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Abstract

This paper focuses on the forced and precipitated return of Ethiopian migrants from the Middle East and associated challenges for migrants and their households and for local and national authorities in Ethiopia. It will take into account the demographic characteristics and gender dimensions of potentially marginalized populations, migration management laws and regulations, as well as the main challenges and opportunities posed by contemporary migration flows and return to both the government and society. The paper starts by discussing some key issues and concepts of return migration and reintegration. It then provides comprehensive information on the migration profile of Ethiopia as a country of origin, transit and destination of immigration and emigration flows. It also illustrates available policies, legislations, and regulations that govern labour migration, return and reintegration of migrant workers in Ethiopia as well as the migration policies of destination countries such as Saudi Arabia. The paper also addresses the motivation and characteristics of returnees, their individual vulnerabilities, the challenges they are facing upon and after returning home as well as the role of state actors, civil society and international organisations in addressing the situation and the challenges involved. The voluntary and involuntary repatriation of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers mainly from Saudi Arabia is not only negatively influences migration investment, but also destroys the livelihoods of low-income families who rely on remittances for a living. The study indicates that returning migrants experience a number of challenges ranging from economic and social to psychosocial which hinders them from effective reintegration. Lack of funds and required skills makes it harder for returnees to re-enter the local labour market through job placement or starting small businesses. The migration cycle in Ethiopia highlights the likelihood of people to re-migrate whether the first experience was positive or not. Evidence demonstrates that remigration is often the result of lack of effective reintegration.

Keywords: migration, return, reintegration, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Middle East, eastern route

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List of abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
GO	Government Organisations
GSA	Good Samaritan Association
HoA	Horn of Africa
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
IEC	Information Education Communication
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ILO	International Labor Organisation
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoHRE	Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
NECC	National Emergency Coordination Centre
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PoE	Points of Entry
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RMMS	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
VoT	Victim of Trafficking

Introduction

People from the Horn of Africa are increasingly moving out of the region seeking better job opportunities. Most of them are taking the Eastern route to reach Saudi Arabia crossing the war-torn Yemen. The migratory route between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, as IOM Director-General António Vitorino put it, is "one of the busiest, most complex and dangerous in the world" (IOM, 2021). The Horn of Africa (HoA) is an important source of migrant workers for the Middle East and it is characterized by complex migration dynamics with a long history of intra-regional and inter-regional population movements through both regular and irregular channels (Marchand et al., 2017; IOM, 2020a). Migration within, from, and to the HoA region has been fueled by various political, socio-economic, and environmental factors. The region is also characterised by mixed migration flows, with different categories of people on the move, such as economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors (IOM, 2020c).

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa after Nigeria, accounts for the largest number of migrant movements in the HoA. In 2019, around 79 percent of all migrant observations along the Eastern route were migrating towards Saudi Arabia, 20 percent were headed to Yemen, and only one percent to other countries on the Arab Peninsula (IOM, 2020a). Ethiopian migrants are increasingly migrating through the Eastern route which has long been an important migration route. According to the estimation of MoLSA, around 1.5 million Ethiopians had left the country illegally between the years 2008 and 2014. Meanwhile 480,480 Ethiopians moved to Arab countries legally during those years. Until Ethiopia lifted a ban on domestic workers moving overseas in October 2018, there were no legal options for labour migration overseas. Many studies and key informants have reported that this tends to increase irregular labour migration, which in turn increases migrants' vulnerability to irregular migration and human trafficking, as well as routine deportation from Saudi Arabia and other countries.

The reverse migration flow to the HoA from Yemen has been a recent migration feature. IOM registered a total of 351,870 returnees between April 2017 and November 2020. More recently, the Coronavirus pandemic has heightened the repatriation of Ethiopian migrant workers from the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries. Over the past three years, the government of Ethiopia has been closely working with countries in the Middle East and Africa to repatriate its stranded citizens, as part of its newly unveiled "citizen focused diplomacy" (MoFA,2021). Saudi Arabia began repatriating Ethiopian migrants from mid-2018, according to UN officials (Ullah, 2021). Tens of thousands of migrants have been repatriated since then. Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia agreed to repatriate 1,000 Ethiopian migrants per week after coming under mounting international pressure (ibid). In its weekly press release on June 24, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia said they will repatriate all compatriots (i.e., over 40,000) stranded in Saudi Arabian detention centers in two weeks (MoFA, 2021). However, the repatriation of these low-skilled domestic workers can also be seen in a political lens, with national elections approaching in Ethiopia. Upon return, migrants face several complex and interrelated challenges. In the current context, where large scale returns are likely to take place, it becomes crucial to better understand the opportunities and challenges of Ethiopians who are being returned to their country of origin. These complex migratory flows pose challenges for policymakers engaged in migration governance.

This paper is organised into six sections. The first section discusses some key issues and concepts of return migration. The second provides a brief overview of the historical development of international migration in Ethiopia. It also highlights the current migration landscape with a particular emphasis on how the migration landscape has changed over time, in terms of the direction, volume, and motivation of the movement and characteristics of the movers. The third section illustrates available policies, legislations, and regulations that govern labour migration, return, and reintegration of migrant workers. The fourth section provides a review of the "Saudisation" of the Saudi Arabia workforce (notably, the replacement of foreign workers with

Saudi nationals in the private sector and, consequently, the forced return of migrant workers to Ethiopia since 2011, along with the motives and characteristics of returnees, as well as their individual vulnerabilities and unmet needs. The fifth section provides the context of return and examines what factors contribute to the successful reintegration (or lack thereof), as well as its challenges, including the impact of conflict in Ethiopia's Northern region, as well as responses by government and other stakeholders. It also identifies key stakeholders working on return and reintegration issues in Ethiopia. The final section provides findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the data gathering, analysis, and interviews.

Return migration: some issues and concepts

Return migration is the 'movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle' (Gmelch, 1980). Return is just one stage of the migration process, but not necessarily the final one (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021). It is one of the least understood phenomena of migration, not least because it is often unrecorded (Cassarino, 2004). As Battistella (2018, p. 12) argued, "return should be properly understood as a diversified process according to the time it takes place, the completion of the migration project, the level of constraint the migrants experience, and the preparedness of the migrants, their families, and the institutions involved."

Return is used interchangeably with repatriation and reversed migration on the one hand, and removal, readmission, or expulsion on the other (Sahin-Mencutek, 2021, p. 5). Return migration takes place in a number of ways and under different conditions, which can create challenges and opportunities for the reintegration process (IOM, 2017). It is largely "influenced by the initial motivations for migration as well as by the duration of the stay abroad and particularly by the conditions under which the return takes place" (Ghosh, 2000, p. 185). Migrants return home for several reasons including personal and family factors, realization of migration objectives, or lack thereof, as well as circumstances in the countries of origin and destination. It is also largely but implicitly linked to asylum and irregular migration governance (Triandafyllidou & Ricard-Guay, 2019; Erdal, 2020; Sahin-Mencutek, 2021; Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021).

The decision to return is as complex as the decision to leave one's own country. The decision to return depends on the (1) the structural conditions in home and host countries (which in turn can be divided into political, economicm and social factors); (2) the individual and family characteristics of migrants themselves; and (3) incentives that exist in public policy that may persuade (or dissuade) people from returning (Black et al., 2014, p. 16).

Voluntary and involuntary return

Based on the circumstances under which the return happens, return migration can be broadly grouped into voluntary and forced (Cassarino, 2004; Triandafyllidou & Ricard-Guay, 2019; Erdal, 2020). Cassarino (2015) noted the importance of emphasising the willingness and readiness of the migrant to return. In other words, the returnee's preparedness refers to a voluntary act that must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home (Cassarino, 2004, p. 271). Battistella (2018) also noted that preparedness is needed at the individual level (psychological, technical, financial, and social capital) and institutional (central/national and local-level institutions). Cassarino (2015, p. 274) further identifies three levels of preparedness which are consequential to how resources, if at all, may be mobilised before and also after return: returnees with high level of preparedness, those having a low level of preparedness, and returnees whose level of preparedness is non-existent.

Voluntary return is the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee. These migrants have an explicit

intention to return, especially once they have reached their savings goals, or acquired skills, higher education, or business networks in their host countries which they can transfer and apply back home (Haase & Honerath, 2016, p. 6). Voluntary returns can be either spontaneous or assisted. With assisted returns, coercion is implicit and not physical, in that there are no legal options left to the migrant, other than to leave the country he or she is in (Erdal, 2020). Assistance may involve some or all of these: business start-up coaching and counselling, labour market counselling, vocational training – including on-the-job training, internships and job placement, housing, health care, and children's education (OECD, 2020).

Involuntary or forced return, on the other hand, is the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, to a place of transit or to a third-country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision (IOM, 2020). Forced return typically coincides with insufficient preparedness because the migrant did not expect to suddenly conclude the migration project (Battistella, 2018, p. 11). It seems that migrants'/returnees' self-identification has been missing in a forced-voluntary continuum discourse, despite the importance of individual migration decisions, experiences, and agency under which it is made in a different and complex circumstances (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018). This is partly because the typologies of return are defined, labelled, and selectively used by international migration organisations, development agencies, and regional bodies in migrant host countries (Cassarino, 2015; Sahin-Mencutek, 2021). However, recent literature on return migration emphasized the importance of the macro, meso, and micro level factors in shaping individual decisions to move or return. Gemi and Triandafyllidou (2021, p. 127), for example, indicate that "while the decision to return is dominated by macro factors such as the economic crisis and consequent unemployment and loss of income or legal status, the meso factors such as networks are crucial for the individual migrant and their family to take the decision and make the move." They also further noted that "it is at the micro level of individual decision and action and the meso level of mediating factors where return's contours are shaped as opportunity or forced decision" (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 127).

Return migration and feelings of belonging

Return migration – forced or voluntary – can be seen differently by host and origin countries. For host countries, it can be a migration management strategy or a border control strategy with the aim of reducing irregular migration. Currently many European countries are providing sustainable return and reintegration assistance to migrants who are willing to return and for origin countries as part of development cooperation (OECD, 2020). The return narratives do not only have "symbolic significance for domestic politics" of migrant host-country governments that "seek to thoughtfully disseminate the message of controlling migration issues and maintaining order" (Sahin-Mencutek, 2021, p. 3; Sökefeld, 2019), but it is also equally important for migrant sending-countries like Ethiopia that wanted to be seen by nationals as having a trustworthy government that fulfils its protection responsibilities for citizens stranded or under difficult circumstances in a foreign soil. The protection of citizens abroad may contribute to perceptions of government legitimacy at least in the context of the recent Ethiopian election on June 21st, 2021. To a lesser extent, the return of Ethiopian diaspora from western countries is related to development with the assumption that they can use the acquired skills, knowledge, and capital for the socio-economic development of the country. However, this is not the case for low-skilled migrants. When there is a mass deportation of migrants it is often seen as an emergency. Only

victim return migrants[1] have the right to access reintegration support, indicating that the focus here is addressing the challenges of vulnerable migrants returning from the Gulf, including those with physical injury and mental health issues.

Lack of effective reintegration policy arrangements increasingly led returnees to remigrate. Here is where the notions of return and reintegration are intimately interlinked with that of sustainability (IOM, 2017). Sustainable return and reintegration indicate that migrant returnees are comfortably participating or re-entering in all aspects of life – social, economic, political, and cultural – and feel a reasonable level of safety and security in the country of origin (Cassarino, 2014; Koser & Kuschminder, 2015). However, sustainable return must not portray that returnees never move again to other countries. In other words, sustainable return does not necessarily mean that the migrant and their family will not engage in new migration (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 124). Indeed, the decisions to migrate must be a matter of choice, rather than necessity (IOM, 2017). Black et al. (2004) also argued that the notion of sustainability must take into account the physical, socio-economic, and political security aspects of sustainability, as well as considering these from the subjective perception of the returnee, in terms of the objective condition of individual returnees, and in terms of aggregate conditions in the home country.

Studies indicate that migrants' return outcomes are affected by several factors ranging from individual and family to community and structural (Black et al., 2004; Bilgili et al., 2018). These outcomes are strongly connected to the migrants' and their families' pre-migration socio-economic status, the experiences encountered along the way and after arrival from the Gulf and Middle East, and the modalities of return. It is to mean that return outcomes are a function of the entire migration experience, not just return as Gemi and Triandafyllidou (2021, p. 131) suggest that:

> …reintegration does not happen in a homogenous environment of the 'homeland' but rather in specific local contexts–in smaller cities or in the capital, at school or at work–and the previous migration experience is both an asset and a liability. Here, individual agency and mobilizing networks are crucial in negotiating both social and economic reintegration.

The reintegration approach must also take all these factors into consideration. Otherwise the reintegration support is less likely to be sustainable.

Motivation to return and the migration cycle

As Table 1 below shows, return outcomes and motivations are linked to the (in)completeness of the migration cycle. Migrants who returned home after meeting their migration objectives tend to have positive reintegration experience; while those who returned to their country of origin before completing the migration cycle are more likely to face reintegration difficulties (Cassarino 2004; Haase & Honerath, 2016). Reintegration into countries and communities of origin have different dimensions – social, economic, and political. A study in Ghana indicated that returnees' definitions of belonging fall into two categories: individual belonging (belonging to a place) and social/collective belonging (politics of belonging) (Arhin-San, 2019). Interventions must address the economic, psychosocial, and social aspects of

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[1] According to Article 2(1) of Victim Migrant Returnees Reintegration Implementation Directive 65/2018: "[An] Ethiopian citizen who left his/her country of origin willingly or unwillingly; regularly or irregularly without a limited duration of his/her stay abroad; suffered physical, economic, psychological or social damage as a result of assault or abuse during the travel/ transit or in the destination country and returned back to his/her country."

reintegration and the support should be provided at individual, family, community, as well as structural level. An integrated approach to reintegration should also address cross-cutting issues such as promoting migrant rights, gender equality, partnerships, and cooperation, as well as improve data collection and monitoring and evaluation of reintegration (IOM, 2019, p. 14).

Table 1. Motivation to return and the migration cycle

Types of migration cycle			
	Complete	**Incomplete**	**Interrupted**
Return motivation	- To run a business concern in the country of origin; - Termination of job contract; - To complete training/studies at home - Achieved migration objective (e.g. successful completion of studies); - Situation in the country of origin has improved	- Job precariousness in the destination country; - Family and personal problems; - Adverse social and cultural environment/ racism/discrimination abroad; - Migration objectives not achieved (e.g. studies not completed)	- Non-renewal of residence permit in the destination country; - Expulsion/readmission; - Administrative/financial hurdles; - Loss of job; - Serious health problems; - Family pressures; - Forced marriage; - War/conflict

Source: Cassarino (2014, p. III): Reintegration and development

By examining the time dimension (before the end or at the end of the migration cycle) and the decision to return (voluntary and involuntary), Battistella (2018, p. 12) identified the four likely scenarios (return of achievement, return of completion, return of setback, and return of crisis (forced return)). He also noted the importance of understanding the complicated nature of return so as to address the different needs of different types of returnees upon and after returning home. In other words, reintegration policies need to take into account the diverse needs of returnees as well as their return outcomes. After analysing the type of return of the first- and second-generation returnees from Greece and Italy to Albania, Gemi and Triandafyllidou (2021, p. 128) identified three patterns: permanent return, transnational return and onward mobility, and occasional return or circularity between the two countries.

Methods and approaches

The study draws on two major sources: secondary and primary sources. The research is based on information collected through a systematic review of the available documents relevant to the subject under study. The desk review encompassed published studies and reports from international agencies, as well as academic studies published on the subject of return migration and integration efforts. It was conducted by assembling reports, research papers, legal and regulatory documents, and analysing migration and return data obtained from government, regional, and international organisations. The database and annual reports of several organisations including IOM, ILO, Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), MoLSA, and MoFA were consulted to analyse the scale and patterns of migration and return flows in Ethiopia. In addition, print and electronic media reports and the internet were widely used.

A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted in Addis Ababa with key stakeholders from a diversity of backgrounds, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, non-governmental organisations, and academics in universities and research institutes. Key

informant interviews were undertaken under a previous study conducted for an international organisation operating in Ethiopia. They were carried out after obtaining ethical clearance from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Flight and Migration Competence Center. Written informed consent was sought from each participant before the interview began, and again after explaining the purpose of the study. Semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with experts working for government and civil society organisations, and international organisations. More specifically, the author interviewed local experts working for the Return and Reintegration Unit of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs which is under the Overseas Employment Directorate; two experts working for Agar and Good Samaritan; employees of local NGOs operating in Addis Ababa focusing mainly on return and reintegration of migrant workers from the Middle East; a staff member working for Ethiopian Red Cross; and an expert from Addis Ababa University. Two officers from two international organisations, notably IOM and ILO, have also been interviewed. The aim was to gather their views on the opportunities and challenges in the national legislation, policies, regulations, and complaint mechanisms that aim to protect migrants, and which provide return and reintegration support. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide which was prepared in Amharic (local language). Each interview took a minimum of 45 minutes and all interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed in Amharic and translated into English. The qualitative analysis was designed to capture and inductively analyse the forced and precipitated return of Ethiopian migrants from the Middle East and associated challenges for migrants and their households and for local and national authorities in Ethiopia. And, the qualitative materials were analysed using thematic analysis to answer specific study questions.

Migration dynamics and patterns in Ethiopia: an overview

While the thematic areas aim at providing a broad overview of the forced and precipitated return of Ethiopian migrants from the Middle East, this section briefly reviews the trends, patterns, and drivers of international migration in Ethiopia. This is mainly because the migration process and experience shape return migration and reintegration. Ethiopia in the last forty years has been experiencing socio-economic, environmental, and political crises that have led to a massive migration of people, both internally and cross-borders. Large scale emigration began in the mid-1970s when the monarchy was overthrown by a military dictatorship. Before the 1974 revolution, some people left for Western countries in pursuit of education, and the rate of return was reportedly high (Terrazas, 2007). In other words, the number of refugees and asylum seekers was negligible, as the country's political terrain was generally stable, despite freedom restrictions. However, migration has subsequently increased during the military regime, and under the current government, and a substantial proportion of migrants remain in destination countries. Consequently, Ethiopia generated a huge refugee outflow in the late 1970s and 1980s with over one million Ethiopians fleeing war and political repression during the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1974 to 1991 (Schroder, 2015). After 17 years in power with catastrophic civil war and political disruption, the military regime collapsed in May 1991 and was replaced by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), triggering a massive successive repatriation campaign. Data obtained from the UNHCR show that the change of government in 1991 allowed the return of over 970,000 Ethiopian refugees from neighboring countries.

Although Ethiopia has seen a reduction in refugee flows over the past decade, documented and undocumented labour migration has significantly increased. Many people are keen to emigrate or desperate to leave the country. Most of the youth in Ethiopia tend to see migration as the only way out of poverty and means of upward social mobility. Currently, emigration is occurring at unprecedented levels in Ethiopia in three major migration corridors: (a) Eastward – to the Gulf States and the Middle East, crossing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden; (b) Southward to South Africa; and (c) Northward or Trans-Saharan migration, from the Horn

region travelling through Sudan, Libya to Italy and beyond. The route chosen by a migrant will depend on her/his income, social status, migration history, and diaspora connections; those with the least alternatives generally choose the most dangerous journeys (DRC, 2017, p. 12).

The Eastern route, which is increasingly characterized by its irregularity, has long been the most relevant migratory corridor in terms of volume and characteristics in the East and HoA region (IOM, 2020a). Over 95 percent of migrants travelling through this route are low-skilled migrant workers from Ethiopia (ibid).

Table 2. Estimates of Ethiopians who migrated to the Middle East

Year	Number of Ethiopians migrated to the Middle East (i.e. Saudi Arabia)	
	Using legal channel	**Irregularly**
2008 – late 2013	480,000	1,500,000
Late 2013 – early 2018 (migration ban)	-	Unknown
2018	-	160,000*
January 2019 – December 2019	-	138,213*

Source: personal interview with MoLSA, IOM, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*Note: The numbers provided here are estimates based on data on returnees assuming all that returned had emigrated using irregular channels.

According to the estimation of MoLSA, around 1.5 million Ethiopians had left the country illegally between the years 2008 and 2014. While, 480,480 Ethiopians moved to Arab countries legally during these years. Women account for about 95 percent of all documented migrants out of Ethiopia. An overwhelming majority of migrants along this route originate from Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regional states. Most of the migrants also return to these regions after being detained while crossing the border or in transit countries such as Djibouti and Yemen (Fernandez, 2017; Marchand et al., 2017; Adugna, 2019). Ethiopian domestic migrants are often young, low skilled, rural based, and with little or no information about the process of migration, the nature of work, as well as areas of destination.

The intensified levels of labour migration to Arab countries can be explained by poverty and population pressure coupled with the scarcity of farmland, unemployment, low productivity, and the rising cost of agricultural inputs, together with the role of social networks. The utility of remittances, the high social status accorded returnees, expansion of illegal agencies, and the relative fall in migration costs have also facilitated this movement (Zewdu, 2019). An estimated 2-3 million people enter the labour market every year while growing youth unemployment adds to existing migratory pressures (DRC, 2016; ILO, 2018). It is also important to note that a universal explanation such as structural problems hides the agency and diverse motives of female domestic migrants. This massive outflow is not only explained by factors associated with the economic situation in Ethiopia. It is also the result of a shift in demand away from Asian domestic workers who tend to seek higher wages, to cheap labour source countries such as Ethiopia, and other countries in the HoA. Ethiopian migrants are often undocumented and their human rights tend not to be protected in the destination countries compared to their Asian counterparts (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004; Fernandez, 2017). This underlines not only the complexity of human mobility across national borders but also indicates the importance of conceptualizing this movement in a broader global perspective, going beyond the traditional push–pull factors embedded in origin and destination countries (Zewdu, 2019). The current trends of migration in Ethiopia shows the fact that the drivers and impact of migration is not just complex, but they are also increasingly interconnected.

Key issues and trends

The landscape of migration has changed from conflict generated to irregular type, mainly driven by economic reasons. Irregular migration, according to IOM (2010), is "movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries." Most Ethiopian migrants either travel irregularly or become irregular in the destination country by overstaying their visas. This irregularity makes them even more vulnerable to abuses and exploitation. It should be noted that migrants using regular channels for migration might also end up in exploitative situations. Restricted access to regular migration options and support to returning migrants, limited awareness of the public on the realities of human trafficking, weak immigration and border management system, as well as insufficient actions being taken to curb climate change-induced migration, all serve as ongoing challenges. The distinction between regular and irregular moves is blurred, as migrants use both channels in the course of migration. Low skilled migrants migrating mainly for domestic work in Arab countries and South Africa have received marginal attention from policy makers and their vulnerability to various forms of abuse and exploitation has continued over the years. The indifference and negligible commitment of governments at both origin and destination exacerbates human rights violations against migrants, including physical and sexual maltreatment, denial of basic freedoms, denial of salary, sleep deprivation, the withholding of passports, confinement, and murder (Anbesse et al., 2009; RMMS, 2015; IOM, 2016; De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Ogahara & Kuschminder, 2019). Deportation is one of the risks of undocumented migration.

A change is also observed in terms of the direction of the movement, volume, drivers, and impact of the movement, as well as the characteristics of the movers. In the last two decades, Ethiopia has seen a massive outflow of female domestic labour to the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries. Its governance has long been problematic. Indeed, the feminization of migration is not unique to Ethiopia, as it is a common phenomenon across the region and beyond. The pattern of migration from and within the HoA is not only mixed but also highly gendered. Female migration from the HoA to the Gulf is recent but now outnumbers their male counterparts, especially from Ethiopia and Somalia. Labour migration of African women to the Middle East is a recent phenomenon, which goes back to the end of the twentieth century (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999).

In Ethiopia, this movement began in the early 1990s. Recent migration from Ethiopia has a strong gender dimension whereby females mainly from the Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions are increasingly moving to Arab countries. On the other hand, rural young men from South Ethiopia increasingly migrate southward to reach South Africa. Women account for about 95 percent of all documented migration out of Ethiopia. The migration of women to Arab countries tends to be undertaken independently, whereas their migration to Western countries is often associated with marriage and other forms of family migration (Zewdu, 2018). This corroborates the findings of other studies that argue that women dominate migration to the developed world through family reunification (Piper 2006; OECD, 2017; Antman, 2018). The majority of Ethiopian female migrants are employed in individual households to perform a variety of household chores including cleaning, laundry, and providing care for children and the elderly. Apart from domestic work, a few of them also work in institutions like clinics and schools as cleaners (Fernandes, 2017; Adugna, 2018;).

The geography of migration has also been changed. The source of migrant labour has expanded from urban centers to small towns and rural villages, which have become an emerging source of labour for the international labour market in Arab countries. This is partly due to the expansion of illegal recruiting agents into regional towns, social networks, the relative fall of migration costs, together with the multiple interrelated push factors, including the reduction of agricultural productivity and unemployment (Adugna, 2019). The government of Ethiopia also reduced migration barriers, and many people now emigrate with few hindrances.

Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia
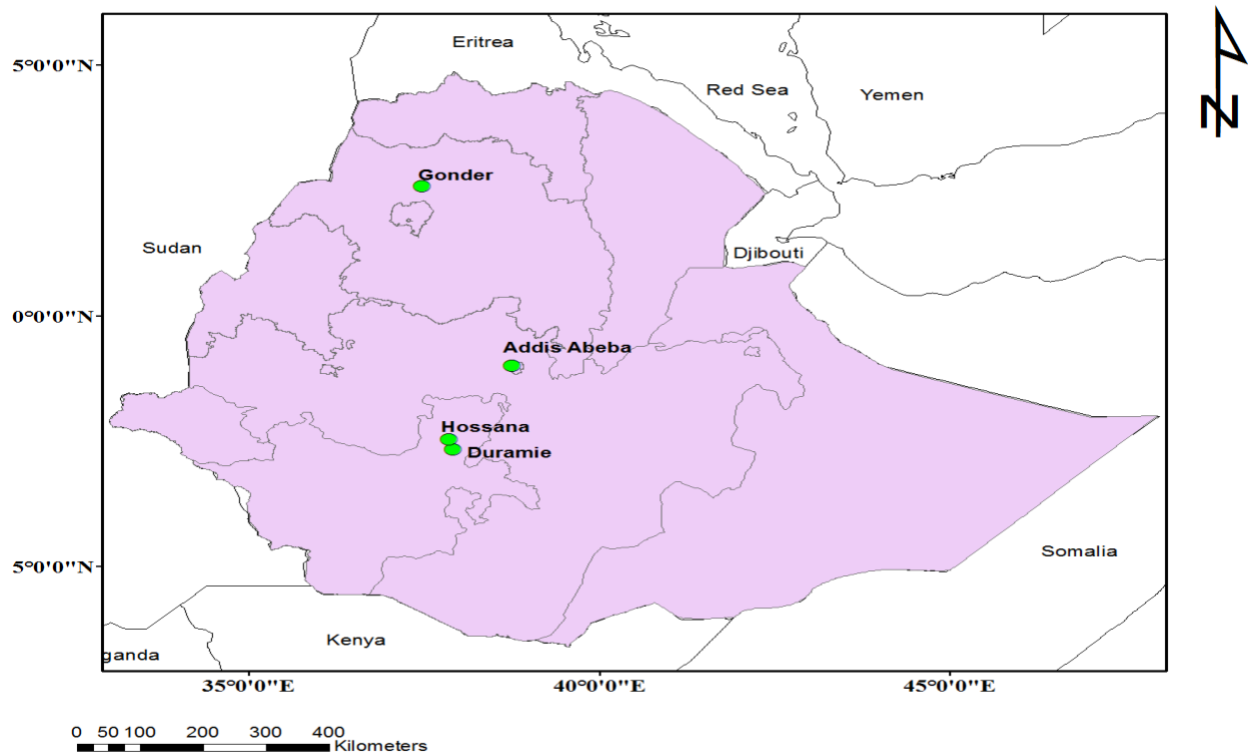
Ethiopia is not only a country of origin but also becoming an emerging destination for refugees from neighboring countries, mainly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. It has an open-door asylum policy that gives humanitarian access and protection to those seeking refuge. It is one of the largest refugee asylum countries worldwide and the second largest in Africa, next to Uganda. Ethiopia is sheltering 797,191 registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of November 30th, 2020 (UNHCR 2020). Still, the country represents one of the most important countries of origin for refugees, with an estimated 92,172 Ethiopians living in neighboring countries and beyond as refugees in 2018 (UNHCR, 2018). The conflict between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray region forced tens of thousands to flee to Sudan. So far, over 60,000 Ethiopians have crossed into Sudan to escape fighting in Ethiopia's Northern region of Tigray, according to UNHCR.

Ethiopia is also an important country of transit for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from neighboring countries. Onward migration or secondary migration from Ethiopia is quite significant, especially among Eritreans and Somali refugees. The results of the desk review show that the causes are many and include general hopelessness, lack of access to work and livelihood, inadequate or insufficient education opportunities, lack of access to legal migration opportunities, friend or family connection overseas, or diaspora support (Hall, 2014; 2017). Other push factors include protection issues, harsh living conditions, inadequate food ration, culture of migration, social networks, accessibility of traffickers, lack of income generating activities, poverty, and high levels of unemployment. Pull factors are also very important.

On the other hand, involuntary return of Ethiopian migrant workers from the Gulf has been the main feature of migration over the past decade. This is not just because Ethiopian migrants are largely undocumented but also because the changes observed in the migration policy of major destination countries such as Saudi Arabia that aims at creating job opportunities for young unemployed Saudis and regularization of the labour market (ILO, 2019). Despite the substantial

growth in the flows of migrants moving back to Ethiopia, return migration has received marginal attention from scholars and policymakers. This is pronounced in both forced and voluntary return cases (assisted and spontaneous return). However, the government of Ethiopia has put an enormous effort to create a policy framework to ensure the protection of migrants and returnees.

Governance and policy frameworks

The large-scale deportation of Ethiopian migrant workers from the Middle East – mainly from Saudi Arabia – represents an issue of growing concern for the government of Ethiopia and international organisations working in the migration fields. The Government of Ethiopia, in collaboration with international organisations and NGOs, has taken a number of measures to reduce irregular migration and combat human trafficking. As part of these measures, in 2013 the Ethiopian government banned all migratory flows to Arab countries and Sudan due to the vulnerability of domestic workers and their exposure to risks at destination. The ban was lifted in February 2018. There were no legal options for labour migration overseas during the five years, and many studies and key informants reported that this tends to increase irregular labour migration, which in turn increases migrants' vulnerability and human rights abuse. Migration through irregular channels is an alternative for migrants when they are desperate to leave the country and going through official channels has become more restrictive or very costly. Indeed, irregular migration was widespread even before the government of Ethiopia banned travel abroad for work.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs issued a new Overseas Employment Proclamation (No. 923/2016) to improve the migration governance but it has paid little attention to reintegration modalities and approaches. With a large number of Ethiopians leaving their country mostly in an irregular manner, return and reintegration have become salient issues for the Government of Ethiopia. However, in 2018, the government issued a National Reintegration Directive, to reinforce the use of common methods and approaches for the reintegration of returnees at the national level (Ogahara & Kuschminder, 2019). Following the issuance of the 2016 Proclamation, the government of Ethiopia signed a bilateral agreement with four countries, namely: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and UAE, to start sending workers legally as of 2019. It also set a minimum wage for Ethiopian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.

As migration transcends national borders involving many actors, more attention should be given to international cooperation especially with destination countries. It is interesting that some destination countries are carrying out labour reforms. UAE, for example, has decided to close all non-government maid-hiring recruitment agencies to better protect the rights of workers and employers. Tadbeer centers whose services are regulated by the Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) have replaced the agencies for recruiting domestic helpers. A total of 250 privately owned recruitment agencies have been shut down across the UAE as part of the effort to streamline the hiring of domestic workers (Rasheed & Zaman, 2020). These centers guarantee a visa, orientation, and training to the workers and this move is expected to be taken by other countries around the region.

"Saudisation" and forced return of migrant workers

Saudi Arabia has been the largest single destination country for Ethiopian migrants in the Middle East. An estimated 500,000 Ethiopian migrants were present in Saudi Arabia in March 2017 (IOM, 2019). However, arbitrary detention and routine practices of deportation of Ethiopian domestic workers from the Kingdom over the past decade makes the exact figure unknown. The five years' ban reinforces irregular flows especially in the Eastern migration corridor.

Corresponding to increasing irregular migration for work purposes, forced return migration has increased over recent years. In the height of the Arab Spring (2011) Saudi Arabia has launched a new labour reform called *Nitaqat* aimed at 'Saudising' the Kingdom's workforce. As Table 3 below shows, in November 2013, Saudi Arabia evicted more than 163,000 Ethiopian migrants for lacking legal documentation to work there. Another 54,083 (20,575 Female) Ethiopian migrants were deported from Saudi Arabia until the end of November 2017 and this has resulted in an emergency.

Table 3. Ethiopian migrants involuntary returned from the Middle East, mainly KSA

Year	Number of migrants returned to Ethiopia
November 2013 – March 2014	163,018
December 2014 – November 2017	54,083
January 2017 – December 2017	73,676
January 2018 – December 2018	114,608
January 2019 – December 2019	120,825
January 2020 – December 2020	36,632
January 2021 – March 2021	5,817

Source: IOM, 2020; MoLSA

In April 2017, Saudi Arabia launched a campaign titled 'A Nation without Violations,' granting all irregular migrants an amnesty period of 90 days to leave the country without facing penalties (IOM, 2020b). After multiple extensions, the amnesty period ended in November 2017. According to IOM, some 380,000 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia between May 2017 and April 2020. The majority of these migrants were returned involuntarily. Deportees are survivors of one of the most hazardous crossings in human migration, where they move from Ethiopia into Saudi Arabia through Djibouti and across the Red Sea into Yemen. Reports over the years indicate that Saudi border guards routinely shoot down people attempting to cross the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border, while those who make it through are imprisoned and then deported. Human rights organisations have since highlighted Saudi Arabia's brutality with its deportation process. Nevertheless, returnees commonly aspire to go back to the Middle East (Kuschminder et al., 2020).

As noted above, migrants who were expelled from Saudi Arabia have returned home with complex economic and psychosocial problems requiring a holistic effort to reintegrate them effectively. Many were victims of trafficking, reported harsh treatments, and have lost most or all of their belongings. In particular, reports show that while in detention centers, migrants had no or limited access to water, toilet, food, and privacy. As a result, many of them suffered severe medical conditions, such as physical and psychological trauma, psychiatric illness due to gender-based violence, and respiratory illnesses, including pneumonia.

Providing the necessary reintegration support, economic or psycho-social, has been challenging. The government of Ethiopia was under pressure due to a public and Human Rights Groups outcry over the human rights violation of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and elsewhere (Lawal, 2020). Coordinated by IOM, assisted voluntary return has also become an important intervention over recent years. In 2017 and 2018, globally, a total of 135,492 migrants returned home through IOM's assisted voluntary return program (IOM, 2018). IOM also assisted thousands of Ethiopian migrants from Africa, Yemen, and other Gulf and Middle Eastern countries after they found themselves stranded on traditional migration trails. As their movement is primarily driven by economic reasons, returnees need alternative livelihood support. However, only a small proportion have received reintegration support of some kind, which is not satisfactory at all.

Motives for return migration and characteristics of returnees

The review of literature suggested that the factors influencing decisions to return include both 'push' and 'pull' factors that are economic, social, personal, and political in scope, and that on balance, family and life cycle factors might be more important for returnees than for initial emigration (Black et al., 2004). Migrants' return to their homeland is done either voluntarily or forcefully. The latter puts them in a difficult situation. It also affects the perceived outcome of reintegration. It is possible to conceive of a wide range of conditions in the country of origin and the host country that potential returnees might take into consideration in making the decision whether to return (Black et al., 2004). The surge in returning migrants to Ethiopia has been driven by several factors such as domestic workers' irregular entry and stay, completion of work contract, as well as economic dynamics and immigration laws relating to destination countries. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened return movements.

Ethiopian migrants moving along or returned from the Eastern route are generally young, low-skilled, undocumented, rural based, and with little or no information about the process of migration, the nature of work, as well as areas of destination, and, hence, have faced many challenges during and after migration. They often originate from Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray regions. Between April 2017 and November 2020, IOM has registered 351,870 migrants who returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. An overwhelming majority (92 percent) of them returned to Ethiopia involuntarily. They have a low level of education: out of the 345,128 involuntary returnees, around two-thirds of them have attended primary education before departure to Saudi Arabia. The majority (93 percent) of these returnees are intended to return to three regions, namely Oromia (31.2 percent), Amhara (31.1 percent), and Tigray (30.6 percent). It is interesting that the majority of Ethiopians migrating to Saudi Arabia through regular channels are female, but they make up only 21 percent of the total returnees, mostly involuntarily. This indicates that men are more likely to migrate irregularly to Saudi Arabia.

Ethiopians move to seek wage employment in the Middle East, mainly in Saudi Arabia, to improve their and their families' living conditions. However, reaching Saudi Arabia does not mean that they all are engaged in some form of employment. Some 42 percent of returnees were unemployed while they were in Saudi Arabia (IOM, 2020a). This migration corridor is generally regarded as a short-term, temporary movement driven by economic reasons. Around two-thirds of migrants returned have stayed between six months and two years. This route is also unique in that it has high levels of re-migrating individuals, or individuals who are on at least their second journey, but oftentimes many more (IOM, 2020a).

Vulnerabilities, unmet needs, and re-migration

Those who return to Ethiopia experience diverse outcomes and are also subject to unique protection risks. It is important to note that returnees' vulnerabilities vary depending on several factors ranging from their individual to socio-economic and legal characteristics to their migration experience and outcomes. It is not just the form of return (voluntarily or forcefully) which makes it more problematic, but also that some of them are returning to a situation of vulnerability. A case in point is Ethiopian migrants who repatriate from Saudi Arabia and intend to return to Tigray, a region currently in political unrest and insecurity. Thousands of migrants have also returned to Ethiopia amid the Coronavirus pandemic, making them doubly or even triply vulnerable. Undocumented migrants and low-paid domestic workers tend to be more affected by the health crisis compared to documented and highly skilled migrants who are more likely to have savings and health coverage. They might also afford handwashing facilities and practice social distancing. However, they too can lose their jobs due to the health crisis as well as the pandemic response

measures of the host countries. As a result, many of them stop sending money home, leaving Ethiopian households with far fewer resources to make their ends meet.

The study suggests that many of the migrants return without meeting their migration goals. Many of the returnees are victims or vulnerable as they are often deported before completing the migration journey or their work contract. They also experience severe hardships during their stay and en route, including arduous journeys, low wages, and hazardous working environments (IOM, 2020a).

The socio-economic characteristics of migrants and their families, their migration experience, and post-arrival situations can affect return and reintegration. Migrants who financed their journey by taking loans or selling assets are more vulnerable. Upon return, they are less likely to get family and community acceptance as they are not able to pay off loans (Adugna, 2018). Returning home is as difficult as leaving. It is important to note that returnees are diverse in terms of their migration experience and socio-economic backgrounds, and as a result they face different integration challenges. A key informant interview with Agar, a local NGO in Addis Ababa, indicated that many migrants return home with an illness, often associated with the poor working conditions and their exposure to physical or sexual abuse in destination countries. This is more pronounced among women. An interview with an ILO officer in Addis Ababa also suggests that Ethiopian domestic workers are generally the most psychologically affected group, which is associated with lower education, language inability, culture, poor labour market outcomes, as well as a mismatch of expectation and reality. This leaves many returnees being a victim of unmet expectations, which is partly induced by smugglers and recruiters. This, in itself, adds a layer into their vulnerability as failure to meet expectations tend to reduce social acceptance and even rejection. The interview further suggests that minors and unaccompanied children also face a number of particular integration challenges as they have little or no access to education and vaccination and other health facilities in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region. Children are a particularly vulnerable group of migrant and displaced populations, and even more so under irregular conditions. They are usually not as resilient as adults and more susceptible to being hurt, as they have physically and psychologically not reached maturity and are less experienced in navigating society (IOM, 2019). They tend to have less communication ability and poor migration outcomes compared to older migrants. In addition, they tend to have high expectations and do not simply accept when things go wrong; and this may contribute to their increased level of frustration.

The mismatch between expectations and reality further exacerbates returnees' vulnerabilities. Research on the perception of people towards migration and return has received relatively little attention. There is no specific research done on this thematic area in Ethiopia. The exception here is a study by Minaye and Zeleke (2017) which examines the attitudes, risk perception, and readiness to migrate to the Middle East or South Africa from Ethiopia. They gathered data from Ethiopians who were either returnee migrants (n=1036) or considering migration to the Middle East and South Africa (n=735). The result revealed that the majority of respondents believe that migrating to the Middle East by any means, including illegal migration, is better than living in Ethiopia, as there is little chance for a better life in Ethiopia (ibid). Family and community perception generally depend on this premise and success is often measured against the expectations from migration and its outcomes. Another recent research found that women have significantly worse perceptions of their living conditions upon return to Ethiopia than men (Kuschminder & Siegel, 2017). It is also reported that migration experiences are the most significant variables that influence perceptions of living conditions upon return. Migrants who returned home empty handed are not welcomed by families and communities, regardless of the form of return.

Reintegration support and challenges

Reintegration is a key aspect of return migration. Ethiopian migrants who returned from the Middle East face a variety of socio-economic challenges. Creating decent livelihood opportunities through job placement or small businesses is one of the most difficult issues, in light of large-scale deportation, internal displacement, conflict, widespread poverty, and high rural and urban youth unemployment. The institutional capacity is too weak to help returnees start their own business or get a job in their respective localities. In order to do so, there is a need to provide access to financial capital, counseling, and market-oriented skills training for migrants who returned in a difficult situation.

A study by ILO (2018) indicated that the post-return socio-economic condition of the returnees has declined compared to pre-migration. The challenges are worse for those who returned to Ethiopia involuntarily. Services are either unavailable, provided in an ad hoc and fragmented manner, or are not known by the purported beneficiaries. As many of them returned with psychosocial issues, counseling services were not accessible for all. These services have been provided to only the most vulnerable returnees. Parents, families, guardians, friends, and key community members should also receive training on how to handle and support the victims. This is lacking.

Legal aid service is important for returnees because they are often victims, abused by overseas employment agencies or employers and sometimes by family and relatives. Some organisations who have rehabilitation centers like Agar may link returnees with other organisations who provide legal aid service for free but generally the service is inaccessible. A key informant interview with a local NGO in Addis Ababa indicated that Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association is known for giving free legal aid but the information about the support service is not readily available for returnees and reintegration officers. Overall, returnees have no information where to get what services.

An interview with MoLSA officials indicated that many returnees are unable to provide documents indicating their returnee and local residence status. This is more pronounced for those who are deported or migrated irregularly. Their names were not registered at the MoLSA database when they left Ethiopia and hence it is difficult for them to access government services when they return. Getting ID cards outside of their usual residence is too difficult as they might be asked to present a support letter from their previous residence. Often, returnees are asked for money by local authorities to receive the services, partly because they are presumed to have earned money while they were abroad.

The primary motive behind migration is to move out of poverty or to improve the living standards of their family through remittances. On some occasions, parents encourage youthful household members to leave for Arab countries and send remittances home – as a strategy to widen income sources and to build on household livelihoods (Zewdu, 2019). As the majority of migrants send remittances to their families, they are less likely to have savings to support their economic reintegration. Most of the returnees are not interested in pursuing education as they have low educational achievement, and perhaps because of the high rates of graduate unemployment in Ethiopia. Data obtained from the Central Statistics Agency (CSA) shows that the unemployment rate in Ethiopia increased to 19.1 percent in 2018 from 16.9 percent in 2016. It is expected to reach 21.6 by the end of 2021, according to Trading Economics global macro models and analysts' expectations. Youth unemployment remains high, and it was 25.3 percent in 2018. Higher education graduates accounted for the largest rate of youth unemployment in Ethiopia. Issa and Tesfaye (2020) estimated that the graduate unemployment rate for universities is around 40 percent. Youth graduates are unable to find a suitable job in their field of study and many of them remain unemployed for several years or others remain underemployed or increasingly involved in low-skilled jobs, which means they are competing for low-skilled jobs with lower educational achievement such as returnees. Migrant returnees are also not interested in

wage employment in Ethiopia as the pay is quite less when compared to what they used to earn in Arab countries. Instead, they prefer to engage in running small businesses in larger towns/cities near to their home villages. The reintegration process of returnees in the Ethiopian labour market as well as their reinsertion into their communities and reunification with their families is another major challenge for the Government of Ethiopia. Studies show that returnees face challenges in translating the skills they learn abroad into the local labour market (Kuschminder et al, 2020). They do not have a letter stating their work experience while abroad, as most of them are working illegally and in the domestic sphere.

Despite all the challenges, the government has continued its assistance to reintegrate Ethiopian returnees resulting from the Saudi Arabian government's closure of its border and massive deportation of migrant workers in 2013, including those who were deported amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Although returnees face stigmatization as potential carriers of the virus, they receive support from government, NGOs, and local communities. IOM in collaboration with the Ethiopian government launched a project to provide cash grants and other forms of support to over 8,000 returning migrants, most of whom are young women who had been working in the Middle East as domestic workers. The grants also aim to provide food, clothing, and other essential items for returnees (IOM, 2020e). However, returnee reintegration and support were not satisfactory at all. Given the large-scale deportation of migrant workers arriving in Ethiopia from the Gulf and other neighboring countries, the government was unable to provide the required services. The number of local and international actors engaged in the reintegration sector is quite limited and their services are not widely available. It is only accessible for a small number of returnees who live in an area where such projects are implemented. The problem was not just availability or in-availability of services, but returnees often lack access to networks and information (i.e., they do not have a clue what to get where).

Reintegration of returnees has received little attention in Ethiopia, given a large-scale and routine deportation of migrant workers, as well as a high level of desperation to receive support. Only a small proportion of returnees have received reintegration support of some kind. Data on migration flows and return are scarce. Estimates of numbers of migrant returnees and those who needed and have received reintegration support are not available. Clearly, the current structure lacks a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and thus it is increasingly important to set up a regular format for review of progress and discussion of challenges. The absence of appropriate measures in this regard fuels re-migration which is indeed a widespread practice. The lack of stakeholders' clarity and accountability caused a mismatch between the needs of returnees – which sometimes demonstrated unreasonable expectations and ambitions – and available resources and government capacity (ILO, 2018).

So far reintegration services are short-term and highly fragmented and have not met the expectation of migrant returnees. Key informant interviews at MoLSA, on the other hand, indicated that returnees usually have high expectations and are never satisfied with the support they have received from the government and other partners during and after repatriation. This, however, should be seen in light of the government's limited financial and technical capacity vis-a-vis returnees' level of vulnerability, as well as broader reintegration challenges. Re-integration requires a range of support including comprehensive skills training, identifying business opportunities, provision of sufficient loans, creating employment opportunities, and working space. It is also important to work in partnerships with the private sector to facilitate job placement for migrant returnees. And, it is important to document and disseminate the success stories from re-integration projects. Increased funding for community-based organisations providing care and support for migrant returnees is also crucial. Overall, the majority of Ethiopian migrants fail to achieve sustainable return that incorporates, as IOM asserts, self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, psychosocial wellbeing, together with the ability to contribute to communities of origin.

The conflict in Tigray leaves returnees stranded in the capital

In November 2020, a violent conflict broke out between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and its Northern Tigray region, leaving many returnees who intended to return to the Tigray region and along its borders stranded in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Those who intend to return to the Tigray region have been triply vulnerable in the face of the pandemic, sudden deportation, and heightened tensions and conflict between the two parties. Migrant returnees were unable to communicate with their families as fighting cut off the region from the rest of the country. There was no communication, Internet, and transportation within and from the Tigray region, leaving returnees in dire situations, putting some to the risk of developing mental health issues. As many of them returned to Ethiopia empty-handed, they were unable to meet their basic needs. Some of them tried to find a job in Addis Ababa, but it is hard to secure one given the high youth unemployment in Ethiopia. Families living in Tigray were also unable to receive remittances from abroad as banks shut down for a long period of time due to the conflict.

Key stakeholders in the return and reintegration process

Migration and human trafficking are complex and multifaceted issues. Ethiopia experiences substantial mixed migration flows involving regular and irregular economic migrants, victims of human trafficking, refugees, and asylum seekers who depart from, arrive in, or pass through the country. This has led many government, inter-governmental agencies, and non-governmental agencies to increase their mandates to support migrants. As a result, a wide range of stakeholders are involved in different areas, including prevention of irregular migration, facilitating support to migrant returnees, victims of trafficking, and potential migrants, as well as enhancing migration governance. Strategic partnerships exist between and among these organisations but it has been fragmented and less coordinated. Another limitation is that the participation of the private sector, victims of trafficking, migrant returnees, and those at risk in these partnerships is very limited.

The primary responsibility of any government is to protect its citizens, including those working abroad, especially in cases of imminent danger or in crisis situations. Coordinated efforts between the Government and other stakeholders allowed the repatriation process to be managed effectively. On their arrival, the government had assisted the returnees in the process of health screening, quarantine services, reintegration, and rehabilitation. Many of these returnees have received immediate and humanitarian assistance including health care, immediate shelter, and transportation. However, given the sudden and unprepared nature of this forced repatriation and with little or no fallback position, the seamless reintegration of these returnees has been painfully slow and largely unaddressed (ILO, 2018; IOM, 2020).

Key informant interviews with government actors indicate the limited private sector engagement in the return and reintegration effort. However, some local NGOs such as Agar and Good Samaritan have been working to rehabilitate returnees through providing medical treatment, temporary accommodation and financial support. Agar has been working on the reintegration of returnees within their families and empowering them through financial assistance. Good Samaritan Association (GSA) also provided shelter to returnees, worked on reintegration, and encouraged them to work in their own country. These two NGOs have been working to address the problems of VoT (Victims of Trafficking) and migrant returnees amid involuntary return. However, given their limited budget and the scale and magnitude of the problem, they are able to reach just a few. It is important to recognise and support the efforts of these organisations so that they can effectively address the many needs of returnees.

The non-governmental support for returnees is duly engaged in the rehabilitation of returnees. Due to insufficient funds and the magnitude of the problem, the economic support

delivered for returnees was insufficient. Although a variety of actors were involved in the return and reintegration of returnees, their efforts lacked coordination. Moreover, interventions were often limited both in scope and in time. Recovery efforts should continue to simultaneously address the physical, psychological, behavioural, social, and economic issues encountered by these individuals (Eneyew, 2017). Despite all efforts, the overall management of the rehabilitation and reintegration processes did not fully meet expectations (ILO, 2018).

Conclusion and policy implications

The surge of irregular migration to and involuntary return from Saudi Arabia – the largest single destination in the Middle East – has been the main features of the Ethiopian migration landscape over the past decade. The unlawful entry and irregular stay of Ethiopian migrant workers, together with Saudi governments strict labour market regulation, which in turn is induced by the changing economic and political dynamics, has resulted in mass deportation of undocumented migrants from Ethiopia and other sending countries. This large-scale involuntary repatriation not only negatively influences migration investment, but also destroys the livelihoods of low-income families who rely on remittances for a living. Ethiopian returnees experience a number of challenges ranging from economic and social to psychosocial which hinders them from effective reintegration. Most of the migrants are returning with little to no savings or into low-income households that are also indebted in order to finance their migration home. Lack of funds and required skills makes it harder for returnees to re-enter the local labour market through job placement or starting small businesses. The low-social status accorded to migrant domestic workers returned from the Gulf and Arab countries further exacerbated their vulnerability and reduced their level of social integration. For many, returning to Ethiopia was as difficult as leaving the country. The pandemic has only made things worse.

The sudden surge of returnees tests the overall capacity of the Ethiopian government, which itself has been in a volatile political transition since mid-2018. In Ethiopia, reintegration and rehabilitation of migrant returnees has received little attention, being addressed only in emergency situations. This is partly because return is considered as the end of the migration cycle. An important lesson observed from the situation in Ethiopia is that a lack of effective reintegration leads many of returnees to re-migrate despite being aware of the risks involved. As IOM asserts, if migrants sustainably reintegrate, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice rather than necessity. However, Ethiopians re-migrate to the Gulf several times out of desperation. This highlights the importance of designing and implementing effective reintegration policies, which should also address gender-based and other inequalities. Otherwise, it is very improbable to break the cycle of irregular migration. In order to reduce this, providing meaningful and all-rounded support is crucial.

Reintegration interventions should incorporate long-term psycho-social and economic support, not just short-term ones. Rehabilitative and reintegrating policies should not only target returned or deported migrants but also their families and communities, which could allow them not only to provide care and support for vulnerable returnees but also to further reduce their contribution to stigma and discrimination. The social integration aspect is key. Furthermore, comprehensive, interdisciplinary service delivery programs are needed to address the legal, economic, social, and health-related needs of returnees. All parties working on migration issues should acknowledge the fact that migration is intrinsically linked with household livelihoods. A good strategy takes into account the entire family and community, not just the migrant.

It is important to note that, thus far, Ethiopia has no migration policy, nor a central body that is fully responsible for managing migration issues more broadly. Migration is managed by a variety of government regulations, legal instruments, action plans, and strategies. Different coordination platforms exist but they lack implementation capacity. Many of the organisations do

not pay due attention as they do not have a staff or budget dedicated to return and reintegration initiatives. At this time, the capacity of these organisations is quite limited – technically, financially, logistically – and they are unable to fully and effectively discharge their responsibilities. And, it is urgently required to improve the overall migration governance. The aim here is to further enhance legal, safe, and voluntary mobility, as well as ensure the protection of migrant workers and their reintegration into local communities. Conducting research on migration and return flows, preparing returnees databases, and continuously updating these, are essential to formulating evidence-based policy.

There exist national level partnerships between government ministries, but the work suffers from a lack of coordination. The focus appears to be on facilitating labour migration abroad. Ensuring the safety of labour migrants in the destination countries and addressing their specific vulnerabilities must also be emphasized. This can be done by reinforcing international cooperation. The government of Ethiopia needs to sign further bilateral labour agreements with other countries and deploy competent labour attachés in its foreign diplomatic missions so as to effectively implement these agreements. Irregular migration is not just illegal entry to another country but also illegal stay or overstaying a visa. The latter receives little attention. Initiating and holding continuous dialogue with major destination countries on regularizing undocumented migrants and developing complementary policy with regards to labour migration has paramount importance. Providing legal and other relevant assistance for migrant workers is crucial when they are forced to leave a host country. The new labour Proclamation and National Reintegration Directive must be consistently enforced in all phases of the migration and return process and be widely publicised. However, adopting Proclamation is no panacea to migration-related challenges, and thus it is increasingly essential to enhance the enforcement capacity of stakeholders at all levels.

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