



# Meneshachin ('Our Departure')

## Study on responsible recruitment in Ethiopia

Large numbers of Ethiopian women seeking domestic work in the 'Middle East Corridor' remains a significant social trend and reflects a key livelihood strategy used by Ethiopian families and communities in the face of widespread poverty.<sup>1</sup> A previous survey found these women are at high risk of abuse and exploitation during transit and upon arrival, with many experiencing financial hardship, long hours, and exploitative living and working conditions.<sup>2</sup>



Of returnees experienced living and working conditions that amount to trafficking



Only **38%** of the returnees had a written contract



They reported earning a monthly income of **US \$185**



They worked a weekly average of **112 hours**

This study examined the role of different actors in arranging Ethiopian women's migration to the Middle East for the purpose of domestic labour and how these actors' activities exacerbate or mitigate risk of harm during the full migration cycle. Interviews with national and sub-national migration stakeholders, migration facilitators and prospective and returnee migrant workers, both within and outside of the capital city, identified trends in the practices and dynamics of migration recruitment, planning and facilitation.

- **Though campaign messages on safe migration are well understood, increased community awareness of migration risks does not influence practice** as many prospective migrants do not have an easy way to 'migrate the legal way.'
- **Regular migration is also disincentivised** as migrants perceive formal channels of migration to be more time-consuming and bureaucratic, and recruiters perceive the inefficiencies of obtaining registration and paying the associated costs of operating legally to be reasons for being out-competed by informal facilitators.
- **As the journey consists of a large and complex web of actors without distinct roles**, neither facilitators nor migrants were clear on how many different facilitators were involved in their migration.
- **There is poor evidence of any recruitment measures to protect migrants in the destination countries**, once they have left Ethiopia, migrants often assume that facilitators will not be able to do anything to influence their work conditions or help them if they need assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Kuschminder, K., Andersson, L. and Seigel, M. (2018). 'Migration and multidimensional well-being in Ethiopia: investigating the role of migrants destinations,' Migration and Development, 7(3), pp. 321-340; Zewdu, G.A. (2018) 'Ethiopian female domestic labour migration to the Middle East: patterns, trends, and drivers,' African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal, 11 (1), pp. 6-19.

<sup>2</sup> Busza, J., Shewamene Z. and Zimmerman C. (2022) 'Towards safer recruitment of Ethiopian women into domestic work abroad: Early findings from the Meneshachin 'Our Departure' qualitative study', London: The Freedom Fund, pp. 39-41.

# Promising practices for responsible recruitment

Recommendations for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Ethiopia and other countries sending high numbers of citizens abroad for domestic work

## NGOs in migrants' country of origin

**Provide prospective migrants with more accurate information about working conditions and remuneration for domestic workers in different destination countries, as well as information about assistance options.**

Competition over prospective migrants increases the likelihood of facilitators offering deceptive information on working conditions and wage levels. To counter this, NGOs and community-based groups could play a more active role in disseminating more accurate information about domestic work in destination countries, especially through lower-cost, interactive methods such as social media and phone helplines.

**Improve prospective migrants' understanding of and access to the legal migration process, as well as the requirements, costs and time that the process typically takes.** While migrating legally does not 'guarantee' that a migrant will not be exploited, it does offer an extra layer of protection and recourse for migrants who do face abuse. Frequent misconceptions may include what 'migrating legally' means and the extra protection it offers, the requirements for legal migration and the required documentation and approximate processing time. These topics should be a priority for future informational campaigns.

**Provide migrants, both regular and irregular, with information on formal and informal support mechanisms at destination, as well as centring survivors in prevention and training to ensure that priorities reflect survivors' experiences.** Working in conjunction with government ministries, UN agencies and recruitment industry bodies, NGOs can serve a vital role in distributing materials such as info cards that contain practical details to access impartial advice in the sending country as well as assistance in destination countries.

## NGOs in destination countries

**Create emergency funds that are accessible to all migrants, irrespective of their migration status.** Life-critical assistance must be made available to irregular migrants. Governments and other donor agencies should consider providing emergency funds that are maintained and disbursed through registered NGOs.

**Support alternate mechanisms for connecting migrant domestic workers at destination.** In many destination countries, migrants are banned from joining or forming unions. Nonetheless, many migrants rely on informal mechanisms such as religious networks, cultural associations and drop-in centres. These models should be further explored as ways to help migrant domestic workers connect with people outside of their employer's home, seek support to deal with challenging situations and be referred to specialist support where needed.

**Consider strategic litigation as a tool for highlighting maltreatment of migrant domestic workers, as well as deterring abuse by employers and inactions by agents.** While legal cases can be costly, slow and with uncertain outcomes, careful investments into selected cases can help set legal precedents, attract media coverage and shape public opinions. As such, strategic litigation should be viewed as a complementary intervention alongside direct services to victims and advocacy to strengthen policies.

Read the full report at <https://freedomfund.org/meneshachin-report-2022>

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