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YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN THE RIGHT TO STAY AND THE RIGHT TO MOVE AND RETURN IN ETHIOPIA

ANALYSIS OF THE MIGRATION SYSTEM IN DIRE DAWA AND RURAL VILLAGES, ETHIOPIA

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This study has been realized in the framework of the project "Ten 4 All. Contribute to the achievement of SDG 10 by promoting and strengthening the social, economic, and political inclusion of migrants, returnees, and people at risk of unsafe migration in the East Hararge and Dire Dawa zones of Ethiopia" (AID 012590/07/6) which is financed by Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

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1. Introduction

An in-depth qualitative study on the migration system in Ethiopia with a particular focus on gender dynamics and the experiences of children and young people has been carried out at kebele[1] level in the framework of the project "*Ten 4 All. Contribute to the achievement of SDG 10 by promoting and strengthening the social, economic, and political inclusion of migrants, returnees, and people at risk of unsafe migration in the East Hararge and Dire Dawa zones of Ethiopia*" implemented by Save the Children in Dire Dawa and East Hararge and financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Adopting **a child and adolescent centred approach**, the study focuses on the factors that can influence their decision to stay or to pursue informed migration through regular channels, aiming to reduce their exposure to irregular and unsafe migration routes. This has been done through an analysis of children's and adolescents' expectations and awareness, and through an in-depth reflection with local State and non-State actors.

The analysis focuses on how the migration decision making process of children and adolescents takes shape considering the existing protective factors for staying and regular and irregular migration system at local level. The research tries to understand if, why, to what extent and in which terms the protective factors and the regular migration system could be improved vis a vis the irregular one. In fact, the ethical and study approach adopted here look at the right to stay as well as the right to move.

Assumptions of the research

In the Global Compact for Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees, the 2030 Agenda, and Pact for the Future, Member States have affirmed the need to facilitate safe and regular migration through policies that ensure the safety, dignity and human rights of all people on the move, including by enhancing and diversifying the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration.

In 2025 **the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) has released a report "Leveraging Regular Migration Pathways for Human Rights", with key messages for sustaining the high political importance of establishing regular pathways among States, asking for s**caling up** "by creating new channels for admission and stay and improving the accessibility of existing ones; d**iversify** regular pathways, by offering them for a variety of purposes, both before and after arrival, and **tailor** them to the specific needs, realities and vulnerabilities of people on the move; i**mprove** regular pathways, by ensuring that they are predictable and secure, and they provide access to rights."

Key messages:

Regular pathways improve the governance of migration and the wellbeing of societies.

Regular pathways prevent and address vulnerabilities in migration.

Regular pathways enable States to address human rights and humanitarian needs.

[1] Kebele is the lowest administration unit in Ethiopia.

Regularization gives migrants the opportunity to live in dignity and brings benefits to societies.

States can enhance options for safe and dignified migration by making regular pathways more accessible.

To be truly beneficial for individuals and societies, regular pathways should lead to secure residence status and provide access to rights and services.

The involvement of stakeholders and all sectors and levels of government strengthens regular pathways.

These messages represent the political framework in which this paper fits in, attempting to apply them in the case of Ethiopian adolescent migration from Dire Dawa and surrounding rural villages towards the Eastern route.

Recent literature on migration from Ethiopia—particularly on Dire Dawa and East Hararge—has focused on the scale and challenges of irregular migration flows to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, including the violence and exploitation faced by young migrants (RMMS "Blinded by Hope; knowledge, attitudes and practices of Ethiopian migrants", 2014; *Captive Commodities*, Ravenstone Consult, 2023). Other studies have addressed the drivers of migration, risk perceptions, and the widespread migratory culture in Ethiopian society (Ayalew 2024; Adugna 2019; Minaye and Zeleke 2017, and Tafesse, 2017). Research has also explored internal migration and its effects on social cohesion and security in Dire Dawa (Alemu, B.F. 2020; Diriba, B. 2025) and the specific characteristics of child and adolescent migration in Dire Dawa (IOM, 2020; Jones, N. 2019) with a particular attention paied to the streetism (Mulugeta, B. 2021; Hailu, T. 2025).

Save the Children's study *Why Children Stay* (Save the Children, 2018) emphasized the importance of protective factors **in encouraging children to remain** in their communities, highlighting the agency of young people in migration decision-making and the need to understand their motivations early in the process.

One area still underexplored is how to improve access to regular migration channels for adolescents. Since labour migration is forbidden before the age of 18, this basically means delaying departure until it is legally permitted. Providing opportunities to delay migration until after 18—while enhancing preparedness or reinforcing reasons to stay—may offer safer, more sustainable options. This assumes greater investment in protective factors, vocational training, and informed decision-making, as well as conducting awareness raising campaigns among both in-school and out-of-school children, their parents, and local communities, while empowering the regular channels.

The decision to migrate typically unfolds over a few years, unless prompted by sudden triggering factor. Children may mature the decision to migrate before the age of 18, but as they have no regular possibilities they do so in an irregular and therefore very risky way. As pointed out in the research of Save the Children (2018), **children are agents** with their own perceptions and interests interacting with family, parents, peers, local community, and "*how potential migrants think about migrating is essential to truly make sense of the changing dynamics of migration patterns, processes and consequences*" (p.22). Thus, it is needed a better "*understanding of the thinking behind migrant decision-making earlier in the chain of events*" (p.22).

Alongside the Save the Children focus on protective factors, this research adopt an approach that considers not only **the right to remain** but also **the right to move**, focusing on the flourishing of

human dignity and therefore the best interests of the child. As in the case of Save the Children's analysis, which looks at the agency of the child, this approach focuses on the right to life and the flourishing of the talents of each person, which can be realized both in their place of residence and at their migration destination.

"*By the rights to stay, it means the freedom and ability of a person and a community to realize their full potential in light of their aspirations and the common good wherever they call home. The right to stay does not preclude migration: it is intrisically connected to the right to migrate and indeed may necessitate migration. These inter-related rights must be honored together based on people's freedom to choose the strategies for thriving. (…) It's focus on agency – how conditions impact individual and their decisions – is distinct from place-based, "root causes" approaches that address only cotitions alone (as important as they may be). This concept would allow persons to decide to remain at home, migrate legally and safely, and return to their home communities, versus inherent objective of most root causes approaches to reduce migration*" (Kervin et al., 2025)

In this framework, a proposed assumption is to **consider the possibility of deferring the migration choice**, to allow the child to conscious mature the choice to migrate or to stay, while improving their understanding of both the risks and opportunities of regular migration. To this end the regular migration system should be improved in its capacity to support potential child migrants' choice, making it better than moving irregularly. In this regard, it must be borne in mind that the boundary between regular and irregular systems is quite blurred, it changes over time and space and remains complicated. The analysis must therefore pay attention also to the interactions between the two systems. Ultimately, children's and family preference should be directed towards regular channels when they reach maturity or the decision to stay if protective factors are improved.

The research hypothesis explored here is whether a structured preparation for regular migration between ages 16 and 18 could align with young people's aspirations for personal development and responsibility toward their families (Save the Children, 2018). During the preparation phase, and therefore during the postponement of the migratory decision, protective factors can be strengthened to consolidate the desire to stay. At the same time, improvements in the regular migration system could offer safer and better-earning opportunities if the adolescent chooses to move after the after the age of eighteen. In this way, the rights of young people both to stay and to move are recognised.

This paper presents the main findings of the research carried out by CeSPI in Dire Dawa and rural villages, which aims to identify key protective and enabling factors for safe, regular migration among adolescents. It builds on past research (Save the Children, 2018; Ravenstone Consult, *Trends, Factors and Risks of Unaccompanied Child Migration*, 2021). Through updated policy analysis and stakeholder interviews, this research assesses gaps in Ethiopia's migration system, the accessibility, requirements and cost of regular migration pathways compared to irregular ones, and propose recommendations for strengthening protective factors and institutional support—ultimately guiding safer choices for children on the move.

After a presentation of the context and main characteristics of migration in Dire Dawa, the new Ethiopian migration policy framework is analysed. The following chapters are based on the findings coming from stakeholder interviews and focus groups discussions about the right to stay and protective factors and the right to move through regular migration channel; the existing deficits of regular migration channel and protective factors for children, the availability of information, access and costs of the regular migration options compared to the irregular one, the services needed and their possible improvement, and the role of different actors can play in the regular system, the protective factors that are needed and measures to implement them. Finally, the last chapter presents the

recommendations on how to improve protective factors and the regular migration channel, proposed to the different stakeholders, including Save the Children and the Italian Cooperation.

Objective

The research contributes to improving the use of regular migration channels and staying options by strengthening protective factors, for children, adolescents from 15 to 18 age, male and female.

Research questions on between the right to move and right to stay

What are the most relevant and missing protective factors in Dire Dawa and rural villages?

What are the deficits of the regular channel versus irregular one in the Eastern route?

What are the measures to improve regular migration or stay choice in view of the age of 18?

Methodology

CeSPI has conducted the research with its researchers together with Etiopian consultants contracted with the project. The research is of **a qualitative nature**. It has been implemented with a total of 70 in-depth interviews and 8 focus group discussions (FGDs) with different stakeholders, in prominent migrant sending localities in Dire Dawa administration and rural villages (see the annex). The kebeles in urban and rural contexts have been identified with the help of Save the Children (StC). StC has supported also the involvement of childrens, adolescents and families involved on protective and migration issues, teachers and directors of schools, several representatives of local offices, the director and teachers of Vocational Training Centers (TVET), officers of Private Employment Agencies and representatives and experts of civil society organisations. Data and information collection focused mainly on interviews and FGDs with minors aged 10 to 17.

A **gender-sensitive lens** has been adopted by capitalising on analyses already carried out in other researches. Research questions have been focused on young women, at least 50% of female respondents and participants in FGDs has been identifed and interviewed, elaborating findings and policy and operational recommendations aimed at women's empowerment in the regular migration system and about protective factors.

The analysis of the irregular migration system has been conducted through reviewing existing **literature, interviews and FGDs** with students of secondary schools, non students would-be migrants and returned irregular migrants, who are also a proxy of information on the role of brokers and other actors in shaping the migration system. These interviews helped us in understanding what factors, services, mechanisms, attract young migrants into the irregular system versus the regular system, and what are the protective factors that are lacking or weak. A portion of the interviews has covered also returned young migrants who are in the process to re-emigrate. These interviews have evaluated the access, costs, quality and availability of services dedicated to protective factors and the regular channel.

The analysis of secondary sources (research and scientific papers), together with the exchange of information with some StC experts and the local consultant, has guided the identification of the elements to analyse the regular and irregular migration system and protective factors, and thus to the elaboration of semi-structured questionnaires and the drafting plan of the study. Semi-structured questionnaires are presented in annex.

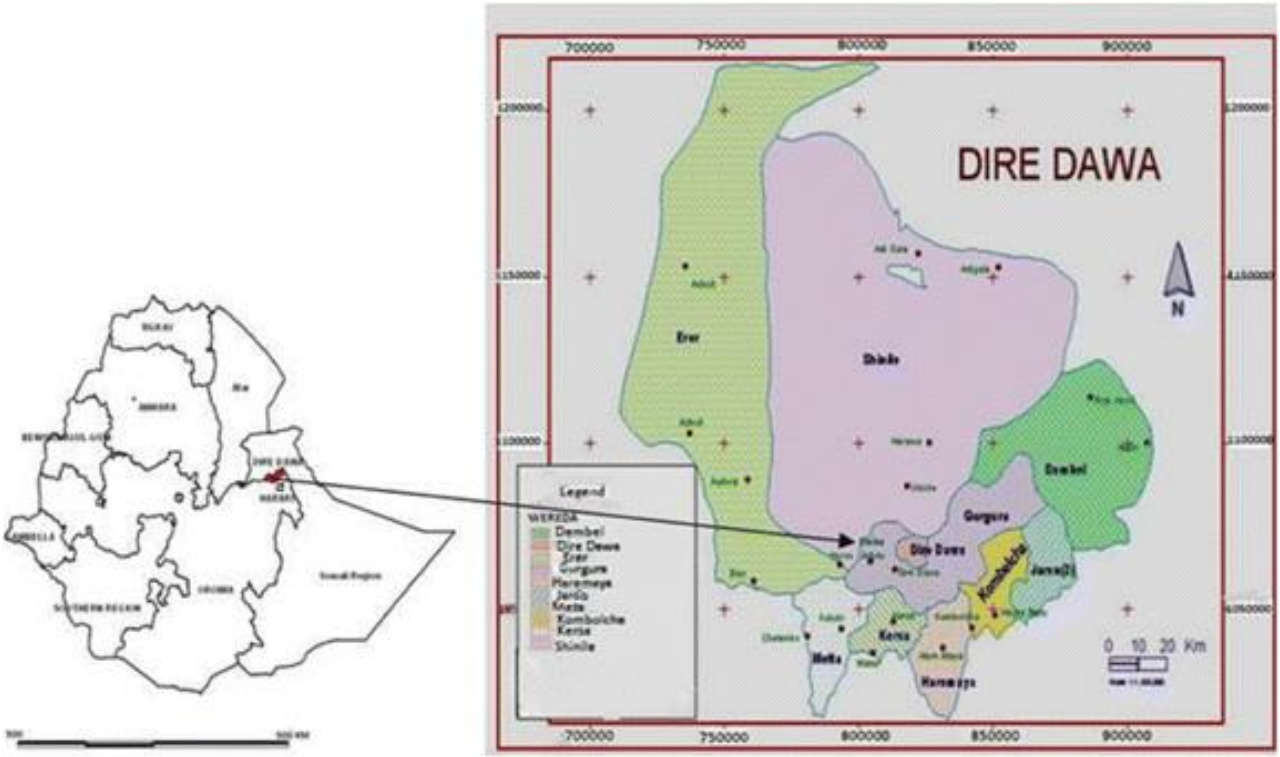
The results of the interviews have been collected, processed, compared with studies that have already been carried out, useful to identify the main findings for policy and operational recommendations. This analysis has interacted with the research on *Drivers of school dropout and migration aspirations:*

evidence from Dire Dawa, by Anna Ferro and Girmachew Adugna, and with the *Participatory research* realised by Dario Conato with Mohammed Ahmed Aliyi.

The analysis has been elaborated in 2024 and 2025. CeSPI researchers have carried out one mission in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa to work with StC officials and local consultants, conducting interviews with federal and local government officers, useful to advance in the drafting of the research, in spring 2024. Local consultants interacting constantly with CeSPI researchers have carried out two missions in Dire Dawa and rural kebeles in autumn 2024 and spring 2025 to deepen and widen interviews with different stakeholders.

2. Dire Dawa socio economic context, migration patterns and the new Ethiopian migration policy

Located in eastern Ethiopia, Dire Dawa is one of two city administrations under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) government[2]. With approximately half million inhabitants[3] and a population growth rate of 4.4% in 2024[4], Dire Dawa is currently the second most populous city in Ethiopia. Dire Dawa Administration is divided into four clusters with 38 rural kebeles and 9 urban kebeles. The administration is bounded by Oromia Regional State in the south and by Somali Regional State in the north, east and west.



Source: *Validation and Examination of Existing Water Distribution Network for Continuous Supply of Water Using EPANET | Request PDF*

Since its foundation in 1902 as a railway hub under Emperor Menelik II, Dire Dawa has grown and developed into a major industrial and commercial center. Owing to its strategic location along the Addis Ababa–Djibouti corridor, it has become a crucial hub for transport, trade, and human mobility both within Ethiopia and across the region. Shaped by the political and economic agendas of the various governments that have ruled Ethiopia over the past century, Dire Dawa has evolved into a cosmopolitan, multi-faith, and multi-ethnic city. At the same time, it retains certain foundational characteristics that have crystallized ethnic segregation patterns, which periodically erupt into conflict

[2] According to the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution, due to their strategic, ethnic, and political significance, Addis Abeba and Dire Dawa are administered directly by the federal government.
[3] Of which 193,249 are rural population and the remaining 344,113 are urban residents. Drought Induced Emergency, Multi Agency Rapid Assessment, Dire Dawa Administration, 2022.
[4] 'Ethiopia: Dire Dawa Urban Profile', UN-Habitat. https://unhabitat.org/ ethiopia-dire-dawa-urban-profile

and violence.[5] Moreover, its location on the border between the Oromia and Somali regions makes it vulnerable to inter-regional and inter-ethnic conflicts (Diriba, 2025).

Since the 1990s, Dire Dawa has re-emerged as **a key commercial and economic center in eastern Ethiopia**. The city has a developed market system, retail trade, and service sectors such as banking, hospitality, and transport. The economy is driven by trade, light industry, services, and agriculture in the surrounding rural areas, and boosted by the establishment of the Free Trade Zone and increased foreign investment in sectors such as textiles and cement. The Chinese-constructed Dire Dawa Industrial Park is actracting several manufacturing firms, employing over 2,500 workers and producing export-oriented goods including packaging materials, footwear, textiles, and automotive components. Local investors have also entered the bottled water sector. According to the city's investment office, capital inflows have steadily grown, with 1,526 investment licenses issued over the past four years for projects totaling over USD 1.8 billion. Dire Dawa is simultaneously undergoing a rapid construction surge, largely uncoordinated without formal urban planning, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.

Despite its economic dynamism and ongoing construction boom, Dire Dawa faces typical **urbanization challenges** such as unregulated expansion, housing shortages, and bad waste management. Major challenges concerns housing availability, with more than 200,000 people living in slums or sub-standard housing (UN-Habitat, 2022 in Yhdego,2025), infrastructure deficiencies, including limited access to water and an inadequate road network. An uneven development has led to the expansion and servicing of certain parts of the city, while contributing to the decline of barren land, farmland, and vegetation areas over the years.

Moreover, although its economic development, Dire Dawa administration still suffer from a high rate of **unemployment.** According to recent studies, the urban unemployment rate in Dire Dawa Administration was 25,3 percent in 2018 compared to the 19,9% national unemployment rate[6]. More recent data shows that unemployment rate in Dire Dawa City Administration is 23,8%[7]. Unemployment disproportionately affects youth[8] and women[9]. A figure highlighting significant challenges especially in terms of skills mismatches, gender disparities, and lack of entrepreneurial opportunities that may act as push factors of emigration.

In Dire Dawa, **employment** is diversified, with significant numbers working in trade, manufacturing, transportation, and public services. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also provide jobs, especially in retail, services, and artisanal production.

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[5] See Diriba, B., 2025, Urban Contestation in Dire Dawa city, Rift Valley Insitute. See also Yhdego, M., 2025, Dire Dawa City, Ethiopia. A City Without a Region Navigating Ethnic, Political, and Urban Chaos;

[6] Belay Felek Alemu (2020) Assessment of Unemployment in Dire Dawa Administration: Trends and Current Conditions European Journal of Business and Management www.iiste.org ISSN 2222-1905 (Paper) ISSN 2222-2839 (Online) Vol.12, No.4, 2020**.**

[7] The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Statistics Service Key Findings on the 2022 1st round urban Employment and unemplyment survey. A Comparative Analysis with 2016, 2018, 2020 UEUS and 2021 LMS Survey Results)

[8] According to the Ethiopia government's definition, youth unemployment concerns the age group 15-29. In 2021, Youth unemployment rate for Dire Dawa Regione was 22,4, while for the city of Dire Dawa 29%. See Geda, A. (2021) The Challenge of Unemployment and Youth Unemployment amidst Fast Economic Growth in Ethiopia (https://includeplatform.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Challenge-of-Unemployment-and-Youth-Unemployment-amidst-Fast-Economic-Growth-in-Ethiopia.pdf).

[9] According to The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Statistics Service Key Findings on the 2022 1st round urban Employment and unemplyment survey. A Comparative Analysis with 2016, 2018, 2020 UEUS and 2021 LMS Survey Results), unemployment rate was 34,4% for females compared to 14,1% for males at regional level in Dire Dawa City administration in september 2022

As remarked by Dube, E.E. (2021)[10] Dire Dawa has long served as a key hub for informal cross-border trade in both the eastern region and the country overall. This context—marked by widespread poverty, rural-to-urban migration, and high unemployment - contributes to the **expansion of informal sector** activities. As a matter of fact, informal urban employment rate in Dire Dawa was estimated around 41% in 2018[11].

In both the formal and informal sectors, **wages** vary significantly depending on the type of employment and the role performed. Formal contracts—typically linked to government positions or regulated private sector jobs—tend to offer higher pay, stability, and additional benefits. In contrast, the informal sector—characterized by verbal agreements, lack of protections, and limited bargaining power—generally offers lower wages, with some exceptions in hospitality-related roles (e.g., waiters who receive tips). According to statistics[12], the average monthly salary in Ethiopia is around 5,280 Ethiopian Birr, which translates to approximately $40, and in the public sector minimum wage ranges from 420 to 4,343 Ethiopian Birr ($3-35) per month[13]. In particular, domestic workers in Ethiopia typically earn an average monthly salary of around 2,393 ETB. In Dire Dawa, live-in housemaids often receive between 2,500 and 3,000 ETB per month (about 18 US dollars), in addition to full room and board, which significantly increases the overall value of their compensation. However, earnings can be much lower in less favorable conditions, with some domestic workers earning as little as 1,051 ETB per month, making them the lowest-paid group in the informal sector. By contrast, waiters and waitresses tend to earn slightly more, with an average monthly income of about 2,915 ETB (about 22 US dollars). Depending on the location and tipping culture, their wages can rise significantly, reaching up to 4,448 ETB per month in the best-case scenarios.

In this context, it is important to note **the income gap between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia**, as it is the main factor explaining the migratory flow along the Eastern route: while average wages in Ethiopia are around $35-40 per month, in Saudi Arabia they can reach $2,500. Obviously, this does not correspond to what Ethiopian emigrants earn, but it gives an idea of the differential. More precisely, in the case of Ethiopian domestic workers, the minimum wage is $266 per month[14] in Saudi Arabia, which is at least 15 times higher than what they would earn in Ethiopia. In the case of waitresses, wages in Saudi Arabia can reach $533[15], more than 24 times the Ethiopian wage.

Due to its economic significance, size, and strategic location, Dire Dawa functions both as a destination for rural-to-urban migration and as a transit corridor for legal and irregular international migration. Indeed, Dire Dawa serves as a point of origin and **a key hub for migration**, attracting both migrants intending to settle and those aiming to continue their journey to Djibouti (and Somalia) and/or towards the Gulf States, Europe or South Africa.

As such, the Dire Dawa urban population growth is largely driven by **urban-urban and rural-urban migration** from the surrounding rural areas, attracted by the opportunities offered by the city and

[10] Dube, E.E. (2021). Motivations and livelihood dynamics in the urban informal economy: the case of Dire Dawa City, Eastern Ethiopia. Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series, 51(51): 61-74. DOI: http://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2021-0005

[11] Central Statistical Agency (CSA) urban employment survey (2018)

[12] See https://statistics.timecamp.com/average-salary/ethiopia/

[13] Under the new pay scale, entry-level salaries for bachelor's degree holders will rise from 6,940 Birr to 11,500 Birr per month. The minimum salary for government employees will increase from 4,760 Birr to 6,000 Birr, while the maximum salary will nearly double from 21,492 Birr to 39,000 Birr; see in Ethiopia raises civil servants' salaries – Ethiopian Press Agency

[14] See "Saudi to pay $266 minimum salary to Ethiopian maids – New Business Ethiopia"

[15] See " Waiter Salaries in Saudi Arabia | GulfTalent.com"

driven by a complex mix of agricoltural and land policies[16], population growth, unemployment and environmental degradation, which make life harsh in rural areas. Add to this, the complex power-sharing arrangement adopted for the city's governance has facilitated politically motivated migration, encouraged by the two dominant ethnic groups in power[17].

As pointed out by Feyisa (Feyisa et al. 2018), nearly **30 percent of the city's overall population consists of migrants**. Of these migrants, 45 percent come from rural areas, whereas 55 percent move to the city from different urban sites. Recently, with 31,3 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants, Dire Dawa recorded the highest net rate of recent migrants (those who migrated within the last five years)[18]. Given that the unemployment rate among internal migrants in Ethiopia is higher than that of non-migrants[19], this influx of migrants—most of whom are young—helps explain the high rate of youth unemployment in the city.

Improvements in the city's infrastructure, including better road systems and mobile connectivity, have made travel and communication easier, thus encouraging rural – urban migration toward the city of Dire Dawa from the surrounding rural kebeles. **Rural-urban mobility** is mainly rooted in the lack of educational and health services in rural areas, which pushes young people to move to cities to complete their education, or as a result of education failure, as well as in the persistence of traditional customs like early and forced marriage, which drives girls to seek refuge in urban settings.

Environmental degradation, which is making life in the countryside increasingly precarious, also acts as prominent push factor for rural-urban emigration. The Dire Dawa administration faces significant exposure to a broad spectrum of both **natural and anthropogenic hazards**, including droughts, floods, pest infestations, and outbreaks of diseases affecting both humans and livestock across substantial portions of the territory. In the context of a changing climate, the frequency and severity of such risks—and their adverse consequences—are projected to intensify.

As remarked by Feyissa (2018), low soil fertility, increasing climate variability, and limited political commitment from local authorities have significantly **weakened the agricultural sector** in rural Dire Dawa, heightening its vulnerability to recurring droughts, making migration one of the main coping strategies adopted by rural inhabitants. Indeed, a recent multi-agency assessement in the 28 rural

[16] As noted by several authors (UNFPA, 2023; Atnafu et al., 2014; Carter and Rohwerder, 2016; Jones, N. et al 2019), Ethiopia has, until recently, sought to limit rural-to-urban migration. This has also been pursued through land and agricultural policies, the outcomes of which have often been contradictory. As pointed out by a recent USAID study "on the one hand, limited rural land availability may incentivize rural-urban migration, but, on the other hand, land rental restrictions may reduce incentives to migrate by increasing the costs of leaving rural areas. Nonetheless, the combination of improved job and income opportunities in urban areas and deteriorating living conditions in rural areas appears to favor migration". Recently, the stance on internal migration appears to have changed: In an effort to reduce youth unemployment, accelerate poverty reduction, and catapult the country to middle-income status by 2025, the GTP II is committed to developing new urban factories and industrial parks (Jones, N. et al. 2019)

[17] As remarked by Diriba, B. (2025) according to the power sharing formula adopoted in 2006 to maintain stability in the city, the largest ethnic group, Oromo and Somali are each one entitled with 40 per cent of the political and administrative office. This formula has generated sustained resentment among both major groups, prompting strategic migration from their respective regions to shift the city's demographic balance in their favor. Diriba, B. (2025) Urban Contestation in Dire Dawa City, Rift Valley Institute | Peace Research Facility.

[18] Geda, A. (2021) op.cit.

[19] Idem

kebeles of Dire Dawa Administration found that about five hundred male household emigrated from Kurtu towards Dire Dawa or other cities due to the impact of the 2022 drought[20].

While **the consequences of rural-to-urban migration** are generally viewed as positive for areas of origin (de Brauw et al. 2017, Feyissa et al. 2018)[21], assessments of its effects on the migrants themselves and on the city of Dire Dawa are more nuanced or less positive.

As highlighted by Feyissa et al. (2018) migrants in Dire Dawa city often end up in precarious and low-paying informal occupations such as day labour, street vending, domestic work, commercial sex work, and begging, and are facing widespread unemployment or exploitation. Recent studies[22] have highlighted the difficulties and multiple risks faced by children and adolescents migrating to Dire Dawa. Migrant adolescents are exposed to **severe exploitation**, including wage suppression and extortion, as well as heightened vulnerability to gender- and ethnicity-based violence, health hazards, and social isolation.

On the other hand, the presence of migrants also can exacerbate pre-existing challenges in the city. A recent study conducted by Diriba, B. (2025) includes migration among the five main layers of urban contestation in Dire Dawa stating that: "*Dire Dawa is facing a growing challenge with the influx of migrants from nearby rural areas in the Hararghe zones in Oromia and from other parts of Ethiopia. Economic migrants* ***compete with local youths for limited job opportunities****. Drug abuse and increased criminal activity are seen as linked to the influx. In some parts of the city, informal settlements pose security challenges. They have also become politically sensitive for the city administration as attempts at forceful eviction could spark conflict*" (Diriba, B. Pag.6)[23]

According to the very limited existing official data, the total amount of **international emigrants from Dire Dawa** in 2021 were 8,891, of wich 4,875 male and 4,916 female. Although they likely underestimate the true extent of the outbound flows, these data are consistent with other sources, which indicate that Dire Dawa is not one of the primary places of origin for international emigration from Ethiopia.

However, recent studies have highlighted that **emigration from Dire Dawa is increasing** and involves increasingly younger children. As pointed out by IOM (2020) the geographical proximity to Djibouti significantly influences migration patterns. Some children as young as seven years old set out to migrate—often described as "an adventure with peers"—with the intention of reaching Djibouti and returning to Ethiopia after a few days or weeks. This form of mobility, particularly common during school summer holidays when many children travel to work temporarily, is often not even perceived as migration[24]. It is worth to stress out that "*destination of children from Dire Dawa used to be Djibouti and it is only recently that child migrants from Dire Dawa are further extending the journey to Yemen and the KSA*" (IOM, 2020, pag. 24).

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[20] Drought Induced Emergency Multi Agency Rapid Assessment Dire Dawa Administration, 2022 (https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/drought-induced-emergency-multi-agency-rapid-assessment-dire-dawa-administration)

[21] As pointed out by Feyissa et al, (2018), rural–urban migration has generally positive effects on areas of origin, primarily through remittances that support household expenses—particularly in health, education, and small investments in land and housing—while also contributing to shifting gender norms, notably by enhancing support for girls' education.

[22] IOM (2020) A Study on Child Migrants from Ethiopia; Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E., Gezahegne, K. (2019) Girls and boys have become the toys of everyone: interrogating the drivers and experiences of adolescent migration in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights.

[23] Diriba, B. (2025) op.cit.

[24] See, IOM, 2020

Children's migration from Dire Dawa is **driven by multiple factors**, ranging from poverty, the low priority accorded to education, until because cigarettes and psychoactive substances are considered more affordable in Djibouti. Children from Dire Dawa often co-migrate in small groups, without the awareness of their parents. The recent involvement of young people from Dire Dawa in migration to the Gulf countries exposes them to the same **risks** already experienced by their peers from other regions in terms of exposure to risk journey, verbal and fisical abuse, sexual violence, detention, labour exploitation, emotional distress.

While it is not the source of significant migratory flows, Dire Dawa is certainly a strategic hub along the eastern migration route both for outward flows and for forcibly returned migrants, mainly along the **Eastern Route**. This route, linking the horn of Africa (mainaly Ethiopia and Somalia) to Gulf States through Djbuoti and Somalia, became notably significant in the early 2000s and it was later intensified with various smuggling networks and brokers involved since 2010s. This period saw increased international attention and efforts by governments (Ethiopia, Gulf countries, and Yemen) to regulate and manage these migration flows. According to data released by IOM - DTM, Ethiopians accounted for the overwhelming majority of individuals along this route—between 90% and 95%, depending on the year. Most of migrants along this route are adult males. However, the share of female migrants has shown a marked upward trend, increasing from 23% in 2022 to 32% in 2024. The proportion of minors also exhibited consistent growth, ranging from 6% to 9%, with a notable share identified as unaccompanied.[25]

Although comprehensive data is lacking, Dire Dawa is also an important hub for **return migration** as well—particularly for forced returns from Gulf countries. Over the past decade until now, Ethiopia has experienced significant return migration flows from the Gulf region (especially Saudi Arabia), through expulsions driven by labor nationalization policies in those countries and, more recently, by the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic[26]. While Addis Ababa has served as the primary hub for large-scale deportations, Dire Dawa has also been involved in reception operations and the subsequent transfer of migrants who returneed especially from Djibouti and/ or Somalia to their areas of origin. Indeed, in 2020 1,916 people (of whom 341 children) returned to Dire Dawa in response to Covid pandemic crisis[27] and 1.140 in the first half of 2022.

Given the significant impact of migration on the city's administration and its role along the Eastern migration route, various interventions have been implemented by the central government and international organizations. For example, efforts to combat trafficking include the development of a website to publish standard operating procedures, although their use remains limited outside Addis

[25] As underlined by IOM (2024) "It is worth noting that the number of tracked child movements increased by 38% between 2023 (8,891) and 2024 (12,308), while the number of tracked movements by women increased by 22% (from 50,363 to 61,326) [...] Similarly, movements of unaccompanied children exiting Ethiopia on the Eastern Route increased by 27% between 2023 (6,037) and 2024 (7,680). https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/2024_Yearly_Eastern_Route_Report.pdf

[26] Between November 2013 and March 2014, 163 018 Ethiopians (100,688 men, 53,732 women and 8,598 children) were expelled from Saudi Arabia, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) registration. These mass deportations should be apprehended as a national political tool of 'saudization' of employment https://hal.science/hal-03940184v1/document . Large return migration flows also began in 2016, when the Government of Saudi Arabia committed to reducing unemployment in the country by tightening immigration policies and cracking down on undocumented migration. Deportations began in 2017 and IOM has electronically registered 421,709 Ethiopians at Bole International airport between May 2017 and October 2021 (IOM, 2021) https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl701/files/documents/iom_rdh_eastern-southern-route-research_returns-report3.pdf . In 2022 73, 697 ethipians were forcibly returned from KSA, end 131.000 between April 2022 and April 2023.

[27] Shoa, D. (2022) Challenges of cross-border migrants amidst the Covid-19 outbreak: The case of migrant returnees in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

Ababa. According to IOM[28], the Dire Dawa city's administration has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the East and West Hararghe Zones, where most children and migrants start their journey toward Djibouti. Additionally, initiatives enmarked in the EU-IOM Joint Initiative provides support to vulnerable migrants through counseling, temporary housing, and vulnerability screening at the MRC (Migration Respons Centre). The same EU-IOM Joint Initiative[29], along with various NGOs, has also implemented projects to support the return of young migrants, assist unaccompanied minors, and promote the social and economic inclusion of migrant women.

Ethiopia's labour migration policy

Located in the heart of East Africa, Ethiopia hosts nearly one million refugees and asylum seeker fleeing conflicts, socio-economic, political, environmental crisis. These factors, compounded by uneven development processes, contribute to more than 3 millions of internally displaced persons (IDP's)[30] and a substantial internal migration flows. Due to its strategic position along migration routes from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf States, South Africa, and Europe, Ethiopia has also become an important transit country for migrants seeking better opportunities.

Over the past two decades, emigration from Ethiopia has gained increasing significance, marked by the consolidation of three major migratory routes: one heading northward (and eventually toward European countries), one directed toward South Africa, and a third —by far the most significant in terms of volume— leading to the countries of the Middle East and the Gulf.

According to the most recent Labour and Migration survey, 839,224 **Ethiopian emigrants** (excluding the Tigray region) were estimated living in other countries in 2021, while the most recent UNDESA data estimate this population at 1.2 million[31], and the Ethiopian Diaspora Service counts about 3 million persons as diaspora abroad[32]. However, migration is dominated by irregular migration and no body knows the right volume and scale.

Ethiopians are mainly in Saudi Arabia (31% of the total), South Africa (12%), United Arab Emirates (9%), and United States of America (8%) and the main regions of origin are Oromia, Amhara, and SNNP. Most of the emigrants are men (54%), emigrated at a young age (between 15 and 29 years old at the time of departure, with a higher concentration in the 20-24 age group), and have low levels of education (57% have completed only primary education). However, this does not protect Ethiopia from brain drain phenomena, as 10.3% of emigrants have attained education above secondary level.

When compared to Ethiopia's total population of approximately 126 million[33], the proportion of migrants remains relatively low (between 0.67% and 0,95% depending on the data), corroborating the limited propensity to emigrate among the Ethiopians often cited by the existing literature. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that emigration has recently experienced a significant acceleration: according to the 2021 Labor Force and Migration (LFM) survey, out of 839,224

[28] IOM (2020) A Study on Child Migrants from Ethiopia
[29] Ethiopia | EU-IOM Joint Initiative
[30] According to UNDP Ethiopia hosts approximately 2.38 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict and violence, with an additional 757,000 displaced by disasters. See UNDP Durable Solutions Programme, june 27, 2025 https://www.undp.org/ethiopia/news/durable-solutions-programme?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[31] The 2021 Labour force and Migration Survey.
[32] See Ethiopian Diaspora Service
[33] UN, Departement of Economic and Social Affairs, population division 2022

ethiopians abroad at the time of the survey, only around 134,000 Ethiopians emigrated prior to 2011, in the subsequent decade an overall of approximately 705,000 Ethiopians left the country[34].

Moreover, these figures only partially reflect the scale of migratory movements from Ethiopia, particularly along the eastern route, which is characterized by massive migration flows, including return movements. For instance, in 2024 alone, nearly 450,000 movements were recorded along this route, 96% of which involved Ethiopian migrants, and the exits from Ethiopia in the same year amounted to around 235,000.[35]

The increase in emigration, along with growing awareness of its positive impacts as a tool to ease pressure on the local labor market and in terms of remittances, skills transfert and transnational networks, has shaped Ethiopia's current **emigration policy**. While primarily focused on the protection of its citizens abroad and the prevention of irregular migration, the policy has evolved and expanded through the development of strategies aimed at actively engaging the diaspora[36]. At the same time, systematic mass deportations of Ethiopian nationals from Gulf countries and the emphasis placed by Europe on return and readmission have led to the rapid development of policies and interventions in the areas of return and reintegration.

More recently, Ethiopia has made progress in aligning its migration policy with its development and employment policies[37] and has more decisively integrated migration into its foreign policy, as clearly expressed for exemple by the Ministry of Labor and Skills (MoLS). The policy has evolved from exclusively focusing on the protection of low-skilled workers to **a more proactive approach** that encompasses the promotion and facilitation of labour migration, including middle-skilled and skilled workers[38].

This process has further advanced, and in 2022, Ethiopia drafted its first-ever **National Migration Policy** (NMP) that is expected to be approved by the Council of ministers in the near future. The new migration policy is very comprehensive, and it is designed to respond to the country's increasingly mixed and complex migratory flows. It seeks to promote strategies to maximise the benefits of migration while ensure protection of migrants and refugees rights. The policy domain addresses a wide range of issues including irregular migration, border management, human trafficking and people smuggling, promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration, refugee protection, reintegration of migrant returnees, and diaspora engagement. Gender, internal migration, IDPs, migration data management and research are also addressed.

The **Secretariat of the National Partnership Coalition on Migration** (NPCM) under the Ministry of Justice is responsible for this policy and leads inter-ministerial coordination of migration-related issues in Ethiopia. A **National Partnership Coalition on Migration Secretariat**, established under

[34] Author's estimate based on data reported by "Ethiopia 2021 Labor Force and Migration Survey" LFM survey.

[35] IOM (2025), Migration along the eastern route, Report 58, 6 March 2025. See https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/2024_Yearly_Eastern_Route_Report.pdf

[36] In June 2013, supported by IOM the Ethiopian government officially adopted a national diaspora policy, following years of fragmented initiatives.

[37] More recently policies, strategies, and plans, on the other hand, have begun to acknowledge the importance of migration management for better employment creation for the youth. These include a Plan of Action for Job Creation, National Employment Policy and Strategy, and Rural Job Opportunity Creation Strategy. Moreover, since 2019 l'Etiopia identified priorities from the 23 objectives of the GCM and selected 10 priority objectives in line with its national priorities to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Compact. See https://www.fanamc.com/english/ethiopia-implementing-gcm-in-line-with-its-national-priorities/

[38] See Draft overseas employment proclamation set to safeguard Ethiopian workers' rights and security. https://www.fanamc.com/english/draft-overseas-employment-proclamation-set-to-safeguard-ethiopian-workers-rights-and-security/ –

the Ministry of Justice, is now responsible for leading and coordinating migration related issues within six working groups[39] established at central and regional level.

While the new law is still pending approval, international labour migration in Ethiopia continues to be governed by a set of proclamations and regulations, among which the most important is **Proclamation No. 923/2016, later amended by Proclamation No. 1246/2021**. The Proclamation provides a comprehensive framework for making migration safer[40] by embedding it within bilateral agreements (BLAs), setting recruitment standards, and providing for the deployment of labour attachés tasked with assisting migrants. Since its adoption, Ethiopia has signed **BLAs** and MoUs with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar[41] and recently with Kuwait, while is finalizing an agreement with the State of Oman[42].

Although commendable, the law has proven insufficient in achieving both its explicit and implicit goals: increasing legal migration and protecting Ethiopian migrants abroad. Independent assessments[43] have highlighted **critical gaps** in the design and implementation of the law, while the Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) themselves have complained that they have been not consulted and some of the restrictions introduced by the Proclamation "*were creating perverse incentives for workers to choose to migrate irregularly*" (ILO, 2022, pag.9)[44].

These criticisms, along with the need to revive overseas job placement which had collapsed following the COVID-19 pandemic, prompted Ethiopia to issue **Proclamation No. 1246/2021**. The Proclamation amended the previous one in 3 key sectors, namely licensing and ownership, recruitment, monitor and oversight mechanisms**[45].** The most significant changes concerned the removing of the requirement for migrants to have completed eighth grade education, which in practice excluded all uneducated women from the legal migration process, including those who had already gained experience in Ethiopia and abroad. Moreover, the Proclamation legalized the provision of private overseas employment services to skilled, semi-skilled, and professional workers (UNFPA, 2023, p. 11)**[46]** thus offering new emigration opportunities for male migrants while broadening business prospects for PEAs. Finally, the Proclamation strengthened protection mechanisms for migrants abroad and enhanced the monitoring system on PEAs.

[39] 1) Awareness Creation and Behavioral Change and Oversea Employment and Development Working Group (Chair Ministry of Women and Social Affairs), 2. Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement Working Group (Chair Ministry of Justice), 3. Victim Care and Reintegration Working Group (M. of Labor and Skills Development), 4. Diaspora Engagement and Development Affairs Working Group (Chair Ethiopia Diaspora Association), 5. Migration data and Management Working Group (Central Statistics Service) 6. Research and Study working Group (Ministry of Education).

[40] As highlighted by UNFPA (2023) Proclamation No. 923/2016 emerged in response to the trauma caused in public opinion by the mass deportations from Gulf states and the revelations of deprivation and abuse suffered by Ethiopian migrants in these countries, that has drive Ethiopia to ban emigration towards Gulf states in 2013. By lifting the ban - whose unintended effect was an increase in irregular migration —Proclamation 923/2016 marks Ethiopia's shift toward promoting "safer" migration pathways. See UNFPA, Assessment of the capacity and practices of overseas Private Employment Agencies in Ethiopia, 2023

[41] https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/news/governments-kenya-and-federal-republic-ethiopia-hold-bilateral-benchmarking-meeting-labour-migration-governance?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[42] https://mfaethiopia.blog/2025/02/21/a-week-in-the-horn-21-02-2025/?utm_source=chatgpt.com#sixth-one

[43] ILO for exemple have pointed out critical gaps in consular support, institutional capacity, law enforcement, and reintegration. See ILO (2016) The Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation No. 923/2016: A Comprehensive analysis of the Proclamation.

[44] ILO (2022) Assessment of the capacity and practices of overseas Private Employment Agencies in Ethiopia.

[45] For a detailed anaysis see: ILO, 2022 op.cit

[46] The Proclamation allowed Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) to charge skilled workers up to one month's salary for their services.

While the Proclamation introduced important innovations, **persistent governance challenges remains**, including fragmented oversight, continuing gaps in the recruitment process that enable informal recruiters to exploit workers, inefficiencies in governmental management of visas and contracts, deficiencies in the provision of quality and affordable pre-departure orientation and a widespread lack of confidence in the protective capacity of diplomatic missions, also due to the staff selection procedures not always merit-based[47]. Those limits have also been acknowledged by the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Skills (MoLS), which recently explained the need for a new Proclamation draft, noting that the previous one fell short in protecting citizens' dignity and enforcing accountability among recruitment agencies.

The new Proclamation Ethiopia's Overseas Employment number 1389/2025[48] introduces a tiered licensing system, which classifies agencies into three levels based on workforce deployment, sector specialization, skills, and initial capital. This approach replaces the outdated one-size-fits-all model. Agencies will manage different number of job orders and will be required to deposit security funds in cash at designated banks to ensure they take full responsibility for workers' safety and repatriation, according to the 3 different levels. The least level requires a deposit security fund of 50,000 USD. MoLS has opened a bank account where Agencies should deposit the funds. The new Proclamation also mandates the full digitization of foreign employment services, including recruitment, training placement, qualification assessment, and ticketing. These services will be delivered exclusively through the Ethiopian Labor Market Information System (LMIS), with the aim to ensuring transparency and eliminating informal, human-dependent processes[49].

One of the main objectives of the Proclamations examined so far has consistently been **to curb irregular migration**. This reflects the need to protect migrants, but it also constitutes a goal in its own right—one that has been strongly shaped also by European and other international partner's influence. Since the 2015 migration crisis, due to its highly strategic position within the geography of mixed migration flows and its importance for regional stability, **Ethiopia has indeed become a key partner in the externalization of European migration policies**, aimed at prevent irregular departures, delegate border control to third countries, facilitate returns and readmissions, and shift the responsibility for international protection beyond European borders.

As we have seen, Ethiopia has established legal migration frameworks through bilateral agreements, regulations, and oversight of private employment agencies (PEAs), aiming to promote "safe, orderly and regular[50] migration." These frameworks clearly distinguish between regular and irregular migration, highlighting the risks of the latter. However, information from senior government officials shows that many Ethiopian migrants still pay large sums of money—ranging from 35,000 to 85,000 ETB—to brokers and recruitment agencies, even when using official channels. This indicates that **formal governance systems coexist with informal intermediaries**, creating a gap between policy narratives of safe migration and the actual experiences of migrants. Migrants often rely on brokers or

[47] See ILO (2022) op.cit.

[48] See https://www.metaappz.com/References/ethiopian_laws/federal/pr_1389_2025/en/pdf?

[49] Digitalization had already begun in 2021 and had attracted criticism from the PEAs.Concerned about the inadequacy of the digital infrastructure necessary to complete this process, as well as the fear of losing flexibility and discretionary control over recruitment processes once it is fully digitized and centralized. See ILO (2022) op.cit.

[50] Ethiopia is a signatory to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and launched the implementation of the GCM in 2019. In the same year, the government of Ethiopia identified priorities from the 23 objectives of the GCM and selected 10 priority objectives in line with its national priorities to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Compact. Currently Ethiopia is mainstreaming the priorities to national policies and programs in conjunction with SDGs. The country has also participated in various regional global review platforms of the GCM and produced its national voluntary report in 2020

pay extra to navigate bureaucratic procedures, reflecting insufficient protection and monitoring within the regular migration pathway.

On the other hand, Ethiopia introduced legislative measures specifically aimed at combating trafficking, smuggling, and irregular migration—such as the **Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Proclamation No. 909/2015, revised and strengthened by Proclamation No. 1178/2020**. This legislation, influenced by the dominant discourse of previous years focused on combating trafficking, has proven still insufficient, and significant concerns remain about Ethiopia's genuine commitment in this area, even if steps forwards have been recognized (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

The new legal framework established by the Migration Law and the Proclamations discussed will need to be capable of **addressing the challenges** outlined above. It must succeed in the difficult task of promoting, expanding, and diversifying migration opportunities (especially towards unskilled male migrants) while at the same time safeguarding the rights of migrants abroad. Furthermore, it must align migration policy with the needs of Ethiopia's labor market and broader national development strategies.

This is a complex challenge, constrained by internal economic and administrative limitations and by the asymmetry characterizing Ethiopia's international relations with destination countries. Ethiopia remains dependent on these countries to provide overseas employment opportunities, yet lacks sufficient leverage to ensure adequate protection of its citizens' rights.

Other challenges relate to the operational level. Currently in Dire Dawa, **the process for regular migration** is carried out as follows: migrants contact the one-stop center at the Kebele office where he/she reside to be registered as unemployed and express interest in migrating. The one-stop centre provides the list of unemployed to the Boureau of Labor and Skill development. The Boureau refers prospective migrants to either Dire Dawa or Ethio Italian TVET colleges for training. Upon the conclusion of the 21 – day training programs, prospective migrants will be entered into the LMIS and will take the CoC examination administred by the Boureau of Labor and Skill development. Following succcessful completation of the exam and the issuance of the certificate, the MoLS utilizes the LMIS to assign and refer these individuals to private agencies to assist with the process of regular migration. The potential migrant will receive an SMS text message that show the contact information of the private agency to which he/she have been assigned. The migrant provides the agency with all required documentation (passport, CoC, medical examination) and he/she will be registered in "Musaned", a digital system that links migrants with employers, preparing his/her CV and attaching his/her official document with the support of the agency. Once the migrant has been selected by the employer, the contract is signed and a copy is sent to the MoLS. The agency then organizes a pre-departure orientation course and covers the costs of transportation, the visa, and employment insurance.

As we will see in the following chapters, the entire process, although seemingly straightforward, actually presents **obstacles at various stages**, especially in the recruitement stage, where bottlenecks may occur for example, in obtaining the necessary documents, in the time required by the overall procedure, or in the availability of slots for training, among others. The key challenge lies in removing bottlenecks that hinder migrants' access to regular migration pathways. This requires the widespread and up-to-date dissemination of available opportunities, the strengthening of institutional capacities and knowledge at central level (MoLS), and the decentralization of the recruitment process through broader territorial coverage of PEAs while securing stricter oversight of their compliance with the ethical recruitment code. In addition, training programs should be made more accessible and more

closely aligned with the labor market demands of destination countries. Alongside others factors, these operational weaknesses are among the most critical issues migrants face directly and, as this study also highlights, they contribute to blurring the boundaries between regular and irregular migration, and to driving migrants toward irregular pathways.

3. Protective factors for the right to stay

The following analysis focuses on the right to stay of children and youth in Dire Dawa and surrounding areas. The rights to stay is articulated on the existence of protective factors which offer economic, social and cultural conditions for a better life of young population, reducing the push factors to emigration throught irregular routes.

Protective factors are defined[51] **as** formal or informal conditions and initiatives that assist in safeguarding individuals - particularly vulnerable groups such as children, women and PWDs (people with disabilities) - from challenges that arise from irregular migration. These factors can be formally established interventions and schemes by State and non-State actors as well as informal cultural and social assets which exist in families, neighbours and communities.

Save the Children conducted a research on "*Why the Children Stay?*" (2018) where it has proposed another definition of protective factors that puts at the center the children perception and agency: *'protective factors' (to) refer to the positive reasons children themselves identify for remaining in their communities of origin. These factors refer not only to attributes in the home environment which relate to child protection, but also to positive factors across sectors which children identify as most influential in motivating their choice to remain*."

The StC research was applyed in three different African countries and it has identified **the following important protective factors**: education in schools with "*the opportunity to complete secondary education in the community of origin*"; "*eating more than one meal per day*"; "*being able to identify someone who acts as primary caregiver at home*"; "*individual agency and a sense of prospect, especially the belief that the child will be successful in realising their future aspirations*"; "*awareness of risks associated with unaccompanied migration and exploitation*".

In this research important aspects are underlined such as: "*Critically, presence of these protective factors overrides the influence of other competing 'push' factors also present in children's environments. Two notable exceptions are* ***violence*** *(both at home and in the form of corporal punishment by teachers) and* ***harmful work****. Children exposed to both factors feel compelled to move even when they prefer to stay.*

The findings above imply the need for a radical shift in programming: instead of targeting push factors relevant to the minority who are leaving, key national and international stakeholders should strengthen the capacity of communities to reinforce the protective factors relevant both to those who refrain from migrating and those who chose to leave.".

In this analysis, **a broader approach is proposed** by considering together both the right to stay and the right to move because they are not antithetical but complementary. At the center lies the choice of adolescent to stay or to move for improving his/her well-being and of his/her family. Action needs to be taken on both fronts of the same coin, involving all the different stakeholders, with children rights at the center.

In this chapter on the right to stay, the research question was "*What are the most relevant and missing protective factors in East Hararge*?". It has been addressed using information from FGDs and targeted interviews to different stakeholders conducted in the area, involving children and young people, so that a more complete and comprehensive view is offered. Existing and missing protection factors are identified in the context of child migration in the Dire Dawa City Administration. The

[51] According to the IOM, protection factors for migrants are elements that mitigate vulnerability and enhance resilience. These factors can be present at various levels—individual, household/family, community, and structural—and they play a crucial role in reducing the risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse during the migration process. Source The IOM Handbook on Migrant Protection and Assistance | International Organization for Migration

analysis revealed several protective needs, some confirming those already identified in the research of Save the Children, others highlighting more contextual and more detailed factors to invest in.

The first factor identified consists in family protection. Some information collected in the migration literature [52] indicates how migration decisions are taken inside the families. Migration is a family strategy to diversify income access and improve the wellbeing of all the members. The possibility to send abroad a son or a daughter can open the access to more resources and particularly to remittances that can be consumed and invested in the family.

But, the FGDs and interviews conducted in this research show that most families do not encourage child migration. Almost all respondents raised **the key role of family as a deterrent factor** for child migrants in the region. For instance, one recurring response is the decision of most child migrants (especially male) to escape and not inform family members of the journey until the it is started. Parents do not seem to support the children's intention to migrate. This confirms the findings of IOM (2020): young people often emigrate in small groups without informing their families for fear of being stopped[53].

The missing protective factor is a good **educative relationship and communication** between family members and potential child migrants. As indicated above, respondents claim that most child migrants - especially male ones - do not inform parents or family members until the journey begins (sometimes mid-journey) because they fear interference and violent penalities. This decreases the ability of family members to deter child migrants from these decisions.

But information collected and the results of the FGDs indicate that the family can be a push factor instead. Children consider moving because they are escaping from bad situations in search for better opportunities.

Children don't confide in their parents because the relationship is very **hierarchical and authoritarian**. The rule is that children shouldn't migrate because they have to help the family on a daily basis. They can migrate only if their parents decide. They can't decide alone. Furthermore, some informants are concerned about **the violent relationships** that appear in several families. This condition does not allow for trusting communication between members. Children hide and do not share their decisions because the family discussion is not well oriented. Families should understand how to improve their educational relationship with their children adopting a **non-violent education**.

These indications have been collected also with the Participatory research that "*reveals that violent behaviours – wether physical or verbal – have a deep impacys on children, often leading to school dropout and triggering irregular migration*". Violent behaviours and bad communication permeat family and community environments. "*Adult perpetrated violence also includes imposing heavy and prolonged labour, such as transporting loads or caring for livestock, often accompanied by physical and psychological abuse*." Such situation may reduce the risk perception of irregular migration and of labour exploitation in Arab countries, where they can access to better earning. We could speculate on the differential between local versus destination country social situations: if it is low adolescents could choose to emigrate, considering that the economic differential is better "ther than here".

This happens in the family but also in the school and in the community. Some teachers in the FGDs "*acknoweldgeed that their previous disciplinary methods, such as corporal punishment and*

[52] IOM 2021; To Change My Life:Risk perception, expectations and migration experiences of young Ethiopians migrating along the Eastern Route toward the Arabian Peninsula, IOM_RDH_Eastern_Route_Research_Final_Report_Obock Djibouti_0_0.pdf; Megersa, H., & Tafesse, T. (2024). Household migration decisions: understanding Ethiopians irregular migration from Kembata-Tembaro zone to the Republic of South Africa. *International Migration*, *62*(5), 106-120. ; Boreda, Binyam. (2023). "Determinants of youth migration aspirations decision in Ethiopia." *ETHIOINQUIRY Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(2), 19-32.

[53] IOM (2020), A Study on Child Migrants from Ethiopia.

humiliating insults, were inappropriate … playing a role in the decision of many young people to drop out of school, precursor ti irregular migration (…) *There is a growing recognition that children are affected not only by direct violence but also by tensions in their social environment*". Parents, teachers and local leaders attending the psychological training of StC affirm that they have acquired a better awareness on the need to improve their behaviours.

The most important protective factor should be the **family's and school's ability to support children in their non-violent education and access to decent work**. This also depends on the economic, social and cultural environment, which does not present the necessary positive conditions. As already underlined by previous studies, the low importance given to education by both the children and their families contributes to pushing them to migrate (see for exemple IOM, 2020, op. cit.).

Together with the family, **local communities** can be an important protection factor**.** Communities in origin and transit areas are a key protection factors in the migration of children in Dire Dawa. According to responses from returnees, **the socio-cultural familiarity** (which emanates from shared culture and language between eastern Ethiopia and Djibouti) serves as a protection factor both to deter irregular migration and to lessen the extent of abuse and violation of rights enroute to destination countries.

However, despite community-based organisations such as religious institutions are influential in shaping the migration decision making process, religious and community leaders do not raise a more comprehensive awareness on migration-related issues. They warn of the risks of irregular migration, but they are uninformed and **unable to direct young potential migrants to the regular system for migration**. They also lack the knowledge on the drivers and consequences of migration.

If community and family relationships create a good protective and skill-enabling cultural environment, children and youth may prefer to stay. But there are other cultural issues that play a disincentive role instead. Harmful traditional practices such as **child marriage** were also identified as an unprotective factor in the region - which have direct implication on the decision of girl migrants to embark on dangerous journeys. With this practice remaining to be prevalent in the villages surrounding Dire Dawa, it is imperative to deal with the issue to mitigate this driving factor of female child migration in the region. This situation has been detected also in the Participatory research stating that girls frequently drop out of school at a higher rate than boys due to family prejudices that undervalue female education, as well as practical chellenges such as early marriage, the stigma of fear associated with attending school while being pregnant, and childcare responsabilities.

It is interesting to note that the propensity for early marriage increases when there are economic hardships due increasingly to periods of **drought and flooding**, among other factors. Child marriage is a family's coping mechanism to face the worsening of social conditions. This shows an **interconnection between environmental/climatic causes, socio/economic conditions, and family decisions,** which may lead to greater migration choices. In this sense, protective factors must look as much at the cultural aspect as at structural aspects concerning economic hardships and climate issues.

Some recent studies on development and migration[54] indicate that State and community **social investments** sustain the right to stay, and the deployment of protective factors that reduce the push to emigrate. Social investments in education, health, recreational activities, sports and the like, create and enabling environment for young populations that can decide to remain.

Education institutions are protective factors but local conditions are poor. Throughout the different interactions with students, dropouts and returnees youth, and other stakeholders, the role of education was raised repeatedly in the FGDs and interviews. A protection factor that is lacking is

[54] Boreda, B. (2023) op.cit; Tilahun, M., & Holden, S. T. (2023). Livelihood diversification and migration intentions among land-poor youth in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia: Do they correlate with livestock assets, trust, and trustworthiness? *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, 1175572. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1175572

related to **scarce enrollment** rates. According to responses from teachers in primary and secondary schools, the rate of enrollment is low in the region (with family members sending only some of their children to school) In addition, dropout rates are prevalent, especially in the second half of the academic year as well as while transiting from primary school to secondary school. (see also the study of Anna Ferro and Girmachew Adugna and the Participatiry research).

This arises from lack of willingness and/or ability on the part of family members to send children to school, the decision to send some children to schools while others have to support family in the workload (especially girls), lack of quality of education system and institutions, increasing failure rates during national examinations and the perceived low value of education in the eyes of children themselves. Respondents recommended community outreach programs to increase and maintain enrollment rates by designing school feeding programs, establishing recreational facilities near schools, and establishing schools near villages of students. The quality of education should be improved to enable young people to pass exams. More resources should be devoted to the teaching class, as well as to life skill development and informal trainings

To summarize suggestions, respondents highlighted that working on and retaining enrollment rates in the region is important due to its ability to keep students engaged in schools and away from push factors of migration. In addition, respondents from TVET training centers, recruitment agencies and government officials stress on the importance of basic education before accessing and benefiting from regular recruitment and migration pathways. In this sense more and better education should be conducive decisions of young people both to stay and to move regularly.

Transport accessibility is another protective factor. The ability to attend school also depends on the availability of well-mantained roads and accessible transportation. Children in rural villages furthest from school infrastructure have difficulty accessing it: time and cost, as well as the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, especially for girls, disincentivize attendance. Consequently, improved accessibility means improved attendance and opportunities for success, as well as the opportunity to improve their nutrition through food access programs in the schools.

The importance to implement **school feeding programmes indicate the need to sustain protective factors against poverty** as underlined about economic contitions below**.** Local economic, social and environmental conditions are harsh. In this context, school feeding is believed to increase school enrollment and reduce dropout rates. Local actors all agree about this need. However, this is not happening in many schools in Dire Dawa and surrounding villages.

Economic conditions represent a protective factor. The study was carried out in the economically disadvantaged suburbs of Dire Dawa city and its neighboring villages, where residents rely on daily labor, petty trade and small-scale agriculture for their livelihoods. This economic condition limits the capacity to sustain migration costs by adolescents, even though there is a strong desire to migrate to Saudi Arabia via Djibouti and Yemen. Poverty limits the possibilities for long-distance migration-the costs are too high relative to disposable income-but not short-distance mobility, from the countryside to the cities. Migration is contructed along the way: moving from rural areas to a near city represents the first step; access to earnings in the city could open new opportunities to move in another better city and/or to emigrate towards Arab countries or Europe, as a following step.

Paradoxically, poverty might be considered as a protective factor from irregular emigration to the Gulf countries. Poverty reduces the possibility to emigrate. Children and adolescents are not able to pay for migrating and they are compelled to stay in harsh local conditions. But poverty is not protective of children's well-being. Reducing poverty is therefore a precondition for both the right to stay and the right to migrate with safety through regular channels.

A significant number of migrants from rural areas return from transit cities and countries before they can access to employment and income in their intended destinations. Consequently, they do not

benefit from any salary and do not send **remittances**. In contrast, residents of Dire Dawa city with family members living abroad receive substantial remittances. This is indicative of the different social economic conditions between the **urban and rural contexts**. Despite all the difficulties, the city offers better income opportunities, and young people are able to embark on even long-distance migration routes, sending remittances home. Conversely, rural conditions are worse and limit the ability to move and to send remittances. Families in the city can rely more on remittances, less so those living in rural villages.

In the context of economic conditions that drive young people to emigrate, respondents report high unemployment rates and low income after graduating. It is not just lack of job opportunities but **lack of decent jobs with good earnings that push adolescents to emigrate**. What this unfortunately means is that education itself is not a sufficient protective factor at a time when young people, after graduation, are unable to find decent employment. They are attracted to jobs abroad that, although under difficult conditions, offer incomes at least 15 times higher than those locally (see previous chapter).

Income differential seems to be the most powerful factor for emigration, that is difficult to reverse in the short to medium term. The most powerful protective factor in terms of reducing irregular migration in favor of the right to stay, is the creation of decent jobs, but it can not be achieved in short times. The **ability to migrate regularly** should therefore be considered **as a complementary protective factor** because it ensures a better income but in a safe way compared to irregular movement.

Remittances sent from abroad and their utilization patterns for social and economic investments usually could serve **as protective factors** for families and children left behind in Ethiopia. They may improve the wellbeing of the family and allow children to have access to education and health services. In this way they could decide to stay or postpone emigration on a regular basis. However, in this study, we do not find evidence supporting this claim. This is – probably - mainly because most of the migration attempts does not appear successful: failed migrations and turning back halfway through the journey are quite common, especially for adolescents migrating from rural areas. While in Dire Dawa exist better opportunities to invest remittances improving local conditions. But the differential with Arab countries persists. While, on the other hand, investment of remittances for improving family life, especially in housing, demonstrates the success of the emigration choice and perpetuets the migration culture.

Objective 20 of the Global Compact for Migration stresses the need to enhance the development impact of remittances by promoting their safe, affordable, and transparent transfer, along with their productive use. Remittances play a vital role in supporting household resilience and local economies, particularly in low-income communities. However, without proper systems for financial education, investment opportunities, or community planning, remittances often fulfill short-term consumption needs rather than long-term development goals. This limits their transformative potential and contributes to cycles of economic dependency and continued out-migration.

Families of migrants usually use funds sent from a family member abroad to finance the education of children and young people and improve their livelihoods. Observations indicate that remittances in Dire Dawa support household needs such as education and livelihood improvements but are often limited to **short-term** consumption due to a lack of financial education, investment options, and community planning. However, there are instances where migrants build homes for their families through remittances.

Consistent with global challenges surrounding remittances, **irregular channels for sending money** are prevalent in Dire Dawa, with official intermediaries charging significant fees. Responses from the Dire Dawa Social Affairs Agency indicate that individuals (shop keepers, merchants, informal currency exchange agencies, etc) with contacts in receiving Gulf countries act as **informal**

intermediaries. They have contacts with parents in the village who have their children in those countries, and serve as a means for financial exchange; sometimes, they also act as recruiters. Also the youth whose siblings, friends, etc., living in the Gulf countries, provide information to prospective migrants, charging migrants a **substantial fee** throughout the process. This not only affects the amount received by families but also diminishes the macroeconomic development contribution of migrants to the city.

Sometimes, remittances are viewed as drivers of migration. Respondents generally agree that remittances represent a significant push factor in Dire Dawa. Although small, remittances can serve as **incentives for migration**, as non-migrant families see their neighbors' receiving remittances from abroad to cover some expenses and improving their housing.

Remittances have been reported also to **encourage legal pathways** for migration (not only irregular ones) due to stories of successful regular migrants who send remittances to improve their families' lives. Positive experiences of legal migration and successful remittance utilization can encourage others in East Hararge to consider regular migration pathways. Respondents shared success stories of migrants who utilized legal schemes for migration from the city administration and sent remittances for the betterment of their families and community, which has encouraged some migrants to choose legal pathways for migration.

Accurate information sharing on the cost, dangers, and security situation of the migration route, sustaining the preference **for the regular way**, is another issue highlighted in the responses as one of the missing link protecting migrants. Returnees, families of migrants, brokers, and agencies must ensure that accurate information is provided to migrants before they embark on their journeys. Periodical trainings on life skills and migration at school and community levels were suggested as recommendations.

The availability of regular migration pathways to destination countries was raised by FGDs as a potential protection factor for child migrants. Different groups of respondents argued that the availability of legal pathways - albeit challenges related to cost and time - has the potential to deter young and child migrants from making the choice to migrate irregularly. Preparation for regular channels could posticipate the migration choice after 18th age. However, while the setup of legal pathways could reduce irregular migration in many circumstances, one must raise questions related to eligibility, cost and time of regular migration and accessibility (see next chapter).

On the other hand, there is **no proven correlation** between less irregular-more regular migration. Provocatively one can indeed imagine that a greater supply of regular migration may generate a greater increase in the demand to move, that could not be evaded by legal channels, producing more irregular migration over time. This shows the importance of **monitoring the dynamics of migration** and taking a flexible approach to access regular channels, while **continuing to invest in both the right to stay and the right to move.**

4. Regular vs irregular migration for the right to move and return

The right to move can be a protective factor for the well-being of young people when emigration is realized in a safe and ordinary manner, ensuring access to basic goods and decent work. The right to move may be more responsive to young people's aspirations than the right to stay, when local conditions are insufficient. It is important to ensure that the best opportunties exist for successful regular migration, making it more competitive than irregular migration. Regular migration, in turn, can improve conditions in the region of origin and thus for those who remain, through the use of remittances and the positive return of migrants. To this end, the research sought to answer the following questions by engaging different stakeholders, including in particular children and youth in Dire Dawa and surrounding rural villages.

What are the deficits of the regular channel versus irregular one in the Eastern route?

What is the knowledge and attitude towards legal migration within the Dire Dawa city administration?

What are the major sources of migration information?

What challenges do potential migrants face in accessing regular migration channels?

What are the current trends regarding re-migration among individuals from this area?

How are remittances typically used by migrant families in this community?

While regular migration offers safer, more dignified, and legally protected pathways for individuals seeking opportunities abroad, a host of structural, financial, and procedural barriers continues to hinder access—particularly for rural populations. **Objective 5 of the Global Compact for Migration** underscores the need to enhance the availability and flexibility of regular migration pathways, recognizing that safe alternatives reduce reliance on smuggling networks and exploitative brokers.

There is a consensus on what is **the right age to migrate**, almost all respondents stressed that it is ideal if migrants don't make the decision to move before the age of 18th. The respondents also agree on the justifications behind these decisions. In line with ethical recruitment principles enshrined in regional and global frameworks for migration management, the minimum age of recruitment for regular migration is 18th years old. Respondents highlight the **bigger exposure of child migrants to physical and sexual abuse**, as well as exploitation of labor, as reasons behind their position on the right age to migrate.

Lack of physical and cognitive maturity, inability to comprehend the challenges during the migration routes, and susceptibility to misleading information from brokers are some of the common justifications of adolescent irregular migration, identified in the FGDs with local stakeholders.

On the other hand, some observ that adolescent migrants are likely to use irregular migration routes due to the age restriction in the recruitment process. This is because one key requirement to get access to the regular scheme is a Kebele (District) ID which is issued upon turning 18 years old. Kebele ID is a prerequisite to receive a passport, ergo, migrants below the age of 18 are irregular migrants. If there were not such restriction, and the age were lowered to, say, 16, then one could think about organised regular migrations for adolescents, for example for study-work reasons. The consideration of age restrictions, along with the continued prevalence of irregular migration among adolescents under 18, underscores **the gap between legal and social definitions of adulthood.** While by law adulthood begins at the age of 18, age is also a social construct. In Ethiopia and Dire Dawa context, children are given responsibilities from a young age to help support their families—an obligation also

emphasized by the African Charter[55], and for many adolescents migration represents a way to fulfill this duty. Studies conducted in Ethiopia show that migration is often undertaken when a boy or girl is considered physically capable of withstanding the harsh conditions of the journey, typically starting from puberty and especially after the age of 15. As a matter of fact, in Dire Dawa, children between the ages of 15 and 18 are defined as potential adults (IOM, 2022).

However, no one wants to travel irregularly while there is **an option to do so through legal pathways**. Regular migration routes allow migrants to take the best possible means to reach desired destinations - so long as they meet the existing requirements in a safer way. This may protect migrants from physical, labor, and sexual abuse at the hands of several stakeholders (i.e., smugglers, traffickers, armed groups, migrants themselves) in countries of origin, transit and destination. In addition, it should also allow migrants to easily access basic services in host countries due to their recognized status in the countries.

On the other hand, analysis of the reality, in which **the boundaries between regular and irregular migration are blurred**, indicates that it is necessary to monitor this intertwining carefully because practices of corruption, exploitation, and human rights violations also characterize regular migration. Several reports also point to "legalized" exploitation in the labor market of the Gulf countries and deportation practices that do not respect the rights of migrants.

All responding groups agree that regular migration is a much better way to migrate as compared to irregular migration routes. Research participants contend that for those who meet the required criteria and have the financial resources, the process is considerably more direct and safer in comparison to the perilous routes of irregular migration. Another positive remark about regular migration is from the returnees who showcased the **unpredictability of the cost of irregular migration as compared to regular migration.** The respondent recalled instances where additional fees (not disclosed at the beginning of the journey) were asked in order to continue the journey. The respondent also noted that refusal to pay, may lead to physical abuse, detention for ransom, and seizure of journey in certain instances. For this reason, there is a consensus amongst respondents that regular migration is a better choice - where accessible and timely.

However, irregular migration to the Gulf countries remains a key challenge for migration governance in Ethiopia. There were some interesting insights shared by respondents on why the regular migration pathways are not sufficient in mitigating irregular migration in the Eastern Route.

Almost all interviews stated that, while legal pathways for migration to the GCC are increasingly being formalized by BLAs and MoU with receiving countries, **legal pathways remain more costly and time-consuming than irregular migration**. The promise of regular migration remains distant for many. A combination of lack of information and awareness on the procedures, administrative bottlenecks, request of extensive documentation (such as skill training, CoC: Certificate of Competence, health certificates, ect), high upfront costs, lack of identification documents, and limited government outreach in rural areas creates **an environment where irregular migration not only appears more accessible but is often perceived as the only viable option**. These challenges not only increase migrants' vulnerability but also undermine the legal frameworks designed to protect them. To change this, Ethiopia's migration policy change is seeking to create and strengthen an institutional, cultural and social environment conducive to regular migration, but much has yet to be accomplished.

According to respondents, accessing regular migration channels in Dire Dawa is hindered by a **complex interplay of financial, logistical, and systemic barriers**, with perspectives differing based

[55] According to the Art. 31 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child **(**Responsibility of the Children) Every child shall have the duty (a) to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need

on institutional affiliation and local experience. Government officials, such as those from the Social Affairs Agency and the Labour Skills and Technology Development Office, emphasized **procedural bottlenecks**—like delays in passport processing and lack of kebele ID cards - to which should be added the **high cost of travel and accommodation** in urban centers to obtain essential services—as significant challenges, particularly for rural residents.

NGO representatives from organizations like PAD and CIFA stressed the **structural absence of State support in rural kebeles** and highlighted how illegal brokers dominate the information space, leaving communities with little trust in legal pathways. Local actors, including school staff and kebele administrators, pointed to the daily realities faced by families—**poverty, long waiting periods, and misinformation**—as key factors pushing youth toward irregular migration. Parents echoed these concerns, citing personal experiences of failed legal attempts due to prohibitive costs and procedural complexity.

Furthermore, according to the literature[56], prospective migrants seem to view the requirements for emigration—completing pre-departure medical checks, undergoing pre-departure vocational training, and obtaining the Certificate of Competence (CoC)—as **obstacles to be circumvented** rather than as tools that increase their protection or enable them to find better jobs.

The following section summarizes more specifically the response of targeted stakeholders on the main deficits of the regular migration pathways in the Eastern Route.

The first deficit concerns the lack of information and the scarce awareness on regular pathways. Objectives 3 and 7 of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration stress the importance of **providing accurate and timely data/information** to migrants at all stages of migration to reduce vulnerability. It also emphasizes the importance of sharing accurate information and data through innovative and contextual methods. Specifically, regarding irregular migration, the GCM—under Objective 10—highlights the role of timely and accurate information sharing in combating irregular migration, smuggling, and trafficking in persons. The situation of Ethiopian migrants—particularly those using the Eastern route—is no exception. According to a study conducted by the MMC in 2023[57], a majority of the respondents (who were returning migrants) did not have information on legal pathways while in Ethiopia, on working conditions in destination countries, and on return procedures upon being sent back by the countries of destination.

Facilitators, recruiters, brokers[58] remain the primary source of information. Young people explain that they decide by themselves, they do not trust brokers, but they have **no other chance** than access to their information and pay for their service. After they receive information from the brokers,

[56] Busza et al, (2023) op.cit.

[57] Mixed Migration Centre. (2023, April 6). *Experiences of Ethiopian returnees in Saudi Arabia: Employment and unmet expectations* (4Mi snapshot). MMC. Retrieved from https://mixedmigration.org/resource/ethiopian-returnees-saudi-arabia-employment/; Freedom Fund, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, & Population Council. (2023). *The role of agents and brokers in facilitating migration from Ethiopia: Qualitative findings on labour recruitment*. Retrieved from https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/03/meneshachin_report.pdf

[58] According to Busza et al. (2023) Migration intermediaries in Ethiopia can be defined as follows: Facilitators – A general term for any person involved in assisting women migrating from Ethiopia to countries in the Middle East for domestic work. They can be referred to as either formal facilitators or informal facilitators, corresponding respectively to recruiters and brokers. Facilitators usually do not rely on migration as their main source of income. Recruiters: individuals for whom arranging migration is their primary occupation. They may work independently or as part of an agency, and are responsible for the final stage of the migration process—namely, the departure from Ethiopia and placement with an employer abroad. The term is used to refer to a person who is believed to operate legally, although those who use it often have no way of verifying whether this is actually the case. Brokers: individuals who act as intermediaries between potential migrants and other facilitators or recruiters. This term typically refers to people operating at the local level who do not have international contacts or any official registration. See Busza et al, (2023) Accidental traffickers: qualitative findings on labour recruitment in Ethiopia, *Globalization and Health.*

individuals make their own decisions to migrate. In this way access to information is distorted and biased toward the irregular channel. Children and youth often decide to migrate themselves, along with their peers**.** Once they decide to migrate, they approach brokers to facilitate their journey to Djibouti and beyond. Other previous studies[59] report spontaneous migration of young people to Djibouti, with facilitators only being used if they decide to continue.

Despite some differences in emphasis, all respondents agree that unless legal migration becomes more accessible, efficient, and visible at the community level, irregular channels will continue to be seen as the more feasible—if riskier—option. Therefore, **misinformation from brokers plays a critical role** in undermining legal pathways to migration.

Regarding misinformation, it is important to highlight certain specificities of the Ethiopian context**.** According to Busza et al. (2023)[60] young people may believe they are receiving information from legal operators, when in fact they have **no way of verifying whether these actors are truly authorized**. Likewise, recruiters themselves—although not formally registered—may believe they are operating legally because they refer potential migrants to agencies they ***believe*** to be officially licensed**.**
To this, it must be added that **not all Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) operate in line with the ethical code of conduct.** By their own admission, some agencies make use of informal recruiters, while others send migrants to countries with which Ethiopia has not signed BLAs or MoUs**.**

According to responses from city administration, NGO representatives working on migration issues in Dire Dawa and in rural kebeles, knowledge and attitudes toward legal migration are uneven and evolving. Formats, such as programs on Dire TV and Fana, have been used as tools to inform potential migrants about the risks of irregular migration, and **awareness-raising programs** targeting youth in urban and rural areas are increasing. While organizations like StC, PAD, and CIFA have introduced creative and culturally sensitive awareness methods—from dramas and returnee testimonies to localized radio broadcasts within the Dire Dawa city administration to educate youth and their families about the dangers of irregular migration, but these efforts are still **limited in scope and reach**.

The response from a teacher in Kalicha reflects the innovative nature of the awareness-raising programs by StC. The value added by these trainings was also highlighted by a response from a mother of a dropout, who stated that even parents are more aware of the dangers of irregular migration. However, **awareness of legal pathways is lacking**, as the teacher from Kalicha School—where training sessions took place—is unaware of the MoLSA registration website or the existence of such legal schemes for migration. One common criticism shared by all respondents is the **focus on curbing irregular migration rather than promoting regular pathways for migration, resulting in a limited impact**.

The Dire Dawa city administration's social affairs agency claimed that despite the increase in regular migration since the BLAs with Gulf States, there are **still gaps in promoting these legal migration routes**. This imbalance underscores the need for more targeted, consistent, and comprehensive

[59] Mixed Migration Centre & International Organization for Migration. (2018). *Young and on the Move: Children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa*. Retrieved from https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/013_young-and-on-the-move.pdf; Freedom Fund, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, & Population Council. (2023). *The role of agents and brokers in facilitating migration from Ethiopia: Qualitative findings on labour recruitment*. Retrieved from https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/03/meneshachin_report.pdf; IOM. 2020. *A study on child migrants from Ethiopia*. Retrieved from https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl701/files/documents/IOM%20Ethiopia_A%20Study%20on%20Child%20Migrants%20from%20Ethiopia_Final.pdf

[60] Busza et al. (2023), op.cit.

messaging that not only warns against irregular migration but also fosters trust and understanding around legal migration processes. **A more proactive approach that promotes legal migration is necessary**.

While awareness creation programs are slowly changing this, information is still lacking **in rural hotspots** like Kalicha Kebele.The weakness of government officials at the kebele level in rural areas and the control of information on migration by illegal brokers in these areas was also raised as a common challenge by respondents.

Concerning access to information, **brokers are the only option in rural areas**. In rural areas, weak administrative structures mean that information is still primarily under the control of illegal brokers, which puts migrants in vulnerable situations. Information from illegal recruiters such as brokers, smugglers, returnees and potential migrants themselves, continues to shape irregular migration decisions.

The main sources of official **information to prepare for legal migration** (if they prepare) are MoLS webpage, newsletter, whatsapp group managed by the PEAs. But it is very unlikely that potential migrants visit the webpage of MoLS, recruitment agencies, newsletters, or WhatsApp groups. If they prepare, they would go directly to the **nearest recruitment agency** in Dire Dawa. But potential migrants often face information challenges that leave them confused about where to start.

Informal recruiters work on behalf of agencies in Addis (recent studies report that this is the most used mode by agencies, either because they had to close local branches after COVID or because people do not trust local branches). This practice obviously exposes the potential migrant to the risk of having to pay an additional commission to the informal recruiter.

During the data collection, only one mother stated that "*one of our family members based in Addis Ababa informed us to process my son's migration through legal means*" [...]. "*After hearing his advice, we went to Addis to proceed, and finally, we understood that it would* ***not be successful since it required more time****. We even lost 80,000 birrs for nothing and returned to Kalicha empty-handed*."

Young people prefer to collect information through other **unofficial sources** (facebook pages and other social network managed by friends and relative, other...). Despite having information from illegal brokers, some of the youth who access social networks through the internet can still receive **information from their relatives and friends in the GCC countries**. However, such sources have never been accurate.

The decision to migrate irregularly also depends on the perception that irregular routes are open to all, faster and more reliable than the legal one since there are not age requirements and bureaucratic processes that would make migrants wait. They prefer the illegal route because it fulfills their demands sooner and helps them migrate faster. Skepticism towards government-managed schemes, fueled by "broker-disseminated misinformation" and the lack of visible administrative efforts to curb this, has informed attitudes that **favor irregular routes** within the city administration. Widespread understanding and trust in legal migration mechanisms remain weak, calling for more localized, sustained, and transparent outreach efforts.

The second deficit concerns issues that refer to a different accessibility according to the gender. In fact, attitude towards legal migration in Dire Dawa city has a gendered aspect. According to a key witness a majority of child migrants in Dire Dawa are boys. However, according to respondents of FGDs **most successful cases of regular migration are for female migrants.**

This is because the existing legal framework and BLAs between Ethiopia and five other countries (Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Qatar, and recently Kuwait) focus on domestic labor, which is typically taken on by female migrants. Consequently, the **recruitment preferences of legal agencies are especially for girls**, considering that less opportunities are available to absorb the male

workforce.

PEAs in Dire Dawa have successfully processed women through the legal channel in the recent past. They consider this experience as a good initiative that should be opened also to men. The opportunity of legal pathwways should be a hope for men as well, as they await the chance. But men have s**everal dubts on the convenience.** They fear that the salary would be taken by the government and that there is no freedom to change work and improve their salaries in the GCC countries.

The new Proclamation 1389/2025 tries to facilitate skilled and semi-skilled migration beyond domestic work, that could represent **new possibilities for male migrants.**

According to Overseas Proclamation 1389/2025 "any skilled or semi-skilled citizen who secures an overseas employment opportunity through his personal effort may have his employment permitted by the Ministry, provided it meets requirements set out in Sub-Article (6) of this Article."

Article 12 establishes that "A skilled worker may be employed in an overseas job if he: 1) possesses the educational qualifications, specialized sectoral knowledge and skills, and relevant professional and work experience required by the position; 2) holds an occupational competency certification from an accredited assessment center as deemed necessary for the targeted field of employment.

And a semi-skilled worker may be employed in an overseas job "if he: 1) partially meets the educational qualifications required by the position, possesses partial sectoral knowledge and skills gained through education or experience, 2) holds an occupational competency certification from an accredited assessment center as deemed necessary for the targeted field of employment"

The above statements can create a space for male migrants to seek job opportunties abroad. **The possibility of recruiting men is beginning to be seen as a good opportunity** by PEAs, both because it means new clients and new earnings (the law authorizes the agency to collect the first salary as payment for the services offered, and these salaries are higher than those of women, as they are skilled or semi-skilled workers), and because they create fewer problems, than women, for PEAs in terms of protection and relations with the families of origin.

Furthermore, in order to promote all migrants -both male and female, skilled and semi-skilled - the governement of Ethiopia could establish bilateral labor agrement with destination countries **beyond domestic work**, including in farming/agricolture, construction, security, etc.

On the other hand, the lack of opportunities for regular channels for males probably stems from the fact that the demand for low-skill jobs (shepherds, farmers, manual laborers, ...) in Arab countries, fails to be organized and managed by local authorities. Significant labor demand for these occupations exists but depends on highly **informal sectors in Arab countries**. Migration of Ethiopian minors and youth continue every year but this all happens irregularly because the target labor market is also irregular. While that for domestic women is more regulated and refers to the kafala system. Consequently, women are realtively more protected with regular channels than male.

Nevertheless, the presence of girls and young women in irregular migration routes continues to be relevant[61]. This is primarily because not all women qualify to meet the documentation requirements, including skills training and CoC. Some may not have ID cards to access passports, which are mandatory to use the legal channels. Acquiring all the documentation and pursuing the legal pathways is slow and time-consuming as we have already stressed and will elaborate in the following paragraph.

The third deficit involves eligibility requirements: access to documentation in a reasonable cost and time is key to encourage regular migration. One of the requirements for registration with the

[61] IOM (2025), Migration along the eastern route, Report 58, 6 March 2025. See https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/2024_Yearly_Eastern_Route_Report.pdf

MoLS is **a Kebele ID** - which is issued upon turning 18 years old. IDs and travel documents like passports—which are required to access legal pathways—are difficult and quite expensive to obtain for migrants who usually come from poor families. Having access to Kebele ID cards is not easy in the rural villages or urban areas, including for returned migrants. It takes long time and sometimes is unaffordable for vulnerable communities.

Another applicable requirement - which migrants face - is the requirement of having **a passport** according to responses from private recruitment agencies interviewed for this study. In Ethiopia, this is one of the most difficult and pricy documents to acquire as a national. Passports are released only in Addis Ababa. Therefore, working to ensure ease of accessing passports for all citizens will support the effectiveness of regular pathways in the context of East Hararghe.

The fourth deficit is represented by time, cost, accessibility of services, and prospective earning. Almost all respondents of the discussions claimed that **irregular migration is cheaper and takes less time** as compared to regular migration. It is therefore key to make the process more financially accessible and reduce the time it takes to complete the migratory process.

The length of process of regular pathways is an important deficit: the regular migration scheme under the MoLS to mitigate irregular migration to the Gulf also has a number of processes that take time. Namely, the migrants must first have proper documentation including Kebele ID cards, passport, insurance, police check, health check, training and CoC. They should also need to find an employment agency which directs names to the Ministry.

About the cost, the FGD with returnees revealed that regular migration is particularly expensive when it comes to migration to Saudi Arabia (the largest recipient of Ethiopian workers in the Gulf region). However, many of the participants **do not have accurate information on the costs** involved in migrating abroad on a regular basis. The assumption is that it is costly and expensive to travel to Addis Ababa, and then to the Gulf countries. Lack of information on legal migration pathways is a key challenge, as described before.

Collected information show a slightly lower cost of regular emigration than of irregular emigration (14,200 vs. 15,900 ETB), and that employment agencies asks for fees that, according to the overseas proclamation 2021, they should not demand, increasing the real cost of regular pathways. **In this regard, it would be important to have constant and comparative monitoring of formal and informal costs, and a strict and regular control on PEAs.**

According to respondents, **the initial cost** of migration is much less in irregular migration when compared to regular migration. The FGDs with returnees, students, and non-students, despite higher risks associated with it, consider irregular migration less costly and easier to initiate. For instance, non-school students claimed that it takes over 30,000 ETB to migrate regularly while it costs less than that to do so through irregular means. **But no one knows what is the final cost of migrating irregularly.**

However, the initial cost is a key factor - especially considering that a majority of potential migrants are from **poor families** that do not have the means to make such payments (passport and medical check). The scheme to cover transport cost and visa fee by employers once the process is complete may be a good practice here. This is what already occurs for the emigration of young women in some countries (i.e., Lebanon for domestic workers). A contributing factor is that a limited number of migrants **in the rural villages** of Dire Dawa are migrating through legal channels. Migration channels through legal ways are not diffused in rural areas. Rural population is not aware on the regular opportunities that, furthermore, are more expensive in terms of accessibility. Households that are poor and live in rural settings appear more discriminated in accessing regular channels, and seem to have no choice but to rely on the irregular one.

Furthermore, workers who want to migrate abroad must complete **medical checks** before departure, but these are only available in a few official centers, mostly in Addis Ababa. This makes it hard for people from rural areas, who have to travel long distances and spend a lot of money on transport, accommodation, and the tests themselves. For many young and low-income migrants—especially women—these costs can be too high, delaying or even stopping them from completing the official process. Because there are so few centers, they can also become overcrowded, with long waiting times. This creates opportunities for informal brokers to take advantage of migrants who want to get checked faster. Some migrants skip the official medical checks or use unlicensed brokers instead, which undermines efforts to ensure safe and legal migration. Overall, having only a few centers makes access unfair and pushes some people toward irregular migration.

Another factor to consider in favor of choosing the irregular channel is **the better prospect of wage adjustments than the regular channel.** Irregular migrants can access to increasing wages in the Arab countries' labor market over time as their skills and ability to disentangle themselves in the local relationship system grow. On the other hand, regular migration pathways are contract based. They are schemes that allow Ethiopian migrants to move and work in Gulf countries for a particular employment sector – which is limited by duration and amount of pay. To the contrary, irregular migrants are in a position to work in different sectors, under different employers so that they can negotiate their own salaries with possibly progressive increments. While it is not as straightforward as this, this was highlighted by the returnees and potential migrants that participated in the study. For economic migrants - whose primary motivation for mobility is a better income - this is a key feature that must be addressed if regular migration pathways are to be effective. For example, if a migrant reaches the destination country and gets abused or experiences an unfavorable working environment, he/she can switch to another employer. This is not possible when a person migrates on a regular basis due to the Kafala system.

A fifth deficit concerns the access and capacity of recruitment and training institutions. The prospective migrants must complete a 21-day **Technical and Vocational Education and Training** (TVET) program before taking the Certificate of Competency (CoC) exam. But, staying at the training centers is expensive, particularly for those from rural areas, as accommodation and travel costs are not covered. Shortening the training could reduce costs but risks compromising the quality of skills, which affects employment opportunities abroad. Respondents from TVET, employment agencies and the ministry stressed on the lack of human-power, resource, and facility as a key obstacle to promoting regular migration. For instance, the respondent from Afra Recruitment Agency claims that lack of support to potential migrants from government and recruitment agencies in the form of accommodation, transportation and food has forced a lot of trainees to abandon rigorous training that happens 5 days a week for 8 hours a day. In addition, the adverse impact of irregular migration brokers in Ethiopia and Gulf states was identified as a key challenge affecting the work of the recruitment and training institutions. Ability to recruit ethically was suggested by the respondents as an important added value of the regular channel.

While observing the TVETs in Dire Dawa, they lack adequate equipment and materials that would allow potential migrants to use and practice before their departure. The lack of adequate skills also reduces the government's negotiating capacity to set a minimum wage, for example. It has been noted in other instances that employers in Arab countries hire experienced fellow Ethiopian domestic workers to train newly arriving domestic workers for several weeks.

Migrants must **match with an employer** before departing. This step is especially challenging for those outside urban centers such as Dire Dawa. Rural migrants often have to relocate to complete training and find an employer, incurring additional costs and logistical challenges. This lengthy and expensive process frequently discourages migrants from participating in the formal pathway. According to recruitment and employment agencies interviewed in Dire Dawa, these barriers contribute to high dropout rates. In contrast, irregular migration is much simpler, requiring only

contact with brokers or informal intermediaries, making it more attractive for many prospective migrants.

Together, the combination of centralized medical checks, costly and lengthy training, and employer-matching hurdles creates a system that is difficult to navigate for rural and low-income migrants. These barriers reinforce **inequities in access and inadvertently push some migrants toward irregular migration channels.**

Table comparison between costs/benefits of regular and irregular migration systems

Pros and cons of the regular system	Pros and cons of the irregular system
Costs, complex and lengthy legal procedures. Slow bureaucracy Cost is an issue: to get a passport one need at least 5000 ETB and wait for several months; if one needs an urgent service has to pay between 20,000 to 25,000 ETB. Transport and accommodation costs to get documents, to make the health check and to attend the training are relevant for young and families from rural areas.	Fast "procedures" and low initial costs, but expenses can increase along the journey; possible ransoms to pay; unpredictability of the costs; debt to pay when arrived.
Formal contract and income established from the beginning, but no possible improvement.	No contract. Informality, but opportunities to increase earnings.
Insufficient or inaccessible documentation Extensive documentation is required. Many potential migrants lack necessary documents (passports, ID cards), health certificates, certificate of conduct from Police, CoC certificates, etc making regular migration difficult and expensive.	No documentation requested but informal obligations and no formal support. High human and monetary risks
Limited access to information and official support Lack of information and awareness about legal migration options. Insufficient official support services, especially in rural areas, leads to reliance on smugglers and irregular routes. No access or limited access to internet: migrants may not have smart phones; or broader virtual social networks to rely on for information; may not be able to read and write or have access to Internet.	Informal social networks support irregular migration Established migrant networks and smugglers facilitate irregular migration, making it more accessible than legal routes. But some migrants especially women and girls may have limited social networks to rely on.
Scarce capacity and resources of institutions and employment agencies for recruitment and training.	No training costs. Easy access to brokers and their "services".

Finally, a discussion about regular and irregular migration pathways has been conducted with local stakeholders about **return, reintegration and remigration trends**. The return and sustainable reintegration of migrants is one of the key objectives of the GCM, with Objective 21 emphasizing the

importance of dignified return and adequate support to ensure reintegration. Without adequate support, local persistent socio-economic challenges make **remigration a recurring strategy for migrants**. Structural issues such as limited livelihood opportunities, family strain, and unmet expectations often lead returnees—particularly youth—to consider migrating again, even through the same irregular routes they previously endured.

Despite migration—be it formal or informal—being a key aspiration of youth in the DD city administration, respondents indicate that **remigration is not as prevalent** as one might expect because of economic and human costs. Across the city administration and rural kebeles, remigration is largely discouraged by financial exhaustion, psychosocial trauma, and weak reintegration mechanisms implemented by authorities. Remigration is also limited by financial constraints. This is because families, especially rural ones, often invest substantial amounts—frequently selling land or livestock—to fund travel and support one migration attempt, leaving little to no capacity for a second attempt at remigration. In some cases, this initial experience ends in imprisonment, deportation, or loss, which deters both the migrants and their families from trying again.

Despite **limited reintegration support**, returnees (especially youth) frequently express a desire to migrate again, driven by persistent poverty, family tensions, or failure to reintegrate into their communities. Several respondents reported that the **aspiration to remigrate remains strong**, particularly among returnees who experienced broken family ties, lacked psychosocial support, or returned to communities with limited livelihood options. Inability to pay off loans to cover migration costs also play a relevant role in shaping the re-emigration behaviour.

In such cases, returnees—especially younger ones—tend to migrate internally to cities like Dire Dawa or Jijiga in hopes of earning enough money to try again. Urban migration is often a steppingstone for re-migration, with returnees relocating to cities like Dire Dawa or Jijiga to earn money and plan another attempt at migration, frequently through irregular means. For instance, CIFA and PAD report that even returnees who benefited from financial and psychosocial support were found to be remigrating, often via the same irregular routes. Teachers and community leaders also noted that these youth, once exposed to life abroad or in transit, often become restless and unwilling to reintegrate locally.

Despite this, community elders and families (especially those who suffered financial ruin) discourage further migration attempts, creating a tension between economic aspiration and communal caution. In sum, irregular remigration in Dire Dawa is economically constrained but emotionally persistent, reflecting **a broader national situation: limited legal options to move, weak reintegration systems, and irregular migration as the only option to escape poverty**.

5. Recommendations to improve the right to stay and the right to move through regular migration at 18 age

This final section indicates key recommendations on how to improve the right to stay, the protective factors, and the right to move in a regular way, of young people. It tries to respond to the issue of staying until the legal age of 18 and to move, if necessary and desired, after this age. The recommendations are the result of an analysis conducted with various local stakeholders and incorporate suggestions made by children and adolescents, taking into account the constraints that exist in the context.

Recommendations are directed mainly to the local government and a supportive international development cooperation in complementarity with local and INGOs.

1. Sustaining the right to stay with protective factors

Obviously, the main protective factor is an environment that provides children and adolescents with the essential conditions for leading a healthy life, with quality educational services and a stimulating family and community that nurtures the growth of their talents and their ability to actively participate in local sustainable development. The local context in Dire Dawa and especially in rural villages is difficult and requires **significant investment in social services and in the labor market**, on capacity building in both public and private services, in environmental adapatation and infrastructure.

The local government with international cooperazione should invest on specific protective factors highlighted by stakeholders.

The first factor identified consists in **family and community protection** with the need to improve **non violent education and communication** among family members and local actors (community and religious leaders, teachers, …), as well as a better understanding of the rights to stay and to move.

Abolishing harmful traditional practices is a direct measure to improve protection. As noted above, harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and GBV are important in the area. These practices force girl students to stop education and at times escape into irregular migration to stay away from the forced early marriage. Those that don't find themselves divorced, on many occasions, have to leave their children with their parents and embark on irregular migration routes. The issue of selectively sending children to school, whether based on number or gender, requires careful consideration. In these instances, it is necessary to **support the livelihoods of very vulnerable families**.

The school system and other institutions need to take into account **gender issues** such as the needs of single mothers, women returnees and their children. Protection needs of women, sexual and gender-based violence and migration, should be **integrated into the school curriculum.** Moreover, **gender club** must be strengthened, and engaging boys and men is also critical.

Additionally, it is essential to incorporate **family planning education**, given that the community experiences a higher number of children per household. Family planning education and practice should consider the social and religious backgrounds of the community.

Parents, teachers, and community leaders should educate themselves and others about **nonviolent education**. Distributing simple **toolkits and resources** on developmental psychology could help in this endeavor, with the aim of creating educational communities in the area that are capable of nurturing the talents of children and adolescents. One of these toolkits could be provided to parents

to recognise their children's desire to emigrate at an early stage, accompanying them with real information and support for a regular migration.

Investments in formal and informal education are essentials. Almost all respondents stressed on investing in increasing and sustaining the enrollment and improving **the quality of education** as key areas of work to curb child migration. Introducing and widening schemes such as **school feeding** and creating **recreational facilities** represent other important factors for a sustained enrollment of children in the East Hararghe region.

Other crucial measures indicated are: providing access to school materials for disadvantaged families on a regular basis; introducing school IGAs (income-generating activities) to support vulnerable children; sustaining female-headed households with access to financial services (loans, training, etc.) in collaboration with micro finance institutions.

Transport accessibility is another protective factor to sustain school enrollment and attendance. Transport services improvement and provision of bonuses to pay for transport services may increase the school accessibility. When and where possible, the establishment of new schools in villages accessible to students is also key as some children must walk up to 55 kms to attend schools. Accommodation, transport, and meal needs should be provided.

Primary schools exist, and it is essential to progressively upgrade them to **secondary education**. While teachers' capacity to offer better quality education should be improved to support adolescent opportunity to **pass national exams**.

Informal trainings focusing on **life skills development** and the realities of migration were also suggested by respondents. The life skills development as well as secondary education should be based on the needs of local **labor market assessment**, which requires conducting and updating this assessment on a certain interval, taking in account the rural-urban divide and respective opportunities available.

Information on how to **invest remittances** for improving enrollement and school attendace and generally on family wellbeing, also with financial education, could be another useful activity fostering protective factors, especially in locations where such remittances are increasing.

Concurrently, while working on education there is also a need to **create rewarding job opportunities** in Dire Dawa and other parts of the region. Local development is a complex job that needs relevant investments from local goverment, international cooperation and private sector. Improving the local labour market is a medium-long term process. In the meantime, the difference in income between Dire Dawa and other foreign opportunities continue to be important and function as the main driver of emigration. For this reason, **the right to remain cannot be separated from the right to move.** Alongside protective factors for remaining, those that enable regular and safe migration must be improved.

This means strengthen awareness-raising campaigns in Dire Dawa and surrounding villages **about regular migration options** and not only on the risks associated with irregular migration. Such campaigns can be carried out at the family, school and community levels, using religious institutions and other community-based interventions. Regular community conversations along with a structured guideline can improve access to information and to the regular migration system. Engaging returnees to share their migration experiences with school and out-of-school children is key, as they could potentially be the most trustworthy information providers. They directly speak from their own experiences and they can show problems and opportunities of the regular system versus the irregular one.

2. Sustaining the right to move in a regular way

Sustaining the right to move in a regular way should be considered as a complementary protective factor. Moving safer and with good opportunities to work and earn a decent salary protect young people from riskier irregular routes and exploitation. The Ethiopian migration policy deserves attention and support. Its promotion and enforcement of regular pathways must be sustained investing in the strenghtening of local regular migration systems. International development cooperation, such as the Italian and European ones, should invest in the Ethiopian policy because it responds to the needs of local populations, especially the youth. Support to regular migration means opening job and earning opportunities, fighting poverty and social distress, reducing irregular migration risks. This needs a strategy composed by several operative measures that we summarise in the following paragraphs.

The first operative measure consists in offering **legal migration pathway information and comprehensive services** with efficiency and accessibility, for making real the right to move. It aims to contrast the perception that the regular migration process is slow and time consuming. A more proactive approach that promotes legal migration is necessary.

Investment in diffusing information in rural villages and strenghtening the capacity of local public services to provide awareness rasing and information with diverse stakeholders is a priority. An information system capable to counter that of brokers is needed. Local public services should strenghten the collaboration with teachers, religious and community leaders, especially in rural villages, PEAs and TVET: all together in a systematic way they should create campaigns with simple toolkits to diffuse extensively good information on existing legal channels, burocracy process, costs and time, work opportunities and cultural characteristics abroad, and return conditions.

The public widespread perception that irregular pathways are timely and cost efficient must be challenged by the regular system. It would be important to have **constant and comparative monitoring of formal and informal costs** between regular and irregular pathways in order to improve the regular conditions. More government officials should create trust with local communities, sharing information and collecting criticisms and suggestions for improving the service.

Second, specific operative measures concern the improvement of the system for making it credible, timely, easy, and accessible. This means:

- improving burocracy and the timing for a **better access to ID**, especially in rural villages, certificates from the police, and **to passport**, overcoming the service concentration in Addis Abeba. A **decentralisation** effort is needed to bring services closer to rural populations.
- Improving access to **medical checks and certificates** through several measures. First, the government could open more authorized medical centers outside Addis Ababa, especially in regions where many people want to migrate. Local hospitals and clinics should be trained and equipped to provide the same quality of medical checks as the main centers. Costs for the tests should be controlled, and financial support could be provided for low-income migrants, while employers or recruitment agencies could help share some of the costs. A simple digital system could track which centers are approved and issue certificates electronically to prevent fraud. Finally, local labor offices and community organizations should share clear information about where and how to get official medical checks and warn against using unlicensed brokers. Together, these measures could make pre-departure medical checks more accessible, affordable, and safer for all migrants.
- Expanding the services of **private recruitment agencies** to provincial areas, particularly in zonal towns and cities, and their capacity to work better with public services;

transparency should be placed on linkages between these agencies and informal recruiters; possibly a simple formalisation of those recruiters should be proposed.

- Improving **TVET equipments and capacity** in offering useful training and skills for migrants, helping them to find **accomodation and transport** solutions at better price, or creating student housing. Furthermore, **awareness raising** of prospective migrants on the need to improve their skills and language should be promoted, because this open the way to better salaries and more capacity to protect their rights.
- Creating **skill partnerships** with training centers in Arab countries, in order to follow and sustaing migrant capacities also in the destination country.

Third, operative measures for improving **protection in regular migration pathways** should be strenghtened, and this could be achieved by:

- **enhancing migrant protection along official channels**, ensuring that prospective migrants receive clear information about their rights, procedures, and entitlements from pre-departure to employment abroad.
- **Strengthening monitoring of PEAs**: regularly audit their recruitment practices, fees, and compliance with labor regulations to reduce opportunities for exploitation.
- **Supporting and oversight for migration counselors and labor attachés abroad**, ensuring they provide timely guidance and assistance to Ethiopian migrants, particularly in cases of disputes, exploitation, or irregular practices by intermediaries.
- **Increasing transparency of costs and fees**: publishing standard rates for medical checks, training, recruitment, and certification to prevent migrants from overpaying.
- **Diffusing community awareness campaigns**: educating high-migration regions about safe and regular migration channels, clearly differentiating them from informal brokers.
- **Recognising of offenders**, improving the ability to defend themselves, using mobile phone and social networks for protection, and improving complaince mechanism.

Fourth, other important operative measures should respond to specific important issues that limit migrants' preference for regular channels; they include rural conditions, fewer opportunities for men, the kafala system for women and the lack of prospects for better contracts, and finally scarce transparency of costs.

As mentioned above, the poor **rural conditions** and distance from Dire Dawa mean higher costs for accessing the regular channel. Consequently, in addition to making services more accessible by bringing them as close as possible to the rural villages, for example with equipped campers, collective trips to the city could be organized with scheduled appointments at public offices.

In order to **improve regular pathwys opportunities for men**, it would be essential for the Ethiopian government to negotiate with Arab governments the inclusion in bilateral agreements of the possibility of managing regular channels for certain sectors with significant labor demands for male. It is equally important that Arab governments ensure respect for workers' rights and their protection. This requires a strong formalisation of local destination labour markets that depends by the political will, interest and capacity of Arab countries. International cooperation could support these requests with the Ethiopian government.

Another issue that limits interest in joining regular channels is the existence of **the kafala system** for women, which forces female workers to depend on their employer, without the possibility of seeking other job opportunities with better conditions. Overcoming this system is important in general to give migrants more opportunities, thereby also improving the skills and contribution they can make both

in the destination country and in their country of origin through remittances and returns. To this regard CeSPI has already carried out a study on the migrant female domestic labourers between Ethiopia and Lebanon that has put forward several recommendations for improving their conditions[62].

About gender issues, **new labour opportunities** other than domestic workers could be indentified improving the profiles and earning opportunities for women. Quality of traditional jobs could be improved aspiring to better salaries, like for nursies, improving their skills.

Irregular channels are characterized by **a lack of transparency as well as by a great unpredicatibility**. Irregular migrants know the initial costs but not the intermediary and final costs. They know when they are leaving but not if and when they will arrive, or in what conditions. It is therefore primarily on this point that leverage should be applied to encourage migrants to choose the regular channel: it should offer greater transparency and predicatibility regarding costs and times. The information system mentioned above and the operational capabilities of the various actors in this system should provide reliable, clear, and useful information for planning migration, in contrast to the irregular channel.

Finally, several studies have been conducted on the dangers of irregular migration along the Eastern route, while few have investigated the problems of regular channels and the possibilities of expanding and improving them, ensuring greater safety and better opportunities for migrants and their families. It is therefore hoped that in the near future **more attention and research will be paid to regular pathways** in order to promote greater investment on regular and safer youth mobility.

[62] "cespi_donne_lavoratrici_domestiche_migranti_etiopia_libano_final.pdf " in the framework of the project "Securing Women Migration Cycle. Assistance, Protection and Return Program for Migrant Women in Lebanon. The Ethiopia Focus" (AID 011 645) financed by the Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo.

Annex on Research Tools

Information and data have been collected with several stakeholders of the migration system through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), and specifically:

- 6 interviews have been conducted with officers of Federal ministries: Ministry of Foreign Affair, Ministry of Labour and Skills, Ministry of Justice.
- 5 interviews to International Organisations and NGOs/research centers: IOM, ILO, UN Women, Addis Ababa University, CETU (Confederation of Ethiopia Trade Union).
- 13 interviews to local stakeholders (public officers, NGO/development experts, school teachers, school directors; religeous leaders) in Dire Dawa**:** Bureau of Labour and Skills; Bureau of Women and Social Affairs; Save the Children Dire Dawa Office; Bureau of Education; PAD (Positive Action for Development); Community Initiative Facilitations and Assistance (CIFA-Ethiopia) and Kalicha Kebele Head.
- 2 interviews to private employment agencies on their role and on weak points, obstacles, possible solutions for improving the regular channel for overseas employment
- 19 interviews to parents of drop out children and 19 dropout students potentially interested in migrating.

Eight focus groups discussions (FGDs) have been carried out in Dire Dawa, in Kurtu and Kalicha rural villages, and in Ganda Garada secondary school.

- 2 FG with students of secondary schools (male and female, aged 10 to 17) on regular/irregular migration and protective factors
- 2 FG and 6 individual interviews to teachers of secondary school.
- 1 FG with non-students (male and female, aged 15 to17 in Dire Dawa), on the assumption that young people in the city is more oriented towards emigration and perceive more gaps on regular/irregular migration and protective factors
- 1 FG with 10 returned young migrants (5 male and 5 female) specifically on their experience with regular channel (young migrants more than 18th years old who have experienced regular mechanisms), on how they would like to improve the mechanisms, and with young migrants, particularly minors, on what protective factors were lacking for choosing irregular emigration, and what they would like to have for staying or to postpone the emigration choice
- 1 FG with teachers of TVET in Dire Dawa implementing preparation courses for emigrants about weak points, obstacles and solution for improving the courses.
- 1 FG to would be migrants attending the preparation courses about weak points, obstacles and solution for improving the courses

Elements for semi-structured questionnaire for the implementation of FGs and personal interviews

Those that follow are some suggested issues to be submitted during the focus groups and interviews, susceptible to improvement and change, after some testing.

Focus group with students (**S**) (secondary school- sample can be at least partially identified during the pre-selection of households for drop-out research), non student (**NS**), returnees (**R**).

1) **The "Right" age to emigrate (S/NS/R)**

   At what age do you think children of your village start thinking about emigrating?

   At what age is one really ready to emigrate? Are there differences in this between boys and girls?

   Do you believe that the reasons your peers emigrate are the same as the reasons older people emigrate? And what, if any, are the differences?

   Do you think there are advantages or disadvantages to emigrating before becoming an adult? If yes, which ones? And are there differences in this between boys and girls?

2) **Protective factors to stay (S/NS/R)**

   In your opinion/experience, what are the things that could make one stay or postpone emigration until reaching the age of 18? Which are the most important things? (this question make sense also for returnees, i.e: What are the protective factors that reduce the risk of irregular re-emigration?)

   Collect information on which are the protective factors according to them; if they do not answer properly, you could stimulate them proposing some factors such as:

   [Enjoying a favorable family situation both economically and in terms of intra-family relations; secure access to feed daily; secure access to health support, secure access to social services, secure access to electricity and water, attend a good school, enjoying a good relationship with schoolmates, peers, and neighborhood, access to leisure activites (sport, games, readings, arts,), have opportunity to access to skill training, good work condition (payed job), have access to information on existing opportunities at local level, other …]

3) **Regular or irregular? (S/NS/R)**

   In your opinion/experience, if one decided to emigrate when he/she is 18th years old, do you think it would be easier to do so through regular or irregular channels? And why? Is there difference between boys and girls?

   Collect information on which are theyr preference on regular or irregular channels and why; if they do not answer properly, you could stimulate them proposing some factors such as:

   [In terms of cost and ease; in terms of timing; in terms of risks (both during the journey and at the destination); in terms of success (in the sense of actually succeeding in emigrating); in terms of outcomes and improvement (in a broad sense, not just economic) of one's own and one's family's well-being, Other] …

   Which one (regular/irregular) do you think is better? and why? Are there differences between boys and girls?

If you were to decide to emigrate legally, would you know how you would arrange emigration? Who would you talk to? Where would you look for the information you need? Who would you ask for help?

What if you were to decide to emigrate irregularly instead?

Do you believe that it is easy/possible to emigrate legally from your village? If yes, do you think it is equally easy for boys and girls?

[i.e., can you access complete information, agencies, pre-departure training, get the necessary documentation, **...]**

If, on the other hand, you believe it is not easy, could you explain why?

What are the things that could help one in deciding to migrate on a regular basis at 18 age?

[Items to be discussed: Access to more information in my village/quarter; Office Accessibility; Assistance in procedures, Certain established times of the procedures, easier access to your passport, access to skills training pre-departure, reduced travel costs, employment access / security, Wage security, Remittance security, Other …

4) Schooling

To Students in secondary school (S):

*(in connection with the research on "**Drivers of school dropout and migration aspirations: evidence from Dire Dawa by** Anna Ferro and Girmachew Adugna).*

If you are currently enrolled in a secondary school, can you explain to us:

Have you ever faced any risk of school drop-out/not going to school so far? (can you make examples)? Why your friends from secondary school stop going to school? Who decides or who influences on this decision?

What are the most important conditions/factors that determine that a kid goes on to the secondary school (or not)? Is it the same for boys and girls?

What would you suggest to change in the secondary school system to favour school access/and limit school drop out?

What are your personal aspirations ➔that the secondary school can offer to you?

To NON – students (NS)

Why did you stop going to school? Who influenced this decision? Is it the same for boys and girls?

To what extent has the school offered you a useful preparation to face situations in life/work?

If you could go back in time, would you reconsider going to school? Why? To do what?

What are your personal aspirations ➔that the secondary school didn't offer to you?

What would you suggest to change in the secondary school system to limit school drop-out and improve life preparation? for boys and girls?

5) Decision-making process that leads to emigration of minors (S/NS/R)

In your experience, when a boy/girl decides to emigrate, does he/she talk to someone within the family about it?

[if yes, who are the people in the family with whom one normally talk about this choice (father, mother, siblings, uncles, cousins, family members abroad...)? And why? If not, why do you think one did not share with family members this choice? Are there differences between boys and girls?]

- *Do he/she usually involve other peers?*

  [If yes, in what ways?]

- *Are there other people it is important or usual to talk to, when one starts thinking about or arranging emigration?*

  [brokers/agents; peers who have emigrated and returned, school teachers, religious figures, important people in the village, village elders].

  Is the opinion of family, friends/peers able to influence the idea of emigrating (or not emigrating)?

  [If yes, in what ways?]

  Based on your experience, are there specific triggers (sudden/unattend event?) that pushed your peers to emigrate?

  [sudden illness or death of a family member, disputes in the family or with neighbors, missed harvest, severe drought, etc.]

6) Returning to stay or returning to go abroad (R)

Introductory question on reasons for returning

In your opinion/experience, what are the main difficulties that people who return after a migration experience abroad find? Are there differences between girls and boys?

[in terms of psychological well-being, economic and labor reintegration, social relations etc.].

Are difficulties different for those who migrated legally and those who did so irregularly?

Who could help people who return in facing these difficulties? how? Are there differences between boys and girls?

[what role and functions could play family, friends, local authorities and social service, charities associations, school and training centres, private sector (local firms, private employment agency) ...]

What are in your opinion/experience the most relevant protective factors that may prompt a returnee to stay? Are there differences between boys and girls?

What, by converse, those that may prompt him/her to re-emigrate? Are there differences between boys and girls?

In your experience, do those who re-emigrate do so regularly or irregularly? Why? and with respect to this choice/possibility, is there a difference between those who had emigrated legally and those who had emigrated irregularly? and are there differences between boys and girls?

In case of drop out, why did you stop going to school? Who influenced this decision? Is it the same for boys and girls?

To what extent has the school offered you a useful preparation to face situations in life/work - mostly abroad?

If you could go back in time, would you reconsider school? Why? To do what?

What are your personal aspirations today ➔ are you interested in returing to school? What school?

What would you suggest to change in the secondary school system to limit school drop-out and improve life preparation (and migration)? for boys and girls? Should secondary school prepare students in emigrating and/or stay?

The following points have not "first" priority, they are already analysed in several researchers, but they could be proposed … if time is available in the FG or in individual interviews

7) **Perception of emigration (S/NS/R)**

What does emigration represent for you guys?

- [The facilitator may suggest to participants to reflect on pairs of opposites, considering emigration as: a danger/an opportunity; a choice/an obligation; a way to escape the family/a way to help the family]

8) **Causes of migration (S/NS/R)**

*In your opinion/personal experience, why your peers emigrate or wish to emigrate**?***

It is important that the discussion does not end with general considerations (widespread poverty, lack of jobs, ec..) but deepening on the family situation, the situation at the local and village level, the role of peers, and the personal aspirations of those who emigrate. Also is important to remarks existing difference between boys and girls.

9) **Enabling factors to emigrate: (S/NS/R)**

Which are conditions/elements that make it possible to emigrate as a minor?

[courage, self-confidence, physical endurance other skills (which ones?); Parental permission/endorsement; Having minimal economic capital; Having links with familiar/friends abroad; proximity to transportation; Having access to information through internet/phone, other...]

Individual interviews or FG with t**arget families of young students in secondary school/non-students**

- *How many sons/doughters do you have? How many are emigrated and are planning to emigrate? Who stay?*
- *What are protective factors you need the most for your son/daughter?*
- *What do you need to plan a regular migration of your son/doughter?*
- *Why is secondary school important for your kid/s? Who influences on the decision to go on or to stop going to school? What are the conditions that determine one or the other decision?*
- *What would you suggest to change in the secondary school system to limit school drop-out and improve life preparation (and migration)? for boys and girls?*

- *What could encourage families to send kids at school? (what incentive?)*

Individual interviews to **local public offices** in charge of protective factors and/or regular migration

- *What are the gaps in the labour market and in training/eucation?*
- *What are your activities for improve young integration in the labour market? What for protective factors? What for support to regular migration?*
- *What are problems in your service? What do young people ask for?*
- *What are possible solutions?*
- *Why is secondary school important? Who influences on the decision to go on or to stop going to school? What are the conditions that determine one or the other decision?*
- *What would you suggest to change in the secondary school system to improve the school access, limit school drop-out and improve life preparation (and migration)? for boys and girls?*
- *What could encourage families to send kids at school? (what incentive?)*

Individual interviews or FG with **local private employment agencies**

- *What are your activities for support to regular migration?*
- *What are problems in your service?*
- *What are possible solutions?*

Individual interviews or FG to **teachers of secondary school**

General considerations on the migration situation in the city/neighbourhood/village

Profile of the young people most at risk of irregular migration (family background, personal inclinations, school success, relations with other pupils, ...)

Role of peers in promoting/disincentivising irregular migration, which other key figures?

Opinion on the school/migration nexus, school dropout as a consequence of the choice to migrate or vice versa?

*Activities carried out by the school to inform about the risks of irregular migration and/or to promote initiatives that can 'keep the children', offering protective factors: [*awareness activities, initiation into training activities, promotion of sociability through recreational activities, confrontation with families, tolerance for prolonged absences, remedial paths for those with deficiencies etc.....*]*

What are things that would help you in improving your teaching/school environment in terms of protective factors? With what kind of coordination with other public/private actors in the area? What subjets shall be included in order to limit school dropout?

What could the school do to inform and prepare adolescents about the possibilities of legal emigration?

What information you need in helping young students to decide to stay or to move regularly instead of irregularly?

Focus group with **community leaders/community coalitions**

- *Is young (less than 18 years old) emigration increasing in the last years? What are main causes? and enabling factors?*
- *What are protective factors that your community could/should improve?*
- *What are services that should be provided to young people for supporting their choice of regular channel?*
- *Why is school important (primary and secondary)? Who influences on the decision to go on or to stop going to school? What are the conditions that determine one or the other decision?*
- *What would you suggest to change in the school system to improve the school access, limit school drop-out and improve life preparation (and migration)? for boys and girls?*
- *What could encourage families to send kids at school? (what incentive?)*

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