

# Trends, factors and risks of unaccompanied child migration from Ethiopia through the eastern migration routes

## Research Report



Ethiopian and Somali refugees and migrants waiting for smugglers to take them across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. Credit: UNHCR/Alixandra Fazzina.

**Save the Children Ethiopia**

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## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Executive summary and recommendations</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
1.1	Executive summary	Page 4
1.2	Recommendations	Page 7
<b>2.</b>	<b>Introducing the migration context</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
2.1	The migratory context	
2.2	Institutional and programmatic context	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Research Framework</b>	<b>Page 21</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Methodology, definitions &amp; limitations</b>	<b>Page 23</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Findings and analysis with key takeaways</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Flow volume and demographic characteristics</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Characteristics and trends of irregular migration (east)</b>	<b>Page 34</b>
5.2.1	Popularity of the eastern route	
5.2.2	Destination choices	
5.2.3	Duration intentions	
5.2.4	Use of smugglers	
5.2.5	Use of technology	
5.2.6	Returns of child migrants	
5.2.7	Re-migration of child migrants	
5.2.8	Resorting to irregularity	
5.2.9	Risks and protection factors of the eastern route	
5.2.10	Gendered conditions and risks	
5.2.11	The impact of Covid-19	
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Perceptions of success, failure &amp; migration ‘culture’</b>	<b>Page 50</b>
5.3.1	Migration ‘success’ rates	
5.3.2	Impacts of migration ‘failure’	
5.3.3	The impact of success	
5.3.4	‘culture of migration’ and notions of success	
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Perception of risk</b>	<b>Page 59</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Migration decisions and root causes</b>	<b>Page 64</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Financial and social aspirations of migrants</b>	<b>Page 70</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>Assistance, services, and responses</b>	<b>Page 72</b>
5.7.1	Assistance during the migration journey	
5.7.2	Parents and children’s perspectives	
5.7.3	Government stakeholder perspectives	
5.7.4	Existing areas of engagement	
5.7.5	Suggested interventions / responses	
<b>6.</b>	<b>National and cross border policy</b>	<b>Page 80</b>
6.1	Selected governance highlights characterising Ethiopia’s migration context	
6.2	The current governance context relating to migration	
6.3	National & sub-national migration governance mechanisms	
6.4	Migrant rights and services	
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>Page 88</b>

### **Annexes: tools (attached separately)**

1. Questionnaire for returnee child migrants
2. Questionnaire for would be child migrants
3. Semi structured interview format for FGDs with returnee child migrants
4. Semi structured interview format for FGDs with would-be child migrants
5. Semi structured interview format for FGDs with parents of would-be child migrants
6. Semi structured interview format for FGDs with parents of would-be child migrants
7. Semi structured interview format for Key Informant Interviews
8. Key Informant Interview participant list

# 1. Executive Summary and recommendations

## 1.1 Executive summary

This research examines **the trends, factors and risks of unaccompanied child migration from Ethiopia through the eastern migration routes out of Ethiopia** towards Djibouti, Somaliland and on to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. It uses a mixture of newly collected (2020) quantitative and qualitative data with extensive reference to other recent data and secondary sources to offer new and relevant insights relevant to the migration of Ethiopian children from the Dire Dawa area of Eastern Ethiopia, close to Djibouti.<sup>1</sup> The many findings that emerge from this research are summarised in this executive summary and, with the elaboration in the main report, multiple quotes and the ‘take away’ summaries in each section, provide the basis for recommendations offered below (See section 1.1).

### Flow volume and demographic characteristics

The eastern migration routes are not new – they have seen a high number of migrants and some refugees making their journey out of Ethiopia for at least a decade, many of them children. In recent years, and before the Covid-19 lockdowns and border restrictions, the numbers were escalating. In terms of the **flow volume and demographic characteristics**, data available suggests that on average approximately 19,000 Ethiopian child migrants entered Yemen in 2018 and 2019 annually – representing 1,580 per month. Approximately 7,200 Ethiopian migrant children use the Obock route (via Djibouti) annually or 600 per month, many starting in the Dire Dawa area or passing through Dire Dawa. Among adult Ethiopian migrants the proportions are that men are almost three times more numerous than women, but amongst child migrants, boys and girl proportions are closer and were almost at parity in 2019, suggesting the number of girls joining the flows were rising before 2020 Covid-19 restrictions. It remains comparatively unusual to see very young children on the move along the eastern route, the typical ages range is 14-17 years, although there are cases of unaccompanied children much younger in both Djibouti and Yemen. A disproportionate number of children migrating come from female-headed households that self-identify as ‘quite’ poor or ‘very’ poor in our survey. Only a small minority say they live ‘adequately’. Education levels intersect with poverty and migration - typically those children migrating or intending to migrate were found to have low educational attainment, high rates of school drop-out and low employment prospects in Ethiopia where poverty line wage levels or lower appear to be the best they can expect to earn.

### Characteristics and trends relevant to the eastern irregular route

In terms of the **characteristics and trends relevant to the eastern irregular route**, this study finds that the eastern route out of Ethiopia - with Dire Dawa as a key migration hub - remains the most popular irregular migration route out of Ethiopia. Although most using the eastern route aim for Saudi Arabia (adults and children), a significant proportion of children from the Eastern Hararghe and Dire Dawa area aim to reach Djibouti itself. This appears to be especially true of the younger ones. Very few are successful in meeting their migration ambitions in Djibouti, if they cannot find casual work for very low

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<sup>1</sup> See the methodology section for the precise areas where the research was conducted and the mixed methods used and the number of Children, parents and key informants who participated in the research.

pay they may beg or shine shoes, clean cars etc and often sleep on the streets or beaches. Very few child migrants aim to stay abroad permanently, most are looking for temporary migration but due to their age and other reasons all fall into irregularity as children cannot legally apply for regular labour migration in Ethiopia.

While all of those crossing to Yemen and beyond use smugglers for some or all of their journey, many going to Djibouti do not use them, especially those using the train which runs through Dire Dawa across the border to Djibouti city. Children 'jump' the train and play 'cat and mouse' with border officials who regularly intercept children on the trains. Perhaps surprisingly, the research found that the ownership of phones and access to and use of social media is very low amongst child migrants both in terms of decision making and information gathering during their migration. Illustrative of the limited success of child migration, forced and voluntary return for child migrants is common and has been especially so in early 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. Covid-19 has had a big impact on flows out of Ethiopia and number of returns/deportations but should be seen as a temporary anomaly as the desire to migrate and underlying driver remains strong amongst children.

Generally, and before the Covid-19 restrictions, re-migration is very common (for adults as well as children returnees) and although most of those interviewed suggested they would not re-migrate, other evidence suggests re-migration is often a priority for returnees as their conditions on return are similar if not worse than before they left. The journey itself remains very risky and dangerous for all migrants but especially children and amongst children it is especially dangerous for girls. Although this is extensively documented in secondary literature this report offers detailed examples and quotes from participants in the research that illustrate the prevalence of abuse and severe protection deficits.

#### Perceptions of success, failure & the migration 'culture'

Amongst children interviewed for this study, **perceptions of success, failure & the migration 'culture'** are important aspects of migration decision-making. Discussions with both children and parents suggested that migration is closely linked to perceptions of success in communities in East Hararge and Dire Dawa, particularly amongst children who acutely feel the burden of poverty and have a sense of hopelessness about their present predicament and future. We found that the success rates of child migrants may be high in terms of getting into Djibouti but those who return having made money or who have avoided negative experiences and mistreatment are extremely few. Child migrants are not only traumatised by their experiences but also haunted by the failure of returning without success and often having increased their parents' or their own hardships.

Although child migrant returns are very common (forced or voluntary), general perceptions of migration 'failure' appears to be significantly out-shone by the few examples of migration 'success' (often adult) that act as important models for child migrants to follow. These perceptions combine with and are part of a pervasive *culture of migration* in the region and throughout Ethiopia that sees a confluence of social (including personal), sometime political and economic factors influencing migratory decisions. Nevertheless, although a variety of factors are cited in literature and other studies, those participating in this study stated they were very focused on income and financial accumulation – very few suggested they had migrated or would migrate for non-economic reasons or for migrations' sake alone. However, echoing findings in other studies, few children stated they were looking for permanent exodus from Ethiopia – for the majority the income-generating potential of migration was the sole aim and their preference would be to live in Ethiopia.

#### Perception of risk

One of the key aims of this research was to understand and gauge migrating children's **perception of risk**. We found that many child migrants consider success and failure (including whether they have had bad experiences on their journey) as a matter of 'fate' and 'luck' and 'chance' and not of bad decisions or the pervasiveness of risk. We also found that while there is widespread knowledge of the 'horror stories' of migration – the violations, privations and even deaths - there appears to be a disconnect between knowing these things and understanding that they are likely to actually happen.

Although there is a relatively high alignment between children's theoretical perception of risk and the reported actual experience of risk and danger (experienced and/or witnessed) as reported by returnees, a very high number of returnees stated the ground realities were far worse than what they expected. In retrospect, about two thirds of returnees consider they were unaware of the scale of dangers before they started their journey. Respondent child returnees stated that during migration children were 'highly' and 'very highly' exposed to many dangers and more at risk than adults and, as mentioned, girls faced different and higher risks than boys.

### Migration decisions and 'root causes'

Possibly surprising is the finding how unimportant social media and mainstream media has been in influencing children to migrate – by far the biggest influence on **migration decisions** appears to be returnees themselves, despite their stories of struggle, violations and 'failure'. Apart from returnees, the findings show that a secondary influence is friends and family *in Ethiopia* are together are a major influence on children's' decision to migrate. Friends and family outside Ethiopia also have a significant influence (but not smugglers) but perhaps less than might be expected.

To a very high degree, economic drivers dominate as the leading reason for wanting to migration, for children (as it does for adults in various alternative studies). There is a strong feeling of *compulsion* expressed by those child migrants interviewed (returnee and would-be). Non-economic and social drivers also play a role in migration decisions and expressions around what constitute the '**root causes**' and while it is understood that the interplay between economic and non-economic drivers can be complex, this study was not able to access the nuance and detail of such complexity. This is born out in the preoccupation by child migrants with their shame of poverty, their own and their parents struggle to survive, and their perception of the dire future prospects Ethiopia offers them.

However, looking at the gender disaggregation in the research, there are interesting findings concerning female child migrants – findings that diverge from the joint findings of combined data of boys and girls. While all girls interviewed in both categories confirmed that economic reasons for leaving were strong (100%), 'personal and/or family reasons' was felt to be high for 23 percent of would-be girls and 17 per cent of returnee girls. Also, the driving factor of the 'culture of migration' for boys is far stronger than it is for girls.

Apart from the central role of economic drivers in this research, no other significant drivers were offered by those who participated, although there are important influences and tipping points that influence child migrants; generally, these include peer pressure and persuasions and stories of smugglers and returnees, but this study was not able to find elaboration of protection deficits or social factors as a significant driver across all participants.

### Financial and social aspirations of migrants

Financial aspirations of child migrants are a strong motivating force and preoccupy much of the thinking and decision-making process for young migrants. Social aspirations encompass the desire to

be able to achieve social mobility as a result of the earnings and status of ‘successful’ migration. Financial aspirations are the corollary to economic driver that ‘push’ young migrants to migrate. When examining the **financial and social aspirations of child migrants** we found that their imagined earnings when abroad were not unrealistic - they correctly appreciate the huge wage differentials between Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia for menial work. However, extremely few - if any - child migrants attain these higher levels, especially if they go to Djibouti instead of Saudi Arabia.

The most common experience of child migrants is to return home empty handed often having sunk their families yet deeper into immiseration through selling assets as a necessary escape from kidnapping and being held to ransom etc. Social and financial aspirations of child migrants were found in this research to be overwhelmingly unmet through migration.

#### Assistance, services and responses

Generally, the perception of those participating in this research stated that **services and assistance** that are currently available in the dire Dawa region from both state or non-state sources, do not reach many families and/or child migrants either before, during or after migration. For most child migrants, shelter, food and water are needs that they place above others during migration itself, despite the fact some, if not many, encounter far more potentially severe experiences during their journey, beyond the need for shelter, food and water.

In terms of what could or should be done to reduce the desire of children to migrate, parents, children and key informants who participated offered the researchers a wide range of interventions or **responses** that they consider will reduce pressure on children to migrate – the most prominent focus on poverty alleviation and unemployment reduction (see section 5.7). Some feel the efforts should focus more on preventative activities instead of remedial.

#### National and cross-border policy

Finally, this research report offers a brief description and some insights into the institutional and programmatic context in Ethiopia for migration related interventions (section 2.2), as well as mapping of national and cross-border policy (section 6). In summary, Ethiopia has a complex and sometimes ambivalent relationship to migration and protecting the rights of its citizens abroad. Ethiopia is forced to balance its migration and citizens right’s ambitions (i.e. desire to protect its citizens abroad) with its delicate relationship with Saudi Arabia and the realities of diplomacy and international relations with rich neighbours in the Gulf. For the last decade or more, Ethiopia has tried to develop wide-ranging strategies and structures to address child migration and other irregular migration including human trafficking at a national level. The extent to which the efforts are child-sensitive and child-focused were not established in this research, nor to what level they are priorities at government level. Generally, the impression appears to be that despite Ethiopia’s efforts with regard to child migration - increasingly supported by international agencies and donors - the impact is felt weakly on the ground, whether in terms of remedial or preventative actions. Part of this is because the root causes of migration are closely aligned to wider intractable issues such as poverty, educational returns, social exclusion and traditional culture. The recommendations that follow seek to recognise these factors as important central causes of migration and offer potential route towards mitigating them.

## 1.2 Recommendations

These recommendations are primarily formed by the findings of the research and, in particular, what the researchers were told by the children interviewed, their parents and key informants (see section 5.7 for a wide range of ideas). They are also informed by secondary sources and special-subject understanding by Ravenstone of migration in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Where possible, the specific actions to be considered by Save the Children are stated. The recommendations are presented in three sections relating to; **programming, policy and advocacy** and **additional research**. Some of the recommendations offered are overlapping across categories and mutually reinforcing through repetition. Most recommendations relate to potential interventions *before* migration and also for those *returning* from migration. In the policy and advocacy section some recommendations are made for intervention *during* migration.

When considering recommendations, it is important to recognise that in general migration is driven by socioeconomic, cultural, governance and security factors that are often deeply entrenched in communities, regions and whole societies. Migration is not necessarily a negative phenomenon and has historically been a critical positive development factor for origin and destination countries, communities and individuals. Restricting, controlling, or diverting compulsions to migrate is often unsuccessful and/or often have other undesirable consequences in contexts where people feel they have few viable alternatives due to their existing conditions and opportunities. However, when viewed from a protection perspective and particularly when considering children on the move, the costs (financial, psychological, risks) of migration are seen to be high and often unforeseen and interventions can be seen to be both necessary and possible in terms of being in the best interest of children.

Finally, these recommendations below are predicated on the fact that regular international labour migration is not permissible for children under Ethiopian labour and education laws, therefore these recommendations do *not* offer suggestions to make cross-border child migration legal or safe by creating 'safer channels of migration'. Instead, they focus on making migration less desirable and less necessary – a significant task in the current environment.

### A. Programming-related recommendations

#### A1 Poverty alleviation

As this research and many other research studies have shown, poverty in both an absolute and relative sense, remains a top priority in Ethiopia as the key driver for child migration. Poverty alleviation, particularly for the poorest households is an unavoidable general objective for agencies seeking to reduce child migration from eastern Ethiopia while enhancing returnee re-integration and offering durable solutions. Current efforts are evidently not sufficient or sufficiently wide-spread to reduce the current perception that to migrate internally or internationally is the only available option for many children.

- Poverty alleviation needs to focus on vulnerable families, female headed families and children without families. Save the Children should identify organizations running poverty-focused programming (including organizations specialising in micro-financing and work towards poverty graduation and financial inclusion programmes) in order to explore targeted inclusion of migration-vulnerable households in communities most prone to migration.

- Save the Children should carry out / continue advocacy with central government around inclusion in Food Security Programme (Productive Safety-Net Programmes – PSNP) safety nets amongst communities and families where migration is a risk.
- Enhance alignment of Save the Children programming with FCDO-funded UNICEF ‘Children on the Move’ programme, particularly in border areas where cross-border referral mechanisms are being piloted.
- Efforts to develop income generation projects should be enhanced and expanded significantly amongst communities where poverty is highest and where child migration is common.
- Government initiatives in poverty-alleviation programmes should be complemented by INGOs, UN bodies and CBOs with capacity building support and financial support. Where Save the Children is already involved the efforts can be enhanced and increased.
- Direct welfare support for most deprived households and children should be enhanced to support adequate access to shelter, water, food and clothing.
- Where additional specific research is needed to understand market opportunities and where to target poverty-graduation assistance, research can be conducted (see below).

## **A2 Opportunities for enterprise and business**

- There is a high and unmet demand from children to have access to schemes and mechanisms to start their own businesses – programmes to offer revolving loans, inspirational mentorship, apprenticeship programmes could greatly enhance motivation of children not to migrate – especially in a context where the returns on education is perceived as and is known to be weak / low. Save the Children can be a significant contributor to these efforts.
- Agencies of the state and NGOs involved in such work should endeavour to offer a full package of facilities, support and follow-up on a medium-term basis to ensure opportunities for enterprise and business are viable. Save the Children can be a significant contributor to these efforts.

## **A3 Education and training for children:**

- Save the Children to work with local government and other agencies to address school attendance and identify truancy; and to target vulnerable families with support for schooling such as uniforms, shoes, school-books.
- Priority should be given to the provision of vocational and technical training in addition to or as an alternative to school to older children who have completed primary level.
- Greater recreational and sporting activities should be developed at local levels to encourage a sense of positive community and engagement among children. Save the Children can be a significant contributor to these efforts.

## **A4 Community coherence and parental engagement in attitudinal /behavioural change**

- Save the Children should identify community allies – parents, teachers, religious leaders, civil society organizations - to address the ‘culture of migration’ at the community level. Deeper engagement with community leadership should work on countering the normalization of child migration stemming from the pervasive culture of migration.

- With community networks, media and social media, Save the Children should support the delivery of concepts of ‘good parenting’ and safe and secure homelife. The process of a community defining what they mean by ‘good parenting’ in this context could be a useful process in itself, generating significant awareness and discussion.
- Parents who generate resources by selling assets and borrowing money to send underage children to migrate (or pay ransoms) should be discouraged and the culture of sending young children abroad should be discouraged through increased engagement with parent groups and other community allies. Media messaging cannot be the only approach.
- With young would-be migrants who are approaching adulthood, and young returnees, Save the Children should support communities to provide opportunities to build and demonstrate resilience and self-reliance, recognizing the agency of each young person. This means there should be programme focus on livelihoods, education, skills building and integration (as described in other recommendations here).
- Increased appreciation at the community level to the specific challenges faced by girls (elaborated in report) who migrate should be encouraged to counter the stigma and discrimination they face in their communities and the particular risks they encounter during migration.
- Build community-based programmes to address drivers of migration from communities of origin which affect young women and girls, including harmful traditional practice, early marriage, sexual violence, and domestic violence and exploitation. Work with family members, especially female family members, to build on the coping and protective mechanisms which strengthen the choice to stay. If such protective mechanisms have not been identified to date, this will also be part of the process.

## A5 Support to returnees

The research found that returnees face special problems around re-integration, acceptance in their community and satisfaction for their community and situation on return. A sense of shame and failure is common and a strong desire to re-migrate is prevalent. Various participants and informants mentioned that it was commonplace for young girls to be particularly affected by migration due to the frequency of sexual violation with many girls returning pregnant and generally facing stigmatisation that has long-term repercussions for the individual. In general, existing activities and services provided to returnees appear to be inadequate and are perceived by children and parents as inadequate in terms of scale and scope, with evident gaps. These recommendations seek to offer mitigation to these situations with suggestions that need to be viewed through a durable solutions lenses, that support sustainable reintegration, and in turn address remigration:

- Save the Children should advocate for greater government and donor investment to meet the needs of returnees.
- Save the Children can contribute to the assessment of facilities and services in light of current and expected levels of returns to ensure there is sufficient capacity (shelter, reception, family re-unification, psychosocial support. etc).
- With a view to providing durable solutions to returnees, Save the Children should become closely involved in and increase the scope of efforts to offer scholastic

support, skills training and micro-finance opportunities (with mentorship) for returnees to reduce the chance of remigration.

- Save the Children should help to strengthen the existing coordinated referral system involving state entities and international agencies and CBOs is needed to ensure returnees receive sufficient follow up and support, including services and opportunities listed above to mitigate against re-migration.
- Save the Children should support and/or establish mechanisms for special assistance (including psychosocial) to girl child returnees (and their families/communities?) needs to be developed to address the specific violations (sexual) and the outcomes of those violations in their own lives and within the community (underage pregnancies and un-marriageability).
- Unaccountable or un-supervised cash support for returnees may be inadvertently financing and encouraging re-migration and needs to be re-assessed. Save the Children should refrain from continuing these programmes until they are assessed – if not they risk contributing to re-migration of children.

## A6. Awareness raising

Awareness raising can be useful and effective, but the government and NGOs engaged in awareness raising and messaging need to appreciate the limitations of these channels as a means of reaching children and affecting their decision choices. Our research shows (as other research confirms) that messaging through TV and radio has wide reach but limited impact and needs to be complemented by more grass roots, peer to peer engagement and use of ‘allies’ (see above) that will have more impact.

- Save the Children should support and engage with non-TV or radio mechanisms and outlets of awareness raising in the beneficiary communities. Save can assist with the increasing of these initiatives that should be specifically calibrated to fill identified gaps as indicated by this research. In particular, the high rate of migration failure and negative cost/benefit realities of child migration needs to be more widely disseminated in addition to the dissemination of awareness of the considerable risks of migration (already quite present).
- Communication strategies that counter the widely held notion that violations during migration are the result of bad luck or ‘chance’ may be important, as the research shows these notions are common and need to be challenged by real facts and probabilities drawn from data.
- Considering the finding that government-driven mainstream media messages may not be the best vehicle for messages that children pay attention to, Save the Children should appreciate the high value children place on peer communication and returnee accounts and design interventions that exploit these channels better.
- The research shows that few children use or pay attention to messages on social media or internet and very few have access to these forms of communication. Save the Children should avoid using these means to message children.
- In messaging the emphasis on potential economic value of migration (mostly not realised by children who migrate) needs to be balanced against the non-economic costs of migration (mental health, physical damage, trauma, unwanted pregnancies, deeper family impoverishment and discord etc.).

## B. Policy and advocacy

Rule of law / issues of censure: in terms of prevention, the implementation of existing rule of law around irregular migration, border control, censure of brokers and smugglers (and especially of traffickers) could have a strong impact. The findings of this research indicate that not only is the suppression of smuggling in Ethiopia and Djibouti weak (and virtually non-existent in Yemen), but smugglers also perpetrate severe violations against child migrants with impunity in all locations. In some cases, state officials are directly implicated in the violations and are frequently named by returnee child migrants as most responsible for violations - after smugglers. An end to the tolerance of violations and abuses of child migrants (and adult migrants) by smugglers and other nationals and the end of impunity for serious crimes against children should be emphasised through tougher pursuit of criminals and implementation of existing laws. Ending tolerance, where it exists, of state officials colluding with smugglers and censuring officials involved in perpetrating crimes against children should be high priority.

Additionally, the increased border restrictions during Covid-19 and the subsequent dramatic drop in migration cases, including children (many would-be migrants reported that they are not migrating because of Covid-related border restrictions) illustrate that border controls can be more effective when higher government commitment exists. Equally, the referral system used for those returned to Ethiopia during the Covid-19 epidemic has also illustrated that coordinated return with protection (at least up to the point of return to communities) is possible.

- Save the Children can enlist the support of regional actors and donors to advocate for stronger implementation of Ethiopia's international obligations towards children, specifically around making policies managing returnee rehabilitation child-sensitive, and allowing all children access to national systems and mechanisms/facilities.
- Save the Children can advocate for governments, donors and agencies to promote protection for children on the move by offering shelter and basic provisions (food and water) in hubs of transit countries – particularly in Djibouti.
- Save the Children can use data and research such as this one to illustrate to authorities that the impact of tighter border restrictions can result in less child migrants attempting to leave Ethiopia.
- Save the Children can advocate around strengthened cross-border protection between Ethiopia and Djibouti in relation to case management and referral mechanisms for children on the move, both at regional policy level, but also in sub-national implementation.
- Save the Children should advocate for inclusion in the national education curriculum of information detailing the considerable dangers of migration to children and emphasise the low chance of success as an income generating and poverty alleviation strategy for children.
- Educational failure and school drop-out is closely linked to children's choices to migrate Save the Children should advocate to improve the quality of education and school retention at critical points such as the start of secondary education, to maximize continuity of education.
- At a wider level, Save the Children can work with the government and donors to encourage greater adherence to rule of law and intolerance of crimes committed against child migrants within Ethiopia by criminals and state officials.

## C. Additional Research

As explained above, migration drivers and societal factors related to migration are complex and very embedded in societies. For interventions to work, often a closer community-based analysis is required of specific aspects to assist organisation in calibrating their responses. The list below comprises of some micro-research recommendations as well as wider research needs.

- There is a need for research or assessment at a micro-level, specific community level, to understand which families are most vulnerable to child migration in order to target interventions recommended above. The findings of this study can direct such an assessment but is not sufficient for precise targeting. Information already held at the kebele level could be a strong starting point.
- More detail is needed about school-drop out at the regional and community level. In what age groups is it most prevalent and how it intersects with economic and social conditions, how it differently affects boys and girls and school drop-out intersects with decisions to migrate? Also, is drop-out more prevalent in areas where the education offered has challenges related to quality of education provided and teaching capacity? This research has offered some guides to this effect but for interventions to be more targeted and precise further micro-research would be useful.
- Vocational skills training cannot be considered without careful appreciation of what skills will be useful, sustainable and mitigate against migration drivers. More research may be needed to achieve this level of understanding before training is considered. Ethiopia's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) may already provide necessary information but this can be augmented and fine tuned to be relevant to specific geographical areas of intervention (East Haraghe and Dire Dawa area).
- Equally with micro-financing, enterprise schemes and income generating interventions: an area-specific market understanding is needed if such interventions are to be viable and sustainable. Some work may have already been developed in this regard in the geographical area by government entities and other NGOs, and Save the Children can use models they have use in other parts of Ethiopia to achieve this.
- A wider perspective: why is the practise of migration and particularly international child migration not common in Djibouti where conditions are also difficult, unemployment high and prospects for youth meagre? Why is it so prevalent in Ethiopia by comparison? A corollary to this would be an understand of why many Ethiopian children do not migrate despite living in the same conditions as those that aspire to migrate. Save has already conducted similar research elsewhere and the same analysis could be useful in Ethiopia to inform and target interventions.
- A protection and advocacy imperative: what is happening to girls who are held and disappear during migration in Djibouti, Yemen and even in Ethiopia once they start their migration journey? How prevalent is this trafficking phenomenon and who are most affected? This alarming aspect of girl child migration is under-researched beyond the 2014 RMMS research titled *Abused and Abducted*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> RMMS (2014) *Abused & Abducted the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen*

## Section 2. Introducing the migration context

### 2.1 The migratory context

In relation to mixed migration, Ethiopia is a country of origin, a transit country and a country of destination for various axes of movement in the Horn of Africa. Out-migration from Ethiopia is well-documented and been a significant trend for some decades, including movement by youth and children.<sup>3</sup> Although many of those leaving have cited political and security concerns as important motivating factors, the overwhelming driver has consistently been economic aspiration – people leave to find livelihood opportunities and better wages in countries where employment prospects and income expectations are higher than those in Ethiopia. Repeatedly, in interviews and studies Ethiopians on the move and those in destination countries report economic opportunity as the prime reason to move internally from rural areas to towns and cities within Ethiopia as well as internationally.

However, this is not the only important motivation and despite household and personal economic prospects being of high concern for many, the tipping points for decisions to move – both regular and irregular – may be various and multi-layered. This is particularly the case for young migrants who make up a significant minority of those on the move and who face particular vulnerabilities when on the move, as well as when working abroad.

Somewhat surprisingly, new research has found that many of the young Ethiopian migrants on the eastern route are still unaware of the risks of the journey. *These include the high likelihood of experiencing hunger, dehydration, or contracting waterborne and gastrointestinal diseases in transit, along with the possibility of exploitation and being abused.*<sup>4</sup> However, earlier studies have found that Ethiopian migrants can have a high awareness and a strong perception of the risks they face when migrating but, despite that, deem the potential benefits to be sufficiently high to continue taking those risks.<sup>5</sup>

The direction of movement of Ethiopian migrants has been, and continues to be, northwards – towards Europe (mainly via North Africa), southwards - towards South Africa (through Africa's eastern seaboard countries), and eastwards – towards the Middle East and Gulf States with Saudi Arabia being by far the most popular target destination for most irregular migrants, including migrant youth and children. Travelling to Saudi Arabia irregularly - as opposed to regularly with pre-agreed employment contracts and by air – exposes migrants to high levels of risks as they travel through eastern parts of Ethiopia, through Djibouti or Somaliland, across the Gulf of Aden or across the Red Sea and through Yemen. According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix 2019 snapshot, *Djibouti is a very important transit country for migration in the East and Horn of Africa due to its geographical proximity with the Peninsula. Migrants enter Djibouti via various border crossings, mainly through Galafi and Balho in the west, or through Assamo (Ali Sabieh) in the south. Many migrants may opt to stay in Djibouti city, and/or Obock town, to work and earn enough money for their onward journey. Migrants travel through Djibouti with the aid of facilitators/smugglers.*<sup>6</sup>

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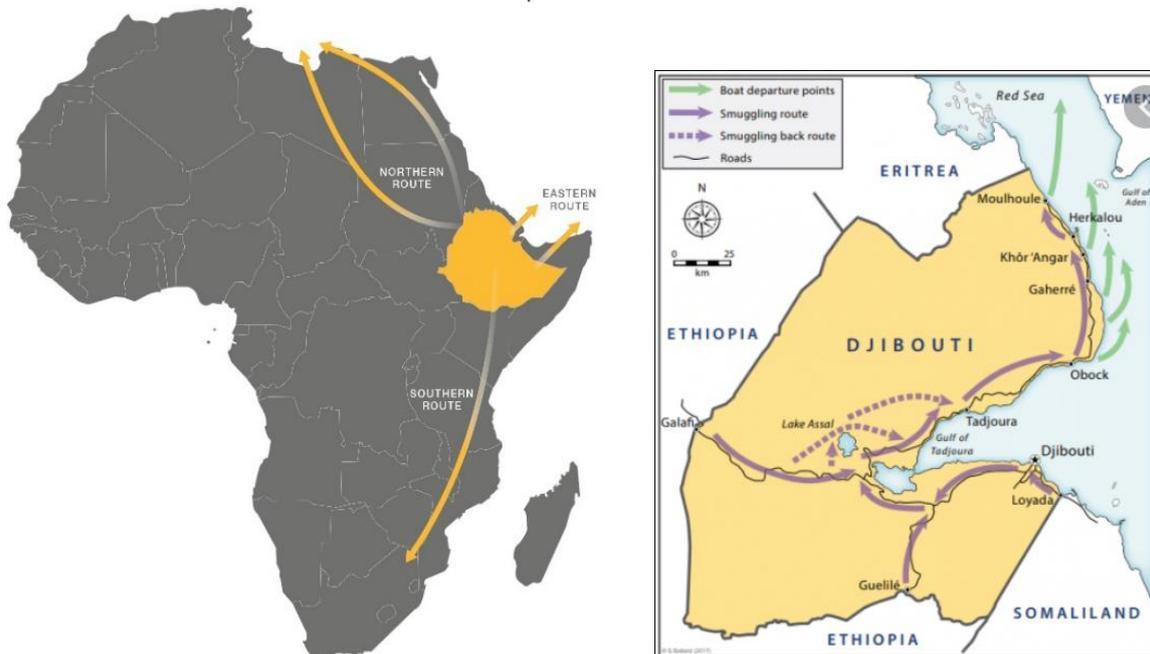
<sup>3</sup> RMMS & Save the Children.(2016) *Young and on the Move. Children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa*

<sup>4</sup> IOM. (2020) *The Desire To Thrive Regardless Of The Risk. Risk perception, expectations and migration experiences of young Ethiopians migrating along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula*

<sup>5</sup> RMMS. (2014) *Blinded by Hope: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Ethiopian migrants*

<sup>6</sup> IOM DTM. (2020) 2019 Migration Snapshot: Djibouti (Published April 2020)

The maps below illustrates the main routes out of Ethiopia as well as the crossing points into Djibouti on the southern and eastern frontiers of Ethiopia.



Not only do the migrants face a variety of hardships and violations and risk of loss of life during the journey, but they also face potential apprehension, detention, and deportation by authorities both during their journey as well as in Saudi Arabia.<sup>7</sup> As a result, a more recent phenomenon particularly facing Ethiopian migrants has been the prospect of forced or voluntary return from Djibouti, Somaliland, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Since 2013 when Saudi Arabia started to conduct widescale forced deportation of Ethiopian migrants (approx. 400,000 since 2017<sup>8</sup> and over 120,000 in 2019 alone. In late 2013 and into 2014 over 160,000) the issue of returnee migrants has been one of concern for the Ethiopian government, international agencies, NGOs and local communities.

Since late March 2020, despite the root causes for migration being as strong as ever, the global pandemic of COVID-19 and governments' responses to it has disrupted mobility considerably forcing many to remain 'involuntarily immobile' and increasing the number of migrants to be detained and returned to Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> Movement restrictions and returns from Djibouti along with tighter border control has curbed migrant arrivals in Yemen since Spring 2020, while new alarming reports indicate that the tens of thousands of Ethiopians in the country trapped in limbo and forcibly distributed within Yemen, blamed as 'scapegoats' for spreading the virus.<sup>10</sup> There are also disturbing indications from some studies that what in fact looks like irregular migration through human smuggling along the

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2019) *Ethiopians Abused on Gulf Migration Route Trafficking, Exploitation, Torture, Abusive Prison Conditions.*

<sup>8</sup> Africa Renewal. (2020) *New study on Ethiopian migrants to the gulf finds many unaware of dangers.*

<sup>9</sup> UN News. (2020) *In Yemen, thousands of Ethiopian migrants stranded, COVID-19 likely widespread*

<sup>10</sup> The Independent.(2020) *Ethiopian migrants in Yemen are being scapegoated over coronavirus, UN reports.* 'With transportation between provinces at a standstill, thousands of migrants, blamed for spreading the virus, have been bussed from their makeshift homes and dumped in different provinces. At least 4,000 are stranded in the southern government-held city of Aden and 7,000 in the rebel stronghold of Saada.'

eastern route, may also include a high degree of trafficking, particularly when young females are concerned.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Institutional and programmatic context

This section is designed to be a reference section for those that are interested in the governmental and international players in migration in Ethiopia. It ends with a brief section on Save the Children's role. Readers interested in the findings of the research should advance to section 5.

### Migration management in Ethiopia<sup>12</sup>

#### Government stakeholders that influence migration management & policy

**Ministry of Peace.** This new ministry (2018) incorporates *inter alia* the armed forces, the former defence ministry, the immigration department and border control responsibilities, national intelligence entities (including ARRA – responsible for refugees) and the former ministry of federal affairs. It also has particular role in management of response and solutions for IDPs. As such, this ministry has a lot of *muscle* and powerful potential to manage and influence migration management in Ethiopia although, to date, its involvement in migration issues is more tangential than direct – with the exception of ARRA.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs** has the overall responsibility to safeguard the interests and rights of the country, and ensures that they are respected by foreign States and that the interests and rights of Ethiopian nationals abroad as labour migrants are protected. MoFA also plays a key role in migration management in general, including management of returnees. Also it has the mandate to coordinate other governmental and non-governmental bodies for the same purpose.<sup>13</sup>

**Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)** assumes number of powers and responsibilities in relation to protecting the rights of migrant workers involved in labour migration. Among others it has the authority to control and supervise private employment agencies. Particularly, it is empowered to issue, renew, suspend and cancel licenses for private employment agencies that operates in sending workers abroad for work. Also, it has the responsibility to provide pre-departure orientation and training for out-going labour migrants

**Ministry of Women and Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA)** conducts a wide range of activities and interventions to meet the considerable mandate that is the welfare, security, flourishing and empowerment of women, youth and children in Ethiopia. Through income generation projects, training and awareness-raising endeavours the MoWCYA attempts to stem the migratory pressured

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<sup>11</sup> Gezie, L.D., et al (2019) *Human trafficking among Ethiopian returnees: its magnitude and risk factors*. BMC Health. Also: RMMS (2014) *Abused & Abducted the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen*

<sup>12</sup> This and the next sub section is edited and repurposed from unpublished material, written by the author of this study, for a Thematic Paper submitted in preparatory phases of the Ethiopian Migration Project in late 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ashine. K.M. (2017) *Migrant Workers Rights under the Ethiopian Legal System*. International Journal of African and Asian Studies.

caused by poverty etc. It is an active member of the National Task Force (now, National Partnership Coalition) and plays a strong role in working with child migrants.

**Federal Attorney - previously the Ministry of Justice**, has recently become increasingly involved in the area of migration. The Ministry has a mandate dealing with prosecution and legal counsel, drafting laws, prosecuting criminals, legislating laws and crime prevention. The ministry of Justice is empowered to, among others, to sign international legal cooperation agreements. Also the Federal Attorney plays a key role in migration management efforts, including in the central coordination of the national council on human trafficking and smuggling.

**The Federal police** entrusted with the obligation of investigation, information exchange, capacity building to prevent and suppression of smuggling and trafficking crimes under Proclamation 909, and the authority to sign a memorandum of agreements with foreign similar bodies.<sup>14</sup> The Women and Children Protection Division in the police commission in Dire Dawa have a range of activities supporting return, family reunification and community reintegration as well as migrant street children.

**The National Council against Human Trafficking and Smuggling** was established in June 2012. It sits in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This multi-ministry (plus<sup>15</sup>) body has a secretariat with four working groups :1. Protection Working Group: Headed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.2. Victims Assistance Working Group: Headed by the Ministry of Health.3. Legislation and Prosecution: Headed by the Ministry of Justice.4. Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation. The **Ethiopian Anti-Trafficking Task Force (EATTF)** which sits in the office of the Federal Attorney General, coordinates between relevant government and non-government institutions on migration and anti-trafficking issues. More recently, the office formally known as National Task Force has been replaced by the National Partnership Coalition

Since 2016, Ethiopia was identified a one of the key 'roll out' countries for the global Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The whole CRRF effort in Ethiopia is managed by the office of the prime minister through the multi-agency CRRF **National Steering Committee** which in turn manages the **National Coordination Office**.<sup>16</sup> However, ARRA has the prime management responsibility for CRRF and the implementation of the **National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy (NCRRS)** and its 6 pillars.<sup>17</sup>

**Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs** agency (ARRA) is responsible for the overall refugee response in Ethiopia, including protection, security and camp management. It has maintained a high level of control and power in the sector since 1993 when it was established as an off shoot of the national intelligence apparatus. In the current changing context its role is changing, away from links

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The National Council comprises representatives of regional governments, the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa municipal authorities, the National Intelligence Service, Parliament, numerous ministries the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Police, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Women and Youth, the Ministry of Urban Development and Construction, the Confederation of Ethiopians Workers Union, the National Chamber of Commerce, the Government Communication Office, religious institutions, and the Ethiopian Youth Federation.

<sup>16</sup> The steering committee comprising: ARRA, MOFEC, UNHCR Co-chairs. Line ministries, Govt. agencies, RC Office, National / Intl. NGOs, IFIs (World Bank), Private sector, Development Partners

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR. NCRRS/CRRF.

with security and intelligence, towards service delivery and implementation of the new refugee and asylum legislation.

## Non-government stakeholders and programmes

### Major stakeholder: The European Union.

Although there are various donors who contribute significantly to migration-related initiative and programmes, including the British government (FCDO, formally DFID) and the Swiss Development Corporation and also Italy, the major contributor and stakeholder is the EU. The EU development cooperation portfolio in Ethiopia is one of the largest in Africa and in the world (€715 million for the period 2014-2020); and the country is also one of the major beneficiaries of the **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** (€257.5 million for 2015-2018). The EU is also providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced people in the country. EU humanitarian assistance to the country amounted to €381 million for the period 2014-2018.<sup>18</sup> As such the European Union is a key partner for the Ethiopian government alongside other major bi-lateral donors and International Financial Institutions (World Bank) and private investors. The EU is the major donor and partner with respect to migration issues in Ethiopia. In recent years the EU and Ethiopia have ‘stepped up’ their partnership and cooperation but it is hard to avoid a sense that the impetus is coming from the EU and its driving need to contain irregular migration in Africa and elsewhere.

### Major stakeholder: IOM

IOM is the major multilateral player in relation to migration issues in Ethiopia. Since 1995, IOM has been working in the region in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the African Union (AU), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), migrants, and other stakeholders. It has a total of 10 offices with its headquarters in Addis Ababa and seven field offices and two Emergency Migration Response Centres (EMRCs).

IOM manages the airport transit centre where since 2013 returnees/deportees (from Saudi Arabia) can be registered and receive immediate assistance (food, shelter, cash assistance) but also family reunification and psychosocial care and support. Always working in collaboration with government ministries or agencies, IOM spearheads many leading projects and initiatives such as the aforementioned current *EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration*.

The scale and scope of IOM involvement in migration issues in Ethiopia are too great for this report to detail, but intervention areas managed by the Ethiopian Migration Management Unit include, assistance to vulnerable migrants; assisted voluntary return and reintegration; counter-human trafficking; immigration and border management; labour migration; migration and development; migration and climate change and Migration Management Coordination Mechanisms.<sup>19</sup> IOM also works in partnership with Save the Children.

### Major stakeholder: UNHCR

With over 500 national and international staff and multiple offices country-wide, UNHCR's main government counterpart to ensure the protection of refugees (over 700,000 in late 2019) is ARRA. With a large country presence and history, UNHCR works in close coordination with 54 humanitarian partners and is part of the Humanitarian Country Team.<sup>20</sup> As part of the CRRF, UNHCR is furthering partnerships

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<sup>18</sup> European Commission. (2019). [The European Union and Ethiopia step up their partnership and cooperation](#).

<sup>19</sup> IOM Ethiopia. [Migration Management Unit](#).

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR [Fact sheet Ethiopia](#). September 2019.

with line ministries, regional and local authorities, as well as development partners and the private sector. UNHCR is also engaged in and augmenting well-established coordination fora, including the inter-sector Refugee Coordination Group, together with national and regional sector working groups.

Currently, amongst a wide range of projects, UNHCR is rolling out the 'Telling the Real Story' Campaign, in various locations, targeting mainly Eritreans planning to move to Europe, and is supporting the 'Dangerous Crossing Campaign', targeting mainly those hoping to reach the Middle East. Both campaigns aim at enabling refugees and asylum-seekers to take informed decisions about further migration. Although UNHCR is not involved in policy and/or programming relating to child migrants, its important engagement with mixed migration in Ethiopia has earned it inclusion in this reference section.

#### **NGOs and other international agencies:**

International NGOs providing support and services for migrants directly or indirectly are many, but some of the larger agencies include *inter alia* the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Action Contre La Faim (ACF), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Norwegian Refugee Council, the Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children International and the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDDS).

A range of local NGOs provide counselling, skills and vocational training and education as well as shelter, job search assistance, family tracing and reunification. The reach of each of these community organizations/ local NGOs is not wide however, and demand for this kind of assistance certainly exceed supply. Amongst these NGOs are, for example, AGAR, Good Samaritan Association and OPRIFS (funded by BMM), Positive action for Development (PAD) and Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE) support the provision of shelter, health and psychosocial assistance, referral, family tracing, legal aid, small grants and support accessing the job markets.

Apart from the array of NGOs working as partners and implementing entities for the larger donors and multilateral agencies, some UN agencies and independent programmes play a strong role in the mosaic of entities in the migration sector. Those of note include:

**GIZ's Better Migration Management:** Currently in its second phase, the BMM is a region-wide, multi-year, multi-partner programme co-funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to a 2-phase total of 80 million Euro. The BMM aims to provide capacity building to a range of governmental institutions to improve migration management, in particular to prevent and address irregular migration, including smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.

**International Labour Organisation (ILO):** ILO has been involved for many years in a wide variety of migrant related projects involving research and support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ethiopian Employers Federation and others with specific regard to migrant labour, child labour and internal and external human trafficking, regulations around private employment agencies (PrEAs) and so on. This agency plays key role in supporting and advising the government on labour migration (legal/regular) initiatives as well as child labour law in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has ratified the two ILO core conventions on child labour (i.e., Minimum Age Convention No. 138 and Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182), but policies and concrete interventions for addressing the child labour problem have yet to be put in place.

**UNICEF:** Insofar that UNICEF has a global concern with protecting children on the move, they are engaged with migration in Ethiopia. They have recently initiated a DFID-funded programme Children on the Move, to be implemented in Somaliland, Ethiopia and Sudan. The programme will focus in

Ethiopia on internal as well as cross-border migrants and is being rolled out in wards of origin in Amhara, Oromia, SNSP, Somali, Tigray regions, and in Addis Ababa. UNICEF also programmes extensively for refugee children in the many camps in Ethiopia.

Also, in a new global partnership (late 2019) with IOM, UNICEF Ethiopia plans to investigate and analyse the underlying causes of the movement of children and provide support to programmes led by the Government of Ethiopia to prevent family separation. They also aim to strengthen cross-border information management pertaining to children and conduct joint information campaigns and fundraising interventions. UNICEF conducted new research of youths and children on the move inside Ethiopia in 2019 (to be published in 2021).

**UNODC:** As part of the UN Ethiopia Country team, gatekeeper of the UN Convention against Transnational Crime and mandate holder on legal issues relating to human trafficking and smuggling, UNODC plays a strategically relevant role on the spectrum of agencies involved in migration issues.

Recently implementing programme activities as part of the Better Migration Management Programme aimed at improving migration management in the region, in particular addressing trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants within, and from, the Horn of Africa. UNODC supports the government through drafting and consultation sessions, but also through capacity building activities for criminal justice practitioners. In 2018 they assisted the Federal Office of the Attorney General of Ethiopia to review its *Proclamation to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants* (Proclamation 909).

### Save the Children's engagement

In Ethiopia, Save the Children operate in a context where various institutions and donors are investing in programmes to support communities and migrants and to reduce risk and unsafe, irregular movement. IOM, UNICEF and ILO are engaged in various programmes with funding from the European Union and especially the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) as well as other bilateral donors. The Better Migration Management program - led by GIZ, and other programs in the region are funded by key donors including the SDC – the Swiss development agency, as well as Britain's DFID. Save the Children acts in partnership with main actors in various initiatives.

Within the East Hararghe region, Save the Children currently implements a project funded by the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development (AICS) "Emergency initiative to fight human trafficking and exploitation of migrants and to support the reintegration of returnees [AID 11548]". The project aims at improving the child protection systems and combating trafficking, along with mitigating the root causes of risky migration at all administrative levels: national, zonal and community. The intervention takes place in the city of Dire Dawa and covers two districts (woredas), with a strong focus on child-protection and livelihood activities.<sup>21</sup> Save have also constructed a new centre in Dire Dawa in recent years, to receive and care for child migrant returnees.

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<sup>21</sup> The AICS project is in line with the Ethiopian government's commitment to ensuring greater well-being for children and combating human trafficking. Specifically, it is in line with the National Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) II 2019/2020 and the National Social Protection Policy, which aim to provide children with the tools to ensure their full participation in the socio-economic and political development of the Country through education and training. The protection of children and young people involved in risky migration is part of the governmental objectives established with the approval of the Proclamation 909/2015 -for the prevention and suppression of

In related initiatives, Save the Children supports 600 hundred vulnerable children (400 migrant returnees and 200 other vulnerable children) in eight sub-regions in East Hararghe, Oromia and Amhara's North Wollo Zones Ethiopia are the focus of a current new partnership between the IOM and Save the Children.<sup>22</sup> This is the fourth such partnership under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration focusing in Ethiopia's regional states prone to irregular migration.

Save the Children has long-standing experience and particular expertise in implementing programmes for children on the move globally and in Africa, including cross-border programming targeting children and young people in irregular and forced migration; and targeting sending, transit and destination areas. In Ethiopia, Save the Children has multi-sector programs that address particular issues of highly vulnerable children, including children involved in unsafe irregular migration and their host communities. Their programme uses multi-sectoral and coordinated approaches that deliver integrated services for children at-risk of irregular migration, those in transit, and upon arrival to longer-term destinations.

The eastern migration route is one of Save the Children's programme target areas, where large number of unaccompanied children are involved in unsafe migration, using the irregular migration routes through Djibouti with destinations to the Middle East. Because there is limited data, programming or policy development related to the particular risks and challenges faced by unaccompanied migrant children through this route, this research study was commissioned.

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human trafficking and migrants smuggling and the Ethiopia's Overseas Employment Proclamation 923 / 2016 that regulates private employment agencies.

<sup>22</sup> IOM. (2019) *IOM Partners with Save the Children to Assist 600 Children in Ethiopia*. Press Release.

## Section 3. Research Framework

As laid out in the Terms of Reference for this study, the overall objective of the study is to **provide in-depth understanding on the trends, factors and risks of unaccompanied child migration from Ethiopia through the eastern migration routes, and to inform responses at different level**. The geographical areas chosen to offer primary data sources and key informant interviews represent the target population of young migrants in the five districts of Eastern Hararghe as well as the Dire Dawa administrative council. East Hararghe is one of the country's administrative zones of the Region of Oromia.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

- **Understand** the trends and risks associated to unaccompanied child migration from Ethiopia through the eastern migration route
- **Analyse** factors behind unaccompanied child migration
- **Understand** existing responses and gaps (at systems, programming and policy levels) to ensure durable solution for child migrants
- **Provide** practical recommendations for research, policy and programming

The initial framework is therefore specific and narrow, requiring a formulation of inquiry in order to elucidate six key areas relating to migrant youth along the eastern route out of Ethiopia with particular attention on special vulnerabilities facing girls:

1. Demographic information and key trends of child migration through irregular migration routes
2. Perception of risk as held by child migrants
3. Migration decision-making process (how decision are made, who is the overall decision making for the child to migrate, who most influence in the child decision to migrate, etc) and criteria; and root causes and triggers influencing child migrants
4. Financial and social aspirations of migrants against realities of experience and actual financial benefits (cost/benefit analysis)
5. What kind of services and / or responses are available to child migrants along their journey, at destination and in Ethiopia on their return.
6. Review national and cross boarder policy and programming initiatives/ frameworks considering Ethiopian child migrants.

The existing data and knowledge of the target groups specified for this inquiry is limited. Some complimentary sources and comparable and relevant recent research has been used to triangulate findings and provide background information but to all intents and purposes this research offers new insights. These insights are dependent on the primary data generated and findings established through the implementation of the selected methodology, while respecting the restrictions forced by Covid-19 and recent security concerns in the project research areas.

## Section 4. Methodology, definitions & limitations

To seek answers to the research questions above the following four research tools were deployed:

- (1) Literature review / existing data from key stakeholders and secondary sources
- (2) Survey Questionnaire: structured interviews with individual children (would-be migrants, returnee migrants)
- (3) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with small groups of would-be and returnee migrants (in separate meetings) as well as parents of would-be and returnee migrants (separated)
- (4) Key Informant Interviews (KII) with third party individuals who work for the government, local service facilities, International and national NGOs etc.

### 1. Secondary sources

Secondary sources are available consisting of previous commentary, earlier studies, and new on-going data from a limited number of sources. A wide range of sources were used to complement the primary data. All referenced are noted in the footnotes and the final bibliography.

Data gathered by Save the Children and partners has relevance to this study as well as data and analysis and information from IOM (DTM) and MMC (4Mi) and recent data from the Ethiopian Migration Project managed by the Danish refugee Council as the consortium lead.<sup>23</sup> Ravenstone Consult were closely involved in the development of the Formative Research Report for the Ethiopian Migration Project (March 2020) which included significant analysis of returnees and would be migrants from Ethiopia, including Save the Children's formative studies as part of the Ethiopian Migration Programme.

### 2. Survey Questionnaires

Particularly at this time of social distancing and avoidance of large groups due to Covid-19, the research team used survey questionnaires to explore key questions from various identified groups. Primary data was obtained from a quantitative questionnaire survey with **83 child migrants (would-be (35) and returnees (48))**, both male and female and selected purposively from specific districts in the project area. As such there was a randomness in how children were selected in terms of their availability and presence and willingness to participate during this restrictive period of Covid-19, but they were not randomly selected according to a statistical methodology. **Of the 83 children interviewed, 36 were girls and 47 were boys.**

The gender/age and status disaggregation of those interviewed were as follows:

	Male	Female	Age range (years)	Medium age (years)
Would-be child migrant	15	20	13-17	15.85
Returnee child migrant	32	16	12-18	15.35
<b>totals</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>36</b>		

<sup>23</sup> Consortium including DRC, Mixed Migration Centre, Save the Children, BBC Media, Altai Consulting and funded by DFID (UK)

The use of this tool has provided a quantitative basis to the research that will compliment findings from the Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A limited number (**20**) of focus group discussions were conducted during the field research, taking into account limitation imposed due to Covid-19 social distancing and group-size restrictions. Child would-be migrants and returnee child migrants were targeted as well as some parents – **in total 134 people** participated in the FGDs.

Participants were selected purposively from specific districts in the project area. As such there was a randomness in how children were selected in terms of their availability and presence and willingness to participate during this restrictive period of Covid-19, but they were not randomly selected according to a statistical methodology. Semi-structured lists of issues and themes were used as guides in the discussions. The findings are used to reinforce and triangulate findings from the individual interviews and offer strong direct quotations throughout this report as authentic voices of the participants.

The number of FGDs conducted was as follows:

- 6 x FGDs of approximately 6 individuals of **returnee** child migrants (39)
- 6 x FGDs of approximately 6 individuals of **would-be** child migrants (40)
- 4 x FGDs of approximately 6 **parents of returnee** child migrants (26)
- 4 x FGDs of approximately 6 **parents of would-be** child migrants (26)

Gender disaggregation of FGDs as follows:

	Female	Male
Parents	42	11
Would-be child migrant	8	33
Returnee child migrant	12	28
<b>totals</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>72</b>

### 4. Key Informant Interviews

In addition to child migrants and their parents or guardians at the community level, there was a need to obtain specialised / expert third party reflection and information on the conditions, trends, factors and risks of unaccompanied child migration. To complete the methodology **14 key informants** were identified and interviewed. The key informants are listed in annex were selected from a range of government departments and state entities directly involved in and responsible for activities or initiatives relating to child mobility. IOM and UNICEF staff also participated in interviews.

#### Site selection:

Interviews and FGDs were conducted in various locations in the 4 woredas of Gerawa, Badano, Deder and Dire Dawa in the East Hararghe and Dire Dawa zones. Within these woredas the following kebeles were targeted: Gerewa 01, Hula Jeneta, Oda Jeneta, Badano, Deder, Qobbo town and Dire Dawa.

<sup>24</sup> The sample size was calculated not to be representative but to offer a sufficient number of voices and variety considering the budget limitations of the research as well as time needed by researchers at a time when both security and health issues (Covid-19) mitigate against spending prolonged period in the field.

## Research tools

The research tools were selected during the inception phase of this research to capture as much data as possible relating to child migration but specifically the research questions identified of interest in the Terms of Reference for this research. From the start it was clear the research was ambitious in terms of using limited tools and limited field presence for data collection (in terms of time) and the wide range of issues of interest to Save. Nevertheless, it was felt that the combination of qualitative and quantitative instruments would allow close triangulation of information, further corroborated by secondary sources, to offer new and relevant research outcomes.

The following research instruments were developed to conduct the research and can be viewed in the annexes as part 2 of this report. They include;

1. Survey questionnaire for returnee child migrants
2. Survey questionnaire for would be child migrant
3. Semi structured interview format for Focus Group Discussions with returnee child migrants
4. Semi structured interview format for Focus Group Discussions with would be child migrants
5. Semi structured interview format for Focus Group Discussions with parents of would be child migrants
6. Semi structured interview format for Focus Group Discussions with parents of would be child migrants
7. Semi structured interview format for Key Informant Interviews

## Definitions<sup>25</sup>

For this report the following definitions are applied.

**Would-be migrants:** individuals in high outward migration (sending) communities with demonstrable aspirations and/or desires to migrate but have not yet taken concrete steps towards migration, as well as those who have made some concrete steps towards their migration, including those who have started their journey internally (such as those migrated to Diredawa) but have not yet crossed the border out of Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup>

**First-time migrants:** individuals migrating along the Eastern Route potentially via Djibouti and Yemen normally towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for the first time.

**Re-migrating individuals:** individuals migrating along the Eastern Route (potentially via Djibouti and Yemen) towards the KSA who attempted or successfully completed previous migration(s) to this destination.

**Returning migrants:** individuals migrating along the Eastern Route via Djibouti and Yemen towards the KSA who have decided to stop the journey and are returning to Ethiopia (either as forced or voluntary returnees)

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<sup>25</sup> In order to maintain cross-sector coherence all these definitions, except the 'would-be' child migrant definition, are quoted from the IOM report of April 2020 *The Desire To Thrive Regardless Of The Risk*. Risk perception, expectations and migration experiences of young Ethiopians migrating along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula.

<sup>26</sup> Agreed definition between researchers and Save the Children for this study.

**Internal migrants:** individuals who have migrated internally within Ethiopia prior to their current experience of international migration.

**Risk perception:** refers to how migrants perceive the risks along the route and at arrival... such as the lack of food and water, the crossing at sea, sexual violations, the war in Yemen and the risk of deportation etc.

**Risk preference:** refers to migrants' willingness to take on risks according to the perceived successful outcome, that is, their intended outcome for the migration-decision .

**Risk reduction:** refers to migrants' strategies to mitigate risks against potential challenges along the route and upon arrival in the KSA. These strategies can be voluntary, for instance obtaining information on the journey, or involuntary, for instance travelling in group when the group is set up by the broker/smuggler.

## Limitations

The overriding limitation affecting the start and preparation of the research as well as research deployment has been the **Covid-19 pandemic** (from March 2020) and the resulting restrictions on movement, access, gathering and contact. The researchers have had to negotiate different rules and restrictions and risks relating to the UK (Ravenstone base) and Ethiopia as well as the internal restrictions and regulations of Save the Children in Ethiopia.

Secondly, in addition to pre-existing levels of **security risk** in the research areas, the political and security risks from late June 2020 and the subsequent internet blackout caused further delays. A window of opportunity opened in October where upon the research team were deployed and with assistance from the Save the Children field teams successfully conducted field data collection.

These two factors have combined to not only delay the project but also limited the level of access and freedom to collect information and for the lead author of this analysis to participate. This affected the scale of geographic coverage in terms of where interviews were conducted and also caused the sample of those interviewed to be selected in a non-random, purposive manner, dominated by people's willingness to participate, availability etc.

International travel restrictions also prevented the presence of Ravenstone staff in Ethiopia for the in-person training and key informant interviews. Alternative arrangements were put in place using virtual means and identifying expert local staff to fulfil the work. A further limitation of the study is that the scope of the primary data collection was limited to Ethiopia only – ideally some supporting research could have taken place in Djibouti and Yemen.

## Section 5: Analysis and findings with key takeaways

This section presents key findings informed by the desk research along with 14 key informant interviews, 83 in-depth interviews with would-be migrants and returnee migrant children, as well as 143 parents and child migrants (would be and returnee) through 20 Focus Group Discussions. Findings are grouped according to the main research themes and questions. Clearly, the sample used for this research is too small to be representative and so secondary sources and other data sets are used to build and support the findings below.

### 5.1 Flow volume and demographic characteristics

#### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- *Using eastern routes, at a minimum, on average, approximately **19,000 Ethiopian child migrants** entered Yemen in 2018 and 2019 annually – 1,580 per month.*
- *Approximately **7,200 Ethiopian migrant children** used the Obock route (via Djibouti) annually, **or 600 per month**, many starting in the Dire Dawa area or passing through Dire Dawa. The Covid-19 restrictions have considerably reduced the movement in 2020.*
- *Among adult Ethiopian migrants the proportions are that **men are almost three times more numerous than women**, amongst child migrants, boys and girl proportions are closer and were **almost at parity** in 2019, suggesting the number of girls joining the flows were rising before 2020 Covid-19 restrictions.*
- *It remains comparatively **unusual to see very young children** on the move along the eastern route, the typical ages range is 14-17 years. A disproportionate number come from female-headed households that self-identify as **'quite' poor or 'very' poor**. Only a small minority say they live **adequately**. Few have phones and even fewer **have internet connectivity**.*
- *Education levels intersect with poverty and migration. Typically those children migrating or intending to migrate **have low educational attainment, high rates of school drop-out and low employment prospects** in Ethiopia where poverty line wage levels (or lower appear) to be the best they can expect to earn.*

#### Estimating flow volume

2020 has been an exceptional year due to the global coronavirus pandemic, disrupting normal migration trends and flows along the eastern route and affecting child would-be migrants in various ways.<sup>27</sup> This study will examine the impact in a different section below, but atypical flow numbers and trends for 2020 are not used in this section's compilations.

On average during the 2011-2019 period, around 108,000 Ethiopians and Somalis arrived on Yemen shores each year. Although there have been significant annual fluctuations during the period the last two years prior to 2020 reveal a **rising trend** with new arrivals in Yemen reaching 160,000 and 138,000 people in 2018 and 2019 respectively.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Wallis, E. (2020) *Giving up on the 'Eastern Route': Why increasing numbers of migrants are returning home.* Infomigrants.

<sup>28</sup> Data from both IOM (2020) op cit and IOM (2019). *Region on the move; 2018 Mobility Overview in the East and Horn of Africa and the Arab Peninsula.* IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa.

With respect to child migrants, a compilation of available recent data (Table 1 below) suggests that approximately **38,000 Ethiopian children** made it to Yemen during 2018 and 2019, or 19,000 children per year (average) – by different routes. This does not represent the true number of how many Ethiopian child migrants leave home and take the eastern route, and nor does it indicate how many arrive in Saudi Arabia.

Many Ethiopian child migrants are detained and deported, many also do not intend to go Yemen but target Djibouti as their chosen destination while others reportedly, may be kidnapped for prolonged periods, return of their own volition, or pass away from illness, thirst, accidents, other misadventures or become victims of murder.

Even within Ethiopia there are many dangers along the eastern route. Children in this research reported seeing bodies of perished migrants in the desert regions exiting Ethiopia and particularly along routes going through the Afar region on routes north of Dira Dawa that enter north western Djibouti instead of routes that enter southern Djibouti. Similar reports have been recorded in previous witness accounts over recent years.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 1: Estimating the number of Ethiopian child migrants (disaggregated) arriving in Yemen in selected years.**

Year	Estimated total number of new arrivals in Yemen	Estimated proportion from Ethiopia	Approximate number of Ethiopian children (under 18 yrs)	Estimated to be Ethiopian girls	Estimated to be Ethiopian boys
<b>2019</b>	138,000	127,000 (92%)	16,500 (13% of total)	7,610 (6%)	8,890 (7%)
<b>2018</b>	160,000	146,000 (91%)	21,900 (15% of total)	14,600 (10%)	7,300 (5%)
<b>2014 (5 yrs earlier)</b>	91,000	72,000 (79%)	14,400 (c.20%)	Not recorded 'mostly boys'	Not recorded 'mostly boys'

Sources: IOM (2020a), IOM (2019), RMMS & Save the Children. (2016)

## Djibouti or Bossaso

In relation to those aiming to enter Saudi Arabia, the two most common maritime departure points are Obock in Djibouti for the Red Sea crossing and the Bossaso area in Somalia (Puntland) for the Arabian Sea crossing. The proportions of refugees and migrants that use one departure point or another has changed over recent years depending on prevailing conditions (including insecurity, smuggler's preferred routes and levels of immigration enforcement). Broadly, between 2009 and 2013, Obock was the preferred departure point but since 2014 most migrants have used Bossaso.

<sup>29</sup> "We started the perilous journey through Afar desert, where some looters attacked us, beat us badly and took the money we had. After around one week of walking in the desert, during which some people died of starvation, we reached Tajor Mountain, where we stopped in order to have a rest. I was looking around me, I found some people dying, some were sleeping, and others were crying and asking for water or food. I was walking among people laying down, looking at them and talking they were staring at me, but no answer from their side, then I realized that they were dead! There I realized that I was going through a journey of death, some people died during the desert crossing, some while climbing the mountain and some on the top of it." Molla 15 yrs old Ethiopian boy, interviewed in Haradh, Yemen. February 2012. From RMMS (2012) *Desperate Choice: conditions, risks & protection failures affecting Ethiopian migrants in Yemen*

Almost two thirds of all new arrivals in Yemen in 2018 and 2019 have used Bassaso while somewhat more than one third (38% in 2019) use the Obock area. Most of those from the Dire Dawa area or Ethiopians who pass through Dire Dawa on their outward journey are on their way to Obock. Those using Bossaso normal take other routes out of Ethiopia.

## Numbers going to Djibouti

Applying the above proportions to the estimated number of child migrants leaving Ethiopia in the last two years, an estimated **7,200 Ethiopian migrant children** use the Obock route annually, **or 600 per month**. Of these, most recent statistics suggest about **324 would be male** and **276 would be female**. Again, this estimate refers to those who actually crossed into Yemen successfully and is not the full number of Ethiopian child migrants who cross into Djibouti, or who leave home using the eastern route. Of the would-be child migrants interviewed for this research **29 per cent** said Djibouti itself was their intended destination, suggesting the number who left home or wherever they were in Ethiopia before they travelled could be **significantly higher**.

## Male / female proportions

Using IOM yearly data, between 2018 and 2019 it appears that the **proportion of girls to boys** making the journey east out of Ethiopia is rising, but further analysis is not reliable with just two years of disaggregated data.<sup>30</sup>

It cannot be assumed that the same proportions of girls to boys arriving in Yemen pertain in the cohort that target only Djibouti (and not Yemen) so it is not possible to extrapolate further. However, the proportions found by IOM in the 2019 data from Yemen appear to contradict the commonly held view that many more boys than girls make the journey east. **They found that 7 percent of the total were boys and 6 per cent were girls**. More typically, IOM data concerning adults indicates a far higher proportion of men (69% of total in 2019) as opposed to women (18% of total in 2019) make the irregular journey to Yemen.<sup>31</sup> These kinds of proportions amongst adults have been common for many years on the eastern journey.

## Typical age of child migrants

In 2009, the then Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants highlighted that there was a lack of accurate statistical information on the number of children involved in the international migration process, in terms of volume and disaggregation.<sup>32</sup> Although assessments concerning volume has improved along some routes (including the eastern route from the Horn), age disaggregation remains weak. Nevertheless, this authors assessment is that Ethiopian **child migrants are typically between 14-17 year of age**, but recent return data may suggest a significant number of younger children also attempt migration, at least into Djibouti if not further.

*“Out of the returnee children brought to us caught on border towns, the ones returned to Dire Dawa, and those that were originally migrated from the city were very young boys age of 10, 11 and up to 15. These children can hardly have the capacity to decide for themselves. They make very poor*

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<sup>30</sup> IOM (2020a) op cit. and IOM (2019) op cit.

<sup>31</sup> IOM (2020a) op cit.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in, RMMS & Save the Children. (2016) *Young and on the Move: children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa*.

*decisions; and think that the problems that have happened to others might not happen on them, by chance.”* Representative from the Ministry of Women and Children and Youth Affairs.

There are evidently cases of very young children on the move, **sometimes 8, 9 or 10 years** old but these are the exception.<sup>33</sup> Despite an apparent global increase of younger children on the move it remains less usual to see very young children on the move along the eastern route.<sup>34</sup> Since the start of the global pandemic in March and up to October 2020 IOM reunited nearly 500 minors between the ages of 15 and 17 with their families, from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Djibouti.<sup>35</sup> Presumably, if they were being deported or assisted to return at age 15 they may have migrated when they were 14 years old.

In the research for this study the average age of returnees interviewed individually (48 in total) had a mean age of 15 and a half years old. However, 27% of these children claimed to have been outside the country for 6-12 months suggesting some of them would have departed their homes aged 14. A further 39 returnee child migrants joined focus group discussions, the youngest participant being 14 but the average age being 16 or 17 years. The 35 would-be migrants interviewed individually also had a mean age of 15, but just under 16. Those selected for this research are not representative of the actual age range who travel but of those available to participate.

Child migrants interviewed typically commented on the high numbers of young Ethiopians on the eastern route, it is not surprising considering that a conservative estimate indicates that about **600 young Ethiopians used the eastern route every month in 2019**. Additionally, of those interviewed for this study, on average 81 per cent of child would-be and returnee migrants said it was ‘quite’ or ‘very common’ for people to migrate from their community and 71 per cent of would-be migrants said they had friends who had migrated before. **Furthermore, 88 per cent of returnees interviewed said it was ‘quite’ or “very common’ to see children under 18 on the eastern route**, 96 per cent of those asked said they had seen them.

## Education matters

The education attainment of those choosing irregular migration through the eastern route is **typically low**. When interviewing over 2,000 Ethiopian first time, re-migrating or returning migrants using the eastern route, IOM found that **22 percent of females and 24 per cent of males had no education at all**.<sup>36</sup> A further 34 percent of females and 33 per cent of males only had primary education. Just 14 percent of the men and 22% of women had completed secondary school. By contrast those who take up overseas employment through regular channels (and Private Employment Agencies) are required to have year 8 schooling completed as a minimal, so in the cohort of regular migration 100 per cent have lower secondary education in theory, and must also be 18 years old or over.

The IOM findings echo research conducted by another study in 2018 from a sample of over 1,600 Ethiopians who were ‘aspirational’, would-be or returnee migrants from rural/peri-urban areas as

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<sup>33</sup> Wallis, E.(2020) op cit.

<sup>34</sup> In particular scenarios globally a spike or unusual increase in unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) can be seen, such as those in the Northern Triangle ‘Caravans’ and others trying to enter the US from Mexico in recent years, or asylum application to Europe during the 2015 ‘migrant crisis’ when 13% of all under 18 yrs applications totalling 88,300 were from UASC under the age of 14.

<sup>35</sup> IOM (2020c) *COVID-19 Unaccompanied Child Migrants Reunited with Their Families in Ethiopia*, by IOM

<sup>36</sup> IOM (2020b). *The desire to thrive regardless of the risk: Risk perception, expectations and migration experiences of young Ethiopians migrating along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula*

opposed to urban areas.<sup>37</sup> The level of education between urban and non-urban migrants was stark with rural or peri-urban migrants likely to have a far lower educational level than those from urban areas. Some urbanites also had tertiary education.

Of those interviewed for this research, **77 percent of would-be child migrants and 77 percent of returnee child migrants only had primary education** (5-6 years of school). Only 2 percent of returnees and 15 per cent of would-be migrants had more than 9 years of education.

## Education intersecting with poverty and migration

Education levels intersect with poverty and migration. Despite “remarkable progress in the past two decades towards universal primary education”, reducing the cumulative drop-out rate to the last grade of primary education has been a major challenge for Ethiopia.<sup>38</sup> **School drop-out** rates remain high in many parts of Ethiopia and although schooling is free on delivery the students are required to have uniform, books and stationery, let alone daily sustenance and means of transport. Additional destabilising conditions such as violence or abuse in the school or paucity of conditions (such as poor sanitation, poor teaching etc.) is also well-documented as reasons for school drop-out. Additional issues like the impact of political unrest, difficult home life and harmful traditional practises such as early marriage for girls also affect school attendance and drop -out rates.

Children who have dropped out of school find it difficult to find work and when they do it is informal and menial and very low paid and sometimes exploitative or considered too burdensome – a strong driver for some children to migrate.<sup>39</sup>

During this research, many children and parents spoke of their **inability to afford to go to school** as a reason for not attending school. Additionally, they had the impression that those who completed school did not visibly benefit due to the paucity of jobs. Despite a prevailing attitude that it was correct and right for children to attend school there was a **low sense of education return**, i.e. that the investment in education at every level did not pay off through visible returns in the job market. Instead there was a view that people who had work were either lucky, well connected (nepotism and/or corruption) or created their own businesses - normally as a result of successful migration.

*“Families in the East Hararghe do not control their children properly. Children and the communities in these areas (West and East Hararghe) do not that much believe in education/schooling.”* Office of the General Attorney Addis.

In responding to questions about what conditions would cause children not to migrate, many spoke of having uniforms and books and adequate sustenance (food) or money to attend school as critical and welcome pre-conditions to remain in school and at home, in the short term. This finding closely aligns with findings from previous Save research.<sup>40</sup>

## Socioeconomic profiles

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<sup>37</sup> EMP (2020) *Formative Research Report* for the Ethiopian Migration Project. (Unpublished) Aspirational migrants are would-be migrants who have taken no action to migrate; the definition as used in the EMP study, of which Save the Children is a consortium member.

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF (2016) *In 10 countries with highest out-of-school rates, 40 per cent of children are not accessing basic education*. UNICEF Ethiopia.

<sup>39</sup> Save the Children. (2018) *Why Children Stay*. discusses how burdensome work (either at home or with an employer) is a main tipping point factor causing children to leave home.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

**Only 3 per cent of would-be migrants and 19 per cent** of returnees described their household as ‘adequate’ or ‘sufficient’. Table 2 below offers indications of the socioeconomic profiles of the 83 child would-be and returnees migrants surveyed for this research who have used, or intend to use, the eastern migratory route irregularly. Coming from what they mostly experience as ‘quite’ or ‘very poor’ households - **a high proportion of which are female-headed (see table)**- these would-be and returnee migrants are normally entirely dependent on their families and have bleak outlooks on whether they could find work in Ethiopia. Furthermore, if they could find work it would be very **lowly paid and casual / occasional** in nature. Despite children’s dependency on their parent, parents and/or guardians, as Table 2 illustrates, 66 per cent of would-be migrant children and 40 per cent of returnees claim that they are ‘partly responsible’ for their household’s income. No children of either category claimed they were entirely responsible for their household’s income.

**Table 2: Selected socioeconomic characteristics of the research sample**

Questions	Would-be child migrants (n=35)	Returnee child migrants (n=48) (before their migrated)
Completed any education beyond primary level	23%	21%
Living with both parents	26%	52%
Living with mother only (female headed household)	66%	29%
Describe their households as very poor	57%	48%
Describe their households as quite poor	40%	33%
Describe their household as ‘adequate’ or ‘sufficient’	3%	19%
Supported by family for food and other financial needs (i.e. dependent)	74%	63%
Consider that for them, in Ethiopia, there are either no income opportunities, or ‘few’ and ‘very few’	83%	82%
Even if work was available what would the monthly income be?	1253 Eth Bir (USD \$39)	2083 Eth Bir (USD \$64)
To what extent are they ‘partly responsible’ for their household income	66%	40%
How many consider themselves ‘not at all responsible’ for their household finances / income	29%	48%

The socioeconomic characteristics of the research sample for this study are broadly similar with findings from IOM’s interviews with first time, re-migrating and returnee Ethiopian migrants, young and old. The IOM study found that economic reasons (for adults and children) were the overwhelming driver causing migration (95% of all migrants) – a finding which is echoed in all studies of Ethiopian migrants’ root causes and drivers , and is, of course, symptomatic of **poor or dire socioeconomic conditions** at home.<sup>41</sup>

Illustrative of the paucity of income opportunities for male and females of this socio-economic profile, a very high percentage (78%) of all categories of interviewees in the IOM study (from 15-29 years old)

<sup>41</sup> The Mixed Migration Centres 4Mi network interviewing Ethiopian migrants and the Ethiopian Migrant Project consortium formative research both confirm this, as do various IOM, UNICEF and ILO reports.

claimed they had no source of income before they started to migrate.<sup>42</sup> Not surprisingly an average of 33 per cent said they were unable to ‘make ends meet’ and had reduced meal portions or skipped meals in their households. Even if they did have some income before leaving it ranged between USD \$51 – 61 per month, or just **less than \$2 per day. These rates are at or below (but no higher) than international poverty line**, also applied in Ethiopia.<sup>43</sup> The would-be migrants in this research suggested on average, that if they could find work they would earn just 1253 Eth Bir per month, just over USD\$1.0 per day. For returnee migrants in this research the expectation was somewhat higher at 2080 Ethiopian Bir or USD\$ 64, **at the same level as the poverty line.**

Not surprisingly children and adults are irresistibly attracted to Gulf States and elsewhere where they expect to earn many times more than these low amounts. In fact, instead of asking why so many leave for migration, in light of very meagre economic prospects at home, it is perhaps **more pertinent to explore why so many young people do not attempt migration.** Again, previous analysis by Save that explored this aspect offer various insights that support the analysis of this report.<sup>44</sup>

### Connectivity and phone ownership

Compared with statistics concerning adults and other migrant groups globally, child migrants from the Eastern Hararghe and Dire Dawa appear to have **low levels of phone ownership and internet connectivity** etc. before and during their migration trips.<sup>45</sup> 85 per cent of returnees interviewed did not have a functioning phone with them when they migrated. 13 per cent had non-smart phone and just 4 per cent had a smart phone. **Only 6 per cent said they used social media** at all during their journey and the very few with smart phone and access to internet during their journey only used Facebook in terms of social media. Of the would-be child migrants interviewed only 17 per cent claim to use social media (again, predominantly Facebook), 54 percent had no phone at all and just 20 per cent had a smart phone.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> IOM (2020b) op cit.

<sup>43</sup> The international poverty line which is currently USD \$1.90 a day, is the threshold that determines whether someone is living in poverty. The line is based on the value of goods needed to sustain one adult.

<sup>44</sup> Save the Children (2018) Op Cit.

<sup>45</sup> Frouws, B. and Brenner, Y. (2019) *Hype or hope? Evidence on use of smartphones & social media in mixed migration.*

<sup>46</sup> As in most countries and particularly developing countries there is a very active used-phone market with phones selling at a fraction of their original prices.

## 5.2 Characteristics and trends relevant to the eastern irregular route

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- *The eastern route out of Ethiopia with Dire Dawa as a key migration hub, remains the **most popular** irregular migration route out of Ethiopia.*
- *Although most using the eastern route aim for Saudi Arabia, a significant proportion of children from the Eastern Hararghe and Dire Dawa aim only **to reach Djibouti**. This may be especially true of the younger ones.*
- ***Very few are 'successful' in Djibouti**, if they cannot find casual work for very low pay they may beg or shine shoes, clean cars etc and often sleep on the streets or beaches.*
- *Very few child migrants aim to stay abroad permanently, most are looking **for temporary migration** but due to their age and other reasons **all fall into irregularity**.*
- *While all of those crossing to Yemen and beyond use **smugglers** for some or all of their journey, many going to Djibouti do not use them, especially those using the train.*
- ***The ownership of phones** and access to and **use of social media** is very low amongst child migrants.*
- ***Forced and voluntary return** for child migrants is common and has been especially so due to Covid-19 restrictions in 2020.*
- ***Re-migration is very common** and although most of those interviewed suggested they would not re-migrate, other evidence suggests re-migration is often a priority for returnees.*
- *The journey remains **very risky and dangerous** for all migrants but especially children and amongst children it is **especially dangerous for girls**.*
- ***Covid-19 has had a big impact** on flows out of Ethiopia and number of returns/deportations but should be seen as a temporary anomaly as the desire to migrate and underlying drives remains strong amongst children*

### 5.2.1 Popularity of the eastern route

The eastern route out of Ethiopia is by far the most commonly used by Ethiopian irregular migrants whether children or adult. For most Saudi Arabia is their intended destination but for some children **Djibouti is the target**. Of all people -refugees and migrants- who go through Yemen towards Saudi Arabia over 90 per cent are Ethiopian.

Historically, in recent years, a smaller number take the northern route towards Europe, a number that reduced by half between 2018 and 2019 according to IOM flow monitoring statistics.<sup>47</sup> An even smaller number and apparently also proportionately diminishing number of Ethiopians travel towards South Africa.<sup>48</sup> None of those interviewed for this study were intending to use the northern or

<sup>47</sup> IOM (2020a) op cit.

<sup>48</sup> In 2017, the Mixed Migration Centre estimated that between 14,750 and 16,850 migrants travel along this route annually – the majority (80%) estimated to be Ethiopians, but IOM claimed in its 2019 data that the number of Somalis using the route is rising as Ethiopian number fall. (Ref: RMMS (2017) Smuggled South. Briefing Paper.

southern routes to leave Ethiopia and none of the returnees interviewed had not used the eastern route.

### 5.2.2 Destination choices

For those using the eastern route, **Saudi Arabia is the destination objective for the vast majority.** Historically, there have been Ethiopian communities in Yemen (mainly Aden and Sana'a) and before 2014 when fighting escalated in Yemen there was work for Ethiopian there, even if it was temporary and useful to migrants to finance the rest of their journey into Saudi Arabia.

Somali (Somaliland and Puntland regions) and Djibouti have been transit areas for those on the eastward journey to Saudi Arabia. It has been evident for some years that Ethiopian children and youths are present in Djibouti-ville, in particular, but little is known of Djibouti as a target destination instead of Yemen and Saudi Arabia.<sup>49</sup> In this research **a third (29%) of would-be child migrants stated Djibouti would be their chosen destination, and 54 per cent of returnees stated that Djibouti was their country of destination.** A higher number (71%) of returnees were in Djibouti when they were forced to return but they were 'still on their way' and had not reached their country of destination when they were forced to, or chose to return back to Ethiopia. Only 6 per cent of interviewed returnees were in Saudi Arabia when they were forced to return.

Before children decide to leave Ethiopia to cross borders into Djibouti or Somaliland, many have already become internal migrants within Ethiopia.<sup>50</sup> Urban centres all over the country draw people in, including children, but particular cities like Dira Dawa become hubs for onward international irregular movement.

*"It is noticed that many children first tend to migrate to nearby woreda towns, then to zonal towns and then plan and prepare their external migration after gathering information. Children that go out on the street or those who see gathering around in the streets of Dire Dawa are increasing in number. In recent days, children and youth flow to this city in an increasing amount. Many young children under 18 are found in different parts of the city like in Sabian area, Dechatu, Ashewa, Gendeqore and Megala. These children stay in this city and try to migrate after some time."* Representative from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. Dire Dawa.

According to a senior child protection advisor at the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, in the Amhara region, and northern and southern Wello, there is a strong 'culture' of migrating to Saudi Arabia and Arab countries. The route is apparently particularly interesting to **Muslim girls** in so far that they expect the cultural environment to fit better with their own culture and there is **ready employment as domestic workers.** *"Similarly, the Muslim communities of Hararghe are getting in the process of developing such a culture in migrating to Arab countries."*

*"Among returnees and those that are caught during migration journey in the recent past, many are girls and female youths between the ages of 15-18. The office understands that females/girls are preferably sent to Arab countries mainly because of high job opportunity/ demand/ for house maids in the destination countries."* Representative from the East Hararghe Zone General Attorney Office

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<sup>49</sup> Spagna, G and Sørensen, N.N.,(2015) *South-South Child Migration*. DIIS Policy Brief.

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF's (2021) *Understanding the Perceptions, Experiences and Vulnerabilities of Migrant Children and Young People in Ethiopia*. Comprehensive Research Report. To be published in 2012 (draft viewed by this writer)

Perhaps, if what these quotes suggest is the case, this would account for the fact that according to IOM between 2018 and 2019 the proportions of girls and boys seen using the route to Saudi Arabia have become closer in number (from 10% boys and 5% girls 2018 to 6% girls and 7% boys in 2019).

Even if it is not clear that Djibouti offers jobs to young Ethiopian boys and girls that in any way compares comparison to Saudi Arabia, both in terms of volume or pay levels, there are a number of aspects that may attract Ethiopian children to target Djibouti instead of Saudi Arabia:

- The geographic, linguistic and cultural proximity of Djibouti to eastern Ethiopia, Dire Dawa and East Hararghe areas. Djibouti is a ‘low hanging fruit’ for those desperate to leave (although how sweet that ‘fruit’ is questionable for most)
- The presence of regular train movements between Ethiopia (Addis) and Djibouti (Djibouti city) passing through Dire Dawa city and the ease of ‘jumping’ such freight and passenger trains, at no financial cost. The journey is approximately 6 hours only, compared to days or weeks it could take to reach Saudi Arabia. **63 per cent of returnee interviewed for this study stated they had used the train as one means of transportation during their migration. Additionally, 63 per cent of would-be migrants stated they expected to leave by train.**
- The sea crossing from Djibouti to Yemen has associated costs and high levels of risk let alone the widely known dangers of travelling to Saudi Arabia through Yemen’s lawless and militia-run war zones. Yemen is also experiencing a prolonged humanitarian crisis.
- The sense that if things go well the migrants may decide to travel on to Saudi Arabia but if things go badly they could relatively easily return to Ethiopia.

It seems many, **thousands perhaps** (pre-covid deportations), live marginal lives on the streets or beaches competing with locals for informal and occasional work such as car washing, shoe cleaning or sex work, while others fall into begging and petty crime.<sup>51</sup> A 2017 report by US department of labour found that migrant children in **Djibouti engaged in the ‘worst forms of child labour’**, including in commercial sexual exploitation, with only moderate advancement improving the situation in the country made by 2019.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, both would-be and returnee child migrants interviewed chose their preferred country of origin because of economic opportunities (average over 78% of those interviewed). Presumably, if there were few or no economic opportunities in Djibouti it would have been known by would-be migrants and others and less child migrants would target Djibouti. However, if there is work for Ethiopians in Djibouti it **appears to be a niche for children as few if any adult Ethiopians select Djibouti as a country of destination.**

*“Mainly many boys migrate often. They come in and go out everyday /frequently. They sleep on the main streets under a tent made of canvas. But their life there is dangerous. They live on the streets. They start inhaling shoe glue and they live running away and hiding from the police. The police mistreat you and do every bad thing on you once you get in their hands. They get raped by the police on the borders...”* Female Ethiopian returnee migrant age 17 years.

### 5.2.3 Duration intentions

Conforming to other studies of migrants from Ethiopia - including the Ethiopian Migration Project data - those interviewed in East Hararghe and Dire Dawa mainly see migration as a method of earning money in order to improve their lives and those of their families before returning home again.

<sup>51</sup> International Bureau For Children’s Rights (2019) *Migration Surge Leaves Children Stranded, Begging On Djibouti’s Streets*

<sup>52</sup> US Department of Labour. (2019) *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor – 2019. Djibouti.*

**Permanent settlement overseas is far less common** as an ambition (and possibility) for most low skilled, low educated Ethiopian migrants on the eastern route. **Circular migration is the model** most pursue, resulting in the high levels of re-migration for many Ethiopian migrants. According to many of those who participated in this study, their preference would be not to leave at all. As reported from various focus group discussions, ‘all the respondents agreed that, if things are good at home, it is preferable to work in their home place than going abroad.’

**81 per cent of returnees were clear that when they migrate they intended to stay abroad only temporarily – 17 per cent said they intended to stay permanently.** Meanwhile, 34 per cent of would-be child migrants said they hoped to stay permanently abroad, 51 per cent temporarily and 14 per cent said it depended on opportunities. The difference between the two groups may be explained by the fact that would-be migrants had not yet experienced the actual conditions they might live in overseas – a reality that once experienced, might **reduce their ambitions to remain permanently**

#### 5.2.4 Use of smugglers

Child migrants do not need to engage with smugglers if their destination is Djibouti and they use the train for transport, but if their destination is Yemen and Saudi Arabia the use of smugglers is non-negotiable.

All vessels taking irregular migrants across the Red Sea or Arabian Sea are smuggler operated, often in close co-operation with other land-based or criminal gangs in mainland Africa as well as Yemen. This is well established and researched.<sup>53</sup> The level of collusion with state actors (police, immigration, coast patrols etc.) is such that continuous illicit movement across these waters has continued unabated for the last decade. Average monthly maritime movements may have been as high as 13,300 people per month in 2018, requiring approximately 200 journeys (with an average of 65 passengers per trip), or 6-7 trips every day. During 2019 it may have fallen to around 5 or 6 trips daily (average). This is an industrial-scale, rolling programme of smuggling requiring high collusion of state actors and generating significant profits.<sup>54</sup>

Smugglers are active along the irregular terrestrial, non-train, migratory routes within Ethiopia as well as in Djibouti and Yemen. It can be presumed as a general statement that any child migrant not using a train to leave Ethiopia or who tries to move on from Djibouti depends on smugglers for some or most of their movement. **90 per cent of over 2000 Ethiopians interviewed by IOM in 2019 in the Obock area of departure said they had used smugglers, most had used multiple smugglers,** or ‘brokers’ as IOM refers to them.<sup>55</sup> From the 83 would-be and returnee migrants interviewed for this study Table 3 offers interesting insight into their perceptions and experience.

*“If it wasn’t for them [smugglers], we wouldn’t have known the location of the road and how to get there. But, now, if we find them here we would be happy to kill them. They took our clothes, our phones and robbed us of our money. They took us without bringing any food with them. When one of the broker is tired he passed us on to another one, but none of them took care of us even though we*

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<sup>53</sup> Smuggling across these waters is well-documented in studies and media articles, for example: UNODC. (2018) *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants (pages 70-92)* , or, Al-Ramsi, M. (2020) *Migrants’ Trip of Death from the Horn of Africa to Yemen*. The Investigative Journal. And, Frouws, B. and Horwood, C. (2019) *Both angels and demons? The role and nature of migrant smugglers*. MMC

<sup>54</sup> Figures based on IOM statistics from 2018 and 2019 previous quoted.

<sup>55</sup> IOM (2020b) op cit.

*were very exhausted. They didn't feed us. They just took advantage of our money."* Ethiopian male returnee migrant, aged 17 years.

*"...the smuggler put us, we were many – more than one hundred, in a medium sized bus. We sat one over the other. Those who were physically strong forced others under them. Many of us were suffocated and screaming. When the screaming was too loud, the smugglers would stop the car and beaten the people who screamed. Then, at our destination, they found five people were dead and the smugglers just ordered older ones from us to dig holes and bury them together. We had travelled sitting on dead bodies...."* Ethiopian male returnee migrant, aged 15 years.

**Table 3: Perceptions and experiences of child migrant interviewees (n=83)**

Questions	Would-be child migrant (n=35)	Returnee child migrant (n=48)	Comment
Do they intend to use, or did they use one or more smugglers to migrate	31%	54%	Many were returned from Djibouti having used the train to leave Ethiopia and therefore did not use smugglers
If they used a smuggler did they use one for the entire journey?	Not asked	none	Not surprising finding considering what we know about smuggler networks and systems
If they used smugglers did they have several for different parts of the journey	Not asked	54%	Having different smuggler at point further away from their origins increases the risk of violations
Agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that the smugglers intentionally mislead / misled them	48%	70%	Returnee experience of smugglers offers a higher rate than those inexperienced
Smugglers misled them about routes, length of journey, its cost, its conditions, conditions at destination and safety or security levels	Not asked	>94%	On each item from 94%-100% agreement
Nevertheless, some agreed or strongly agreed that despite intentionally misleading them the smugglers do help them to migrate	29%	31%	Illustrates the dual aspects of smugglers
In your experience smugglers were responsible for rights violations and incidents during your migration journey	Not asked	50%	This was a multiple-select question and 'criminal gangs' and 'government officials' scored higher than smugglers
Describe smugglers as criminal	Not asked	73%	62% of these also described them as 'service providers'
Did they pay the smuggler in full before you left?	Not asked	8%	Not surprising finding considering what we know about smuggler networks and systems
Did they pay the smuggler(s) in instalments along the way	Not asked	92%	Not surprising finding considering what we know about smuggler networks and systems

### 5.2.5 Use of technology

In recent years much has been made of the use of smart phones and social media by migrants (and refugees) engaged in mixed migration. Their use in terms of pre-departure preparations and communication and information sharing during the journey has been described and quantified and for

many nationalities, socioeconomic groups and routes.<sup>56</sup> Smugglers also use these platforms to advertise their services and in some cases warnings against movement or the dangers of entering particular countries have been posted.<sup>57</sup> Even for adult Ethiopians using the eastern route the evidence suggested that over 50 per cent had phone throughout their journey and just over 30 percent had smart phones.<sup>58</sup>

However, concerning the children interviewed for this study the **ownership of phone and access to and use of social media was relatively low** – perhaps not surprising given their socioeconomic profiles. 54 per cent of would-be migrants said they had no phones, but 20 per cent they had a smart phone. **84 per cent of returnees said they did not have use of a phone during their journey. Only 6 per cent said they used social media at all during their journey.**

Overwhelmingly, would-be and returnee migrants obtained information before and during migration through direct verbal contact and direct conversations with others – 94 per cent for both group in both situations (before and during migration). **Zero would-be child migrants and zero returnee migrants interviewed said they obtained information about migration from the internet or social media** and none listed them as sources that influenced them to migrate.

### 5.2.6 Return of child migrants

The hundreds of thousands of regular labour migrants return to Ethiopia when their contracts and work agreements have ended. Some will try to re-migrate again at a later date or soon after and others may choose not to re-migrate. **Return is a natural part of the regular migration cycle.**

However, **it is also a characteristic part of the irregular migration cycle.** Previous sections discuss the scale of deportations that have been ongoing from Saudi Arabi involving more than 600,000 Ethiopian adults and children, but Yemen and Djibouti have also deported or cooperated with agencies assisting return of irregular migrants.

Return can be voluntary or forced, they can be organised or spontaneous. Return is an on-going reality and part of the irregular migration eastern route phenomenon - more than any other route. For years irregular migrants would also spontaneously return to Ethiopia when they chose to return, sometime their status was such that they could leave Saudi Arabia without problems, in other cases they would hand themselves to police or allow themselves to be ‘caught’ in order to be deported (at no cost to themselves, apart from the discomfort of detention and delays possibly).

Forced returns are practiced globally, but possibly no other migrating group, except those crossing irregularly from Mexico to the USA, are subject to such systematic and high volume forced returns as those on the eastern route and in Saudi Arabia.

Since 2013, major and systematic deportations of Ethiopian irregular migrants who use the eastern route are typically between Riyadh or other Saudi airports and Addis Ababa, and even from Yemen airports directly into Addis. From there the government with major engagement from IOM (and to a lesser degree by other agencies) have organised return to communities with or without limited re-integration support and follow-up. Deportations and border push-backs from Somaliland and Djibouti

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<sup>56</sup> Frouws, B. and Brenner, Y. (2019) *Hype or hope? Evidence on use of smartphones & social media in mixed migration.*

<sup>57</sup> Frouws, B., Phillips, M., Hassan, A. and Twigt, M. (2016) *Getting to Europe the ‘WhatsApp’ way The use of ICT in contemporary mixed migration flows to Europe.* RMMS Briefing Paper.

<sup>58</sup> Frouws, B. and Brenner, Y. (2019) op cit.(graphic)

into Ethiopia do occur, and have occurred over the last decade but have been ad hoc and sporadic in nature.

**Systematic returns of irregular Ethiopians in Djibouti** (including those deported from Yemen to Djibouti) only began once the Covid-19 pandemic brought in closed borders and a fear of migrants as vectors of the virus. Many hundreds of children were part of the deportation from Djibouti since March 2020 - see sub-section 5.2.11 below for more details.

Return from regular migration by plane is a long way from the way most child migrants return to Ethiopia. For children forced to return there are complex issues to be resolved or come to terms with.

*“The condition of these children is very worrying one because they return with lots of physical and psychological problems (traumas) and it is costly and time taking to treat and health that. Furthermore, they do not wish to return back empty handed for they initially left home by selling their parent’s asset or by robbing them.”* Representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, Dire Dawa.

According to a representative of the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs in Dire Dawa, the returnee data locally indicated that **30 to 35 per cent were children, and the majority were boys aged 12 -13 years old. Girls were in the 16 – 20 age range.** As further discussed below (see; sub section 5.3.2, *Impact of migration ‘failure’*), an important aspect of child migrant return is the issue of re-integration and returnees’ sense of failure, shame, and guilt, let alone any mental health issues related to the negative experiences they may have witnessed or experienced while migrating. The following quote is typical of many heard during the research.

*“My family paid me a lot of money at different times during my journey. They rented out their farmlands to earn money and send me. They sold their cattle. Now, we have no land to plough. I returned with no money. I am totally dependent on them. Sometimes, it is embarrassing to speak with others. I do not know what I can do next. I am hopeless person. I had better die there. The only thing I am happy is that I returned alive...”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged 16 years.

According to the police in Dire Dawa, **not infrequently children who left from their homes do not even return back to their homes** when their migration plan fails. They have nothing to return back to so they end up in Dire Dawa and other urban centres in the area. *“... when their plan to get the job fails, they become street children, and beggars commercial sex workers, and drug addicts.”*

*“We are aware that children show high interest to re-migrate even before the process of reunification is completed. There were some children who insisted and wanted to return right after a police hand them over to their families.”* Representative from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. Dire Dawa.

The issue of whether returnee child migrants return to education is an important one. Of the returnees interviewed 42 per cent said they were (at the time of interview, to a multi-select question) ‘continuing schooling’, 44 per cent said they were ‘earning income’ (this could be along-side education) while **31 per cent said they were doing ‘nothing’**. No one said they were attending a training programme or engaged in an income generating project.

*“Another difficulty is for those returnee children to continue attending lower level class while their peers have passed several grades from where they stopped by the time they migrate. That affects their decision very much. [...] also they migrate preferring money over education, they still choose to start a business than go back to school after reunification.”* Office of the General Attorney, Addis.

### 5.2.7 Re-migration of child migrants

The desire for re-migration is a common phenomenon in Ethiopia amongst both adults and child migrant returnees. In 2019 the Ethiopian Migration Project interviewed 114 returnees, two thirds of whom had returned from Saudi Arabia – **90 per cent expressed a desire to re-migrate. 40 per cent of them had already made more than one migratory journey, 10 per cent had made between 5 and 9 previous journeys.**

Migrants using eastern route return for many reasons. Many have their migratory journey thwarted because of detention and deportation along the way – this may occur in Ethiopia itself, or Somaliland, Djibouti and Yemen. In some cases migrants have taken voluntary re-patriation assistance from IOM, national governmental authorities or other non-government agencies. Alternatively, migrants run out of money or find the hardships and risks too high and turn back.

*“My son is 13. He went to Djibouti twice without my knowledge. During his first journey, he was detained and deported back to Dire Dawa. In the second attempt, he managed to reach Djibouti and worked there for three months. Again, he was detained and sent back to Dire Dawa. In all these, he was beaten by police, detained, suffered of hunger and thirst and walked over dead bodies.”* Returnee parent.

Many others succeed in getting to Saudi Arabia and find work but have sub-optimal or traumatic work experiences or are cheated or abused or are detained and rounded up for deportation by the Saudi government.<sup>59</sup> Since mass deportations started in late 2013, **over 600,000 Ethiopians have been deported in various waves** – these have continued into 2020 despite coronavirus but were eventually halted in April.<sup>60</sup> According to IOM, **6-10 percent of all deportations are unaccompanied minors, most being between the ages of 16-17 years but 25 per cent of these minors are 15 years or under.**<sup>61</sup> The vast majority of forced returnees from Saudi Arabia entered the country through Yemen and used the eastern routes out of Ethiopia.

There is increasing focus and appreciation of the special strains and needs of returnees as well as challenges related to their re-integration into their communities. But the reality is very challenging with both parents and children recognising that **to some extent re-migration is inevitable for many.**

*“I feel good because I came back home with my health but I am sad and desperate as I came with nothing. The situation in here is worse than before. There is no job. Life is not good at all.”* Ethiopian male returnee.

*“... we cannot support our children. Morally, we cannot advise our children against re-migration because we are not fulfilling their needs...”* Parent of returnee

*“If we had assets, our children wouldn’t have tried to leave us. And that breaks our heart very much.”* Parent of returnee

However, there are three factors that may suggest that efforts to re-integrate returnees may meet with limited success:

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<sup>59</sup> IOM, 2019. Return of Ethiopian Migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>60</sup> Dawit Endeshaw, D. and Paravicini, G. (2020) [U.N. says Saudi deportations of Ethiopian migrants risks spreading coronavirus.](#) Reuters

<sup>61</sup> From interview with IOM for this study.

- The critical reality is that returnees come back to a situation that is **worse or the same than when they left**. Their families remain very poor and their job prospects or education possibilities are bleak – there are few alternatives.
- Migrants who return empty-handed (or worse, have caused their families to be further impoverished through having been extorted by criminals in along the way) feel a strong sense of **shame and guilt resulting often in low self-esteem and increased tensions** at home.
- They are no longer ‘innocent’ - returnees are ‘experienced’. This can be apparent in different ways - returnees who made it and who were earning wages when they were deported know its possible and want to try their luck again. Returnees who started their journey but were turned back are sure that the next time they will succeed, **their initial failure drives them to try again**.

Interviewees for this study (both parents and adults) often spoke of the **restlessness of returnees**, and their commonly-held desire to re-migrate. They also spoke often of the mental health fragility of some returnees.

*“It feels very guilty to have become extra burden to my family. We are living less than the life status we used to live before migrating and I am the main cause for that and that hurts a lot.”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged between 14-17 years.

Of returnees interviewed 46 per cent said they were treated differently when they returned and **82 per cent said they are treated worse**. 44 per cent said it had been ‘very difficult’ at a psychological or emotional level to return. However, just 23 per cent of those interviewed said they intended to migrate again. 30 per cent of those claimed they were worse off than before they left and 50 per cent said **the reasons why they initially wanted to migrate had not changed**.

A senior police official in Dire Dawa told this study that, *“out of 20 returnees our office re-united with their families, when we do follow up visits, it is only around 6 that we find where we left them – with their families, continuing schooling and supporting their families. The rest have already migrated again.”*

*“We work to integrate returnees and provide them assistance to start working in micro enterprises; but during these times, it is too difficult to find returnees in their localities. They move fast to re-migrate.”* Representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, Dire Dawa.

## 5.2.8 Resorting to irregularity

**Ethiopians under the age of 18 have the perception that they have few alternative livelihood or educational options but to attempt migration irregularly.** Labour laws, education laws and rules relating to overseas labour migration linked to anti-trafficking protection means they cannot work regularly overseas through any of Ethiopia’s many private employment agencies (PEAs) regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. A person under 18 cannot apply for and obtain a passport in Ethiopia without parental assistance. Given that so many child migrants leave without their parents’ consent this is also a barrier for young migrants further **pushing them into undocumented irregular movement**.<sup>62</sup> Of the returnees interviewed, **98 per cent said they did not have any documentation**, and 77 per cent of would-be migrants said they did not intend to get any official documentation.

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<sup>62</sup> Of those interviewed 85% of returnees and 63% of would-be child migrants said their parents were against them migrating.

Furthermore, the demand for regular labour migration is overwhelmingly focused on domestic labour services from young women. The demand for female migrants from Ethiopia is high but for males it is lower and probably less than 20 per cent of annual quotas available. Even if boys were allowed to apply for work overseas regularly there would be no availability as the current slots for males are already highly oversubscribed and the educational requirement of successfully complete 8 years of schooling **would preclude many of those who chose the irregular route.**

Child migrants may also be nudged or persuaded to take the irregular route through peer communication and urgings from local smugglers. One representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Dire Dawa claimed that, *“returnees often open a shop in their localities and they become brokers, and make it business to assist other children in their localities to migrate.”*

During the research the main reason would-be and returnee migrants gave for travelling irregularly was the **cost of obtaining documentation and paying the employment agencies** their fees etc. Even if the official fees agencies demand from clients are low (they routinely charge employers in destination countries their fee), the perception is that they are high, or perhaps, brokers at the woreda level spread the notion that legal means are costly to encourage people to use smugglers and go irregularly – this is speculation.

*“It would be much better if there can be easier way we could use to go legally. If we could go legally then we could work properly, without many problems. But they ask for more than 80,000 Ethiopian Birr (USD \$2,500) to do that.”* Ethiopian female returnee migrants aged 17 years.

In other studies irregular migrants have said that travelling independently is more risky but allows them to avoid the costs and potential abuses of the PEAs and the *kafala* system in Gulf States and also allows them to choose who they work with and negotiate their salary.<sup>63</sup> None of those interviewed in this study mentioned these issues, but a previous ‘knowledge, attitudes and practices’ study conducted in 2014 (RMMS’s *Blinded by Hope*) found that of would-be (potential) migrants who were surveyed almost **half (49%) preferred the option of irregular migration compared to regular migration.**<sup>64</sup> The reasons for preferring irregular migration were that it would enable them to find better jobs and payment (44%) and that they considered the risks and obstacles are similar whether they use irregular or regular channels (26%). However, a substantial proportion of on-going migrants and returnee migrants interviewed in that study (31% and 40% respectively) reported they would opt for the regular route ‘next time’ after having experienced the risks.<sup>65</sup>

### 5.2.9 Risks and protection factors of the eastern route

The dangers of the eastern route are extensive and well documented in sector literature.<sup>66</sup> There are risks from poor planning and misadventure in some of the world’s harshest geographical environments, but also high risks caused by neglect, abandonment, exploitation, victimisation, kidnapping, torture and outright murder. Interestingly, **despite the high-profile documentation of the**

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<sup>63</sup> The *kafala* system is a controversial and restrictive system used to monitor migrant laborers, working primarily in the construction and domestic sectors in Gulf Cooperation Council member states and a few neighbouring countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>64</sup> RMMS (2014) *Blinded by Hope; knowledge, attitudes and practices of Ethiopian migrants.*

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Three of many examples: RMMS (2012) *Desperate Choice: conditions, risks & protection failures affecting Ethiopian migrants in Yemen*, And: Human Rights Watch (2014) *Yemen’s Torture Camps Abuse of Migrants by Human Traffickers in a Climate of Impunity* Bierbach, M. (2019) *Eastern Africa to Yemen: One of the most dangerous migrant routes.* Infomigrants.

**wide range of rights violations and criminality perpetrated by state and non-state actors on migrants on this route little changes.**

Stories heard during this research conducted in October 2020 from returnee child migrants are as harrowing to listen to as stories that were told and recorded a decade ago (also by this author). Far from reducing criminality or seeing enhanced protection systems in action, the smuggling ‘machine’ along the eastern route, while enjoying almost complete impunity and increased volume of migrants, has become **more routine, the migrant ‘commodity’ more efficiently exploited and is as brutal as ever**. Probably more so now, due to the on-going war and humanitarian crisis in Yemen and division of territory between government and militia forces.

Writing about Ethiopians passing through Yemen in 2018, the UN wrote, ‘some take irregular work in Yemen to make money to fund the rest of their journey while others get caught up in the on-going conflict between the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi rebels, sustaining injuries - or dying in crossfire. Some also end up in detention centres. At various stages of their journey, these migrants face the risk of being exploited by ruthless smugglers and other criminals, including enduring physical and sexual abuse; torture for ransom; arbitrary detention for long periods of time; or gruelling forced labour, without wages.’<sup>67</sup> The **arrival of Covid-19 in March 2020 brought added misery** to Ethiopians stranded in Yemen and Saudi Arabia with particularly harrowing reports from both countries.<sup>68</sup>

For young Ethiopians these **dangers start in Ethiopia itself** and continue through all countries they pass. Inside Yemen the situation has been highly risky for children on the move - not only are they passing through active war zones and areas notorious for lawlessness with gangs and militias exploiting and victimising migrants (particularly Ethiopians), but the terrain is harsh, not to mention the dangers of crossing into Saudi Arabia where Saudi border control forces present additional risk (beatings, detention, robbery, deportation, shooting etc.).

Returnee child migrants had much to say about the dangers of their journey, even though few of them had travelled beyond Djibouti and into Yemen - where many of the most egregious violations and risk are typically reported. **85 per cent of those interviewed said the risk and dangers were ‘many’**. **65 per cent agreed that the dangers and risks were more severe for children as opposed to adults and 75 percent said they were worse for girls (see the following section)**. However, some of those asked also thought the risks were equal for boys and girls.

In terms of what returnee girls reported on levels of risk, **70 per cent (of 17 interviewed) said female child migrants face more risk than boys**. Only 6 per cent felt boys faced more risk than girls and 23 per cent did not know.

As Table 4 illustrates, in terms of specifying the dangers and risks they faced, of the 48 returnees interviewed 60 per cent said there was risk of death, 79 per cent there was risk of physical violence, 54

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<sup>67</sup> UN News. (2018) *Smugglers see thousands of migrants in Yemen as ‘a commodity’, UN agency warns*

<sup>68</sup> MacGregor, M. (2020) *Virus adds to risk for trafficked migrants in war-torn Yemen*. Infomigrants. And, Infomigrants. Human Rights Watch. (2020) *Yemen: Houthis Kill, Expel Ethiopian Migrants*. Brown, W. (2020) *International condemnation rains down on Saudi Arabia after Telegraph investigation into hellish detention centres*. The Daily Telegraph

percent identified sexual violence, 73 per cent robbery, 46 per cent detention, 83 per cent hunger and thirst, 58 per cent abandonment and 15 per cent identified abduction and trafficking risks.

However, as Table 4 also shows in most categories of violations, female migrants (girls) not only agreed with their male counterparts on most categories but also identified particular violations to a higher degree than boys or combined findings. In particular, an alarming 88 per cent of girls identified death as a major risk, and almost 60 per cent (57%) identified sexual violence and 29 per cent identified abduction and/or trafficking as a risk while they migrated (unlike a lower proportion of males).

**Table 4: ‘What are the main risks and dangers you and fellow migrants faced on your journey?’**

Risk/danger	Proportion of all returnees (male and female) identifying these risks and dangers on their journey (either from witnessing or experiencing).n=48	Proportion of female returnees only identifying these risks and dangers on their journey (either from witnessing or experiencing).n=17
Death	60%	88%
Physical violence	79%	76%
Sexual violence	54%	57%
Robbery	73%	82%
Detention	46%	47%
Kidnapping	10%	18%
Hunger / thirst	83%	88%
Abandonment	58%	59%
Exposure / no shelter	52%	41%
Abduction and / or trafficking	15%	29%

The prevalence of migrant children (and adults in other research) who say **they were held until their parents or relatives paid a ransom** is very high but not reflected in these findings where the respondents do not equate extortion or being held by their smugglers as ‘kidnapping’. However, this practice is very common and mentioned by all returnee focus groups and parents.

*“People desire to change their lives and that of their parents through migration but put themselves into more troubles because parents are forced to pay ransom money for smugglers. A migrant can face up to 7 smugglers; each demanding him/her to call his/her parents for pay.”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged 17.

In terms of who they considered most responsible for these threats of risk based on their own experiences and what they knew, Table 5 illustrates their assessments.

**Table 5: ‘Who do you think were the main perpetrators of these incidents against migrants?’**

Identified group	Percentage of all returnees (bots and girls) (n=48)	Percentage of female returnees only (n=17)
Smugglers	50%	71%

Criminal Gangs	69%	59%
Armed groups / militias	48%	47%
Government officials	52%	53%
Other migrants	21%	12%

From Table 5, it may be seen that female returnees felt that the dominant perpetrator group of violation were smugglers (71% selected this category) , significantly higher than boys, but they identified fellow migrants as a low category with only 12 per cent choosing this category. This suggests that fellow Ethiopian migrants normally do not present a high risk to girls, especially when compared to smugglers, gangs and government officials, who as related in verbal testimony (focus group discussion) are the many risk for female migrants.

Not surprisingly 60 per cent of those asked experienced or witnessed violation of those listed above in Djibouti but 42 per cent also identified Ethiopia as where violations occurred. Considering the proximity of Eastern Hararghe and Dire Dawa to Djibouti and the dominance use of the train to exit Ethiopia this is a surprising finding. Almost half (47%) of female returnees interviewed said they used the train from Ethiopia to Djibouti.

Of the female returnees interviewed 76 per cent said they were on their migration journey/experience for 6 months or longer. In terms of where they were when they decided to return (forced or voluntary) 59 per cent were in Djibouti, 12 per cent in Ethiopia, 18 per cent in Somaliland, and only 6 per cent were in Yemen and again 6 per cent in Saudi Arabia. This indicates that for most female child migrants (and also male child migrants – 77%) their migration experience was between Ethiopia and Djibouti and no further (by design or happenstance).

These findings also point to the fact that violations perpetrated against child migrants interviewed of both sexes occurs predominantly in Ethiopia and Djibouti implicating smuggler, gangs and government officials in those areas.

The following quotes are from the focus group discussions with returnee child migrants and parents.

*“Along the routes of migration, multiple of armed criminals and smugglers organized themselves along ethnic groups: Oromo, Somali, Tigre, Amhara and Arab and trouble the migrants to collect money one after the other. They beat migrants, melt plastics over their body, and put them inside wells (dry and wide space made to imprison migrants) and put thorny branches over it until they get money from our parents. They made migrants to call their parents in tone of terror and sufferings.”* Ethiopia male returnee migrant, aged 16 years.

*“They [smugglers] terrorize parents through the phone, for instance, saying “ We are going to remove kidneys of your daughter/son if you don’t send money. Urgent!””* Parent of returnee.

*“Djibouti soldiers caught us while we are cooking rice in tin cups in the wooded areas. They beat us, took us and imprisoned us. The soldiers and the smugglers know each other and when the smugglers deposit money into their account, then the soldiers released us and then the smuggler put us on a vehicle and sent us back to Dire Dawa.”* Ethiopian male returnees, aged between 15-17 years.

*“All migrants are afraid of getting caught by soldiers and/or militias/armed groups when crossing the Ethio-Djibouti border at Dewele through the forest. If you get caught, you will get beaten and suffer a lot. Girls get raped and robbed. You may suffer from thirst and hunger when trying to walk through the forests and desert towns.* Ethiopian male returnee migrants, aged between 14-17 years.

*“They [gangs] live in the forest/desert between boarder of Yemen and Saudi. Even there are some who have migrated from here [eastern Ethiopia] and who have started living in the forest. They are armed and they make things very difficult for us. Melting plastic bottles on our hands and in our eyes; they might kill you, cause you suffering and trouble you until you make your relatives send them some. They know afar and oromo but they speak only Arabic. Their aim is to only to get money from us.”* Ethiopian male returnee migrants, aged between 15-17 years.

*“Females do not withstand the challenges of long journey because they are weaker. They die of hunger and thirst. Smugglers and criminal individuals along the way rape them. There were pregnant girls traveling with a crowd of migrants...”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged 17.

### 5.2.10 Gendered conditions and risks

Females, both adults and children, are exposed to particular risks along the eastern migration route between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia. This has been repeatedly established in previous research and studies and is confirmed by the findings of this study.<sup>69</sup>

**Sexual assault including rape appears to be a common violation that migrating girls face** even within Ethiopia and the risk increased both in likelihood and frequency the longer they travel towards their destination. Migrants Girls sleeping on the streets and beaches of Djibouti-ville have experienced sexual violations.<sup>70</sup>

Abduction, kidnapping and even trafficking (sale of females) for sexual and labour exploitation appears to be a strong characteristic of the gendered conditions of risk along this route out of Ethiopia but has also been documented widely on other routes and amongst girls of other nationalities on the move.<sup>71</sup>

The sense that migration is worse for girls (as mentioned above, **75% agreed**) was often repeated in focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews, mainly because girls were at risk of rape that could result in pregnancy with serious life repercussions, not to mention the trauma of the event or events themselves.

*“Females suffer a lot more than males – they experience a lot of physical and sexual violence.”* Ethiopian would-be migrant aged 16/17 years.

Study researchers from focus groups discussions with returnees reported that participants claimed that in terms of challenges, both boys and girls encounter problems during migration but the type varies. **Girls are usually raped and victims of labour abuses** while boys are beaten, but as some parents mentioned in the focus group discussions, some boys also experienced rape; *‘they can do whatever they want to the girls (rape). If they refuse, they can cut their breasts. They (respondents) said that the sufferings and the problems they have encountered are disgusting ones.’*

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<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2014) *Torture Camps in Yemen - Abuse of Migrants by Human Traffickers in a Climate of Impunity*. Also, Horwood, C. (2015). *Irregular Migration Flows in the Horn of Africa: Challenges and implications for source, transit and destination countries*, Research programme, Occasional Paper Series. Belconnen: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

<sup>70</sup> Altai Consulting. (2013). *Mixed Migration: Libya at the Crossroads: Mapping of Migration Routes from Africa to Europe and Drivers of Migration in Post-revolution Libya*.

<sup>71</sup> Amnesty International (2015) *‘Libya Is Full Of Cruelty’ Stories Of Abduction, Sexual Violence And Abuse From Migrants And Refugees*.

*“There are women, from Chelenko, Alemmaya, Bedeno, Eresa [All East Hararghe] and Dire Dawa. There are a lot of women traveling from those locations. They rape them and beat them right there in front of us. They put us boys on one side and they take the girls away. The smuggler chooses one of the beautiful girls and takes her away.”* Ethiopian male returnee migrant, aged 14-17 years.

The extent of **abduction and trafficking of girls** is not clear, and was mentioned almost as a side-issue by various interlocutors, such as in the quote above. The issue of abduction and disappearances of significant numbers of Ethiopian girls and women in Yemen was raised in a 2014 RMMS report but to date no subsequent inquiry or assessment has been made.<sup>72</sup>

A representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs told the study, **“they [smugglers] keep the girls with them as long as they wish and abuse them sexually, especially the ones that are good looking.”** A representative from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs also claimed *“child migrants are sold on border areas especially on the Somali border, based on their appearances/looks and physical strength and age range, like cattle.”*

*“We have also heard that female migrants/girls are highly exposed to various problems including sexual violence during their journeys. And some among the migrant girls, if they are good looking, get kidnapped by smugglers and either they keep them as wives, or abuse them as long as they want and may or may not release them.”* East Hararghe Zone General Attorney Office Manager

These claims cannot be tested here but were frequently repeated during the study but **if true should be cause for considerable alarm.**

The prevalence of rape affecting girls on the move has important repercussions for them in terms of their physical health, psychological health and re-integration into their community. This aspect deserves deeper analysis and is beyond the scope of this report, but during the research rape of girls was mentioned so often that it appears to be **an entirely expected result of migration for girls**. Boys spoke of newly pregnant girls along the eastern route to Saudi Arabia and others spoke of single girls giving birth in Ethiopian communities have returned from migration. A female researcher in the team who comes from the areas herself reported that **it was ‘common’ to see children of rape in the villages**. One mother interviewed explained how rape affects a girls’ prospect of marriage in the community.

*“...whatever amount of money a returnee girl may own, males do not want to marry them. They are subject of marital exclusion. This harms the morale of girls very badly. The situation for males and females is different. As a result, parents are not willing and interested in their daughters’ migration.”* Parent of returnee.<sup>73</sup>

A senior police representative agreed saying, *“it is difficult for returnee girls to marry and establish a family. The community thinks of them as ruined, touched by other men on their migrating journey.”*

Some respondents suggested that the issue of rape and possible pregnancy of returning migrant girls intersects with their putative behavioural changes and how they are viewed by their communities. One representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Addis Ababa told this study that,

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<sup>72</sup> RMMS (2014) *Abused and Abducted. The plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen*

<sup>73</sup> Note from the focus group discussion: ‘The respondents were not willing state the expression people use to call returnee girls despite frequent probing. They simple stated “Something”. The facilitator thought that the expression might be derogatory and humiliating.

*“the community somehow treats returnees (female migrants) as crazy (with mental problems). These returnees have a typical behaviour that makes them unique from the rest of the community members – they speak loud, and they hardly listen to others.”*

*“Mostly returnees, especially females are not able to get married and establish family. The community sees them differently due to the experiences they have had during their migration journey. And they couldn’t continue schooling for they have not attended initially before they migrated or they can’t continue with youngest class mates. Furthermore, the behaviour exhibited by returnee children is a bit different. They tend to be fast and become angry simply (on everything); and they often decide to re-migrate.”* Representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (Dire Dawa).

### 5.2.11 The impact of Covid-19

Government reactions in origin, transit and destination countries to the global coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 has **created even more stringent and risky conditions restricting irregular movement and double down efforts to remove irregular Ethiopian migrants from Djibouti, Yemen and Saudi Arabia.**<sup>74</sup> Specifically relevant to the area under focus in this study, Ethiopian child migrants in Djibouti have been detained and deported (with quarantine) and border restrictions preventing new crossings from Ethiopia into Djibouti have been more strictly enforced.

IOM have been active with assistance to those trapped in Yemen and Djibouti because of Covid-19, and in late September 2020 claimed **that 8,700 irregular migrants from Ethiopia have been received by Ethiopian authorities from Djibouti since the start of COVID-19.**<sup>75</sup> This figure has included many children and according to IOM some have been as young as 8 years old. In a report of October 2020, the government of Ethiopia is quoted as saying 34,000 Ethiopian migrants return from Gulf countries since Covid-19 started in March, but that more than 550,000 Ethiopian migrants are expected to return from Gulf countries, due to COVID-19, ‘posing an enormous challenge for Ethiopia’.<sup>76</sup>

Many children interviewed mentioned that it was **impossible to move at the time of this research** (October 2020) but that both would-be child migrants and returnees said once the pandemic was over they would attempt to migrate or re-migrate. Only 7 per cent of returnee migrants interviewed said they thought Covid-19 was responsible for their return but this is not surprising since 83 per cent of the sample interviewed had return to Ethiopia ‘longer than 6 month’ before the interview, before the outbreak and subsequent restrictions. However, **83 per cent of would-be child migrants interviewed said if there were no Covid-19 restriction at the time of interview (October 2020) they would have already tried to migrate. 46 per cent said they will try to migrate as soon as the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted,** suggesting the current low volume of movement using the eastward route out of Ethiopia is an anomaly and the **trend to migrate will resume.**

Some respondents suggested the impact of Covid also affected reintegration work and communities’ willingness to receive returned child migrants.

*“During Covid, there were communities that had been refusing to accept returnees due to fear of the virus. Even some of our staffs and officers from stakeholder organizations were very uncooperative in*

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<sup>74</sup> Sanderson, S. (2020) *Trapped in Yemen: African migrants face growing animosity and danger amid COVID-19 outbreak.*

<sup>75</sup> IOM (2020) *Thousands of African Migrants Return from Yemen, Assisted by IOM in Djibouti*

<sup>76</sup> IOM (2020) *IOM, Government of Ethiopia Provide Cash Grants to Thousands of Migrants Returning Due to COVID-19*

*receiving and reunifying returnees. Everyone was afraid of the virus during the first time of the breakout of the pandemic.”* Federal police representative in Dire Dawa.

## 5.3 Perceptions of success, failure & migration ‘culture’

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- *Migration is closely linked to perceptions of success in communities in East Hararghe and Dire Dawa, particularly amongst children who acutely feel the burden of poverty and feel a sense of hopelessness.*
- *Success rates of child migrants may be high in terms of getting into Djibouti but those who return having made money or who have **avoided negative experiences and mistreatment are extremely few.***
- *Child migrants are **traumatised** by their experiences and also **haunted by the failure** of returning without success - also often having increased their parents’ or their own hardships.*
- *Child migrant returns are very common (forced or voluntary) but general **migration ‘failure’** appears to be significantly out-shone by the few examples of **migration ‘success’** that act as **important models for child migrants** to follow.*
- *There appears to be a pervasive **‘culture of migration’** in the region, but children and adult are very focused on income and financial accumulation – few are migrating for migrations’ sake alone. Few are looking for **permanent exodus** from Ethiopia.*

### 5.3.1 Migration ‘success’ rates

It is hard to assess the success rate of migratory efforts of children along the eastern route. Many of those who are thwarted and return without having reached their destination try again, sometimes multiple times. Other disappear or die along the route, are abducted or are not heard of for long periods. By contrast, those who successfully migrate and are working overseas are not available to be interviewed or sampled in research – however, if this were common in communities children and parents would surely refer to them but almost no one did.

*“Not all migrants are successful. For females, it is only 5% who become successful and the rest 95% won’t be.”* Ethiopian female returnee migrant. Aged 17 years.

As previously discussed there are also many who re-migrate after successfully reaching their destination but are later deported. However, there are also those who do not succeed and due to various reasons, including their experiences and what they witnessed during their journey, decide not to attempt to migrate again.

*“I wouldn’t advise anyone to go. I would explain them the difficulties we experienced on our journey. When they see us returning back without anything, they change their mind. They accept our advice, they don’t reject it.”* Ethiopian female returnee, aged 17 years.

Not attempting to re-migrate may be more prevalent amongst children than adults. In the Ethiopia Migrant Project **90 percent of returnees (mostly deportees) interviewed intended to re-migrate**. But in this research 90 per cent of returnees interviewed said they were unlikely to recommend migration to others knowing what they now know. **Only 25 per cent said they would try to re-migrate**. Clearly, this could change as they get older and if their perception / experience of conditions in Ethiopia continue to be bad or get worse.

It is also problematic defining what ‘successful’ migration looks like. There is a danger that it is evaluated by migrants and their families only in financial terms. Is success for some managing to access their chosen country of destination alive? Or is it finding any source of income in that location

or even before arriving in that location? Or is it being able to save money and/or remit money to Ethiopia during the work? Or is it to spend sufficiently long outside Ethiopia earning money to off-set the costs of migrating and the associated discomforts and risks? If so, how long is sufficient to achieve this? To what extent is the calculus only economic – what if income is achieved but the working conditions are harsh or abusive (as they often are, especially for females)?

*“Not all children who migrated came back with money. There is one I know who returned back home after 12 years and she came back with nothing – empty handed.”* Ethiopian female returnee, aged 17 years.

Other questions could be asked about the risks and obstacles that migrants face that could mitigate success; how bad do conditions need to be for someone to regard their migration journey as being ‘unsuccessful’ – some girls are raped multiple times *en route* to Yemen and some then experience further abuse in Saudi Arabia yet still manage to send remittances home. Is this success? Others may be tortured and extorted or witness killings and other atrocities throughout their journey but could reach Saudi Arabia and find work. Later the same migrants could be brutally detained and deported by Saudi authorities and still have managed to earn *some* money and sent *some* home. As mentioned earlier, in some cases migrants have mentioned that deportation from Saudi Arabia after some years is a ‘free ticket’ home to visit their families before re-migrating again.

Travelling to Saudi Arabia regularly through official agencies is also no guarantee of ‘success’. In one focus group discussion with returnee parents one woman told this study how she regretted sending her daughter to work there;

*“...after my divorce, I had had no income to support my children. Then, a woman who went to Saudi Arabia from my neighbour advised me to send one of my daughters to Saudi Arabia. I paid 25,000 birr [USD \$770] and sent her. She worked there for six years. However, she suffered a lot in the hands of her employers and the woman. The neighbour used to take my daughter’s salary and send me nothing nor did she give any to my daughter. Finally, she became sick and the employer imprisoned her in a bathroom. She was even attacked and was cut by a knife on her legs. Whenever we could speak by phone she told me these things. I was troubled so much. Finally, she was deported to Ethiopia and now she is living with me. It is all a loss.”*

Nevertheless, it is clear that many, perhaps the majority, of hundreds of thousand or more that use the irregular eastern route each year do arrive in Saudi Arabia and find work. This is apart from the tens of thousands or more who also organised work there using private employment agencies. **If establishing work (informal or formal, regular or irregular) is the criteria for success then the success rate for adults and children must eventually (perhaps after multiple attempts) be high.** A proxy and partial indicator of how many get into the country is the number who are forcibly deported, over 600,000 since 2013. Deportations are not only those who used the irregular route through Yemen but can include those who flew into the country regularly who for whatever reason fall outside the *kafala* system, or have overstayed beyond their terms of contract or fled their original registered employers etc.

As mentioned, children represent 13-15 per cent of the irregular eastern flows each year (according to IOM’s 2018 and 2019 data of Yemen arrivals) but **this is not the full figure of those that attempt migration because many return or are returned before they reach Saudi Arabia** and as mentioned, a significant proportion of those from eastern Ethiopia target Djibouti, not Saudi Arabia. Some respondents told this study that those who went to Djibouti were less likely to find success, which may be the reason that adult Ethiopian migrants rarely target Djibouti as a destination.

*“There were migrants who managed to reach their destinations and improved their parents’ life and most commonly, such migrants are older ones. The successful ones are not those migrated to Djibouti but to Saudi Arabia. There were people permanently living in Djibouti and Saudi Arabia. Most of them were not successful and returned having a single cloth they wore.”* Ethiopian male would-be child migrant aged between 15-17 years.

Of those children who target Saudi Arabia using the irregular eastern route, **if they make it to Yemen, it should be assumed the majority eventually enter Saudi Arabia, notwithstanding the appalling conditions and treatment they face along the way.** Those children who succumb to death or disappear through long term abduction in Yemen itself are likely to be only a fraction of the total, even if their absolute number is alarming and, of course, tragic.<sup>77</sup>

### 5.3.2 Impacts of migration ‘failure’

The Ethiopian Migration Project Formative Research report found that decisions surrounding migration are taken in a social context in which migration is seen as synonymous with success by the vast majority of Ethiopians but that ‘unsuccessful migration (returns, deportations, death, detention in transit countries) is seen as a form of failure and worsening one’s well-being and capacity to cope’.

In this research no returnees or parents interviewed identified themselves or their children as having had a successful migration experience. **69 per cent of returnees ‘consider themselves having failed by being returned’.** In all cases they spoke about their experiences with stress, anguish, and pain. None of those interviewed said their position in their community was stronger, although 56 per cent felt it was ‘the same’ as before they left. Somewhat contradictorily 46 per cent of returnees also said they were treated differently since they returned and **82 per cent said it was ‘worse’ on their return.**

Parents frequently spoke of the dangers to mental health of their children and family equilibrium that ‘failed’ migration results in.

*“When we fight with our parents, they mention such things. They say, “you are a person of loss/bankruptcy”. They mention that we wasted their money and make no benefit out of it, and that it was all loss for the family. They mention that our friends have become successful abroad and are sending money, and that we/I am a failure and is sitting around. This issue is a headache to me. I had a peace of mind before migrating. Now I returned back unsuccessful and lost their money, it took away all my peace and conscience... and that is a lot of pain. And when the community meets with them “they say to them: Oh poor you, in the name of getting success, that kid of yours put you in a loss, that is sad”.* Female Ethiopian returnee, aged 17 years.

Through the quantitative survey, of 48 returnees interviewed it was clear that **financially their migration had been unsuccessful**; of the 40 per cent who found any paid work outside Ethiopia, **75 per cent returned without any money at all, 88 per cent had not sent anything home**, and on average those interviewed paid having spent USD\$265 (8,600 Eth Birr) on migration itself (mainly their families). **Only 15 per cent of returnees said they gained more financially than they lost from their migration experience, 75 percent said the cost was greater than anything they gained.**

There was a generalised sense of shame and failure amongst returnees. Many blamed themselves for the further immiseration they caused their families, mainly because of the common occurrence of smugglers holding child migrants to ransom soon after their journey begins. The ‘migrate now, pay

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<sup>77</sup> RMMS (2014) *Abused and Abducted. The plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen*

later' model appears to be very commonly used to persuade children to travel with smugglers along the eastern route, **but the payment is made by parents and relatives**, who are very ill-equipped to respond to the extortion.

*"Migrant children leave with empty pocket or with some money for in-country transportation without the knowledge of their parents. Their parents learn when the smuggler made their children make agonising sounds through the telephone. Then, they are obliged to pay whatever amount of money they are asked to save the life of their children."* Ethiopian female returnee, aged 17 years.

*"Children are in the hands of smugglers once they leave home. Their lives are in the hands of smugglers. They have beaten and detained them. They did whatever they wanted to do. They did anything to them to get money from parents. Parents have no choice. They rent out their farmlands, sell their possession and/or borrow money in order to deposit the money in the smugglers' bank account."* Parent of returnee migrant.

Parents interviewed for this study expressed their **anguish and pain** through desperate stories of how they received calls from smugglers who were torturing their sons or daughters, and their efforts to raise money to release them.

*"A smuggler ordered me to deposit 10,000 birr [USD 300] in his account. He said "if you don't deposit 10,000 birr into my account, I will burn your daughter. Save the life of your child! She cannot pass the night alive!" When, he told me this, imagine! I become crazy and confused of what to do next. I started talking to myself like crazy person. He forced my daughter to talk to me and she was crying. When I asked her to return because I don't have such amount of money to send her [...] he closed the phone and did not allow me to talk more....I was about to hang myself."* Returnee parent

**Parents also feel guilty** for not being able to provide adequate food and living conditions at home, this is often compounded by the distress they see in their returnee children.

*"It is painful for people to come back home without any gain. It is difficult for children to start to live again because they have nothing to use to start life. They start from zero. The situation at home is all the same and nothing is different from what they had left behind before their migration, even worse than before. The returnees suffer psychologically and in terms of economy. They cannot get jobs easily."* Returnee parent.

Others worry that their returnee children may attempt to migrate again and are well aware of the difficulties their children face.

*"... I am in worry that my daughter can migrate again because she is feeling bad of my loss due to her migration. She feels that her journey cost her parents and we are living without income. She considers herself as failure and wants to migrate again to pay my debts. In fear of her re-migration, I do not let her go elsewhere without my knowledge. She always regrets."* Returnee parent.

Not only have returnees failed to escape their lives of poverty but also to alleviate their family's conditions which was one of the main objectives of migration for them. On the contrary, they have increased burdens on their family and this aspect of the impacts of 'failure' rests heavily on many child returnees.

*"I feel good because I came back home with my health, but I am sad and desperate as I came back with nothing. The situation in here is worse than before. There is no job. Life is not good at all."* Ethiopian male returnee, aged between 15-17 years.

*“My family has got into a fight with the person who lent them the money they sent me when I was on my journey – to pay smugglers. And for this reason, my parents fight with each other. For example, even though we tell them what had happened to us and all the sufferings, I feel guilty for the problem I caused on my family due to the money wasted on me.”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged between 15-17 years.

*“I am fighting with my family. Also, the community says to me: “Rather than wasting your family’s money you could have lived by selling second hand clothing”. I could have done business with the money here rather than playing with it. I feel hurt when they say that.”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged 16 years.

*“My family paid me a lot of money at different times during my journey. They rented out their farmlands to earn money and send me. They sold their cattle. Now, we have no land to plough. I returned with no money. I am totally dependent on them. Sometimes, it is embarrassing to speak with others. I do not know what I can do next. I am hopeless person. I had better die there. The only thing I am happy is that I returned alive...”* Ethiopian male returnee, aged 16 years.

### 5.3.3 The impact of success

*“People, in the community, also talk about the success of migration all the time in their conversation during coffee times and in school discussions. Many were heard saying, “in terms of seeing a change take a look at Mr X’s and Mr Y’s children. They helped (did this and that) for his family ...”* Ethiopian male would-be migrant, aged 16 years.

This study was told by one returnee that “successful people who benefited from migration are few in number.” This may refer to those attempting irregular migration from the five districts of Eastern Hararghe as well the Dire Dawa administrative area and cannot be said to apply to the whole of Ethiopia. In fact, **for Ethiopia as a whole migration works** and is, and has been, at least financially beneficial for hundreds of thousands of Ethiopia’s population of 110 million. National Bank of Ethiopia data shows that formal remittances inflows to Ethiopia were about \$1.16 billion in 2011 and have increased to \$4.47 billion in 2017 accounting for some five percent of the country’s GDP, remitted from an estimated 3 million Ethiopians living overseas (regularly and irregularly).<sup>78</sup>

For those living in the woredas of Eastern Hararghe and Dire Dawa the **impact of any visible success goes a long way**. According to one would-be adolescent boy, “successful migration is seen as honour among families of migrants. They usual say “My son/daughter sent me money; s/he bought me this and that, ...”. These families also initiate other children in the family to migrate.” Typically, young people and their parents discuss success in terms of the **tangible assets successful migrants have or enable**. These can range from smart phones to new clothing, to new stone houses, cars and starting up new businesses. Behind these visible assets and endeavours, presumably, are also stories of improved conditions at the household level, of increased food, payment of debts, education costs afforded and a general ease of the financial pressures many households live under.

*“A few migration returnees were successful and owned buildings in the town of Dire Dawa. Other children in the area idolise these few successful people and dream to go abroad too.”* Ethiopian female would-be child migrant aged between 12-15 years.

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<sup>78</sup> Tsegay, H.A. and Litchfield, J. (2019) *Changing patterns of migration and remittances in Ethiopia 2014-2018. Migrating Out Of Poverty.*

*“Many successful returnees bought cars, houses, good clothes, land, phones and other materials for their families, which one could not get in years of working locally and without migration.”* Ethiopian male would-be child migrant, aged 17

*“Many rich people are the ones that have children in Saudi Arabia; they constructed houses in towns like Dire Dawa and Harar. Poor ones have become rich within short period of time. Many people aspire to have such living standards and decide to migrate.”* Parent of would-be child migrant.

The impact of these symbols of success is potent is so far that in most cases they have only been possible through migration and therefore stand as a **continual reminder to those who feel hemmed in by poverty and hopelessness of a potential they too can achieve**. If only they try...if only they too could be lucky...

*“We get jealous of those who have succeeded from migration. We wish our children succeeded too. We would love if they could go and get successful like the other children. It is a matter of luck for one child to succeed and become successful. There is no one who hates good things.”* Parent of would-be migrant

The powerful impact of **the psychological impact successful migration has upon young people in eastern Ethiopia cannot be overestimated**. Even if children don't own technology, the penetration of and access to smart phone technology, use of social media, picture sharing as well as satellite TV only magnifies the sense that there is a better world to be had and within their reach, if they are prepared to *run the gauntlet* of risk.

Reportedly, young people discuss migration constantly - sharing stories, comparing knowledge, magnifying success – and with smugglers close at hand, trains regularly moving past them and Djibouti and the Gulf States seemingly so close, **the temptation to migrate must become irresistible to many**. In fact, of the returnees interviewed **83 per cent claimed that it was ‘quite common’ or ‘very common’ for people in their community to migrate. 29 per cent had a parent who had previously migrated and 17 per cent had a sibling who had migrated**. 100 per cent of them told this study that when they were thinking of migrating everyone around them (friends) were also wanting to migrate which influenced them. Only 10 per cent also said they wanted to experience something new and different.

In terms of the would-be child migrants interviewed the findings were very similar, **80 per cent claimed that it was ‘quite common’ or ‘very common’ for people in their community to migrate. 17 per cent had a parent who had previously migrated and 20 per cent had a sibling who had migrated**. 100 per cent of would-be child migrants also agreed that everyone around them (friends) were also wanting to migrate which influenced their own thinking. And additional 22 per cent said they wanted to experience something new/different through migration.

According to one parent interviewed, high numbers of children attempting migration also depletes the number of young people in communities **creating peer pressures** and companions are missed; “It has a psychological pressure to see peer age children get separated because of migration and see only the few left raised in the neighbourhoods alone.”

Having a family member or relative who has successfully migrated is a strong influence on children. In some cases they will provide funds to assist with migration or offer to find work but most compelling is their example that **migration is possible**. 37 per cent of would-be migrants indicated that friends or relatives overseas were one of the top influences on their decision to migrate, but this does not

compare to the impact of returnees in their community – **81 per cent of would-be child migrants and 64 per cent of returnee migrants claimed that talking to returnees, were by far their most important influences.**

It seems therefore, that even if their peers failed to migrate successful; failed to earn more money than they used for the trip; returned with stories of severe hardship and abuse; and more often than not did not intend to re-migrate, they were still strong influencers in their community. **They were living evidence that migration was and is possible.**

*“When some children become successful in their migration; they are spoken about very highly They say, oh he got to Djibouti! or, Oh, he got to Yemen! Or, He got in to Arabia! The story of two successful migrants is told louder than the failures and miseries of many [returnee] migrants.”* Ethiopian, male would-be child migrant, aged 17 years.

Perhaps it was not only the child returnees that influenced children but also adult returnees with their more tangible and visible accoutrements of success, (the question in the quantitative survey used for the interview did not specify between child and adult returnees).

Recognition of their influencing role is behind why many parents and children spoke to this study of how their **parents tried to prevent children talking to returnees**, not least because of a tendency to *bravado*. Just as returnees want to big-up their successes, their listeners are also **keen to filter out bad experiences**. This was powerfully expressed by one male would-be migrant adolescent; “people want to listen to successful migrants; they do not give ears for failures and their bad experiences. Returnees, and those who managed to reach their destination area often share only successes with children who want to migrate and other people in their community.”

#### 5.3.4 ‘culture of migration’ and notions of success

*“Children are too eager for a change. I remember a young boy who came from the Southern region, Hadiya, and said to me: “let me reach at the destination area, and die right then”. He preferred to die right on his arrival of the destination country than staying in his locality and work to change his life. He had prepared around 50,000 birr [USD 1,500 ] for his migration journey. This is a serious attitude problem and some kind of peer pressure and migration culture in the area.”* Senior Police representative, Dire Dawa.

In Ethiopia as a whole, in recent years a palpable ‘culture of migration’ has set in normalising movement and shaping migratory dreams of millions of Ethiopians – even if many will never fulfil their stated aspirations to move. As elaborated in the Formative report of the Ethiopian Migration Project (EMP) ‘*Migration is conceived as a major aspiration, with up to 82 per cent of those interviewed [approx. 1,300] stating to have always dreamt of migration. Migration is considered as a viable and sought after means towards diversifying and accumulating greater financial capital, social empowerment and quality of life.*’ The EMP research found strong evidence of a culture of migration in Ethiopia and a close lineage with **societal notions of success**.

Shaped by external influences (diaspora, returnees and success stories) and normalised through social discourse, migratory aspirations have become entrenched in the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of Ethiopians. This normalisation is evidence of the ‘culture’. However, some could argue that even if there is a culture of migration in Ethiopia, young children are not in a position to make balanced choices. A representative from the National Partnership Coalition (previously Task Force) said “*children are too young to analyses their cost and benefit from migration and they often lean too much on the information they obtain from friends about the benefits.*”

For some migration offers a chance to level-up in a context of extreme socioeconomic differences and inequalities. One parent of would-be child migrants told this study, *“Children compare themselves with other children – children of the rich parents vs. children of the poor. The difference between children from poor parents and that of the rich is visible. The rich ones have TV, food, clothes and other things but the poor children not. These two cannot seat and learn together in the same class/school. Hence, children from poor families are not interested to go to school - they consider migration a way to catch up with their friends in terms of living standards.”*

For many children and youth, migration is also **seen as a duty** by making monetary contributions to the family when domestic options are few and far between. Driven initially by necessity, migration is not only a livelihood option or adaption to dire circumstances but a **route to social and economic mobility**.

Some adults interviewed for this study felt that children and young people who migrated did not have a positive attitude to Ethiopia as a country or even a good work ethic, suggesting they wanted **instant wealth** and were unprepared to work steadily for it. One representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs claimed that, *“these children often have the impossible mindset or attitude towards growth and development in their country. [...] migration is like a dream. When they see someone in their locality who has become successful from migration, they wish to migrate and become like him/her.”*

Another from the East Hararghe Zone General Attorney Office suggested *“families should also help their children grow their love towards their country.”*

Although a personal decision, migration is well documented as a strategy for **household income diversification**. This **ambivalence** between the individual and parental involvement was also found in this research where on one hand parents anguished that their children felt forced to migrate but at the same time they hoped that they would be successful so they could change their own and their family's fortunes.

*“We get jealous of those who have succeeded from migration. We wish our children succeeded too. We would love if thye could go and get successful like the other children.”* Parent of returnee migrants.

According to many parent respondents in focus group discussions, they could not refute their children's argument to migrate because they cannot fulfil their children's needs for education and a 'better life'. The children feel that their future is hopeless if they continue to live with their parents who are struggling to survive and therefore in reference to migration aspiration, *“they cannot confront them.”*

The above quote is relevant to those parents that know, but most are unaware that their children intend to migrate, despite a general fear amongst parents that migration is an attractive option for many children. Most children left home or intended to leave home clandestinely, without the consent of their parents, or parent. Of the returnee migrants interviewed, **81 per cent their parents were unaware that they intended to migrate and 85 per cent said their parents were 'against' them migrating. Amongst the would-be child migrants 69 per cent said their parents did not know they were thinking of migrating and that 63 per cent said their parents were 'against' the idea of them migrating. Nevertheless, a third (29%) of would-be migrants did have the support of their parents to migrate, while 13 per cent of returnees said their parents were supportive before they left.** Many parents felt resigned to the fact their children had to migrate in the absence of other choices.

*“Our children are migrating. We are not preventing them from migration. We do not know what we are going to do to stop our children from migration. They just leave as behind whenever they hear about availability of jobs somewhere else.”* Parent of returnee migrants.

*“We feel very sorry and mourn when we think that we might not find one of our children at home some day when we return from work. It’s very painful for parents.”* Parent of would-be child migrant.

The premise for many, and which feeds the ‘culture of migration’, is that Ethiopia cannot provide young people opportunities to thrive and to be successful. **67 per cent of would-be child migrants interviewed said Ethiopia offered them ‘none’ or ‘very few’ opportunities to earn money. 34 per cent of returnee said the same although an additional 48 per cent of returnees also said there were ‘few’ opportunities to earn money in Ethiopia before they left home.**

Ethiopia’s culture of migration acts as a driver and enabling context. 26 per cent of would-be child migrants interviewed and 42 per cent of returnees identified the ‘culture of migration’ around them as **an important reason for wanting to migrate**. Another indication that a special culture has built up around migration in Ethiopia is the fact that despite socioeconomic deficiencies and deprivation in other countries, such as Djibouti, they do not have a similar desire to migrate. In fact, given how many transiting migrants they see and their proximity to Gulf states it is remarkable that Djiboutian citizens living with high levels of unemployment and in harsh conditions are rarely, if ever, counted in migratory flows.

A notion that mitigates the idea that the culture of migration is too deeply entrenched in Ethiopia is that unlike some parts of the world, in Ethiopia it is very centred on Ethiopia’s deficiencies – people leave more for the push of what Ethiopia does not provide rather than the pull of wanting to live outside, in another culture or society. Indeed, **90 per cent of child returnees interviewed said if conditions were better in Ethiopia they would not want to migrate at all.**

*“These children are migrating because they don’t have a capital that enables them to start a business/job here. They wouldn’t choose to migrate if they had such capacity. We also don’t want our children to go away.”* Parent of returnee migrants.

Nevertheless, even here, there is ambivalence. In the various focus group discussions conducted for this research, the idea that it was better to try to migrate rather than be inactive or passive in the face of poverty or difficulties was strong. There is a notion of success that includes migration ‘failure’ This is captured well by a young man quoted in a new UNICEF study.

*“In my community, a dead corpse of a migrant is more respected than a poor person at home. So, although I know that illegal migration is surrounded by challenges, risk and death, it is better to die on the move than wait for death at home.”<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>79</sup> Quote from a 19 year old man in Hosana, SNNPR, and quoted in UNICEF’s (2021) *Understanding the Perceptions, Experiences and Vulnerabilities of Migrant Children and Young People in Ethiopia*. Comprehensive Research Report. To be published in 2012 (draft only viewed by this writer)

## 5.4 Perception of risk

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- While there is **widespread knowledge** of the most egregious consequences of migration – the violations and deaths - there appears to be a **disconnect** between knowing these things and understanding that they are very likely to happen to those considering to migrate.
- There is a relatively **high alignment** between would-be and returnee migrants' perception and actual experience of risk and danger.
- Nevertheless, a very high number of returnees stated the **ground realities were far worse** than what they expected. In retrospect, about two thirds of returnees consider they were **unaware of the scale of dangers** before they started their journey
- Child returnees stated that during migration children **were 'highly' and 'very highly' exposed** to many dangers and more at risk than adults.
- Many child migrants consider success and failure (including whether they experience bad things on their journey) as a matter of **'fate' and 'luck' and 'chance'**.

In this study the perception of risk and the discussion of risk permeated through all focus group discussions, discussions with key informant and third parties as well as all children interviewed. The fact that there are so many dangers and risks facing children on the move along the eastern route is recognised by parents and children themselves as well as those in authority as **the central concern at the heart of the migration phenomenon**. One representative of the Bureau for Labour and Social Affairs told this study that, *“the level of psychological and psychical risks these migrant children encounter is beyond measure.”*

Different studies have attempted to quantify the perception of risk amongst Ethiopians who are attempting or have attempted irregular migration, predominantly using the eastern routes.

In 2014, an early assessment of risk interviewed Ethiopians adult returnee, on-going and would-be migrants ('potential migrants') and found that. “a strikingly large proportion of migrants have knowledge about serious protection risks they may face, with over 80% of potential migrants (those hoping to or planning to migrate) reporting that they have heard about extortion and robbery, exhaustion, dehydration, starvation and deprivation of sleep, mild to moderate or extreme physical violence, criminal kidnapping for ransom and degrading treatment and verbal and sexual abuse.”<sup>80</sup>

Of the same group of interviewees in the RMMS research, 80 per cent believed that the risks have increased in prevalence and severity over the past few years. Nevertheless, 42 per cent of them stated the benefits of migration are worth the protection risks faced during the journey and upon arrival in transit and destination countries (Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somaliland, Yemen and Saudi Arabia). By comparison and contrast, 45 per cent of those on-going migrants in Yemen and 68 per cent of returnees believed that the benefits of irregular migration were not worth the protection risks faced during the journey and upon arrival in the transit and destination countries.

<sup>80</sup> RMMS (2014) op cit.

In this research, in terms of being warned of risks some children expressed cynicism towards televised efforts to put them off migration. *“We have also watched many migration related horrifying films/videos that have experiences of former migrants broadcasted on TV. However, they are less influential when compared to what children actually observe on the ground in their neighbourhood. Parents of the migrants and their families are living better life besides them. People trust and model what they see with their naked eyes rather than what they see in TV films. For this reason, no one fears migration, except the financial limitation we have.”* Ethiopian male would-be child migrant, aged between 14-17 years.

The Ethiopian Migration Project, also interviewing adults and many of which were hoping to travel regularly and by plane, found a much lower perception of risk amongst ‘aspirational’ and ‘intentional’ migrants interviewed. While their knowledge of the general risks were high - most were aware of the risks and had heard stories or seen TV warnings etc. – **a very low percentage considered that they would personally be at risk if and when they travelled.**

These apparent contradictions, between a detailed knowledge of risks others have faced and a sense that they themselves would experience the same violations or dangers, was also found in this research of children thinking of leaving Ethiopia. In focus group discussions, **many respondents (parents and children) spoke of ‘fate’ or ‘luck’ as an external factor that would shape their personal experience,** even though the reality of most returnees indicated that many of the negative experiences and violations were unlikely to be avoided. **26 per cent of would-be migrants interviewed said that even though there were risks they felt they would avoid them.**

Respondents in a focus group meeting with six would-be male migrants aged between 15-17 years agreed that “success in migration is a matter of chance.”

In this study, almost half of would-be migrants those interviewed (46%) agreed there were dangers on the journey they intended to take but the risks and dangers were ‘few’. A further 31 per cent felt they were ‘few’ or ‘none’ and only 20 per cent reported they were ‘many’. 40 per cent of them felt there were no differences between risks faced by children and adults, with 36 per cent thinking it would be more dangerous for children and 26 per cent thinking children faced less risks and dangers. However, **there was a strong sense that girls were at higher risk than boys – 74 per cent agreed, and only 9 per cent though boys and girls faced the same risk.** Table 6 shows what kind of risks would-be child migrants expected to face on their journey and contrasts the findings with returnee reports.

**Table 6: Types of risks and dangers would-be migrants expected to face compared with those reported to have witnessed and/or experienced by returnees (with gender disaggregation).**

Risk/danger	Expected to have to face by would-be male and female child migrants (n=35)	Expected to have to face by <b>only female</b> would-be child migrants (n=23)	Either experienced or witnessed during migration by both male and female returnees (n=48)	Experienced or witnessed during migration by <b>only female</b> returnees only. (n=17)
Death	23%	22%	60%	88%
Physical violence	71%	56%	79%	76%
Sexual violence	57%	60%	54%	57%
Robbery	29%	35%	73%	82%
Detention	54%	56%	46%	47%

Kidnapping	14%	9%	10%	18%
Hunger / thirst	51%	60%	83%	88%
Abandonment	23%	26%	58%	59%
Exposure / no shelter	9%	13%	52%	41%
Abduction and / or trafficking	14%	4%	15%	29%

With some notable differences (death, robbery, hunger/thirst / abandonment and particularly shelter), would-be child migrants perceptions of risk align **quite closely to returnees responses, suggesting their perception of actual risk is relatively realistic.**

Comparing female would-be child migrants to female child migrants returnees, Table 6 suggests that **girls are only very realistic about the risks of sexual violence to themselves during the migration journey. On almost all other categories except ‘detention’ they underestimate risks,** especially concerning the real risk of death (largest contrast) will only 22 per cent of would-be migrants identifying this as a risk while 88 per cent of returnee girls saying they witnessed death during their journey. Again, in terms of physical violence, robbery, kidnapping, hunger and thirst, abandonment, exposure and abduction girl would-be migrants underestimated their risk when compared with reports from those who actually migrated.

Despite being aware of the risks and dangers they may face, **29 per cent of would-be child migrants stated they were still considering migrating because the benefits of successful migration will make the risks worthwhile.** Additionally, **9 per cent felt the risks were exaggerated and 31 percent of those interviewed felt even if the risks are high they ‘have no choice’ but to migrate.**

By contrast returnees, who had experienced migration, stated that risks and dangers they faced were ‘worse’ than they had expected (90%) and only 8 per cent saying they were ‘not worse’. **Furthermore 87 per cent of returnees said that children were ‘very highly exposed’ (35%) or ‘highly exposed’ (52%) to risks and dangers, with 65 per cent reporting that it was ‘more dangerous’ for children and 85 per cent agreed that they faced ‘many’ risks and dangers on their journey.** Only 10 per cent said the risks and dangers were ‘few’. Furthermore, 42 per cent of returnees claimed that violations and negative experiences happened to them within Ethiopia, while 29 per cent of would-be migrants thought they would face risks within the country. Table 7 illustrates the comparison between would-be and returnees on these key issues offering insights into both perceptions and risks.

**Table 7: illustrates the comparison between would-be and returnees on key aspects of risk perception/experience.**

Risk perception / risk experience	Would-be child migrants (n=35)	Returnee child migrants (n=48)
There will be/are ‘many’ risks and dangers on the migration journey	20%	85%
There will be/are ‘few’ risks and dangers on the migration journey	46%	10%
The risks and dangers are ‘greater’ for children than adults	34%	65%
The risks and dangers are ‘less’ for children than adults	26%	15%

The risks and dangers are 'greater for boys' than for girls	11%	2%
The risks and dangers are 'greater for girls' than for boys	74%	75%
In your experience, during migration children were 'highly' and 'very highly' exposed to many dangers	n/r	87%
You were 'very aware' of risks facing children before you migrated	n/r	23%
You were 'unaware' of risks facing children before you migrated	n/r	65%
The risks and dangers you experienced were 'worse than your expectations'	n/r	90%

In terms of appreciating whether they were well informed of the risks and dangers prior to departure, only 29 per cent of returnees claimed they were 'very' or 'moderately' aware, while **65 per cent report they felt 'unaware'**. This is an interesting finding when in fact table 6 shows the expectations and perceptions of risk of would-be migrants is **reasonably realistic**. How accurate or reliable is this finding? Will today's would-be migrants claim that they too were unaware of risks when they one day return from migration? **Is this a normal psychological defence tendency or a form of self-justification for those that have suffered negative experiences but are reluctant to admit they voluntarily chose a path that where dangers were evident and likely?**

In the RMMS analysis of 2014 would-be migrants were also asked which protection risks they would tolerate for the sake of reaching their destination if it was certain the events would occur during their journey.<sup>81</sup> The results showed the extent to which migrants claimed to be prepared to endure harsh circumstances in order to attain their migration goals – 44 per cent said would tolerate degrading treatment and verbal abuse, 37 per cent declared they would tolerate exhaustion, dehydration, starvation and deprivation of sleep, 35 per cent would tolerate mild to moderate physical abuse and 33 per cent claimed they would tolerate extortion and robbery and 7 per cent said they would tolerate criminal kidnapping for ransom. Only 1 per cent said they would tolerate sexual abuse. The protection risks no one would not tolerate include murder or threat of it, being overthrown from a boat, or shot at or tortured; extreme physical abuse; forced prostitution and forced labour and slavery-like practices (i.e. only extreme and life-threatening abuses).

In another more recent study, the findings suggested that migrants may even instrumentalise risk knowing that they are likely to be abused and held for ransom en route. "They gamble on their captors' demands being met by family members, who would not otherwise have endorsed or paid for their journey. These findings challenge common assumptions about risk and decision-making, and suggests that some migrants may move because of, rather than in spite of, the risks involved. It also calls into question initiatives that seek to deter migration by raising awareness about the risks of the journey."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> RMMS (2014) op cit.

<sup>82</sup> Bakewell, O & Sturridge, C. (2021) [Extreme Risk Makes the Journey Feasible: Decision-Making amongst Migrants in the Horn of Africa](#). Social Inclusion. Vol 9 Issue 1.

Although these findings are from another study with adult groups of Ethiopians, it sheds some light on the reality that migrants approach risks with eyes open having already assessed their tolerance and expectation of certain abuses or conditions along the way. **At the same time however, there is evidence of a degree of *cognitive dissonance* or failure to offer full disclosure where those planning to migrate claim they would not tolerate certain violations which are in fact, according to returnees, relatively common.** For example, few females, if any, would publicly admit to accept rape as part of an acceptable cost of migrating successfully and yet **many girls and women do in fact embark on migration journeys in the full knowledge that rape is a distinct possibility, if not a virtual certainty.**

*“Once they [child would-be migrants] are filled or pre-oriented with the false hope that they can get a lot of money abroad, they just don’t listen to any advice or counselling we try to provide them.”*

Representative from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Addis Ababa

## 5.5 Migration decisions and ‘root causes’

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- *To a very high degree, **economic drivers dominate** as the leading reason for wanting to migration, for adults and children. This is born out in the preoccupation among child migrants with their **shame of poverty, their own and their parents struggle to survive, and dire future prospects** Ethiopia offers them.*
- *There are no other significant drivers although there **are important influences and tipping points** that influence child migrants; generally, these include peer pressure and persuasions and stories of smugglers and returnees, but this study was not able to find elaboration of protection deficits or social factors as a significant driver.*

This section looks at the power of economic and non-economic drivers for young people who intend to migrate or who have already migrations and may also wish to re-migrate. It will show that as far as this research can provide, economic drivers are by far the top motivating factor causing people to migrate. **Non-economic and social drivers also play a role and it is understood that the interplay between economic and non-economic drivers can be complex but this study was not able to access the nuance and detail of such complexity**, even though the tools used offered ample opportunity for details and elaborations to emerge.

This section starts with a brief look at some elements of the decision-making process by child migrants. Firstly, in terms of being influenced to form the notion of migration 94 per cent of returnees but only 77 per cent of those would-be migrants interviewed admitted they were influenced by someone or something to migrate. Table 8, below, summarises some of the findings and the differences between returnees and would-be child migrants around decision-making. **One of the most surprising finding is how unimportant social media and mainstream media in influencing children to migrate – by far the biggest influence is returnees themselves, despite it seems their stories of, struggle, violations and ‘failure’.** Perhaps in response to this question those interviews were thinking about successful returnees, and even adult returnees. This category was closely followed by friends and family in Ethiopia who appear to be a major influence on children’s’ decision to migrate. Friends and family outside Ethiopia also have a significant influence (unlike smugglers) but perhaps less than might be expected (37% for would-be and just 11% for returnees who are experienced in migration and therefore do not need influence from friends and family abroad).

**Table 8: Biggest migratory influences on would-be and returnee migrant children (multi-select question)**

	Would-be child migrants (male and female) (n=35)	Returnee child migrants (n=48)
Parent	19%	2%
Friends/family in Ethiopia	59%	53%
Friends/family outside Ethiopia	37%	11%
Smugglers	7%	36%
Social Media	0	0
Mainstream media	4%	0
Returnees	81%	64%

Other	7%	9%
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Almost half (average 44%) of those interviewed in both groups said ‘nothing’ could reverse their decision to migrate. However, 21 per cent of returnees and 34 per cent of would-be child migrants said that changes in Ethiopia would make them reconsider migration. Border restrictions and stricter migration policies appear to be a significant deterrent for many of those interviewed (as Covid-19 restrictions illustrate).

**There is a strong feeling of compulsion amongst those interviewed.** They claim that they would rather not have to consider migration and remain in Ethiopia. When asked 74 per cent of would-be child migrants said they would prefer not to migrate if things were better ‘at home’. 90 per cent of returnees said the same. At the same time 51 per cent of would-be child migrants and 94 per cent of returnees said that **they did not think there were any ways of resolving their concerns (mostly economic) in Ethiopia.**

Many of the findings from different questions and discussions with child migrants (would-be and returnee) point to the fact that **the culture of migration is prevalent and strongly influences decision-making and decision-formation, as illustrated in many section of this report.** Not least many are directly affected by their community where for returnees 83 per cent, and for would-be migrants 80 per cent, stated it was quite or very common for people to migrate from their community. 17 per cent of returnee child migrants have siblings who had previously migrated and 29 per cent, almost a third, had one or more parent who had previously migrated. For would-be child migrants the pattern is similar with 20 per cent having siblings ‘currently’ overseas and 77 per cent having friends or relatives living overseas.

## Economic drivers

Young people’s aspiration to migrate is **not an aspiration for migration, but for transformation through migration.** In terms of root causes or drivers causing children to leave home and travel out of Ethiopia, this study confirms what all other studies of irregular Ethiopian migration have found; that economic drivers are by far the greatest factors that compel movement. When interviewing over 2,000 Ethiopian first time, re-migrating or returning migrants using the eastern route IOM found that on average **95 per cent were migrating for economic reasons, with 77 per cent reporting that they had no source of income prior to migrating.**<sup>83</sup>

In the Ethiopian Migration Project approximately 1,600 were questioned resulting in 93% of would be migrants (in the study’s terminology ‘aspirational’ and ‘intentional’ migrants) as well as returnees intent on re-migrating stating that income and economic opportunities would be improved by migration and that **the wage magnet of overseas work was the most strongest lure.**

The number of children in this study that identified economic reasons as the main driver for their decision to migrate is high with **100 per cent of would-be child migrants and 92 per cent of returnee migrants as key reasons for leaving.** This is not a surprising finding given the very low socioeconomic standing of most who travel east out of Ethiopia irregularly. An additional 11 per cent of would-be and 13 per cent of returnee child migrants also identify ‘personal or family reasons’ as a major reason to migrant but family difficulties are also often closely linked to economic stressors.

<sup>83</sup> IOM (2020b) op cit.

*“We do not have financial capacity to help them attend their high school education in towns due to large family size. Consequently, many children are obliged to drop their education. Even if they drop their education, there is no land for them to farm. Then they are susceptible to migration smugglers and they are convinced easily. Children migrate because they are unable to tolerate the living problems of their parents.”* Parent of returnee migrants

A recent UNICEF report on youth migration in different parts of Ethiopia (internal and international) also found that **‘most children and young people move for multiple reasons, with economic hardship, family problems and insecurity being the most common drivers of movement.’**<sup>84</sup> These were also the three top reasons given by respondents in this East Hararghe and Dire Dawa study, although the economic reasons always predominated.

Beyond these quantitative findings it was in the focus group discussions with over 130 children and parents that the raw sense of desperation and hopelessness was vividly, and repeatedly, expressed by participants. **Parents anguished with a sense of shame and resignation that they simply could not provide for their children.**

*“Children cannot stand the suffering of their parents because of lack of income and they decide to migrate to solve the problems. They drop their education and migrate to Saudi Arabia.”* Parents of returnee child migrants

*“There are children who do not get breakfast, lunch or dinner all the time because their parents are incapable of providing them. Therefore, no one can convince them not to migrate unless their needs are addressed there in Dire Dawa.”* Ethiopian female would-be child migrant aged between 12-15 years.

*“We are very tired of paying house rents, we have no shelter of our own. The money we can earn by washing clothes for others is not enough to pay the rent. We buy food items and feed our children. We are expected to buy uniform and school materials. These all are far beyond our earning and we cannot support our children.”* Parent of returnee child migrant.

*“My son is stressed by our living situation. One day he told me that ‘Mama, don’t worry, one day I will construct you a house. We will be out of these problems. You don’t have to suffer working for others to get some money to support us.’ He cried with me. Then, I asked him, ‘are you thinking to go abroad? Do not try it. It is dangerous.’ But he gave me a deaf ear. He didn’t reply.”* Parent of would-be migrant.

## An intolerable burden

**Children felt they were a burden to their already burdened and impoverished families** and appeared to feel trapped by a situation they felt would not change. Many children spoke of wanting to help their families through migration. **73 per cent of returnees and 86 per cent of would-be child migrants told this study they wanted to migrate to help their family.** Not surprising therefore, the shame and guilt they felt when returning empty handed or worse, as many admitted, they had caused yet further stress to their family economy by trying to migrate.

A significant number of children spoke of family sizes being a problem (‘too many children’), the shortages of land, no job opportunities, no capital or assets with which to start small businesses, corrupt authorities only assisting their favourites and no financial support from any external entity.

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<sup>84</sup> UNICEF (2021) op cit.(currently only in draft)

*“If there was work opportunities in the county in the area we are living in, we wouldn’t want to migrate abroad. If we have had 10,000 birr, [USD 300] we would do business here. If we have had asset here, have had money here, we wouldn’t plan to migrate. Nobody would plan to see these problem that we experience on the road.”* Ethiopian male returnee migrant aged between 14-17 years.

*“Even if we want to learn we can’t, even if we wish to work, we can’t. We can’t sustain our lives through the harvest we get from ploughing our families land. It is not enough.”* Ethiopian male returnee migrant aged between 14-17 years.

In on focus group meeting with boys aged between 15 and 17 years, all the discussants said they intended to migrate because **they were ‘stressed out’ by their families’ life problems**. They said they were living with their half parents/stepparents/relatives and felt they “couldn’t dare to ask for support with their needs.” Not having the means to go to school (uniform and books) or to feel people’s scorn for their poverty were also reasons some children intended to escape for something better

*“Most of the children migrating to Djibouti are children from parents of low economic status. Such parents do not have the capacity to support their children in terms of food and education that’s why the children are stressed and stop going to school. They do not have uniform and exercise books to continue their education. As a result, they migrate in search of income to survive. For many children from poor families, migration is taken as a life-changing opportunity.”* Ethiopian male would-be child migrant aged between 15-17 years.

*“Children from poor families are subject of prejudice and discrimination. Other children insult them say “You! Son of the poor”. Such psychological harassment makes them to feel bad and agitated to work for better life by taking migration as an alternative.”*

Most children would prefer not to have to migrate. **90 per cent of returnees claimed that they would not have migrated if things were better at home** and 90 per cent also said they were unlikely to encourage others to migrate knowing what they did having migrated. 74 per cent of would-be child migrants said they would not migrate if things were ‘better at home’ but 51 per cent felt there were **no ways of resolving their needs without migrating**.

## Non-economic drivers and influences

Although irregular child migrants and adults on the eastern route out of Ethiopia have for years overwhelmingly selected economic necessity as their main driver, this does not mean there have not been other **influences and tipping point factors**. If we consider that many families and many children in Ethiopia live with the same level of economic stress and poverty as expressed in the quotes above, the question arises: why do particular children decide to migrate? To explore the same dynamics, Save the Children has asked the reverse question in a previous study called *Why Children Stay*.<sup>85</sup>

Every child will have their own story of what tipped them from feeling a compulsion to migration and having aspirations to migrate to actually taking concrete steps to start their journey. For some it could have been a particular argument with their parents or the need to flee domestic abuse, for others they did not want to miss going with their friends who had already planned to leave. Respondents in this study and the accumulated responses from children interviewed suggest the that **three strong non-economic factors were peer pressure in terms of the frequency of other young people desiring to**

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<sup>85</sup> Save the Children. (2018) *Why Children Stay*.

and planning to migrate, the stories or persuasion generated from brokers or smugglers as well as the influence of returnees.

*“According to our office, economic reason is just one reason for migration; peer pressure, brokers’ pressure/influence –deceiving children and convincing them to migrate, community’s problematic attitude towards irregular migration are the major causes.”* Representative from the East Hararghe Zone General Attorney Office

Similarly, a representative from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs stated that *“along with economic problems, high smugglers influence and family disintegration/loss makes children vulnerable [...to being convinced to migrate].”*

A representative from the Drought and Risk Management department in Dire Dawa also said that *“these children are provided false information about irregular migration and its success from their peers and from brokers/smugglers. They think that they can easily make big money if they migrate to urban areas and beyond Ethiopia.”*

### Protection factors in the decision-making process?

While accepting that there is evidence of a complex inter-linkage between economic and non-economic factors that form part of the decision-making process for children as they decide to migrate, this research was not successful in elucidating them clearly. Efforts to identify non-economic aspects of their motivation to migrate resulted in results shown in Table 9 below, which indicate how economic factors and the pervasive ‘culture of migration’ are by far the major drivers.

Generally, a relative low number of would-be and returnee child migrants selected ‘personal or family reasons’ for their decision to migrate (average 12% of both would-be and returnee groups). None chose ‘rights or freedoms’ as drivers but a significant number of returnees (but not would-be migrants) selected ‘access to services’ which included education and health as reasons influencing their decision to migrate (19%).

**However, looking at the gender disaggregation there are interesting findings concerning female child migrants – findings that diverge from the joint findings of combined data of boys and girls.**

While all girls interviewed in both categories confirmed that economic reasons for leaving were strong (100%), **‘personal and/or family reasons’ was felt to be high for 23 percent of would-be girls and 17 per cent of returnee girls.** Additionally, while a further 23% of would-be migrant girls selected ‘access to services’ as important, only 4 per cent of female returnees chose that category.

The findings in this disaggregation relating to the ‘culture of migration’ also show interesting divergences with only 18 per cent of would-be girl migrants identifying this as a significant driver, and 17 percent of returnee girls. By contrast, the average findings of the influence of the ‘culture of migration’ (26% for would be migrants of both sexes and 42% of returnees of both sexes) are far higher than the female-only findings suggesting that the driving factor of **the ‘culture of migration’ for boys is far stronger than it is for girls.**

It can be imagined that protection issues are embedded in the selection of ‘personal and/or family reasons’ by would-be and returnee migrant girls (and boys) but the findings in our research did not elaborate further. When the questionnaire survey drilled deeper to examine what kind of ‘personal or family reasons’ children faced, the data is unreliable with many omitting to answer further details. However, two female returnees (out of 23 interviewed) stated that ‘domestic violence / forced marriage’ was the reason for them selecting ‘personal and/or family reasons’. Equally, in the focus

group discussion there was now particular evidence of protection issues being of concern in the discussions held. Adolescent children, both boys and girls, spoke of arguments and disagreements with parents but no protection-specific issues were raised.

**Table 9: Issues motivating migration – as chosen by those interviewed (multi-select question)**

	Would-be child migrants (male and female) (n=35)	Returnee child migrants (n=48)	Only female would-be migrants (n=23)	Only female returnee migrants (n=17)
Economic	100%	92%	100%	100%
Violence or insecurity	0	2%	6%	0
Rights and freedoms	0	0	0	0
Personal / family reasons	11%	13%	23%	17%
Access to services	3%	19%	23%	4%
Natural disaster or environment factors	0	0	0	0
Culture of migration	26%	42%	18%	17%
Other	3%	0	0	0
Refused	0	0	0	0

## 5.6 Financial and social aspirations of migrants

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- *Child migrants imagined earning levels abroad were not unrealistic -they correctly understand the huge wage differentials between Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia for menial work*
- *However, **extremely few, if any** child migrants attain these higher levels, especially if they go to Djibouti instead of Saudi Arabia*
- *The most common experience of child migrants is to return **home empty handed** often having sunk their families yet deeper into immiseration through selling assets etc.*
- ***Social and financial aspirations** of child migrants overwhelmingly **not met***

Financial aspirations of child migrants are a strong motivating force and preoccupy much of the thinking and decision-making process for young migrants. Financial aspirations are the corollary to economic driver that ‘push’ young migrants to migrate. Social aspirations encompass the desire to be able to achieve social mobility as a result of the earnings and status of ‘successful’ migration.

*“Before migration they assume/think that there would be a comfortable/luxurious life abroad and they don’t know about the problems that will make them suffer abroad. They think that the money those children are sending from abroad is easily acquired/accumulated, and their expectation will totally fail them once after they arrive their destination. Things are not how they look like from outside and from departure place.”* Parent of would-be child migrant.

Previous sections have already established that the culture of migration and dire economic conditions and prospects are a pervasive influence on decision-making to migrate. For many children notions of success are closely associated to migration through their financial aspirations and **their assumption that financial success would also lead to social improvement for themselves and their families.**

The extent of their financial expectations through migration not only illustrates the poor economic options at home, but also the **irresistible temptations that higher wages offered abroad.** The wage differentials for menial work abroad compared with equally menial work at home is striking. Table 10 shows the comparison of financial expectations of returnees and would-be migrants between Ethiopia and abroad (normally Djibouti and / or Saudi Arabia. A notable feature of the findings showed how **unpopular agriculture and farming occupations are for some children interviewed.** Of the 48 returnee migrants interviewed **none said they wanted to work in that sector,** preferring to start a business or work for the government.

**Table 10: Comparison of financial expectations of returnees and would-be migrants**

All figures in Ethiopian Birr (USD equivalent)	would-be child migrants (n=35)	Returnee child migrants (n=48)
Expectation of what they could earn per month in Ethiopia if they could find work	1,250 (USD 39)	2,080 (USD 64)
Their preferred monthly salary in Ethiopia	-	8,200 (USD 247)
What would they expect to earn overseas each month in the kind of work available for low skilled Ethiopian migrants	8,040 (USD 247)	13,760 (USD 425)

Actual payment received when outside Ethiopia	-	2760 (USD 85)*
At the time of this interview you have some income source: Yes?	80% (casual)	38%
Estimate how much the migration itself would cost	18,000 (USD 555)	8,630 (actually spent) (USD 266)
How much did you expect to spend on the migration journey	-	6,365 (USD 196)
Do you agree that you lost more money than you gained through the migratory period?	-	75% agreed

\* The returnees in this study mostly went to Djibouti, not Saudi and 60% did not find regular paid work while abroad.

The above table illustrates that even if the sample interviewed did not achieve it, the general expectations of wage levels outside Ethiopia are either six times (600%) what they can earn in Ethiopia (would-be child migrants), or four times – 400% increase – for returnees. When compared to the finding of IOM’s 2019 survey of 2,000 Ethiopian migrants in Obock a similar pattern emerges. Their findings showed that typically first-time adult migrants expected to experience a 640% gain in income from around \$60 in Ethiopia per month to about \$450 per month in Saudi Arabia. This was born out in actual figures reported by returnees who claimed that having earned around \$57 in Ethiopia prior to departure, they earned on average \$490 in Saudi Arabia – a gain of 755 per cent . **With these kind of wage differentials, the magnetic power of migration over endemically poor communities with widespread unemployment and low wages is inevitable.**

In this study there are ample examples from those children who were interviewed (who predominantly travelled to Djibouti) that their efforts were not rewarded, and their migration was not a success: **they paid more to migrate than they earned, most did not find paid work, 88 per cent did not manage to remit any money to their families and 75 per cent did not return with any money at all.** However, its clear that many children and adults do make a success of their migration and even if they are (repeatedly) deported they re-migrate. The IOM study found that on average the re-migrating migrant remained under 4 weeks in Ethiopia before re-attempting the same journey eastward, using the same route and normally the same brokers/smugglers as before.

Migrants are invested in migration as a medium to long term strategy and perhaps the would-be and returnee child migrants interviewed for this study will also have a long migration story history ahead of them and are ‘learning the ropes’ while still underage. The danger of a ‘snapshot’ analysis such as this study is that the longer strategy is not appreciated – **if over some years and enduring many hardships a migrant manages to work in Saudi Arabia at the wage levels indicated above for some months or years, then they will no doubt see their efforts as being successful and offer them new opportunities** when they return to Ethiopia and eventually curtail their circular irregular migration. By that time they may have children themselves who aspire to do the same for themselves if Ethiopia continues to offer so little options for its many poor citizens.

## 5.7 Assistance, services and responses

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- Generally, services and assistance that are currently available **do not reach** many families and/or child migrants either before, during or after migration.
- For most child migrants, **shelter, food and water** are needs that they place above others during migration.
- Parents, children, and stakeholders offer **a wide range of interventions** that they consider will reduce pressure on children to migrate – the most prominent focus on poverty alleviation and unemployment reduction.
- Some feel the efforts should focus more **on preventative activities instead of remedial**.

In terms of services and responses for child migrant, this research mainly focused on the responses of returnee child migrants, focus group meetings and certain key informant interviews themselves. The authors attempt to offer recommendations in a separate section of this report.

### 5.7.1 Assistance during the migration journey

During the journey which for returnees interviews lasted from between one month or less (33%) and between 6 months and a year (27%), **73 per cent said they received no assistance along the way, or during their time outside Ethiopia**. What assistance they did receive was mainly food, water, clothing shoes etc and a quarter said they received some cash assistance, but mainly **from ‘local communities/volunteers’ (54%), fellow migrants (24%) and a smaller proportion from NGOs (15%)**. Table 11 shows the kind of assistance returnees said they were in most need of during migration. **Interestingly many more identified shelter, food and water as critically absent assistance, far higher than the number who identified cash.**

**Table 11: Most needed assistance identified by returnee migrants during their journey (n=48)**

Shelter	69%
Medical assistance	13%
Psychological support	6%
Legal assistance	4%
Food	92%
Water	92%
Clothing, shoes, blankets, sleeping bags	23%
Washing/bathroom facilities	19%
Access to communication	6%
Cash assistance	27%
Safe spaces for women and children	8%
Assistance to return	4%
Other	6%

**A high proportion of returnees interviewed claimed they had received no assistance of any kind (94%) since they returned to Ethiopia and the same number went further to say there were no NGOs or government department offering them support in their community.** Of the 3 individuals who claimed to have had some support, one claimed to have had protection assistance against the risk of violence and two others said they received economic support. **By contrast 88 per cent reported that**

they wanted economic support, 52 per cent asked for more education and training and 19 per cent said they needed psychosocial support. 4 per cent said they wanted no support. However, 90 per cent of returnees interviewed said they did not face any ‘protection concerns’ in their community since their return. Finally, 98 per cent of returnees interviewed said that ‘more should be done’ to assist child returnees.

### 5.7.2 Parents and children’s perspectives

The focus group discussions with children and parents indicated that support was needed but none spoke of having received any. UNICEF conducted research with over 400 children and young migrants in various parts of Ethiopia in 2019 that focuses on service provision and service requirement. Their findings show that while some refugee and internal migrant children receive assistance in Ethiopia the **demand for assistance is far greater than supply and many children (and their families) lack some basic essentials such as shelter and access to clean water**, let alone adequate nutrition, school, income sources etc.

Not surprisingly, as a corollary or mirror to the stated drivers of migration or the ‘root causes’, those services most often requested by parent and children in this study centre around **poverty alleviation and income generating activities as well as education and training**. “Many youths have completed their education and become jobless for years. The government should help them to engage in small-scale businesses in the town.” (Parent of returnee migrant) The following table (Table 12) is a list of suggestions from child migrants and parents (in their own words), illustrate where they feel support could best be directed. This is listed here to reflect their thoughts and concerns and should not be confused with research recommendations at this stage.

**Table 12: Suggestions from parents and children (would-be and returnee migrants) from focus group discussions (131 interviewed)**

Intervention area	Suggestions from parents and children (would-be and returnee migrants) from focus group discussions (131 interviewed)
<b>Support vulnerable families</b>	Provision of shelter for parents/families  Reduce children’s burden of supporting their parents so that they can attend their education  Food item assistance is needed for children and families vulnerable to migration.
<b>Education support</b>	Educational support – Uniform, exercise book, foods; their education should be given priority  Government should give support: with food, school fees, rent/housing costs, college fees, pocket money, sanitary supplies, and some items students require when learning in college/secondary school residing in a rental room in town
<b>Job opportunities</b>	Job opportunities for those who dropped their education and do not want to continue, in groups or independently  Cash assistance to start independent businesses or repayable loans to start businesses
<b>Good parenting</b>	Parental support, advice and monitoring

	<p>Parents and families of parents should counsel and warn their children about migration and inappropriate demands</p> <p>Families should support their children in any business opportunity children might get or come up with</p>
<b>Community attitudes</b>	<p>The community should discuss and raise awareness by inviting elderlies, religious leaders, good neighbours who protect and supervise children should sit together with the community and discuss the issue of migration</p> <p>The community should also monitor and denounce migration</p>
<b>Training and income generation:</b>	<p>Skill trainings for their children</p> <p>The kinds of income generating activities that families and children should be supported with included restaurants, retailing vegetables, chat trade, retailing clothes, boutique shops, hens and eggs enterprises, grain mills, cash assistance to trade commodities</p>

In general, **the impression given by both parents and children was that neither government offices nor NGOs were active in providing these services in their areas.** Some spoke of nepotism and corruption being ‘common’ in their area, suggesting that was why no opportunities were provided. Some would-be child migrants told a focus group meeting that *‘nepotism and corruption were common in their district, and that is the reason for them not to be provided the opportunities. Government offices and workers at the grass root levels are the most corrupt and do not treat everyone the same.’* Furthermore, some also felt that *‘government offices and NGOs had been registering their names several times but they had actually done nothing for them. NGOs and government should live up to their promises...’*

### 5.7.3 Government stakeholder perspectives

This research interviewed 12 Ethiopian government employees directly or indirectly involved with child migration in various departments and offices. They were mostly, based in Dire Dawa and East Hararghe zones but some are in Addis Ababa. Quotes and observations from these key informant interviews have already been represented throughout this report and informed its analysis and findings.

Through the various interviews with government staff representing different state offices and departments, **the strong impression received was that multiple government entities were not only aware of the problem of children migrating but were engaged together and with NGOs and international agencies in activities to address irregular child migration from a remedial and preventative perspective.**<sup>86</sup> Some had been involved for some years already. Their interviews also suggested the issue was one of high concern to government, especially at the local level, and all those

<sup>86</sup> Individuals were interviewed from the Dire Dawa Police, the Bureau of Finance and Economy Development, the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA and MoLSA), Draught and Risk Management, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, the National Partnership/Coalition (National Task Force), and the office of the General Attorney – a full list is attached as annex 8 in Part 2 of this report.

interviewed offered constructive and wide-ranging suggestions concerning responses and improvements to current responses.

#### 5.7.4 Existing areas of engagement

**[Message to Save reviewers from DD and the field: please add additional information of correct information in this section as much as you wish. Use tracked changes always pls ]**

From the research and discussions with stakeholders a generic picture emerges of various existing activities, services and engagements in East Hararghe and Dire Dawa in relation to irregular child migration:

**Reception of returnees:** With regard to receiving and reunifying children with their parents, the police stated that they work with the BoWCYA to receive and register returnees, take them to centres, offer them psycho social support, feed and take care of their personal hygiene; identify their families, and reunite them. Many are given approximately 2,000 Birr (USD 60) when they are sent back home to help them integrate and perhaps start some income generating activity.

**Centres:** Temporary shelters and centres have been established to house children who have been returned from Djibouti and border security. There are migrant rehabilitation centres located at borders as well as in Dire Dawa. The entities most involved are Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA), the Bureau of Women, Youth and Children Affairs (BoWCYA), IOM, Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE) and more recently Save the Children (recently established a new centre). The police work with these centres also, sending them migrant street children from Dire Dawa and returnees, mainly.

**Case management:** Under the National Child Protection Framework, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs is in charge of collaborating with concerned organizations/bodies and case management. Concerning reunification, they work closely with IOM. With regard to case management, a referral system was proposed to start functioning by 2020. The referral system incorporates the education bureau, health, transport, and job creation divisions, shelter, food, and justice but due to poor low inter-linkage and understanding between the entities there is no current referral coordination.

**Cash assistance:** Cash is given to returnees to assist their reintegration in their communities as well as to cover the cost of their travel (bus) to their homes. A representative from the police office stated that there were many cases where returnees used the cash assistance to immediately re-migrate and therefore the approach should be re-considered, unless someone accompanies the child to their home location.

**Working with destitute families / street children:** Various NGOs, including Positive action for Development (PAD) and Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE) have MOUs with the Bureau of Finance and Economy Development to work in Dire Dawa to assist street children, many of which are would-be migrants or are returnee migrants and many already internal migrants. They also conduct family reunification and reintegration and provide income generation support for vulnerable women.

**Family reunification and reintegration:** The main government agencies conducting these activities are the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA), the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (BoWCYA) along with assisting NGOs. IOM works closely with BoLSA on reunification and reintegration in the zones.

**Anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking coordination:** The National Task force has been replaced by the National Partnership Coalition. The office leads and coordinates governmental and non-governmental organizations such as MoLSA, Ministry of International Affairs, Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MoSHE), Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA), National Defence, Federal Attorney, Religious institutions, government administrative offices, IOM, ILO, and NGOs like Save The Children etc. The office is currently preparing a new declarative that will ensure and direct all stakeholders' specific role and involvement and collaborative works.

**Awareness-raising activities:** Awareness raising around human smuggling and human trafficking has been a national effort and active for some years in Ethiopia. It is provided for children and families, youth, adults, and religious leaders on different occasions such as: through the media on Haremaya FM EBS, NAHOO, Police TV, Southern and Amhara regional TVs and other outlets. Awareness can also occur through any meetings called for on any development agenda. According to the National Partnership Coalition, MoLSA is primarily responsible for awareness raising and behavioural change around migration, smuggling and trafficking. Media bodies and NGOs work with MoLSA providing information/documentaries- case stories/ on irregular migration and its risks.

### 5.7.5 Suggested interventions / responses

Some felt that most of the **activities implemented are remedial and that more preventive works should be enhanced**, and many felt the budgets allocated for all work related to irregular child migration, return and reintegration was **too limited and needed to be expanded**. To capture the range of ideas that stakeholders offered as measures to address the child migration phenomenon, the following table (Table 13) was compiled aggregating the many suggestions around different themes. As with the suggestions from parents and children, these are not report recommendations but are used to inform the final recommendations.

**Table 13: Suggestions for action from interviewed stakeholders:**

Intervention area	Suggestions from Ethiopian government stakeholders (12 interviewed)
<b>Reunification and reintegration</b>	<p>No child shall be given a cash in the process of sending him/her back home. Concerned government bodies/case workers/shall be designated to undertake the reunification (children should be accompanied on their return to home)</p> <p>To control/stop child migrants when they are trying to migrate and re-migrate after reunification. Children need to be tracked and controlled before they leave from their localities/towns.</p> <p>NGOs should contribute to establish and enhancing a strong referral mechanism to take care of returnees and provide them all the support they need (social, psychological, shelter, medication or economic support)</p>

<p><b>Support vulnerable families</b></p>	<p>Conduct door to door visits (similar to health extension workers, and agriculture development workers), identify and record vulnerable families and their children; and provide them psycho-social, economic and schooling support, and follow up to prevent migration.</p> <p>Provide economic support to vulnerable families (help them start business, train them on entrepreneurship trainings).</p>
<p><b>Education support</b></p>	<p>Provide support for children to attend school.</p> <p>Conducive environment should be created for children in their localities so that they focus on their education and prefer to stay in their localities.</p>
<p><b>Educational curriculum</b></p>	<p>The educational curriculum should be reviewed and there should be a knowledge structure that shows the path to change and development in Ethiopia, and culture of serving should be incorporated.</p> <p>Schools must include a section in their civics/ethics subject curriculum and teach about irregular migration and its multifaceted impacts.</p>
<p><b>Good parenting</b></p>	<p>Parents should control their children and raise them well.</p> <p>Awareness raising among families – to stop pressuring/encouraging their children to migrate and dream of better income/wealth.</p>
<p><b>Rule of law: ending impunity &amp; implementing anti-smuggling</b></p>	<p>Eliminating illegal brokers/smugglers (those that are motivating farmers' children and feeding them falls information and false hope about successful irregular migration).</p> <p>Police, legal bodies (including transportation bureau) must strengthen their action against irregular child smuggling. Efforts to bring brokers and child smugglers to justice should be increased.</p> <p>Community should collaborate in identifying child smugglers working in their neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The transport sector should be informed and strict about unaccompanied child mobility and they should penalize all that are found involved in such actions.</p> <p>There should be a practical legal framework/context that holds families accountable for their support in child migration/for their children's run-aways/ and poor parenting.</p> <p>Mainly brokers found/working in communities should be arrested and punished (in collaboration with the community).</p>
<p><b>Shelter Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>Build more shelter/centres to keep returnees and would be child migrants until reunification is possible and until they are given psycho-social support.</p> <p>NGOs should finance/support GO's activities for example in constructing shelter for returnees. Reunification can take some time.</p>
<p><b>Economic opportunities and development</b></p>	<p>Urbanizing nearby woreda towns, and expand economic opportunities; to diverge/reduce the migration interest directed towards a few cities in the country.</p>

	<p>Diversification of income should be introduced/practiced widely in rural areas to enhance productivity and production and grow families' annual income. (Many families solely rely on agriculture or another single source of income while having extended family size, and that affects their living conditions.)</p>
<b>Community attitudes</b>	<p>Communities' attitude must change. Aim to build a community that refuses to rest while their children are out on the street and suffering in the deserts and in the middle of nowhere.</p> <p>Interventions should be undertaken on parent-child relationships and teacher to student relationships; those should be strengthened and children should receive close adult supervision during their childhood.</p> <p>Families are the base for everything. They should raise their children teaching about the value and respect they have to give for work, should raise them teaching about love for the country, and that children should be taught self-respect.</p> <p>The community should not discriminate against returnees when they return after spending/working some time away. They should be supportive, caring, and welcoming.</p> <p>Work on diet and nutrition: raising awareness to the community to utilize nutritious food from the supply they get on their farm and from the nearby market.</p>
<b>Training and income generation:</b>	<p>Families could be supported by providing IGA support; provide them entrepreneurship training, providing them financial support (revolving fund) to start small businesses.</p> <p>TVET training should be provided for those that have the interest and they should be given COC (Certificate of Occupational Competence) on timely bases so that they can continue processing their migration legitimately.</p> <p>TVETs and Job Creation office could work in collaboration with I/NGOs to provide investment and training support.</p>
<b>Capacity training</b>	<p>Donors and INGOs to provide capacity development training and awareness raising training for key stakeholder government organizations working at different level of government structure</p> <p>Provision of trainings (psycho-social skills) for justice departments (police office workers working with migrant children), and social affairs officers along with social workers and case workers (volunteers) working at community level on how to treat and handle returnee children.</p> <p>Child protection NGOs should provide technical support on enhancing systems on child protection, help on identifying problems and coordinating, preparing workshops and share information with all stakeholder organizations; and prepare various tools in tracking and optimizing data collection and documentation.</p>
<b>Increased Awareness</b>	<p>Work on awareness raising to the community, families and all stakeholders on irregular migration and its negative impact</p> <p>Schools, and all community level institutions must work on raising awareness to prevent/discourage irregular migration.</p>

	Donors to provide awareness to the community (larger level), using all sorts of medias
<b>Local infrastructure</b>	Basic infrastructures should be constructed/availed in rural areas including provision of drinking water. Rural areas need to be made more conducive for its residents.
<b>Policy development</b>	<p>The country should design a migration policy .There should be a policy that prevents irregular migration.</p> <p>The country should have a citizen-centred development plan. The country should declare high value for its own citizens. After that children might choose to live and work in their country than try their chance in migration risking their lives.</p> <p>Government should work to make alternative legal migration options smoother and accessible.</p>
<b>Stakeholder collaboration</b>	<p>All stakeholders should work in collaboration to be effective.</p> <p>Donor organizations should provide support to government organizations by identifying their activities and checking their performance.</p> <p>Joint activity/project planning should be considered while working on a such complex social issue. If strong collaboration is built and maintained among stakeholder bodies, significant level of change/result can be obtained.</p>
<b>Research and data</b>	<p>Establishing consortiums to discuss and reach a common understanding/consensus on the magnitude of the problem, understanding its causes, impacts and solutions (ones that are being undertaken and ones that are not yet done)</p> <p>Interventions should widely target on narrowing in on the root causes for child migration.</p>

## Section 6. National and cross-border policy

### ➤ Key sub-section takeaways

- Ethiopia has a **complex and sometimes ambivalent** relationship to migration and protecting the rights of its citizens abroad.
- Ethiopia is forced to balance its migration and citizens right's ambitions (i.e. desire to protect its citizens abroad) with its delicate relationship with Saudi Arabia and its diplomatic international relations with rich neighbours in the Gulf.
- For the last decade or more, Ethiopia has tried to develop **wide-ranging strategies and structures** to address child migration and other irregular migration including human trafficking at a national level.
- Despite these efforts, increasingly supported by international agencies and donors, the **impact is felt weakly on the ground**, whether in terms of remedial or preventative actions.

Migration governance is continually evolving, particular in complex migration environments such as Ethiopia today where changes and competing issues are developing rapidly, such as the impact on Covid-19 on movement in 2020. At the policy level, irrespective of the current and past governance structures, policies and laws, the *de facto* reality relating to migration and mixed migration can be characterised by a number of realities - sometimes conflicting. It is useful setting the scene by highlighting some of these characteristics.

To appreciate possible programmatic interventions, it is important to understand the national and regional context when considering irregular movements, including those of children along the eastern route. As such this final section may be seen as more of a reference section as it moves away from using findings from the specific instruments used for the research and leans on existing documentation and secondary sources.<sup>87</sup>

### 6.1 Selected governance highlights characterising Ethiopia's migration context

For many years the government has supported and **facilitated 'regulated' labour migration** of Ethiopians overseas, benefiting from the resulting remittances and the 'vent' it offers on high youth unemployment, low wages and competing ethnic groups and dissidents.<sup>88</sup>

The government is aware of, and has made passports available for, the hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians who **move regularly and irregularly** overseas – if irregular, then crossing borders by vehicles or foot - into Somaliland and Djibouti (for Yemen and Saudi Arabia), Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan (towards Europe).

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<sup>87</sup> Much of this section on the policy context is edited and repurposed from unpublished material written by the author of this study, for a Thematic Paper submitted in preparatory phases of the Ethiopian Migration Project in late 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Reckoned to be as high as 3.4% of the GDP of Ethiopia in 2014, but now just over 1% at an estimated USD\$816 million in 2017.(World Bank [data](#))

Border efforts to stop irregular movement (including trafficking) have been half-hearted and limited to official crossing points that can be easily circumvented.<sup>89</sup> Certain state officials have benefited financially by **colluding with human smugglers**. However, since March/April 2020, faced with the global pandemic and subsequent restrictions on cross-border movement borders have become far **harder to cross** irregularly – in particular the Ethio-Djibouti border. In addition, as previously mentioned, Covid-19 has caused deportations and return from Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Djibouti that **has significantly changed the profile on irregular migration in 2020**.

**Widespread abuse** (with fatalities) of Ethiopian citizens on the move within Ethiopia (especially in its eastern arid zones), in Yemen (torture for ransom, disappearances of women - presumed trafficked<sup>90</sup>), and more recently in Sudan and Libya has generated little effective censure from the government or effective efforts to curtail irregular migration.

The government has not expressed visible public outrage at the roughly managed and rights-violating **mass deportation** of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian men and women from Saudi Arabia between 2013-2020.<sup>91</sup> It is also accused of not assisting its own citizens in this process.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, in recent years the government has made some efforts to persuade citizens **not to migrate** irregularly and there has been a **temporary ban** (2013-2018) on regular migration - due to right-abuses of Ethiopians in formal employment managed by Private Employment Agencies, PEAs - who have recently been subjected to more scrutiny and rules than previously.

Ethiopia has resisted the notion that Ethiopian should be an asylum seekers overseas (e.g. in Yemen), while at the same time has **opened its doors** to large numbers (700,000 as of Oct. 2019) of asylum seekers and refugees mainly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, since January 2019, Ethiopia has adopted **progressive new asylum and refugee legislation** in what some are describing as one of the most progressive refugee laws on the continent.<sup>94</sup> Amongst other aspects it decriminalizes irregular entry into Ethiopia and ends the encampment policy - thereby regularizing the status and access to services of tens of thousands from Somalia and Eritrea who live in urban areas (particularly in Addis Ababa) previously unregistered and unassisted.

With the **EU-Ethiopia's 'Strategic Engagement'** (since 2016) Ethiopia has been a major beneficiary of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa since 2016, in the wake of the political crisis around irregular migration into Europe. With job creation and integration of refugees being at the heart of these EU initiatives its clear **containment of migration** is a main driver from the EU side.

The concluding of the peace deal between Eritrea and Ethiopia in July 2018 resulted in the **borders opening from the Eritrean side** (and an end to the infamous Eritrean 'shot-to-kill' border policy). Thousands of Eritreans entered Ethiopia in 2018/19 to seek asylum - many were unaccompanied minors.<sup>95</sup> As of April 2019, the borders were closed again although hundreds reportedly continued to

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<sup>89</sup> The Guardian. (2015) [Despite border crackdown in Ethiopia, migrants still risk lives to leave.](#)

<sup>90</sup> RMMS.(2014) [Abused and Abducted](#). Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat.

<sup>91</sup> Global Detention Project. Current website entry for [Saudi Arabia](#).

<sup>92</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2019) [Ethiopians Abused on Gulf Migration Route](#).

<sup>93</sup> UNHCR Ethiopia figures for end [October 2019](#): South Sudanese; 319,000, Somalis; 186,000, Eritreans; 141,000, Sudanese;53,000.

<sup>94</sup> Maru,M.T. (2019) [IN DEPTH: Unpacking Ethiopia's revised refugee law](#). African Portal.

<sup>95</sup> The New Humanitarian.(2018) [Eritrea-Ethiopia peace leads to a refugee surge](#).

cross into Ethiopia daily up to the start of the Tigrayan crisis that started in November 2020.<sup>96</sup> During the writing of this report this civil conflict that erupted between the central government and Tigray has already resulted in tens of thousands of Ethiopian migrants displaced mainly into Sudan in an on-going crisis.<sup>97</sup> An analysis of the likely impact of the Tigray crisis on mixed migration in Ethiopia and the region was written by the author of this research report in January 2021 and offers more details of possible outcomes from a mixed migration perspective.<sup>98</sup>

A new **National Reintegration Directive** was endorsed at Ministerial level in September 2018. This serves as a legal document to reinforce the use of common methods and approaches for the reintegration of returnees at the national level.

## 6.2 The current governance context relating to migration

### Association with global governance mechanisms

Ethiopia is signatory to a range of international treaties and conventions that offer different aspects of protection through international law to those on the move within their territories as well as their own citizens on the move. Those most relevant to mixed migration concerns range from the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**, the **UN Refugee Convention (1951)** or the **Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987)**, the 'Palermo Protocols'<sup>99</sup> against human smuggling and human trafficking (accession only, not ratification), and most recently in the **Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – GMC (2018)**. Ethiopia is also signatory to the sister compact to the GCM, the **Global Compact for Refugees – GCR (2018)**.

Ethiopia is not signatory of key conventions relating to the rights of migrant workers such as the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (2003)**.

Insofar that the Europe-Africa engagement on policy and collaboration on migration issues (predominantly mixed migration and the issue of irregular movement) is part of a global interface, Ethiopia is a major stakeholder in the **2014 AU-EU Khartoum Processes**. The process has highlighted the importance of the regional dimension in tackling the challenges posed by the mixed migratory flows of irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers between countries of origin, transit and destination particularly between the Horn of Africa and Europe.

The AU-HoAI (**Horn of Africa Initiative**) was formally launched through the signing of the Khartoum Declaration in October 2014 and aims at addressing the challenges of migration, including irregular migration, human trafficking and people smuggling within and from the Horn of Africa. In 2015, the Valletta Summit (convened in response the European 'migration crisis') resulted in the **Joint Valletta Action Plan**<sup>100</sup> which in turn resulted in the launch of the **EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration** in December 2016, funded by the EUTF. The main focus of the initiative

<sup>96</sup> The New Humanitarian. (2019) [Eritrean refugees defy border closures only to find hardship in Ethiopia](#).

<sup>97</sup> Amin, M. (2020) [Tigray refugees recount the horrors of Ethiopia's new conflict](#). The New Humanitarian

<sup>98</sup> Horwood, C & Frouws, B. (2021) [Mixed migration consequences of the Tigrayan crisis](#). Mixed Migration Centre.

<sup>99</sup> The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children; and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, as part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2003)

<sup>100</sup> Khartoum Process. (2019) [What is the Joint Valletta Action Plan](#).

has been the return and reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin and reinforce the containment approach of the EU.<sup>101</sup> Ethiopia is a major beneficiary of the EUTF.

### Compliance with global governance mechanisms

Ethiopia has been criticized for its 'brutal oppression' and dire human rights record for many years<sup>102</sup> and at present almost three million of its citizens are currently internally displaced mainly due to violence and conflict.<sup>103</sup> Most of these 'new' displacements occurred during 2018 and during and after the new reformist and pro-rights prime minister took power. Such a situation (in peacetime) raises many questions, but they are mainly beyond the scope of this paper, except to mention that its association with rights treaties and conventions does not guarantee compliance on the ground, even if the human right landscape has been 'transforming' in Ethiopia during 2018 and 2019.

In terms of human trafficking, for example, the 2019 State Department Trafficking in Persons report found that despite some improvement, Ethiopia once again did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Equally, domestication of international laws or independent national laws may also not be implemented on the ground. Here the reality of *de jure* and *de facto* that those on the move face is pertinent and of concern.

### Association with regional migration governance mechanisms

Ethiopia, as part of the African Union, is committed to the continent-wide updated **2006 Migration Policy Framework for Africa**, resulting in a revised framework for Africa, and **Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)**<sup>104</sup> The document aims to reflect AU priorities, policies, and incorporates the aims of Agenda 2063<sup>105</sup>, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international migration standards, and covers areas such as migration governance, labour migration and education, diaspora engagement, border governance, irregular migration, forced displacement, internal migration and migration and trade<sup>106</sup>.

Ethiopia is also party to the **IGAD Policy Framework for Management of Migration**<sup>107</sup>, and has since been involved in various migration management/governance efforts, supported by IOM and GIZ. The IGAD architecture for combatting human smuggling and trafficking is currently a patchwork of strategies, policies, institutions, and capacities of individual member states, within the context of the IGAD Peace and Security Strategy and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).<sup>108</sup> Efforts are reportedly taking place at all levels to strengthen the sub-region's capabilities to counter human smuggling and trafficking. IGAD has also taken a lead in coordination of efforts to manage the regional Somali refugee and return situation, including CRRF-aligned integration of Somali refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya.<sup>109</sup> IGAD has also been active in 2019 promoting the Free Movement protocol which aims at free movement of persons and transhumance in the IGAD Region and thereby improving opportunities for regular Labour mobility. Negotiations are on-going, but if the protocol is accepted it will have important implications for migration to and from Ethiopia.

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<sup>101</sup> IOM-UN Migration 2018. [The EU-IOM Joint Initiative: Putting the Valletta Plan into Action in Africa](#)

<sup>102</sup> Human Rights Watch (2019) [Ethiopia Events of 2018](#).

<sup>103</sup> IDMC (2019) Global Report. GRID. [Ethiopia](#).

<sup>104</sup> African Union. (2018) (Draft) [The Revised Migration Policy Framework For Africa And Plan Of Action \(2018 – 2027\)](#)

<sup>105</sup> African Union. [Agenda 2063](#). The Africa We Want.

<sup>106</sup> African Union. [Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action 2018 - 2030, Executive Summary](#)

<sup>107</sup> [Adopted](#) by the 45th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers, July 11th, 2012

<sup>108</sup> SAHAN / IGAD (2016) [Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route](#).

<sup>109</sup> [IGAD Special Summit On Durable Solutions For Somali Refugees And Reintegration Of Returnees In Somalia](#) (2017). Nairobi.

There are also a number of regional evidence and data-collection mechanisms that Ethiopia is directly or indirectly involved with; such as the **African Observatory on Migration and Development (AOMD)** – expected to be operational by 2020, and the **Regional Operational Centre** in support of the Khartoum Process and AU-Horn of Africa Initiative (ROCK) - established in 2016, with funds from the EUTF (5 mil Euro) but there is no public evidence of its work to date. There are also recently developed plans to set up a **Migration Statistics Working Group** in Africa.

Under the **Overseas Employment Proclamation (923/2016)** the Government of Ethiopia has made it mandatory to have bilateral agreement with destination countries before labour migrants can officially work in them. Its purpose is primarily to establish better protection of Ethiopian migrants in the Middle East.

In 2015, Kenya and Ethiopia signed a UN-backed trade deal worth \$200m in a bid to ease cross-border conflict, and they have had for many years a bilateral immigration agreement allowing Ethiopians to enter Kenya for 3 months without a formal visa. In mid-2018 Sudan and Ethiopia met for the first time to discuss improvements to seasonal labour migration across their borders. Following the peace agreements in 2018, in September 2018, for the first time in twenty years, Eritrea–Ethiopia border crossings were reopened but by April 2019 they were closed again in contravention of the stipulations of the peace accord.

## 6.3 National & sub-national migration governance mechanisms

### Freedom of movement

Freedom of movement is guaranteed under Art 32 of the Ethiopian constitution. Any Ethiopian or foreign national lawfully in Ethiopia can move, choose his/her residence, within the national territory, and can leave the country at any time he/she wishes. This does not apply to irregular migrants or those who left refugee camps to live irregularly in urban centres. Any Ethiopian national also has the right to return to his/her country.

### Domesticating international law

Article 9 of the Ethiopian constitution states that international instruments ratified by Ethiopia became part of the law of the land. Ethiopia has ratified and hence has made part of the law of the land various international instruments that have direct and indirect importance to protection of migrant workers. However, three particularly relevant international (ILO) conventions remain un-ratified by Ethiopia: (1) **Migration for Employment Convention of 1949 (No.97)** and **the Migrant Workers Convention of 1975 (No. 143)** as well as the aforementioned **UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW).(2003)**

### Anti-trafficking / smuggling law

Although Ethiopia has not ratified the ‘Palermo Protocols’, trafficking in human beings for whatever purpose and forced or compulsory labour is prohibited under Art 18 (2 & 3) of the constitution.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the 2015 **Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Person and Smuggling of Migrants Proclamation (No:909/2015)** took the crime of trafficking far more seriously, increasing the fines, sentencing and powers of police to act. Now persons convicted of trafficking in persons and smuggling migrants may be punished up to life imprisonment (Art 3(2) & 5(2) even, in aggravated circumstances, may even receive the death penalty (Art 6).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> In 2012, Ethiopia acceded but did not ratify the protocols against trafficking and smuggling.

<sup>111</sup> ILO (2019) Eliminating Forced Labour. [Ethiopia](#).

### Private employment agencies

The **2009 Employment Exchange Services Proclamation** (No: 632/2009) repealed the **Private Employment Agency Proclamation** No. 104/1998, and contains the major legal regimes of Ethiopia that protects migrant workers going abroad. The proclamation, among other things, defines the role of public and private employment agencies (PrEAs) in employment exchange, aimed at providing protection of the rights, safety and dignity of Ethiopians going abroad for employment, strengthen the mechanism for monitoring and regulating domestic and overseas employment exchange services. Critics of PrEAs say that in recent years they permitted abuse knowingly and were part of the problem despite the proclamation designed to protect migrants.

### The 5-year ban on labour migration

In 2018, the Ethiopian government lifted the 5-year ban on overseas labour migration. The new legislation aims to protect its citizens from ill-treatment by establishing regulations for recruitment agencies, minimum age requirements, a minimum level of education, and training for migrant workers before departure. The challenge to ensure licensed recruitment agencies operate ethically remains. Also, there is the issue of those Ethiopians who do not qualify, or who choose not to work through a PrEAs, who will then use smugglers and irregular channels and expose themselves to high levels of abuse and even death.

### Legislative reform

Ethiopia has pursued national legislative reform for refugees, consistent with the Global Compact of Refugees commitments, resulting in the new refugee and asylum legislation in January 2019. These reforms have been welcomed as very progressive and possibly a model of other African countries to follow. They are discussed further below.

### Increased irregularity

The Ethiopian constitution states that freedom of movement, as one of the basic human rights, is protected in Ethiopia (Art 32). Using this right many Ethiopians have and are moving from place to place for earning a living or various other reasons within the country and abroad. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) estimates that while approximately half a million Ethiopians went to Arab countries legally and regularly between 2014-2018, approximately 1.5 million Ethiopians left irregularly.<sup>112</sup>

### Old practices may persist

Ethiopia may be starting along a pathway of political change and reform, but for decades it has been characterised by centralised state authoritarianism alongside considerable poverty, insecurity, ethnic conflict and corruption. These factors have influenced the way national laws have been implemented and upheld and are expected to continue to have influence going forward, in the short and medium term, despite current reforms.

## 6.4 Migrant rights and services

### Documentation

All Ethiopians are permitted to apply for a passport. Previously the process was centralised in Addis but today citizens can obtain passports through regional administration offices. However, unlike the

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<sup>112</sup> Ashine. K.M.(2017) Migrant Workers Rights under the Ethiopian Legal System. International Journal of African and Asian Studies.

past they reportedly need to show evidence of travel documentation or plane tickets if they are seeking a passport to work overseas and labour migrants.

### **Pre-departure orientation**

Since the travel ban has lifted, the MoL&SA and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) have resumed the pre-departure orientation courses designed for prospective labour migrants (with contracts to work overseas). Applicants need to be over 18 years old.

### **Triangular employment relations**

Despite aforementioned regulations and periodic scrutiny, the highly profitable private employment agencies, that organise work for hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians overseas continues to violate people's rights. A new ILO study finds that clear gaps exist that make it "particularly difficult to regulate triangular employment relations". As a result of these legal gaps and weak implementations of the legal instruments in place, employment relations involving PrEAs are "often found to be exploitative".<sup>113</sup>

### **Bilateral agreements on labour migrants**

The government has sought to protect labour migrants' rights by signing bilateral labour agreements with various countries. Some of these were sought or renewed prior to the lifting of the ban in 2018.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, past violations and deaths also occurred while bilateral agreements protecting rights were in place, and in 2019 the evidence indicates that abuses continue, and even that the commitment by state representatives to protect Ethiopians abroad is limited.<sup>115</sup>

### **Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan**

The **2018 Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan for Ethiopia** only mentions migration in the context of seasonal labour migration and potential rural-urban internal migration.<sup>116</sup> International migration and irregular migration is not discussed, or addressed or included.

### **Migration returns and reintegration**

The issue of migration returns and reintegration has become more important in recent years as more Ethiopians are returning to the country. They come as deportees, rejected asylum seekers, pardoned political exiles, returning diaspora, spontaneous individual returns and those on 'assisted voluntary repatriation' programmes (with IOM). Responsibilities for receiving the new arrivals falls under the responsibility of the Agency for Refugee and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) and those returning fall into three groups: those who come from the Gulf States; Europe; or Libya and other transit countries. Apart from ARRA's role, the Ethiopian government has set up a task force for returns, and linked to the **National Council against Human Trafficking and Smuggling**.

There have been various programmes to assist returnees, mostly instigated, funded and operated by international organizations using EUTF financing. Apart from IOM's transit centre and care at the Bole airport as well as a cash grant to assist people to return home, the ILO, for example, ran a '*Support to the Reintegration of Returnees in Ethiopia*' project from 2015-2018 including various elements including skills training, income generation and awareness programmes.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> ILO (2019) [Assessment of private employment agency service provision in Ethiopia](#).

<sup>114</sup> Bahrain (2013), Djibouti (2009), Jordan (2012), Kuwait (2010), Lebanon (2014), Oman (2013), Qatar (2013), Saudi Arabia (unsigned, pending), Sudan (2009), Sudan (2012), United Arab Emirates (2012) Lists here quoted from Ogahara,Z and Kuschminder,K. (2019). op cit.

<sup>115</sup> Zelalem,Z.(2019) [Ethio-Lebanese corpse disposal inc](#). Open Democracy.

<sup>116</sup> Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners Document. (2018) [Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan](#).

<sup>117</sup> ILO website. [Support to the Reintegration of Returnees in Ethiopia](#).

### Community Discussion Forums

In 2014, following the mass deportations from Saudi Arabia, the Ethiopian authorities with IOM, started to set up community-based task forces, known as Community Discussion Forums, ('community conversations') in 400 locations in Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, and in the Southern Nations regions. The purpose of these forums has principally been to lead public awareness campaigns, which also include the airing of government-produced films warning of the hazards of human smuggling and trafficking. It appears new funding in 2019 will allow this programme to continue and expand its reach.<sup>118</sup>

### An expanding sector

There are various services, interventions and provisions provided by a growing number of non-state entities, international agencies and non-government NGO (international and local). The 2018 lifting of the restrictions on NGOs and their sources of funding and activities<sup>119</sup> will no doubt expand an already expanding sector of agencies working in the field of migration – an expansion encouraged by recent large scale funding opportunities mainly from the European Union.

### Millions of new jobs and TVET

The Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs, has recently introduced a new *Livelihoods and Job Creation Unit* with its **Plan of Action for Jobs Creation** - all part of the agency's spearheading of increased economic inclusion and self-reliance for refugees in line with the GCR and CRRF and Ethiopia's revised refugee law. Its ambition is to create 20 million new jobs by 2025.<sup>120</sup> – the aim will play a role in creating economic opportunities for refugees and host communities through facilitating the engagement of strategic government and non-governmental partners including the private sector and thereby tackling some of the main 'root causes' of migration.<sup>121</sup> Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) already active in Ethiopia for over a decade (2008) are an important resource that can mitigate migration – they seeks to 'create competent and self-reliant citizens to contribute to the economic and social development of the country, thus improving the livelihoods of all Ethiopians and sustainably reducing poverty.'<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> IOM website. [Community Conversations with a Message: To Change Lives](#)

<sup>119</sup> Civil Society Proclamation 1113/2019, which repeals the restrictive Proclamation No. 621/2009.

<sup>120</sup> Tadesse,A.G.(2019) [Ethiopia unveils jobs creation plan](#). AA.

<sup>121</sup> UNHCR [Ethiopia Factsheet](#), September 2019

<sup>122</sup> Ministry of Education (2008) [National Technical & Vocational Education & Training \(Tvet\)](#)

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