey data should always be interpreted in light of the exact questions asked of respondents. When we use data from specific questions, notes indicate the survey item IDs, such as 'C10', so that formulations can be identified in the survey instrument.[12] A key foundation for the survey data analysis was the careful development of composite measures based on multiple questions, for instance to differentiate between forms of migration aspirations.

In addition to the regression analyses, we used qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to understand the variation of drivers and outcomes across the 26 research areas. This method for cross-case comparison can help explain why a certain outcome occurs in some cases but not in others. It does so by exploring whether multiple factors ('conditions') and their combinations are necessary and/or sufficient to produce a particular outcome. Importantly, QCA helps identify which combinations of conditions can yield the same outcome, such as widespread migration aspirations. The QCA was of the fuzzy-set type and carried out with R in combination with custom packages for QCA and set methods.[13]

The survey data was collected on tablets to maximise data quality and efficiency. Jørgen Carling for MIGNEX.

12   See Hagen-Zanker et al. (2023a).
13   For details see Czaika and Godin (2022); Czaika and Weisner (2023); Weisner and Czaika (2024).

The analyses were based on matrices that scored each research area against a large number of conditions. The foundations for these scores came partly from the survey data and partly from the coding scales that researchers completed on the basis of qualitative fieldwork.

While QCA is referred to as 'qualitative', it is a formal method founded on mathematical logic. By contrast, MIGNEX analyses of focus group data used a conventional approach to examining textual data through descriptive and interpretative coding. The transcripts from the discussions amount to almost 700,000 words and were coded in NVivo. A team of researchers developed a codebook by means of an abductive approach, staying close to the data while being attentive to the project's objectives and research questions. The codebook contains 60 codes at different levels of abstraction, such as 'ideas about migration', 'disagreement' and 'hopeful', which were applied alone or in combination.[14] Compilations of text segments were then retrieved using analytically defined filters, and researchers compared, contrasted and synthesised content through interpretative reading.

Research ethics

The principles of research ethics spur reflections on how and why knowledge is generated, as well as on the nature of interactions between researchers and other stakeholders – from research participants to funders and colleagues. We have therefore gone beyond the narrow view of research ethics as 'compliance' and have sought to integrate research-ethical perspectives into all aspects of the project. The synergies with research methods are evident, for instance, in the attention given to how survey respondents and focus group participants experience their involvement in the project.

Research ethics and research integrity
MIGNEX Handbook Chapter 4
mignex.org/d013

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14   Erdal et al. (2023a).

1 Migration is a multifaceted and stepwise process

The causes of migration span a stepwise process. It includes the formation of migration aspirations as well as their various consequences. Planning and preparation play a part in determining migration outcomes, but are not necessarily decisive.

Image: Kombolcha (Ethiopia). Camille Kasavan for MIGNEX.

Migration aspirations are essential

Research increasingly splits the migration process into the *formation of migration aspirations* and their subsequent *conversion into actual migration*.[15] In other words, people first make up their mind about migrating, and then, if wishing to migrate, attempt to carry it through – which they may or may not succeed in doing. This shift has allowed for better understanding of how migration works, in a world with widespread barriers to mobility.[16]

Migration aspirations is an umbrella term for the personal conviction that migrating would be better than staying in the present. It could mean that migration is simply the lesser of two evils. For instance, refugees may have preferred to stay in their country of origin but see it as too dangerous and decide to flee. This is also a form of migration aspiration.

Inspired by the notion of a stepwise process, researchers have surveyed people about their migration aspirations as well as preparatory steps they may have taken.[17] The idea being that it is easy to wish for something, but that people who are serious about migrating are probably taking specific action. For instance, the widely used Gallup World Poll asks respondents: 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?'. Those who say they would prefer to move are subsequently asked: 'Have you done any preparation for this move? (For example, applied for residency or visa, purchased the ticket, etc.)'. A key conclusion is that a desire to migrate is only rarely followed up with specific preparations.[18]

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15 Carling (2002); Carling and Schewel (2018); de Haas (2021).
16 This chapter draws on the conceptual foundations laid in the early phases of the project, as well as their development in the course of research.
17 Laczko et al. (2017); Migali and Scipioni (2019).
18 Manchin (2023).

A focus on preparations can be deceptive

The logic of preparing to migrate (see Figure 4) seems sensible but turns out to be deceptive. First, 'preparations' can be varied and hard to pin down. For many prospective migrants, the most important preparations lie in building or nurturing relationships with other people, including relatives abroad, who might facilitate their move. There might also be people in the community of origin who have valuable information or contacts. But it is not always clear which interactions with other people actually amount to preparation for migration.

Figure 4. An overly streamlined view of the migration process

Migration aspirations → Migration preparations → Migration
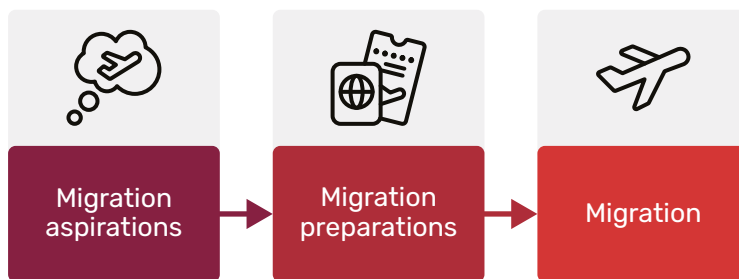
Source: The authors.

Conversely, distinct actions such as obtaining a passport or applying for a visa are not necessarily meaningful indicators of preparing for migration. For those who need to make an irregular journey, obtaining a passport might not be feasible or necessary. And for those who travel with a passport and visa, the visa application might be the last step in a lengthy preparation process. Visa applications are expensive, and often futile unless extensive requirements are met. [19]

Lastly, migration does not always result from meticulous preparation, but rather comes about because an opportunity presents itself. This can lend an unpredictable or circumstantial quality to migration. [20] Among the people who said they would prefer to stay in their own country, 39% would nevertheless seize the opportunity to migrate to a richer country if it appeared. This finding from the MIGNEX survey illustrates the shortcomings of seeing migration as a process of streamlined planning and preparation.

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19   For example, the non-refundable application fee for a short-stay visa to the Schengen area (€80) exceeds the minimum monthly wage in many countries. Furthermore, processing is generally outsourced to a service provider that charges an additional fee.
20   Carling and Haugen (2020).

In reality, migration preparations play unpredictable and variable roles, but they are not irrelevant. In the MIGNEX survey we ask whether, during the past five years, people have made preparations to move to another country but were unable to go. In total, 17% said they have. This proportion is lowest in Yenice (Turkey) and Awe (Nigeria), at 3%. It exceeds 30% in all the Tunisian and Afghan research areas, peaking at 41% in Shahrake Jabrael (Afghanistan) (Figure 5).

Not all people who have prepared to migrate during the past five years would still prefer to go. In fact, almost a quarter said they would prefer to stay. They might have been discouraged by the obstacles they encountered, or other life events in the meantime could have changed their mind. Again, this illustrates the variable significance of migration preparations.

Migration preferences and preparations only partly overlap
—

Each dot represents 1% of the sample (N=12,688) across 25 research areas.

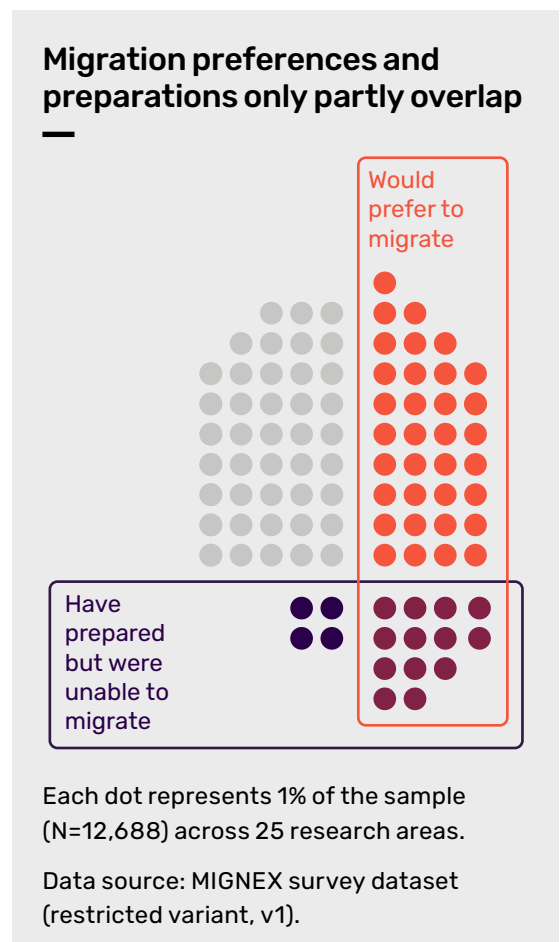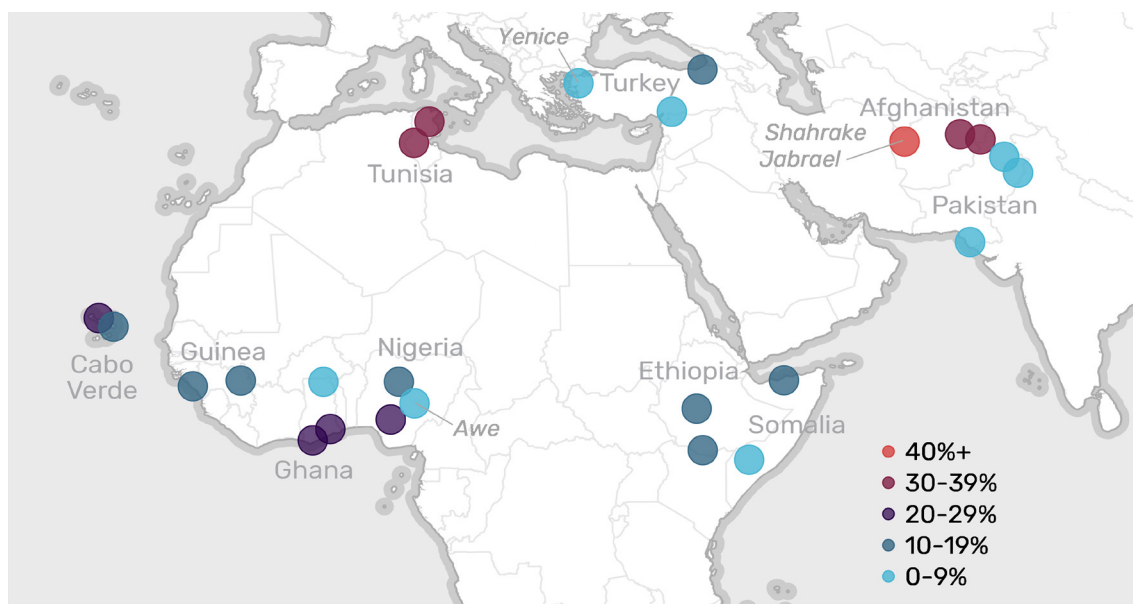Data source: MIGNEX survey dataset (restricted variant, v1).

Figure 5. Proportion of people who have prepared to migrate during the past five years but have been unable to go

Data source: MIGNEX survey dataset (restricted variant, v1). N=12,933. Based on survey item C10. See Figure 1 for names of research areas.

Migration aspirations are three-dimensional

We have discussed migration aspirations with respect to preferring to move abroad versus preferring to stay. But this preference is only one dimension of migration aspirations. We have identified three distinct dimensions that merit joint analysis:[21]

– **Preference:** whether a person would prefer to move to another country or stay in the country where they live.
– **Consideration:** whether a person has seriously considered migrating to another country.
– **Readiness:** whether a person would seize an opportunity to migrate to another country. Readiness in this sense is about availability or state of mind, not about having prepared.

The different *combinations* of the three dimensions are particularly revealing. For instance, we find that half of the people who said they would prefer to migrate have not given it serious consideration during the past year. It could even be the survey interview itself that made people think of migration.

Based on the three dimensions, we developed a new typology of migration aspirations, with five distinct types (Box 3). At one extreme, there are people with no *migration aspirations*. At the other extreme there are people with what we call *resolute migration aspirations*. They would prefer to go, have seriously considered it during the past year, and are ready to seize the opportunity. In between these extremes are three different types of indeterminate migration aspirations.

> *At one extreme there are people with no migration aspirations. At the other extreme there are people with what we call resolute migration aspirations. They would prefer to go have seriously considered it during the past year and are ready to seize the opportunity..*

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21   Since **migration** has diverse meanings and connotations, survey questions were phrased in terms of 'living or working in another country'. The questions used to measure preference, consideration and readiness are C3, C6 and C8, respectively. The question about preference refers to 'some time during the next five years', while the question on consideration refers to 'during the past year'.

Box 3. A typology of three-dimensional migration aspirations
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By reviewing past survey questionnaires, engaging with migration theory, testing questions in the field and analysing our survey data, we identified *preference*, *consideration* and *readiness* as key dimensions of migration aspirations. Hence, we say that migration aspirations are three-dimensional.

Answers to the survey questions pertaining to the three dimensions occurred in all possible combinations, each representing a particular type of thoughts and feelings about migrating or staying. We combined them analytically to create a typology that identifies five types of migration aspirations:

	Preference	Consideration	Readiness
	Would prefer to migrate rather than stay	Has seriously considered migrating	Would be ready to seize opportunity
No migration aspirations	No	Yes or No	No
Deferred migration aspirations	Yes	Yes or No	No
Ambivalent migration aspirations	No	Yes or No	Yes
Spontaneous migration aspirations	Yes	No	Yes
Resolute migration aspirations	Yes	Yes	Yes

Answers of 'don't know' were also considered a substantive response and were incorporated into the typology, making the actual classification more complex than the table above.

Source: See Carling et al. (2023) for details on the typology and Carling (2019) for the preparatory work. The development of the typology also draws on research within the project Future Migration as Present Fact (FUMI), funded by a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant (grant agreement no. 819227).

Many of our analyses focus on explaining resolute migration aspirations. In other words, we distinguish between the people who are consistently oriented towards migrating and all the people who have no migration aspirations or some form of indeterminate migration aspirations. The prevalence of resolute migration aspirations ranges from 2% in Keti Bandar (Pakistan) to 46% in Enfidha (Tunisia).

Figure 6. Prevalence of resolute migration aspirations across research areas (%)
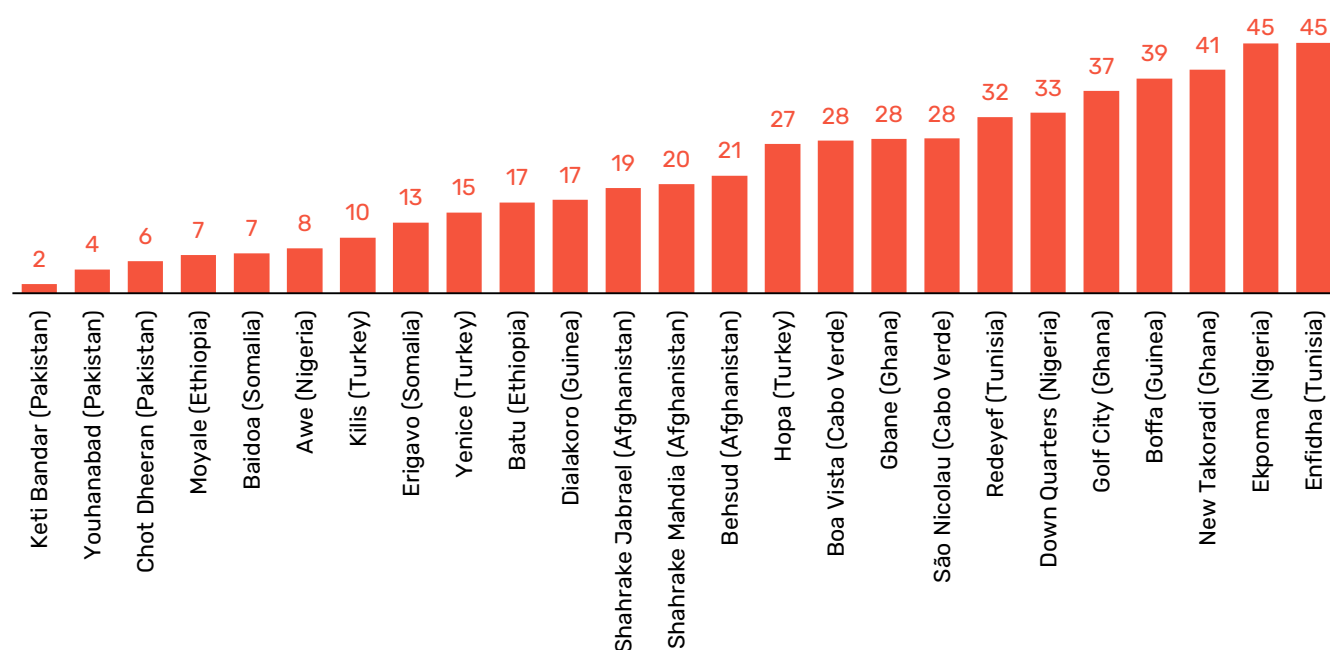
Data source: MIGNEX survey (restricted variant, v1). See Box 3 for an explanation of resolute migration aspirations.

Migration is often driven by a desire for change

Migration aspirations and preparations are both part of a longer causal chain. Figure 7 shows how we have envisioned this process. The chain starts with the interaction of people's assessment of their current circumstances and their prospects for the future. Even if people are struggling, they might endure if they see better times ahead. Conversely, a feeling of 'futurelessness' can be deeply frustrating and produce a desire for a change of course.[22] In MIGNEX, the two Tunisian research areas stand out as places of widespread pessimism about the future. A woman in Redeyef lamented that parents are sacrificing so much to give their children an education, but then 'there is no future for them'.[23] Women in the town said that 'many people's dreams have been killed' and that, without the right connections, it is impossible to get a job.

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22 The concept of 'futurelessness' is used by Anđić (2020) in analysing migration aspirations among Serbian youth. It resonates with other studies that explore similar themes (Boccagni (2017); Carling (2002); Crivello (2015)).
23 Focus group TUN2D.

Whether people feel that their circumstances and future prospects are untenable also depends on their life aspirations. In material terms, even if livelihoods are improving, notions of a decent standard of living might be rising more quickly and create a sense of relative deprivation.

Migration is not the only possible option

If a desire for change is established, people might respond in different ways, as illustrated in Figure 7. Again, the people in Redeyef provide a good example. Referring to the Ben Ali dictatorship, which lasted until 2011, one woman said 'they treated us bad for many years, so people started to riot and migrate illegally'.[24] In other words, some people sought to bring about change through protest, while others opted to leave.

The idea that migration is one of several possible responses applies in other contexts too. For instance, migration aspirations might subside if opportunities for education and employment expand and offer an alternative pathway to securing a future.

Figure 7. The sequential causation of migration
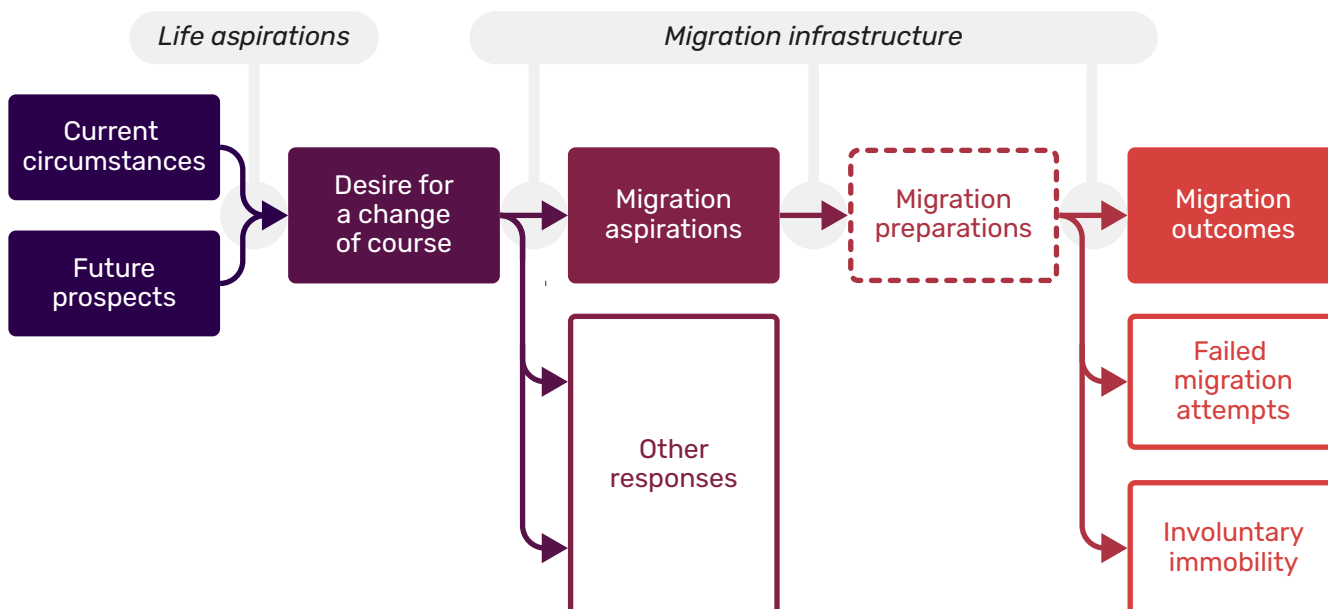
Source: Elaborated from earlier variants in Carling and Talleraas (2016) and Carling (2017).

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24   Focus group TUN2D.

Migration might not even feature as a possibility in people's minds. But it probably will if many others have already left the same community. This is one aspect of **migration infrastructure**, a concept that covers many of the societal features that enable and shape migration (Box 4).[25]

And people who develop migration aspirations may or may not prepare for migration. As illustrated in Figure 7, migration infrastructure affects both the nature of preparations and their results. The survey data shows that, in areas where there are strong migrant networks, migration aspirations are more likely to be accompanied by migration preparations, as elaborated in Chapter 7.

Box 4. Migration infrastructure

—

Migration infrastructure is 'the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility'. It has five dimensions:

– the commercial (brokers, smugglers)
– the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures)
– the technological (communication, transport)
– the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations)
– the social (migrant networks).

Migration outcomes are shaped by the interaction of these dimensions. For instance, migration aspirations are more easily transformed into actual migration if the regulatory infrastructure allows for it, or alternatively, if there is a commercial infrastructure that helps circumvent the regulations.

The social dimension of migration infrastructure overlaps with the more established concept of a **culture of migration**, which we address in Chapter 7.

Source: Xiang and Lindquist (2014: Sp.124).

There are three scenarios for people who have developed migration aspirations, and possibly made preparations. First, they could succeed in migrating, in the sense of travelling and reaching their intended destination. We describe this broadly as **migration outcomes** in Figure 7, since the circumstances of migration, arrival and stay abroad are so varied.

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25   Xiang and Lindquist (2014).

The second scenario is a **failed migration attempt**. Thousands of migrants die en route, get stuck before reaching their destination or are deported.[26] Failed migration attempts are a serious emotional and financial burden also for migrants' families and communities of origin.

The third scenario occurs when migration aspirations are thwarted at the outset and people fail to leave. They are then in a situation of **involuntary immobility**.[27] This is a largely invisible outcome, but potentially a consequential one.

We expected that when people pin their hopes on leaving, they are less likely to invest resources in local livelihoods and engage in local civil society. This would have made involuntary immobility a liability from a development perspective. However, we find that resolute migration aspirations are associated with higher levels of local initiative, perhaps because this and involuntary immobility both reflect an energetic personality.[28]

In New Takoradi (Ghana) every second person knows someone who's made a failed migration attempt, yet migration aspirations remain high. Marie Godin for MIGNEX.

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26   Black and Sigman (2022).
27   Carling (2002).
28   Carling et al. (2024).

2 Migration is shaped by many factors, all at once

Migration can only be understood by looking at the interplay of multiple drivers. Individual perceptions and experiences can matter as much as what is experienced collectively in a community or country. Personal traits and other invisible factors such as risk appetite play a role alongside more visible ones such as unemployment levels.

Image: Moyale (Ethiopia). Tewelde Adhanom for MIGNEX.

Numerous terms describe the causes of migration

Understanding why and under what circumstances people migrate is one of the oldest questions in migration studies.[29] One of the challenges in making sense of this large body of literature is the varied and inconsistent terminology, with terms such as 'drivers', 'push factors', 'determinants' and 'causes' used seemingly interchangeably.

Figure 8 shows a simple map of how these key concepts relate to each other. The broadest concept is the **determinants of migration**, which are factors that predict migration but do not represent specific 'causes' of migration.[30] Determinants include individual attributes, such as gender and age, and they potentially predict migration. To give one example, in most contexts, men are more likely to migrate, but being male is not a cause of migration.

Figure 8. Determinants, drivers and root causes of migration

Determinants of migration
Factors that statistically predict the likelihood of migration

Root causes of migration
Widely experienced hardships, to which migration is a possible response, that are perceived to be persistent, immediately threatening, or both

Drivers of migration
Forces leading to the inception of migration and the perpetuation of movement
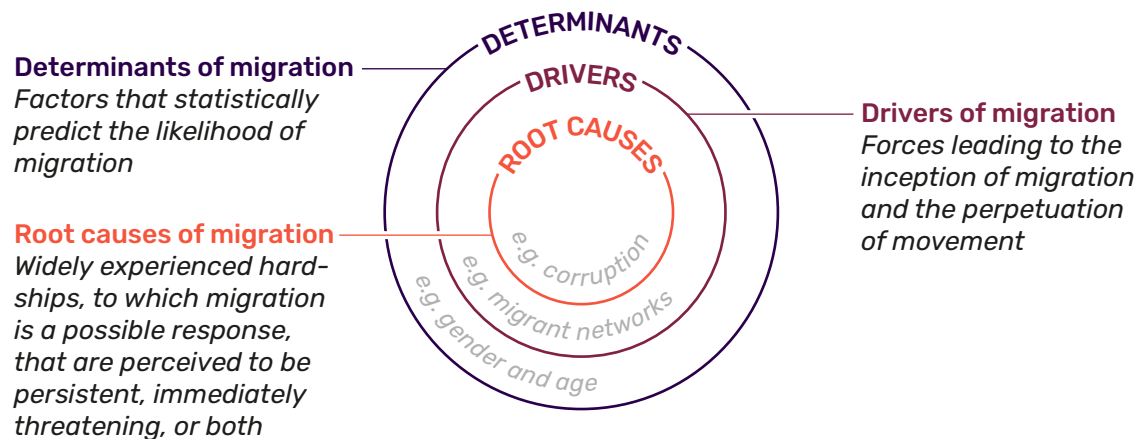
Source: The authors.

A subset of determinants are the **drivers of migration**, defined as 'forces leading to the inception of migration and the perpetuation of movement'.[31] This underscores that migration drivers potentially have a causal influence on migration. Examples include transnational networks and employment opportunities at the destination.

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29   See, for example, Harris and Todaro (1970), Lee (1966) and Ravenstein (1889).
30   Czaika and Reinprecht (2022); de Haas (2011).
31   Van Hear et al. (2018).

An even narrower concept is the **root causes of migration**. It is a contested term that has been a central and sustained element of policy and academic discourses. In MIGNEX, we provide a definition that allows for deliberate use and empirical analysis:[32]

Root causes of migration are widely experienced hardships, to which migration is a possible response, that are perceived to be persistent, immediately threatening, or both.

As a sub-set of drivers of migration, examples of root causes include insufficient employment opportunities in the community. The definition spans the problematic divide between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration and covers various forms of hardship. They typically represent hardships that are important to address to improve people's lives, regardless of the effects on migration. Yet, whether root causes result in migration depends on a range of other considerations, including migrant networks and policy-related obstacles and opportunities.

Box 5. Should we still be using the term 'root causes of migration'?
—

In political and policy discourses, migration is often described as a problem, and addressing its 'root causes' is seen as part of the solution. Migration can be a problem, not least for migrants. Many – but not all – of those who seek security or livelihoods elsewhere would have preferred to remain at home if they could. Yet all too often, the term 'root causes of migration' is used indiscriminately in policy and politics, referring to many forms of migration, not just those that are problematic for migrants themselves. Our definition side-steps toxic political discourses and clearly delineates migration stemming from root causes from other forms of migration.

In the course of our research, we have engaged with academics and practitioners who diverge in their view of 'root causes' of migration. Some want to abolish the concept entirely; others would like to recast it in more positive terms. Our approach is a pragmatic one: we take the essence of current usage as a given, but we advance a more precise understanding of what 'root causes' entail and when the concept can justifiably be applied. We conclude that 'root causes' are a meaningful label for some of the drivers of some forms of migration – that is, those resulting from widely experienced hardships.

Source: Carling et al. (2023); Hagen-Zanker and Carling (2023); Hagen-Zanker et al. (forthcoming).

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32   Carling et al., 2023.

The determinants of migration sit at different levels

Migration processes are formed at multiple levels. In other words, the determinants that explain migration range from those relating to individuals and their families, to those operating at the country level, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Migration determinants sit at different levels

Country	e.g. membership in area of free movement
Community	e.g. level of crime and insecurity
Household	e.g. number of children in the household
Individual	e.g. level of life satisfaction

→ Individual migration outcomes
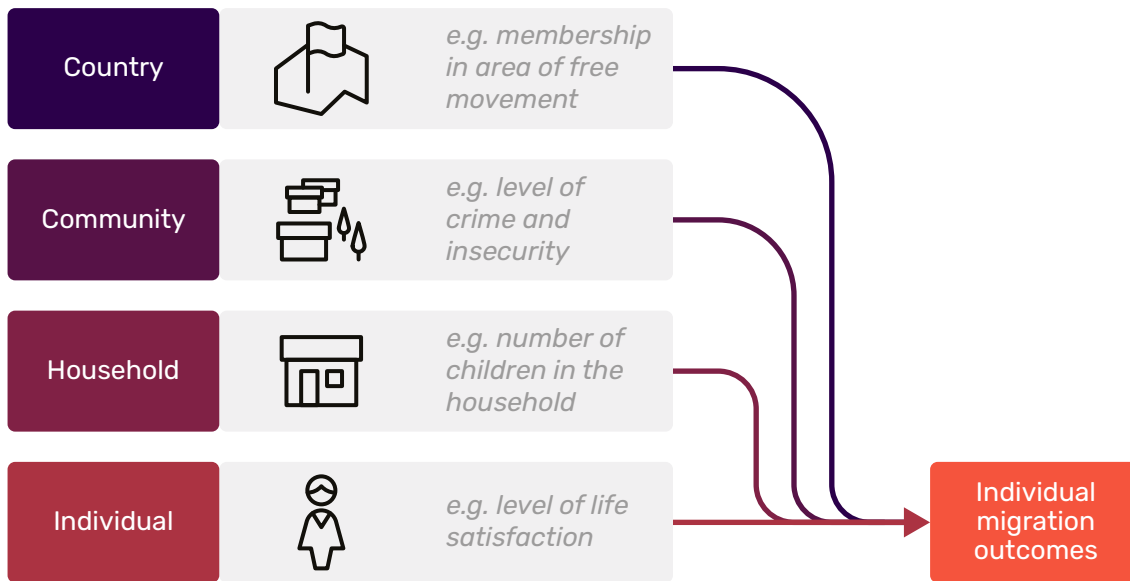
Source: The authors.

At the country level, particularly open or restrictive migration policies can explain why people from one country might be more likely to migrate compared to others.[33] For example, membership in regional free movement areas is often associated with frequent mobility to neighbouring countries, for instance from Guinea to Mali.[34]

What happens within the community matters too. The level of crime and insecurity in an area might explain the high prevalence of migration in some locations compared to others.

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33 In MIGNEX analyses we excluded the country level, as intended in the research design. This is because there are few relevant country-level factors that affect all research areas in the same way. The most obvious would perhaps be legal frameworks, national-level policies or migration opportunities tied to specific citizenships. These might be pertinent to include in other analyses, but they were not sufficiently important for MIGNEX analysis to merit inclusion.

34 Botta Somparé et al. (2022). Mali has since withdrawn from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) area of free movement.

Furthermore, the situation within a household can influence different dimensions of migration processes. For example, the number of children in a household could influence both migration aspirations – making household members either more or less likely to want to migrate – and the ability to migrate.
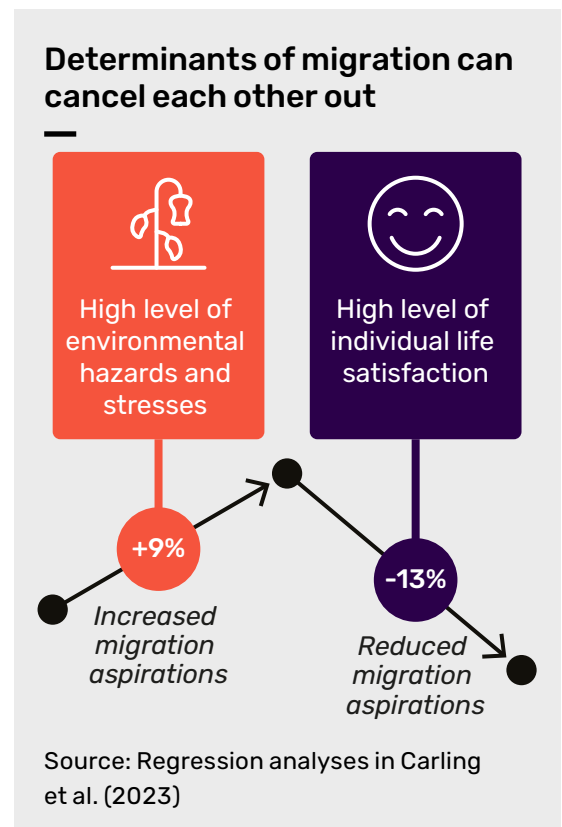
And finally, migration is also shaped by determinants that are unique to individuals, such as their levels of satisfaction with life, their educational background or their personality traits.

We find that the levels interact to contribute to the formation of migration processes. Let's concretely return to migration aspirations for an example. The multi-level determination of migration aspirations means that they not only depend on personal experiences or perceptions, but also on what is experienced collectively.

So, for example, at the community level, a person who lives in an area with a high degree of environmental hazards and stresses is 9% more likely to have resolute migration aspirations compared to people living where the hazards and stresses are low.[35] However, at the individual level, if that person is very satisfied with their life as a whole, they are 13% *less* likely to hold resolute migration aspirations than those not satisfied with their life.[36]

In other words, both of these levels explain aspects of migration aspirations, and only looking at one level would mean having an incomplete picture and understanding. Moreover, effects such as these can cancel each other out.

Determinants of migration can cancel each other out

—

High level of environmental hazards and stresses

High level of individual life satisfaction

+9%

Increased migration aspirations

-13%

Reduced migration aspirations

Source: Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023)

We conclude from this that individual perceptions and experiences are as relevant as collective attitudes or experiences for explaining migration processes. Which makes sense – people are social beings, and their decisions are affected as much by their environment as by their own preferences.

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35   See the full regression results in Carling et al. (2023).
36   See the regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023).

Some factors we can observe easily, others less so

To understand who might wish to migrate, it is not sufficient to just look at the obvious drivers – those we can easily observe or measure, such as levels of unemployment across different areas. How people view their circumstances and prospects and the idea of potentially migrating are also shaped by cultural differences, individual traits and personal experiences that are not easily observable.[37]

Attitudes to risk or uncertainty are among the unobservable characteristics that affect migration. Previous research shows that migrants tend to be more accepting of risk.[38] The MIGNEX survey measures this personality trait with a series of questions about imagined scenarios.[39] We find that most people are inclined to avoid uncertainty, preferring to settle for something that is immediate and guaranteed, rather than taking a chance on better outcomes that are postponed or uncertain. Figure 10 shows the variation within this general picture. In line with other research, we, too, find that being willing to accept more uncertainty is associated with a higher likelihood of having migration aspirations.[40]

Box 6. Migration as adventure
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The role of adventure in shaping migration aspirations is an important corrective to the image of migrants being driven by hardship. Even in settings where life is hard, diverse life experience is valued. A man in Dialokoro (Guinea) referred to a Mandinka proverb about migration that makes this point: 'If you go for the adventure, then if you don't get material goods or money, you will at least get experience'. What adds to the weight of this attitude is that Dialokoro is so poor and remote. Only 30% of households have a television and the majority of people in Dialakoro think that earning a living and feeding a family is difficult, while the level of life satisfaction is lower than in any of the other MIGNEX research areas.

Source: Focus group GIN2A and statistics from the MIGNEX survey.

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37   Hagen-Zanker et al. (2023b).
38   Goldbach and Schlüter (2018); Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012).
39   Based on survey items N01, N02, N03. See Carling et al. (2023) for details.
40   Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023).

Figure 10. Distribution of willingness to bear uncertainty
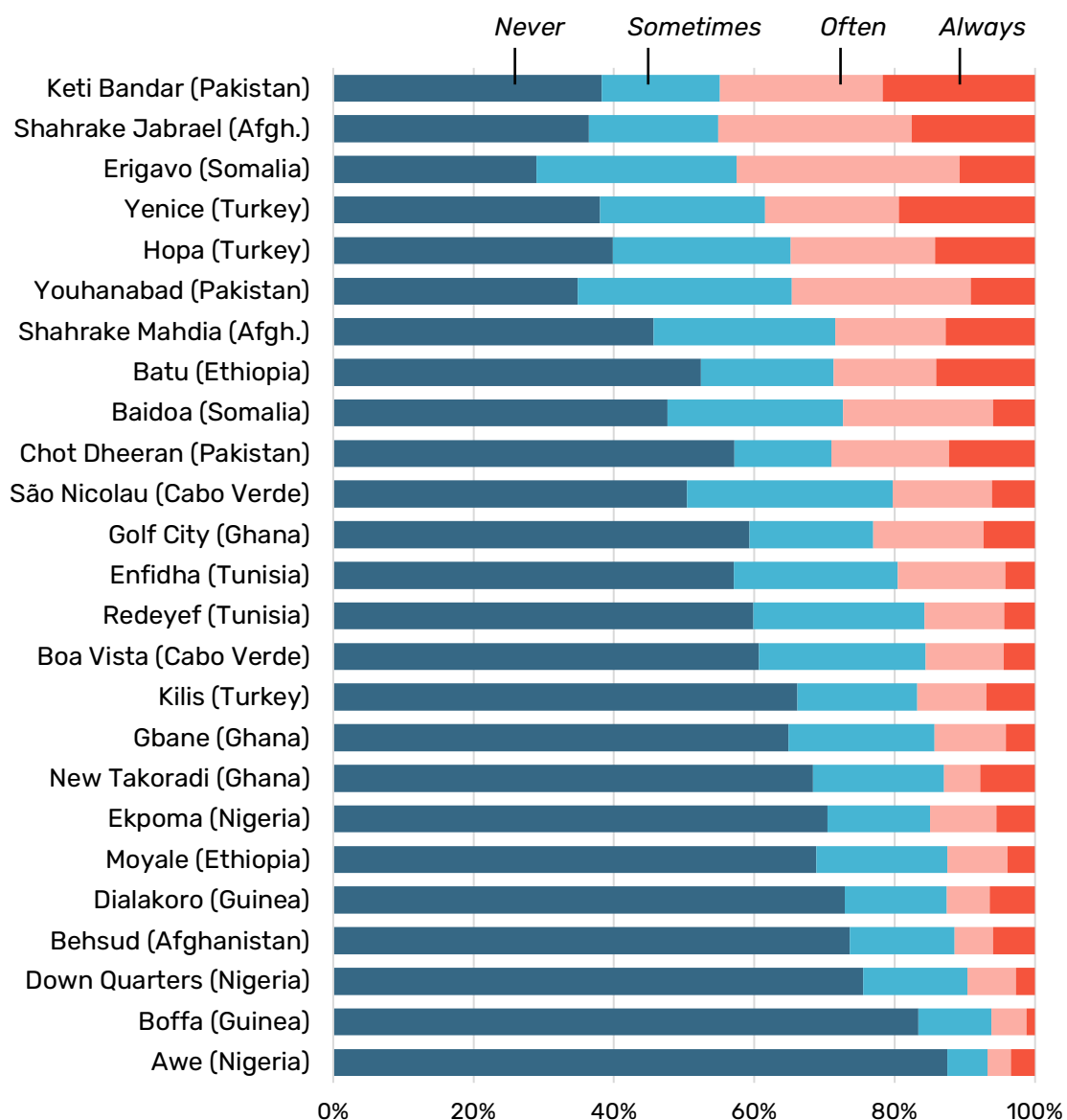
Data source: MIGNEX survey (restricted variant, v1). Calculated on the basis of survey items N01, N02, N03, which asks individuals to partake in different games to assess willingness to bear different levels of uncertainty, as described in Carling et al. (2023). Research areas are ordered by overall willingness to bear uncertainty.

Other individual traits matter too. For example, those who are more trusting of others in the local community are more likely to do something else than migrate if they are dissatisfied with their lives.[41] Among the dissatisfied, those who are more trusting are in fact more likely to have joined a community group or to have voted in the most recent election.

A number of different considerations might go through people's minds if they ponder migrating. These range from the general search for a 'good life' to the desire to have an adventure, fun and to broaden horizons.[42] A young man from Redeyef (Tunisia) explained his thoughts as he considered migrating:

> 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…[43]

With jobs in mining and other sectors now limited in Redeyef (Tunisia), many young people are hoping to move abroad.
Camille Kasavan for MIGNEX.

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41   Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023).
42   Erdal et al. (2023b).
43   Focus Group TUN2B.

There is seldom a single driver of migration decisions

There is usually an interplay of multiple drivers that shape migration decisions and broader migration dynamics.[44] In one analysis comparing research areas, we find no single driver that explains migration aspirations or migration outcomes on its own, but rather a combination of two or more drivers taking effect co-jointly.[45] These combinations of drivers also vary across different research areas.[46]

The diversity of drivers and their perceived importance is also observable in the focus group discussions among residents of each research area.[47] In some areas, environmental change influences people's migration aspirations and their decision to migrate, but often indirectly, through its impact on livelihoods. In other areas, different drivers rank more prominently, for instance past and present conflict and violence, in particular specific experiences of violence, rather than general perceptions.[48]

Chot Dheeran (Pakistan)

Chot Dheeran, a village in Punjab province, has strong transnational ties. Most people know a migrant in the United States or Europe and 50% are in monthly contact with a migrant abroad. These ties are associated with having stronger migration aspirations. But they are not the only driver of migration aspirations.

Those holding poor views of public services and institutions are also more likely to hold migration aspirations, as are those who were negatively affected by Covid-19. Local people talked about feeling increasingly unsafe because of violence associated with longstanding rivalries between several high caste families. Those who experienced physical violence are also more likely to have migration aspirations. Chot Dheeran is thus an example of a research area where several factors shape migration dynamics.

Source: Carling et al. (2023); Erdal et al. (2022).

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44 Carling et al. (2023); Czaika and Reinprecht (2022); Czaika and Weisner (2023).
45 Based on QCA by Czaika and Weisner (2023).
46 Czaika and Weisner (2023).
47 Erdal et al. (2023b).
48 Erdal et al. (2023b); Hagen-Zanker et al. (forthcoming).

3 Each migration determinant can work in contrary ways

The same determinants that increase migration aspirations in some communities can lower aspirations in others. They can work in contrary ways for several reasons, including contextual differences and their interaction with other factors.

Image: Chot Dheeran (Pakistan). Safia Mehmood for MIGNEX.

Determinants vary across communities

There are some general trends that explain migration aspirations and behaviours, whether as determinants, drivers or root causes. For instance, women are less likely than men to hold migration aspirations.

But more interesting is our analysis of differences and similarities between research areas, in terms of how migration comes about. Most determinants that affect migration aspirations have a positive effect in some areas and a negative effect in others. Among the 41 variables included in the analyses, only six consistently relate to *either* an increase or a decrease in migration aspirations.[49]

This is an important finding, showing that there are few determinants that affect migration aspirations universally. Figure 11 provides three examples of how effects vary across research areas. It illustrates the effect of each variable on the likelihood that a person has resolute migration aspirations, as described in Chapter 1.

The first example shows that *gender* is among the few determinants that always affect migration aspirations in the same direction, if there is any effect at all. In 16 research areas, gender makes no difference, but in the nine where it does, the effect is consistently that being female is associated with a lower likelihood of having resolute migration aspirations – that is, it has a negative effect.

Out of 41 determinants of migration aspirations, 35 have divergent effects in different research areas
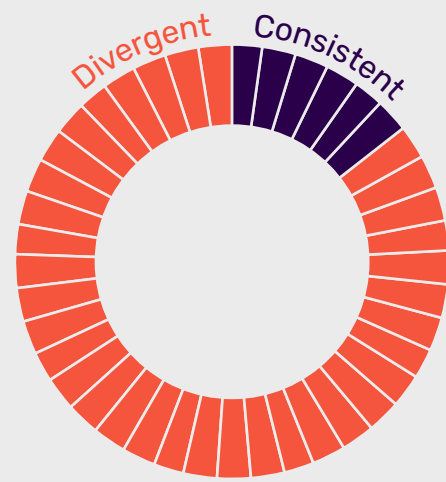
Source: Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023)

"Most determinants that affect migration aspirations have a positive effect in some areas and a negative effect in others. Among the 41 variables included in the analyses, only six consistently relate to either an increase or a decrease in migration aspirations."

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49   These six variables are distrust in institutions, being female, being married/cohabiting, not being in the workforce, life satisfaction and having been negatively affected by Covid-19.

Interestingly, the nine areas where gender has a clear effect are not geographically clustered but scattered across seven countries. Sometimes, the local context explains why gender matters more than in other parts of the same country. For example, in Ghana, the one area where women are significantly less likely to have migration aspirations is New Takoradi, where irregular migration and failed migration attempts are particularly common. In Nigeria, only in Ekpoma are women less likely to have migration aspirations, perhaps because this is in the part of the country where trafficking in women (and campaigning against it) is most widespread.

Figure 11. Effects on resolute migration aspirations

	Positive effects		
		▲ Youhanabad (Pakistan)	
		▲ Gbane (Ghana)	
		▲ Boffa (Guinea)	
		▲ Enfidha (Tunisia)	
		▲ Redeyef (Tunisia)	▲ Shahrake Mahdia (Afgh.)
		▲ Batu (Ethiopia)	▲ Erigavo (Somalia)
Non-significant effects	● 16 research areas	● 17 research areas	● 21 research areas
Negative effects	▼ Yenice (Turkey)	▼ Hopa (Turkey)	▼ Shahrake Jabrael (Afgh.)
	▼ Ekpoma (Nigeria)	▼ Awe (Nigeria)	▼ Redeyef (Tunisia)
	▼ Boffa (Guinea)		
	▼ Shahrake Mahdia (Afgh.)		
	▼ Enfidha (Tunisia)		
	▼ Dialakoro (Guinea)		
	▼ New Takoradi (Ghana)		
	▼ Behsud (Afghanistan)		
	▼ Chot Dheeran (Pakistan)		
	Effect of being female	**Effect of knowing of someone's failed migration**	**Effect of the household receiving support from a social protection scheme**

Note: Based on coefficient from multivariate linear probability model regressions run separately for each research area. Research areas are ordered by effect size. A positive effect means that migration aspirations are increased.

Data source: Analyses in Carling et al. (2023).

The second example in Figure 11 is the effect of knowing about failed migration attempts of other people.[50] Interestingly, being aware of someone's failed migration – be that deportation or someone dying en route to another country – is associated with *stronger* migration aspirations in most cases. This indicates that this awareness of the dangers of migration journeys does not deter migration aspirations. On the contrary, it is associated with stronger migration aspirations and preparations. One potential explanation is that awareness gives people information on how to migrate effectively. Only in two cases, Hopa (Turkey) and Awe (Nigeria), does knowledge of failed migration attempts decrease people's migration aspirations. Previous research on migration decision-making has shown that risk information may be irrelevant to prospective migrants who consider the possibility to change their life worth the risks.[51]

If someone in the family receives social protection support, such as a child benefit, pension or similar, the effect on migration aspirations is insignificant in the vast majority of research areas. But in the four areas where there is an effect, it is divergent. While in Sharake Jabrael (Afghanistan) and Redeyef (Tunisia) receipt of social protection is associated with a *decrease* in migration aspirations, it is associated with an *increase* in Sharake Mahdia (Afghanistan) and Erigavo (Somalia). An extensive review of the literature shows that, indeed, social protection support may either increase or decrease migration aspirations. Sometimes social protection support is used to finance migration and sometimes the receipt of regular support means a family thinks migration is no longer necessary. The effect also depends on the design and implementation of the support programme.[52]

Migration drivers interact

Most migration drivers do not operate in isolation; rather, they work together to shape migration aspirations and other migration outcomes. The *same outcome* can be caused by *different combinations* of drivers.

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50 People were asked whether they knew someone who was injured or lost their life on the way to another country, who were detained, who were stuck in a transit country, or who were deported and forced to come back. Any of these experiences were regarded as a 'failed migration experience' in the analysis.
51 Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012).
52 Himmelstine et al. (2023).

Widespread migration aspirations is such an outcome. As shown in Chapter 1, the proportion of people who wish to migrate varies enormously across the research areas. Which area characteristics can help explain this variation? A systematic comparison of driver constellations across all 26 research areas finds two combinations of factors that result in widespread migration aspirations, as illustrated in Figure 15.[53]

In some areas, widespread migration aspirations are explained by a strong migration culture, combined with the *absence* of poverty and poor livelihoods. In other areas, the *presence* of poverty and poor livelihoods results in widespread migration aspirations when combined with poor public services and weak governance.[54] These kinds of results are produced with a method known as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), described in the Methodology section. This approach shows how migration drivers can manifest in contrary ways, not just in terms of their presence or absence, but also in combination with other drivers.

Figure 12. Combinations of drivers contributing to migration aspirations

Source: The authors.

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53   The analysis did not include all possible drivers but tested those most discussed in policy and research: poverty and poor livelihoods, weak governance and public services, insecurity and conflict, environmental stress, and migration culture (including networks and ties). All are considered in their presence and absence. For more information on the model specifications see Czaika and Weisner (2023).
54   See the full results in Czaika and Weisner (2023).

44   New insights on the causes of migration

While these combinations of drivers can produce widespread migration aspirations, they do not necessarily do so in all areas, due to further differences in contextual factors that are not included in the analysis. For example, Awe and Ekpoma (Nigeria) share the driver combinations visualised in Figure 12 but in Awe there are no widespread international migration aspirations.

Drivers affect aspirations and outcomes differently

As shown in Chapter 1, migration is a multifaceted, stepwise process. As such, migration aspirations and actual out-migration are shaped by different drivers. To demonstrate this, Figure 13 echoes Figure 12 but with migration *intensity* rather than migration *aspirations* as the outcome. The first of these figures shows there can be widespread migration aspirations despite the existence of poverty and poor livelihoods (Pathway B in Figure 12). The second figure shows that, by contrast, the existence of poverty and poor livelihoods is *not* part of any of the pathways that lead to a high level of out-migration (high migration intensity).[55] We find that high migration intensity results from a strong culture of migration combined with either the *absence* of poverty and poor livelihoods, or the *presence* of poor public services and weak governance. The effects of poverty and livelihood opportunities on migration aspiration and ability are further discussed in Chapter 5.


Awe (Nigeria)

Awe is a town and administrative centre located in Nasarawa State, in North-Central Nigeria. It has historically served as an internal migration destination, with agriculture being a primary source of livelihood. Although livelihoods and mobility are increasingly impacted by conflict, erosion and flooding, out-migration is uncommon.

Most young adults (84%) expect to stay in Nigeria over the next five years and the majority expect to stay in Awe. When people do leave, it is largely to other areas of Nigeria. One-third (35%) of young adults know of someone who has migrated internally in the past five years – often to pursue farming in areas considered more peaceful. In this context, despite local conflicts, international migration remains an infrequent choice, as it is regarded as distant and perilous.

Source: Genyi et al. (2022).

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55 High levels of out-migration measured with survey items G03 and G05. These values were aggregated at the research area level for the QCA.

Figure 13. Combination of drivers contributing to migration intensity
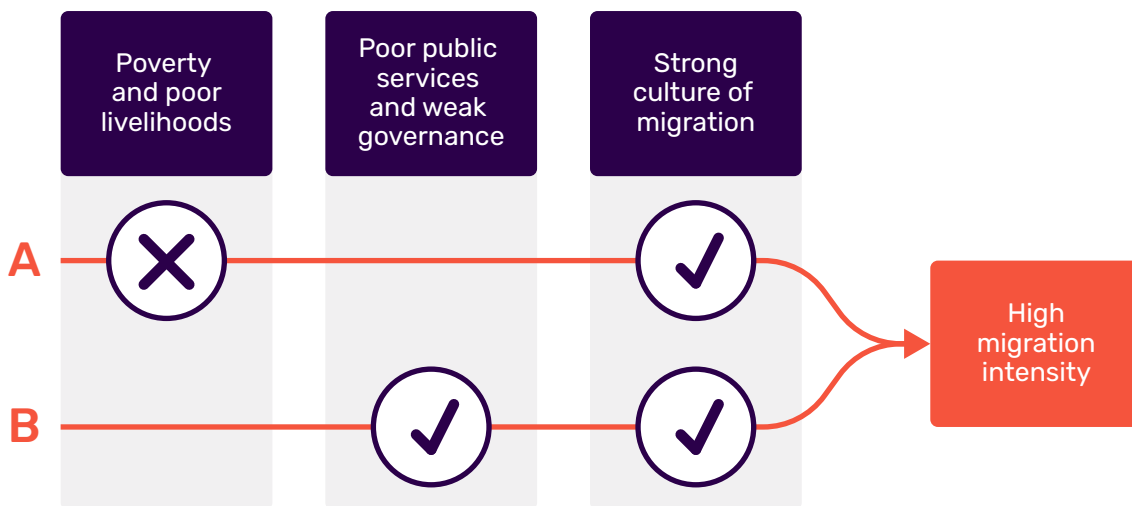
Source: The authors.

Enfidha in Tunisia captures both pathways displayed in Figure 13. While Enfidha has abundant agricultural and industrial livelihood opportunities, young adults harbour scepticism towards government institutions. Nearly 90% of the young population has family or friends residing abroad, highlighting the presence of a well-established migration culture.[56] As a result, international out-migration remains prevalent.

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56   Kasavan et al. (2022a).

4 Migration means different things in different contexts

Long-distance international migration receives the most attention in research and policy, though it only makes up a small part of actual mobilities. Short-distance and temporary migration is the most common, with varying risks associated with different types of migration.

Image: Moyale (Ethiopia). Tewelde Adhanom for MIGNEX.

Not everybody wants to leave

International migration is almost the standard life path for young adults in a couple of the MIGNEX research areas, but these are exceptions. Much more commonly, international migration is simply one of several possibilities or desires in life.

There are many research areas where migration is not prominent at all in people's mind and instead their focus is on local futures. This highlights that, for the most part, migration is seen as an exception to a norm of staying. This is also reflected in the MIGNEX survey, where people were asked whether, during the past year, they have considered international migration, internal migration, both or neither. The majority of people in most areas have not considered migrating at all, as shown in Figure 14. For example, in Youhanabad (Pakistan) 85% of people have not been thinking about leaving.

"People were asked whether, during the past year, they have considered international migration, internal migration, both or neither. The majority of people in most areas have not considered migrating at all."

While the search for a good life is a key reason for migration aspirations, most people do, in fact, primarily hope to find this good life at home. As explained by a woman in Awe, Nigeria, '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'.[57]

Most migration is short-distance and temporary

In research, 'migration' has largely come to be understood as 'international migration', leading to a relative disregard of internal migration. European migration policy, too, appears to mainly see migration as irregular migration towards the European Union. Yet, when people do leave, they usually don't go as far or stay for as long as policy discussion and public debate often seem to suggest.[58]

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57 Erdal et al. (2023b); Focus group NGA2A.
58 McAuliffe and Khadria (2019); Skeldon (2018).

Figure 14. Consideration of international migration, internal migration or both

Internal migration only   *Internal and international migration*   *International migration only*

Ekpoma (Nigeria)	
Gbane (Ghana)	
New Takoradi (Ghana)	
Boffa (Guinea)	
Enfidha (Tunisia)	
Golf City (Ghana)	
São Nicolau (Cabo Verde)	
Boa Vista (Cabo Verde)	
Down Quarters (Nigeria)	
Redeyef (Tunisia)	
Hopa (Turkey)	
Batu (Ethiopia)	
Dialakoro (Guinea)	
Behsud (Afghanistan)	
Shahrake Jabrael (Afgh.)	
Shahrake Mahdia (Afgh.)	
Yenice (Turkey)	
Erigavo (Somalia)	
Kilis (Turkey)	
Awe (Nigeria)	
Moyale (Ethiopia)	
Keti Bandar (Pakistan)	
Baidoa (Somalia)	
Chot Dheeran (Pakistan)	
Youhanabad (Pakistan)	

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Data source: MIGNEX survey (restricted variant, v1), based on survey items C06 and C07. The remainder of respondents in each research area have not considered migrating during the past year.

Urbanisation and other forms of internal mobilities are the most common type of migration globally.[59] The distinction between migration and other forms of travel is sometimes challenged by the mobile lives that people lead, for instance splitting their time between the city and the village.

This diversity is reflected in the way people talk about migrating, moving and travelling.[60] Regarding internal migration especially, other words are more often used (such as travel, shifting, moving, leaving or work-related stays). However, it is exactly these types of short-distance and temporary movements that are most important for the majority of people. For example, a man from Gbane, Ghana, explained how people from the south of the country come temporarily to the area. 'They go to the mines', he said, 'they make some money and then they go back to their community, and it will be a positive thing for them.'[61]

The temporariness of movement, therefore, implies that people are expected – and expect – to return to their area of origin at some point. This means an implicit idea of return is inherent to migration, with the perception that returnees bring back skills and expertise from other places. Consequently, short-term and short-distance migration is intricately linked to local development processes, as further discussed in a MIGNEX Policy Brief.[62]

The overlooked opportunities of short distance and short-term migration
MIGNEX Policy Brief
mignex.org/d066b

The MIGNEX survey results reflect the prominence of internal rather than international migration. Figure 14 shows that for those who have considered migrating, the majority are not set on either international or internal migration. Gbane (Ghana) has the highest proportion of people having considered *only* internal migration. That might be because it is a remote farming and mining community and international migration is perceived as dangerous, expensive and unrealistic. However, travelling within Ghana for a limited period with a specific goal is common in Gbane.[63]

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59   Hickey and Yeoh (2016); King and Skeldon (2010).
60   As part of the MIGNEX project, we conducted 104 group discussions with young adults having either strong or weak personal links to migration in 26 local communities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
61   Erdal et al. (2023b); Focus group GHA1D.
62   Erdal et al. (2023c).
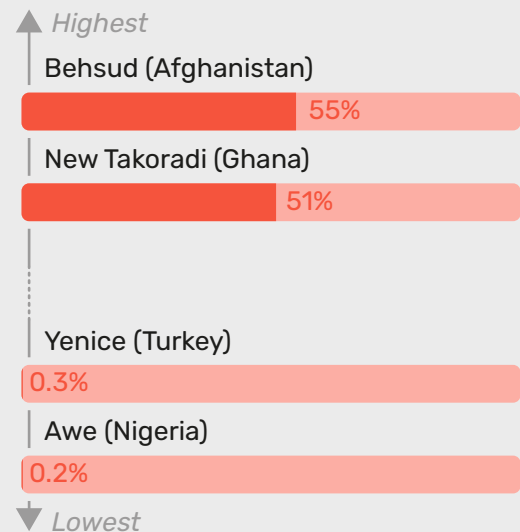63   Kandilige et al. (2022).

Risks vary and affect perceptions of migration

Whether migration is internal or international significantly impacts the feasibility and obstacles of a journey. Migration, therefore, also differs in terms of the risks that people associate with it and reflects the varying destinations and opportunities of migration in each area. For example, the specific dangers associated with trying to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean is a central concern for people in some areas, while in other areas migration to Europe is just not that prevalent. Overall, however, people are very aware of the costs and benefits, as well as the risks connected to different types of migration. In some areas, most people know of someone who has died en route.

Gender also shapes the expected and experienced risks on migration journeys. In some research areas, the idea of women travelling alone is stigmatised or women are perceived to be at higher risk of experiencing exploitation and discrimination if migrating, not least during their journey. Therefore, in some areas people said it was best to stay, showing the profound impact gender norms can have on migration dynamics.

Indeed, the gendering of migration has several dimensions. Men and women might leave in different numbers, to different destinations or in different ways, for instance. These differences are shaped by local gender norms in a community as well as gender differences in migration opportunities (e.g., for certain types of work or for marriage). Figure 15 highlights the variation in this gendering of out-migration.[64]

There is great variation in the share of people who know someone who has died attempting to migrate

—

▲ *Highest*

Behsud (Afghanistan)

55%

New Takoradi (Ghana)

51%

Yenice (Turkey)

0.3%

Awe (Nigeria)

0.2%

▼ *Lowest*

Data source: MIGNEX survey dataset (restricted variant, v1).

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64   Based on the Research Area Interim Report (RAIR) Scale. For more information see the Methodology section.

Figure 15. Men and women's out-migration patterns
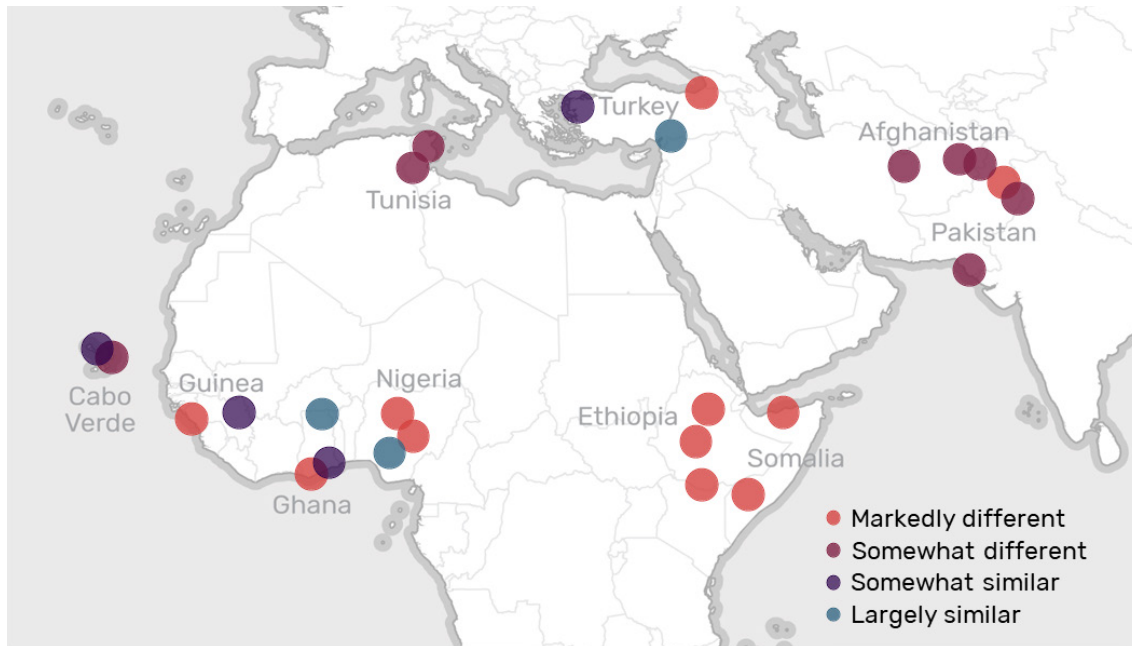
Note: Comparisons refer to whether men and women migrate from the area in similar numbers, in similar ways and to the same destinations (internally and internationally).

Source: Coding scales based on summary assessment from fieldwork. See Erdal and Carling (2020) for methodology.

Non-migrants also shape views on migration

Migration research and policy often overlooks people who are affected by migration without being migrants themselves. This is especially true of inhabitants in migrants' communities of origin. Listening to what such people have to say about migration helps overcome this 'migrant bias'.

Families of migrants and people staying behind in communities of origin are also affected by migration. Their experiences of the *consequences* of migration therefore also shape the views on migration in a particular area.

For example, we find that the risks of migration are considered in much broader terms than the direct danger to migrants. Migrants' families in particular are affected: 'One of our relatives lost three of their sons in illegal migration to Europe,' said a woman in Shahrake Mahdia (Afghanistan). 'All of these boys had wives and children. Now, their families live in bad situations in absence of them.'[65]

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65   Erdal et al. (2023b); Focus Group AFG3B.

The loss of a family member can also affect the mental and emotional well-being of those staying behind. 'I was informed that my son has migrated abroad, and his friends have crossed the river, but he is stuck there,' said a woman in Behsud (Afghanistan). 'I was really shocked and fasted for many days without eating or drinking anything, and I didn't speak to anyone for many days.'[66] At the time of fieldwork, she still had not heard from her son and was worried about him. Beyond the family, people see migration as entailing risks to the community, such as emptiness, stagnation and decay.

At the same time, migration of household members and the subsequent receipt of remittances is considered to be of fundamental value to people in the areas of origin. Another Afghan woman, from Behsud, explained how a migrant relative can be a blessing. 'When he arrives there, he starts work and sends money to his family,' she said. 'The money he sends changes the life of his family and other household members, as they will be able to have education or start a business with the money he sends from abroad.'[67] The migration of one person can therefore mean the possibility of others having a better life at home. These dynamics are further explored in the MIGNEX Report *The impacts of migration.*[68]

66   Focus Group AFG2B.
67   Focus Group AFG2D.
68   Siegel et al. (2024).

# 5 Wealth and livelihood opportunities have opposing effects

People are more likely to want to leave if they see limited local opportunities to earn a living and feed a family. However, people who are poorer, or live in poorer communities, are less likely to want to leave.

Image: Erigavo (Somalia). Fatuma Ahmed for MIGNEX.

Scarce livelihoods raise migration aspirations

The possibility to find better paid jobs has long been seen as one of the most important drivers of migration.[69] Indeed, a lack of local livelihood opportunities that allow people to earn a living to meet basic needs is a very common reason to consider migrating, internally or abroad.[70] One man from Ekpoma (Nigeria) explained clearly: 'People travel abroad because the jobs are not available here. If the jobs are available, people will not migrate."[71]

Livelihoods can be found in diverse ways, through agriculture, trading or employment, for instance. Figure 16 illustrates the variation across MIGNEX research areas. Only in 10 areas is the most common way to earn a living to be employed and receive a salary. Self-employment is the second most common livelihood, while most people in five research areas rely on casual work.

Figure 16. The most common way to earn a living
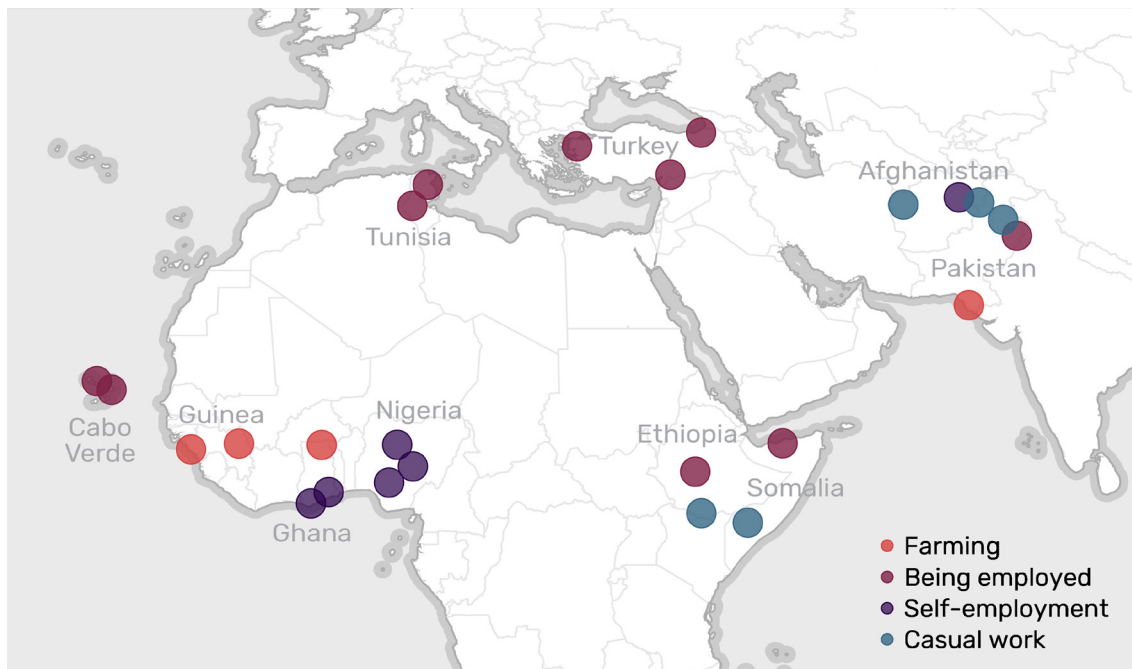
Note: Farming includes fishing and livestock. The proportion of people who earn a living (as defined by the four categories listed) account for 26–82% of the sample in each area. The largest excluded categories are being unemployed, studying and doing unpaid housework.

Data source: MIGNEX survey item B02 (restricted variant, v1).

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69   Harris and Todaro (1970); Lee (1966).
70   Erdal et al. (2023b).
71   Focus Group NGA3B.

But the unemployed – who make up more than one-third of young adults in several areas – are frustrated by the lack of jobs. And some people who are self-employed or live off casual work would prefer to have a steady job. A scarcity of livelihoods can therefore be perceived in two ways: that it is generally difficult to earn a living and feed a family, and that it is difficult to find good jobs.

As shown in Figure 17, most people in every research area think that finding a good job is difficult. More than 80% think this is the case in all but three research areas. There is greater diversity in views on the difficulty of earning a living. But still, overall, the majority say that it is difficult.

Figure 17. Perceptions of livelihood hardships

Proportion of people who say it is difficult to…   *…earn a living and feed a family*   *…find a good job*
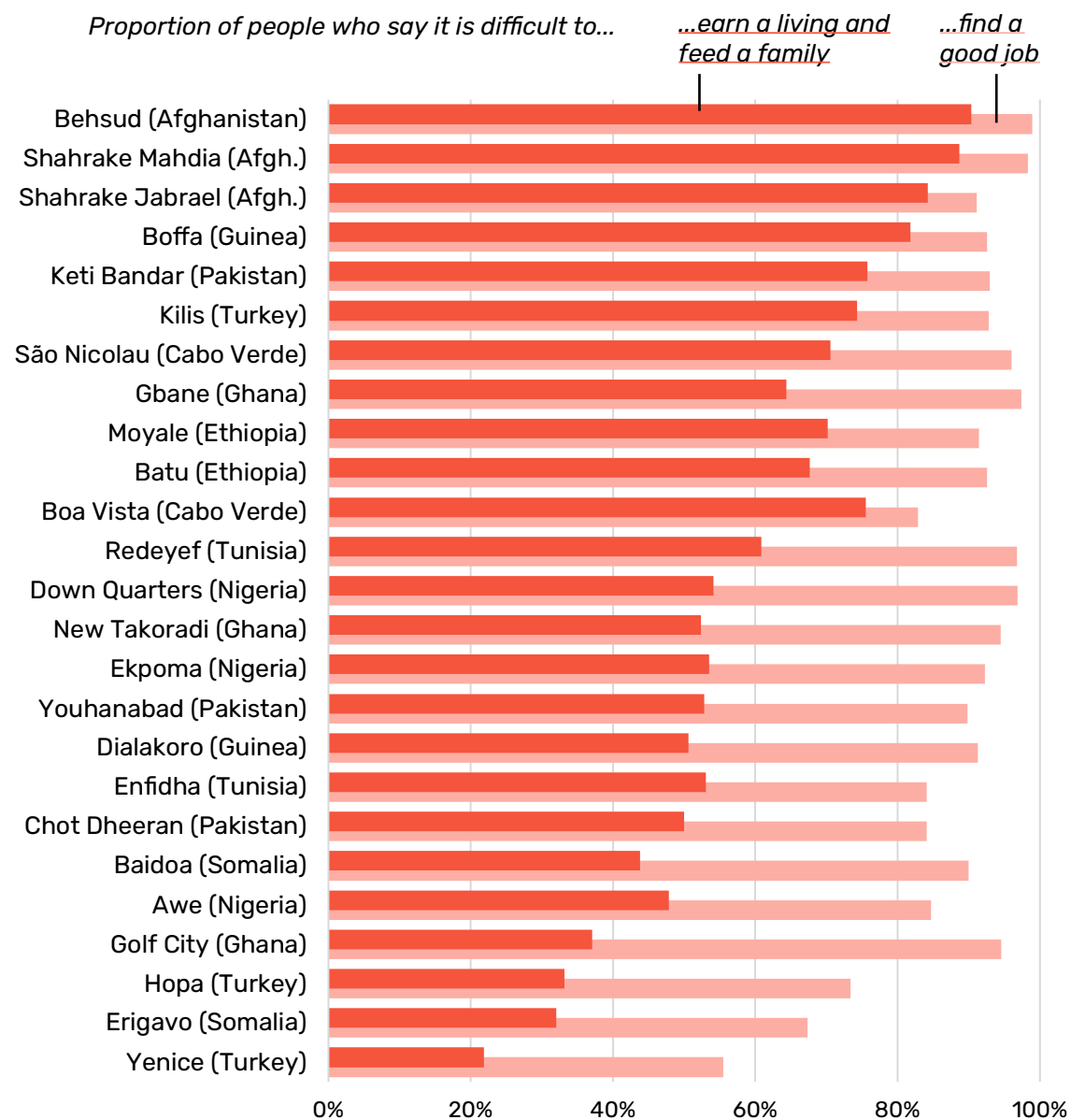
Data source: MIGNEX survey items B01 and B06. Values for B01 combine the responses 'very difficult' and 'difficult'.

The perception of what makes a 'good' livelihood is, of course, subjective. This perception is shaped by individual traits, such as different risk appetites, as discussed in Chapter 2. As described in Chapter 1, it is also grounded in a person's broader ambitions for the future.

It is precisely these *perceptions* of opportunities for earning a living or securing a good job that affect whether people want to migrate. We measure livelihood hardships by combining individual perceptions of how difficult it is to make a living and feed a family in the area and of how difficult it is to find a good job. People who perceive greater livelihood hardships tend to have stronger migration aspirations. Concretely, those perceiving worse livelihood hardships are 9% more likely to have resolute migration aspirations.[72]

By contrast, *being unemployed* is only weakly associated with having migration aspirations.[73] This confirms the findings of other research showing that, when people reflect on migrating or not migrating, perceived opportunities matter more than current individual circumstances.[74]

Moreover, as we describe in Chapter 3, migration drivers can work in contrary ways. This means that, in some research areas, unemployed people are *more* likely to want to migrate, while in others they are less likely to want to do so.

Behsud (Afghanistan)

Behsud is on the outskirts of Nangahar city, near the border with Pakistan. Many residents have been displaced from elsewhere in Afghanistan or have returned after living in Pakistan. The inflow of people initially led to growth and livelihood expansion. Social protection programmes funded by international donors provided a safety net. Yet, jobs are hard to come by and nearly every young adult (91%) considers it difficult to earn a living and feed a family. Unemployment rocketed during the Covid-19 pandemic and security challenges in the lead-up to the fall of Kabul limited mobility outside the home. Given these deep livelihood challenges, migration is viewed as necessary for survival. A woman from Behsud explained: 'It is hard to find a job here, people are poor, security is getting worse day by day. Young people should go abroad to get higher education and return back to help develop their communities.'

Source: Akakhil et al. (2022); Focus Group AFG2A.

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72   See regression findings in Carling et al. (2023).
73   See regression findings in Carling et al. (2023).
74   Aslany et al. (2021).

Poverty generally lowers migration aspirations

Across the MIGNEX research areas, most residents believe that people who migrate to another country become rich.[75] Intuitively, one would therefore expect that poorer people are more likely to want to migrate, and that there is higher out-migration from poorer areas. Yet, in practice, poverty plays the opposite role. People who are poorer, or who live in poorer areas, are *less* likely to want to leave.

Those who live in poorer research areas are 48% less likely to hold resolute migration aspirations, compared to those living in better off areas.[76] Likewise, higher wealth[77] is associated with stronger migration aspirations (up to a certain level), indicating that the poorest do not consider migrating. One explanation for this pattern is that poorer people may feel more constrained in their aspirations, so they are less likely to even consider migrating.[78]

Most people agree that those who migrate to another country 'become rich'
—

Average across 25 research areas

Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
67%	20%	13%

Highest: Chot Dheeran (Pakistan)
92%
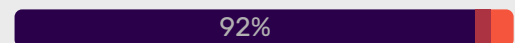
Lowest: Boa Vista (Cabo Verde)
28%

Data source: MIGNEX survey dataset (restricted variant, v1).

Poverty also affects the ability to migrate

Migration is often a costly enterprise, especially when it involves crossing international borders. As such, migration rates amongst poor people, and those living in poorer areas, tends to be lower because of financial constraints.[79] Costs include securing passports and travel documents, facilitation by agents or smugglers, plus travel costs. As a man from Youhanabad (Pakistan) explained, some families go into debt to finance their children's migration: 'I think boys should not move to other countries because it is a costly process for poor parents.

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75   Based on survey item C21.
76   Based on regression analysis in Carling et al. (2023).
77   We measure wealth through an index created using the International Wealth Index methodology, as outlined in Hagen-Zanker et al. (2023b).
78   Appadurai (2004); Carling (2002); Clemens and Mendola (2020), Czaika and Vothknecht (2012).
79   Castles (2000); de Haas (2007); Skeldon (2021).

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.'[80]

And the considerable costs of international migration can explain why we only find higher out-migration in research areas that are less poor. In areas where poverty and poor livelihoods are not present, we see high migration intensity, but only where there is also a strong migration culture to further facilitate migration endeavours[81] (see Figure 13 in Chapter 3). This takes us back to the stepwise migration process discussed in Chapter 1. For migration to take place, people need to have both the aspiration and the ability to migrate.[82]

For people to migrate from poor areas like Erigavo (Somalia) they need to have the aspiration and ability to migrate. Fatuma Ahmed for MIGNEX.

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80 Focus group PAK2D.
81 QCA analysis in Czaika and Weisner (2023).
82 Carling and Schewel (2018); de Haas (2021).

6 Corruption is a major driver of migration

People who live in communities with widespread corruption are much more likely to want to leave. Corruption is not merely a nuisance and an obstacle to development, but it often reflects a deeper sense of societal dysfunction and hopelessness.

Image: Redeyef (Tunisia). Safouen Azouzi for MIGNEX.

Corruption can permeate communities

Among the many drivers of migration, corruption is remarkably important.[83] Corruption may seem like quite a specific problem, but it is typically a symptom of deeper and less visible challenges. For instance, corruption in hospitals, schools and police forces can be signs of low pay, inadequate management and a lack of accountability. In other words, it can reflect deeper institutional and societal dysfunctions.[84]

Corruption also has diverse and far-reaching consequences. First, it might be a direct drain on people's finances, for instance when bribes are required for services that are nominally free. Second, corruption can be an impediment to creating a better life for oneself, such as when jobs are given to poorer qualified, but better-connected candidates. Third, corruption can create disillusionment, even when it has no immediate personal impact. For instance, people could be discouraged from furthering their education if hiring practices are perceived to be unfair, or from investing in a business if the market is rigged.

Beyond these impacts, corruption has indirect consequences that matter for migration. When public funds are diverted from their intended use, or personal interests steer decision-making in institutions, it harms development, broadly speaking. Such effects can be important, but they do not make corruption a direct driver of migration aspirations. If corruption is

Redeyef (Tunisia)

Redeyef is a mining town in decline, located in the Tunisian desert. Almost 80% of people say that corruption is a serious problem, and an even greater number say that it is getting worse. With the decline in jobs, corruption in hiring is a growing frustration. A man there summed up the situation: 'we, the youngsters with our diplomas, no longer have hope in being employed. You can spend ten years without being employed.' People could have taken matters in their own hands and created their own livelihoods, he said, but were obstructed by self-interested bureaucrats. The owner of a small business complained that, indeed, excessive taxation and bureaucracy make it hard. 'I'm not ready to spend three years trying to get a simple authorisation,' he said, so he pays bribes instead.

Source: Kasavan et al. (2022b); Redeyef FGD transcripts.

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83   Carling et al. (2023).
84   There is a large body of research literature on corruption and development. See, for instance, Rose-Ackerman (2014). Studies of the specific link between corruption and migration include Auer et al. (2020), Cooray and Schneider (2016), Dimant et al. (2013) and Lapshyna (2014).

largely obscured and people experience the effects in the form of decaying infrastructure and deficient services, for instance, it is these deficiencies that are the drivers of migration.

Given the wide-ranging causes and consequences, corruption is a valuable indicator of more elusive societal ills. But corruption itself is a slippery concept with divergent understandings and usage. What one person regards as a favour, another might see as corrupt. In the MIGNEX survey we therefore ask about perceptions of corruption being a problem, as well as about experiences of being expected to pay a bribe.[85]

## Corruption levels and poverty interact

What individuals say about their experiences and perceptions of corruption can be summed up to describe the community overall. For example, the proportion of people who have been expected to pay a bribe during the past year ranges from 2% in São Nicolau (Cabo Verde) and Yenice (Turkey) to 38% in Boffa (Guinea) and Ekpoma (Nigeria). These differences in overall corruption levels are important, regardless of personal experiences with corruption.

We would expect that more people would want to leave communities with higher levels of corruption. However, there are also many other aspects of a community that affect migration aspirations. One such influence is the overall level of poverty: as shown in Chapter 5, migration aspirations are lower in poorer communities.

Figure 18 illustrates the relationships between corruption and migration aspirations, while also taking poverty levels into account. Each dot represents one of the 25 MIGNEX research areas. The further a dot is to the right in the figure, the larger the proportion of people who have been expected to pay a bribe during the past year. The further a dot is to the top, the larger the proportion of people who have resolute migration aspirations.

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85   Survey items J13–J15.

Figure 18. Relationships between corruption, poverty and migration aspirations
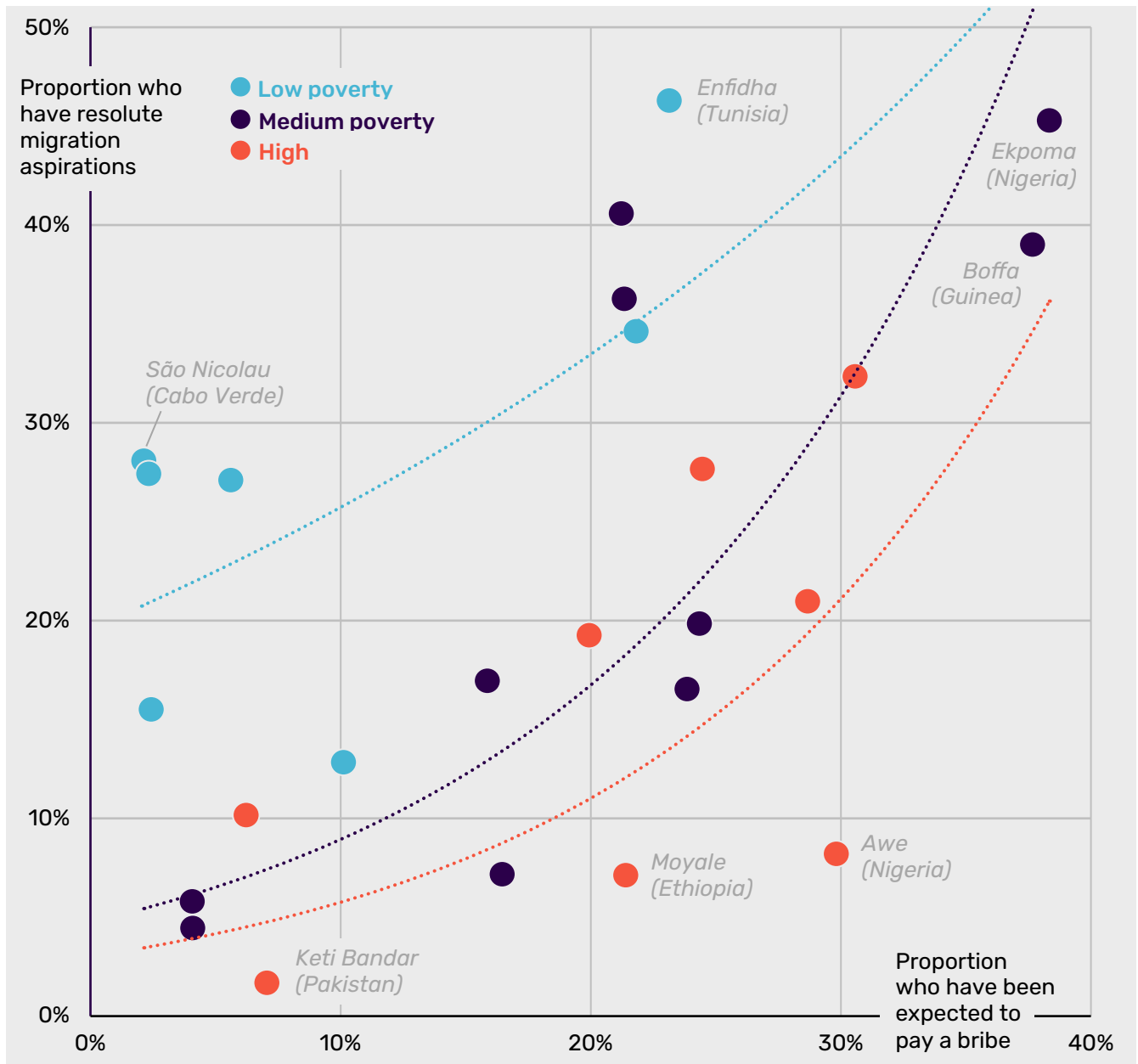
Note: See Chapter 1 for a definition of resolute migration aspirations. Expectation to pay a bribe is based on survey item J14. Poverty levels are based on multiple indicators (Carling et al., 2023).

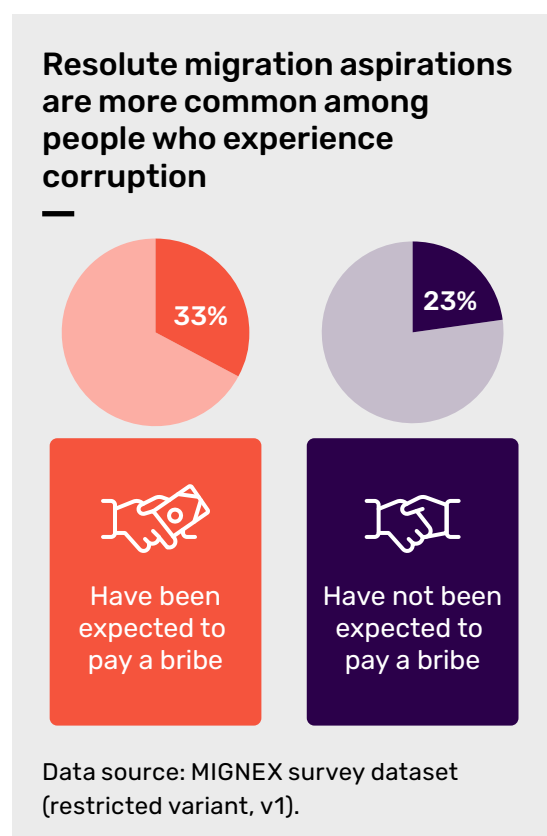Data source: MIGNEX survey (restricted variant, v1).

The dots are coloured to indicate three levels of poverty, and the curves mathematically summarise the relationship between corruption and migration aspirations within each poverty level. All curves have a steep upward gradient, meaning that migration aspirations rise markedly with the frequency of bribery. At each level of corruption (comparing sideways across the figure), migration aspirations are most common in the areas with low poverty, and comparatively rare in areas with high poverty. This is evident in the stacking of the three curves.

Some of the research areas are labelled as examples. We see that where corruption is most widespread, in Ekpoma (Nigeria) and Boffa (Guinea), the prevalence of migration aspirations is also very high. At slightly lower levels of corruption, poverty helps explain why migration aspirations are rare in Awe (Nigeria), and Moyale (Ethiopia), where overall levels of poverty are higher, while they are pervasive in Enfidha (Tunisia), where poverty is lower.

In areas where experiences of corruption are minimal, migration aspirations are nevertheless substantial in some of the wealthier areas, such as São Nicolau (Cabo Verde), while migration aspirations are minimal in Keti Bandar (Pakistan), which is very poor.

Seeing the role of corruption in the context of poverty reveals how strongly corruption can stifle people's faith in creating local futures. The interaction between the two also clearly shows how different pieces of the puzzle fit together to explain variation in migration aspirations.

So far, we have compared communities with each other and show that overall corruption levels matter. But what about differences in individual experiences of corruption? The data show that, among people who *have not* been expected to pay a bribe, 23% have resolute migration aspirations. In contrast, the prevalence among those who *have* been expected to pay a bribe is 33%. Such a difference in migration aspirations holds true for almost every research area.[86]

Resolute migration aspirations are more common among people who experience corruption

33%

23%

Have been expected to pay a bribe

Have not been expected to pay a bribe

Data source: MIGNEX survey dataset (restricted variant, v1).

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86   The figures are based on cross-tabulation, including only the 17 research areas where at least 10% of people have been expected to pay a bribe. In 15 of these areas, the prevalence of resolute migration aspirations is higher among people who have been expected to pay a bribe (between 3 and 21 percentage points higher) compared to those who have not been expected to pay a bribe.

The public sector affects people's lives and plans

Corruption is one aspect of how the public sector functions and is experienced by people. The broader picture is captured by the concepts of governance, public service provision and trust in institutions. This cluster of influences is important, and it is remarkably consistent in explaining where we find widespread migration aspirations and large migration outflows – more so than poverty and livelihoods, environmental stresses, or insecurity and conflict.[87]

Again, we can shift perspective from differences between research areas to differences between individuals who live in the same research area. People who express distrust in the institutions that are supposed to provide safety and justice – the police, the courts and the armed forces – are more likely to have resolute migration aspirations.[88] The same is true for people who are dissatisfied with the quality of health and education services.

However, dissatisfaction with the local or central government has a smaller effect on migration aspirations. This is understandable since people who are dissatisfied can hope for a change of government. This is in contrast with hope for an overhaul of a dysfunctional and underfunded justice system or health sector, which might seem less realistic and therefore which might not ward off migration as a response.

> *"People who express distrust in the institutions that are supposed to provide safety and justice – the police, the courts and the armed forces – are more likely to have resolute migration aspirations."*

As explained in Chapter 3, the factors that sway migration aspirations among the 13,000 survey respondents in aggregate do not have this effect in every research area. Only in Dialokoro (Guinea) and Behsud (Afghanistan) is it clear that people who disapprove of the government are more likely to have migration aspirations.[89] On the other hand, distrust in institutions and dissatisfaction with public services make a difference in a greater number of areas.

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87   Based on qualitative comparative analysis; see Czaika and Weisner (2023).
88   Based on multivariate regression analyses; see Carling et al. (2023). Trust in the three institutions is combined with perception (not experience) of corruption to create a composite index.
89   See Carling et al. (2023). (Please note, the MIGNEX survey was conducted shortly before the Taliban's takeover of the Afghan government.)

7 Migration fosters migration, at multiple levels

Migration experiences and transnational networks are key predictors of migration aspirations and preparations at the individual level. At the community level, social norms surrounding migration drive aspirations and aid in translating those aspirations into migration outcomes.

Image: São Nicolau (Cabo Verde). Jørgen Carling for MIGNEX.

Experiences and networks shape migration aspirations

Migration experiences and migrant networks are key in all aspects of migration: they influence decision-making, direct migration flows, shape settlement and integration patterns, and generate and sustain transnational links.[90] Figure 19 highlights how different migration experiences and network variables from the MIGNEX survey are associated with resolute migration aspirations.

At the individual level, having an experience of international migration has the largest effect. It can influence thoughts and feelings about migrating again in the future. This might be because migration feels more familiar and less frightening, or because of a better understanding of how the process works and how migration aspirations can be converted into actual migration.[91] We find that those who have previously lived in a high-income country are, on average, 8.5% more likely to have migration aspirations compared to those who have not.[92]

Seeing other people migrate can be an inspiration and a source of information about migration. In this sense, previous or current migrants may serve as role models. Migrants' display of success – whether through gifts, houses or flashy appearances during return visits – strengthens this effect. But we find that even being aware of someone's *failed* migration attempt is generally associated with stronger migration aspirations, as shown in Chapter 3. This indicates that such awareness does not deter migration.

> *"Seeing other people migrate can be an inspiration and a source of information about migration. In this sense, previous or current migrants may serve as role models."*

Having transnational ties – active relationships with people who currently live abroad – can stimulate migration in additional ways. These contacts are often crucial in helping with travel costs, paperwork, employment, accommodation or other aspects of migration. Such ties can significantly increase the likelihood that individuals wish to migrate by reducing (perceived) risks and costs.[93]
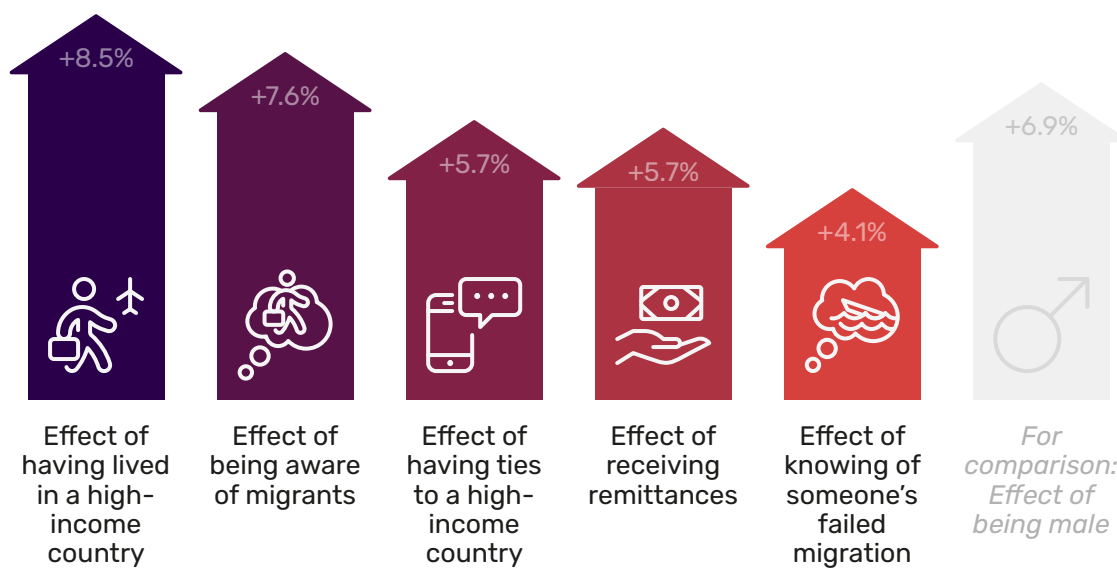
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90   Massey and España (1987).
91   Aslany et al. (2021).
92   Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023).
93   Sha (2021).

Figure 19. Effects of migration experiences and networks on resolute migration aspirations

+8.5%	+7.6%	+5.7%	+5.7%	+4.1%	+6.9%
Effect of having lived in a high-income country	Effect of being aware of migrants	Effect of having ties to a high-income country	Effect of receiving remittances	Effect of knowing of someone's failed migration	*For comparison: Effect of being male*

Data source: MIGNEX survey (restricted variant, v1). Based on multivariate regression analysis in Carling et al. (2023).

Some communities have a culture of migration

Beyond individual decision-making, drivers of migration can also amalgamate at a societal level and compel individuals to consider migrating, even in the absence of personal migrant networks.[94] This kind of cultural imprint leads to migration becoming a self-perpetuating norm, as the 'thing to do'.[95]

Such a phenomenon has been referred to as a **culture of migration**, composed of social practices, institutions and cultural beliefs that render out-migration natural and desirable.[96] As an early elaboration of the concept put it, 'migration becomes deeply ingrained into the repertoire of people's behaviours, and values associated with migration become part of the community's values'.[97] But also on a more practical level, a culture of migration is part of the social dimension that sustains the migration infrastructure, as explained in Chapter 1.

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94   Massey (1990).
95   De Haas (2010b).
96   Galam (2015); Horvath (2008); Cohen and Sirkeci (2011).
97   Massey et al. (1993: 452–453).

Drawing on descriptions in the literature, we have used the MIGNEX survey to devise a new way to measure a culture of migration.[98] In Keti Bandar (Pakistan), there is almost no sign of a culture of migration. At the other extreme, the research areas in Cabo Verde and Tunisia have a very strong culture of migration. Most research areas fall somewhere in between: there are elements of a culture of migration, but not to a degree that engulfs the whole community.
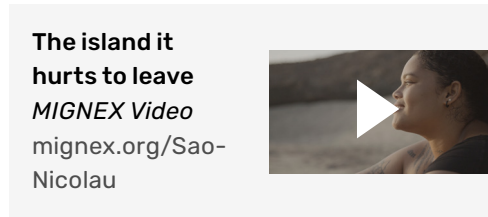
Figure 20 shows how the strength of a culture of migration varies across the research areas. It also displays the proportion of people in each area who have resolute migration aspirations, as defined in Chapter 2. There is a clear trend that more people want to leave areas where the culture of migration is stronger, in addition to the effects of migration experiences and networks shown in Figure 19.

The island it hurts to leave
MIGNEX Video
mignex.org/Sao-Nicolau

Figure 20. **Culture of migration and migration aspirations, by research area**
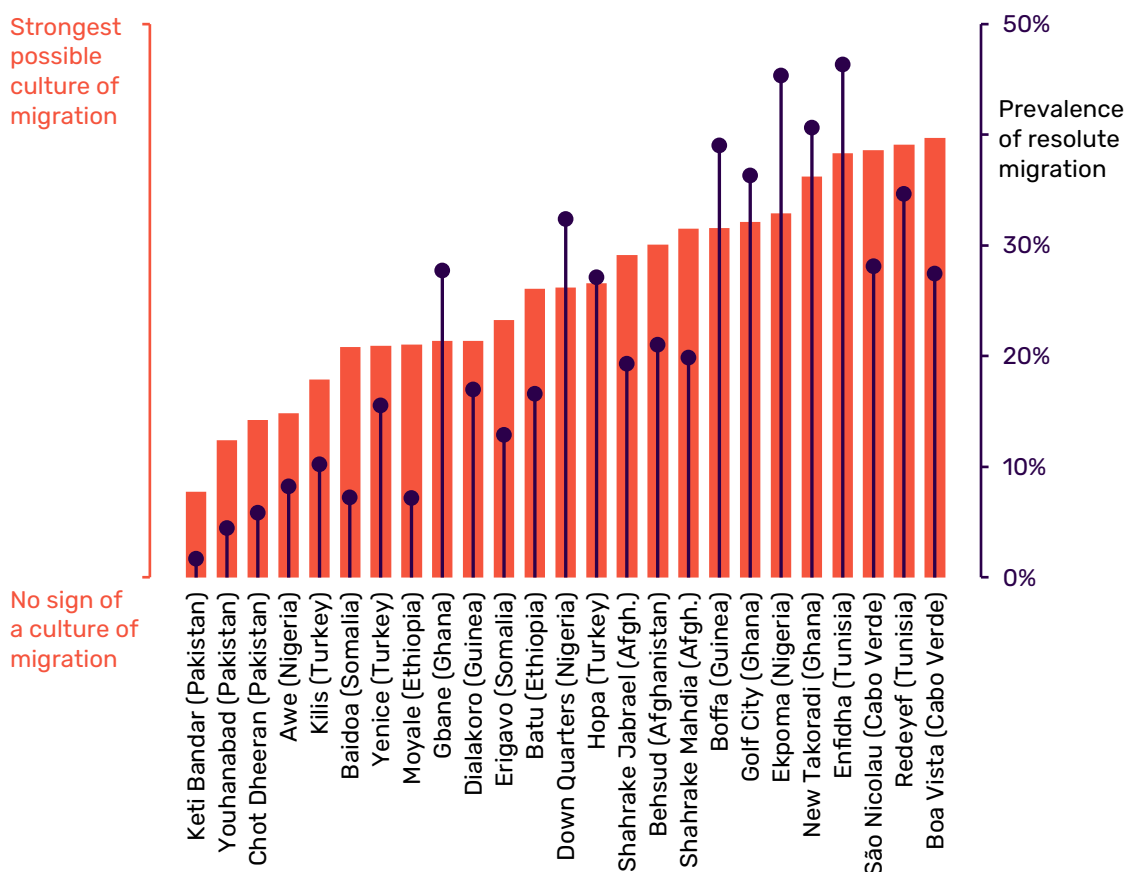
Data source: MIGNEX survey. See Carling et al. (2023) for definition of variables.

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98   The measure is based on the criteria that out-migration must: (1) be an established phenomenon, (2) continue to be relatively widespread, (3) be seen as a normal part of a life course, and (4) be viewed positively. See Carling et al. (2023) for details.

Whether the area has a culture of migration – that is, societies where out-migration has become established in institutions and values – has the largest effect on migration aspirations of all variables tested in the MIGNEX project. A stronger migration culture within the research area is associated with a 25% increase in the prevalence of resolute migration aspirations.[99] With this, we are able to quantify a common finding in the migration literature that has, to date, been rarely studied in a comparative or quantitative way.

People migrate because other people migrate

Migration experiences, transnational networks and cultures of migration not only shape migration aspirations. They are also the most important determinants of migration preparations and migration outcomes. This is because people can draw on these networks and experiences to seek out information and resources for migration. This is sometimes called 'cumulative causation', with migration being sustained by past migration.[100]

More specifically, migration-related networks are a source of financial resources and they facilitate migration in other ways too.[101] When individual networks expand with each new migrant, the result is an increase in information and resources, and a decrease in the economic, social and psychological costs of migration. In turn, this encourages further migration.

New Takoradi (Ghana)

Built for those displaced by the expansion of an industrial port, New Takoradi, Ghana, is a densely populated settlement covering a nearby hill. Migration aspirations are high as many young adults struggle to make a living. Most people (82%) have family or friends living abroad, and the vast majority have regular contact with them. Almost half of young adults live in households that receive remittances, but this is rarely the main source of income. Beyond the household, collective remittances from diaspora members fund the annual Takoradi carnival, *Ankos*. Diaspora members pick the characters and fund the production of costumes, often named after European and American destinations. The transnational dimension of the festival is a particular manifestation of the culture of migration in New Takoradi.

Source: Kandilige et al. (2022).

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99   Regression analyses in Carling et al. (2023).
100   Massey (1990).
101   The QCA results highlighted in Chapter 3 show it is not just financial means that shape migration outcomes. Lower levels of poverty need to co-exist with a well-established migration culture to contribute to migration aspirations as well as to out-migration.

Comparing migration drivers across research areas, we find that the combination of migration aspirations and migration culture most commonly drives higher levels of out-migration.[102] As illustrated in Figure 21, further factors play a role, but not as prominently across all three pathways.

Figure 21. The combination of drivers and migration aspirations that contribute to migration intensity
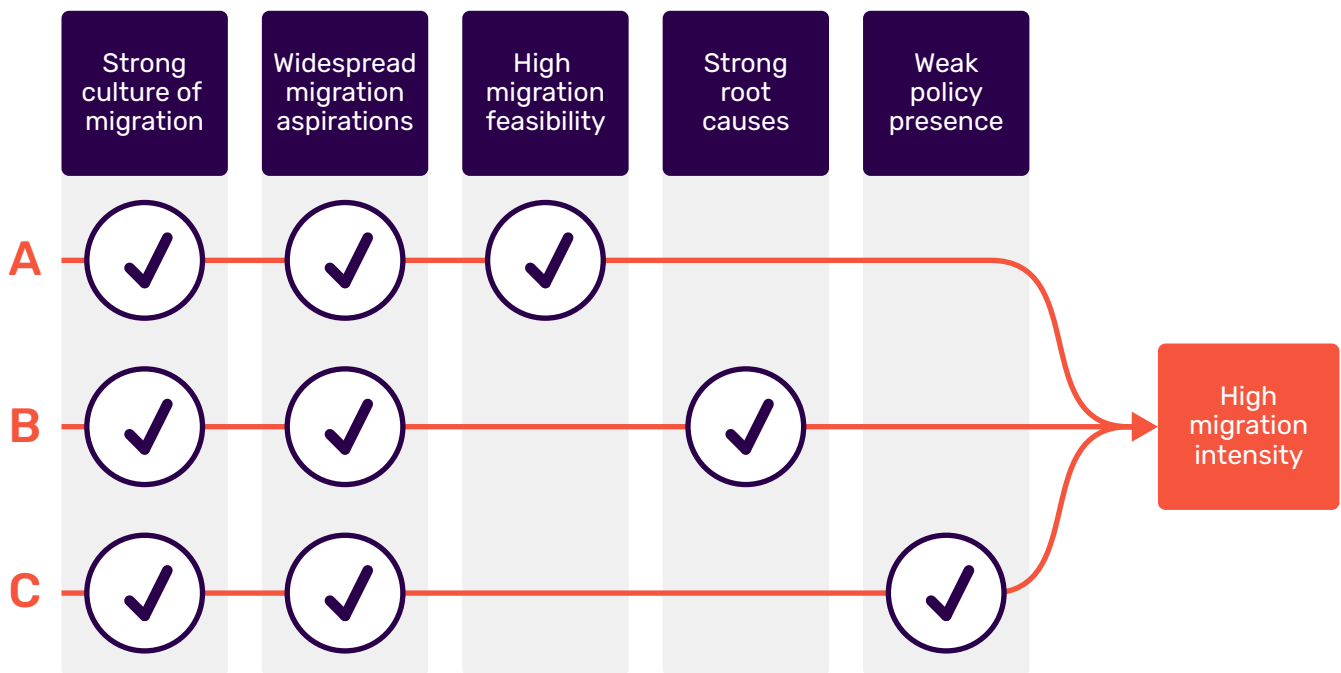
Note: 'Migration feasibility' represents perceptions of the ease or difficulty of international migration to wealthier countries. 'Root causes' is a combination of poverty and poor livelihoods, insecurity and conflict, weak governance and public service, and environmental stress. 'Low level of policy interventions' denotes the relative absence of micro-level international aid and migration-information campaigns. For the measurement and definition of each factor see Czaika and Weisner (2023).

Source: The authors.

This underlines that migration aspirations are a key first step to realise out-migration.[103] However, aspirations alone are not sufficient; they need to be combined with a strong culture of migration (including transnational ties) as a facilitating factor. And because the self-perpetuating effects of a migration culture are outside the control of policy-makers, it is therefore crucial to consider the impacts of past and present migration in analyses of the causes of migration.

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102   Results of the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). See Czaika and Weisner (2023).
103   See Chapter 1; Carling and Schewel (2018).

Policy implications

MIGNEX research provides new insights into the causes of migration, drawing on extensive data and analysis from key origin and transit countries for migration to Europe. These insights can be used to understand the potential and the limits of policy to address the causes of migration.[104]

The research sheds light on the reality of migration for many people across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Most people do not, and do not want to, migrate. Moreover, when migration does takes place, it is mostly short distance and temporary.

One finding that matters for policy development is that the drivers of migration are remarkably inconsistent. Factors that help explain migration from a birds-eye perspective across communities are often insignificant in many specific contexts.

In policy-making, the logic of 'addressing the root causes of migration' implies a win-win situation: improving lives in countries of origin will lower migration aspirations and reduce irregular migration. But this is only partially true. For instance, our findings indicate that reducing poverty and raising educational levels might, for the most part, *increase* desires to migrate. Reducing corruption, on the other hand, might improve lives and also strengthen people's confidence in building local futures rather than seeking opportunities elsewhere. Yet, this does not make poverty reduction and educational expansion any less important.

Many of the determinants of migration are difficult, or even impossible, to address through policy measures. For example, our findings reinforce the importance of migration networks and experiences on migration aspirations and intensity, and in particular the importance and lasting influence of a strong migration culture.

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104 Other MIGNEX publications address policy dimensions in greater depth. They include Vargas-Silva et al. (2023), on addressing the root causes of migration.

Some drivers can be addressed, but it takes time. Scarce livelihoods drive migration aspirations. Therefore, effective and well-designed labour market and livelihood interventions could – eventually – ensure access to more reliable livelihoods in origin communities. However, it could take a long time for conditions in origin countries to improve to a level where international migration is no longer desirable.[105]

Addressing corruption and building strong institutions can to some extent reduce migration aspirations. Yet, corruption tends to be an incredibly protracted issue across different sectors and institutions. Furthermore, where configurations of power and capabilities do not support a rule of law, anti-corruption efforts are likely to have limited results.[106] This means that short-term or sector-specific measures are unlikely to have a sustained or large enough effect that would stop corruption being one of the root causes of migration.[107]

Policy-makers should pay attention to the broader and unintended consequences of policies put in place to address the causes of migration. For instance, funds spent through the European Union Trust Fund for Africa to reduce migration to Europe have been shown to exacerbate poor governance and corruption.[108] Such policies thus have the potential to *increase* migration aspirations, instead of reducing them.

Likewise, policies that tackle the drivers of migration often also pose serious ethical dilemmas. Alleviating the hardships that might also result in migration is important, for the wellbeing and development of human beings. But if migration and development policy objectives are increasingly intertwined, policy efforts will focus on the hardships that appear to drive migration, as opposed to those hardships that matter the most to *all* people who are affected and not just those seen as potential migrants.[109]

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105   Vargas-Silva et al. (2023).
106   Khan and Roy (2022).
107   Vargas-Silva et al. (2023).
108   Boersma et al. (2020).
109   Vargas-Silva et al. (2023).

Overall, tailored policy responses are needed to address the causes of migration and to support communities in origin and transit countries. Policies need to relate to the specific local area they are targeting and be based on an in-depth understanding of the specific migration and development dynamics at play there. Finally, integrating awareness of commonplace mobilities in policy, and facilitating local, domestic and regional migration, would support development and migration policy aims by better reflecting local realities.[110]

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110   Erdal et al. (2023c).

Concluding remarks

Our findings represent new insights on the causes of migration. Drawing upon rich data from 26 communities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, we better understand the local dynamics that lead to migration. The MIGNEX research helps consolidate a long-standing body of academic research on the causes of migration and provides scientific context for high-profile policy agendas on 'migration management' and 'tackling the root causes of migration'.

In all research areas, migration features as one of many options in life, as one possible pathway to address broader life aspirations. Consequently, migration should be viewed as part of broader life processes and development.

The migration that takes place is mostly short-distance, circular and temporary. The prominence of *international* migration – as an actual phenomenon and as an aspiration – varies greatly. But in more than half of the research areas, most people have family members, relatives or friends abroad – which is a remarkable reflection of the globalisation of migration.

There is not one specific cause or even set of causes of migration. It is the interplay of multiple drivers that explains migration processes. Individual characteristics and perceptions matter as much as what is happening in the community. Moreover, the mix of drivers varies across individuals and communities. Therefore, our focus on research areas, instead of on countries, has been key in showing how the drivers of migration function.

Each migration driver can work in contrary ways. For example, being unemployed is associated with stronger migration aspirations in some locations and weaker migration aspirations in others. This is because most determinants do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact with other determinants to shape migration aspirations and other migration outcomes.

By providing the first formal definition of the 'root causes of migration' and taking a precise analytical approach, we enable more meaningful and deliberate use of this politically salient term. We find that some root causes do indeed drive migration aspirations, though they represent only a proportion of the drivers that explain migration. As such, our analysis points to the futility of and the ethical dilemmas in managing migration by focusing on addressing root causes.

While it is a well-established fact that migration fosters migration, we add to the understanding of the processes at work here. A culture of migration at the level of the community interacts with migration-related networks of individuals. Both can provide inspiration and information to prospective migrants; personal networks are also a source of practical and financial support. Remarkably, knowing of other people's failed migration attempts – such as being deported, stranded or dying en route – also tends to increase migration aspirations.

Ultimately, migration is shaped by many factors, all at once. It can be motivated by desires for learning, experience and adventure, irrespective of current levels of welfare or security. Therefore, while for some migration may be a problem to be managed, for others it is an opportunity for change. By integrating a diverse range of causes, and their combinations, MIGNEX research contributes to understanding how migration arises and unfolds in different contexts.

Publications and data

MIGNEX research is documented through more than 80 publications across five types within the MIGNEX series. In addition, analyses are further developed as articles in peer-reviewed journals. The range of formats ensure that insights are available to diverse audiences, including policy makers, practitioners, students, and researchers.

Project publications are available at mignex.org/publications.

14 MIGNEX Handbook Chapters contain foundations, procedures and documentation of the research process and the data that have been collected

26 MIGNEX Case Study Briefs present migration and development dynamics in each of the 26 research areas

29 MIGNEX Background Papers contain development of methods, reviews of migration-related policies and empirical analyses across a range of research questions

10 MIGNEX Policy Briefs highlight selected findings and point out their relevance for policy on migration and development

3 MIGNEX Reports synthesize selected insights from across the more specific and technical analyses

Journal articles based on MIGNEX research contain analyses further developed for peer reviewed journals

Raw data from the survey, focus group discussions and policy reviews will be available for secondary analyses when the project ends. The data have been anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of research participants.

Data and documentation are available at zenodo.org/communities/mignex.

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