



ETHIOPIA

Safer migration hotspot report

September 2024



Migrant rehabilitation centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Ethiopia, the Freedom Fund works with local partners on two hotspot programs: safer migration and child domestic work. This report covers progress and outcomes during 2023 from our safer migration program, which aims to prevent the exploitation of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers going to the Middle East.

Advocacy and networking by the Freedom Fund and our partners led to significant policy developments in 2023. These included the development of a comprehensive migration policy by the Ethiopian government and the issuing of directives on the rights of migrant workers and returnees. We also successfully advocated for the implementation of a digital registration system to reduce exploitation of migrant domestic workers by brokers and illegal recruiters.

In destination countries, the hotspot worked with Ethiopian domestic worker groups in Lebanon and Kuwait to improve systems of support for migrant workers. This included the setting up of a hotline which handles around 60 cases a month and liaises with the Ethiopian embassy when action is required. The workers' group in Kuwait was also selected to help train new officers of the embassy before their deployment to Kuwait and other countries.

During the year, survivor-led organisations in Kuwait and Freedom Fund shelter partners in Ethiopia concluded MOUs, in order to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of Ethiopian women returning from Kuwait. In 2023, more than 7,200 returnees/survivors received support services in Addis Ababa from Freedom Fund partners, with 354 women provided with access to shelter. Assistance included support with vocational training and alternative livelihoods, with 681 women supported to earn a new income or start a micro-enterprise during the year. In addition, a new formal employment scheme in Addis Ababa provided training and long-term support to 240 women returnees.

Building community understanding of safer migration helps reduce the risk of exploitation and supports reintegration. In 2023, four hotspot partners facilitated the inclusion of returning migrants in Community Conversation groups. These groups held 4,351 Community Conversations during the year, enabling returning migrants to re-establish relationships in the community and bring issues to the attention of community leaders.

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OPERATING CONTEXT

Escalation of tension and conflicts led to increased migration. In 2023, despite the end of the war between Federal forces and the Tigray Liberation Front, clashes between the defence forces and local militias have resulted in civilian deaths and displacement. Amhara, the region where part of the hotspot's work is based, is one of the areas most seriously affected by conflict. Nationally, over 4 million Ethiopians have been internally displaced by conflict, while the country also experienced extended drought and high inflation in 2023. The 2023 net overseas migration rate from Ethiopia increased by 326% compared to 2022.

Declaration of state of emergency delayed program activities in Amhara. The state of emergency in this region, which was declared in August 2023, suspended many basic freedoms and prohibited public gatherings without authorisation. This caused delays because partners had to obtain authorisation before organising any community activities. Blocked internet services in the region also disrupted local field staff communication with their head offices and with other partners.

International funding gap in assistance to Ethiopia. By March 2023, the US government pledged a total of US \$778 million to provide basic needs for people displaced by conflict, drought and food insecurity. However, according to the Ethiopian government, with the situation worsening, US \$3.2 billion is required in 2024 for humanitarian assistance to 15.5 million Ethiopians. In addition, conflict and violence in neighbouring countries, particularly Sudan, has led to an influx of returnees.

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PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policy/legislative

Development of a comprehensive migration policy. During previous years, Freedom Fund partners have been advocating for a comprehensive migration policy. In 2023, this policy was finalised by the Ethiopian government. The policy goes beyond a narrow focus on overseas employment and addresses the entire sequence of migration, from migrants leaving Ethiopia up to the process of reintegration of returnees.

Issuing of vital directives on the rights of migrant workers and returnees. In 2023, the Freedom Fund and our partners contributed expertise to the development of three new government directives or strategies:

- a directive on the reintegration of returnees who had been victims of exploitation, and the assistance that they should receive
- a newly drafted organised crime prevention strategy on trafficking and smuggling of migrants
- ratification of the free legal aid strategy which was then promoted to various agencies across the country.

Signing of bilateral agreements with destination countries. The Ethiopian government signed six bilateral agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan covering the rights and protection for domestic workers, which may not be covered under national legislation. Examples include agreed wages and benefits. However, it should be noted that these agreements do not in practice provide perfect protection of migrant workers' rights because migration source countries have tended to compromise workers' rights in a bid to send more of their workers. In addition, workers are often not aware of the agreements and there are gaps in the implementation of these protections in both Ethiopia and destination countries.

Political will/public awareness/attitude change

Government galvanising collective effort. In 2023, one sign of increased political will was the issuing of the Hoshana Declaration by the government, which called for collective effort by all relevant actors against trafficking and unsafe migration.

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Addis Ababa
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Government performance

Increased coordination. The National Partnership Coalition for Migration is led by the Ministry of Justice and brings together government and civil society actors. It is a key space for the Freedom Fund and our partners to influence the government, and it has shown responsiveness through the policy changes described above. Anti trafficking coordination was also set up at local level with 11 partnership coalition set up at sub-city level and 116 coalitions at woreda (district) level in Addis and Amhara region.

Business performance

Digital registration system launched to reduce exploitation by brokers and illegal recruiters. Extensive advocacy by the Freedom Fund and our partners contributed to the implementation of this system. The system gathers data throughout the migration process, providing all the necessary information to Ethiopian border forces as well as embassies in destination countries to assist potential migrants and returnees. The system also aims to work within Ethiopian regions through the decentralised services of the Labour Ministry, enabling migrants to access services closer to them. Most importantly, this digital system should significantly reduce the involvement of brokers and illegal recruiters as well as avoiding forged documents. Since its launch in July 2023 through May 2024, 146,000 Ethiopian migrants have used the system when travelling for overseas employment.

Community organisation

Improved systems of support in destination countries. Through the Freedom Fund's ongoing assistance, two Ethiopian domestic worker groups in Lebanon and two in Kuwait have significantly improved systems of support for workers in destination countries. One of the groups set up a hotline handling approximately 60 cases a month. Importantly, the group alerts the embassy to cases where appropriate, thereby enabling relevant action to be taken. Another encouraging success was that the workers' group in Kuwait was selected to help train new officers of the embassy before their deployment to Kuwait and other countries.

Collaboration between survivor-led organisations in destination and source countries. In 2023, women domestic workers from the groups in Lebanon and Kuwait strengthened their participation in the Global Migrant Workers Network (GMWN). A visit by GMWN to Addis Ababa kick-started collaboration between migrant workers in the Middle East and Ethiopian government representatives. It also helped to link survivor-led organisations in destination countries with partner organisations in Ethiopia. Survivor-led organisations in Kuwait and Freedom Fund shelter partners in Ethiopia concluded MOUs this year, as a way to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of Ethiopian women returning from Kuwait.

HOTSPOT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Headline results

More than 7,200 returnees/survivors received support services in Addis Ababa, with 354 women provided with access to shelter.

Vocational training and support with alternative livelihoods are key to the successful reintegration of returnees/survivors. This year, 681 women earned a new income or started a micro-enterprise. A new formal employment scheme in Addis Ababa provided training and long-term follow-up support to 240 women returnees.

13 schools agreed to set up anti-trafficking school clubs, which promote best practices for safer migration and enable students to discuss and address issues raised by their peers.

Four partners supported the inclusion of returning migrants in Community Conversation groups. 4,351 Community Conversations were held during the year, enabling returning migrants to re-establish relationships in the community and bring issues to the attention of community leaders.

Advocacy and networking by partners led to significant policy developments, including agreement by the Minister of Labour and Skills to include domestic workers in Ethiopian labour law and to promote ratification of ILO Convention 189 regarding domestic workers' rights.

Five survivor-led organisations received Survivor Leadership Fund grants from the Freedom Fund. The Freedom Fund will support the organisations' institutional and leadership capacity, fostering collaboration with our existing partners, research institutions, and international NGOs.

Frealem, a returnee migrant from the Middle East, holding eggs from her chicken coop in Legetafo, Oromia region, Ethiopia.
Photo credit: © Genaye Eshetu / The Freedom Fund



Progress towards hotspot objectives

Hotspot Objective 1: Building community understanding of safer migration

- **Endorsement of bylaws by community groups against offences linked to trafficking.** Bylaws are being passed by the *iddrs* and then endorsed by the community, who are members of and respect the rules of the *iddrs*. This has progressed from being an innovation to being a standardised approach in 2023. These bylaws disrupt the networks of irregular brokers as well as giving community members a way to report issues to their *iddrs* without having to go to the authorities themselves.
- **Our partner African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN)'s anti-trafficking school clubs have been recognised by the woreda-level Bureau of Education.** 13 schools in the *woreda* will now incorporate these into their curricula. Training of school club representatives enables students to address problems raised by their peers, while promoting best practices for safer migration. Clubs have also helped identify the most vulnerable young people for support.
- **4,351 Community Conversations took place in 2023.** Four partners have nurtured Community Conversation groups, leading to important collaborations with elders, *iddir* (community group) leaders and religious leaders. These leaders can help to resolve some of the immediate push factors for migration, such as family disputes, bereavement or lack of access to emergency finance. The conversations now also include returning migrants, as a way to share their experiences and to re-establish relationships in the community that can improve their reintegration.

Becoming a village free from unsafe migration: *"Women in the Community Conversations believed that by saving ten Birr every week, they could solve both personal and collective social and economic problems. They established the Unity Women's Savings Group. Besides savings, the group focuses on avoiding wasteful traditional practices in the area, such as excessive spending on rings and wedding parties. They also engage in other income-generating activities such as rearing chickens and growing vegetables including spices in their gardens. They consult and gather together to do handicraft activities like lace-making, household items like sefed, mosab, kuna, jewellery, and spinning cotton to sell."* Anecdote from PADET Amhara

- **Toll-free phone lines, Telegram groups and drop-in centres operated by partners provide information and support related to safer migration when it is not possible to conduct Community Conversation groups in person (due to the ongoing conflict).** Partners offered services including information on safer migration options and psychosocial support. In particular, there has been an increase in the use of partner phone lines to report illegal broker operations.

Addis Ababa Bole Airport.
Photo credit: © XPlane.org





A returnee migrant from the Middle East, at the Agar shelter.
Photo credit: © Genaye Eshetu / The Freedom Fund

Hotspot Objective 2: Improving functioning of the migration system in Ethiopia, such as supporting government responses, promoting fair and transparent recruitment practices, and strengthening law enforcement actions

- **Improved presence of formal recruitment agencies in the Amhara region after consistent advocacy by partners.** 41 agencies opened offices in Amhara, in the *woredas* where partners work. The local government has also restarted pre-departure training for migrants in three intervention areas. However, escalation of conflict in the region meant that government and private recruitment agencies then reduced their operations.
- **Supporting and strengthening Migration Partnership Coalitions to combat trafficking.** The devolution of national Partnership Coalition structures started in 2023. These local structures are critical to engage communities and respond to trafficking. Six partners provide assistance to the local-level coalitions, such as collaboration on repatriation and aftercare for intercepted at-risk migrants.
- **Collaboration between shelters and government offices to improve justice outcomes for returnees.** Agar shelter is now using a Victim of Trafficking Assessment Form with new returnees. This information-gathering is enabling the arrest of traffickers. Agar provides support to returnees throughout their case, conducting practice sessions for giving evidence, and familiarising them with the courtroom. However, many women have a long wait between the arrest of a perpetrator and the court date, leading some to drop their case so they can go home.
- **Strengthening collaboration of private companies and local authorities for waged employment of returnees.** Under the *Thrive Together* platform, the Freedom Fund brought together representatives from federal government, employers, service providers and civil society to share experiences from the Thrive program, with the aim of the Labour Ministry adopting the program in their own training centres. In addition, a job fair led to the job placement of 36 women under Thrive, expanding the number of employers within the pilot to 84. In Amhara, partner Onlus – Centro Internazionale per L'infanzia e la Famiglia (CIFA) followed a similar approach resulting in all trainees securing work after completion of training.

Hotspot Objective 3: Strengthening the capacity of civil society actors to influence and hold the government accountable

- **Furthering policy development.** Our partner Comunita Volontari per il Mondo (CVM) brought together worker union representatives and parliamentarians on the issue of domestic workers' rights. As a result, the Minister of Labour and Skills agreed to include domestic workers in Ethiopian labour law and to promote ratification of ILO Convention 189 regarding domestic workers' rights. In addition, members of the Ethiopian Parliament agreed to work on the inclusion of domestic work within the Labour Proclamation 1156/2019. CVM has established an advocacy coalition, including our partner PADET, the Council of Trade Unions, the Ethiopian Domestic Workers' Association and CARE Ethiopia, to influence the ratification of ILO Convention 189.
- **Influencing minimum wage policy through worker collectivisation.** The Council of Trade Unions, supported by our partner CVM, achieved a breakthrough: the government agreed to establish a Wage Board that will set the national minimum wage. The minimum wage could be a critical protective factor to reduce irregular migration into exploitative work.
- **Increased visibility and recognition for survivor-led organisations.**
 - The Freedom Fund provided the first Survivor Leadership Fund grants to newly-established survivor-led organisations. This was a ground-breaking moment, with five such organisations receiving funding. Their efforts were celebrated by the Deputy Mayor of Addis Ababa at an official event. The Freedom Fund will support the organisations' institutional and leadership capacity, fostering collaboration with our existing partners, research institutions, and international NGOs.
 - Our partner Hiwot organised a workshop on evidence-based advocacy for 30 partners and key government bodies, to introduce the supported survivor-led organisations (Finot, Biruh Addis and Kasma Charitable Organisation).
 - We continued to support Ethiopian migrant domestic workers' groups in destination countries in the Middle East. We co-hosted a meeting in Addis Ababa of the Global Migrant Workers Network, involving activists from six countries. This was an opportunity for migrant workers from Kuwait and Lebanon to meet with our safer migration partners and to better understand the services offered to returnees. It was also an important opportunity for workers to engage with senior officials.

Hana, a returnee migrant from the Middle East, in the classroom where she takes vocational skills training in hairdressing in Addis Ababa
Photo credit: © Genaye Eshetu / The Freedom Fund



Hotspot Objective 4: Improving access to and quality of reintegration services for returnees

- **Provision of comprehensive shelter support for returnees/survivors in Addis Ababa.** More than 7,200 people accessed services, with 354 women provided with access to shelter. Two partners, Agar and Beza Posterity Development Organization (BPDO), run shelters where they provide a wide range of services to women to enable their sustained reintegration. Provision of these services requires strong relationships with over 20 health care facilities to treat psychological and medical needs.
- **Reintegration and follow-up.** When shelter residents are ready to reintegrate with their families, the organisations provide counselling to the families to build understanding of the traumatic experiences that survivors have undergone. Family tracing and reintegration has been hampered by ongoing conflict, so more women have opted to reintegrate within Addis Ababa. Women in the shelters also receive life skills training and, if they are ready, vocational training.
- **Vocational training and alternative livelihoods for returnees/survivors.** This year, 681 women earned a new income or started a micro-enterprise.
 - The Freedom Fund piloted a formal employment scheme in Addis Ababa with private service providers who provided training and long-term follow-up support to 240 women returnees. This has been lauded as a revolutionary approach by both employers and government. The approach is unusual both for the length of support that it gives and the focus on formal sector employment, mainly in the hospitality industry. The drop-out rate in the program has been only 4%, with 227 women entering employment. Early findings from the evaluation show huge decreases in the average number of hours worked per day (from 12 hours to 8 hours) and the majority have at least one day off per week. Women's sense of self-worth, their confidence, and their outlook for the future were rated as good or very good for nearly 90% of the participants.
 - Partners have implemented other livelihood schemes with long-term training and accompaniment for women to engage in skilled work. CIFA, for example, has been providing psychosocial support, life skills, peer mentoring and vocational training in industries such as garment manufacturing, baking and hairdressing. This approach has enabled some of the trainees to go into the formal sector while others have been able to start small enterprises with the help of seed grants. In a recent report CIFA said: *"It is obvious that coaching and follow-up service is critical for livelihood interventions."*

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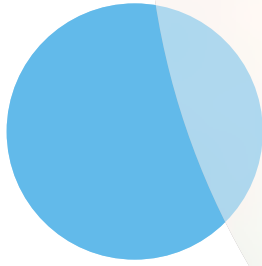


SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- In Amhara, partners reviewed the use of a neutral local selection committee by our partner (Emmanuel Development Association) EDA in order to make participant selection for income-generating activities more transparent. ANPPCAN is now considering adopting this practice in their income-generation activities.
- 15 partner representatives held a workshop on 'Increasing engagement of survivors in the anti-slavery sector in Ethiopia'.
- Five partners have adopted interface meetings and community conversation activities within their projects.

Bole, Addis Ababa
Photo credit: © Unsplash / Kaleab





*A Saudi returnee has her photo taken by one of the volunteers at the migrant rehabilitation center.
Photo credit: © UNICEF Ethiopia/2013/Ayene*

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

Mid-term evaluation

Population Council undertook an independent mid-term evaluation of the Freedom Fund's hotspot work in Ethiopia, with the following findings about the Safer Migration hotspot:

Most effective interventions:

- awareness-creation model in schools and communities
- comprehensive shelter and psychosocial support services
- creation of and support for survivors/returnees advocacy groups.

Challenges experienced by partners:

- effectiveness is determined by resources and duration – conflict and high inflation disrupted activities, especially income-generation initiatives, and partner capacity
- changes in government structures led to difficulty identifying responsible bodies for intervention
- lack of shelter for migrants intercepted on irregular migration routes.

Recommendations:

- reasonable timeline and larger scale to intervention work, particularly the comprehensive shelter model
- further advocacy for policy change to address bureaucratic barriers to regular migration
- stronger collaboration with government on overseas employment regulation and enforcement.

The Freedom Fund then arranged a workshop for partners to consider the recommendations, with their decisions feeding into program planning for the coming two years.

VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

MISSION




Our mission is to mobilise the knowledge, capital and will needed to end slavery.

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