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# **“THEY CHANGED THEIR LIVES BECAUSE THEY WENT TO ARAB COUNTRIES”**

## **LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN’S OVERSEAS MIGRATION FOR DOMESTIC LABOUR IN AMHARA REGION**

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*Findings from a pre-project assessment to inform the development and  
evaluation of Freedom Fund’s Ethiopia Hotspot Programme*

May 4, 2016

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## Local perceptions of women’s overseas migration for domestic labour in Amhara region

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) was commissioned by the Freedom Fund to conduct a rapid qualitative assessment on decision-making around international migration for domestic labour by girls and young women from Amhara Region, Ethiopia. The aim of the study was to explore how communities in the area where the Freedom Fund plans to implement its Hotspot programme obtain and interpret information on how to migrate, and their perceptions of risk and protective factors associated with different approaches to migration.

The research questions were:

- Where do women and girls access information on migration and how do they interpret it?
- What factors influence decision-making around migration, including selection of how to migrate?
- How are “safe” and “unsafe” migration understood by prospective migrants and their communities?
- What might increase a woman’s vulnerability to negative migration outcomes and what might increase women's chances of having a safe and positive migration experience?

For all the above questions, the study focused on practical information or “tips” from respondents that could be used to advise future migrants and their families on how to minimise the risks of migration.

### **Methods**

The rapid assessment was qualitative and consisted of focus group discussions, semi-structured key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews. Research was conducted in 4 kebeles (villages) in one woreda (district) located on the outskirts of Hayk.

Qualitative research collects in-depth and open-ended data from a small sample of respondents in order to understand perceptions of a specific event or activity from the perspective of those most closely affected by it. While it cannot be described as representative of the larger population in a statistical way, qualitative data offers a “snapshot” of current norms, patterns of behaviour, and interpretation of behavioural trends and can highlight existing diversity of opinions and experience, all of which are useful in designing context-specific interventions.

Findings have been used to develop a draft programmatic Theory of Change to help guide selection of specific Hotspot activities in Amhara Region so that they increase the knowledge and skills identified as likely to be associated with safer migration outcomes.

### **Findings**

In the study area near Hayk, migration abroad by girls and young women seeking domestic work appears to be widespread and accepted as a means to further the life chances of migrants and their families. Study participants were aware of negative outcomes during migration, at destination, and following return, and community members could identify potential risks based on the experiences of relatives or peers, as well as from information disseminated by government. Nonetheless, reports of positive experiences shared by returnee migrants appear more persuasive and encourage others to take their chances, particularly as viable income opportunities in the area are considered scarce.

Young women reported having made their own decision regarding migration, some in opposition to spouses or parents. On the other hand, family members of migrants or returnees described an environment of expectation that may make the choice to migrate nearly inevitable. Concerns about the poor state of the local economy and weak agricultural productivity appear to further shape local risk-benefit analysis regarding migration.

Participants reported that local contacts assist women in the migration process, some of whom are family members or acquaintances and some more formal brokers. They link migrants to individuals

or agencies in Addis Ababa that finalise the arrangements with agents in the destination countries. While people associated legal migration with greater protection and saw illegal migration as “unsafe”, in reality there appears to be considerable difficulty differentiating between the two options. Some differences recounted between the legal versus illegal included costs (legal seemingly less expensive), time from application to travel (shorter for illegal migration), level of preparation provided before departure (which varies even between legal and illegal arrangements), access to assistance following migration (better for legal migration), etc., but, based on women’s reports, these distinctions are not always clear, often resulting in decisions about migration made based on which form of migration seems more convenient at the time.

Whether women have good or bad experiences in the destination country are considered to be a matter of “luck” or “chance,” and to depend on the character (kind/unkind) of employers. Examples of both good and bad employers were provided by returnee migrants and family members. Participants described a continuum from employers who have badly abused or even killed migrant women to those who treat them like family, provide gifts, and pay for holidays back in Ethiopia. Respondents explained that women with bad employers can try to seek redress from local or Ethiopian employment agencies, or terminate their contracts and try to work illegally outside their visa. The success or failure of such strategies varies, depending partly on the agency (seemingly regardless of its legal status) and whether they secure better employment/ living conditions and avoid arrest /deportation if they break the terms of their visa.

A key objective of this rapid assessment was to identify protective factors and respondents were encouraged to think beyond the role of “luck” and “chance” and to consider how migration outcomes could be influenced by what migrants knew or how they acted.

Although many said that successful versus unsuccessful migration was a matter of “chance”, returnee migrants also described knowledge, skills, and interpersonal attributes they believe to be associated with safer outcomes (summarised in the table below).

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Arabic</li> <li>• Cultural expectations (clothing, religious observation, gender relations)</li> <li>• Personal hygiene (using and disposing of sanitary pads)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modern appliances and domestic products</li> <li>• Cleaning toilets or other unfamiliar household items</li> <li>• Financial planning, e.g. opening an account prior to departure</li> </ul>
INTERPERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Assertiveness</li> <li>• Obedience</li> <li>• Older age/ maturity</li> <li>• Being Muslim/ pretending to be Muslim</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phones and local sim cards</li> <li>• Contact details of agency, local Ethiopians, family</li> <li>• Leaving copy of contract and agency details with family</li> <li>• Access to Facebook, WhatsApp, VIBER etc</li> <li>• Arriving with foreign currency for any delays on arrival</li> </ul>

They suggested that desirable or protective skills include familiarity with the destination country’s culture and expectations (such as basic hygiene), understanding modern appliances and domestic products, rudimentary language ability, access to a mobile phone and local sim card, possession of contact details for employment agencies and local Ethiopians, and adopting a demeanour combining confidence, assertiveness and obedience. Participants explained that it was an advantage to regularly send money back to someone’s bank account in Ethiopia rather than rely on accumulating cash or being paid at the end of the contract. It was commonly reported that older women appear to have the kind of maturity required for handling difficult situations.

Women seemed to assess the success of their migration based on whether they returned with earnings or found that the money sent was put to good use or saved by a family member. Returning with nothing or finding their hard-earned funds had already been spent was perceived as failure. Either outcome may encourage a woman to re-migrate, either to consolidate wealth or make up for the lost income.

## INTRODUCTION

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This report presents findings from a rapid qualitative assessment undertaken by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) as part of its collaboration with the Freedom Fund for monitoring and evaluation of the Ethiopia Hot Spot programme. This formative research was commissioned to take place in the Hotspot programme area of Amhara Region in order to identify local understanding of women's migration, current decision making practices around the means of migration, and perceptions of risk and protective factors; these themes will help inform the design of intervention activities and key messages supported by the Freedom Fund and their implementing partners.

The formative research questions were as follows:

- Where do women and girls access information on migration and how do they interpret it?
- What factors influence decision-making around migration, including selection of how to migrate?
- How are “safe” and “unsafe” migration understood by prospective migrants and their communities?
- What might increase a woman's vulnerability to negative migration outcomes and what might increase women's chances of having a safe and positive migration experience?

The focus of the study was on identifying factors associated with pre-departure, transit, and in-country experiences that could be translated into realistic messages and practical advice for prospective migrants and their families to increase the chances of positive migration experiences in future.

Findings have been used to develop a programmatic Theory of Change to help guide selection of specific Hotspot activities that will increase the knowledge and skills identified as likely to be associated with safer migration outcomes. The Theory of Change suggests ways in which information from this assessment can be used to identify a realistic pathway through which specific intervention activities can lead to enhanced community capacity and an enabling environment for safe migration choices. In turn, this pathway provides guidance for evaluation research to track the programme's progress along this pathway to change.

## METHODS

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The rapid assessment was entirely qualitative, consisting of focus group discussions (FGD), semi-structured key informant interviews (KII), and in-depth interviews (IDI). Research was conducted in 4 kebeles (villages) in one woreda (district) located on the outskirts of Hayk and considered to be typical of the surrounding area in terms of its socio-demographic profile, accessibility by road, and reliance on agriculture by most of the population.

Following discussion with woreda authorities, sampling was conducted in each kebele through a combination of purposive recruitment (seeking individuals likely to provide a diversity of perspectives, e.g. representing different age groups, religious backgrounds, education levels) and opportunistic selection (interviewing respondents with relevant experience who are available and willing to participate at the time of data collection). The final Amhara data set consisted of the following:

- 12 in-depth interviews with returnee migrant women
- 1 in-depth interview with a woman planning to migrate in the near future
- 7 key informant interviews (School Director, Muslim Leader, Police Officer, 2 mothers of migrants, 1 former Women's Affairs kebele representative, and 2 Woreda Women and Children's Affairs authorities who were interviewed together)
- 3 focus group discussions with returnee migrants (5, 8 and 10 participants each)
- 1 focus group discussion with 6 husbands of migrants

- 1 focus group discussion with 4 fathers of migrants

Qualitative research collects in-depth and open-ended data from a small sample of respondents in order to understand perceptions of a specific event or activity from the perspective of those most closely affected by it. While it cannot be described as representative of the larger population in a statistical way, qualitative data offers a “snapshot” of current norms, patterns of behaviour, and interpretation of behavioural trends and can highlight existing diversity of opinions and experience, all of which are useful in designing context-specific interventions that will be meaningful to the local population.

Data were collected during December 2015 and January 2016 by an independent research consultant and fieldwork assistant, both of whom are female, Ethiopian, and fluent in the local language (Amharic). All interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded and translated into English by the fieldworker. Two members of the research team read all the transcripts and used thematic content analysis to categorise text into topic areas that were both pre-selected prior to the research (how do prospective migrants obtain and interpret information? What “tips” can they provide for others to reduce risks and maximise positive outcomes?) as well as identify ideas emerging directly from the data (the role of God and luck in determining experiences, the importance of how earnings are spent in perceptions of “successful” migration).

The voices of respondents are prioritised throughout this report, with extensive use of direct quotes from the expanded notes to ensure fidelity to respondents’ language and how they contextualise their perceptions and experiences within their own lives. Excerpts from interviews and group discussions provided throughout the text have been lightly edited to improve English grammar and syntax from the original translation.

Although this study was qualitative and thus not conducive to presenting numbers or proportions, terms such as “most” “a few” “commonly” or “rarely” are used throughout the report to provide some indication of which findings appeared more frequently in the data than others. Although specific numbers are avoided, where certain ideas or experiences were universal or, on the contrary, clear outliers, this is sometimes quantified, e.g. “all returnees...” or “only one respondent...”.

To help interpret experiences and direct quotes of individual interviewees, a brief summary of key socio-demographic and migration-related variables for the 12 returnee migrants who participated in in-depth interviews is provided in Table 1. In-depth interviews allow exploration of personal experiences, beliefs, and perceptions, all of which are likely to be influenced by personal history and current circumstances.

The same information is not provided for participants of focus group discussions in which the aim was to elicit group norms and acceptable ways of talking about migration, obtain background information to guide the study, and help select respondents for follow-up interviews, rather than ask about individual experiences. Additional details have also not been provided for the key informants and one prospective migrant interviewed to avoid inadvertent loss of anonymity.

All direct quotes are identified by data collection method, type of respondent, and age (except for key informants holding formal community roles who might be more easily identified).

**Table 1: Summary Characteristics of Returnee migrants interviewed individually**

	Current Age	Years of Education	Religion	Marital Status	Destination(s) & Duration	Use of Legal or Illegal Route	Migration Process	Current Occupation/ Plans
1	24	7	Christian	Divorced	Qatar (18 months)	Does not know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents sold cattle to raise money for journey</li> <li>Used Addis Ababa based broker</li> </ul>	Unspecified
2	23	6	Muslim	Married	Dubai (30 months)	Does not know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dropped out of school to work in Addis Ababa first</li> <li>Borrowed money from relative</li> <li>Used Addis Ababa based broker who sent her friend</li> </ul>	Working in her own shop but planning to re-migrate as business not going well.
3	28	Illiterate	Muslim	Single	Saudi Arabia (22 months)	Unspecified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked as maid in Addis Ababa</li> <li>Heard about overseas work opportunities on TV</li> </ul>	Working in her own shop and hopes business will succeed.
4	24	5	Muslim	Single	Dubai (29 months)	Illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used local broker</li> </ul>	Planning to re-migrate to Saudi Arabia as her mother spent all her earnings
5	25	9	Muslim	Married	Dubai (26 months) Saudi Arabia (Time not provided)	Unspecified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dropped out of school</li> <li>Found broker in Addis Ababa through uncle</li> <li>Used agency in Addis Ababa for second migration</li> </ul>	Unspecified
6	29	8	Christian	Divorced	Saudi Arabia (36 months)	Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked as maid in Addis Ababa</li> <li>Used agency in Addis Ababa</li> <li>Had to wait 7 months for visa</li> </ul>	Unspecified
7	22	10	Muslim	Single	Dubai (Time not provided) Saudi Arabia (24 months)	Illegal & Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used illegal Addis Ababa broker for first migration</li> <li>Used legal agency for second migration</li> </ul>	Plans to re-migrate as soon as possible
8	24	8	Muslim	Married	Saudi Arabia (24 months)	Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked at relatives' home in Addis Ababa</li> <li>Used agency in Addis Ababa</li> </ul>	Unspecified
9	22	10	Muslim	Married	Saudi Arabia (27 months)	Illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used local broker</li> </ul>	Owens a shop with her husband
10	20	6	Muslim	Divorced	Dubai (24 months) Qatar (3 months)	Legal & Illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Borrowed money from relatives for first migration</li> <li>Used legal agency for first migration with contract</li> <li>Used illegal local broker for second migration as ban was in place by then; he "sold" her to employers and took all the earnings</li> </ul>	Unemployed and "bored"; has sent passport to a broker to try re-migration to Dubai
11	35	4	Christian	Divorced	Dubai (Time not provided) Saudi Arabia (Time not provided)	Legal & Unspecified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used local broker for first migration</li> <li>Second time to Saudi Arabia, from description appears to be illegal although she did not specify</li> </ul>	Engaged in farming
12	20	8	Muslim	Single	Dubai (24 months)	Illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father made all the arrangements</li> </ul>	Plans to re-migrate

## FINDINGS

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### **Migration as a Prevailing Norm**

Migration is highly prevalent in the study community and considered the primary means of improving one's livelihood. This was reflected by all types of respondents.

*Most [returnees] build houses and open shops. Here it is difficult to build houses unless someone helps you to do so. However those who have migrated to Arab countries can easily build houses when they returned back home. ... they easily purchase what they want because they have money. Most people in this kebele live in poverty, so when you see returnee migrants you definitely decide to migrate to Arab countries, so that you can change your life just like them. We are easily motivated. [IDI with returnee, 29]*

*It is obvious in this community that migrating to Arab countries is a better option to change life. It is one good opportunity for the community. [FGD with fathers, 51]*

*Migrating to Arab countries is the only means of earning money. ... People also see returnee migrants. They witness how they change their lives and that of their families as well. Look at the houses in the kebele - all these houses are built with the money sent from migrants. [KII with mother of returnee migrant, 60]*

Women's migration to the Middle East and Gulf States is both widespread and normative; respondents consistently stated that most young women in the communities will migrate overseas for work at some point. Returnee migrants who participated in this study had migrated to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (mainly Dubai), some to more than one of these destinations. In the focus group discussion with husbands of current and past migrants, for example, participants estimated most households in the South Wello area in Amhara region (which includes the study sites) have at least one member who is a current migrant or a recent returnee, making Arab countries a second home for local women, many of whom have gone and returned multiple times and speak Arabic:

*Most of the community migrates to Arab countries, and this helps us to change our lives. ... You couldn't find women who didn't go to Arab countries. Some of them went there two or three times, some went there for five or six times. They are very familiar to their lifestyle. It is just like their country. [FGD with husbands, 39]*

At community level, reasons for migration combine concern about limited local opportunities and increasingly difficult agricultural conditions with an eagerness to earn money fairly easily and transform the lives of migrants and their families. Confidence in the *potential* of migration to increase an individual's or family's wealth appears to dominate discussions on the topic and creates an environment that motivates potential migrants to take their chances, work hard, and try to return successful, something previously found in studies of out-migration by Ethiopians<sup>1</sup>. The fact that so many people migrate from a relative small geographical area has created its own momentum, and many study participants expressed a sense that young people today are "forced" to migrate due lack of feasible alternative options:

*The main cause of this problem is the life of the community deteriorates because of natural disaster; most families are exposed to economic problems. In addition the government doesn't offer any job opportunity for the youth. Our children are told to find a job themselves even after they graduate from college. It is very difficult to get a job here, therefore all the youth in this kebele are forced to migrate to Arab countries. [FGD with fathers, 45]*

Inadequate access to land or decreasing agricultural productivity were also cited as reasons young people leave. Furthermore, some returnees who have started their own businesses felt these did not prove viable or incurred high taxes, making re-migration more appealing as well as serving as an example to others of the difficulty in forging a successful livelihood in Ethiopia.

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2014) *Blinded by Hope: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Ethiopian Migrants*. Mixed Migration Research Series. Nairobi: RMMS.

*I opened a tea shop but the government forced me to have a license. After I have the license it was very difficult to pay the tax, it was more than my income. [FGD with returnee migrants, 25]*

*We migrated to Arab countries because we have no opportunity to change our lives here. I started a small business after I returned back ... I can't even sell a single item the whole day, my goods are expiring inside my shop. ... I haven't seen any hope in my businesses; I am planning to re-migrate after the government lifted the ban. [IDI with returnee migrant, 23]*

According to one woreda level official, however, feasible opportunities in Ethiopia do exist, but the strength of norms around overseas migration limit community members' ability or willingness to consider these:

*Though there is poverty ... there are women who changed their lives working in this area. Almost all youth in this area don't think they can change their lives if they are working in the kebele, they would prefer migrating to Arab countries. ... But I assure you there are many youth who changed their lives with the opportunities offered by the government. [Woreda Women & Children's Affairs Representative]*

In our data, however, the overwhelming majority of migration stories highlighted how specific families have been able to improve their socioeconomic status through women's work overseas: couples who have bought up to six camels; families who received electronic goods from abroad that could then be sold for profit in home communities; individuals who no longer take loans for seeds and other farming inputs, or who have taken been able to pay their debts back quickly after a family member migrates. Lastly, respondents in the focus group with migrants' husbands explained how remittances in their bank accounts allowed them to seek medical care for their children when required. At the same time, however, one downside of women's prevalent migration for the broader community was also mentioned, including very young daughters left in charge of the household and having to manage heavy workloads of cooking, cleaning and looking after younger siblings.

### **Obtaining & Interpreting Information**

Individuals' motivation to migrate is also fuelled by observing financial success of some returnees and hearing their experiences. Study respondents emphasised the role played by local success stories in maintaining the momentum to seek domestic labour overseas. Women who were able to build new houses, purchase material goods or accumulate cash savings were described as "shimmering". According to one young woman, many prospective migrants selectively listen to positive stories and discount the negative experiences they hear. She herself ignored "bad news" and now finds that in turn, others want to hear only positive accounts of her time abroad:

*I was motivated to go when I saw women in the village who went to Arab countries changed their lives. I asked myself "Why don't I go there and change my life just like them?" ... I saw them sending money to support their families. They also built houses and fulfilled their needs. ... We saw them wearing gold. They bought good clothes, they also brought household equipment. All girls in the community are motivated to go to Arab countries when we see these returnees. ... We want to be just like them. We don't like to hear their negative experiences. ... When we tell our bad experiences to prospective migrants they don't trust us. They usually say "Why do you try to forbid us [to go] when you went there and returned with money?" [IDI with returnee migrant, 24]*

Returnees and their families, or families of current migrants, are considered the most reliable sources of information on conditions abroad and what to expect. Potential migrants conduct research by talking to returnees about what kind of homes they worked in, the kind of work they performed, challenges they faced, advice on how to handle employers, as well the names of objects in Arabic. There is thus a sense that migration is a "known entity," which might lead to reduced apprehension among prospective migrants.

*I am sure that all people in the community have sufficient information about Arab countries since there are many returnee migrants in the community. It's our regular topic in our normal chat. We talk about this issue wherever we go [IDI with returnee migrant, 20]*

*Before I went to the destination country I tried to find out from the returnees about the culture of Arab society, how I can easily assimilate myself with their culture, how I can easily understand their behaviour and so on [IDI with returnee migrant, 29]*

One returnee described how when she first went to Dubai she acclimatised to her surroundings so quickly thanks to information from a returnee neighbour that her employer asked her if this was a repeat migration for her. Where prospective migrants have a sister who went overseas before them, their experiences are particularly invaluable as they have the advantage of living together and thus having time to learn not only relevant skills but also basic Arabic language before migrating themselves.

At the same time, however, some migrants said they knew nothing before departure and were thus unprepared for how best to manage the new situation.

*When I first went to an Arab country, I never had any information about it; I just met an illegal broker. ... I did not have sufficient information about the destination country. [FGD with returnee migrants, 22]*

*I just didn't know what will happen to me. I said okay to everything asked by my employers because I didn't know my rights and duties, but now I have matured enough to know my duties and responsibilities, I would surely ask for my rights now [IDI with returnee migrant, 23]*

Government efforts to provide information about risks of migration were familiar to respondents, but there was a tendency to dismiss these in the same way that negative experiences shared by returnees were downplayed. While community members did not question the validity of information reported through public education initiatives (or those relayed by other community members), such warnings did not seem able to outweigh the positive narratives in circulation.

*If you ask me, I won't change my mind if I heard some woman died in Arab countries ... Let me tell you I went to Dubai immediately after one woman died in the neighbourhood. My mother tried to stop me from going, but I said no. Nothing happened to me. [IDI with returned migrant, 20]*

*All these houses are built by people who migrated to Arab countries. We can't deny that our life changed since people start migrating to Arab countries. ... However only one out of ten became successful. Only very few are successful. [KII with mother of migrant, 45]*

*There are people from the woreda who provide advice especially for those who choose to travel by sea. However people don't want to listen to any of this advice. They totally reject it. ... They just said 'let us go there and die'. They just think of the money they will earn there. [IDI with returnee migrant, 35]*

This was an acknowledged difficulty for those authorities who felt it was their responsibility to discourage potentially dangerous migration:

*The police department provides messages regarding illegal migration to the community. ... We inform them about the consequences of illegal migration. ... We have regular awareness creation sessions every month; we invite all members of the community above eighteen years. We reveal some actual stories as evidence; sometimes we invite people to share their stories to the rest of the community about the consequence of illegal migration. This makes the messages tangible. ... They [community members] accept all the messages, they say that it is true, but they won't practice it. [KII with police officer]*

*We show some videos that show the danger of migrating to Arab countries. We show the video every Friday in Hayk since it is a market day. However some of them [community members] commented that the awareness creating campaign is very late, because the campaign should have been started before the youth started to migrate intensively, before communities experienced earning better money in the destination countries. [Woreda Women & Children's Affairs Representative]*

One way in which community members selectively interpreted positive and negative perspectives on migration outcomes was to rely on "chance" or "God's will" as a primary determinant of overseas experiences. Respondents understand potential risks, yet benefits predominate in their narratives as migrants and their families fervently hope that they will be among the "lucky" ones:

*We heard that there are women who are thrown from the fourth floor while they make some mistakes or when the children they are babysitting have an accident. We heard these kinds of stories in the*

community. ... But I can't help it if something bad comes from Allah. ... When we see returnee migrants, they changed their lives. [IDI with prospective migrant, 25]

What they only think [about] is earning money. ... I think they have all the information. ... They don't really care when they see some women who return back crazy. [KII interview with School Director]

### **Decision-making**

There is much diversity in how the decision to migrate is understood. For the most part, respondents felt that women made the decision on their own, but in constrained circumstances relating to poor livelihood opportunities and disappointing agricultural productivity. Migrants and family members described women migrating against the will of parents or husbands, but others described consultative decision-making.

*If I am married I will discuss the issue with my husband, and then we will decide I should migrate in order to change our life. And if I am not married I may discuss with my family to make the decision together. [FGD with returnee migrants, 26]*

*My wife and I are the ones who made the decision. ... These days there is no hope to get a good harvest due to lack of rain. The environment changed; we have to have money to buy cereals for home consumption, so I discuss this issue with my wife before making the decision. [FGD with husbands, 24]*

*In my case I have never asked my family's or my husband's consent when I migrated. I have made the decision myself. ... I just discussed with myself, one day I just close my door and left ... without saying good bye to my daughter, I dropped my house key to my neighbour and I left. [FGD with returnee migrants, 30]*

The extent to which the normative culture of migration creates peer pressure or makes young women feel they have no real choice is difficult to document, but some respondents talked about a pervasive expectation to work abroad that was difficult for young women to challenge:

*To tell you the truth our children couldn't get a job after they have completed tenth grade, if you see most youngsters in the community are jobless and they become thieves, and some of them become addicted to 'chat'. So we prefer sending them to Arab countries so that they change their lives [FGD with fathers, 54]*

*In most cases the migrant woman made the final decision. However her parents or her husband play the main role in motivating her to make the decision to migrate. They talk about successful migration stories to the woman, so that the success stories motivate her to make the decision to migrate to Arab countries. On the other hand, brokers also play a significant role to convince parents and the woman as well. [KII with Woreda Women & Child Affairs Representative]*

The police officer interviewed stated that she felt parents "pushed" their daughters but stopped short of forcing them; she described a process whereby young women were persuaded of the positive impact they could have on the family's well-being. One returnee migrant attributed her migration to an unspecified "conflict" in the family, but this was an exception in our data.

Many respondents, however, described situations where they felt exploited by the relatives whom they tried to help. Stories of women's savings being spent before their return by their parents or spouses "wasting" the money on their own expenditures highlighted how even if women had what they considered to be successful migration experiences when they were overseas, they were unable to see the benefits themselves. For example, one young woman expressed bitterness that her mother used her remittances to 'feed' a new husband after her father passed away; the risk that a migrant's husband will fritter away earnings also appeared to be a common concern.

*Some parents don't properly save their children's money. Some migrants get mad when they found out that their parents didn't save their money properly. ... Most men wish to marry returnee migrants because they think she has money. Many men trick these women to marry them. They leave them after they spend the money together. They used them. [KII with migrant's mother, 45]*

*[Migrants] will be successful only if they have good parents to save their money. Some of our parents spend the money on nothing; some of them chew chat [a local plant used commonly as a stimulant] with the money sent here. [FGD with returnee migrants, 21]*

This then led returnees to want to re-migrate and some version of the phrase “this time it will be for me” repeatedly featured in interviews with women seeking to work overseas again.

*Until now I was working to benefit my parents, but this time I plan to do something for myself [IDI with returnee migrant, 20]*

### **The Migration Process**

The research found that once a woman has decided to migrate, the most common way for her to start the process is for her to contact a broker in her community or in the nearby town after receiving the contact details from returnees, families of current migrants, or their own family members.

*My brother is a broker ... so he asked me if I want to go to an Arab country or not, and he also asked me to find other women in the village who wanted to go to Arab countries. Then I gave them his number and they communicated with him so that they can go. [FGD with returnee migrants, 31]*

Following initial contact with a broker, women obtain their IDs from their local kebele and take it to the Immigration Office in Dessie or Addis Ababa to process their passports. Underage girls can receive their ID based on evidence provided by their neighbours or physical appearance of being 18 or older. The passports are then given to the broker who obtains a visa for the relevant destination country in it in return for a fee. Some women never met their brokers, others worked through a ‘chain’ of brokers from the village who put them in touch with colleagues in Addis Ababa, while some received their visas directly from a local broker in Hayk or nearby.

*I talked to him [broker] over the phone, and he told me to send him my passport, after I send him my passport I continued communicating with him about the progress of my process, finally he informed me my visa arrived. ... I got his number from people in the community. [FGD with returnee migrants, 22]*

One 20-year old returnee said some brokers rent houses in Addis where prospective migrants can pay to stay while processing their visas, although no one reported having stayed in one.

During data collection all respondents were asked about how prospective migrants and their families went about selecting a specific approach or route for migration. The dominant topic of conversation under this theme was an attempt by respondents to distinguish between legal and illegal routes of migration, which were seen to be synonymous with “safe” and “unsafe”, e.g. “women who go illegally are the ones who face a problem” (returnee migrant, 22). When probed, however, much confusion between the two arose and it became apparent that negative or positive experiences can occur through either option.

*Even though you are legal migrant you might get cruel employers. It's a matter of luck. [FGD with husbands of migrants, 39]*

Although legal migration through an accredited agency is considered safer, illegal migration, through a network of locally known and trusted brokers, is often preferred because it is quicker and its process less stringent.

*For instance, let us say that two women start the migration process to Arab countries at one time. One starts legally while the other contacts an illegal broker. The legal one surely takes six months or more, while the illegal one only takes only fifteen days. Most women choose illegal migration because the process ends in a very short period of time. [KII interview, School Director]*

Some respondents were not sure if they had migrated through legal channels.

**Interviewer:** Did you migrate legally or illegally? **Respondent:** I am not sure about that, but the broker told me I was a legal migrant. Every broker convinces you that they are legal brokers. Even these days (during the ban) migrants are told by the brokers that they are migrating legally. [IDI with returnee migrant, 24]

*Honestly I didn't know [whether it was legal or illegal], at that time we just compared the money which we are going to pay for the brokers. We had no awareness about the ways of migration. [IDI with returnee migrant, 23]*

Whether these examples illustrate genuine confusion or an attempt to disguise use of illegal agencies is difficult to determine. At least one woman insisted in a focus group discussion that her brother was a legal broker but then admitted in a personal interview later that he in fact operated illegally, which was corroborated by another respondent who had used his services for her own migration.

*Last time I preferred to stay quiet because she [the sister] said her brother is a legal broker, I just don't want to tell you the truth during the FGD because she won't be happy if I say her brother is not a legal broker. ... Most women don't know who is legal or who is not legal. Most of the community believed he is legal because he sends the visa very quickly; the process is faster than other brokers. But he is illegal broker. He is the one with whom I communicated. [IDI with returnee migrant, 22]*

Nonetheless it appears difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal brokers and agencies given that both can have offices, take migrants' passports and return them with visas, and arrange for agencies in the destination countries to match them with employers.

*All the brokers and the agencies convince you that they are legal, there is no way that we know if they are legal or illegal. They ask you to give them your passport and after some time they inform you your visa arrived, then we depart to the destination country [FGD with returnee migrants, 20]*

The fact that this system has persevered even during the ban on out-migration caused confusion, and some women assumed recent migration must have been legal given their exit through Addis Ababa's main airport:

*They [migrants] officially take off from the airport. How can the government not know about it? [FGD with returnee migrants, 40]*

The illegality of brokers in Ethiopia was further confused by their collaboration with (presumed) legal employment agencies in destination countries that provided official visas. This further made the distinction between legal and illegal means of transit difficult to differentiate:

*It's the same office [in the destination] which has been working before the legal ban. Their office is still there. ... When the legal agencies in Addis Ababa are closed, the legal agencies in the destination countries start communicating with illegal brokers, now they are working with illegal brokers. [KII with Muslim Leader]*

Table 2 summarises community perceptions of how legal and illegal migration *should* differ.

Table 2: Perceptions of illegal and legal routes of migration

LEGAL	ILLEGAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Safe" – can contact broker, safeguards in place</li> <li>• Medical examination included; training provided</li> <li>• Less expensive (~ 3000 Birr) but time consuming (6 months+)</li> <li>• Contract with employers and lower set salary</li> <li>• Woman can change employment within first 3 months</li> <li>• Woman traceable through registration number</li> <li>• Accommodation and expenses provided by employer</li> <li>• Broker can negotiate with employer e.g. about unpaid salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Unsafe" – no contact following migration, no insurance</li> <li>• Medical examination arranged and paid for by migrant</li> <li>• Costly (~10,000 Birr) but rapid (2-3 months)</li> <li>• No contract before arrival but often higher salary negotiated</li> <li>• No contact with broker following arrival at employers</li> <li>• No formal ID provided by broker</li> <li>• Accommodation (shared house) and expenses paid by migrant</li> <li>• No assistance to migrant in case of difficulty</li> </ul>

The main ways these expected differences were illustrated by respondents centred around access to the brokers' services in case of difficulties, provision of a contract through legal agencies, and better conditions of employment such as access to health care and insurance (although not necessarily better salary).

*When you are a legal employee, your employer prepares the 'Ikama' (work permit). In the work permit are pasted my picture and the employer's picture, listing the obligations of the employer. The employer has the responsibility to take me to the hospital whenever I face a health problem, and she is also responsible for sending me home if I couldn't continue working for health reasons. On the contrary, if I*

*am working illegally my employer doesn't take responsibility for me, and if I face health problems my only option is to cover my own expenses. [FGD with returnee migrants, 22]*

*We have right to change our employer if we have [unreasonable] workload or we can't tolerate their behaviour. We can directly call the agency and inform them of our situation and the agency will change our employer immediately. [IDI with returnee migrant, 29]*

*The only advantage of working illegally is the better salary. If you went there on contract basis you only get one thousand birr until the end of the contract time. However illegal migrants earn two thousand Saudi birr. [KII with School Director]*

If a migrant died while abroad, a legal agency was said to be responsible for repatriation of her remains, something that seemed important to family and community members.

*If they migrate legally, we can get their coffin even though they died. If they are illegal migrants there is no way that parents could ... get even their coffin. [KII with migrant's mother, 45]*

The widespread confusion between legal and illegal processes led many respondents to conclude that there was little difference between the options. Women told stories of having gone with legal agencies only to find they were unresponsive to requests for assistance. As a result, the illegal route is often selected for convenience, or to ensure greater freedom and mobility after arrival (due to working outside a formal contract), or because potential migrants did not fully realise their broker or agency was not officially registered. For example, participants in the FGD with migrants' fathers explained their daughters preferred to migrate illegally as they don't want to spend months or even up to a year on organising their travel and because they could not afford numerous trips to Addis Ababa for the health checks and other mandatory steps. Furthermore, under the ban put in place following mass deportations of undocumented Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia in 2013, all recent migrations were by definition illegal.

*They [local brokers] gave us information even [during]... the government ban on travel to Arab countries - it is illegal. They told us we will not face any problem on the way, people are still travelling to Arab countries [IDI with returnee migrant, 35]*

Reports that this ban is being lifted was welcomed by both community members and local authorities, who seemed to be in agreement that the ban itself has encouraged illegal and thus less safe migration.

*So many women died in this community while working in Arab countries. People never stop migrating to Arab countries ... If the government is truly concerned about its citizens, it should lift the legal ban and help citizens to migrate legally. [KII with former kebele Women's Affairs Representative]*

Some expressed concern, however, that the conditions imposed on legal migration in the new legislation (yet to be proclaimed as law), such as completing an eighth grade education and going through an agency with insurance, may be too restrictive and push potential migrants into illegal and unsafe routes. One father said, "after we heard on the news that potential migrants need to be eighth grade and above, you can't find any youth who is not planning to migrate by sea" [FGD with migrants' fathers, 45]. That it would be easy to obtain a fake eighth grade certificate was also suggested.

All returnee migrants in this study travelled by air to their destinations, and this appeared to be common for the recent time period, especially for female domestic labour migrants. The other known route of travel to the Gulf – primarily to Saudi Arabia – is by land and sea via Djibouti or Somalia, and then across to Yemen. One father reported that after one of his daughters emigrated against his wishes and came back to their village his younger daughter dropped out of school at fifth grade to work as a domestic worker in Addis Ababa. This young woman remains determined to emigrate, refusing to go back to school and her father said that she was considering going by sea.

The Muslim prayer leader interviewed as a key informant had himself lived in Saudi Arabia for three years and described the harrowing sea journey made with fellow Ethiopian men and women. It involved walking from Hayk town to Semera in Afar Region then on to Djibouti, a journey that might take up to nine days and during which some people died from thirst and hunger. From Djibouti, they travelled by sea to Yemen, where according to this respondent traffickers took two women who

had travelled away for two days and when he saw the women again, they were crying and said that they had been raped by six men and beaten up. With the exception of those two accounts, no respondents claimed to have considered the land and sea route nor gave examples of women working in domestic labour who had done so.

### **Being Prepared, Reducing Risks**

A key objective of this rapid assessment was to identify protective factors and respondents were encouraged to think beyond the role of “luck” and “chance” and to consider how migration outcomes could be influenced by what migrants knew or how they acted.

First, formal pre-departure training offered to migrants was described, although it was not clear how common this was in practice as not all were asked about it or brought it up spontaneously. Why some women received training, for how long, and from whom appears inconsistent. From migrants’ descriptions it appears that some brokers and agencies had acquired training videos that provided basic information on work conditions, domestic skills, and some advice regarding cultural adaptation to local customs (religion, dress, use of sanitary products). Some women had received no training, others just a few hours or one day, while a few described 3, 5 and up to 15 days of training. Some women described it as a mandatory part of the process, while others suggested it was voluntary. The association between legal and illegal agencies and provision of training could not be ascertained, although where women described being referred for training to a government office, they assumed this meant their agency was operating legally and had an established relationship with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA).

*Yes, I have received half day training one day before my departure. ... It was obligatory to take the training before departing to Arab countries. ... The broker informed me I should go there (Ministry of Social Affairs) and take the training. Look at the booklet it teaches you about Arab countries. ... The first page shows about the departure, the second page is about dressing, the next page is some of the words we used in Arabic like ladder, water container, and dust bin. ... Of course it helps. It is very helpful. [IDI with returnee migrant, 22]*

*My sister went to Addis Ababa for five days training before she departed; the training was after they have done the medical examination. ... I think they advise them to stay with one employer until they finish their contract period, not to run away from their employers. It is up to them [migrants] to follow this advice. [KII with School Director]*

Most women did not discuss costs of the training or intimated that it was free, although one returnee reported paying 600 Birr for participating in such a course, and the prospective migrant paid 1000 Birr for a 3-week MoLSA training course in Dessie right before the ban was put into place and curtailed her departure plans.

*In the training we were trained how to cook their food, how to serve the Arabs while they are dining, how to prepare fresh food, how to clean toilets and how to prepare beds. We were also told to return back everything they lost in the household. ... The training was for all prospective migrants who were planning to go legally. After we received the training we went to Addis Ababa for medical check-up, then the government issued the ban when we had almost finished the process [IDI with prospective migrant, 25]*

One returnee claimed she had forgotten the training content prior to departure, but was nonetheless able to describe it during her interview. She did emphasise, however, the importance of learning from employers “on the job” after arrival, also mentioned by others.

*We have received three days training in the agency. We were advised to respect our employers, to be loyal to them. In addition we learned that how to wash and iron cloths, how to clean houses, and how to clean mirrors, and how to put the clothes in the closet. The training was assisted by TV. I forgot the training after I arrived there, however my employer showed me everything before I started working in the household. [IDI with returnee migrant, 24]*

*I have never received any information, I just trust Allah. ... No one informed me anything before I actually migrated there. ... my employer informed me how I can perform household chores. [IDI with returnee migrant, 20]*

*The Arabs are the ones who show us how to use the household equipment and the cooking equipment. But here no one informed us what we use to cook food and how we can handle them, they just tell us to go there [IDI with returnee migrant, 35]*

But for the most part, women who received pre-departure training spoke highly of it and felt it should be an integral part of preparation for prospective migrants. They felt the information was pertinent and they were able to put the acquired knowledge into practice during their work, for example how to prevent injury from strong cleaning solvents, how to separate dark and pale laundry, and how to operate appliances.

*The [1-day] training is very useful since it is assisted by TV, they can show you how you perform household chores ... how to clean the house, and how to communicate with your employers. This would definitely help you to be aware of your responsibilities in the destination country ... and it makes you confident. Most of the time migrant woman encounter language barrier after they arrive in the destination; it will take us a few months to communicate with our employers. On the other hand we have also cultural difference; in our culture it is very common to communicate with men but in Arab countries you aren't even allowed to see men. If you are not aware of this you will be in trouble with the housewife because she thinks that you are harassing her husband [IDI with returnee migrant, 22]*

Participants in the FGD with migrants' husbands also provided an example of how information received during the formal training helped to save a woman's life.

*We found out that it [training] is very useful after one incident happened to a lady in the community. Her family hadn't heard from her for more than two years. They were almost sure that she was dead. ... Her brother found a paper which she was given after she completed the training offered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Her passport number and other information was found, so we took that paper to the agency in Addis Ababa, and then they found her employer's phone number and address. Then the office reported it to the Ethiopian embassy ... finally the woman was found locked up in that house for two years. ... She finally returned safely. The woman was found because of that single paper she received from the Ministry of Social Affairs. [FGD with migrants' husbands, 39]*

Returnee migrants also drew on their own experiences overseas as well as those of peers to suggest less formal ways to help future migrants reduce their vulnerability and improve their experiences. These can be categorised into knowledge, skills, interpersonal characteristics, and access to resources (Table 3 below).

**Table 3: Risk Avoidance Factors**

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Arabic</li> <li>• Cultural expectations (clothing, religious observation, gender relations)</li> <li>• Personal hygiene (using and disposing of sanitary pads)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of modern appliances and domestic products</li> <li>• Cleaning toilets or other unfamiliar household items</li> <li>• Financial planning, e.g. opening an account prior to departure</li> </ul>
INTERPERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Assertiveness</li> <li>• Obedience</li> <li>• Older age/ maturity</li> <li>• Being Muslim/ pretending to be Muslim</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phones and local sim cards</li> <li>• Contact details of agency, local Ethiopians, family</li> <li>• Leaving copy of contract and agency details with family</li> <li>• Access to Facebook, WhatsApp, VIBER etc</li> <li>• Arriving with foreign currency for any delays on arrival</li> </ul>

The knowledge and skills refer to having a practical understanding of life in the destination country and her expected duties, some of which were covered in pre-departure training as previously described. Returnees also shared information and “tips” with others after their return, some of

which proved useful to prepare the next wave of prospective migrants. The importance of learning basic Arabic – either prior to departure or as quickly as possible on arrival – emerged repeatedly.

*Some of them tell you how the Arabs beat and shout at you, they only tell you how cruel they are. They also told me we can only sleep for two hours because of the workload. But some others provide you with very important information. They tell you what you should be aware of before you decided to migrate. They inform you to give priority to sanitation, secondly they will teach you a few important words in Arabic. [IDI with returnee migrant, 29]*

*Once I saw a booklet which has Arabic words with Amharic translation, I bought that and I studied until I depart to the destination country. I also used it as a reference whenever my employer orders me to do something. [FGD with returnee migrants, 26]*

Interpersonal attributes, including both personality traits and specific behavioural adaptations, were also referred to by respondents as determinants of how women would be treated by employers or able to cope with challenges they might confront. Some characteristics such as being older or more emotionally mature might not be amenable to change, but other attributes mentioned by respondents could help future migrants consciously adopt a particular demeanour or approach during their employment. These included being obedient and polite yet assertive and confident, as well as remaining calm under difficult circumstances and understanding that in some countries people “shout” when they are not necessarily angry.

*It's good if you shout back when they shout at you. ... it's natural for them [Arabs] to shout in normal conversation, you don't have to be scared while they shout at you, you answer them back with a louder voice. [FGD with returnee migrants, 20]*

*The Arabs respect a woman who has confidence and who knows her rights, they abuse you if they know that you don't have confidence and if you all the time you say 'okay' to them. [FGD with returnee migrants, 31]*

*It is advisable to prepare yourself in order to be confident, not to get confused with what you see or hear. You have to convince yourself that you went there for work; you have to change your behaviour if it is necessary. If you are shy here you should no longer be shy there. Confident and strong characteristics helps you to be tolerant and successful. [IDI with returnee migrant, 29]*

*The woman should have reserved behaviour ... she should be obedient to what they told her to do even if she couldn't actually do the job at the time. If they asked her why she didn't perform it she should politely explain the reason and promise them to perform it later. [IDI with returnee migrant, 25]*

Finally, access to technological resources and information was highlighted. Most important was being able to own or use a mobile phone in order to phone home, contact the agency, or reach other Ethiopians (including for escaping abusive or dangerous situations). Relevant contact information for people (in Ethiopia or the destination country) who might be able to assist in an emergency is also useful. Women's access to phones, however, appears completely dependent on employers' permission, for example, “Our employers checked out baggage immediately we arrived at their house. My employers searched everything including my hair. I took a phone with me but they took it from me” (returnee migrant, 20).

There was an extremely wide range of employers' attitudes toward phone ownership, from total prohibition to employers' purchasing phones and international credit for their domestic workers. Women who did have their own phones or could use their employer's felt safer as they could maintain regular contact with family, obtain information, and also communicate with other Ethiopians based overseas. Access to Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp, Tango, IMO and other social media also reduced women's feelings of isolation and risk. Among our respondents, however, being able to keep a phone was much rarer than being forbidden to have one, although in these cases employers usually allowed sporadic use of their own phones, with a few extreme exceptions.

*I usually called [home] three or four times a month because I have mobile phone. If I want someone's phone number I asked my parents, and they searched and give it to me when I call them back again. [IDI with returnee migrant, 29]*

*Most of the time employers don't allow their employees to call even their families. There are women who were lost for six months and for eight months. One legal migrant women in our neighbourhood disappeared for one year ... [her family] even thought she was dead. She called after one year and told her family that her employer would not allow her to even to touch a phone. [KII with Muslim prayer leader]*

*My employers permit me to call my parents every month or every two months. They didn't allow me to call relatives or friends in the destination country. They only allowed me to call Ethiopia. My employers didn't allow me to have a mobile phone, but there are some who buy mobile phone for their maids. [IDI with returnee migrant, 24]*

This may mean that women with riskier employers tend to have lower access to these protective resources. Nonetheless, respondents emphasised that women should try to bring or obtain a phone and negotiate keeping it, or hide it and try to purchase a local Sim card to use in secret.

*I advise them [future migrants] to take Saudi money with them while they migrated because they can buy SIM card and mobile phone. If they can take the mobile from Ethiopia and take 50 Saudi birr to buy the SIM card from the airport. It is good to hide the phone and call the agency or the broker whenever they face any problem with their employers. They should also have the number of the agency or the broker. [IDI with returnee migrant, 25]*

*If you have mobile phone you can call to the police or to the agency whenever you come across any challenge. If you don't have mobile phone how can you call someone to help you? Your employer can abuse you the way she wants. [IDI with returnee migrant, 22]*

Identifying how best to transfer money home and ensure its safekeeping also emerged as a key resource for successful migration. Although this recommendation is more about improving life conditions following migration, it also is relevant as a way to prevent women unnecessarily extending their stay overseas or re-migrating due to financial instability. Financial literacy included learning how to make bank transfers from the destination country and opening an individual account prior to departure or arranging to save through a trusted family member.

*They [future migrants] will be successful if they get someone who saves their money properly. If they save the money, they can buy a car or build a house when they return home. For instance I built this house with the money which my mother saved me in a bank [IDI with returnee migrant, 20]*

*I also open an account before I went, but what I did was I gave my bank book to my mother, then sent the money in her name, she took the money from the bank and then she put the money into my account [IDI with returnee migrant, 22]*

A further practical measure taken by some women was to procure long acting contraception to protect against unwanted pregnancy in cases of rape. Only one woman we interviewed reported having done this herself, although others gave examples of physically fighting off potential assailants.

*I took injectable for three month. There was some clinic that provides family planning. ... They asked all the women who were planning to go to Arab countries if they need family planning, and ... I decided to take Depo-Provera. ... You could be raped or beaten up or face some other challenges. I never have faced any problem though. But I think some women would definitely face this kind of problems. [IDI with returnee migrant, 20]*

Using long acting contraception as a protective strategy emerged often enough in the data to suggest sexual harassment and assault is an acknowledged risk although it does not appear to dissuade women from migration.

## MOVING FORWARD: IMPLICATIONS FOR HOTSPOT PROGRAMMING

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The main purpose of this assessment was to contribute to the Hotspot programme's selection of practical, realistic, and contextually appropriate messages and activities to strengthen individual and community capacity for safe migration. Experiences and advice shared by returnee migrants, their families and community members highlight local perceptions and understanding of the potential risks of migration and their thoughts about how to prevent and mitigate potential problems.

The Ethiopia Hotspot programme's identified goal is to maximise the potential for safe and successful migration outcomes for young women seeking domestic labour overseas. Findings presented in this report thus have implications for the design and implementation of the Hotspot programme. While the Hotspot will be implemented in both Amhara region and one urban district (Addis Ketema) in the capital city of Addis Ababa, this study was conducted solely in Amhara in order to explore perceptions and norms among "sending" communities and where no current programme interventions have commenced. Freedom Fund has been supporting local organisations in Addis Ketema since 2015, and the issues there differ as the district is also a location of "transit" where rural women stay temporarily while they arrange onward travel. The study findings, therefore, and the Theory of Change presented at the end of this section are designed to inform development of this specific component of the Ethiopia programme.

First, the results suggest that there are 'migration norms' in communities where the research took place. There appear to be widely held beliefs that migration is the most promising way to earn a decent income, achieve a promising future—for people to 'change their lives'. Moreover, people are likely to overlook or ignore reports or warnings about bad experiences, estimating or hoping that they are likely to have financially successful migration experiences—or at the very least, that they have little control over their fate and prefer to take a chance. To be accepted by and meet the needs of these communities, programmes will have to be designed to recognise people's favourable attitudes towards migration. Additionally, the findings indicate some potentially important lessons learned and recommendations from experienced migrants that can be taken into account for activities intended to help migrants prepare for a better migration-work experience, including by suggesting practical 'risk' and 'protective' factors.

At the same time, however, the research suggests that teasing out distinct 'risk' and 'protective' factors related to entering the migration process may not be straightforward because there were a number of overlapping and inconsistent comments related to the use of legal versus illegal brokers, including people not necessarily being certain who in the chain of brokers might be operating legally or illegally. This is a subject area that probably will require significant further investigation during the programming, particularly as the Ethiopian government has recently removed its ban on out-migration and is in the process of introducing new conditions for legal migration.

Based on assessment findings, an initial Theory of Change (ToC) has been drafted that can be used by the implementing agencies for programming in Amhara. A Theory of Change is a diagrammatic tool used to depict a hypothesised pathway from activities or programme "inputs" through to their intended outcomes, making the intermediary steps explicit and thus conducive to tracking progress (e.g., to inform potential adaptation, for monitoring and evaluation). This ToC should be considered a dynamic tool that will be adapted as new evidence emerges, based on group learning as the programme adapts to the needs of their target groups, etc.

Ultimately, because there has been so little large-scale evidence on practices that foster safer, more successful labour migration, and because the context and dynamics of migration can change so rapidly, it will be important for the local groups, the research team and the Freedom Fund to be alert to these changes, to document emerging evidence and make appropriate changes to programme activities.

### Activities Based on Findings

**Provide evidence-based knowledge & skills to prospective migrants**

- Basic Arabic & acculturation (by country)
- Domestic labour skills
- Home health & safety (avoiding hazards)
- Awareness of reasonable contract terms & conditions, fair workload
- Assertiveness building
- Financial literacy and planning
- Smartphone, internet & social media skills
- Instilling self-efficacy & decreasing reliance on “chance”

**Community Messages:**

- Check credentials of brokers & agencies
- Give migrants phones & local currency
- Keep copies of migrants’ passports and other documentation
- Share contact details of current migrants for each destination
- Migrants should control their own savings accounts
- Encourage migrants to take available training & practice skills before departure
- Success depends on safety – do not cut corners preparing for departure
- Success is not due only to “luck”

**The assessment did not investigate factors related to improved livelihood options within Ethiopia.**

### Determinants of Target Outputs

**Women better understand migration risks and how to prevent them**

**Women increase their interpersonal and practical skills associated with safer migration**

**Families & communities have increased knowledge about different migration options & level of preparation required**

**Feasible subsistence opportunities exist for potential first-time and repeat migrants**

### Target Outputs

**Young women who migrate take informed decisions about destination and means of transit**

**Young women who migrate take measures to increase their safety overseas based on evidence**

**There is an enabling environment for supporting & facilitating safer migration options for women**

**Young women who choose *not* to migrate have the confidence & capacity to support themselves within Ethiopia**

### Hotspot Outcomes

**MIGRATION EXPERIENCES & OUTCOMES ARE SAFER**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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