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Labour
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Policy Brief

Key findings and recommendations
from survey on **labour migration** from
Ethiopia to Gulf Cooperation Council
states and Lebanon





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First published 2019

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Title: Policy Brief: Key findings and recommendations from survey on labour migration from Ethiopia to Gulf Cooperation Council states and Lebanon

Language: English edition

ISBN: 978-92-2-132970-1 (print)
978-92-2-132971-8 (web pdf)

ILO Cataloguing in Publication Data

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Design and layout by the International Training Centre of the ILO, Turin – Italy

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THE NEED FOR ORIGINAL DATA

Ethiopia has become one of the major sending countries of Migrant Workers (MWs) to the Middle Eastern countries and their numbers have greatly increased in recent years. According to the data from Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) around 460,000 Ethiopians have legally migrated for employment to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States mainly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon between September 2008 and August 2013¹. MoLSA's administrative records show that 86 per cent of the 460,000 migrants who migrated from 2008 to 2013 were women. The high number of female migrants in official statistics on regular labour migration is mainly due to the greater opportunities they have for regular labour migration (mainly into domestic work) to the GCC States, Lebanon and Sudan, while male migrants might need to resort to irregular channels due to lack of opportunity for regular labour migration.

Following an escalation of outward migration in 2011 and 2012 and heightened reports of abuse, exploitation and the trafficking of workers, the Government of Ethiopia identified labour migration as a forefront priority and imposed a temporary ban on all labour migration to the Middle East as of October 2013 as a way to better protect its citizens. This ban was lifted in October 2018.

In the meantime, the Ethiopian Government developed and adopted a new legal and institutional framework aligned to international standards, geared towards minimizing abuse and exploitation of Ethiopian Migrant Workers and maximizing

¹ MoLSA. *Annual Report*



the development outcomes of these flows. Specifically, in 2015, the Government adopted Proclamation No. 909/2015 on Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons that sets out procedures for the investigation of smuggling and trafficking offences as well as establishing procedures for the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. Then in 2016, many positive institutional and legal framework changes were incorporated into the revised Ethiopia Overseas Employment Proclamation No. 923/2016.

Recognizing that there has been an increase in unemployed and underemployed youth that migrate overseas for better jobs over the past several years, and acknowledging the numerous decent work deficits that Ethiopian migrants experience in the Middle East, the ILO initiated a four-year DFID funded project titled *“Improved Labour Migration Governance to Protect Migrant Workers and Combat Irregular Migration in Ethiopia”*. The project aims to support efforts by the Government of Ethiopia and civil society groups to reduce irregular migration by improving labour migration governance and making regular labour migration more accessible and desirable to potential migrants in Ethiopia. The project supported a baseline survey which was designed to respond to five objectives:

- ▶ Estimate the prevalence of regular and irregular labour migration to Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) States and Lebanon.
- ▶ Examine the capacity of government agencies to manage labour migration effectively and efficiently.
- ▶ Assess the awareness and knowledge of potential migrants and migrant workers on laws, rights, procedures and information about major destination countries.
- ▶ Assess the protection of migrant workers, including the quality of services provided by Ethiopian diplomatic missions and the satisfaction of migrants who have used their services.
- ▶ Identify and assess challenges, opportunities and recommendations for effective labour migration governance in Ethiopia and for Ethiopian missions in major destination countries.

a violation under the Employment Exchange Services Proclamation No. 632/2009 as well as the revised and endorsed Ethiopia's Overseas Employment Proclamation No.923/2016.

ACCESS TO PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

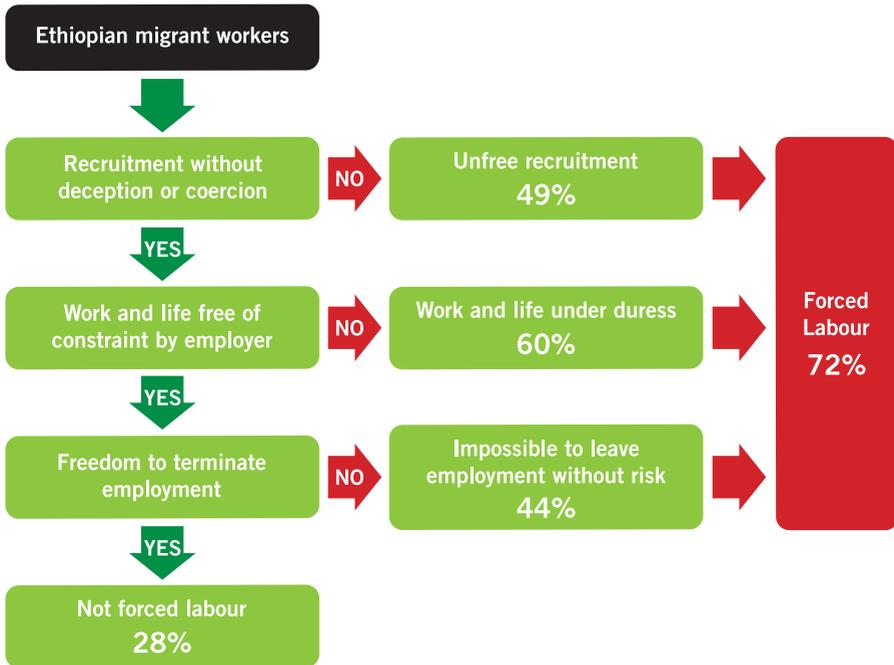
Most of the respondents who cited some form of abuse indicated they had not resolved their problem. Only 12 per cent had found some solution from friends and family (24 per cent) or the Ethiopian mission (21 per cent).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION BACK IN ETHIOPIA

Upon their return to Ethiopia, 42 per cent of respondents remained unemployed and were looking for work. Most had to shift to a new sector in most cases agriculture, the very sector they had left initially for a better opportunity abroad. Male and female respondents experienced similar unemployment rates.

SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF ETHIOPIAN MIGRANT WORKERS END IN FORCED LABOUR

About 72 per cent of working and returned Ethiopian migrants from GCC States and Lebanon were under forced labour based on the ILO definition. The ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) defines forced labour as *“all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily”*. As per the framework a forced labour case is confirmed when indicators of involuntariness and penalty are both active. Ethiopia has ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (C29) and Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention of 1930 (P029), which establishes the obligations to prevent forced labour, protect victims and provide them with access to remedies, and emphasizes the link between forced labour and trafficking in persons. In line with Convention No. 29, the Protocol also reaffirms the importance of prosecuting the perpetrators of forced labour and ending their impunity.

Figure 1. Prevalence of forced labour among returned and still working respondents

SOME ROOT CAUSES

Payment of recruitment fees and absence of proper pre-migration services were identified as the two significant drivers towards forced labour for Ethiopian migrant workers in GCC States and Lebanon. Whether or not migrant workers paid a recruitment fee in the GCC States and Lebanon and whether or not they received pre-migration services, were conditions found to have the strongest impact on forced labour outcomes.



Paying of recruitment fees were higher for migrants in situation of irregular migration than those in regular migration as it usually included transiting through high risk countries like Yemen, Djibouti and Somalia. It also suggests smugglers were involved. When such fees were paid, forced labour cases increased to 86 per cent as opposed to 65 per cent when not paid, since migrant workers were forced to stay with their employers and work under abusive and exploitative conditions until they had paid off their 'debt'. This process is constitutive of 'debt bondage', which, like the payment of fees, is prohibited in international UN instruments and ILO standards.

The second condition relates to **pre-migration services including skills training and pre-departure orientation**. When migrants received such services in combination with using regular migration channels with zero recruitment costs, forced labour outcomes decreased to 49 per cent. Contrary, almost 97 per cent of migrant workers who were or had been in forced labour situations were much more likely not to have received pre-migration services and were forced to pay recruitment fees.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Fair recruitment practices and zero recruitment fees and related costs

The Government of Ethiopia should continue to put in place and monitor measures implementing its new legislation thus ensuring fair recruitment practices and eliminating worker-paid recruitment fees and related costs of recruitment fee. Government should adopt measures which will effectively protect migrant workers from exploitation and abuse by corrupt labour recruiters and fraudulent and abusive employment agencies. The Government of Ethiopia has to work actively and regularly on monitoring and following up the recruitment process and recruitment related costs to prevent abuse and exploitation of migrant workers. MoLSA has to develop a strategy that ensures proper monitoring of the recruitment practices including licensing of recruitment agencies, their inspection, and proper enforcement and follow-through.

Enhance provision of quality service for potential migrant workers

MoLSA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General Office should establish, in a coordinated manner, quality and proper service provision mechanisms for potential migrants to access the needed labour migration information prior to departure, during employment abroad and upon return, including in terms of conciliation, arbitration and redress mechanisms. MoLSA should strengthen its pre-departure orientation and training to employment standards at destination.

Improve protection of migrant workers in GCC States and Lebanon

The Government of Ethiopia should ensure timely and pertinent training and assignment of Labour Attachés and Protection Officers in major destination countries in order to ensure follow up of working conditions, handling of work related disputes and grievance and support migrant workers towards successful integration in the destination countries. In addition, Ethiopian missions abroad need to identify major challenges for Ethiopian migrant workers and proactively work on addressing these by expanding prevention, protection and other services.

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Link to full survey: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-addis_ababa/---sro-addis_ababa/documents/publication/wcms_646291.pdf



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ISBN 978-92-2-132970-1



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