

Informed journeys: promoting gender-sensitive communication on migration risks, opportunities and alternatives for Ethiopian women

Policy brief

Policy brief produced by
Fondazione ISMU ETS,
with the support of
Fondazione Terraperta ETS
– CEFA ETS



Authors: Luca Merotta & Mariam Diarra (Fondazione ISMU ETS).

The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the Italian Ministry of the Interior. The Italian Ministry of the Interior cannot be held responsible for them.

Suggested citation: Fondazione ISMU (2026). Informed journeys: promoting gender-sensitive communication on migration risks, opportunities and alternatives for Ethiopian women, Policy brief, WORK2gether project.



Research conducted within the project *WORK2gether: "Working together for sustainable employment and agricultural development in Ethiopia"*, CUP F41D24000140008 cofinanced by the Italian Ministry of Interior.

In partnership with



Introduction

In recent years, awareness-raising on the risks of irregular migration and on legal and local alternatives has become a core component of European migration policy. At EU level, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) has increasingly supported communication and prevention initiatives in third countries, aimed at reducing exposure to smuggling, trafficking, and exploitation, while promoting informed decision-making and safe pathways. Numerous AMIF-funded projects target countries of origin and transit, combining strategic communication, community-based outreach, and diaspora engagement. Within this framework, Ethiopia has emerged as a priority partner country, reflecting both the scale of migration flows and the EU's broader engagement in the Horn of Africa through migration governance, labour mobility, and development cooperation initiatives.

This policy focus is mirrored at national level, particularly in Italy, where Ethiopia represents a key country of origin within bilateral and EU-level migration dialogues. Italy has invested in prevention and awareness-raising through programmes such as RELINT, which supports integrated approaches to migration governance, community resilience, and information campaigns in countries of origin. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Migration and Mobility between Italy and Ethiopia in 2025 and of the Global Skills Partnership in 2026 further reinforces strategic relations, with a strong emphasis on expanding regular pathways, strengthening protection mechanisms, improving reintegration, and countering irregular migration and trafficking. Within this context, communication initiatives are expected not only to discourage unsafe migration, but also to provide credible information on rights, procedures, and

realistic alternatives—both locally and through legal international mobility.

At the same time, the Ethiopian policy and institutional landscape has undergone important developments. The Ethiopian government has adopted a range of measures aimed at regulating labour migration and enhancing migrant protection, including the conclusion of bilateral labour agreements (BLAs), efforts to improve the regulation of brokers and recruitment agencies, the rollout of digital systems for labour migration management, and initiatives to strengthen embassy and consular support abroad. These measures are complemented by awareness-raising campaigns led by government institutions, international organizations, and civil society actors, many of which specifically target Ethiopian citizens—women in particular—through pre-departure training, community outreach, and mass and social media communication.

Against the background of an increasingly dense landscape of policies, programmes, and campaigns, this policy brief provides a context-specific, gender-sensitive understanding of what works—and what does not—in awareness-raising on migration targeting Ethiopian women. By analysing migration dynamics, information ecosystems, institutional frameworks, and the lived experiences of Ethiopian women, the policy brief identifies key gaps, barriers, and practical dos and don'ts for designing effective communication strategies. Its purpose is to support policymakers, civil society actors (INGOs, Ethiopian NGOs and community-based organisations) and communication experts in ensuring that current and future initiatives on migration awareness and development are not only well-intentioned, but also realistic, credible, and transformative—so that migration becomes an informed choice rather than a constrained necessity.

This policy brief builds on evidence collected under the WORK2gether project (Working together for sustainable employment and agricultural development in Ethiopia) which aims to promote access to education and training, decent employment, stable sources of income, food security, and sustainable agricultural practices for women and youth in urban and rural areas of Ethiopia by analysing and mitigating the causes of irregular migration. Implemented between 2024 and 2027, the project adopts an integrated approach combining employment promotion, agricultural development, gender empowerment, and awareness-raising on the risks of irregular migration and available legal and local alternatives. WORK2gether is coordinated by CEFA and implemented in partnership with AIDOS, WISE and Fondazione ISMU ETS. The project is funded by the Italian Ministry of the Interior under the RELINT 2024 programme, which supports initiatives addressing the root causes of irregular migration in priority countries through development cooperation, prevention, and rights-based communication.

Methodology

This policy brief builds on the analysis of evidence collected through desk research and field research between July and November 2025 as part of the WORK2gether project.

The first phase (July–October 2025) consisted in the review of existing literature and statistical sources on migration trends, legal frameworks, and gender-specific vulnerabilities of female migrants in Ethiopia. Sources included reports and datasets from international organizations (UN, IOM, ILO, UNHCR), academic literature, policy evaluations, and national legal as well as institutional documents related to labour

migration, bilateral labour agreements, return, and reintegration. This phase provided contextual grounding and informed the design of fieldwork tools.

In the second phase (27 October–7 November 2025) primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in Ethiopia, namely in Addis Ababa and Asella (Arsi zone, Oromia region)—two locations targeted by the WORK2gether project and selected to capture both national-level policy perspectives and rural-local migration dynamics. In total, the study included: a) 11 semi-structured interviews with policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on migration, gender, labour mobility, and communication; b) 5 focus group discussions involving women returnees and practitioners, aimed at capturing collective narratives, shared experiences, and community-level dynamics. Participants included representatives from government institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations, research institutions, and survivor-led or returnee groups. The full list of interviews and focus groups is provided in the Annex.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with the aim of including diverse perspectives across the migration system. Selection criteria prioritized: a) direct professional experience with migration governance, reintegration, gender-based violence, or communication campaigns; b) lived experience of migration and return among women participants; c) geographic diversity between urban (Addis Ababa) and rural (Arsi) contexts. Women returnees were engaged through trusted local intermediaries and practitioners to ensure ethical access and minimize risks of re-traumatization.

Semi-structured interview and focus group guides were developed to allow

comparability across interviews while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging themes. Key thematic areas included: migration drivers and decision-making; awareness and perceptions of risks, legal pathways, and alternatives; role of brokers, intermediaries, and social networks; gender norms, stigma, and reintegration challenges; information sources, misinformation, and communication practices; policy and institutional gaps.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in person or online, depending on participant location and availability, and were documented through detailed notes. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Interview and focus group notes were coded to identify recurring patterns, divergences, and gender-specific dynamics. Analysis followed an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data, while also being informed by the analytical framework developed during the desk review.

Unless otherwise specified, all evidence reported from section 2 on is taken from the interviews and focus groups conducted in Ethiopia. When relevant, footnotes have been added to show sources on statistics and practices collected through the desk review of mentioned by interviewees.

1. Data on migration in and from Ethiopia

Ethiopia is at the center of complex and interconnected migration dynamics, acting simultaneously as a country of origin, transit, and destination.

According to UN data, an estimated 1.2 million Ethiopians were living abroad in 2024, representing about 1% of the national population¹. The majority are concentrated in North America (33%), Asia (30%), and Africa (28%). At the country level, they are primarily in the United States, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, South Africa, Israel, and Lebanon. Only 8% of Ethiopians live in Europe, namely in Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

As of 31 October 2025, Ethiopia hosted a total of 1,115,839 refugees and asylum seekers, including 1,010,432 refugees and 105,407 asylum seekers². This population has a slightly female majority, with 52% women and 48% men. The main countries of origin are South Sudan (43%), Somalia (32%), Eritrea (15%), and Sudan (9%). Regarding accommodation, 798,710 individuals (72%) reside in 20 refugee camps, while 72,495 people (6%) live in urban areas, mainly in Addis Ababa and Mekelle. The population is predominantly young, with 79% women and children, 46% adults aged 18–59, and only 3% elderly (60 years and older).

At the same time, Ethiopia faces massive internal displacement. At the end of 2024, 757,000 people were internally displaced due to natural disasters, while 2,378,000 were displaced due to conflict and violence³.

In September 2025, IOM's Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) in Ethiopia recorded 34,669

¹ UNDESA (2024) *International Migrant Stock 2024*. United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

² UNHCR (2025) *Ethiopia: Refugees and IDPs statistics – October 2025*. UNHCR

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2025) *2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID)*

cross-border movements⁴. These movements represent a combination of legal and informal crossings, which cannot be fully quantified with available data. Most flows consisted of outflows (73.9%, equal to 25,605 individuals), while inflows represented 26.1% (9,064). Among those leaving, the main declared destinations were Saudi Arabia (50.2%), Kenya (12.8%), Djibouti (6.5%), Somalia (6.3%), and Sudan (4.8%); smaller shares headed to South Africa (3.8%) and Yemen (3.4%), as well as other African, Middle Eastern, North American, and European countries. The prevalence of outward movements is mainly linked to economic reasons (87.7%), while among incoming flows, returns (62.8%) and conflict-related movements (14.6%) predominate.

Flow monitoring data from 16 mobility points indicate that between January and December 2023, 817,000 movements were recorded along Ethiopian migration corridors⁵ along different routes:

- The Eastern Route (towards Djibouti, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia) is the most used, with 395,121 movements.
- The Horn of Africa Route (intra-regional mobility between Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti) accounts for 337,172 movements.
- The Southern Route (towards Kenya and South Africa) registers 80,891 movements.
- The Northern Route (towards Europe) is smaller but significant, with 3,732 movements.

⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2025) *DTM Ethiopia Flow Monitoring Dashboard – September 2025*. Displacement Tracking Matrix.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2025) *Returns from Saudi Arabia*. IOM East and Horn of Africa Regional Office. Available at: <https://ehsa.iom.int/returns-saudi-arabia> (accessed on 2/12/2025)

At the same time, the number of returning migrants—both voluntary and deported, mainly from Gulf countries—continues to rise. Between 2017 and 2025, over 730,000 migrants were forcibly returned to Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia⁶—one of the main destination countries—placing significant pressure on humanitarian and reintegration systems. Many return without financial resources and suffer severe physical and psychological trauma, creating substantial challenges for the country's capacity to provide long-term support and reintegration. The assessment by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁷ highlights acute difficulties related to restoring livelihoods, housing, and socio-economic reintegration, further aggravating tensions in communities already affected by poverty and displacement. In terms of assisted return and reintegration, in 2023, Ethiopia was the top country of origin in returns to the East and Horn of Africa, with 9,837 migrants assisted to voluntarily return, signifying an increase of 52% compared to 2022⁸.

In response to these trends, Ethiopia has strengthened cooperation with international partners. In 2025, the governments of Ethiopia and Italy signed a new Memorandum of Understanding on Migration and Mobility in Rome, aimed at expanding regular migration channels, improving reintegration mechanisms, combating irregular migration and trafficking, and promoting skills-based mobility⁹. MoUs with Gulf and West Asian countries aiming to regulate the

⁷ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2025) *Evaluation Report: Emergency initiative to support migrants and returning migrants and host communities*. Rome: MAECI.

⁸ International Organization for Migration (2024) *Return and reintegration: 2023 highlights*. Geneva: IOM.

⁹ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2025) *Italia-Etiopia, firmato il Memorandum d'Intesa su Migrazione e Mobilità*. Portale Integrazione Migranti.

employment of its citizens and strengthen migrant protection have also been concluded with Saudi Arabia¹⁰, the United Arab Emirates¹¹, Kuwait¹², and Jordan¹³. At the same time, there is a cooperation MoU signed with the ILO¹⁴ aimed at protecting, training, and reintegrating Ethiopian women domestic migrant workers from the Gulf countries, Lebanon, and Sudan.

2. Structural drivers of migration

Migration in Ethiopia is shaped by structural factors that intersect economic, environmental and social dimensions, with gender often playing a key role across them. These drivers make migration less of a voluntary choice and more of a survival strategy for millions, particularly women.

Economic hardship and unemployment

Ethiopia's economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture, a sector that according to the ILO estimates 62% of the population, with higher values in the rural areas¹⁵. However, declining productivity, limited industrial growth, and underdeveloped service sectors have created a severe employment crisis. Youth

unemployment is rising, and even those with jobs often face underemployment—working below their skill level or earning wages insufficient to meet basic needs. Educated individuals, including teachers and graduates, increasingly abandon local jobs for better-paying opportunities abroad. Urban areas offer slightly better prospects, but rural communities experience acute poverty and lack of alternatives. Migration thus becomes a coping mechanism, framed as a family strategy to diversify income and escape economic stagnation.

Land scarcity and resource fragmentation

Land scarcity is a critical push factor, particularly in Ethiopia's highland regions. Population growth and inheritance practices have led to land fragmentation, leaving most households with plots too small to sustain livelihoods. The average household farm size in rural Ethiopia in 2016 was 1.1 hectares, of which about 0.9 hectares is cultivated¹⁶—a figure that has decreased since 2004¹⁷ and makes farming economically unviable. Young people, especially women, rarely inherit land, reinforcing their exclusion from agricultural opportunities. Productivity beyond subsistence farming is constrained by intensive agricultural practices that have degraded soil fertility and by farmers'

11/11/2025. Available at: <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/4492>

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice of Ethiopia. (2018) *Proclamation No. 1092/2018: Agreement between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia on the employment of domestic workers*. Federal Negarit Gazette.

¹¹ Ministry of Justice of Ethiopia (2019) *Proclamation No. 1122/2019: Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates on the employment of Ethiopian workers*. Federal Negarit Gazette.

¹² Ministry of Justice of Ethiopia (2024) *Proclamation No. 1337/2024: Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and Kuwait on the employment of domestic workers*. Federal Negarit Gazette.

¹³ Ministry of Justice of Ethiopia (2024) *Proclamation No. 1319/2024: Memorandum of Understanding*

between Ethiopia and Jordan on the employment of Ethiopian workers. Federal Negarit Gazette.

¹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013) *Ethiopia and ILO sign an MoU to support domestic migrant workers to the Gulf States, Lebanon and Sudan*. Addis Ababa: ILO.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2025) *Employment in agriculture (% of total employment) (modeled ILO estimate) – Ethiopia*. Database. SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS (accessed on 18/11/2025)

¹⁶ FAO (2019) *Ethiopia Socioeconomic Survey 2018–2019*. RuLIS Country brief.

¹⁷ Bachewe, F., N. & Minten, B. (2023) *Changing farm sizes and farmers' demographics in Ethiopia*, ESSP working papers 161, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

preference for low-value staple crops, which has limited diversification and income potential. These structural constraints drive internal migration from rural to urban areas and, eventually, international migration. For many, leaving home is the only way to secure income and social mobility.

Climate change and environmental degradation

Climate change acts as a risk multiplier, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Ethiopia's rain-fed agriculture makes rural livelihoods highly sensitive to environmental shocks. Droughts, floods, and soil degradation have become more frequent and severe, reducing crop yields and deepening food insecurity. The frequency of droughts has shifted from once every decade to every two or three years¹⁸, forcing households to adopt migration as a survival strategy. Environmental degradation not only undermines agricultural productivity but also accelerates rural poverty, pushing families toward migration as a last resort. However, in this case mobility is not publicly perceived or discussed as climate-driven but is rather framed as a coping strategy for the economic impact triggered by the climate crisis.

Conflict and insecurity

Armed conflicts in regions such as Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara have disrupted livelihoods, destroyed infrastructure, and displaced thousands. Internal displacement often precedes international migration, with Addis Ababa serving as a key transit point for those seeking safety and opportunity abroad. Conflict-driven migration is combined by gender-based violence, forced conscription, and the collapse of education systems. Families living in insecure areas face limited mobility and

shrinking economic options, while investors avoid conflict zones, further reducing job opportunities. For many, migration becomes the only viable to escape from violence and instability, in particular the related economic consequences.

Gender inequality and systemic exclusion

Parallel to all these root causes, gender inequality is a cross-cutting aspect that characterises key aspects of women's life that shape their migration project. Women face systemic exclusion from land ownership, credit access, and decision-making, despite legal provisions guaranteeing equality. Cultural norms discourage women from farming or owning property, reinforcing dependency on migration for economic independence. Migration decisions are often household-driven, with young women pushed by relatives or spouses to migrate as a means of supporting family income. Experiencing gender-based violence, early marriage, and divorce as well as being over 30 and unmarried are major motivators for migration, particularly among rural women seeking autonomy and safety.

¹⁸ Cherinet A., Tadesse C., Abebe T. (2022) Drought and Flood Extreme Events and Management Strategies in Ethiopia. *J Geogr Nat Disast.*, 12:248

3. Migration options through a gender lens

Routes and mobility pathways

Migration in Ethiopia is not a neutral process but one profoundly shaped by gender roles, cultural expectations, and structural inequalities. Women and men experience migration differently, both in terms of the options they have access to, the routes they take and the vulnerabilities they face throughout the process.

Interviews stressed that Ethiopians can access three main international migratory routes, with irregular movements representing the vast majority:

- The Eastern Route (Ethiopia → Djibouti/Somalia → Yemen → Saudi Arabia), which is also the busiest and deadliest¹⁹
- The Northern Route (Sudan → Libya → Tunisia → Europe), which in the public debate is seen as marginal compared to the Eastern
- The Southern Route (Ethiopia → Kenya/Tanzania → South Africa), which is less visible but marked by stories of detention and xenophobia in destination countries.

Addis Ababa, as the capital and political center, concentrates recruitment agencies and government offices that manage visas and bilateral agreements—both aspects that are fundamental for people to migrate regularly. Women predominantly migrate to Gulf countries and often do so through these formal channels thanks to the availability of bilateral agreements between

Ethiopia and third countries, especially in West Asia.

In rural areas such as Arsi irregular migration predominates, especially among young men, who leave toward Saudi Arabia or South Africa often with the logistical support by smuggling networks. Rural women sometimes engage in irregular migration too as legal options have either low visibility or entail procedures that are difficult to access due to financial constraints and centralisation of procedures in Addis Ababa. These journeys are seen as inevitable, as the lack of local opportunities and economic pressure push them to risk their lives in search of a better future.

Women's migration patterns are dominated by employment in domestic and care work in Gulf countries. This reflects both the demand for female labour in these sectors and the cultural framing of domestic work as "women's work." Women are often pushed into migration by family members or spouses, with limited autonomy in decision-making. Even when migration occurs through formal channels such as recruitment agencies or bilateral labour agreements the risks of exploitation remain high. Research in Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait, for instance, shows that 75% of Ethiopian domestic workers interviewed reported experiencing at least one form of abuse at work, ranging from withheld wages to physical and sexual violence²⁰. Upon return, women face stigma and discrimination, particularly if they are divorced, over 30 and unmarried, or have children born abroad. This stigma reinforces their marginalization and often drives

¹⁹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2025) *Migration along the Eastern Route: Report 58 (January–December 2024)*. IOM Regional Office for East, Horn and Southern Africa; While in the interviews and focus group the Horn of Africa Route was not mentioned per se, the countries mentioned did overlap

with the ones of the Eastern Route, suggesting that in the public perception these two routes tend to be perceived as the same one.

²⁰ Dank, M., Zhang, S. (2024) *Between Hope and Hardship: Migration and work experiences of Ethiopian domestic workers in Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon*.

repeated cycles of migration among women to secure their livelihood.

Men's migration patterns, by contrast, are more closely associated with irregular routes toward Europe or Southern Africa. However, men also resort to the Eastern route to the Gulf countries and are disproportionately represented in irregular border crossings²¹. IOM data show that in 2024 there were 446,194 movements along the Eastern Route, a 13% increase compared to 2023, with men disproportionately represented in irregular crossings. These journeys are marked by extreme risks: smuggling networks, unsafe desert and sea crossings, and precarious employment upon arrival. In rural areas men are culturally expected to remain protectors of the family, while women migrate to support livelihoods. When men do migrate irregularly, failure abroad translates into stigma, as they are perceived as unable to fulfil their role as breadwinners. This highlights how cultural norms shape not only migration choices but also reintegration outcomes.

Decision-making on migration options

Migration decisions are rarely individual, especially for women. Household dynamics play a decisive role, with families negotiating who migrates and how remittances are used. Peer-to-peer storytelling programs—where women returnees share their own migration story with other women—show that mothers often play a central role in advising daughters, while fathers are excluded from the conversation. Remittance management reflects gender roles, as men's remittances are typically directed toward agricultural investments or business ventures, while women's remittances sustain daily expenses, children's education, and healthcare. This division underscores the crucial contribution of female migrants to

household stability, even as they face greater vulnerability abroad.

At the community level, decision-making is more visible in internal rural migration, where collective strategies help households cope with crises. Rural communities often discuss migration collectively, strengthening solidarity and resilience. In international migration, however, brokers dominate decision-making, reducing women's autonomy and exposing them to exploitation. The contrast between community solidarity in internal migration and external control in international migration shows how transnational mobility fragments social cohesion and increases vulnerability.

Cultural norms and gender roles define which migration pathways are considered acceptable. For men, irregular migration is valorised as bravery and responsibility, for women, domestic work abroad is tolerated but often stigmatized upon return. Stigma against returnees, especially divorced women or survivors of sexual violence, remains a major barrier to reintegration. These cultural factors sustain cycles of migration and re-migration, reinforcing structural inequalities and limiting the sustainability of reintegration programs.

Brokers and intermediaries play a key role in legal migration options, both Addis Ababa and Arsi. In the capital, they operate through semi-formal networks linked to agencies, while in rural areas they act informally but remain influential. Women often migrate under broker pressure, incurring debts and facing exploitation. Stakeholders highlight that misconceptions—e.g., “flying equals legal migration”—are exploited by brokers and girls as young as 14 falsify their age to meet migration requirements, often facilitated by brokers. This underscores the

²¹ See note 19

urgent need for stronger child protection protocols.

Gender dimension of migration options

Women's choice to migrate is rarely autonomous, shaped instead by family decisions and broker influence. NGOs provide training and microcredit to reduce dependence on brokers, while survivor networks document violence and exploitation during recruitment and employment²². Cultural norms reinforce these vulnerabilities as men are expected to migrate to prove responsibility, while women are seen as sacrificial providers.

The gender dimension of migration options is also evident, as in general women have easier access to legal pathways, where options are highly gender-based but also in low-paid sectors like homecare where malpractice and gender-based violence are recurring. On the other hand, legal options are not sufficiently available to men, who resort to irregular migration more often and face higher level of risks. However, bilateral labour agreements with Gulf countries establish mechanisms, such as recruitment standards and grievance mechanisms, that remain weakly enforced. In addition, ILO has mapped more than 150 bilateral and multilateral agreements globally²³ but, in Ethiopia, their implementation remains limited and domestic workers are often excluded, leaving women unprotected. Returnees from Saudi Arabia report limited access to grievance systems or consular support. Local institutions acknowledge the

need for stronger monitoring but cite resource constraints and poor cooperation with embassies.

4. Return and reintegration

Return migration in Ethiopia is rarely a smooth transition. In general, failure abroad translates into stigma, suspicion and discrimination for both genders, though women returnees face harsher exclusion—especially those pregnant or with children born abroad²⁴. Life skills training helps returnees envision local opportunities and reduce repeated migration intentions²⁵.

Experiences of returnees

Many female returnees come back with minimal savings, despite years of work abroad, and face immediate economic hardship. Cultural expectations—such as bringing gifts or supporting the livelihood of the core and extended family—lead to financial stress, while debts incurred to finance migration often remain unpaid. Psychosocial challenges are equally severe. Women report traumatic experiences, including physical injuries like burns and falls from buildings, with some cases resulting in permanent disability. Emotional distress, depression, and feelings of failure are common, particularly among those who return without meeting family expectations. Stigma adds another layer of vulnerability, as returnees who fail to achieve financial success or who return after divorce often

²² Fabbri, C., Stöckl, H., Jones, K., Cook, H., Galez-Davis, C., Grant, N., Lo, Y., & Zimmerman, C. (2023) Labor recruitment and human trafficking: Analysis of a global trafficking survivor database. *International Migration Review*, 57(2), 629–651

²³ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020) *Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) Online Repository*. ILO. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/resource/bilateral-labour-migration-agreements-blmas>

²⁴ Kimo, K., & Gurmu, G (2023) Practices and challenges of reintegration of female return migrants in Ethiopia: The case of domestic labor migrants in East and West Arsi Zones of Oromia Regional State. *Arsi Journal of Social Inquiry*, 7(1), 97–115.

²⁵ UN Women Ethiopia (2024) *UN Women, partners deliver training on gender-responsive reintegration service to migrant women returnees*. 26/07/2024. Available at: <https://ethiopia.un.org/en/277273-un-women-partners-deliver-training-gender-responsive-reintegration-service-migrant-women>

face social isolation and shame, reinforcing their marginalization within communities.

Survivor-led organizations and shelters

Support structures for returnees are limited but evolving. Shelters provide temporary assistance for women returning from exploitative conditions, offering medical care, psychosocial counselling, and short-term accommodation. However, these services are under-resourced and cannot guarantee long-term reintegration. Survivor-led organizations play a critical role in bridging this gap. They organize peer-support groups, share real-life migration experiences, and lead awareness campaigns to inform potential migrants about risks and rights. These organizations also advocate for policy reforms and community-level stigma reduction. Programs such as WISE's peer-to-peer storytelling²⁶ and Freedom Fund's survivor networks²⁷ demonstrate the value of lived experience in shaping effective interventions.

Reintegration programs: successes and gaps

Several reintegration initiatives look promising but remain fragmented and with important shortcomings. IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) program supports migrant men and women in vulnerable situations, providing business planning, vocational training, and in-kind support²⁸. Similarly, UN Women's life skills training²⁹—focused on confidence building, goal setting, and practical tools—helps returnees envision local opportunities and reduce repeated migration intentions. Despite

these achievements, systemic gaps persist. Reintegration efforts are often short-term and lack proper funding for full psychosocial support, leaving trauma unaddressed. Embassy support abroad is inconsistent, and legal redress for abuse cases is rare. Government programs, while offering pre-departure training and bilateral agreements, fail to integrate comprehensive reintegration strategies. Coordination between ministries, NGOs, and local authorities remains weak, limiting scalability and sustainability.

Repeated migration and its drivers

Despite reintegration efforts, repeated migration remains common, driven by structural and social pressures. Economic instability is the primary factor as local job opportunities are scarce, and income from small businesses or temporary work rarely meets household needs. In many cases, the resources provided by voluntary return and reintegration programmes are used to earn sufficient funds for repeated migration. Social expectations exacerbate this trend, with families often viewing migration as a duty and expect remittances, creating pressure on returnees to "try again." Hope for success persists even among those who experienced exploitation or trauma abroad, reflecting the powerful influence of migration narratives and the absence of viable alternatives. Structural gaps in reintegration programs—such as limited financial support, inadequate psychosocial care, and lack of long-term livelihood

²⁶ <https://www.wiseethiopia.org/>

²⁷ <https://www.freedomfund.org/>

²⁸ According to an impact study by IOM, the value of in-kind contribution varied depending on the type of business chosen by the beneficiary and it could range from 1,110 USD for ruminant fattening businesses to 2,650 USD for construction businesses. Source: International Organization for Migration (2023) *Returning Home: Evaluating the Impact of IOM's*

Reintegration Assistance for Migrants in the Horn of Africa, IMPACT Study Report #1, IOM Regional Data Hub for the East and Horn of Africa, Nairobi.

²⁹ UN Women (2023) *Second Chance Education (SCE) signature features*. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

strategies—make repeated migration a rational choice for many.

5. Alternatives to migration

Local employment and livelihood opportunities

Migration in Ethiopia is often perceived as the only viable path to economic survival, particularly for women. Local employment options remain scarce and poorly remunerated, pushing individuals toward risky migration routes. Stakeholders emphasize the urgent need for job creation in agriculture, manufacturing, and services, alongside women's entrepreneurship programs supported by credit and market linkages. Returnees highlight that irregular migration costs—sometimes exceeding 200,000 birr (around 1,110 euros)—could finance small businesses if accessible funding and institutional support were available. Community-based cooperatives are often seen as a sustainable model, enabling women to pool resources and reduce vulnerability to migration brokers. However, policymakers acknowledge that without systemic investment in rural economies, migration will continue to dominate as a survival strategy.

Skill development: vocational and soft skills

A recurring theme is the skills gap that limits local employability. Vocational training aligned with labour market needs is critical to reducing migration pressure. Relevant actions include technical training in trades such as construction, electrical work, and agriculture. However, technical skills are not enough for people to navigate their own condition, investigate their ambitions and find opportunities to turn them into reality. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes need to be combined with initiatives to develop soft

skills—communication, financial literacy, and decision-making, problem-solving and critical thinking—which are lacking in Ethiopian formal education, leaving youth vulnerable to misinformation and exploitation. Returnees, indeed, often lack both vocational and soft skills, reinforcing dependency on migration. Scaling up TVET programs and integrating life skills into education systems are essential steps toward creating viable alternatives.

Financial inclusion and microfinance

Economic vulnerability is the strongest push factor for migration, and interviews underscore the absence of accessible financial services for women and, more generally, youth. Stakeholders and policymakers suggested microfinance schemes and cooperative models to support women-led enterprises, with financial literacy playing a key role of women empowerment. Returnees repeatedly stressed that migration costs could fund local businesses if credit and seed funding were available. Suggestions include tax exemptions, start-up grants, and revolving funds to enable small-scale entrepreneurship. However, financial interventions must also be credible and sustained, as awareness campaigns alone fail when poverty persists. Linking financial inclusion with vocational training and market access can create a holistic framework for resilience, reducing the economic frustration that drives irregular migration.

Community-based resilience strategies

Interviews highlight that migration decisions are deeply social and shaped by family pressure and community narratives. Effective alternatives must therefore operate at the community level. Stakeholders advocate for participatory platforms, such as community committees, school-based initiatives, and multi-stakeholder forums, to foster structured

dialogue and ownership around drivers of migrations, safe pathways and local alternatives. Survivor-led organizations play a pivotal role in reshaping perceptions and supporting reintegration through peer mentoring and advocacy. Adopting gender-sensitive approaches, including psychosocial support for returnees and targeted programs for disabled women, is also fundamental. Community resilience also requires addressing misinformation: stakeholders recommended localized awareness campaigns that combine risk education with hope-based narratives and practical alternatives. By embedding livelihood programs within community structures, interventions can counter the prestige associated with migration—including irregular migration—and promote sustainable local development.

6. Policy and institutional frameworks

Legal migration systems and digital platforms

Ethiopia has made notable progress in establishing legal migration systems, yet significant gaps remain in accessibility and implementation. The Digital Labor Migration System (LMIS)³⁰ was introduced to regulate recruitment and curb irregular migration by requiring migrants to obtain a barcode from the Ministry of Labor before departure. While this innovation aims to enhance transparency, interviews reveal that rural communities face major barriers, including poor internet connectivity, lack of local offices, and high travel costs to Addis Ababa for registration and training. Legal migration processes involve multiple steps—

registration, pre-departure training, certification—but decentralization is incomplete, leaving rural migrants dependent on brokers. Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) with Gulf countries, historically focused on domestic work, are being expanded to include medium-skilled sectors such as construction and electrical work. However, awareness of these opportunities is low, and gendered patterns persist, with women concentrated in domestic roles and men excluded from legal pathways.

Regulation of brokers and recruitment agencies

Despite the existence of over 600 licensed recruitment agencies³¹, monitoring and enforcement remain weak. Interviews consistently highlight agency malpractice, including hidden fees and exploitation of migrants who believe services are free. Brokers manipulate legal frameworks by rerouting migrants to unintended destinations and charging exorbitant sums that often leads many and their families to sell livestock or incur debt to finance migration. While the government has introduced deposit requirements for agencies to enhance worker protection, implementation is inconsistent. Local policymakers and NGOs call for stricter regulation, transparency, and penalties for violations. The persistence of irregular migration underscores systemic failures as legal migration is perceived as slow and costly, while brokers offer faster, albeit riskier, alternatives. Without robust oversight and community-level enforcement, recruitment practices risk continuing to undermine trust in formal systems.

³⁰ <https://lmis.gov.et/>

³¹ The Ethiopian Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (EOEAF) is a unique umbrella organization established in 2020 that accounts for 98% of

Ethiopian national recruitment abroad. Source: <https://eoeaf.com/about-us/> (accessed on 20/11/2025)

Embassy and consular support abroad

Embassy and consular support for Ethiopian migrants abroad is described as limited and inconsistent. While some embassies provide temporary shelter or mediation during crises—such as the Lebanon case—these interventions are ad hoc and insufficient for systemic protection. Plans for labour attachés in Gulf countries exist but lack clear timelines and operational frameworks. Migrants often remain unaware of their obligations and rights under bilateral agreements, such as the conditionality of work visas and the possibility to change employers upon request, due to poor communication and outreach. Returnees report minimal assistance in cases of abuse, unpaid wages, or health emergencies, reinforcing perceptions of abandonment. Strengthening embassy capacity and ensuring proactive engagement with host countries are critical to safeguarding migrant rights and reducing vulnerabilities.

Regional and international cooperation

Ethiopia's migration governance is increasingly shaped by regional and international partnerships, yet challenges persist in enforcement and bargaining power. Bilateral labour agreements with Gulf states aim to promote safe migration, but Ethiopia struggles to negotiate terms comparable to countries like the Philippines, which secure stronger protections for workers. At the same time, Ethiopia faces significant political challenges in diversifying its migration agreements to include mid- and high-skilled workers, amid concerns that partner countries may prefer other regional corridors or may eventually opt for cheaper labour from other regions. This keeps the economic return of migration for the country—in terms of remittances—considerably low. EU and international partners—including GIZ and ILO—play a key

role in supporting Ethiopia to develop Global Skills Partnerships³² with countries and improve migration governance. Stakeholders also advocate for gender-sensitive frameworks and monitoring of BLAs to ensure sectoral balance and protection standards. Regional coalitions are recommended to strengthen negotiation power and harmonize labour standards across East Africa. However, without sustained investment in institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms, these agreements risk remaining aspirational rather than transformative.

7. Risks and vulnerabilities for women

Gender-based violence and exploitation

Migration exposes women and girls to severe risks of abuse and exploitation both during transit and at destination. Testimonies reveal physical and sexual violence en route, particularly along irregular corridors through Sudan and Yemen. Women reported sexual violence, harassment, and coercion by smugglers and employers. At destination, exploitation is systemic: wages withheld for months, passports confiscated, and threats of death if workers attempted to leave before a replacement was found. Interviews highlighted cases of women returning with burn injuries, unpaid wages, and trauma, underscoring the severity of risks even in formal migration channels. Domestic workers were often transferred to other households without consent, intensifying vulnerability. Underage migration compounds these risks—girls as young as 14 falsified their age to meet migration requirements, often facilitated by brokers. Survivor accounts underscore that even legal migrants face abuse, highlighting gaps

³² <https://gsp.cgdev.org/>

in bilateral agreements and embassy protection.

Health and psychological impacts

The physical and mental toll of migration is profound. Women returned with serious injuries, sometimes resulting in disability or death. Irregular migrants crossing deserts lacked access to medical care, facing dehydration and disease. Beyond physical harm, psychological trauma is pervasive: isolation, overwork, and abuse lead to depression and anxiety. Reintegration is further complicated by stigma and suspicion, especially for women returning with children born abroad or past “marriageable age”. Emotional distress, depression, and feelings of failure are specifically common among returnees, particularly those unable to meet family expectations. Divorce and social exclusion drive migration decisions and deepen emotional distress upon return. Despite these challenges, due to lack of sufficient funding, psychosocial support and shelters remains minimal, including under available reintegration programmes.

Specific risks of irregular migration

Irregular routes are marked by extreme danger that often leads to death, especially in desert areas. Migrants, including women, endure life-threatening conditions, including heat up to 46°C, starvation, and violence. Smuggling networks operate with impunity, subjecting migrants to kidnapping and ransom demands, while families are extorted for money. Brokers exploit desperation, charging exorbitant fees and spreading misinformation. Even those who start legally often become irregular when fleeing abusive employers or seeking better pay. These journeys are not only perilous but also strip migrants of any legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to arrest, detention, and further exploitation.

Legal migration challenges and agency malpractice

While Ethiopia promotes regular migration through bilateral labour agreements, implementation gaps and systemic flaws undermine safety. Legal migration is slow, costly, and centralized, forcing rural migrants to travel to Addis Ababa for documentation and training. Reported costs for legal pathways can be up to 400,000 birr (around 2200 euros), pushing many toward irregular routes. Licensed agencies, meant to safeguard migrants, often engage in fraudulent practices—charging hidden fees, rerouting migrants to unintended destinations, and failing to provide promised protections. Even digital systems like the Labor Migration Information System (LMIS), introduced to regulate recruitment, remain inaccessible in rural areas. Embassy support abroad is inconsistent, and enforcement against brokers is weak. These structural barriers erode trust in formal systems, perpetuating reliance on informal networks and irregular migration that are perceived as faster and more reliable, despite their dangers.

8. Information ecosystem on migration

The information ecosystem on migration in Ethiopia is characterized by a sharp divide between formal and informal sources, with the latter often dominating decision-making processes.

Formal sources

Formal sources include government ministries, embassies, and international organizations such as IOM and ILO, which provide official guidelines, pre-departure training, and digital systems like the Labor Migration Information System (LMIS). The LMIS requires migrants to obtain a barcode to travel legally, aiming to regulate

recruitment and reduce irregular migration. However, analysis by civil society stakeholders shows that recruitment agencies remain concentrated in urban centres, leaving rural migrants with little access to these services. As a result, the majority of rural households rely on informal channels.

Informal sources

Word-of-mouth, local leaders, and personal networks play a decisive role in shaping migration choices. CSOs' fieldwork demonstrates that mothers are often the primary advisors for daughters considering migration, while fathers are excluded from the conversation. Returnees also influence perceptions, but their narratives are frequently incomplete or misleading. Interviews confirm that returnees often glorify their experiences abroad, omitting exploitation and hardship, which creates unrealistic expectations for prospective migrants. This dynamic reinforces migration as a socially accepted strategy, even when risks are high.

Social media and diaspora narratives

Digital platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram amplify migration narratives and misinformation. Diaspora members often share success stories emphasizing financial gains while concealing exploitation, thereby reinforcing migration as a desirable path. These narratives strongly influence community perceptions, particularly among youth and women. At the same time, misinformation spreads rapidly online, with brokers exploiting digital channels to advertise false opportunities. The result is an ecosystem where myths and half-truths dominate, overshadowing official campaigns.

Brokers and misinformation

Brokers exploit information gaps by presenting irregular migration as safe and profitable. Misconceptions such as "flying equals legal migration" are deliberately spread to mislead migrants. In rural areas like Arsi, brokers are perceived as both indispensable and dangerous: families rely on them to access routes but are aware of the risks of debt and abuse. This dual perception underscores the structural dependency on brokers, even as they perpetuate exploitation.

Community and peer networks

Community and peer networks provide trust and guidance, often outweighing formal sources. Arsi University research shows that rural communities engage in collective discussions about migration, strengthening solidarity in internal mobility. However, in international migration, peer influence can perpetuate risky decisions. Returnees' testimonies, whether accurate or embellished, shape household strategies and reinforce migration as a family duty. Survivor-led organizations attempt to counter misinformation by sharing lived experiences, but their reach remains limited compared to brokers and diaspora narratives.

9. Communication and awareness campaigns

Recent and current campaigns

In Ethiopia, awareness campaigns on migration rely heavily on TV, radio, and social media platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Telegram. However, stakeholders consistently describe these efforts as generic and disconnected from local realities. National messaging lacks consistency and cultural adaptation, often using one-size-fits-all approaches that fail

to resonate with rural audiences. Local policymakers echo this concern, explaining that campaigns highlight risks like injury, slavery, and psychological trauma but do not address the economic desperation driving migration. Government-led initiatives tend to be sporadic and top-down, with limited engagement of communities and little emphasis on practical alternatives. Returnees confirm that most campaigns they encountered focused on warnings rather than solutions, leaving them sceptical about their relevance.

Good practices

Evidence on good practices demonstrates that localized, participatory, and survivor-led approaches are far more effective. Some campaigns are grounded in baseline studies that assess community perceptions and preferred communication channels, ensuring cultural relevance. These campaigns use multi-platform strategies, combining TV, radio, TikTok, and community dialogues to reach diverse audiences. Adapting campaigns to the different communities' communication codes is also essential, especially by providing messages in the local languages and by involving migrants and community leaders to co-design communication actions. Survivor testimonies are central, helping to challenge stigma and reshape migration narratives by presenting authentic experiences rather than idealized success stories. School-based media clubs, community forums, and storytelling formats such as drama and plays, which foster ownership and sustainability. These approaches integrate risk awareness with empowerment, making campaigns relatable and impactful. Using visual tools like short documentaries and culturally adapted performances during market days can also be effective, as they attract large audiences and encourage dialogue.

Challenges

Despite these promising practices, campaigns face significant limitations. Messaging often lacks depth and fails to offer credible alternatives. While risks are highlighted, practical solutions—such as local employment opportunities or access to microfinance—are rarely included. Economic desperation undermines awareness efforts, as even micro-grants intended for local businesses were diverted to pay brokers, which illustrates the disconnect between messaging and lived realities. Returnees also noted that campaigns seldom address psychosocial needs or stigma, leaving reintegration challenges unresolved. Furthermore, broker networks often outpace official campaigns, reaching communities first and shaping migration narratives through emotional appeals and false promises. This competitive information environment makes it difficult for institutional campaigns to gain traction.

Recommendations by stakeholders and women returnees

Stakeholders interviewed recommend combining risk awareness with hope-based narratives and practical solutions. Storytelling and peer education should be leveraged, using real-life testimonies to counter unrealistic success stories and promote informed decision-making. Survivor-led campaigns can challenge stigma and empower women with knowledge about rights and protections. Timing campaigns with international observances such as Migration Day or Domestic Workers Day can increase visibility and community engagement. Additionally, integrating campaigns with skills training, financial literacy, and livelihood programs would enhance credibility and reduce reliance on migration as the only perceived option. Communication strategies should be faster

and more localized than broker networks, using trusted messengers and culturally relevant formats. Finally, campaigns must move beyond fear-based messaging to offer tangible pathways for resilience, ensuring that migration becomes a choice rather than a necessity.

Women returnees interviewed emphasized that migration campaigns and policies must reflect their lived realities and aspirations. They called for recognition and listening, insisting that their experiences be valued as life stories rather than reduced to statistics. Many highlighted the need for information on economic support, noting that the resources spent on migration could have financed local businesses if credit, seed funding, and access to microcredit, vocational training, and local markets had been available. They also stressed the importance of conveying information on social protection, including reintegration programs that tackle stigma, provide psychological assistance, and guarantee healthcare. Furthermore, they demanded active participation in campaign design, serving as educators and mentors for younger generations. Finally, they urged for balanced narratives that not only discourage unsafe migration but also present concrete local opportunities and safe, legal pathways. These stories generate hope and show that migration can have a transformative impact if accompanied by protections and opportunities.

10. Recommendations for a gender-sensitive and effective communication campaign on the risks of irregular migration, legal pathways and local alternatives to mobility

The analysis presented in the previous sections highlights a clear disconnect between the growing number of awareness-raising initiatives on migration and their actual effectiveness in shaping informed, safer, and gender-responsive migration choices among Ethiopian women. While communication campaigns increasingly emphasize the risks of irregular migration, evidence from the field shows that these messages often fail to resonate with the lived realities of their intended audiences. Campaigns tend to be generic, risk-centred and top-down, insufficiently grounded in local contexts, gender norms, and structural constraints that shape migration decisions. As a result, they struggle to compete with powerful informal narratives transmitted through brokers, social networks, returnee stories, and diaspora-driven social media content.

Several interlinked gaps emerge from the analysis. First, economic hopelessness and lack of viable local alternatives undermine the credibility of awareness messages: information on risks alone is rarely persuasive when migration is perceived as the only pathway to income, autonomy, or social mobility. Second, gender-specific drivers and vulnerabilities—including household pressure, stigma, limited autonomy, and exposure to gender-based violence—are insufficiently addressed in mainstream communication strategies, despite women being a primary target of both legal labour mobility schemes and irregular migration routes. Third, the information ecosystem is highly fragmented

and asymmetrical: official sources are centralized, inaccessible to rural communities, and poorly communicated, while brokers and informal intermediaries provide faster, albeit misleading, information tailored to local aspirations and fears. Finally, previous sections show that campaigns often lack integration with institutional support mechanisms, such as legal migration procedures, reintegration services, financial inclusion, and skills development, weakening their capacity to translate awareness into concrete, safer choices.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations aim to support the design of context-grounded, gender-sensitive, and actionable communication campaigns on migration. Rather than proposing one-size-fits-all messaging, they focus on practical dos and don'ts derived from empirical evidence, with the goal of aligning awareness-raising efforts with structural realities, policy frameworks, and the voices of women themselves. The recommendations are intended to support policymakers, civil society actors (INGOs, Ethiopian NGOs and community-based organisations) and communication experts seeking to strengthen the impact, credibility, and sustainability of migration and development communication initiatives targeting Ethiopian women.

Recommendation 1 – Acknowledge gender dimension of risks and awareness

- **Integrate gender-sensitive messaging:** Recognize that women's migration decisions are shaped by systemic exclusion (land, credit, decision-making), cultural norms, and family pressure. Campaigns should explicitly address these realities.
- **Tailor timing and content:** Different rationales (economic survival, escaping violence, seeking autonomy) require

different timing for information delivery. For example:

- Pre-departure: Focus on rights, risks, and safe channels.
- Return phase: Emphasize reintegration support and stigma reduction.
- **Adapt communication styles:** Use culturally relevant formats (storytelling, drama, peer testimonies) and local languages to resonate with women in rural and urban areas.
- **Highlight gender-based expectations:** Address norms that push women into domestic work abroad and men into irregular migration, showing alternatives that challenge these stereotypes.

Recommendation 2 – Focus on risks, but also on opportunities

- **Provide a comprehensive risk mapping:** Present risks across all migration stages (pre-departure, journey, destination, return), including physical (violence, injury) and psychological (trauma, isolation).
- **Balance with alternatives:** Pair risk messages with practical options—vocational training, microfinance, and local business opportunities.
- **Adopt a multi-platform strategy** by using:
 - Mass media: TV and radio for broad reach.
 - Digital: TikTok, Facebook, Telegram for youth engagement.
 - Community-based: Market days, school media clubs, storytelling events.
- **Counter misinformation:** Use informal channels (peer educators, survivor networks, families and community members) to outpace brokers' fraudulent narratives.
- **Localize content:** Translate messages into local languages and adapt to cultural codes.

- **Use visual storytelling and other fact-friendly formats:** Combine short fact-based “pills” with real-life visual storytelling to make risks and alternatives relatable.

Recommendation 3 – Inform people on their rights and relevant procedures

- **Promote rights education:** Explain protections under bilateral agreements, safeguards from brokers malpractice, grievance mechanisms, and embassy support.
- **Step-by-step guides:** Break down legal migration processes into clear steps (registration, training, certification), indicating:
 - Who can help (local offices, NGOs, embassies).
 - Where to go (addresses, phone numbers).
 - How to access (costs, timelines).
- **Focus on risks and mitigation measures:** Clarify risks and mitigation strategies for both irregular and semi-formal migration.
- **Integrate digital and offline tools:** Provide QR codes and hyperlinks for LMIS and embassy contacts, but also printed guides for rural areas with poor connectivity.

Recommendation 4 – Leverage key allies

- **Foster community engagement:** Use multi-stakeholder platforms to co-design and co-own campaigns and map local needs.
- **Involve returnees as educators:** Involve women returnees and survivors of

gender-based violence in storytelling and peer mentoring.

- **Leverage institutional multipliers:** Partner with embassies, consulates, and local authorities to disseminate accurate information.
- **Target family and community:** Address household decision-making dynamics by including parents, spouses, and community leaders in dialogues.

Recommendation 5 – Call for policy change

- **Regulate intermediaries:** Enforce stricter monitoring of recruitment agencies and brokers, with penalties for malpractice.
- **Improve Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs):** Negotiate better protections, grievance systems, and diversify sectors beyond domestic work.
- **Promote gender equity in labour mobility:** Move beyond gendered job allocations to reduce vulnerability and exploitation among all genders
- **Improve financial inclusion:** Expand microfinance, cooperative models, and seed funding for women-led businesses.
- **Boost skills:** Scale up TVET programs and integrate life skills (financial literacy, decision-making, critical thinking, communication) to reduce migration dependency.
- **Enhance consular support:** Strengthen embassy capacity for crisis response and rights enforcement abroad.
- **Enhance reintegration programs:** Fund long-term psychosocial support, stigma reduction campaigns, and livelihood initiatives to prevent re-migration.

Annex–Table of interviews and focus groups

ID	Interviewees' profile	Institution/Organisation	Location	Date	Format
1	Practitioner	WISE	Addis Ababa	27/10/2025	Interview
2	Practitioner	Women shelter	Addis Ababa	27/10/2025	Interview
3	Practitioner	Freedom Fund	Addis Ababa	28/10/2025	Interview
4	Practitioner	UN Women	Addis Ababa	28/10/2025	Interview
5	Researcher	Arsi University	Asella	29/10/2025	Focus group
6	Policymaker	Arsi Zone; Hitosa Woreda	Asella	30/10/2025	Interview
7	Women returnees	NA	Asella	30/10/2025	Focus group
8	Practitioner/Researcher	Ayuda	Addis Ababa	3/11/2025	Interview
9	Policymaker	European policymakers	Addis Ababa	3/11/2025	Interview
10	Practitioner/Researcher	IOM	Online	4/11/2025	Interview
11	Practitioner	CISP	Addis Ababa	5/11/2025	Interview
12	Women returnees	NA	Addis Ababa	5/11/2025	Focus group
13	Women returnees	NA	Addis Ababa	5/11/2025	Focus group
14	Practitioner	LVIA	Addis Ababa	5/11/2025	Interview
15	Practitioners	Practitioners working on communication	Addis Ababa	6/11/2025	Focus group
16	Practitioner/Researcher	ILO	Online	7/11/2025	Interview