



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.¹ 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.²



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.

¹ 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.

² 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 government officials in Ethiopia and other countries sending high numbers of citizens abroad for domestic work

Involve recruiters in review of law and policy and engage them as positive social agents so that they help create an enabling environment for safe migration. To ensure policies are feasible to implement, including recruiters as active participants in the review and adaptation of existing laws and practices might empower them to comply with regulations rather than seek ways to circumvent legal requirements.

Liaise with governments in destination countries to hold recruiters and their counterparts to financial account for all parts of a migrant's journey and to support mechanisms to protect foreign migrant workers. Government ministries should clarify and advertise the mechanisms for lodging claims for compensation, which would help deter agents and employers from unlawful and abusive behaviours, as well as enable victims to receive due compensation. Government ministries should push for foreign governments to take action on the behaviour of local job placement organisations and hold them accountable for the safety and financial remuneration of their migrant clients, not only their employer clients.

Negotiate new, and improve existing, bilateral labour agreements with destination countries, especially to expand the modes of employment available to migrant domestic workers and foreign employers. The unique and direct relationship between a domestic worker and a private employer requires thoughtful matching and room for flexibility, especially as the needs of the worker and the host employer are likely to change over the course of two to three years, the typical duration of a migrant domestic worker contract.

Prioritise funding for adequate Labour Attaché or other diplomatic staff with relevant knowledge and training in key destination countries. Labour Attaché posts or teams of other, appropriately trained, diplomatic staff can support workers currently overseas by offering an extra layer of protection and recourse for those who face abuse and being a contact at the Ethiopian Mission overseas.

Improve monitoring and reporting on the status of destination agents, to ensure they are fulfilling their duties to protect deployed migrant domestic workers. Overseas Missions could help reinforce accountability across the 'chain' of facilitators by conducting more inspections and issuing financial penalties for non-compliance. This monitoring can also be done in conjunction with civil society groups at destination, who could refer unresponsive or unethical agents to the Labour Attaché for further review.

Commission research and assessments of current practices by local employment placement agencies in destination countries. Ultimately, migrants' safety and well-being are in the hands of the local placement agencies, as they are the direct intermediary between the migrant and the employer. Serious mapping and assessment are needed to determine ethical and unethical practices as well as to differentiate reliable from unreliable actors in destination locations. Findings from destination-side research can help destination governments to learn about the behaviours in their own country, to better inform Labour Attaché about bad actors and to help agencies gain a sense of who they can trust to place their migrants in safe situations and assist them if things go wrong.

Build capacity of agents to enable them to function optimally in accordance with the legal framework and for the benefit of migrants. Recruiters are often viewed positively by migrants and their communities, as they provide an essential service to those seeking opportunities abroad. Often, licensed private employment agencies face competition for those operating outside legal requirements, which incentivises them to try to cut costs through irregular practices, or makes their business model untenable. A supportive environment for licensed agents can strengthen their role and potential to act on behalf of migrants.

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

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