



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

An exploration of migration aspirations and development interventions of refugees, other migrants, and nationals in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mali and Turkey.

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INTRODUCTION

Significant investments have been made in recent years towards humanitarian and development interventions that aim to reduce migration flows from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Such interventions are vast and have included cash transfer programmes to refugees in near hosting countries, such as the European Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Turkey, programmes aimed at ‘tackling the root causes of migration’ such as livelihood and youth employment interventions in Mali, and information campaigns aimed at reducing irregular migration. Given the diversity of interventions it is difficult to make clear conclusions regarding the impact of development interventions on migration aspirations and realized movements. Overall, there is mixed evidence of the impact of development interventions on migration movements and migration aspirations.

Work package six of the ADMiGOV project aimed at exploring the relationship between migration aspirations and development interventions in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mali and Turkey including Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon, Afghan refugees in Turkey, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, migrants in Mali, and nationals in Ethiopia and Mali. All of the countries for this research have been significant recipients of funding since 2015 through initiatives such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the EU-Turkey Statement.

This policy brief explores the relationship between development interventions and migration aspirations. We have defined **development interventions** from a human development perspective that is multidimensional and aimed at capabilities enhancement. A development intervention is a “result-oriented action aimed at improving people’s quality of life. The agents initiating the development intervention can be insiders or outsiders, civil society institutions, governments, individuals or small groups” (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013). Interventions are actions that are being implemented.

Migrant Decision-Making Processes refers to the full complexity of factors that influence individuals' mobility decisions in all directions including internal migration, onwards international migration, and return migration. **Migration aspirations** are viewed along a continuum (Carling, 2019) and we consider aspirations in three stages: 1) a consideration to move to another country; and 2) having a concrete plan to migrate. We also consider if aspirations have changed from prior to the COVID 19 epidemic in each country to the time of interview.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 created several implementation challenges for the research resulting in less comparable data than the initial research design. However, high level findings from across the countries still present key insights that may be of interest in policy development.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Diversity of Access to Development Assistance

Respondents had very different access to development assistance across the four countries. In Lebanon refugees had the most access to assistance; Eighty-nine percent of respondents had ever received development assistance, which was most commonly food aid that was essential for the respondents survival, followed by education cash transfers. Despite the high prevalence of development assistance, respondents reported that the assistance received did not improve their quality of life as it was not enough and they could barely afford food. For example, one respondent stated: "It didn't change my quality of life. I feel like their support is not enough because everything is expensive now" (Trovato, Al-Akl, and Ali, 2021, p. 33).

In Turkey, 50% of respondents had ever received access to a form of development assistance, of which 54 percent of Syrians had ever received access, compared to 44 percent of Afghans. Similarly to Lebanon, respondents reported in the qualitative interviews that received development assistance has relatively little impact on their lives.

In Mali, Malian residents were the most likely to have received some form of development assistance at 49 percent, compared to Malian returnees at 45 percent. Migrants in Mali were unlikely to have ever received assistance in Mali at 8 percent. Most qualitative interview respondents acknowledged that the development assistance does have a positive impact, however it is not enough to sustainably support them and is a crisis response. One respondent stated: "*this aid was certainly useful at one point, but it cannot change my way of life, let alone that of the communities, it was little*".

Finally, in Ethiopia, only 3.5 percent of Ethiopians and 13.5 percent of Eritreans interviewed had received development assistance. Eritreans had most commonly received assistance when in refugee camps in the Tigray region. At the time of the research, however, most Eritreans were no longer in refugee camps and few respondents currently received any form of development assistance.

The diversity of access to development assistance reflects a global focus on supporting Syrian refugees at the time of research, wherein Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey were the most likely to be the recipients of development assistance. At the same time however, the amount of development assistance received in these countries is far less than needed. For example, in Lebanon, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan received 63% of identified need in 2020 (Trovato, Al-Akl, and Ali, 2021). Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, by contrast, had far less likelihood of receiving development assistance and migrants in Mali had an even lower likelihood.

Migration Aspirations

All respondents were asked if at this time they planned to migrate onwards, stay in the current country, or, where relevant, to return to their country of origin. The results show that refugees and

other migrants are the most likely to plan to migrate onwards with Afghans in Turkey (64%), migrants in Mali (61%), Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia (53%), and Syrian refugees in Lebanon all having more than half of respondents seeking to migrate onwards. Migrants in Mali were the most likely to consider return at 14%, whereas Syrian, Afghan, and Eritrean refugees were highly unlikely to plan to return. It is noteworthy that in Turkey, Syrian and Afghan refugees were asked ideally, if they had the opportunity, where they would like to live, and 11% of Syrian respondents said Syria and 8% of Afghans said Afghanistan. This shows a higher preference for return if conditions allowed it.

The reasons for aspiring to migrate varied in the different contexts, but as per previous research on refugee and other migrants' decision making was often influenced by multiple factors including poor living conditions, lack of education, lack of employment opportunities, and for refugees' uncertainty regarding their legal status and rights and fear of and experiences of discrimination in the current host country. Overall, it is unsurprising that refugees had a fairly high aspiration to move onwards from the current country.

COVID-19 and Compounding Crisis

The research took place either during or shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of respondents did not report that COVID-19 significantly changed their overall aspiration. Some respondents did say that they did not move during COVID-19 because it was too difficult, therefore their planned migration was delayed.

At the same time, these countries have also experienced significant crisis in recent years that may impact on migration aspirations and realized movements. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, in most of our case countries other crisis' were simultaneously occurring, creating an environment of compounded crisis in each location. Evidence has now aptly demonstrated that "the COVID-19 crisis has significantly exposed existing fragilities and exacerbated inequalities at every level" (UNDP, 2020). In Ethiopia this is the current civil war and several environmental crisis of locusts and drought. Mali has been the most stable in a comparative perspective of the countries in terms of not having a new crisis emerge, however, is still classified by the World Bank as a medium-intensity conflict country where long-standing conflict has continued for several years. Lebanon has been at the forefront of the Syria crisis since 2011 and since 2019 has faced a severe economic crisis placing the country on the brink of collapse and being a key case example of compounded crisis. Finally, Turkey has also been at the forefront of the Syrian crisis, the Afghan refugee ongoing crisis, and has faced its own economic and political crisis' in recent years. Resultantly, each country faces compounding crisis of conflict, refugee hosting or being a transit country for irregular migration, and economic challenges.

It is therefore unsurprising that the COVID-19 pandemic itself was not the most formidable crisis affecting the lives of respondents, although the collateral impacts due to COVID-19 were identified including inflation and job loss. In Ethiopia, inflation was identified by both refugees and Ethiopians as the most important factor influencing their life at the moment. Inflation in Ethiopia is a result of both COVID-19 and the war. In both Turkey and Ethiopia, job loss was reported as a critical factor influencing respondents, and more so for refugees than Eritreans.

The results reflect and bring attention to the increased complexity of global issues and for further research to explore and understand linkages between compounding crisis and migration. As the number of displaced people reaches the highest level ever recorded, the continuing conflicts are protracted and unresolved for refugee populations that continue to aspire to migrate onwards from host countries.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results suggest three core policy implications and recommendations:

1. **Refugees** – Following from the findings of the ADMIGOV project in WP6, this work package provides further evidence of the daily struggles of refugees in Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Turkey. There is a continued pressing need for more daily assistance and long-term solutions. Refugees aspiring to migrate from these countries do so due to poor conditions, which are not mitigated by assistance received. Assistance received by refugees in Turkey and Lebanon provides a bare minimum to prevent starvation.
 - The criteria to receive cash assistance for refugees should be extended to include more refugees that are also vulnerable.
 - The cash stipend must be adjusted to reflect current devaluations and cost of living so that consumption remains steady.

2. **Return** – Relating to ADMIGOV work package 2 on Exit, return is a central concern amongst refugee populations in Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Turkey. All refugees were asked if they aspired to return, and there were very low aspirations for return across these groups. This reflects the protracted nature of these crisis and the need for permanent solutions.
 - International funders, the EU, as well as national authorities should not encourage refugees into voluntary return programs without fully informing the potential returnees of the associated risks. The right to non-refoulement must be respected amongst refugees.

3. **Development Funding and Migration Aspirations** – In line with the *Mid-term Evaluation of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa 2015-2019* (Disch et al., 2020) the EU should be highly cautious in expecting development interventions from the EUTF to prevent migration aspirations to the EU. Development funding from the EU should be targeted to development needs. The ability of these instruments to impact migration aspirations is questionable.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

In WP6 the ADMIGOV team sought to address the following two research questions: 1) Under what conditions are migration decision making processes influenced by development interventions? 2) To what extent do different migration decision making factors shape migration decisions? The initial research design of mapping development interventions in each location, then determining precise sites for data collection, and finally conducting in person surveys, clearly became unfeasible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Resultantly, each location team had to adjust their methodology to work within the local context and restrictions in each location. Table 1 provides a resulting overview of the methodology used in each country context.

Table 1: Summary Overview of Methods per Country

	Ethiopia	Lebanon	Mali	Turkey
Recruitment	Existing Listing with Telephone Numbers	Facilitated by Danish Refugee Council Lebanon, based on listing of residents in informal tented settlements	Interlocutors and respondent driven sampling	Facebook and Interlocutors
Questionnaire Method	Phone Interview	WhatsApp or Phone Interview	WhatsApp or Phone Interview	On-line Survey, Phone Interview,

				or in-person survey
Questionnaire	Standardized and country specific questions	Standardized and country specific questions	Standardized and country specific questions	Standardized and country specific questions
Follow-up Interviews	Phone or in-person if possible	Phone or in-person if possible	Phone or in-person if possible	Virtual or in-person if possible

Table 2 provides an overview of the survey data collection, wherein a total of 2698 questionnaires were completed, of which 1897 with refugees and other migrants, and 801 with nationals.

Table 2: Overview of Survey Data Collection

Mali			Turkey		Lebanon	Ethiopia	
Malian residents	Malian returnees	Non-Malians	Refugees (Syrian)	Refugees (Afghan)	Refugees (Syrian)	Ethiopian	Refugees (Eritrean)
239	128	217	550	414	185	434	531

Table 3 provides an overview of the qualitative interviews conducted. In total, 168 qualitative interviews were conducted, of which 138 with refugees and other migrants and 20 with nationals.

Table 3: Overview of Qualitative Interviews

Mali			Turkey		Lebanon	Ethiopia	
Malian residents	Malian returnees	Non-Malians	Refugees (Syrian)	Refugees (Afghan)	Refugees (Syrian)	Ethiopian	Refugees (Eritrean)
9	21	15	25	20	30		48

Considering the multiple challenges of conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic and additional crisis's such as the war in Ethiopia and the Beirut Port explosion in Lebanon. The resulting samples in each country have been adequate for an analysis of each case. Regrettably, although consistent questions were used in each country context the diverse sampling methodologies mean that the results are not comparable across the country contexts. The consistent findings in each country case are thus presented as the key findings.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME ADVANCING ALTERNATIVE MIGRATION GOVERNANCE (ADMIGOV).

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FUNDING SCHEME

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DURATION

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BUDGET

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WEBSITE

<https://admigov.eu/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FURTHER READING

Katie Kuschminder and Iman Rajabzadeh (2022) [Migration Aspirations and Development Interventions in Compounding Crisis](#). AdMiGov Deliverable 6.5, Maastricht: University of Maastricht.

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