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FROM SCHOOL DROPOUT TO MIGRATION: EDUCATION DISENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH MIGRATORY ASPIRATIONS

EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELDWORK IN DIRE DAWA – ETHIOPIA

A STUDY TO UNDERSTAND ROOT CAUSES AND IDENTIFY POSSIBLE PATHWAYS FOR INTERVENTION IN A CONTEXT OF HIGH SOCIO-ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY IN 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 the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

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Introduction

This document presents the findings of a study conducted by CeSPI to explore the drivers of school dropout and their links to youth migratory aspirations in Dire Dawa – Ethiopia between 2024 and 2025. The study is part of the *Ten-4-all project* led by Save the Children and financed by the Italian Agency for International Cooperation (AICS) – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Maeci).

The overall goal was to understand the socio-economic, environmental, and psycho-social factors behind school dropout, the relationship with migration intentions, and what local conditions and initiatives could reduce dropout (and possibly diminish child migratory pressure).

Understanding the multiple causes of school dropout, and their intersection with youth migration, is essential. These dynamics reflect both the **impact of household poverty** (children leaving school because families must reduce educational expenses or rely on their labour) and the ways in which **migration becomes a perceived solution to poverty** (children migrating to increase family income). Analysing this interplay enables policymakers and practitioners to design interventions that not only strengthen education systems, but also address the economic and social pressures experienced by families. From this perspective, **education policy must be linked to broader strategies for employment, social protection, and migration management.**

Data evidence from fieldwork in Dire Dawa shows that **dropping out of school is both a symptom and a driver of migration**. Both are the **outcomes of poverty and systemic fragility**. The analysis suggests that tackling school dropout requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses not only direct school-related costs, but also the broader socio-economic vulnerabilities that induce children, especially girls, to remain out of school (and – for some of them – to opt for migration). Integrated interventions in Dire Dawa are needed that combine economic support and resilience, food security, gender-sensitive community engagement, and awareness raising initiatives.

This study consists of an opening *background framework* on the link between school dropout and migration and a *context analysis* collecting secondary data and desk information on Ethiopia and Dire Dawa. It then illustrates the findings from the fieldwork in Dire Dawa including: (1) the *methodology* of qualitative/quantitative data collection, (2) *local context* highlights and (3) the *socio-economic conditions* of the households' interviewees. The fieldwork findings of the analysis offer evidence of: (1) the dropout *drivers*, (2) the *climate change* impact, (3) the *interlink* between education and migratory aspirations, (4) the *local stakeholders* and (5) possible conditions and initiatives to reduce school dropout (and diminish early and risky migration).

The study relies on literature review and on qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

This document is part of a broader research scope that includes also additional and complementary information[1] addressing a *literature review on school incentive mechanisms*, which informed three case study analysis aimed at guiding action on school dropout and migration.

[1] https://www.cespi.it/it/ricerche/contribuire-al-raggiungimento-delloss-10-promuovendo-rafforzando-linclusione-sociale

BACKGROUND FRAMEWORK

Rationale of the study on school dropout and youth aspirations to migrate

Human capital formation is a central pillar of development, representing both a public investment and a household commitment[2]. It is primarily built through national education systems, which provide individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for social and economic progress. In many low income/developing countries, nevertheless, not all children, and especially girls, are in the condition to attend school[3].

Current gaps exist in enrolment and learning achievements in primary and secondary education (Sparreboom and Staneva, 2014). In many sub-Saharan African countries, the transition from primary to secondary school can be difficult. Almost 65 million secondary school age youth are out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa[4]. The consequent effect is a high rate of school absence and dropout and an increase in child work and child early migration risk.

In Ethiopia the formation of human capital faces serious constraints. While the country is experiencing rapid population growth, limited are the economic opportunities and limited is the access to secondary schooling and vocational training, affecting especially remote areas and marginalized communities. This mismatch creates **pressure on households**, especially those with many dependents and limited income. Families are often forced to make difficult choices about education. Even though primary schooling is officially free, attending school still generates costs. These include **direct expenses** (such as books, uniforms, and transportation) as well as **indirect** ones, since children who spend time in school are not available to support domestic tasks or contribute to economic activities. As a result, **the opportunity cost of education is high, particularly for poor families.**

Additionally, intrinsic **motivations for school dropout** often arise from a lack of interest or commitment to continue education, largely due to the **poor quality of early learning**. When children fail to acquire foundational skills (reading, writing, and basic numeracy) at primary school they struggle to progress and gradually lose motivation. As **Gustavo Arcia** notes (2014), without solid basic learning, later education yields little benefit, leading to frustration and early withdrawal. Evidence shows that children in developing countries, especially in rural areas, rarely reach expected grade-level competencies (Bold et al. 2017; Pritchett 2013). It is highlighted that there is an urgent need to prioritize education quality (…), particularly reading, a foundational skill critical for success in school and later in life (Usaid, 2023). **Strengthening early learning,** as case studies suggest (Eble et al., 2019[5]), is essential to reduce dropout and possibly lessen the subsequent early migration risk in migration prone areas.

These barriers explain the persistence of school dropout, especially among vulnerable groups (as girls, children in rural areas, and low-income households). For many young people, **dropping out of school is also linked to migration dynamics.** Migration, whether internal or international, is often perceived as a more immediate path to survival and opportunity than remaining in school.

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[2] World Bank. 2019.
[3] World Bank. 2018.
[4] UNESCO-UIS, September 2019.
[5] A study in 169 small villages/schools in The Gambia, applying an approach previously tested in India, shows that low learning outcomes in remote/rural areas can be improved with massive combined interventions and tools: para teachers delivering after school lessons; an improved, scripted, and targeted curriculum; and extensive monitoring of the para teachers. The policy response depends on whether this solution can be operationalized within the government system, or contract it out. (Eble et al. 2019; see also USAID, 2023, for other examples).

The migration-education link

Migration is a significant phenomenon in Ethiopia today, involving adults, but also children and young people[6], especially through Eastern Hararge/Dire Dawa. Unaccompanied child migration (the mobility of individuals under 18 without guardianship) is prohibited under Ethiopian labour and education laws, and thus constitutes an illegal practice. To reduce such outflows, policy efforts should aim to make early migration a less necessary and less attractive option.

According to previous studies in the target areas[7], **unaccompanied child migration** from Ethiopia through irregular routes implies high risks (abuse, violence, exploitation)[8]. It is estimated that approximately 7.200 Ethiopian migrant children use the Obock route (via Djibouti) each year[9]. Along this corridor, most young migrants are between 14-17 years old, although cases of 8 years old children have been documented (Zeleke, 2018). In 2018 and 2019 an average of 19.000 Ethiopian children (below 18 years old) entered Yemen (representing 14% of all recorded migrants)[10].

At the same time, in Ethiopia, almost **80% of the population lives in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture**, despite the gradual expansion of urban industrial and service sectors (UN 2017[11]). The share of young people with formal education (mostly at primary level) is steadily increasing; the same population is not necessarily willing to remain in rural areas or work in agriculture[12]. In recent years, government concern about urban youth unemployment has led to policies aimed at discouraging rural exodus[13]. Internal migration and urbanization are taking place in the country also affecting traditionally agrarian regions.

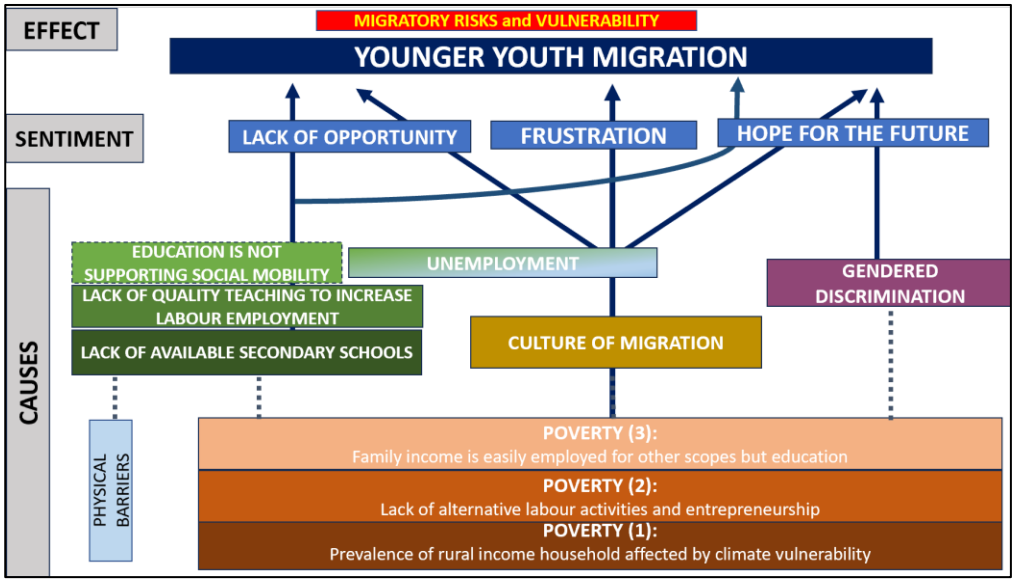
A study on **youth migration aspirations across five Ethiopian regions**[14] (Schewel and Fransen, 2018: p. 565) found that 68% of youth expressed a migratory desire, of whom 26% wishing to go abroad (equivalent to 16% of the total sample). In general migration in Ethiopia is primarily motivated by a search for employment and education. **The study highlights that the desire to internally migrate (to urban areas) correlates with the educational attainment**: those who completed primary or secondary school are more likely to aspire migration compared to those without formal education. The authors highlight: "*more general aspirations for the future, and the confidence to achieve them, are forces driving the aspiration to migrate*" (2018: p. 573). Conversely, the poorest and less educated individuals more likely prefer to stay where they are.

However, **education** (particularly at primary and secondary level) does not emerge as a strong predictor of **international migration aspiration.** On the contrary, other factors such as gender (especially female), previous migration experience and feelings of self-confidence and hope for the future play a more decisive role. Wealth status, economic and occupational ambitions shape the desire

[6] REF (2017); IOM (2020 a).
[7] Save the Children: 2017, 2021: IOM: 2019, 2020.
[8] Research Brief. UNICEF, November 2020. Ending violence, abuse and exploitation of migrant children and young people.
[9] Or 600 per month, many leaving from or passing through Dire Dawa Save the Children, (December 2020). Boys and girls are equally present among child migrants in 2019, Trends, factors and risks of unaccompanied child migration from Ethiopia through the east migration routes)
[10] IOM (2020).
[11] United Nations Statistics Division. 2017
[12] This is also due to land scarcity; lack of government investment in small-scale agriculture or rural infrastructure; insufficient rural job creation; and environmental degradation (Bezu and Holden 2014; Ya, 2016).
[13] Promoting rural students to be absorbed in agricultural labor (FDRE 2003 - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). 2003. *Rural Development Policies and Strategies*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development) or regulations prohibiting sale of land, loss of land rights for those who leave rural areas (Dorosh and Schmidt, 2010).
[14] The regions are: Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). The study analyzed data from the Young Lives survey (2013/14) with a final sample of 823 individuals 18-19 years old.

to leave, more than formal education, although in complex and varied ways. Additionally, different types of schooling can also influence trajectories and aspirations**:** rural education initiatives (Kwauk and Robinson 2016[15]), vocational and technical diplomas, and continuing education opportunities can affect young people's propensity to stay or move in distinct manners.

The policy implications of these findings suggest that that expanding access to formal education, while beneficial, may have also mixed effects on mobility dynamics. As Schewel and Fransen conclude: "*expanding opportunities for secondary schooling to rural areas* ***might decrease the immediate need to migrate for education****; however, the* ***gradual accumulation of human capital*** *among rural residents may also increase the likelihood of their out-migration in the long-term*" (2018: p. 579).



Author's graph based on literature review analysis and fieldwork evidence

A study by the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) Consortium[16] explored the relationship between TVET, youth **employment and migration in Ethiopia and Uganda**[17]. Based on data collected in Amhara and SNNPR regions, the study found that TVET graduates are generally more mobile[18], particularly toward urban areas, than those without such training, while showing less inclination toward international or irregular migration (REF 2019, p. 40). At the same time, migration aspirations were not a primary motivation for young people's participation in TVET programmes.

Rising levels of education and training can be possibly associated with a greater propensity to move, but it can also mitigate migration pressure. As Dustmann and Glitz (2011) note, migration and education are indeed intertwined, but their interplay depends on the ability of local labour markets to absorb newly acquired skills. Comparative evidence (Bernard and Bell, 2018) confirms this dynamic: in contexts where education is rewarded with adequate employment opportunities, enhanced human capital may strengthen retention rather than trigger emigration. Migration, if not matched by domestic

[15] Kwauk, 2016.

[16] "The Impact of Youth Training and Employment on Migration Dynamics in the Horn of Africa", 2019. Focused on fieldwork in the Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regions, both characterized by out-migration and TVET public investments. The quali-quanti methodology includes 600 respondents and over 70 semi-structured interviews with a TVET students and providers (https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2020/02/TVET.pdf)

[17] https://www.oefse.at/fileadmin/content/Downloads/Publikationen/Briefingpaper/BP26-Migration-and-TVET.pdf

[18] Due to the more developed skills to access to and manage information, to the more articulated aspirations, to the increased portability of skills in other places, to the impact of wage differentials etc.)

opportunities, can erode human-capital both abroad and at home (Navarro 2024). Ginsburg et al. (2016) argue that improving human capital may offer domestic opportunities, reducing the need for emigration if local labour markets can absorb skilled workers.

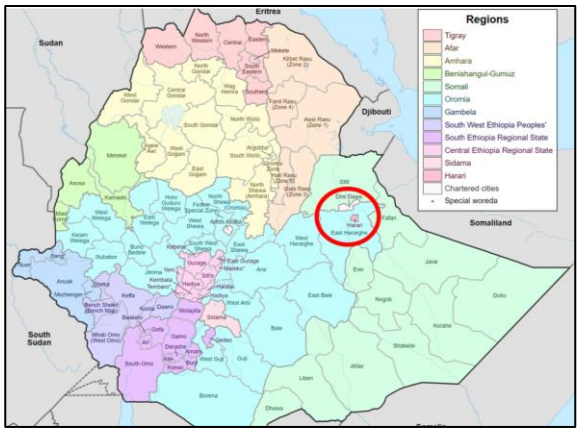
On one side, improved education and training can **expand migratory aspirations** (as more people can aspire to migrate, especially where expected returns abroad are higher than at home). But on the other side, education can function also as a **protective factor**: if domestic labour markets offer decent jobs and opportunities, improved human capital may retain potential migrants; better skills may lead to better wages and stability at home, reducing push factors. Thus, improving education and human-capital formation does not mechanically lead to higher migration, but instead affects the **balance between push and pull factors** - and under favourable conditions, it can mitigate migration pressure. To conclude, investing in education and training is not only compatible with reducing outward migration - under the right economic and institutional conditions, but it may become a key ingredient of national development strategies.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

1. Education challenges and dropout in Ethiopia and Dire Dawa[19]

1.1 Socio-economic conditions in East Hararge - Dire Dawa

The East Hararge region, bordering the Dire Dawa Administration, faces rapid population growth and growing food insecurity, driven by land degradation, low soil fertility, climate change, and extreme weather events affecting agriculture-dependent households. Basic infrastructure and services are limited, and the area is prone to localized conflict. Youth face restricted access to quality education and adolescent services, including reproductive healthcare, while opportunities for decent employment, microfinance, and economic inclusion remain scarce.



Source: File: Ethiopia adm location map.svg: User:NordNordWest Derivative work: User: SUM1 - Created from File: Ethiopia adm location map.svg by User:NordNordWest[20]

The Dire Dawa administration, with an estimated population of 521,000 (urban and rural areas combined[21]), is predominantly inhabited by Oromo and Somali communities. It comprises two woredas (urban and non-urban), 9 urban kebeles, and 38 rural kebeles[22]. Dire Dawa faces multiple challenges related to social, economic, and human wellbeing.

Rural households mostly depend on agro-pastoral livelihoods (involving cattle, sheep, goats and camels); the agricultural sector for crop production is today very vulnerable to recurrent droughts**.** The agricultural economy of Dire Dawa rural kebeles is affected by climate variability; many rural inhabitants move to the city due to land scarcity, shortage of water for irrigation, poor soil fertility and severe food insecurity.

[19] See annex tables offering with further data details.
[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Hararghe_Zone#/media/File:Map_of_zones_of_Ethiopia.svg accessed June 2024.
[21] https://diredawa.gov.et/#:~:text=DIRE%20DAWA%20INDUSTRY%20PARK%20*%20Established%201894,Km%C2%B2%20*%20Population%20521000.%20*%20Elevation%20255. It was 435.000 in 2023, https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/dire-dawa-population, site accessed 10/11/23
[22] Kebeles (village communities) are neighborhoods made up of 150- 300 households. Woredas are made up of a number of kebeles.

Urban Dire Dawa functions as a major hub for transport, trade, communication services and human mobility. Since the construction of the railway in 1902, the city has developed, gaining also a reputation for its post-contraband economy[23]. Ethiopia's foreign trade heavily relies on the port of Djibouti, connected to Dire Dawa by rail, reinforcing cultural and commercial ties between the two cities. Due to its strategic location, Dire Dawa also serves as a key migration entry and transit point[24]. Many internal migrants arrive with intentions of onward migration (towards Sudan–Libya–Europe, Djibouti-Yemen-Saudi Arabia/Gulf States, or South Africa), but some settle in the city (Feyissa, 2018). Environmental degradation, drought, and famine have contributed to the growth of a vulnerable street child population, particularly visible in the Kezira neighbourhood (Feyissa, 2018: p. 21).

Youth unemployment represents a major challenge and a policy priority at both national and administrative levels[25]. In Dire Dawa, local labour market tensions arise from work competition between native residents and rural or regional migrants[26]. Migrant workers are often preferred for daily wage labour, particularly in the construction sector, as well as for seasonal and domestic work, due to the lower wages they accept and the prevalence of exploitative employment practices.

In **2022**, the **unemployment rate** in Dire Dawa administration (rural and urban) was 23,8% (34,4% female and 14,1% male). Informal employment accounted for 19% of the workforce[27]. Among the **youth population** (aged 15-29; 51.848 persons), 34% were unemployed (24% men, 41,9% women).

A key urban pull factor driving youth migration from rural to urban areas in Dire Dawa is the **limited access to basic social services, particularly education and healthcare, in rural kebeles.** As noted by Feyissa (2018: 6), "*there is no high school in rural Dire Dawa, and students (…) who wish to continue their education must go to Dire Dawa to do so, resulting in a large student migrant population*." Only three junior high schools (above grade six) serve the 38 rural kebeles, and their geographic distance from many villages forces students to relocate to the city to pursue their studies (Feyissa, 2018: 34). Educational access is especially constrained for girls[28]. In 2007 the Dire Dawa Administration, in partnership with UNICEF, established a hostel in the city specifically to accommodate female students.

In 2022, the regions of Afar, Oromia, Somali (Soomaali Galbeed), and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) - which border Dire Dawa and East Hararge - were severely affected by drought following three consecutive failed rainy seasons. The resulting water scarcity disrupted economic activities and displaced many families, leading children to drop out of

[23] https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2020/02/Expectations-and-belonging-in-Dire-Dawa.pdf

[24] Trade in contraband represented a lifeline until the 1990s; increased border controls and stricter law enforcement limited this economy. Regardless of the existing risks (of confiscation, extortion and punishments – Esayas and Mulugeta 2020), informal cross-border trade is still running. Nevertheless, it difficult to distinguish formal from informal vendor activities (engaging mostly engages migrants, youth and women) in the city (Dube, 2021). In 2022 Dire Dawa Free Trade Zone has been inaugurated, to improve Ethiopia's economy by boosting import and export trade (https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_37794). Additionally, rural areas around Dire Dawa enter the khat economy involving farmers and (local, regional and international) traders.

[25] Among the Dire Dawa urban kebeles, micro and small enterprises (MSEs) are engaged in small scale manufacturing, service and retail trade/shops sectors; they all need public/private support in business development, including capital asset formation and expanding sales and employment levels. Supportive and reinforcement activities are needed "to bring the jobless youth to the business of MSEs" (Eshetu et al. 2013: p. 28).

[26] "Anyone with a kebele ID card is recognized as a legal resident of the city and entitled to all rights reserved for the native population, including access to jobs" (Feyissa, 2018: p.19).

[27] https://ess.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2022_1st-Round-UEUS-Key-Findings.pdf

[28] It is reported that female genital mutilation and early marriage are widely practiced in rural Dire Dawa.

school either to search for water or due to forced migration[29]. In response, UNICEF launched the *Bete /My Home* programme[30], offering children aged 6–18 safe spaces for *accelerated learning and skills development within an integrated education and child protection framework.*

Ethiopia, and the eastern regions in particular, remain highly vulnerable to climate variability, with limited adaptive capacity. As environmental conditions continue to deteriorate, the compounded impacts of climate change are likely to increasingly affect children and young people, especially in rural and marginalised communities.

1.2 Education system in Ethiopia and its challenges

Most of the population in Ethiopia is young[31]: the 39% of the population is aged 0-14 and the 33% is 10-19.

The education system in Ethiopia[32] consists in pre-primary school, followed by 12 grades: ***primary school*** includes two cycles (grades 1-4 and 5-8) and ***secondary school*** (grades 9-10 and 11-12). Primary education students are between 7-14 years old. The *Education Sector Ten-Year Strategic Plan* (2020–2030) underlines that free and compulsory primary education shall be implemented in Ethiopia[33]. The government also introduced the *Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap* (2018-30) to transform the education and training system[34]. With the support of the *Education Sector Development Programs VI* (2020/21 - 2025/26), mechanisms to identify out-of-school children are to be locally adapted, and alternative primary school modalities provided (MoE, 2022).

In the last two decades, a **public effort improved rates of primary school enrollment and accessibility**[35]. Funding strategies[36] have led to an increase in school enrolment as a result of free education[37], but the **quality of education has not overall improved**. Access to secondary schools is

[29] https://www.unicef.it/media/etiopia-6-8-milioni-di-persone-avranno-bisogno-di-assistenza-umanitaria-a-causa-della-siccita/

[30] https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/media/5526/file/Bete%20factsheet.pdf

[31] World Polulation Dashborad, UNFPA, https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/ET

[32] The main guiding document of the Ministry of Education is the Education Sector Development Plan 2020-2025. The education system in Ethiopia is made up of the Federal Ministry of Education, Regional Education Offices, Zone (district) Offices, Woreda (circuit) Offices and finally Kebeles (Egziabher, 2010). "The Federal Ministry of Education sets national standards and education programming, including the curriculum for secondary and higher education. The Regional level manages primary and secondary education, vocational schools and teacher training institutes. The Zones education offices have a role of coordination and assistance and woredas administer basic education services, including primary schools" (Oumer, 2009, p 25).

[33] https://www.adeanet.org/sites/default/files/publications/ethiopia_ict4e_country_profile_report.pdf

[34] https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/ethiopia_education_development_roadmap_2018-2030.pdf

[35] "Ethiopia's National GER has increased for both cycles of primary education over the last two decades. GER for the first cycle of primary education consistently increased until 2015/16; since then, it has been gradually declining. GER for the second cycle of primary education has relatively consistently increased since 2000. This highlights the issue of children repeating first cycle grades, or dropping out of school altogether, indicating low levels of transition from the first to second cycles of primary education", MoE, 2022, p. 11.

[36] Public spending on education sometimes is allocated in ways that exclude poor and marginalized children, reinforcing existing inequalities between socioeconomic groups (https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/education-finance-using-money-effectively-is-critical-to-improving-education).

[37] Woredas can raise funds for education: one of the strategies is the involvement of women and farmers in decision making when it comes to mobilizing resources for the schools (Oumer, 2009). The community is therefore involved in decision making in regards to education. International donors and NGOs are also contributing to school financing in Ethiopia.

lower[38]. Secondary and particularly tertiary schools are more often located in urban areas, determining the so-called "migration-for education" of rural students (Crivello 2011).

Many are the challenges of education system in Ethiopia that affect its capacity to meet the basic educational needs of children[39]: a general low quality of the education[40] and teachers' preparation, low salaries, lack of adequate funding, basic school supplies, facilities and school space (overcrowded classes with up to more than 60 pupils)[41]. Differences exist between urban and rural and remote areas' education access and availability, also considering a *significant nomad population*. The robust persistence of social norms, gender stereotypes and barriers for girls' participation in primary and mostly secondary education. In the last few years, the Ethiopian public school system has suffered from armed conflict crisis, COVID-19 and indirect impacts of climate conditions (droughts, extreme events, climate change), especially affecting agriculture-based family incomes and regional economies. As a result, literacy rates in Ethiopia are extremely low: about half of the male population is literate; literacy rate estimates for the female population range from about one-third to two-fifths.

1.3 Why do children dropout in Ethiopia

The reasons why kids drop-out from school in Sub-Saharan countries[42] depend by different factors[43]. At policy level, the state allocation of sufficient/insufficient resources and the commitment for an inclusive education system, especially to reach marginalized segments of population and to target dropout kids, girls and children with disabilities (Inoue, 2015). At the individual or household level, other factors refer to the kids' age, gender, interest in school, the education level of the parents, presence of economic barriers, nature of cultural and religious beliefs.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, in 2017, only 17% of the girls were enrolled in secondary school (Basa, 2017). Gender equality in education is an important development goal, but in many Sub-Saharan countries gender stereotypes and restrictions exist – with male and female youth socialized to different productive and reproductive roles, overall limiting or preventing mostly girls to participate in formal or informal schooling. The impact of poverty in education is largely transferred on girls, compared to boys[44].

[38] Secondary education within urban enrolments is estimated to be 85%-92%, while in rural enrolments it is estimated between 8%-15% (JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency). 2012. Basic Education Sector Analysis Report: Ethiopia.)

[39] https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/media/486/file/UNICEF%20Ethiopia:%20Education%20Advocacy%20Brief%20.pdf

[40] Primary school pupils are poor in basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy and the illiteracy rate among children of secondary school age in Dire Dawa is 38% (Unicef, 2020).

[41] The other constraints from the external environment that impact on the educational development in the Sub-Saharan region include economic vulnerability, demographic pressure, weak governance, ongoing conflicts, a prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other health concerns (Unesco, 2020).

[42] Literature distinguishes out-of-school youth weather kids never attended school, kids left school completing at least 12 years of schooling or after completing secondary school (Jimenez et al., 2007). Out-of-school youth are more likely to come from poorer households with fewer working or educated adults, live in rural areas and be female (Inoue et al., 2015).

[43] https://mastercardfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Alternative-Education-and-Return-Pathways-FINAL.pdf

[44] Families will lose a valuable work contribution (at home or in family income activities as in agriculture, in the market) if girls go to school (Rihani, 2006).

In Ethiopia, based on the Socioeconomic Survey[45] data, the different reasons explaining why household members **never attended school**[46] refer firstly to **cultural barriers** (in total 46%) **within the family and in the local context,** including parents' lack of school consideration (15,4%) and opposition to schooling (6,7%), general lack of interest (8,4%), (presumed early) marriage (8,9%) and ignorance (6,6%). Secondly are **barriers from the external context** (in total 9,4%), as the unbearable physical distance of the school (9,2%), and less importantly for the presence of conflicts and risks for security (0,2%). Thirdly, there are **economic reasons** liked to the constraints of the family income (in total 8,6%): the too high cost of the school tuition (2,1%), family income needs (at home or for a job) (4,9%), and lack of money (1,6%).

Moreover, the reasons mentioned to explain why household members **are not currently at school** (at the time of the survey), mostly refer to ***lack of time/interest*** (23,4%), ***marital obligations*** (31,7%) and ***lack of money*** (13,3%).

While the 91,3% of kids were *not absent* from school for more than a week continuously, 8,7% actually were. The reasons explaining their absence refer primarily to ***work duties*** (41,6%) and *health problems* (31,7%).

The majority of kids go to school by **foot** (85,9%), followed by taxi and moto-taxi. For almost half of the kids (45,5%) the time required to go to school is up to 15 minutes, followed (35%) by 30 minutes and (10%) 45 minutes.

1.4 The magnitude of school dropout in Ethiopia and Dire Dawa

According to data available (EMIS database 2019/20, in MoE 2022, p. 11), the 82,9% of 7-14 years old population in **Dire Dawa** was attending school, while 17,1% were out-of-school children. Data confirm a higher **school dropout in Ethiopian rural areas**, among boys and girls, compared to urban areas[47]. The percentage of school dropout in Ethiopia is lower for **kids aged 10-14**[48] (28,3% for girls and 23,8% for boys) compared to the cohort **15-19** (44% for girls and 41,5% for boys).

At national level, the **dropout rate is particularly high in grade 1, but also in grade 5 and 8,** suggesting low transition rates from the first to the second cycle of primary, and from primary to lower secondary, respectively. Likely causes of dropout have been identified as socio-economic and cultural barriers in both urban and rural settings, poor school infrastructure, poor preparation at the pre-primary level, and lack of school feeding in some areas (MoE 2022, p. 12).

[45] The survey is a collaborative project between the Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) and the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study-Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA) team. A total of 6770 households from 535 enumeration areas were interviewed. Respondents are 53,2% rural (SAQ14: Rural/Urban), 11,8% from Oromia Region (where East Harage is) (SAQ01: Region code), 51,5% being women. Eee detailed tables in the annex section (2018-19).

[46] Excluding the too young ones, that are not yet school-age.

[47] Aged 10-14 and 15-19.

[48] The highest school attendance rates are recorded in Addis Ababa among children aged 10-14 (92,9% for boys and 88,1% for girls), compared to all other regions.

Primary-school-aged OOSC and enrolled children (7-14) by region and sex

Region	Population	Attending primary	Attending Secondary	% Attending Primary or Secondary	Not attending (OOSC)	% Not attending (OOSC)
Addis Abeba	52073	46927	11926	92.4%	39534	7.6%
Afar	392029	130832	806	33.6%	260391	66.4%
Dire Dawa	**85940**	**70813**	**444**	**82.9%**	**14683**	**17.1%**
Oromia	9084859	7635455	12969	84.2%	1436435	15.8%
Somali	1381226	632004	10386	46.5%	738836	53.5%
Total	22815802	18199294	73881	80.1%	4542627	19.9%

Source: Population Projection from UNDP, EMIS Database and authors calculation 2019/20, in MoE (2022), p. 13 (National study on the magnitude of out-of-school children in Ethiopia)

Based on enrollment data for Dire Dawa (2018/19 and 2019/20), participation in primary schools highlights a large over-age school population[49], a significative percentage (34%) of out-of school primary age children in grade 1[50]. A need is evident to improve access to the second cycle of primary education and to generally reduce the number of out-of-school children[51]. For secondary schools' participation, the transition from 8th to 9th grade is a bottleneck especially for girls and rural children[52].

In Ethiopia, nearly 2.8 million (51.7%) of **children of lower-secondary-school** age are out-of school (OOSC), 53.5% of which are girls. A large proportion of 15- and 16-years old children are still in primary school, being overage learners (MoE, 2022, p. 16). In **Dire Dawa**, 47.7% of 15-16 years old children are out of school, 19.7% is properly enrolled in secondary school while 32,7% is still in primary school.

1.5 Dire Dawa dropout data

During fieldwork, obtaining detailed and up-to-date data on the urban and rural population of the Dire Dawa Administration proved problematic. Even where detailed data exist, they are often difficult to access[53]. Available data for 2023 and 2024 indicate relatively low recorded dropout figures in Dire Dawa[54]: In 2024, only 8 students were registered as having dropped out from urban secondary

[49] Children younger than 7 years and older than 14 years.
[50] This refers to children supposed to be in primary school/grade 1 according to their age but are not. In the surrounding regions as Afar and Oromia this percentage of Out-of-school-children (OOSC) is much higher. See table.
[51] In Dire Dawa in 2016/17, the survival rate to Grade 5 (completion of first cycle) was 51% (Unicef, 2020). More generally, the predominantly pastoralist regions of the country, Afar and Somali have the highest proportion of OOSC (2019/20).
[52] The overall dropout for grades 1-8 in 2019/20 was 15% for girls and 13% for boys. Compared to 2017/18, the dropout for grade 1-8 in Dire Dawa increased (10.6%), and the repetition rate was 7.9 %.
[53] Generally, data collection in disadvantaged and geographically dispersed contexts presents significant challenges (in terms of financial, human, and technical resources and territorial coverage). These constraints affect the availability, reliability, and timeliness of information. In particular, information on school dropout rates in Dire Dawa was received only after the selection of the field sites, limiting its utility in guiding research design. Additional security issues also limited fieldwork possibilities.
[54] Including all woredas (districts) and Kebeles (villages/neighbourhoods): Asaliso Cluster, Biyo Awale Cluster, Jaldessa Cluster, Kebele 03, 08, 09, Wahel Cluster.

schools. In contrast, primary school dropout figures were higher in rural areas (44) compared to urban areas (2), with certain clusters exhibiting a disproportionate concentration of cases.

Dropout primary schools - Rural Woredas - Dire Dawa	Male	Female	Total (absolute nr)	Concentration of dropouts:		Fieldwork sites:
2024 (*2016 Ethiopian calendar*)	28	21	**49**	44	Wahel Cluster, Wahel school (majority of dropouts in grade 1)	Kalicha and Kortu schools, within the Biyo Awale cluster = 0 dropouts
2023 (*2015 Ethiopian calendar*)	28	22	**50**	*50*	Jaldessa Cluster, Legedini school (all dropout in grade 1)	
Dropout primary schools - Urban kebeles - Dire Dawa	Male	Female	Total			Gende Gerada Primary School, within Kebele nr 9 = 0 dropouts
2024 (*2016*)	1	1	**2**			
2023 (*2015*)	13	11	**24**	24	Kebele 8, Ale-Ershda Primary School	
Dropout secondary schools - Urban kebeles, 2024 (*2016)*	Male	Female	Total			
	3	5	**8**			

Source: Dire Dawa administration, Education Bureau (All DIRE DAWA; TYPE_SECTOR Primary and Secondary; TYPE_LOCATION Rural and Urban) (2023, 2024).

At the same time, information gathered during the fieldwork in Dire Dawa from parents, dropout students, and local stakeholders point to a much broader and more fluid phenomenon of school dropout than is not captured in official statistics. These accounts suggest the presence of a significant number of unregistered or undocumented dropout cases.

Information collected among 38 interviewed persons in Dire Dawa on the presence of dropout family members.

FIELDWORK EVIDENCE (2024/25)	School-age children/ siblings (age 7–16).	Of whom dropout
19 parents of dropout students	89	26[55] (29%)
19 dropout students	38	11[56] (29%)

[55] 17 at the primary level and 9 at the secondary level.
[56] 7 at the primary level and 4 at the secondary level.

Information provided by the school director of the Kortu/Khalica School (rural kebele) in 2024, during fieldwork

Khalica	Grade 1-8	Grade 9–12	Dropout rate
Total students **1.343**	906 (518 boys and 388 girls)	437 (314 boys and 123 girls).	95 students (7,1%)

While absenteeism and dropout are recognized as widespread issues in the study area, data seem to possibly underestimate the true scale of the problem. Several informants noted that dropout figures should be interpreted with caution; underreporting these numbers might avoid reputational damage or perceptions of underperformance among teachers, school principals, and education officials.

EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELDWORK IN DIRE DAWA – ETHIOPIA

2. School dropout and youth aspirations to migrate

2.1 Methodology[57]

The research in Ethiopia was conducted by a team of local and transnational experts through several field visits (April 2024, August 2024, and May 2025). The local team carried out individual and group interviews, administered questionnaires, and collected available secondary data. The area of investigation was identified in collaboration with Save the Children's local staff, including both urban and rural contexts (Kalecha and Kalicha Kebeles). However, some fieldwork was limited due to security concerns and logistical challenges[58].

The research employed primarily a qualitative methodological approach, centred on in-depth interviews to dropout students, families and key informants[59] and on focus groups[60]. The content of the interviews was subsequently incorporated into a structured questionnaire, enabling the qualitative insights to be explored through quantitative analysis as well.

The information was collected from the following interviewees:

- **19 parents of school dropouts**: 11 women and 8 men (10 mothers, 7 fathers, and 2 siblings), 14 from rural kebeles and 5 from urban areas. All of them have dropout dropout: 7 parents had children who dropped out of primary school, and 16 parents had children who dropped out of secondary school. The average age of respondents was 42 years. On average, each parent had 4.6 school-aged children (mode: 6; median: 4.5), with family sizes ranging from 1 to 10 children.
- **19 school dropouts**: 8 females and 11 males, 9 from rural and 10 from urban kebeles, with an average age of 18.5 years. These students were not the children of the parents interviewed.
- **13 local stakeholders** in Dire Dawa: including public officials, development practitioners, education representatives, school staff (teachers and school directors), and religious leaders.

Given the aim to understand the root causes why children dropout, interviewees were selected based on the following criteria: parents of children who had dropped out of school, and students who had dropped out after completing either the first or second cycle of primary school (grades 6 to 10[61]). The identification of interviewees (parents and students) was supported by Save the Children's local staff in Dire Dawa, with the cooperation of school directors and teachers. Respondents were selected randomly and independently of their involvement in the Ten4All project. The selection was not based

[57] See annex tables offering with further data details.
[58] Fieldwork activities had to adapt to school and agricultural on- and off- activities, with efforts to engage with parents and students. As the research area is situated in a disadvantaged region, locating parents who receive remittances proved to be difficult. The Save Children (SC) Branch office in Jigjiga is located in the eastern region, while the SC office in Dire Dawa serves as a liaison office. Physical distance has been a barrier for some research activities.
[59] Key informants in Dire Dawa include: local government offices as the Bureau of Children and Women Affairs Office, Labor and Skills Development, and the Education Bureau. Information was also collected thanks to the Migration Task Force Office and Labor Market Office.
[60] In parallel with another project activity on "legal vs illegal migration pathways," eight focus groups were held, involving youth (students and non-students), returned migrants, prospective migrants, TVET and high school teachers from Dire Dawa and rural kebeles.
[61] Except from one case who dropped out in grade 2.

on a statistically representative sample, as the research aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the drivers of school dropout in an area particularly prone to child migration.

Originally conceived as a pilot, the research aimed to collect accurate information on household conditions and local root causes influencing school dropout and its potential linkages to migration. One of the project's goals was to visually represent part of the research findings: the schools were mapped, and some of the data collected is now available through an online dashboard.

ONLINE OPEN ACCESS CHARTS, BASED ON FIELDWORK ANALYSIS, Jacopo Ottaviani

1	Dire Dawa survey response	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/VC8Bq/
2	Map of Dire Dawa schools	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/HJLpE/?v=3
3	How many respondents have electricity?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/qOOHy/?v=2
4	How many respondents have internet at home?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/qwrGI/?v=4
5	How many parents and students have phones?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/qox7E/?v=2
6	Main reasons why youth drop out from school	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/yR8QY/
7	Who in the family mainly took/takes the decision of school dropout?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/4348G/
8	Who can affect the decision not to go to school?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/ZEVIv/
9	Who can affect the decision to go to school?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/HwN9l/
10	How is migration perceived by youth?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/bVjIR/
11	Why young people migrate in the area?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/O6EOo/
12	Who are the key persons that can influence the child migration decision?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/fw9hL/
13	Who in the family mainly influences the child migration decision?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/rgN5h/
14	What could concretely encourage families to avoid school dropout?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/IhjFj/
15	What subjects could be reinforced or included in school to improve and make it more interesting for families and students?	https://www.datawrapper.de/_/Uc4p5/

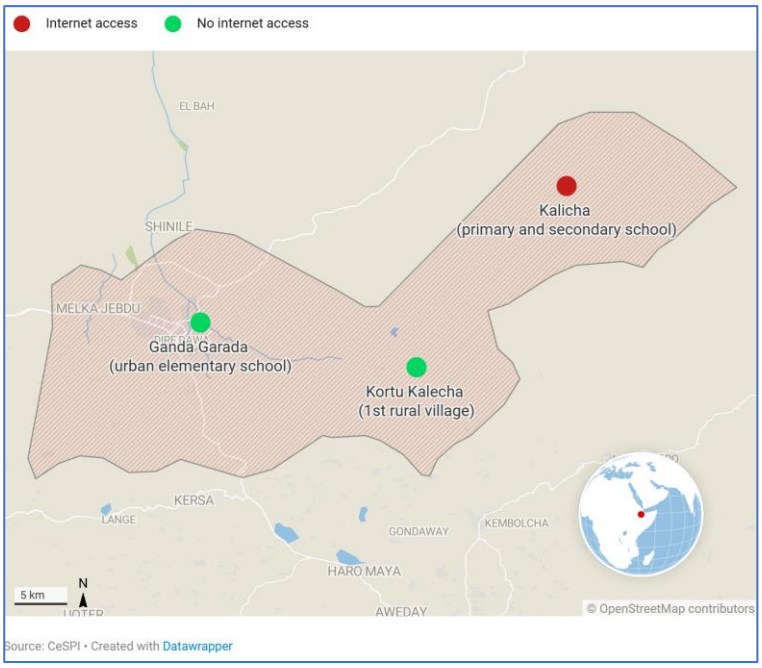
2.2 Local context: an impoverished area has little to offer to local youth

Confirming what the context analysis shows, the fieldwork highlights both economic and non-economic challenges affecting the population in Dire Dawa, particularly youth. The information here reported is based on interviews with local stakeholders, parents of dropout students and dropout students.

The area suffers from widespread poverty, offering few opportunities for local youth. Contributing factors include rapid population growth, high youth unemployment, dependence on subsistence

agriculture - vulnerable to climatic shocks[62], especially drought, and limited access to potable water. Economic opportunities are scarce: small-scale farming cooperatives, low-wage urban jobs (e.g., taxi driving), or employment in the local industrial park. These jobs are often poorly paid (e.g., 3,000 birr/month) and fail to meet young people's expectations. These limited opportunities influence youth perceptions of their future and increase the appeal of migration.

Dire Dawa, schools mapped as part of the fieldwork in Ethiopia; information on schools' internet connectivity.



Visual representation, J. Ottaviani

Beyond economic hardship, a number of social vulnerabilities affect the local population. These include widespread use of khat (local drug) among youth, family disruptions (e.g., divorce, death of breadwinners), inter-ethnic tensions, domestic violence, and early marriage.

Child labour is commonly reported in both urban and rural areas. In the city, children are involved in activities such as car washing, waste collection, and baggage carrying. In rural areas, children are engaged in tasks such as fetching heavy water containers from long distances, agricultural work, herding, and harvesting. It is frequently reported that school dropout occurs when families send their children from rural villages to urban centres for work. In these cases, children face increased risks (including exploitation, physical violence, and exposure to hazardous work) especially in the absence of protective factors such as family support, school engagement, or local community.

2.3 Socio-economic conditions of respondents' households

The **multidimensional nature of poverty in the area reflects a combination of economic and non-economic disadvantages**. Most interviewees reported frequent or occasional **difficulties in securing enough food for all family members**, they cited **serious economic hardship** and difficulties in meeting basic household expenses. Similarly, they all reported **struggling to invest in activities to**

[62] In Ganda Ganda and other urban areas of Dire Dawa, many residents are internally displaced due to past flooding and rely on precarious daily labour, such as selling fuelwood.

improve households' livelihoods, such as building or repairing shelters, purchasing new seeds or tools for farming, or acquiring a motorbike for transport or work.

DATA VISUALIZATION ON SOME HOUSEHOLD'S RESPONDENTS CONDITIONS

- ❑ How many respondents have internet at home?
- ❑ How many parents and students have phones?
- ❑ How many respondents have electricity?

Unemployment, the lack of capital for income-generating activities, and the inability to sustain farming or animal husbandry were identified as the most common causes of household hardship. Sudden events (such as the illness or death of a breadwinner) were often mentioned as critical turning points that worsened already fragile household economies. **Divorce was also cited as a contributing factor in some cases.**

Beyond economic constraints, many highlighted **health-related vulnerabilities** within their households. Half parents and dropout students mentioned serious health issues affecting family members (including epilepsy, HIV, physical disabilities, chikungunya, dengue, and malaria). Other cited challenges include the impact of internal family problems, particularly *domestic violence.*

Environmental and climate-related shocks - especially drought - **were widely reported as major drivers of poverty.** Respondents described how unpredictable rainfall patterns have negatively affected both agricultural and livestock activities, causing crop failure, livestock loss, and even the destruction of homes and shelters due to heavy rain. A large proportion of parents declared that climate change has had a substantial or moderate impact on their household's income and economic activities.

Profession of the respondents

Parents		***Dropout students***	
10	Farmers	6 (6 urban; 1 rural)	Workers (mostly occasional farmer, daily labour, driver assistant, selling tea in the street)
4	Daily labour	7 (4 urban; 3 rural)	Stay home and help (child bearing, cleaning)
3	Small traders	6 (rural)	Other /unemployed
2	Housewives		

Dropout students play a central role in supporting household activities, particularly domestic duties and farming, with limited impact on improving family income, especially in rural settings.

Nearly all dropout students assist their families working from few hours per day to few hours per week. Girls, in particular, are fully engaged in domestic tasks such as caring for siblings, elderly relatives, cooking, and cleaning, dedicating several hours daily. The majority assists the family with farming and agriculture-related work[63]. However, this contribution is largely unpaid: most respondents reported never receiving compensation. As some of them explained: *"I support my father*

[63] 42% on a daily basis and 32% weekly

during harvesting time", "I help them when there is rainfall and farming", "I am the eldest girl in the family and help at home since we lost the father five years ago."

These **responsibilities often expose children to physical exhaustion and risks**: many[64] reported experiencing fatigue or danger while working (such as lifting heavy loads, working in the dark or under extreme heat, handling large animals, or feeling unsafe when alone). Some shared: *"It is so difficult to work at hot time", "I injured my left leg with iron when moving my mother's mobile café", "I occasionally have pain in the kidney due to house work."*

Income-generating activities mainly involve small-scale farming and livestock breeding, both highly climate-dependent. **Access to public subsidies and external financial support, including remittances, is limited**. Most families rely on **irregular daily labour**, such as agricultural work, cleaning, selling tea or khat at local markets, and washing clothes.

Only few parents (6 out of 19) reported receiving **occasional remittances** from relatives, either within Ethiopia or abroad. These transfers occur every few months and average 2,000 birr (approximately €12). The highest reported remittance transfer was 10,000 birr (€60).

Reported **yearly household incomes[65]** range from a minimum of 600 birr (€36) to a maximum of 50,000 birr (€300), with an average of 21,000 birr (€126). Monthly incomes vary from 500 birr (€3) to 3,000 birr (€18).

Among all interviewees: 24 households have electricity access, while 14 do not. Only 4 have internet at home. However, 32 families have a mobile phone, of which 12 are smartphones. Internet connectivity is present in two of the three surveyed villages.

As a broader context, 38.64% of Ethiopia's population lived below the international poverty line ($3 per day, PPP 2021[66]). **The families participating in this research live in conditions of acute poverty and multidimensional vulnerability.**

[64] Twelve out of 19.
[65] Information collected among parents only.
[66] https://pip.worldbank.org/country-profiles/ETH

3. Fieldwork findings among parents, dropout students and stakeholders in Dire Dawa

3.1 Reasons why children dropout in Dire Dawa

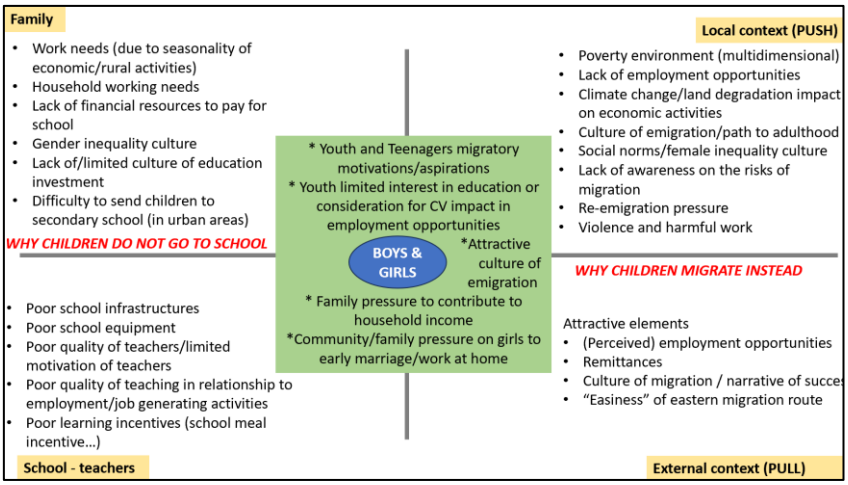
The average age of student respondents at the time of the fieldwork was 18 years[67], while their average age at the time of dropping out was 16[68]. The majority were at least two years older than the expected age for their grade level when they left school (both urban and rural). This pattern reflects a broader tendency for school enrolment and progression to be delayed or interrupted, often shaped by shifting household needs and vulnerabilities.

All **dropout students and most parents affirmed that the decision to leave school was made by the child.** Still, **peers were widely acknowledged as a key influence**: half respondents said friends could sway a student's decision to continue or quit school. Teachers, religious leaders, and community figures were seen as **potential positive influencers**. Ultimately, although children appear to own their decisions, these are clearly shaped by an environment of structural deprivation. **The act of leaving school often reflects the awareness within the household that economic survival requires difficult trade-offs.**

Children are aware of the financial trade-offs their families must make. One student remarked: *"I dropped out to support my sister to continue her education, to economically support the family."*

Based on the analysis, reasons for school dropout can be sorted into two groups:

- **Household-related (internal) factors**, mainly linked to the family's financial situation, lack of resources to purchase school materials, need for children to contribute to income-generating activities, and domestic responsibilities, especially in large families or when a parent is ill or deceased. *Economic internal household factors are largely affected by the local external context.*
- **Contextual (external) factors**, including an impoverished local ecosystem, but also cultural and traditional practices, long distances to school, limited access to transportation, climate-related challenges, and the perceived quality or value of education.



Author's graph based on literature review analysis and fieldwork evidence

[67] Median 19, mode 20.
[68] With 20 as median and mode.

Economic pressures and household priorities

Among all the contributing factors, **economic pressure dominates**. All parents and most dropout students cited **monetary difficulties as the primary reason for leaving school**. Qualitative evidence collected during fieldwork provides deeper insight into how economic hardship directly impacts children's educational pathways. Most parents reported that a lack of income led to food insecurity - often worsened by climate shocks. The costs associated with education, such as books, uniforms, and transportation, frequently exceed what families can afford. Families often depend on children either to supplement income or to take over domestic duties, allowing other members to engage in paid work. In this context, **school-aged children often become essential to household functioning.**

Ultimately, financial constraints increase the demand for children's labor and reduce the feasibility of continuing their education, as families prioritize immediate survival over long-term investment in schooling.

Main reasons why dropping out from school								
Parents of dropout students	Frequency	%	***Dropout students***	Frequency	%	***Stakeholders***	Frequency	%
Economic need of the family	19	100	Economic need of the family	17	89.47	Economic need of the family	12	92.31
No money to pay for books/ uniform	10	52.63	No money to pay for books/ uniform	8	42.11	No money to pay for books/ uniform	11	84.62
Climate obstacles or impacts	7	36.84	Domestic need of the family	5	26.32	Domestic need of the family)	9	69.23
Domestic need of the family (support to care siblings, cleaning)	5	26.32	Logistic problems (transport, long distance, bad roads)	5	26.32	Death of a relative (father/mother)	9	69.23
Child health problems	3	15.79	Other	3	15.79	Marriage	9	69.23
Death of a relative (father/mother)	3	15.79	Death of a relative (father/mother)	2	10.53	Climate obstacles or impacts	7	53.85
Logistic problems (transport, long distance, bad roads)	3	15.79	Climate obstacles or impacts (heavy rain, extreme heat)	1	5.26	Problems with peers (shame, acceptance, recognition)	6	46.15
Early marriage	1	5.26	Child health problems	1	5.26	Child health problems	2	15.38
Total	19		*Total*	19		Total	13	100

Gendered economic pressures

Gender norms also shape dropout patterns. Girls reported that economic hardship combined with domestic responsibilities often made it impossible to stay in school. One girl explained: *"Girls drop out for family support and domestic workload. Boys, for migration, drug addiction, and peer pressure."*

The girls interviewed said they had left school to support the family income, with some also citing unpaid domestic labor (e.g., fetching water, cleaning, helping ill parents). Notably, none mentioned early marriage as a reason for their own dropout. However, stakeholders and parents emphasized that early marriage remains a prevalent cause, particularly in rural areas.

"Girls' education is not a priority in this area," "Tradition tells that girls should stay home. They marry earlier and are more needed at home", "Their responsibility is to support the family economy and avoid unwanted pregnancy."

Despite these structural expectations, *girls often make their own decision to drop out*: this was confirmed by female dropout interviewees who also acknowledged the role of *peer pressure* in influencing their choices.

Psycho-social and peer influences

Emotional and social dimensions also shape the dropout process. Many students expressed feelings of frustration and hopelessness: *"I just want to change my life since the situation of my parents is the same, there is no food."*

Peer influence plays a powerful role: *"I dropped out because my friend told me to work in the city and I listened to her advice and joined her*."

For most, **dropping out is not a sudden decision**; it unfolds gradually, with periods of absence linked to economic strain, illness in the family, or increased domestic duties: *"My mother's health problems affected my school attendance." "Domestic work made her frequently miss class, and that later led to dropping out."*

Less commonly, some students reported sudden decisions triggered by peer discussions or personal reflection: *"I stopped after discussing with my friends, and we migrated to Dire Dawa." "One day I thought it was better to stop going to school, and I left for Dire Dawa."*

Asked what they missed most about school, dropout students mentioned friends, a safe space (*protective factor*), and personal freedom, but also the loss of self-esteem and respect in the eyes of the community. *"Now I have more responsibilities to support the family and do heavy work that doesn't suit my age."*

Spatial barriers to school attendance

The physical accessibility of schools, particularly in rural areas, emerged as another co-determinant of school dropout, while not being the main direct cause. This relates to what is often referred to as the "*geography of educational opportunity and spatial equity*[69]." In the absence of affordable public or private transport, **walking commutes reduce the time children have to support household responsibilities, disproportionately affecting girls**. The economic vulnerability of families also restricts their ability to afford transport to distant schools. In addition, extreme weather conditions, such as floods, heatwaves, and droughts, can make commuting to school unsafe or unfeasible.

- **Primary school access**:
    - Rural dropout students reported walking between 10 and 180 minutes[70].
    - Urban students walked for 1 to 10 minutes on average.
- **Secondary school access**:
    - Rural students walked an average of 85 minutes (up to 180 min)[71].

[69] Casey Cobb (2020), *Geospatial analysis*: *A new window into educational equity, access and opportunity*, Review of Research in Education, Vol 44. Issue 1.
[70] Mean: 65.5 minutes; median: 35 minutes; mode: 30 minutes.
[71] Mode: 180 minutes; median: 50 minutes.

- Urban students, who relied on local transport, reported commutes ranging from 10 to 70 minutes[72].

Several rural students walked up to three hours daily, particularly to reach secondary schools. In many cases, the absence of free public transport represented a serious obstacle to school attendance. As some students explained: *"We used bajaj (tuk-tuk) when we had money. You're supposed to pay 100 birr a day for a round trip.", "We used to walk for 3 hours.", "The secondary school is too distant, and the family has no money for transportation."*

Even urban students, though better positioned to reach primary schools, often faced challenges accessing secondary schools. **The cumulative time spent commuting reduced opportunities for study and increased pressure to support domestic responsibilities. In sum, the distance to school, particularly in rural areas, and the lack of accessible, affordable transportation emerge as critical structural factors that contribute to school dropout.**

3.2 Climate change and its impacts on school dropout

While climate change affects entire communities, certain groups, especially children, are identified as particularly vulnerable. **The indirect impacts on children include increased risks of malnutrition** (due to food scarcity), **declining health** (linked to food insecurity), and **school dropout** (as a result of economic strain, which leads to the inability to afford school costs and an increased demand for children to support household activities).

All rural respondents (24) and half urban respondents stated that **climate change had a visible effect on their household's income and livelihoods**. Only some urban respondents perceived the impact as minimal. Dropout students, especially girls, also recognized significant personal impacts on their day-to-day lives.

Climate and environmental changes were widely reported as having significant impacts on their daily lives and livelihoods. Respondents provided a broad range of examples illustrating how recent droughts and floods had disrupted climate-dependent livelihoods, causing economic hardship:

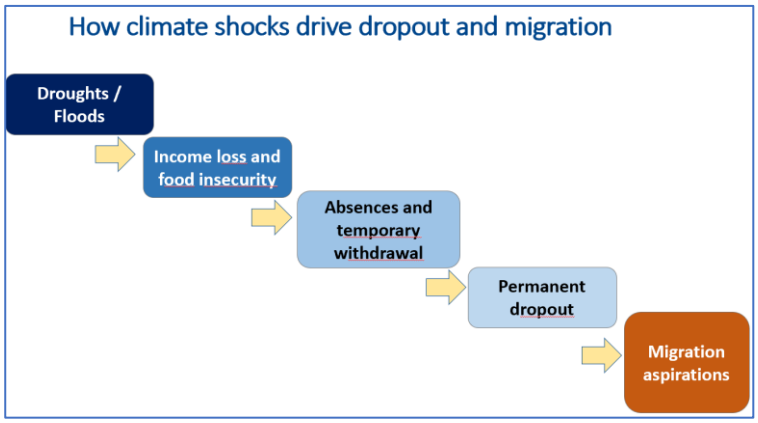
- "*Due to the drought, there is a shortage of food at home." "From my experience, when there is good rainfall, my father gets a good harvest—but not this time."*
- *"When there is no rainfall, the production is very low."*
- *"Due to flood risks, I could not move around the area looking for a job."*
- *"The* khat *(local drug) my mother sold was destroyed by the hot temperature."*
- *"The flooding destroyed our home. We stayed with neighbours for a while, but eventually had to stop our business."*
- *"The wind and heavy rain last year destroyed our home."*
- *"We lost cattle and crops due to the drought."*
- *"My mother had to stop selling* injera *because of the heavy rain."*

Both students and parents confirm climate change directly and indirectly affects children's ability to attend school. **Extreme weather** (flooding, heavy rain, or extreme heat) **can physically prevent children from reaching school, but most importantly climate-related shocks worsen household poverty. This, in turn, limits educational opportunities.**

Examples from respondents include:

[72] Mean: 37 minutes; mode/median: 30 minutes.

- *"During heavy rain, no one can go to school. Children help with farming and stay home."*
- *"The drought and water shortages made girls spend more time fetching water and caring for younger children, which kept them home from school more often."*
- *"Girls prioritize food for boys and younger siblings."*
- *"The drought made girls too busy with housework, and boys felt hopeless and preferred to migrate."*



Author's representation based on fieldwork evidence

The multidimensional impact of climate change on school retention is evident. While the physical environment may impose occasional access barriers, **environmental degradation worsens household vulnerability, ultimately pushing children out of school.**

In addition, a majority[73] of dropout children said they were aware of climate change, while only few were not. When asked whether schools provided information on climate change or how to prepare for it, most parents were unable to answer. Among dropout students, about half mentioned receiving some instruction at school, such as lessons on forest management, terracing, wind, soil erosion, and floods, while others reported no awareness of such topics. Importantly, none of the dropout students and only three parents saw climate change education as a potential motivation to return to school.

These findings indicate that, despite the deep local impact of climate-related challenges, **schools are not yet perceived as active agents in promoting climate awareness or adaptation strategies. The lack of visibility and relevance of environmental education reduces the role schools could play in addressing both dropout risks and climate resilience.**

3.3 The interlink between school dropout, migration, and individual aspirations

How youth migratory aspirations are shaped

The **primary driver of youth migration from Dire Dawa is economic hardship and the lack of local employment opportunities. Poverty, food insecurity, and limited future prospects shape how young people envision their lives.** The majority of interviewees (dropout students and parents) identified **job-seeking as the main motivation for migration**. **If appropriate job opportunities were available locally, many youths would likely abandon the idea of migrating**. In addition to

[73] 14 out of 19.

economic necessity, other young people are discouraged by the **absence of appealing work prospects aligned with their aspirations**.

Migration is widely discussed and romanticized among young people in Dire Dawa[74]. Many view it as a **positive and transformative experience**, though some approach it with realism and caution. Migration is described mainly as a *path to personal success*, a *strategy to escape poverty*, and a way to *support one's family*. Only some dropout students acknowledged the **risks**, and parents often believe that children underestimate the dangers. For some girls, migration is also perceived as a route to escape early marriage.

Peers are identified (by all students, parents and stakeholders) **as the most influential** on **the youth decision to migrate** (much more than school staff or community/religious leaders or family members): "*Peer pressure is stronger than brokers". Kids' migration is described as an autonomous decision that is not influenced or discussed with family members ("The young boys and girls still have a plan to migrate even if publicly do not say so*").

The youth migratory aspirations reveal both ambition and a yearning for change: "*I want to change my life*," one stated. Another shared, "*I feel depressed with my situation and I've lost hope*." Young girls interviewed aspire to become doctors, lawyers in Dubai, footballers, hairdressers in England, or domestic workers abroad. Boys mentioned goals such as becoming drivers, mechanics, artists in Harar, or businessmen, both in Ethiopia and overseas. Notably, many of these dreams would require further schooling or vocational training.

Among dropout students, 8 out of 19 expressed a desire to secure employment in Ethiopia, while 11 preferred to work abroad. Just **over half of the dropout students stated they were seriously considering migration.** The reasons were clear and pragmatic: *"I want to migrate to Saudi or Dubai to work as a domestic worker and earn money for my family."* Another said, *"We all have a plan to migrate, even when we just talk among ourselves*." One student added, "*I heard the government has started legal migration programs after training, I want to be part of that*."

Among those not interested in migrating (9 out of 19), most cited the ***risks*** *associated with irregular migration and the* ***lack of legal alternatives***. Personal stories of suffering underscored this concern: "*I suffered in jail in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. I don't want to go through that again*," and "*I heard about people from our village who died at sea*." Others simply felt unmotivated or financially unable to migrate.

Respondents reported divergent experiences regarding whether migration is openly discussed at community or family levels. As one parent noted, "*we parents don't make decisions, rather, the children discuss with their friends and migrate*." Most parents and half students acknowledged that migration is occasionally addressed at the community level (often through awareness campaigns). Students mention that discussion often revolve around either tragic news of migrant deaths or success stories of migrants who made it abroad.

"Migration is a private issue," one student explained. *"The community only discusses it when they hear about a migrant's death from Kalecha."* Others noted, "*people always speak about the changes brought by past migrants," or "When a family member migrates, it becomes public conversation."*

The findings strongly support the need for continued community-based awareness campaigns that address both the risks and realities of migration, especially those targeted at youth and key influencers such as peers, students, and school dropouts.

[74] Almost one fourth of respondents (10/38) have family members living abroad (eg. Djibuti, Saudi Arabia, Yemen), and the majority (8/10) is less than 18 years. More than half dropout students (11/19) know someone (less than 18 years) who migrated abroad. The consideration for the friends who migrated is actually mixed ("the migration is full of risk and advantages for the family", "*Some of them were helped by Allah and now in good condition and others like me faced bad luck and got back home after sufferings*").

The link between migration and school dropout

Migration is widely perceived by youth in Dire Dawa as one of the few tangible pathways to improve their families' economic well-being, an outcome that schooling, in its current form, does not necessarily guarantee. While school is recognized for its potential to build individual capacity, it is not perceived as effectively preparing students for existing challenges. The majority of dropout students believe that education is important; some of them view school as a means to acquire the skills needed for a good job, while only few see it as an investment in their family's future or in their own personal growth.

Yet, many feel that school does not equip them with the competencies required to face the economic and social realities of Dire Dawa. Several students expressed **dissatisfaction with teaching quality** and a lack of teacher engagement, while stakeholders confirmed that primary and secondary education remain disconnected from the local labour market.

Stakeholders emphasized that **primary and secondary schools offer traditional education and curricula, excluding practical or market-relevant skills** (unlike vocational and technical training institutions). **Neither dropout students[75] nor stakeholders[76] consider schools capable of developing the competences necessary for employment.** This gap is reflected in students' attitudes: **only 3 out of 19 would consider returning to school** if it offered employability-oriented skills, compared with most parents (13 out of 19) who would send their children back if education could better prepare them for local opportunities. As one student observed, *"The unemployment of graduates discourages me from learning,"* while others cited: *"The time to learn has passed,"* or *"only financial support to my family would convince me."*

In this context, **education is perceived as offering a poor "return on investment" compared to the immediate, though risky, gains associated with migration**. Poverty, scarcity of decent work, and the failure of schooling to generate employable skills push youth to view migration as a more viable strategy to improve family well-being and social mobility. As one student highlights: *"We all think migration is a way to support our parents and change our lives."* Others reflect: "*It's full of risks during the journey but successful in the end*," and "*Migration is something good after challenges*."

Across parents, students, and stakeholders, there is a shared recognition of the **need to make schooling more practical, engaging, and relevant**. When asked which competences would help them either succeed abroad or find work locally, respondents offered complementary visions:

Competences for migration success	*Skills to strengthen within the school curriculum*	*Competences to integrate into the local labour market*
Technical and vocational skills (construction, electrical work), foreign language knowledge, and driver's license	Technical competences, entrepreneurial skills, computer literacy, and language skills	Profession-specific technical training (electrician, driver, hairdresser/barber, mechanic, cook, secretary, carpenter, furniture repair)

This alignment reveals that **strengthening vocational, entrepreneurial, and digital skills** within the school curriculum could serve a dual function: ***improving employability in the local labour market*** while also ***equipping youth with useful competences*** for safer migration pathways. An education system integrating practical skills development could reinforce schools as protective environments,

[75] *Not at all*, 42%; *Not much*, 16%.
[76] *Not at all*, 31%; *Not much*, 15%.

offering children viable alternatives to early migration and enabling them to envision futures at home or abroad.

3.4 Stakeholders' analysis

The stakeholder analysis in Dire Dawa explored the roles, perceptions, capacities of local actors concerning child dropout and migration. The findings are based on field data collected through interviews and qualitative analysis of the local context[77]. The stakeholders identified include: Government and local authorities[78], schools and teachers, families and communities, children and youth, civil Society and NGOs, development actors/international agencies. Other key actors were interviewed in Addis Ababa. Limitations exists as other stakeholders might be missing[79].

The analysis conducted through stakeholder interviews and contextual research shows some trends:

- There is **broad awareness of the link between dropout and migration**, but limited coordination between education and migration actors.
- The stakeholders identified **poverty, unemployment, and lack of services** as root causes, but few initiatives deeply integrate education, job creation, and migration management.
- Early warning systems for dropout exist, but their integration into other initiatives (as early migratory prevention programmes) shall be enhanced.
- Migration overall still appears as separate from education and child welfare.

The main stakeholders involved in "school dropout and migration"

In Dire Dawa, several government institutions have complementary mandates in addressing different aspects of child dropout and migration.

The *City Administration* sets overall policies, coordinates the work of different offices, and makes sure programs in education, labor, and social welfare follow national guidelines. It also manages resources and oversees programs for social protection and youth employment, although challenges like limited technical skills and weak data systems remain. The *local government structures* (eg Kebele administrations) are very close to affected communities, but often report limited mandates and resources to act proactively in implementing preventive (dropout/early migration) strategies. As an interviewee says: "*We see children missing school or migrating, but we don't have structured tools or training to intervene before the problem escalates*."

The *Bureau of Education* (BoE) manages schools and works to prevent students from dropping out. It monitors enrollment and attendance, offers programs to help children return to school, and partners with communities to promote education. The *Education Bureau* is a central actor, with high influence and commitment to addressing school dropout. Despite efforts to monitor enrolment and absenteeism, there is a need for a more coordinated system with other players and sectors to prevent dropout and early migration. Similarly, *social protection agencies* hold considerable capacity and interest, as they interface with vulnerable households affected by poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity (that largely affect dropout and child migration).

The *Bureau of Labour, Skills & Technology Development* focuses on supporting labor migration, especially to Gulf countries, while also tackling the economic drivers of migration through job

[77] Thanks to the fieldwork of Dr Girachew Adugna.
[78] Bureau of Education, Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, Kebele administrations, Migration Office.
[79] As for instance a diaspora organization from Dire Dawa or other local players not mapped.

training, social support, and child labor monitoring). Both public offices face challenges, including limited resources and difficulties coordinating with other departments

The *Women's, Children's and Social Affairs Bureau* focuses on child protection and public awareness initiatives, while *Police and Justice Departments* enforce child protection laws, investigate trafficking, and ensure the safety of vulnerable children. Although these agencies play a key role in protecting children, they face problems like understaffing, reliance on outside funding, and focusing more on responding to issues than preventing them. Together, these institutions form the core of Dire Dawa's efforts to protect children and reduce migration risks.

At the frontline, *schools and teachers* observe early signs of vulnerability and disengagement. Respondents suggested the potential of *reinforced tutoring*, *school-based referral systems*, and *peer-led media programs* as **mechanisms to retain students and raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration**. Yet these actors often face overwhelming class sizes, insufficient support staff, and limited psychosocial or community outreach tools. As one primary school teacher noted: "*Sometimes we know a child is at risk, but we don't know where to refer them or how to help the family*."

The analysis highlights the central, but under-resourced role of *families and youth*. Parents might value child education, but child labor or migration are key to support their income needs. Children and adolescents are exposed to peer pressure, reinforcing their perception of migration as a way to success. A youth respondent explains: *"If you're not in school and there are no jobs, migration seems like the only choice. Even if it's risky*."

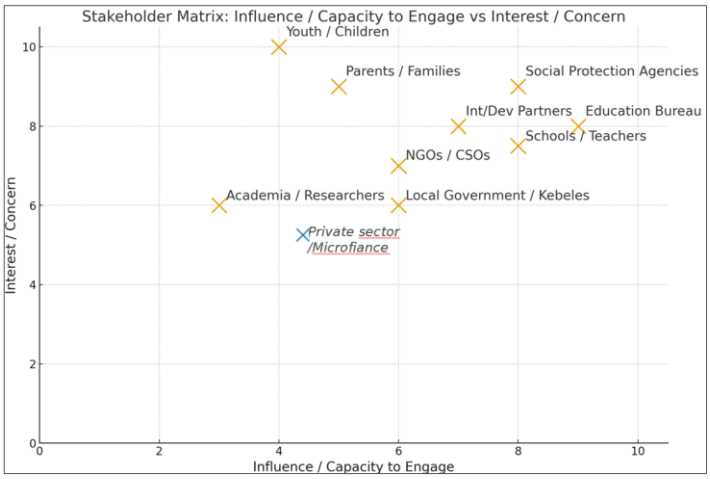
Civil society organizations (CSOs) and *NGOs* are very active in the areas of child protection and livelihoods. However, their efforts and capacity can be too project dependent. *Academia*, think tanks and researchers, though low in operational influence, offer valuable contributions through fieldwork or data evidence. I*nternational donors and development partners* can have high influence and high degree of interest. Their potential to link national strategies with local interventions is significant, particularly when focused on long-term capacity building, integrated service delivery, and migration governance. The engagement of the *private sector and micro-finance institutions* in Dire Dawa – while appearing crucial to improve economic resilience, shall be further explored.

Overall, *state and non-state actors* in Dire Dawa face coordination gaps, resource constraints, and weak data systems that limit their collective effectiveness. Strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly among education, social affairs, and justice institutions, is essential for a more integrated local governance approach to child protection and migration management. Enhancing institutional cooperation through joint frameworks, shared systems, and coordinated programs is a critical step toward reducing school dropout and prevent child migration.

Stakeholders' interest and influence on school dropout issues

A stakeholder matrix has been developed to illustrate their possible role in addressing school dropout and child migration in Dire Dawa. For each stakeholder, a score (low, medium, high) has been autonomously assigned by the author for *influence* and *interest axes* based on: fieldwork analysis (interview responses), context analysis (field visits of the local researcher Girmachew Adugna[80]), typical influence these actors play in similar education/migration contexts. Limitations exist in terms of completeness and detail of information collected. The pilot matrix below represents therefore an analytical tool to be tailored to each specific context.

[80] Available for internal use only, but elements were included in this document.



Matrix by the author based on fieldwork interviews and questionnaires' analysis

Based on the pilot matrix attempt, several stakeholders seem to demonstrate **high interest or concern** (youth and families, social protection agencies, and schools/teachers), but only a few combine this interest with **high influence or capacity to act**. Conversely, some actors seem highly interested, but lack the structural capacity or coordination mechanisms to influence broader outcomes.

While many stakeholders recognize the seriousness of school dropout and child migration, **few mechanisms exist to connect them in an integrated, preventive, and child-centered framework.** Stakeholders underline that there is **limited cross-sector collaboration.**

Two approaches can be outlined based on the pilot stakeholder analysis. First, **empower low-influence but high-interest actors** (including schools, youth, and families) through practical support (eg early-warning systems, financial literacy/support, parental engagement, peer awareness initiatives, local mentoring, school awareness programmes, pilot improved school curricula). Second, **align high-influence actors** (the Education Bureau, social protection services, and international agencies/donors) toward a coordinated strategy that links education, household economic resilience, and child protection with migration prevention.

Additionally, concrete measures need to be adopted to **address the underlying socio-economic roots of vulnerability**, which drive both school dropout and early/unsafe migration (conditional cash transfers and school feeding programs, livelihoods and skills development for youth etc). The role of the private and micro/finance sector needs to be further explored.

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - Stakeholders' analysis

***Questionnaire: Local stakeholders** interviewed in Dire Dawa*
1 Women Association chair person, Murti Gutu, Urban Dire Dawa
StC local staff, Dire Dawa
1, Local NGO, Dire Dawa
1 Women federation chairperson, Urban Dire Dawa
3 School teachers - Ganda Grada Primary School, Urban Dire Dawa
1 School Director - Ganda Grada Urban Dire Dawa
1 School Director, Lagahrie Primary and Secondary School, Urban Dire Dawa
1 women and children affairs, Kalecha, Rural Dire Dawa
1 school director, Kalecha Primary and Secondary school, Rural Dire Dawa
1 school teacher, Kalecha Primary and Secondary school, Rural Dire Dawa
1 religious leader, Kalecha, Rural Dire Dawa
Bureau of Education, Dire Dawa
Urban Job Creation and OSS coordinator director, Dire Dawa
Ministry of Women & Children, Social Affairs, Dire Dawa

Stakeholder Matrix – Qualitative Assessment

Stakeholder	Influence / Capacity to Engage	Interest / Concern	Rationale
Education Bureau	High	High	Key actor in dropout prevention and education policy. Strong institutional mandate but partial coordination on migration.
Social Protection Agencies	High	High	Crucial to address poverty-related causes of dropout and migration; active but under-resourced.
Local Government / Kebeles	Medium	Medium	Proximity actors with community ties; engagement limited by capacity and unclear mandates.
Schools / Teachers	High	Medium-High	Key frontline actors with direct contact; often lack tools or systems for early intervention.
Parents / Families	Medium	High	Highly invested in outcomes but often lack resources and awareness to act.
Youth / Children	Low	High	Directly affected; very limited influence on decisions and systems.
NGOs / CSOs	Medium	Medium-High	Can support protection and prevention, but actions depend on donor cycles and coordination.
Academia / Think Tanks / Researchers	Low	Medium	Provide strategic insights and data, but disconnected from field action.
Private/microfinance sector	Medium	Medium	Crucial to support income generating activities and household income and to develop/offer products/services also linking remittances/education
Int/Dev Partners	High	High	Strong influence through funding and technical assistance; potential to coordinate systems and actors.

3.5 Conditions and initiatives to help reducing school dropout

Because school dropout in Dire Dawa is largely linked to economic vulnerability of poor households, **most respondents emphasize the need for structural improvements to the local economy as a fundamental condition for keeping children in school**. A healthier and more dynamic economic environment is perceived as a pathway to increasing household income, which in turn could reduce school absenteeism and dropout.

Dropout students and parents highlight several key areas of intervention. These include: the development of a **more vibrant local economic ecosystem**, targeted **measures to reduce school-related costs** for families (e.g., through public or private subsidies), and **improved access to micro-financial services**. Enhanced financial inclusion is seen as particularly relevant for reducing dependence on subsistence agriculture, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, respondents point to the importance of developing **strategies to climate-related challenges**. Interestingly, improving secondary school accessibility or teacher preparedness is not prioritized among the most impactful solutions by respondents.

Students and parents both highlight:

- *"The people in the kebele have the capacity to work and run businesses, so it is better to support them financially."*
- *"If the local economy is good, everything will be good."*
- *"Even if farm production declines, if my mother is able to run her business, all things get better."*
- *"The economic support for my family is vital for me, so I can rejoin the school and continue my education."*
- *"Create jobs for mothers to support the income gained from agriculture."*
- *"Better production of grains."*
- *"Improve water supply."*

When asked about **specific incentives** that could reduce school dropout, both students and parents ask for **school-based material and financial assistance. These include free meals at school**, **free uniforms**, and support for family **economic activities**. These priorities outrank other interventions such as public transport availability, curriculum enhancements, or free internet access. **Improving household financial security remains the most pressing concern.**

Addressing **girls' dropout in particular**, nearly all respondents pointed at **improving the local economy as the most effective measure**. While parents tended to emphasize the provision of **school meals and sanitary kits**, female dropout students also noted the need for a **more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities within households**. Every female respondent identified **economic support to the family as a necessary condition to enable girls to stay in school.**

As noted by several respondents:

- *"A school feeding programme will resolve the students' problem of getting food, and the provision of stationery will also alleviate the lack of scholastic support."*
- *"School meals and stationery support can encourage children to go to school and families to send their children."*
- *"Create working opportunities for youths and women to break the cycle of poverty."*
- *"Sensitize the community about women and their role in the family."*

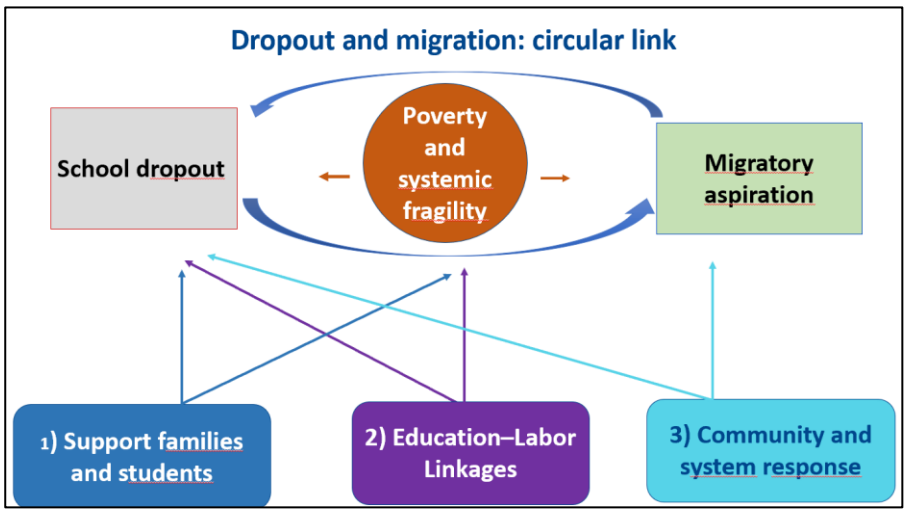
GOOD PRACTICES. Concrete examples were cited to illustrate these strategies in action. For instance, Lagaharie School is already providing free meals to students to reduce dropout. Similarly, Kortu School in Khalicha has launched a school feeding initiative, growing vegetables such as tomatoes and papayas to generate income. These proceeds are used to assist vulnerable families and encourage school attendance, especially among the most at-risk children.

Respondents suggest that tackling school dropout requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses not only direct school-related costs, but also the broader socio-economic vulnerabilities that prevent children, especially girls, from remaining out of school. **Integrated interventions in Dire Dawa are needed that combine priority economic support and economic resilience, food security, gender-sensitive community engagement, and awareness raising initiatives.**

4. CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The interconnected challenges of school dropout and child migration in Dire Dawa reveal to be multi-layered, while rooted in socio-economic fragility. The field evidence highlights that poverty, household economic vulnerability, and climate shocks are factors affecting school dropout and early-migration aspirations in Dire Dawa. Additionally aggravating elments are the gendered burdens, long distances to school, and the weak educational relevance. **Migration emerges as an alternative coping strategy for many youths, perceived as a path to economic improvement and family support**. The education system is not seen as providing the skills or prospects needed to compete with this perception. This study underscores how young people in Dire Dawa often do not perceive formal education as a viable tool for improving life outcomes, especially in the absence of labour market absorption and vocational relevance.

In Dire Dawa, dropping out of school is both a symptom and a driver of migration. Both are the outcomes of poverty and systemic fragility. School dropout increases migration risk as it: reflects household vulnerabilities that also drive migration, accelerates exposure to peer and labor market pressures that normalize migration, and it erodes children's future prospects, making migration the only perceived alternative. **Solutions must integrate family support, education, jobs, social protection and migration management.**



The analysis presented here reinforces the **urgent need for multidimensional interventions targeting the structural roots of both school dropout and youth migration**. Literature and field evidence converge on the role of poverty, gender inequalities, and disillusionment with the education-to-employment pathway in affecting early dropout from school and migration decisions. Individual choices are deeply embedded in family strategies and community narratives that valorise migration and normalize departure as a rite of passage or a survival mechanism.

Policy responses must be grounded in an integrated strategy that **restore the credibility and value of education**: reinforcing foundational learning, enhancing the capacity and relevance of secondary and technical education to respond to local economic realities (aligning curricula with employability and life skills, strengthening school-to-work transitions), and investing in decent, accessible job opportunities. Special attention should be given to girls, who face compounded vulnerabilities due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and limited mobility.

WHAT OTHER EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL INCENTIVE INITIATIVES TEACH ON HOW TO BUILD STRATEGIES TO LIMIT SCHOOL DROPOUT

According to the supplementary research document realized to complement this study – based on literature review and analysis of school incentive programmes in Africa– some additional recommendations are here included to support local, national and international stakeholders steer possible initiatives in Dire Dawa in the future.

Evidence from various contexts shows that school incentive programmes, whether directed at students, parents, or teachers, can positively influence enrolment, attendance, and, to a lesser extent, learning outcomes. However, their effectiveness is **highly context-dependent and often relies on integration within broader education reforms and strong accountability mechanisms**. Available evidence is in fact often case-specific and produces mixed or even contradictory findings. **Long-term impact of incentive schemes requires complementary interventions that address systemic weaknesses, support educators, and align with local socio-economic realities**. As such, incentive strategies must be carefully designed, transparently implemented, and continuously evaluated to ensure equity, sustainability, and real improvements in educational outcomes.

Drown from the literature review, **several important lessons and recommendations are can contribute to inspire and design initiatives in Dire Dawa:**

- Some studies[81] (though not all) suggest that the *impact of financial incentives may persist* even after the incentives have been withdrawn.
- Despite limited data, evidence indicates that *larger impacts* are not necessarily correlated with the size or monetary value of the incentive provided.
- Several analyses emphasize that, while financial incentives can improve school enrolment, *the interplay between education and poverty shows that the income needs of a family may be an incentive in itself*, pushing for short-term income needs over the long-term financial benefits of education (Arcia, 2014, p. 20).
- *Incentive and accountability measures* tend to be more effective in enhancing learning outcomes when embedded within broader education reform programmes.
- Holding teachers and schools accountable for learning outcomes requires the system to provide them with robust and *continuous support*.
- Programmes that *simultaneously involve* teachers, students, and parents appear to produce stronger results, according to experiences primarily documented in Western countries[82].
- *Successful incentive schemes require shared information*, dialogue, and consensus among the various stakeholders involved[83], taking into account their diverse expectations, interests, and levels of commitment.
- The design and implementation of any incentive programme must be grounded in *accurate baselines, reliable data, and sustainable measurement tools*.
- While ICT can support expanded access to education, its effectiveness depends on a country's achievement of *minimum thresholds in infrastructure and education system readiness*. Without this, technology may inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities.

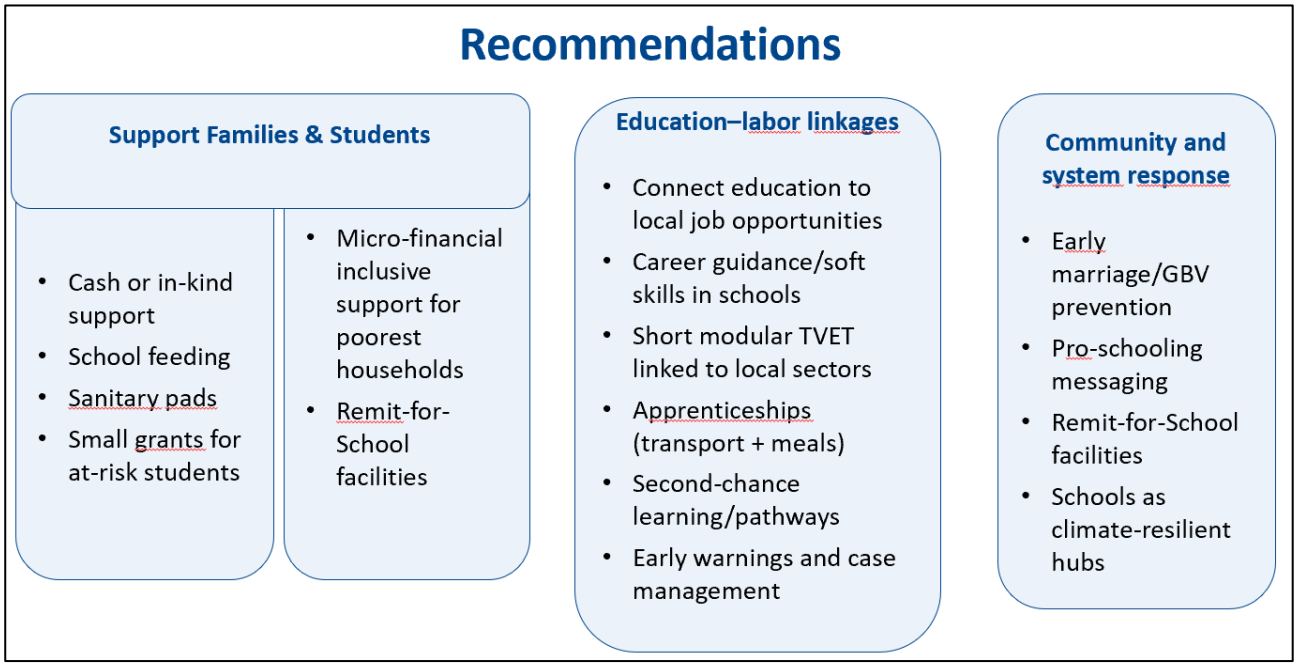
[81] As Kremer, Michael, Edward Miguel, and Rebecca Thornton. 2009." Incentives to Learn." The Review of Economics and Statistics 91(3): 437–456.
[82] Bradley M. Allan and Roland G. Fryer, Jr., The Power and Pitfalls of Education Incentives. The Hamilton Project, Discussion Paper 2011-07 | September 2011, p. 16.
[83] Including: community leaders, parent associations, politicians, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, funding agencies and donors, NGOs, international organizations, diaspora groups etc.

The findings of the research and fieldwork in Dire Dawa highlight the need to **build a system of protective factors** for children, grounded in family support (and family eased access to services), school engagement (improving the link with labour skills and market), and community engagement and system response. In this perspective, the following policy recommendations can be outlined:

Link education with household resilience, by expanding school feeding, conditional cash transfers, and microfinance opportunities and services (especially in rural areas) that reduce the economic pressures leading to dropout.

Reinforce the protective function of schools, through curricula that combine learning with life skills, vocational training, and awareness of migration risks.

Reinforce multi-actor collaboration to build more resilient echo-systems, connecting schools, local authorities, private sector and micro-financial sector, and community organizations, in addition to public players and donors.



A supplementary research has been realized to complement the research. **Three specific case studies** and **frameworks for action were analysed - according to the above recommendations and areas of intervention identified -** to possibly tackle root causes of school dropout . Additional and practical suggestions are therefore included to support local, national and international stakeholders steer possible initiatives in Dire Dawa in the future. The three case studies illustrate that **financial, social, and aspirational incentives can work in synergy to address school dropout and early migration in Dire Dawa**. Together, these approaches suggest that school retention and migration prevention policies must intersect with financial capability, economic inclusion, cultural and community awareness and response and meaningful aspirations for youth. The main key takeaways of this analysis suggest and confirm that:

- *Financial inclusion products* must be adapted to low-income and low-literacy contexts, offering commitment savings, education-linked credit, and mobile tools. They must be designed to address not only school-related expenses but also food security, health/climate shocks, and livelihood support

- *Remittance*s offer untapped potential when linked to education goals, especially through trust-based channels, leveraging transfers of individuals and diaspora associations, and mobilizing diaspora knowledge to improve especially secondary/tertiary education.
- *Youth employability interventions,* targeting both skills and aspirations, can offer meaningful reasons to remain in school, especially if they connect to real and strengthened labour market opportunities.

WHAT 3 CASE STUDIES' ANALSYS IS SUGGESTING ON HOW TO BUILD STRATEGIES TO LIMIT SCHOOL DROPOUT IN DIRE DAWA

Case study 1. Developing financial tools to help families face school-related costs

Support families and students ➔ Outcome: improved family income ➔ by improving the household access to financial services that also target education

The evidence from Dire Dawa highlights the early emergence of financial services that consider educational needs. Nonetheless, these initiatives remain nascent and urban-centered. The scarcity of microfinance services in rural kebeles, combined with low levels of financial/digital literacy and limited mobile connectivity, hampers the potential of these tools to significantly reduce school dropout.

An effective framework for action should focus on expanding **multi-purpose financial products** tailored to low-income families, particularly in rural areas. These products, whether savings accounts, education-linked microloans, or bundled digital services, must be designed to **address not only school-related expenses but also food security, health/climate shocks, and livelihood support.** Donor engagement and public-private partnerships will be critical to reinforce existing actors, expand outreach to underserved communities, and pilot **education-smart financial inclusion strategies** within broader household economic resilience frameworks. Potential and candidate players to be mobilized have been identified, offering promising entry points for collaboration and upscaling.

Case study 2. Leveraging migrant remittances to promote education of recipients' children

Support community and system response / families and students ➔ Outcome: reduce family costs for education or improve school curricula ➔ by offering access to financial instruments / leveraging remittances and knowledge transfer into education

Although the role of the Ethiopian diaspora in Dire Dawa's education sector is currently limited and underexplored, experiences from other countries illustrate the promising potential of diaspora engagement, both through financial flows and knowledge transfer. The presence of diaspora networks offers a valuable foundation for structured engagement strategies. Building on this potential, a clear framework for action should begin with the **systematic mapping of Dire Dawa diaspora groups**, including professionals interested in educational development. Beyond the tertiary level, diaspora contributions could target secondary education through *knowledge transfer* and direct student support. Collective engagement may be fostered via *matching-fund schemes* or school infrastructure projects, drawing inspiration from successful models such as Mexico's 3x1 programme. At the same time, the **increasing formalization of Ethiopia's remittance channels** presents an opportunity to design remittance-linked financial products that support education, such as direct school payments, conditional transfers (e.g. EduRemesa), or education-focused savings schemes embedded in digital financial platforms. **Promoting regular and legal migration pathways** can also enhance access to formal remittance systems and their integration into tailored financial services.

Case study 3. Enhancing youth employability and life skills

Support education labour linkages ➔ Outcome: school retention and better equipped students for local labour market and work abroad opportunities ➔ by improving quality of education to reinforce employability skills

Field evidence indicates that among adolescents in Dire Dawa, especially in rural areas, formal schooling (particularly at the secondary level) is not perceived as a viable route to a decent and rewardable employment. This perception contributes to early school leaving and risky migration. International examples confirm the critical role of **youth employability** in making education relevant and aspirational.

Stakeholders in Dire Dawa should coordinate around a shared **local agenda** to design a *youth employability strategy* with the objective of strengthening the **education-to-employment pipeline** and reducing the push factors behind dropout and migration.

To simultaneously **combat school dropout**, the interventions must address its root causes including: a) the possibility for conditional *cash transfers* (small financial incentives to families to keep children in school), b) special attention must be given to **gender-sensitive interventions**, including flexible schooling options, offering alternative arrangements for domestic work and providing community-based mentorship to challenge traditional gender norms.

In Dire Dawa, where formal employment remains scarce, close collaboration is needed with the local **private sector** to develop market-driven skills and bridge the **skills gap**. Similar to Rwanda's PSGYE, by engaging local businesses and industry associations, a pilot program shall a) ***identify the most in-demand skills***, offer apprenticeships and internships, b) partnering with schools, introducing more ***contemporary and relevant curricula*** that incorporate vocational and life skills (including computer and language skills), making education more appealing and practical (according to employers' needs).

Given the limited formal and rewarding job creation in Dire Dawa, a **culture of youth entrepreneurship** shall be fostered. Comprehensive **start-up packages** shall include: a) ***entrepreneurial training*** (addressing agro/pastoral business with more contemporary approach and tools, but also activities as hair dresser, barber shop, construction work, electrician), b) access to ***micro-finance*** (partnering with local micro-finance institutions to provide small grants or loans, bypassing the collateral-related barriers youth often face), and c) ***mentorship*** (establishing a network of local entrepreneurs/antennas to provide guidance and support).

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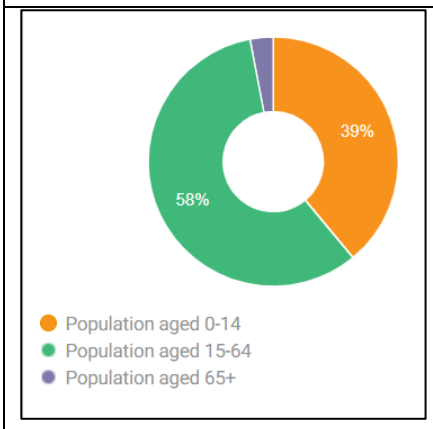
ANNEX TABLES: Context analysis - "Education challenges in Ethiopia – Dire Dawa"

Youth unemployment rate: Ethiopia and Dire Dawa

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
National	17,5	16,5	17,4	16,8	16,9	
Dire Dawa	22,7	22,3	22,8	18,1	23,9	18,5

Source: Dire Dawa Administration Urban Job Creation and Food Security Agency (Feyissa, 2018: p. 18)

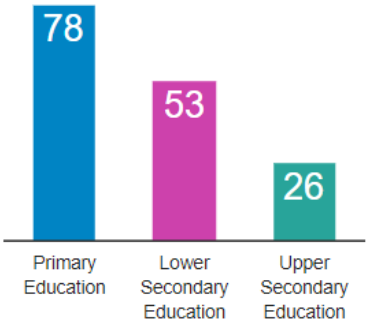
Ethiopia. Population, by age group, per cent



Total population in millions, 2023: 126.5
Population annual doubling time, years, 2023: 28
Population aged 0-14, per cent, 2023: 39
Population aged 10-19, per cent, 2023: 23
Population aged 10-24, per cent, 2023: 33
Population aged 15-64, per cent, 2023: 58
Population aged 65 and older, per cent, 2023: 3
Total fertility rate, per woman, 2023: 4
Life expectancy at birth, years, 2023, male: 64
Life expectancy at birth, years, 2023, female: 70

Source: World Polulation Dashborad, UNFPA (https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/ET, site accessed 07/09/23).

Ethiopia. Education: Total net enrolment rate, percent



Total net enrolment rate, primary education, percent, 2010-2022: 78
Total net enrolment rate, lower secondary education, percent, 2010-2022: 53
Total net enrolment rate, upper secondary education, percent, 2010-2022: 26
Gender parity index, total net enrolment rate, primary education, 2010-2022: 0,9
Gender parity index, total net enrolment rate, lower secondary education, 2010-2022: 0,9
Gender parity index, total net enrolment rate, upper secondary education, 2010-2022: 0,9

Source: World Population Dashborad, UNFPA (https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/ET, site accessed 07/09/23).

Girls, aged 10-14, by school attendance (in the right school grade and out of school)

	In school (right grade)	Out of school
Ethiopia	76.2%	**23.8%**
Rural	73.7%	**26.4%**

Boys, aged 10-14, by school attendance (in the right school grade and out of school)

	In school (right grade)	Out of school
Ethiopia	71.7%	**28.3%**
Rural	68.2%	**31.8%**

	Urban	88.1%	11.8%
	Addis Ababa	82.1%	17.9%

	Urban	92.9%	7.1%
	Addis Ababa	94.9%	5.0%

Girls, aged 15-19, by school attendance (in the right school grade, wrong school grade, and out of school)

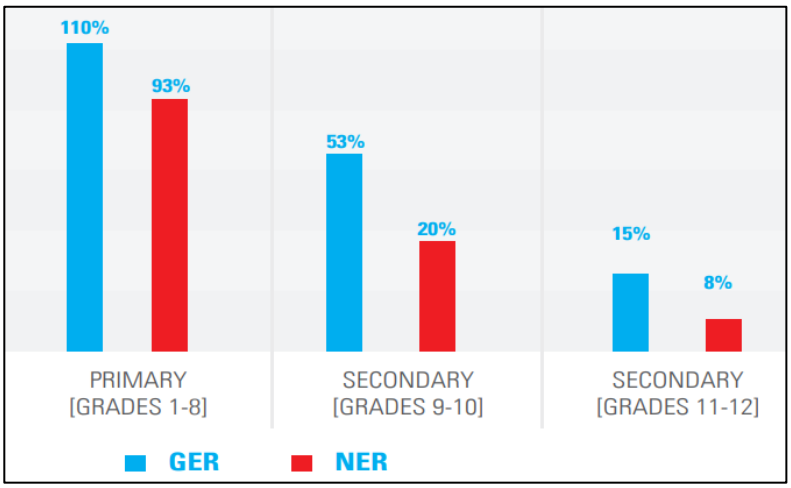
	In school (right grade)	In school (wrong grade)	Out of school
Ethiopia	14.2%	41.7%	**44.0%**
Rural	5.4%	45.1%	**49.4%**
Urban	40.2%	31.6%	28.2%
Addis Ababa	31.8%	27.7%	40.5%

Boys, aged 15-19, by school attendance (in the right school grade, wrong school grade, and out of school)

	In school (right grade)	In school (wrong grade)	Out of school
Ethiopia	14.3%	44.2%	**41.5%**
Rural	6.5%	47.4%	**46.2%**
Urban	45.4%	31.4%	23.2%
Addis Ababa	45.7%	20.9%	33.5%

Source: The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), 2011 – https://www.unfpa.org/data/adolescent-youth/ET Accessed 08/09/23

GER and NER for early childhood care and education, primary and secondary education, Dire Dawa, 2018/19



GER: Gross Enrolment Rate; NER: Net Enrolment Rate

Source: *ESAA 2018/19,* UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Children and Women, Dire Dawa Administration, https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/media/2556/file/Dire%20Dawa.pdf)

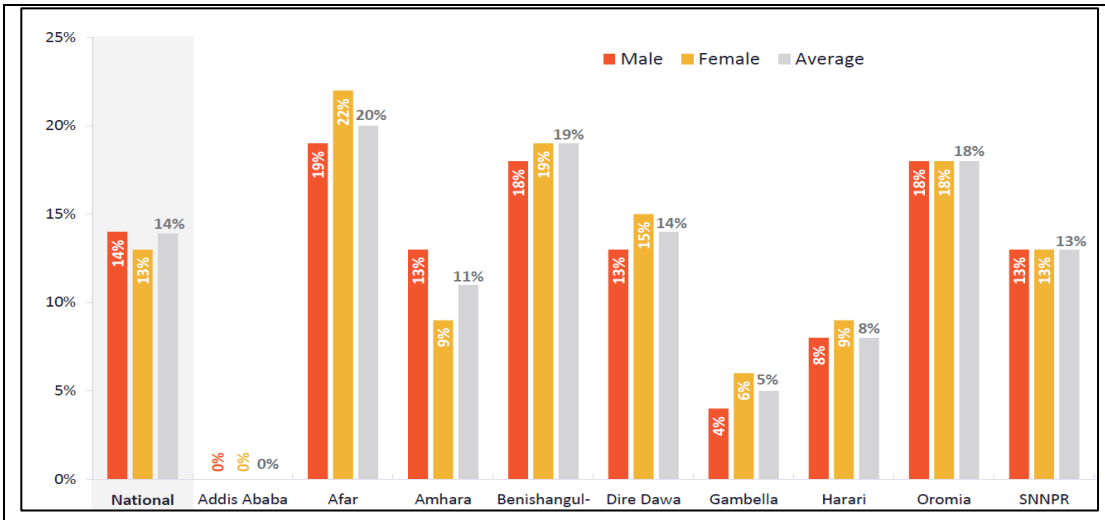
6-year-old OOSC (out-of school-children) and enrolled children, by region and sex

Region	Attending Pre-Primary	Attentidng primary	Not attending primary (OOSC)	Population 6-Year- Old
Afar	10505	1862	41237	53604
Dire Dawa	**6544**	**851**	**3867**	**11262**
Oromia	380964	10196	842027	1233187
%	*Attending Pre-Primary*	*Attentidng primary*	*Not attending primary (OOSC)*	*Population 6-Year- Old*
Afar	19,60	3,47	76,93	100,00
Dire Dawa	**58,11**	**7,56**	**34,34**	**100,00**
Oromia	30,89	0,83	68,28	100,00

Source: UNDP Population Projection 2020 data, EMIS database (2019/20)

More information on other regions is available in MoE (2002), p. 8 (National study on the magnitude of out-of-school children in Ethiopia)

Dropout rates for grades 1-8 by region and sex (2019/20)



EMIS database (2019/20), in MoE (2002), p. 11 (National study on the magnitude of out-of-school children in Ethiopia)

ANER of lower-secondary-school-aged children (15-16 years) by region

	Population	Enrolled primary	Enrolled secondary	Not attending (OOSC)	% Not attending (OOSC)	% ANER[84]
Addis Abeba	153859	53716	73457	26686	17.3%	82.7%
Afar	81789	13889	5302	62598	76.5%	23.5%
Dire Dawa	**22398**	**7319**	**4404**	**10675**	**47.7%**	**52,30%**
Oromia	2129513	491403	392865	1245245	58.5%	41.5%
%	*Population*	*Enrolled primary*	*Enrolled secondary*	*Not attending (OOSC)*	*% Not attending (OOSC)*	*% ANER*
Addis Abeba	100,0	34,9	47,7	17,3		
Afar	100,0	17,0	6,5	76,5		
Dire Dawa	**100,0**	**32,7**	**19,7**	**47,7**		
Oromia	100,0	23,1	18,4	58,5		

Source: Population Projection from UNDP, EMIS Database (2019/20), in MoE (2002), p. 16 (National study on the magnitude of out-of-school children in Ethiopia)

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - METHODOLOGY

Interviewed parents of dropout kids have:	Frequency	Percentage
Dropped-out boys or girls (1-6th grade)	7	36.84
Dropped-out girl(s) (7th-8th grade)	6	31.58
Dropped-out boys or girls (9-12th grade)	5	26.32
Dropped-out boy(s) (7th-8th grade)	4	21.05
Total 19		

Parents of dropout students	

[84] Adjusted Net Enrollment Rate (ANER) measures the number of pupils of primary-school age who are enrolled in either primary or secondary education, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

Urban/rural dimension	Site	Age	Role of the respondent	School name	School grade
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa (DD)	40	Mother	Ganda Grada, Primary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	55	Father	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	45	Father	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	35	Father	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	55	Mother	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	45	Father	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	50	Mother	Ganda Grada, Primary School	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	39	Mother	Ganda Grada, Primary School	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	20	Mother	Ganda Grada, Primary School	Primary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	45	Father	Kalecha Primary and secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	35	Brother	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	35	Mother	Ganda Grada, Primary School	Primary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	50	Mother	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	29	Mother	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	45	Father	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	37	Sister	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	35	Mother	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	65	Father	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	32	Mother	Kalicha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Total 19					

Characteristics of dropout students interviewed					
Urban/rural dimension	**Site**	**Age**	**Sex of the respondent**	**School name**	**School grade**
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	18	Male	Kalecha Primary and secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	17	Female	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	17	Male	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	19	Male	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	19	Female	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	18	Female	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	20	Female	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	16	Female	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	15	Male	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	22	Male	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	19	Female	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kortu Kebele, Kalecha	20	Female	Kalecha Primary and Secondary School	Primary and Secondary
Urban	Ganda Grada, Dire Dawa	18	Male	Ganda Grada Primary school	Primary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	20	Male	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	19	Male	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	18	Female	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	20	Male	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	17	Male	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary

Rural	Kalcha Kebele, Dire Dawa	20	Male	Kalicha Primary and Secondary school	Primary and Secondary
Total 19					

Interviewed students' highest grade completed before dropping out		
Grade completed	Frequency	%
2	1	5.26
6	2	10.53
7	8	42.11
8	3	15.79
9	4	21.05
10	1	5.26
Total 19 dropout students		

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - Socio-economic conditions of respondents' households

Most fitting sentence with the current family condition					
Dropout students	Frequency	%	*Parents of dropout students*	Frequency	%
Occasional difficulties to have food for all	9	47.37	A lot of difficulties to have food for all	9	47.37
A lot of difficulties to have food for all	7	36.84	Occasional difficulties to have food for all	7	36.84
Some difficulties but also some occasional good times	2	10.53	Some difficulties but also some occasional good times	2	10.53
No problem with food	1	5.26	No problem with food	1	5.26
Total	19	100	*Total*	19	100

What are the main difficulties that affect the family income? *(multiple option)*									
Dropout students	Frequency	%		***Parents of dropout students***	Frequency	%	**Stakeholders**		
Lack of money to improve current economic activities	15	78.95		Difficulty to collect enough money to cover for family needs	15	78.95	Difficulty to collect money to cover family needs	13	100
Difficulty to collect enough money to cover for family needs	14	73.68		Lack of money to improve current economic activities	14	73.68	Lack of money to improve current economic activities	12	92.31
Climate obstacles affecting agriculture or farming activities	10	52.63		Climate obstacles affecting agriculture or farming activities	11	57.89	Health problems affecting family income activities	10	76.92
Health problems ffecting family income activities	6	31.58		Health problems/death of family breadwinner/disable	3	15.79	Climate obstacles affecting	9	69.23

				members affecting family income activities			agriculture or farming activities		
Infrastructural obstacles affecting family income activities	1	5.26		Land ownership problems affecting family income activities	3	15.7	Debts to pay	6	46.15
Debts to pay	1	5.26					Infrastructural obstacles affecting family income activities	5	38.46
Land ownership problems affecting family income activities	1	5.26					Land ownership problems affecting family income activities	5	38.46
Other	1	5.26					Inter-communal conflicts/insecurity affecting family income activities	3	23.08
Total	19	100		*Total*	19	100	Other specify	2	15.38

Other non-economic family challenges *(multiple option)*

Dropout students	Frequency	%	***Parents of dropout students***	Frequency	%	***Stakeholders***	Frequency	%
Health problems	10	52.63	Health problems	9	47.37	Internal family problems (violence…)	11	84.62
Problems induced by climatic conditions (inability to take roads, to go out, to find water)	4	21.05	Problems induced by climatic conditions (inability to take roads, to go out, to find water)	6	31.58	Problems induced by climatic conditions	9	69.23
Internal family problems (violence…)	3	15.79	Internal family problems (violence…)	2	10.53	Health problems	6	46.15
Other	2	10.53	Other	2	10.53	Problems with youth peers	5	38.46
Problems with youth peers	1	5.26	Problems with older members of the community	2	10.53	Insecurity in the area	3	23.08
Total	17	100	Problems with youth peers	1	5.26	Problems with older members of the community	2	15.38
			Insecurity in the area	1	5.26	Problems with the social and cultural norms	2	15.38
			Total	19	100	Total	13	100

What is the yearly family income made of? *(multiple option)*					
Dropout students	Frequency	%		***Parents of dropout students***	Frequency	%
Other specify	7	36.84		Farming/breeding/pastoral/grazing related activities	7	36.84
Agriculture related activities	7	36.84		Agriculture related activities	7	36.84
Farming/breeding/pastoral/grazing related activities	5	26.32		Other specify	4	21.05
Commercial/vendor/crafting activities (not related to agriculture or farming)	2	10.53		Commercial/vendor/crafting activities (not related to agriculture or farming)	3	15.79
State subsidies	2	10.53		Remittances	1	5.26
Remittances	2	10.53				
Total	19	100		*Total*	19	100

Households' information					
		Parents	%	Students	%
Electricity	Yes	10	52,63	14	73,68
	No	9	47,37	5	26,32
Phone	No	5	26,32	1	5,26
Phone (no smartphone)	Yes	9	47,37	11	57,89
Smartphone	Yes	5	26,32	7	36,84
Internet access at home	Yes	0	0,00	4	21,05
	No	19	100,00	15	78,95
Total		19	100	19	100

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - Reasons why kids' dropout in Dire Dawa

The dropout condition is									
Parents	Frequency	%		*Students*	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Temporary condition	12	63.16		Temporary condition	11	57.89	Temporary condition	12	92.31
Permanent condition	7	36.84		Permanent condition	8	42.11	Permanent condition	1	7.69
Dropout has taken place as									
Parents	Frequency	%		Students	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Gradual process	16	84.21		Gradual process	15	78.95	Gradual process	11	84.62
All of a sudden	3	15.79		All of a sudden	4	21.05	All of a sudden	2	15.38

Who in the family mainly took/takes the decision of school dropout?								
Parents	Frequency	%	*Students*	Frequency	%	*Stakeholders*	Frequency	%
Child	15	78,95	Child	19	100,00	Father	4	30.77
Father	2	10,53	Other	2	10,53	Mother	4	30.77
Mother	2	10,53	Mother/Grand mother	1	5,26	Child	4	30.77
Other	1	5,26	Total	19		Other	2	15.38
Total	19					Total	13	100
Who can affect the decision NOT to go to school?								
Peers/friends	18	94.74	Peers/friends	11	57.89	*Stakeholders*	Frequency	%
						Peers/friends	10	76.92
Ethiopians abroad	1	5.26	Community leader	1	5.26	Ethiopians abroad	4	30.77
Community leader	1	5.26	Other specify	1	5.26	Community leader	1	7.69
Total	19		Total	19		Religious leader	1	7.69
Who can affect the decision to go to school?								
Peers/friends	12	63.16	Peers/friends	12	63.16	*Stakeholders*	Frequency	**%**
						Community leader	12	92.31
School teachers	12	63.16	Teachers/school directors	12	63.16	Teachers/school directors	11	84.62
Community leader	10	52.63	Community leader	7	36.84	Peers/friends	10	76.92
Religious leader	6	31.58	Other	5	26.32	NGOs, Church, experts	6	46.15
Other	5	26.32	Religious leader	4	21.05	Religious leader	5	38.46
NGOs, Church, experts	3	15.79	Ethiopians abroad	1	5.26	Other	3	23.08
Ethiopians abroad	2	10.53	Total	19		Ethiopians abroad	2	15.38
Total	19					Total	13	100

Why girls drop out?					
Parents	Frequency	%	*Students*	Frequency	%
Girls get married earlier than boys	18	94.74	Girls get married earlier than boys	18	94.74
Girls are more needed at home	15	78.95	Girls are more needed at home	14	73.68
The local tradition tells girls shall better stay home	2	10.53	The local tradition tells girls shall better stay home	1	5.26
Other specify	1	5.26	Other specify	1	5.26
Education for girls is not as important as for boys	1	5.26	Girls prefer not to go to school	1	5.26
Total	19		Total	19	

How did you reach school? (*students*)					
Primary	Frequency	%	*Secondary*	Frequency	%
Walking	19	100	Walking	15	78.95
Other (tuk tuk)	1	5.26	By a public transport mean	7	36.84
			By a private transport mean	1	5.26

How much time (minutes) to reach the school?				
	Mean	*Median*	*Mode*	*Standard deviation*
Primary	38.21	10.00	10.00	50.08
Secondary	61.89	40.00	30.00	58.61

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - Climate change and its impacts on school dropout

Climate change impact on your family livelihood								
	Students	*Parents*	*And on **you personally** (students)*			*And on **girls specifically** (students)*		
A lot	15	17	A lot	12	63.16	A lot	13	68.42
Enough	1	1	None	4	21.05	I don't know	4	21.05
A little	2	1	Enough	4	21.05	A little	2	10.53
Not at all	1		A little	1	5.26	None	0	0
Total	19	19	Total	19	100%	Total	19	100%

Impact of climate change on kids' capacity to go to school					
Students	Frequency	%	*Parents*	Frequency	%
Yes, sometimes	10	52.63	Yes, often	13	68.42
Yes, often	7	36.84	Yes, sometimes	6	31.58
Not that often	1	5.26	Not that often		
Never	1	5.26	Never		
Total	19			19	

The most vulnerable to climate change		
Students	Frequency	%
Children	13	68.42
Women	10	52.63
Elderly people	9	47.37
All in the same way	5	26.32
Girls	3	15.79
Boys	1	5.26

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - The interlink between school dropout, migration, and individual aspirations

	Family members abroad	*Of whom: less than 18 years old*	*Total*
Dropout students	3	2	19
Parents of dropout students	7	6	19

How is migration perceived by youth?								
Students	Frequency	%	*Parents*	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
A life success	13	68.42	A life success	13	68.42	A support for the family	12	92.31
An opportunity to escape from poverty	8	42.11	An opportunity to escape from poverty	13	68.42	An opportunity to escape from poverty	12	92.31
A support for the family	8	42.11	A support for the family	6	31.58	A life success	11	84.62
Dangerous and risky	7	36.84	An aspiration	5	26.32	An aspiration	7	53.85
An aspiration	2	10.53	Other	1	5.26			
Other	2	10.53						
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	

Why young people migrate in the area?								
Students	*Frequency*	*%*	*Parents*	*Frequency*	*%*	*Stakeholders*	*Frequency*	*%*
To look for a job (due to unemployment)	17	89.47	To look for a job (due to unemployment)	18	94.74	To look for a job (due to unemployment)	13	100
To look for a better job (a more rewarding job)	7	36.84	To look for a better job (a more rewarding job)	9	47.37	To look for a better job (a more rewarding job)	10	76.92
Other	3	15.79	To escape from marriage	5	26.32	To look for adventure/aspiration/success abroad	8	61.54
To look for adventure/ success	2	10.53	To escape from violence/insecurity	1	5.26	To study/get better skills and competences	5	38.46
To escape from marriage	2	10.53	To study/get better skills and competences	1	5.26	To escape from violence/insecurity	3	23.08
To study/get better skills and competences	1	5.26	To look for adventure/ success	1	5.26	To escape from marriage	1	7.69

Who are the key persons that can influence the child migration decision?								
Students	Frequency	%	Parents	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Peers/friends	19	100	Peers/friends	19	100	Peers/friends	13	100
Teachers	7	36.84	Teachers	7	36.84	Ethiopians abroad	9	69.23
School director	4	21.05	School director	6	31.58	Community leader	8	61.54
Ethiopians abroad	3	15.79	Religious leader	4	21.05	Teachers	7	53.85
Community leader	3	15.79	Ethiopians abroad	4	21.05	School director	6	46.15
Other	2	10.53	Community leader	3	15.79	Religious leader	6	46.15
Religious leader	1	5.26	Other	2	10.53	Other	4	30.77
			NGO/local expert	1	5.26	NGO/local expert	4	30.77
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	

Who in your family can mainly influence the child migration decision?					
Students	Frequency	%	Parents	Frequency	%
Child	11	57.89	Child	15	78.95
Father	3	15.79	Mother	3	15.79
Other	3	15.79	Father	1	5.26
Mother	2	10.53			
Total	19		Total	19	

Is migration a topic discussed at the community level?								
Students	Frequency	%	*Parents*	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Never	6	31.58	Yes, often	9	47.37	Yes, occasionally	8	61.54
Yes, often	6	31.58	Yes, occasionally	8	42.11	Yes, often	4	30.77
Yes, occasionally	4	21.05	Never	2	10.53	Not that often	1	7.69
Not that often	3	15.79						
Is migration a topic discussed at family level?								
Not that often	6	31.58	Yes, often	4	21.05			
Yes, occasionally	6	31.58	Yes, occasionally	1	5.26			
Yes, often	5	26.32	Not much	1	5.26			
Never	2	10.53	Never	1	5.26			
Total	19		Total	7				

Competences needed to migrate								
Students	Frequency	%	Parents	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Technical/vocational	13	68.42	Technical/vocational	17	89.47	Technical/ vocational	13	100
Language	11	57.89	Language	12	63.16	Language	11	84.62
Driving	11	57.89	Driving	10	52.63	Driving	9	69.23
Computer	6	31.58	Computer	6	31.58	Computer	8	61.54
Other specify	5	26.32	Other specify	2	10.53	Soft/relational skills	5	38.46
Health	3	15.79	Soft/relational skills	1	5.26	Health	4	30.77
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	100

Has the school the capacity to develop skills/competences for the local labour market?					
Students	*Frequency*	*%*	*Stakeholders*	*Frequency*	*%*
Not at all	8	42.11	I do not know	4	30.77
I do not know	5	26.32	Not at all	4	30.77
Not much	3	15.79	Yes, somehow	3	23.08
Yes, somehow	2	10.53	Not much	2	15.38
Yes, a lot	1	5.26			
Total 19			Total 13		

Would you consider going back to school if this could give you more skills and competences to find a local job*?*		
Dropout students	Frequency	%
Not at all	5	26.32
I do not know	4	21.05
Not much	4	21.05
Yes, a lot	3	15.79
Total	19	

Would you consider sending back the kids to school if this could give them more skills and competences to find a local job?		
Parents	*Frequency*	*%*
Yes, a lot	13	68.42
Yes, maybe	3	15.79
I do not know	2	10.53
Not much	1	5.26
Total	19	

What subjects could be reinforced or included in school to make it more interesting for families/students?								
Parents	frequency	%	*Students*	frequency	%	*Stakeholders*	frequency	%
Technical competences (as vocational training, learning a profession)	14	73.68	Technical competences	14	73.68	Technical competences	12	92.31
Entrepreneurial training	9	47.37	Entrepreneurial training	11	57.89	Entrepreneurial training	11	84.62
Computer training	7	36.84	Computer training	10	52.63	Computer training	10	76.92
Language skills	6	31.58	Language skills	8	42.11	Language skills	9	69.23
Pre-migratory preparation	6	31.58	Agriculture related training	3	15.79	Agriculture related training	6	46.15
Agriculture related training	3	15.79	Pre-migratory preparation	2	10.53	Pre-migratory preparation (how to organize and manage migration)	4	30.77

Climate change related issues	1	5.26	Climate change related issues	1	5.26	Climate change related issues	3	23.08
Total parents' answers 19			No need to change, it is already good	1	5.26	Other	3	23.08
			Other	1	5.26			
Total parents 19			Total dropout students 19			Total stakeholders 13		

ANNEX TABLES: Fieldwork evidence - Conditions and initiatives to help reducing school dropout

What could concretely encourage families to avoid school dropout?								
Students	*Frequency*	*%*	*Parents*	*Frequency*	*%*	*Stakeholders*	*Frequency*	*%*
Free meals at school	17	89.47	Free uniform/ books/	18	94.74	Free meals at school	13	100
Monetary support/loans for family for economic activities	17	89.47	Free meals at school	15	78.95	Free uniform/ books/	13	100
Free uniform/ books	16	84.21	Monetary support/loans for family for economic activities	11	57.89	Monetary support/loans for family for economic activities	12	92.31
Free access to health facilities	4	21.05	Monetary support/loans for family to pay for schooling	6	31.58	Better teaching/school programme/new skills-competences	6	46.15
Other	1	5.26	Public transport/better roads connection	4	21.05	Free access to health facilities	4	30.77
Free internet/ internet access	1	5.26	Better teaching/school programme/new skills-competences	1	5.26	Monetary support/loans for family to pay for schooling	3	23.08
Better teaching/school programme/new skills-competences	1	5.26	Lower school tuition	1	5.26	Different school schedule	2	15.38
Monetary support/loans for family to pay for schooling	1	5.26	Free internet/ internet access	1	5.26	Free internet/ internet access	2	15.38
Public transport/better roads connection	1	5.26	Different school schedule	1	5.26	Free electricity	1	7.69
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	

What different local conditions could reduce school dropout in your village/Kebele?								
Students	*Frequency*	*%*	*Parents*	*Frequency*	*%*	*Stakeholders*	*Frequency*	*%*
Improved local economy	14	73.68	Money/support for books/uniforms	14	73.68	Money/support for books/uniforms	12	92.31
Money/support to pay for books/uniforms	13	68.42	Improved local economy	12	63.16	Presence of micro-finance services to improve family economic activities	10	76.92
Presence of micro-finance services to improve family economic activties	10	52.63	Better climate/environmental conditions	10	52.63	Improved local economy	9	69.23
Presence of secondary school in the area	7	36.84	Micro-finance services to improve family economic activities	6	31.58	Presence of secondary school in the area	8	61.54
Better quality of education/teachers /school programmes	5	26.32	Better quality of education/teachers / school programmes	3	15.79	Better quality of education/teachers / school programmes	6	46.15
Better climate/environmental conditions	4	21.05	Presence of secondary school in the area	3	15.79	Improved road connectivity/transportation offer	4	30.77
			Other	1	5.26	Better climate/environmental conditions	4	30.77
						Improved security conditions	3	23.08
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	

What could encourage families to send girls to school? (multiple)								
Students	Frequency	%	*Parents*	Frequency	%	Stakeholders	Frequency	%
Economic support for the family	18	94.74	Economic support for the family	18	94.74	Economic support for the family	12	92.31
Someone else to substitute girls' domestic work	7	36.84	School meal for girls	8	42.11	Approval from family members (father, mother, others)	8	61.54
School meal for girls	6	31.58	Other (sanitary pad)	7	36.84	School meal for girls	8	61.54
Girls' commitment to go to school	3	15.79	Girls' commitment to go to school	4	21.05	Someone else to substitute girls' domestic work	7	53.85
Approval from family members	2	10.53	Approval from family members	3	15.79	Approval/discussion with the village community	7	53.85
Discussion with the community	2	10.53	Someone else to substitute girls' domestic work	3	15.79	Approval from the religious leader	4	30.77
Other (specify)	2	10.53	Discussion with the community	2	10.53	Access to health facility	3	23.08
Gaining competences useful for family activities	1	5.26				Girls' commitment to go to school	3	23.08
Access to health facility	1	5.26				Competences gained useful for family activities	3	23.08
Total	19		Total	19		Total	13	