

# Research Report

## Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent Girls' Migration in Ethiopia



Dr Marina de Regt

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**Terre des Hommes**  
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**GirlEffect**  
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## Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	
1. Background of the study	9
2. Migration, girls and adolescence	9
3. Research questions	10
2. The Context	
1. Introduction	11
2. Education	12
3. The labour market	12
4. Migration	13
5. Addis Ababa	14
3. Methods and Fieldwork	
1. Introduction	16
2. Research methods	17
3. Challenges and limitations	18
4. Social Profile of the Respondents	20
5. Becoming a Migrant	
1. The economic situation of the family	23
2. Family circumstances	23
3. The gender order	24
4. Education	26
5. Migration motives	27
6. The decision to leave	29
6. Being an Adolescent Migrant Girl in Addis Ababa	
1. First impressions	32
2. Living conditions	32
3. Working conditions	33
4. Education and educational aspirations	34
5. Risks, threats and set-backs	35
6. Support and protection	36
7. Being an Adolescent Migrant Girl in the Middle East	
1. Living and working conditions	39
2. Moving back and moving on	39
3. Deportation experiences	40
4. Risks, threats and set-backs	41
5. Support and protection	41

8. Transitions and Transformations	
1. Internal migrant girls' evaluations of migration	43
2. Views on marriage and economic independence	43
3. Aspirations to migrate to the Middle East	44
4. Supporting those left behind	45
5. Future aspirations of returned migrants	46
6. Transitions and intersections	47
9. Sources of Vulnerability and Protection	
1. Sources of vulnerability	49
2. Sources of support and protection	50
10. Key implications for policy and interventions	52
<b>Bibliography</b>	57
<b>Annex: Three Life Stories</b>	60

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background of the study**

From January 2014 – December 2015 the research project “Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent girls’ migration and development in Ethiopia” took place. The research was part of a larger project that also includes research in Bangladesh and Sudan, and carried out under the umbrella of the Global Migration Centre of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. The overall research project is funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS). The case study in Ethiopia was co-funded by Girl Effect Ethiopia. Additionally, the project was supported by the Terre des Hommes Federation, the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, Feminist Review Trust and VU University Amsterdam.

The research project focused on the experiences, life choices and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women who migrate internally and internationally. It specifically looked at the life course and at how the decision to migrate intersects with other important choices, which characterise this particular life stage. By examining choices related to education, marriage and having children the study provides insights into adolescent girls’ aspirations and decision making capacity as well as into changes in their status resulting from their migration. The research also looked into the effect of girls’ migration on certain aspects of social development, such as education, employment, health care, and decrease of early marriage.

### **Methodology**

The fieldwork in Ethiopia took place between March and September 2014. The research was carried out by a team of Ethiopian researchers under supervision of Marina de Regt (VU University Amsterdam). The main researchers were Felegebirhan Belesti and Arsema Solomon. Aynadis Yohannes and Medareshaw Tafesse carried out interviews with young women who returned from the Middle East. Two migrant girls assisted in identifying migrant girls for interviews and carried out interviews themselves. The fieldwork was facilitated by the following Ethiopian NGOs: NIKAT Charitable Association, Timret Le Hiwot (TLH), CHADET (Organization for Child Development and Transformation) and OPRIFS (the Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration for Female Street Children).

The research methodology used was common for all case studies (in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Sudan) in order to be able to compare the findings. The research methods were of a qualitative nature and included 60 questionnaires, 20 life story interviews, 6 focus group discussions and 20 expert interviews.

The research focused mainly on domestic workers and sex workers as they form the large majority of adolescent migrant girls in Addis Ababa. Most of the interviewed girls were between 12-18 years old, yet women in their 20s who had migrated while they were under 18 years old were also interviewed in order to study the impact of migration on their lives. In addition, interviews were carried out with 30 young women who migrated to the Middle East while they were under 18 and who returned to Addis Ababa (15 of them were deportees from Saudi Arabia). They were between 18-24 years old at the time of the interviews. 10 experts working for ministries, international organizations and Ethiopian NGOs were interviewed in Addis Ababa.

In order to study the impact of migration in the places of origin fieldwork was carried out in South Gondar and in the city of Shashamene. Parents of girls who migrated to Addis Ababa and to the Middle East and peers who had not migrated were interviewed; 4 focus group discussions were organised with peers and with returned migrants and 10 expert interviews were carried out with people at organizations and institutions involved with migrants (such as the police, the Bureaus of Women, Youth and Children, and local NGOs).

## **Key findings**

### Family relations and decision making

The large majority of the interviewed girls reported that they took the decision to migrate themselves, sometimes without consulting their parents. As the most important reasons to leave their place of origin they mentioned poverty of their families, experiences of abuse at home, escaping early marriages and abduction and the aspiration to continue their education. Quite a number of girls experienced situations of abuse at home, often related to dramatic events in the family such as a divorce, death of one of the parents or even of both parents. There was a strong link between the decision to migrate and the negative role of step-parents, aunts and uncles, who abused the girls physically, mentally or sexually. Other girls reported that they migrated to help their parents financially. The interviewed parents hoped that their daughters would be able to improve their own lives in the city. In addition, there would be “one mouth less to feed”. Sometimes girls ran away from their families but more often they were invited by a relative or acquaintance to move to Addis Ababa. They offered them accommodation and education in exchange for domestic work. Relatives and friends (including boyfriends) affected the decision to migrate in many cases; most girls migrate with the help of others, very few migrate on their own.

### Adolescence as a particular phase in life

In Ethiopia, adolescent girls suffer from the gendered restrictions on their lives, in particular in rural areas. Those that come from farming families have to help their parents with agricultural work and with housekeeping, in addition to their schoolwork. While the number of girls that attend school has rapidly increased in the past decade, girls that come from poor families tend to drop out when they reach puberty. Parents fear that girls may start sexual relationships, get abducted and raped, become pregnant and therefore keep them at home and do not allow them to continue their education. The sexuality of girls is restricted and taboo, but the numerous stories about rape, sexual violence, unplanned pregnancies and boyfriends show that these restrictions work against girls' wellbeing. Some girls long for freedom of movement, and want to experiment with sexual relations, yet the restrictive environment puts them automatically in a stigmatized position affecting their future lives.

### Living and working conditions in Addis Ababa

The living and working conditions of domestic workers and sex workers in Addis Ababa differ to a great extent. Domestic workers depend on their employers, who determine the extent in which they can have contact with their family back home, go outside of the house to meet others, and/or attend evening classes. They live isolated lives; going to evening classes is sometimes the only way in which they can establish contacts with peers. Evening classes are therefore not only important for educational reasons but also for social reasons. Domestic workers spoke about a heavy workload, low salaries (or no salary at all) and various forms of abuse. Sex workers are much more mobile and have a bigger say over their own lives. There is a clear trajectory from domestic work to sex work: a large proportion of sex workers in this study started to work as domestics but moved into sex work after having encountered abuse and exploitation in domestic work. Sex work has advantages over domestic work with regard to payment, freedom of movement, access to social networks, building up human capital and other resources.

Both domestic workers and sex workers encounter abuse during their work, yet sex workers are more able to cope with their vulnerabilities and express greater self-esteem, which could be related to their age. The interviewed domestic workers were often younger than the interviewed sex workers. Sex workers have learned to fight for themselves and have often developed strong personalities. They also have more social capital than domestic workers: they meet more people and are able to build up a social network. Yet, many interviewed sex workers mentioned that it is “easy to get into sex work but very difficult to get out.”

### Expectations and aspirations

Almost all of the interviewed girls had high expectations of their life in Addis Ababa. They had hoped to continue their education, improve their own lives and those of their families back home by obtaining well-paid jobs, and become financially independent. While all of them enjoyed the infrastructure, the availability of shops and health services in the city, in addition to its cleanliness and entertainment possibilities, most of them were disappointed by the way in which their lives had turned out after migration. Both groups aspired to become economically independent, have their own accommodation and improve their living conditions.

Domestic workers who attended evening classes hoped that they would be able to continue their education and find better jobs. In the long run, they were interested in getting married but they first wanted to become economically independent and build up their own lives. Sex workers also aspired to continue their education but they did not see any possibilities to do that; they work at night and are unable to attend school during the day or in the evening. Most of them hoped to set up a small business, such as a hair salon or a shop, so that they would become economically better off. They had little hope that they would find a suitable marriage partner, because they were disappointed in men or because they thought that nobody would be interested in marrying them, and sometimes intended to migrate to the Middle East. In short, almost all of the interviewed girls valued economic independence over marrying.

### Transitions and transformations

In some cases, migration has contributed to girls' self-development; some feel that they have gained new experiences, become more independent and have more social capital. Yet they are faced with new structures of inequality and obstacles to develop themselves. They have limited opportunities to continue their education and find better jobs, often face abuse and exploitation, and this may affect their self-esteem negatively. In addition, very few of them were able to send back money home, and oftentimes they had lost contact with their parents. The impact of the migration of girls to Addis Ababa on their families seems to be minimal. Sex workers preferred not to have contact with their parents and siblings out of fear that their work would be concealed. Domestic workers kept more often in touch and sometimes returned home for holidays. None of the interviewed girls wanted to return home permanently, yet almost all of them said that they regretted their migration. They were of the opinion that they would have been better able to improve their lives by continuing their education at home. The transition to adulthood was affected by migration. While some girls have become economically independent, their chances to get married have decreased, in particular in the case of sex workers.

### Returned women from the Middle East

The young women who had returned from the Middle East were between 18-24 years old. They had left with high hopes about earning a lot of money but often faced with hardship, exploitation and abuse. They had changed their birth certificates in order to be able to migrate through legal channels. Some spent years abroad in different countries. They returned to Ethiopia for various reasons, related to their work abroad, sometimes for personal reasons and others were deported (in particular from Saudi Arabia during the large scale deportations in 2013-2014). They were disappointed about the limited impact of their migration on their own lives and those of the family they left behind. The remittances did not lead to a structural change in their livelihood for example by building a house, buying land, and setting up a business. The money they sent home was used for daily expenses, health care, and consumer goods (often furniture and audio equipment). Half of them said that their own lives had improved after migration; most of them were happy to be home but all of them were frustrated about the limited job opportunities in Ethiopia. They would like to stay in Ethiopia but said that there is little work available and that the salaries are low. Most of them aspire to set up a small business such as a beauty salon or a small shop, yet they lack the capital to do so. In addition, while they desire to get married and have children, they mentioned that the chances to find a suitable husband are limited. Also in

their case, the transition to full adulthood was not achieved. As a result, quite a number of young women intend to migrate again despite the hardship they went through.

### Support for migrant girls

The expert interviews showed that adolescent girls' migration is an important topic in Ethiopia but a legal framework and policies to improve the situation of migrant girls are lacking. The Ethiopian government is a signatory to various international conventions regarding children's rights and there are policies protecting them but the implementation of these policies is not fully realized. A number of local NGOs also have activities protecting adolescent migrant girls. The focus of the activities is often on the rehabilitation of migrant girls with their families back home or on the prevention of migration. Very few organizations work on improving the lives of migrant girls in the places of destination. In view of the large numbers of migrant girls in Ethiopia and the numerous girls that aspire to migrate, there is a strong need to initiate activities that improve the lives of migrant girls.

### **Summary of recommendations**

1. Tackling the drivers of girls migration
  - a. Organize awareness raising programmes about gender, sexuality, violence and abuse for girls and boys, women and men, children and parents, and for religious leaders, community leaders, representatives of legal bodies and service providers.
  - b. Improve the school enrolment of girls but also the quality of education including skills training for the labour market.
  - c. Increase the number of job opportunities for girls and young women.
  - d. Establish centers for girls in rural areas where they can spend their leisure time but also learn life skills and practical skills that prepare them for the future.
2. Promoting safer migration of girls
  - a. Collect more data about adolescent girl migrants so that they can be reported and tracked, without the intention of rehabilitating them.
  - b. Prepare girls who intend to migrate via awareness raising programmes which include training on their legal rights, the jobs available, financial management and the importance of social skills and social networks.
  - c. Organize awareness raising programmes in cooperation with schools, churches, community organizations and via radio and television. Instead of preventing girls to migrate the focus should be on safer migration.
  - d. Improve the coordination between the various interventions in the field of child migration and introduce a gender focus so that adolescent girls will receive more attention.
3. Improving the living and working conditions of migrant girls
  - a. Organize activities for migrant girls in order to increase their decision-making skills so that they will be better able to take their lives in their own hands.  
Develop project in cooperation with migrant girls.
  - b. Organize workshops in which migrant girls discuss among themselves how their lives can be improved. These workshops could be organized in cooperation with neighbourhood organizations, women's groups or associations for the urban poor.
  - c. Organize skills training, including the training of life skills, financial management, legal rights and ways of self-defence, in particular in the case of (sexual) violence.
  - d. Establish a peer education system so that migrant girls can support each other, and support systems for returned girls from the Middle East.
  - e. Establish safe spaces where migrant girls can meet peers and female mentors.



- f. Raise awareness among service providers, such as health care providers, and representatives of legal bodies about the particular needs and circumstances of adolescent migrant girls, including their reproductive and sexual health.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

The research project *Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent Girls Migration and Development* aims to answer a number of questions around adolescent girls' migration in three countries in the South: Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sudan. The research mainly focused on the experiences, life choices and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women who migrate internally and internationally. It specifically looked at the life course and at how the decision to migrate intersects with other important choices, which characterise this particular life stage. By examining such choices related to education, marriage and having children the study provides insights into young women and adolescent girls' aspirations and decision making capacity as well as into the changes in women's status per effect of migration. The research also looked into the effect of girls' migration on certain aspects of social development, including: women's status (social as well as economic); level of education; participation in the work force; health and education of siblings and of other family members; and decrease in the rate of early marriage and fertility. One of the objectives of the research was to generate evidence in order to propose interventions that help and address the needs and challenges of migrant girls. In relation to this, available migration policies at the national level were reviewed. The knowledge, awareness, and opinions of the migrant girls about these interventions, policies or laws were also studied.

The research mainly focused on the circumstances under which adolescent girls take the decision to migrate, how this decision is related to other choices such as those around education and marriage, and the responsibility of the girls back in their place of origin. In addition, fieldwork was carried out in two places of origin in order to assess the impact of migration on the families of migrant girls and the views of their peers on migration. Interventions with regard to girls' migration and available policies were reviewed as part of the research questions in the project. One of the objectives of the research is to provide recommendations for interventions to improve the lives of migrant girls.

The overall project was funded by Swiss Network of International Studies (SNIS) in Geneva, Switzerland. Girl Effect Ethiopia has given additional funds for the project in Ethiopia.

### 1.2 Migration, girls and adolescence

In the past decade the number of children that are leaving their places of origin in search of better livelihoods is increasing rapidly. The large majority of these children are adolescents, and many of these adolescent migrants are girls (see Temin et al 2013). In the literature on migration and development the migration of children and adolescents is mainly described in the context of trafficking and exploitation. The focus on exploited and abused child migrants in international advocacy has made it difficult to recognise and address the needs of other migrating children. A number of studies (see for example Whitehead, Hashim, and Iversen 2007; Jacquemin 2009; Hashim and Thorsen 2011) have criticized this approach, by showing that early migration is often children's and adolescents' own decision and that their reasons for migrating are often very similar to those of 20-25 year old. In the past five years an increasing body of literature has been published that pays attention to the agency of children (see for example Huijsmans 2011), yet few of these more nuanced accounts have included the experiences of adolescent girl migrants. They are invisible in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Exceptions are a number of studies on domestic workers and sex workers in Africa and Asia (see for example Erulkar, Mekbib, Simie and Gulema 2006; Camacho 2006; Erulkar and Mekbib 2007; Jacquemin 2009; Klocker 2007; Van Blerk 2008; Guo, Chow and Palinka 2011).

While the link between migration as part of wider social transformations have been addressed to some extent in the literature (see Bakewell 2010; Grabska 2013, 2014), there has been less focus, with a few exceptions, on the particular effects of migration on the individual life course. The link between transitions into adulthood has been only to a limited extent examined by academic scholars. The period between 11 and 20 years of age is a crucial one in the individual life course; a period of critical transitions when major life decisions are taken, albeit in context specific ways (Bucholtz 2002; Del Franco 2012). The spatial shift implied in migration is one such critical transition that intersects with other choices that are being made (Gardner and Osella 2003; Gardner 2009; Grabska 2010). Bucholtz (2002) points out that age is not the only important factor that determines adolescence. Youth is a flexible and social category and is based on locally and context-specific practices and norms. Adolescence in the western psychological thought has been regarded as the primary preparation for adulthood. While it is an important phase in people's lives, with spatial moves having significant implications for its outcomes, transition into a particular type of adulthood is often closely related to the decision to migrate (Hertrich and Lesclingand 2012; Temin et al. 2013).

This applies in particular to adolescent girls. Adolescent girls are increasingly being identified as a crucial segment of the population, whose successful transition into adulthood is of major importance for their own lives and that of the people around them (see Temin et al. 2013). The general idea is that girls who are healthy and educated will marry later and have fewer children, which will improve their economic prospects and positively affect the lives of their children. This notion, which is nowadays known as the Girl Effect, has inspired an increasing number of international organizations to start investing in girls, aiming to break the cycles of poverty and in doing so work towards the social and economic development of the population as a whole.

The migration of adolescent girls can have major implications for their transition into adulthood. Migration can be a response to the lack of opportunities in their home communities; for some it is a response to acute family needs, for others to their unmet aspirations. Many girls migrate for work but employment is not always the main factor behind girls' decision to move (see for example Jacquemin 2009). Migration can also offer girls escape from difficult circumstances, and it can be a way to express agency, escape dominant gender regimes, and to build independent resources. Migration can be inspired by a desire to continue education, and related to decisions about marriage and reproduction. The decision to migrate intersects with other important decisions in the lives of adolescent girls, and affects girls' transition into adulthood in various ways. While migration of girls is often portrayed negatively, focusing on trafficking and exploitation, it may also offer them new opportunities and have positive implications for their future lives.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The research considered four broad sets of questions:

- The first one concerns migration choices and trajectories: what are the reasons for the first migration and for the subsequent choices; what were the circumstances under which the decision to migrate has been taken?
- The second concerns young girls' life course transition/s: how does migration as a spatial shift intersect with other transitions for adolescent girls and in which ways does it affect their life trajectories in terms of: education, marriage, work, childbearing?
- The third set of questions concerns the sources of migrant girls' vulnerability as well as the sources of support for the adolescent girl migrants.
- The last set of questions concerns the legal frameworks and policy that shape adolescent girls' migration: How do national and regional policies and projects address the needs and priorities of these migrants?

## 2. The Context

### 2.1 Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the most populated countries in Africa with more than 90 million inhabitants. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world; although the poverty rate has decreased from 39 per cent in 2004 to 30 per cent in 2011, still more than 72 per cent of the population lives on less than 2 USD per day (World Bank 2011). Ethiopia is also one of the least urbanized countries in the world; 84 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. The large majority of the rural population depends on farming or livestock activities. Ethiopia has one of the world's highest birth rates (33/1000 in 2013) and almost 45 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age (CSA 2012). Adolescent girls (10-19 years old) make up 12 per cent of the total population. The majority lives in rural and pastoralist communities and lack access to basic services such as education and health care (Girl Hub Ethiopia 2015).

Population movements have been part and parcel of Ethiopia's modern history, consisting mainly of rural-urban migration but also of large-scale refugee flows to neighboring countries and the West, in particular during the Derg in the 1970s and 1980s. Under the dictatorial regime of Mengistu, international labour migration was restricted. In 1991, freedom of movement became a constitutional right under the government led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF). In the past two decades international migration to the Middle East and to South Africa has increased rapidly. In 2006 there were around 800,000 to 1 million Ethiopians working abroad (Fernandez 2010). While the government has put a lot of emphasis on economic growth, unemployment rates remain high, salaries are low, and many people have difficulties to make ends meet. Labour migration has become one of the main ways in which people aspire to improve their livelihoods (see Carter and Rohwerder 2016).

Migration of children and adolescents is not a new phenomenon in Ethiopia: historically children have migrated for seasonal labour in agriculture and to work in other sectors, such as in the weaving sector and as domestic workers. Nowadays international migration of women and children receives most attention in the media and from governmental, non-governmental and international organizations in Ethiopia, yet internal migration should not be neglected. Rural poverty caused by, amongst other things, overpopulation, land scarcity, governmental agricultural policies, and a lack of agricultural resources, coupled with the desire to explore new opportunities partly explain this increased migration from the countryside to urban centers, and from towns to cities, and in particular to Addis Ababa. In addition, the lack of educational and employment opportunities inspired migration to urban areas (see Atnafu, Oucho and Zeitlyn 2014). The current government has been able to improve school enrolment rates but jobs for educated youth are still lacking.

### 2.2 Education

Adult literacy rates have been structurally low in Ethiopia, affecting the country's economic development. In 2011, female illiteracy rates (10 years and older) was 40 per cent and male illiteracy 60 per cent (MoE 2013). Improving the educational level of the population has been one of the main objectives of the current Ethiopian government. In the past fifteen years the government more than doubled its budget for education. Around 25 per cent of the government budget is spent on education (MoE 2013). Numerous schools, universities and other teaching institutions have been built in rural and urban areas and large numbers of teachers have been employed. According to a report assessing the improvements in Ethiopia's educational sector in the light of the Millennium Goals, the number of primary schools has increased by more than 360 per cent (Education for All 2015). There were 6,958 primary schools in 2000/01 and 32,048

schools in 2013/14. In 2011, 17 per cent of girls in the age group 10-14 years said that they had not attended any education at all, compared to 98 per cent of women over 65 years of age (CSA and ICF 2011).

Primary education in Ethiopia consists of two cycles: the first cycle is from 1-4 grade and the second cycle from 5-8 grade. The first cycle in secondary education is from 9-10 grade, and the second cycle is from 11-12 grade. While primary enrolment rates are high for both boys and girls (93 per cent and 95 per cent resp.), secondary enrolment rates decrease rapidly (35 per cent for girls and 39 per cent for boys) (MoE 2013). In 2014 almost 20 million pupils were enrolled in primary and secondary education of whom 75 per cent in primary education (EPDC 2014). The gross enrolment rate in primary education is 87 per cent for boys and girls. This decreases to 38 per cent in the first cycle of secondary education. The primary net enrolment rate is 68 per cent and the primary completion rate is 47 per cent (EPDC 2014).

Despite the success in enrolment rates, in particular, girl's education has caught with many challenges and hindrances. Among the challenges for girls are early marriage (under 18 years), heavy domestic duties, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and abduction, and the lack of support from teachers and school administration. According to the 2011 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) the average rate of marriage is 16.5 years, and over 41 per cent of women between 20-24 years of age married before the age of 18 (CSA 2012 in Jones et al 2014b). In some areas, girls are expected to quit school early in order to support their family financially. Other factors that hamper girls' school enrolment are the lack of washrooms, toilets and lack of access to sanitary pads.

In spite of the expansion of educational facilities, the education system is highly criticized for its poor quality and lack of creativity. The most important criticism is that it is not able to train qualified and skilled labour force (see EFA 2015). In addition, tens of thousands of young people stay home after graduation due to the absence of job opportunities.

### **2.3 The labour market**

Ethiopia's economy is largely based on agriculture; 85 per cent of the population is employed in the agricultural sector. The second largest sector of employment is the service sector, followed by the industrial sector, which only accounts for 10 per cent of the GDP (Broussard and Tekleselassie 2012: 3). In the past decade Ethiopia witnessed a rapid economic growth (10.3 per cent in 2013/2014); the IMF considers the country one of the five fastest growing economies in the world. Yet, this economic growth has not yet led to overall development and unemployment remains a problem. According to the Central Statistical Agency, in 2014 the unemployment rate was 20.7 per cent, with a clear disadvantage for women (43,4 per cent opposed to men 13,8 per cent) (CSA 2014).

The most important factor affecting the Ethiopian labour market is the rapid growth of the population. As a result, the labour force is growing much more rapidly than the population as a whole. Creating jobs for a rapidly increasing labour force is one of the main challenges for the government. Young people do not only face the challenge of obtaining productive employment, but also of obtaining safe and acceptable work. This situation triggers the increasing rates of migration from rural to urban areas and abroad, in particular of young women (see Jones et al 2014a).

The employment status of girls and young women is worse than of men. Adolescent girls aged 10-19 comprise 12 per cent of the population. Women comprise approximately 52 per cent of the youth labour force; however, in 1999 and 2011, 67 per cent of all unemployed youth were women (Broussard and Tekleselassie 2012). As mentioned above, this percentage has decreased to 43,4 per cent in 2014 but it remains much higher than the unemployment rate of men. This is

particularly so when rural and urban areas are looked at separately. In both areas the rates of female unemployment are higher than of male. In urban areas the unemployment rate of female youth was 30 per cent, 14 percent higher than of male youth (ibid 18). Interestingly, while male unemployment increases with higher education, women with higher education have lower unemployment rates than women with less education (ibid. 24). Young women are primarily employed in wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, and domestic work. Women are more often employed in the informal sector. In 2011, 41 per cent of employed women were working in the informal sector (ibid). Domestic work is one of the main jobs in the informal sector.

The main barriers for adolescent and young women in the labour market are that they have lower educational levels and therefore cannot enter technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, which require grade 10. Even if girls are able to continue their studies, TVET's and secondary schools with grade 11 and 12 are only available in towns requiring them to rent accommodation, which poor parents cannot afford (Jones et al 2014a, viii). Girls that cannot continue their studies have less job opportunities in the formal sector and are forced to take up paid work in the informal sector.

## **2.4 Migration**

As mentioned above, rural-urban migration is a common phenomenon in Ethiopia. Most studies on migration in and from Ethiopia mention poverty as a major driving factor. Yet, under the layer of poverty and the need to assist families back home there are multiple other factors that influence adolescent girls' and young women's mobility. These have to be situated within the wider changes that have been taking place in Ethiopia in the past twenty or so years (see Dom 2015).

Between 1995 and 2013 a large research project was carried out in 20 communities in Ethiopia in which also data on migration was collected (Dom 2015). The research entitled Wellbeing and Illbeing Dynamics in Ethiopia (WIDE) identified the following issues emerging in outmigration from these communities. In the early 2000s, male seasonal migration was an important element in livelihood strategies in some communities. The male outmigration was often triggered by big crisis or hardship. In 2010/13, the WIDE research team noted striking diversification in outmigration. First, there was a decrease in importance of agricultural migration and an increase in importance of urban and international migration. There was also an emergence of industrial migration, with a big increase in women's and young women's mobility. In general, the researchers observed a significant rise of female and male youth migration in comparison to 1995. In some communities, women outnumbered migrating men. Urban and industrial migration was observed in most communities, among those in twelve communities it was perceived as significant, yet most of the industrial migration was dominated by men. For women, international migration especially to the Gulf was more attractive. International migration included diverse directions, for example in 15 communities it was mainly to the Gulf, in 5 communities to Sudan, and in one to South Africa. A significant change observed was the increased outmigration of ever younger people. While this was seen as a concern for the local populations, at the same time, children and adolescents' work is perceived as 'normal' and practiced in both rural and urban areas in Ethiopia.

In the past decade an increasing number of adolescent girls have left their home villages and settled in urban towns. Addis Ababa is an important destination but girls also migrate to nearby towns, and sometimes continue to the capital or move abroad (see Erulkar 2006; Erulkar and Mekbib 2007; Van Blerk 2008; Jones et al 2014a). A World Bank report (2010) states that most of the girls who migrate from rural areas would like to stay in Addis Ababa for a longer period of time without thinking of migrating to overseas, however, there is no clear evidence that supports this claim.

International labour migration from Ethiopia commenced in the early 1990s. Whereas labour migration was restricted under the socialist regime of Mengistu, the government that came to power in 1991 made free movement a constitutional right. In 2006 there were around 800,000 to 1 million Ethiopians working abroad (Fernandez 2010). Remarkable in particular is the large number of young women that have migrated to the Middle East to fill the demand for domestic labour (Kebede 2001; Fernandez 2010; de Regt 2010; Afework and Habte 2011; Jones et al 2014a). Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States have become major destinations for Ethiopian women migrants, but also economically less developed countries such as Sudan and Yemen. Legally only women over 18 years of age are allowed to migrate abroad, yet sometimes younger women go as well, in particular those who migrate over land to Sudan or over sea to Yemen. Women and girls are recruited in their home villages or have first migrated to small and middle-sized towns, and from there migrate abroad.

In the past ten years a number of international organizations and Ethiopian researchers have studied Ethiopian women's migration to the Middle East (see for example Kebede 2001; ILO 2011; Minaye 2012; Reda 2012). Very few studies have paid attention to the increasing number of adolescent girls that migrate to the Middle East. A recent study done in order of the Overseas Development Institute (Jones et al 2014a) has filled that gap to some extent. While international migration is officially not allowed under the age of 18, the study showed that many adolescent girls are able to obtain false identification and girls as young as 13 years of age do migrate abroad. One of the conclusions of the study was that the exploitative nature of girls' and women's migration to the Middle East should not be underestimated, even though girls and young women oftentimes migrate voluntarily.

Freedom of movement is a constitutional right for every Ethiopian citizen. Yet, in November 2013 the Ethiopian government announced a temporary ban on migration to the Middle East as a response to the large number of human rights violations against Ethiopian migrants, and women in particular. This ban has stayed in place until date. As a result many women who were intending to migrate are stuck in Ethiopia, or decided to migrate over land to Sudan or Yemen instead. In addition, migration via Kenya increased as Ethiopians do not need a visa to enter Kenya. Brokers facilitated the use of these irregular migration routes, with all its consequences.

Between November 2013 and April 2014 more than 160.000 undocumented Ethiopian migrants were deported from Saudi Arabia after the end of a seven months amnesty period (see de Regt and Tafesse 2015). Among the returnees were 7000 children (Jones et al 2014a: vi), including numerous adolescent girls. This large-scale return has had a big impact on the employment situation in Ethiopia, and on the integration process of the returnees in their communities and families. In order to reduce out-migration the government is offering skills development training courses. Micro finance enterprises are, for example, promoted. Regional bureaus of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs are responsible to find jobs in cooperation with a variety of organizations and businesses. At the federal level there are various programmes to assist returned migrants with their social, economic and cultural reintegration. Yet, despite these programmes and regardless of their negative experiences in Saudi Arabia, many returnees do not see a future in Ethiopia and oftentimes intend to migrate again. This is in particular so for young and unmarried women, who do not see many chances to get married and settled at home (see de Regt and Tafesse 2015).

## **2.5 Addis Ababa**

Addis Ababa is the political, economic, cultural and historical capital of Ethiopia. It is located in the centre of the country, and has rapidly expanded in the past 25 years. The capital is the home of the African Union, it houses the headquarters of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and there are many continental and international organizations based in the

city. The city has grown exponentially in the past two decades and the number of inhabitants is now more than three million (CSA 2015). The city attracts tens of thousands of people from all over the country yearly. The construction sector is booming, creating opportunities mainly for migrants from the provinces. Yet, hundreds of thousands of the city's inhabitants are unemployed. Addis Ababa is a clear example of an African metropole suffering from the consequences of rapid urbanization in the context of neoliberal policies, with high unemployment rates, shortage of affordable housing, large scale urban poverty and environmental degradation (see Demissie 2008: 521).

In the past decade the government has invested greatly in the improvement of the city's infrastructure and the building of large-scale housing projects. As a result, age old residential areas have been demolished, new roads have been constructed including a railway, and many of the green areas in the city have disappeared. Yet, finding affordable housing is still a big challenge for many people in the city. Large slum areas have come into being, both inside the city as well as on the outskirts of town. The new condominiums that have been built in various parts of town are supposed to offer affordable housing for lower middle classes, but are clear signs of the government's neoliberal policies.

Urban transport consists of minibuses, buses and private cars, and since the summer of 2015 a tram. Traffic jams are the order of the day at the most important hubs in the city. In the past decade the city has transformed greatly with the building or expansion of new roads, aiming to decrease the number of traffic jams. The newly built tram is supposed to provide affordable transport for the city's residents but is still too expensive for many people, who continue to use buses and minibuses. Addis Ababa has changed from a green, relatively calm and environmentally friendly capital into a busy and overpopulated metropole.



A busy street in Addis Ababa (photo: Marina de Regt)



### 3. Methods and Fieldwork

#### 3.1 Introduction

Studying adolescent migrant girls in a city where thousands of migrant girls are living is a challenge. In view of the limited size of the study and our interest in questions around the experiences, motivations and aspirations of migrant girls we decided to employ a qualitative methodology. We (the two local researchers and the principal researcher) were therefore not seeking a representative sample of migrant girls, which is also impossible in view of the lack of statistical data about the number of adolescent girls in Addis Ababa. It was more important for us to find girls that were representative for the large group of migrant girls in the city with regard to their living and working conditions. Based on the already available knowledge about adolescent migrant girls in Addis Ababa (see Erulkar and Mekbib 2007; Erulkar 2008; Van Blerk 2008) we decided to focus on domestic workers and sex workers. Initially we wanted to include a third group, namely girls that have recently arrived in Addis Ababa and that are staying in guesthouses around bus stations until they have found employment. In that way we hoped to be able to study three phases in the trajectories of migrant girls: from the arrival in Addis Ababa, to doing paid domestic work, which is often the first occupation of migrant girls, to becoming a sex worker, as many sex workers have first done domestic work. However, already at the start of the fieldwork we found out that it was too difficult to find girls under 18 years of age in guesthouses. Brokers told the local researchers that it was illegal to employ girls under 18 years of age. Brokers who did employ minors were not staying in one place but moved around the city in order to avoid being caught by the police. We therefore decided to focus on domestic workers and sex workers.

There are numerous adolescent domestic workers and sex workers in Addis Ababa but both groups are difficult to access for researchers. While almost every family in Addis Ababa has a domestic worker, approaching and interviewing them is very challenging. Domestic workers live and work in the house of their employers and have hardly time off. In addition, building up a relationship of trust and confidence and getting more insight in their lives by sharing it, such as anthropologists would like to do, is very difficult if not impossible. Sex workers, on the other hand, have much more freedom of movement and live in many cases on their own or with friends. However, also in their case it is difficult to build up close relationships by sharing their lives. Sex workers work in the evenings and at night and sleep during the day, which makes it problematic to find them. During their working time they are interested in making money and not in spending time with researchers, while in their spare time they are tired of their nightly work and want to rest. We therefore had to think of creative ways to get in touch with adolescent girls working as domestic workers and sex workers.

In the case of domestic workers we decided to approach a school that gives evening classes to boys and girls that are unable to attend regular school. Many girls in evening classes are domestic workers. Urael School is such a school and the school director was willing to facilitate the research. We started with a focus group discussion with ten adolescent girls who were working as domestic workers. After the focus group discussion we approached three girls and asked them whether they would like to be involved as interviewees in the research, but unfortunately two of them declined. One of them first accepted but then withdrew because she did not find anyone to look after her child. The other domestic workers were found via the contacts of the local researcher, and via house to house visits.

Our access to sex workers was facilitated by two local NGOs. NIKAT is a self-organization of sex workers in Addis Ababa. It was established in 2006 with the aim to improve the living conditions of sex workers in Ethiopia, and to fight against poverty and HIV/AIDS. NIKAT has a drop in center where sex workers can come to relax, rest, meet others and have access to

information. The first FGD, which was a pilot, was carried out at the drop in center of NIKAT. Two girls that participated in this FGD were asked to assist the researchers with the questionnaires. They were instrumental in accessing other sex workers. The second NGO that facilitated access to girls was Timret Le Hiwot (TLH). The organization was established in 2004 with the aim to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. TLH also has programmes directed at sex workers and their clients. With the help of TLH a number of adolescent sex workers were found for interviews.

One of our intentions was to carry out research in cooperation with adolescent girls. We were of the opinion that this would greatly improve the quality of the research results. After a short exam to test the writing skills of the girls, three adolescent girls were invited to participate as interviewers, two girls that participated in the FGD at NIKAT and one girl that participated at the FGD at Urael School. The local researchers organized a short training in administering the survey questionnaires. The two other girls enjoyed their participation in the research. They were very helpful, active and assisted in finding more girls. They were oftentimes surprised by the stories they heard from their peers. In addition, working with them provided the researchers with a deeper insight in the daily lives of adolescent migrant girls and their perception of the world.

Prior to the fieldwork the research team received a short training provided by Girl Effect Ethiopia on the Child Safeguarding Policy, which focused on the ethical considerations that must be taken into account while working with girls. Based on this training the researchers have made sure the criteria of ethical research with children were fulfilled. The life stories and survey questionnaires were always carried out in such a way that the interviewer and the interviewee were visible for other people. At the start of each interview the purpose of the study was explained and the consent of the girls was asked. Confidentiality was guaranteed; the interviewees were informed that their names would not appear in the report. Their names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

The fieldwork was divided into two phases: the first phase took place in Addis Ababa between March and July 2014, the second phase took place in September 2014 in two places outside of Addis Ababa. The fieldwork in Addis Ababa took longer than envisaged, which was mainly due to the fact that migrant girls working as domestic workers and sex workers have limited time available for interviews. In addition, the local researchers started transcribing the interviews during the fieldwork. The fieldwork in the rural areas was much shorter than envisaged. While we had planned to spend twenty days in each place of origin we ended up staying only five days, which was mainly because of logistical reasons.

In the period August 2014 till February 2015 we also interviewed thirty young women who migrated to the Middle East when they were under 18 years old. Half of the interviewees had returned from Saudi Arabia after the large-scale deportation in the period November 2013 – April 2014. The other half had returned for a variety of reasons, such as the end of their contract, problems at work, and personal reasons. The respondents were found via a snowball method. The interviews were carried out by two Ethiopian researchers on the basis of an adapted version of the survey questionnaire. In a number of cases the principal researcher joined them.

### **3.2 Research methods**

#### Survey questionnaires

Thirty questionnaires were carried out with adolescent migrant girls who came to Addis in the past five years. Fifteen questionnaires were conducted with sex workers and fifteen with domestic workers. The questionnaires were in Amharic so that the migrant girl assistants were able to administer them. Each questionnaire took around one hour to fill in. The data was entered in a grid in order to allow for comparative analysis with the outcomes of the survey done in Bangladesh and Sudan. As mentioned above, thirty survey questionnaires were done with young

women who returned from the Middle East. Fifteen had been deported during the large-scale deportation campaign in 2013-2014, and fifteen had returned for other reasons.

#### Life stories

Twenty life stories were collected and recorded. Ten life stories were carried out with migrant girls who migrated to Addis Ababa in the past five years. The other ten life stories were conducted with women who migrated to Addis Ababa as adolescent girls. This last group has been living in the city for more than five years. From the twenty life stories ten were with sex workers and ten with domestic workers. The life stories were transcribed and translated into English.

#### Focus group discussions

In total six focus group discussions were conducted. Two FGDs were with migrant girls in Addis Ababa (one with domestic workers and one with sex workers); two other FGDs were with peers of migrant girls outside Addis Ababa (one in Amhara region and one in Shashemene); one FGD was done with migrant girls who returned to their place of origin (in Amhara region) and one FGD was done with migrant girls staying in a shelter in Shashemene (waiting to return to their place of origin). The FGDs were recorded and transcribed literally in English.

#### Expert interviews

In total twenty interviews were done with representatives of (non-governmental) organisations involved in migration policies and programmes. Ten interviews were done in Addis Ababa, five interviews in Estie/Amhara region and five interviews in Shashemene. The expert interviews in Addis Ababa were not recorded digitally. The interviews in Estie and Shashemene were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed in English.

#### Informal conversations, observations and field diaries

In addition to the methods mentioned above the research team also gained insight in the issues around adolescent girl migration via informal conversations with the two migrant girl assistants, the interviewees, people working in organizations and others. They have also done observations, and in some cases written field diaries.

#### Collection of secondary data

Secondary data, such as research and policy reports, was collected and reviewed. It was, however, difficult to obtain statistical data or policy reports from governmental institutions. While the importance of the phenomenon of adolescent girl migration is acknowledged by many stakeholders, there are no reliable figures available.

### **3.3 Challenges and limitations**

As mentioned above, getting access to migrant girls was not easy, despite the fact that there are many migrant girls in Addis Ababa. In addition, building up relationships of trust was difficult and doing ethnographic research almost impossible. Another limitation was the extent to which we were able to do participatory research. The two migrant girls that assisted in administering the questionnaires were very helpful and the accounts of their lives and their responses to the stories of other sex workers gave the local researchers more insight in the issues around adolescent girls' migration. It would, however, have been good when they had been involved more than only in the administration of the questionnaires. It was also a pity that there was no domestic worker involved as a migrant girl assistant. In the rural areas we were not able to do any kind of participatory action research, which was mainly due to the limited time we spent in the field. The fieldwork in the rural areas was decreased from twenty days in each place of origin to five days. In Estie we were able to work together with three young women, one a counsellor and two community workers, who brought us in touch with families of migrant girls. Their stories and reflections on the situation of girls' migration in the area were very insightful.

Carrying out expert interviews and organizing an FGD with experts was a challenge as well. We were able to meet a number of representatives of international organizations and local NGOs and discuss the research project with them. Initially we had planned to organize a FGD with representatives of local organizations in Addis Ababa but in view of the difficulties to get hold of people we decided to skip this activity. Instead we used the discussion of the kick-off workshop that was organized in March 2014 (which was attended by six experts).

A major limitation of the research was that we were unable to interview family members, such as parents or siblings, in the place of origin of some of the interviewed girls. None of the interviewed girls was willing to give the contact details of their relatives back home. Their reasons varied: in some cases their relatives did not know their whereabouts, in other cases they had lost contact with their relatives or their relatives did not know what type of work they were doing in Addis Ababa. One of the interviewed girls was still in touch with her family but had not seen them in a long time. We offered to take her home, yet she still refused. The fact that none of the girls was willing to give the contact details of their parents or other relatives points to the difficult circumstances of their migration. Many of the girls had experienced abuse and exploitation and did not want their parents or relatives to know about their situation. Sex workers were afraid that their family would find out what kind of work they were doing, whereas domestic workers had oftentimes so little money that they were unable to send money home, and did not want to return home empty-handed. They were often disappointed about the fruits of their migration and preferred not to be in touch with their relatives.

Instead of visiting the families of migrant girls it was decided to select two areas that are known as “sending areas” of migrant girls. A number of the interviewed girls were coming from these areas, namely South-Gondar (Amhara region) and Shashemene (Oromia region). In addition, two local NGOs were willing to facilitate the fieldwork in these two areas. CHADET is an organization that aims to improve the lives of highly vulnerable children in various parts of Ethiopia. The NGO works, amongst other things, with street children, child labourers, orphans, and migrant children. One of their programmes focuses on the rehabilitation of migrant children in urban areas. They have established a number of shelters in the country; one of them is located in Estie woreda (South Gonder). Thanks to the willingness of the staff of the CHADET office in Estie we were able to carry out fieldwork there.

In Shashemene the research was facilitated by the Ethiopian organization OPRIFS (Organization for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children). While OPRIFS initially mainly focused on improving the lives of female street children, it has expanded its work on rehabilitating girls who are abused, which are in most cases migrant girls who were employed as domestic workers. They provide a shelter for abused girls, assist the girls with law suits against their employers, facilitate their rehabilitation home and create awareness about the risks of migration in the home communities. OPRIFS has offices in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar and Shashemene. Because Shashemene is considered to be an important migration hub for children from the southern part of Ethiopia we decided to do the second part of the fieldwork there.

#### 4. Social Profile of the Respondents

In this section we will present the data of the survey, which was carried out among 30 adolescent migrant girls in Addis Ababa (15 domestic workers and 15 sex workers) and 30 young women who returned from the Middle East who were under 18 years old when they migrated abroad.

**Table 1 Age of respondents at the time of the interview**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Up to 13		1	
13 to 17		14	
18 to 24		15	24
< 24			6
	60	30	30

The girls who migrated to Addis Ababa were all between 12 and 18 years old, which is not surprising as this was one of the selection criteria. Only one was 13 years of age, fourteen were between 14-17 years old and fifteen were 18 years old (they fall in the category 18-24 years old but were all 18). The returnees from the Middle East were older at the time of the interview; this is again not surprising as we had intentionally looked for girls that had migrated when they were under 18 years of age and most of them had spent at least a couple of years abroad. More interesting is the age at migration, which is presented in table 2.

**Table 2 Age at first migration**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Under 13		9	
13 to 17		21	29
18 to 20			1
< 24			
	60	30	30

The large majority of girls was between 13-17 years old when they migrated to the Middle East, and most of them were 17 years old; only a few were under 17 years. The girl that migrated when she was between 18-20 years old was 18 at the time of migration. Most of the girls that migrated to Addis Ababa were between 14-17 years old at the time of migration; only nine girls were under 13 years old. The large majority of the girls migrated directly to Addis Ababa. Only two girls migrated first to another place and then to Addis Ababa. Fifteen girls came to Addis 2 years ago and fifteen between 2 to 5 years ago, which is logical as we intentionally selected the girls in these two categories.

The returned migrants from the Middle East were all currently living in Addis Ababa but this does not mean that they were originally from the capital. Some of them had migrated to Addis Ababa prior to migrating abroad, and some had stayed in the city upon return from the Middle East. The large majority was living with relatives/family in Addis (25); two girls were living with friends.

**Table 3 Economic condition of the family prior to migration**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Very poor		1	4
Poor		20	13
Middle income		7	11
Well-off			
Not applicable (no family)		2	2
	60	30	30

We used the following criteria to determine the economic condition of the family:

*Very poor:* people who do not have land or animals, those whose land is small compared to the size of the family, and those who work as daily labourers or have no work at all.

*Poor:* farmers whose lives are dependent on farming and who use the products for their own consumption.

*Middle income:* farmers who have sufficient land to produce for the market, and people who have an additional income from children who are working.

*Well-off:* people who have a regular salary or a business such as traders, and those who can sell their agricultural and livestock products to traders.

As can be seen from table 3, the internal migrants were coming from poorer families than the returned migrants. This is in line with other research, which showed that international migration is only an option for people with resources. Members of poor and very poor families are often not able to cover the costs of cross-border migration.

**Table 4 Education**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Never gone to school		10	1
Years 1 to 5		5	3
Years 6 to 10		4	23
Years 11 to 12			
University but not graduated			2
Graduated			1
Continued studying after migration		4	
Currently studying		6	
	60	29	30

The educational level of the internal migrants was considerably lower than of the girls who had migrated to the Middle East. One third of the girls (10 out of 30) had never gone to school, some had attended basic education and six were going to school at the time of the interview. The last group was attending evening classes; this is not a coincidence as interviewees were selected via evening classes. The outcome should therefore not be taken as representative for the larger group of migrant girls. Most of the girls that migrated to the Middle East had attended 6 to 10 years of schooling, and one was even a university graduate. This is in line with other studies which have shown that women who migrate to the Middle East have often a relatively high educational level (see Kebede 2001; Fernandez 2010).

**Table 5 Marital status**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Never married		29	24
Married when migrated		1	
Married after migration			3
Divorced			3
Married and divorced more than once			
	60	30	30

Among the internal migrants only one girl was married before migration. Among the return migrants three women were married and three were divorced. The majority (24 out of 30) of the women were unmarried. The fact that the large majority of internal migrants was never married points to the delay of the age of marriage in Ethiopia. In addition, running away from early marriages and the chance of abduction were for some girls the reason to migrate. Parents sometimes also encouraged their daughters to leave, afraid that they would be abducted.

**Table 6 Children**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
No children		27	22
Children living with respondent		1	8
Children living at place of origin		1	
Children living with the father		1	
	60	30	30

The three internal migrants with children all had their children after migration. At least one of them was a sex worker; she had a child from a client. Most of the returned migrants had their children after their migration.

While the survey data gives some insight in the living and working conditions of the girls, the focus group discussions and the life story interviews say much more about girls' lives from their own perspectives. In the next chapter their stories will be central. The focus will be on the internal migrants because we did not collect life stories of returned women from the Middle East, but we will occasionally refer to the returnees.

## 5. Becoming a Migrant

### 5.1 The economic situation of the family

As mentioned in chapter 2, Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with the large majority of the population depending on subsistence agriculture. Most of the interviewed migrant girls in Addis Ababa came from families economically depending on agricultural activities (see table 3). Their parents often owned a little piece of land, which they cultivated for their own use and sometimes for the market. Only a small number of girls were from families that did not own land; these families can be considered very poor. The parents of these girls earned a living with daily labour. Some girls came from urban areas, and grew up in relatively better circumstances than the girls in villages. The parents of two girls were civil servants; they were educated and can be considered middle income families.

Household chores are a must for each and every girl in Ethiopia; already from a very young age girls learn to clean, cook, prepare coffee, do the laundry, and take care of their younger siblings. Girls in rural families also have to fetch water and look after the cattle. The double workload of household chores and livestock activities was for some girls the reason they did not attend school. A small number of girls also had to help their parents or relatives with income generating activities. Feven told us that she had to help her aunt serving local beer to farmers: *“My aunt exploited me; I had a heavy workload and worked long hours. Our domestic worker left us when I was 9 years old and after that time I took her position and I was doing all the household chores. I prepared materials for the traditional alcohol, like roasting barley, maize and grinding other ingredients, cleaning the house with the cattle’s waste, selling alcohol the whole day, and after finishing this I had to prepare for the next day. If I failed to perform all these tasks my aunt used to beat me badly.”* Eventually Feven left her aunt and came to Addis Ababa, encouraged and facilitated by a female broker who recruited girls as sex workers (see more under 5.2). Haimanot, who is 17 years old and doing domestic work in Addis Ababa, supported her mother as a daily labourer: *“I used to carry bricks for building houses. I used to make 30 Birr per day. With that money, I bought some injera and something to make soup, such as potatoes.”* Her father died when she was a child, and her mother was working for a family washing clothes and baking injera. Also among the returned migrants poverty was one of the main reasons for migration. Zemzem said: *“I am from a poor family, no one covers my expenses and I wanted to improve myself. (...) Before I left I was studying and helping my family with household chores. I was also working as a waitress, making coffee, doing daily labour, domestic work and even small trading. I did all kinds of jobs but nothing changed, so I decided to leave.”*

The economic situation of the family is one of the main factors affecting girls’ lives. Girls that are from poor and very poor families are less able to attend school because of their responsibilities in and outside the house. Migration may be a way to help their family economically, yet it can also be a way to flee poverty and find a way to improve their own lives. In addition to the economic situation of the family, family circumstances affect girls’ migration as we will see in the next section.

### 5.2 Family circumstances

Haimanot was not the only one who lost her father. Quite a number of girls, and in particular those that were doing sex work, had lost one of their parents and even both parents. Tsedi, a 24 year old sex worker who came to Addis Ababa when she was 10 years old, said that not having a family was the main obstacle in her life: *“My mom had me without being married to my father. She passed away and I grew up with my grandmother. When she also died, my uncle moved into my grandmother’s house. It was my uncle who brought me to Addis. When I came to Addis I was only 10 years old.”* When asked what the most important event affecting her life was, she said: *“Having no family! When you want to have a family it should be based on a plan. My family did not have a plan; as a result my life was not good. I could not*



*live in my area because I don't have parents. I don't have any economic activity to base my life. I came to Addis. I spent my life doing different types of work either in my aunt's house or life before her. So, life has no meaning for me. I faced all these problems because I don't have parents. I don't know my mother; if she was alive I wouldn't have faced all these problems."*

Orphans and children who are born out of wedlock are often considered "cursed" in Ethiopia, especially by relatives who feel forced to take care of the children of their deceased sister or brother. They are seen as an economic burden on the family, and are used for domestic work and not treated in a similar way as the other children in the family. For some girls this was a reason to come to Addis Ababa. Helen grew up with her aunt, thinking that it was her mother. She was abused and exploited continuously. *"I used to ask myself "Why would my mom do that?". (...) When I asked people why she was beating me so much, they told me that she was not my mother"*. She was 15 years old when she found out that her aunt was not her mother and then decided to run away with her boyfriend to Addis Ababa. Family relations are very strong in Ethiopia and those who do not have a family are marginalized in society. Tigist lost both her parents in a car accident when she was 9 years old. She and her brother started living with her maternal aunt, and encountered abuse and exploitation. When she was 15 years old she ran away, and lived for three months on the streets. When she was 16 she came to Addis Ababa with her boyfriend.

Girls that grew up with relatives or in single-parent families mainly had bad memories of their childhood; they only remembered poverty and hardship, and those that experienced a dramatic event such as the death of a parent said that their lives changed completely after that. Hayat, a sex worker of 17 years old, said: *"Actually my childhood was very short, I did not play enough with other children due to my father's early death"*. When her father died Hayat started working as a nanny at the age of 10 to support her mother. She mentioned the death of her father several times in the interview, which shows the importance of this life-changing event.

There were also girls who remembered their childhoods in a positive way: *"I remember playing with my friends. We used to play ashenda (a cultural dance performed around mid-August, when New Year is approaching). It was in the rainy season, our hair was nicely done, and we had butter on our head. Our mothers used to decorate us when Ashenda approaches."* Other girls spoke about their love for school, and their ambitions for the future. Almost all of them aspired to finish their education and take up a paid job.

### **5.3 The gender order**

Ethiopia is a patriarchal society and already from the very first days of a child's life, its gender is important, regardless of whether children are born in rural or in urban areas. As in other patriarchal societies, male children are valued higher than female children because they will continue the patrilineal family line. Children get their father's names, and traditionally boys would continue to live with their parents after marrying while girls move out. Gender affects children's lives from the very beginning; it affects the way they are treated by their parents, siblings and relatives, the type of work they have to do in the household and on the farm, their education, their freedom of movement, their relationships with friends, and their ambitions and aspirations for the future. Numerous studies have shown that Ethiopian girls are at a disadvantage when it comes to issues regarding education, health, and basic human rights. In 2013 Ethiopia was ranked 173<sup>rd</sup> out of 187 countries on the Gender Development Index (undp.org).

Most of the girls that grew up in rural areas spoke about the restrictions on their mobility, in particular when they were growing up. Early marriages and abduction are common in some parts of Ethiopia, especially in the Amhara region, even though there have been many interventions from the side of the government and non-governmental organizations. It is forbidden by law to marry children under the age of 18 and awareness-raising programmes have been carried out to inform people about this law. Girls are also increasingly aware of the law and of the fact that early

and arranged marriages are not in their benefit. Girls that attend school can prosecute their own parents in case they suspect that they are going to be married against their will. Yet, early marriages and abduction still take place.

According to the interviewed girls their lives were to a large extent determined by their parent's will and there were clear gender differences with respect to their freedom of movement. They were not allowed to move around freely, in most cases because their parents were afraid that they would start premarital relationships or get abducted. Sexuality was not something their parents spoke about with them, and (sexual) relationships between boys and girls were not allowed. Elsbieta, who grew up in the region of Menz (Amhara) said that she liked to play with boys and girls but her parents would punish her when she would come home too late: *"When this happened I would go to my brother or sister and they would let me in late at night after everyone had gone to bed"*. Her friendships were, however, innocent and she did not have any boyfriends: *"It's not common in our culture to have boyfriends. It's considered bad to have a boyfriend. You won't have a good image in the community. It would also mean that you won't be fit to be chosen to marry. It's mostly a brotherly friendship and nothing more. If a family finds out that someone's son touched their daughter, it can escalate to the level of killing people. It's the same if you're found drinking or going out at night."* And Hayat, another sex worker, said: *"Getting pregnant without wedlock is frowned upon and parents may ask children to leave their house for being a disgrace. In some instances if other people didn't know about it they might keep her in the house until she gives birth"*.

The sexuality of adolescent girls is controlled strictly and premarital relationships are judged very negatively. Stories about unwanted pregnancies are common and used as a warning against premarital relationships. Girls that get pregnant without being married are stigmatized and marginalized in rural communities. Their parents have to accept the child once it is born, but it is an economic and social burden for them. The larger society does not accept children born out of wedlock. Abortions are sometimes carried out in order to avoid having the baby. Girls that do have children without being married face difficulties finishing their education and often drop out of school. In Estie we came across a girl who had become pregnant by her boyfriend, she was living with her parents and supporting herself and her child with daily labour. We also heard often that parents in villages were afraid that their daughters would start sexual relationships when they would go to secondary school in the town of Estie, where they had to stay at a boarding school. Controlling the sexuality of their daughters was much more difficult when they had moved to Estie, yet it seems that most parents still preferred their daughters to be educated. The emphasis on education was remarkable and points to an important shift in attitudes towards girl's education, a topic to which we will return later.

The dominant discourse about sexuality in Ethiopia is that unmarried girls should not have boyfriends and be involved in sexual relations. As a result, most of the interviewed girls said that they did not have a boyfriend when they were living at home; some said that they had friends with boyfriends and others also heard about unwanted pregnancies. While the taboo around premarital relationships may have affected girls' responses, having boyfriends does not seem very common among young girls living in rural areas. Yet, there were also some girls who openly told us about their premarital relationships. This was particularly so for girls who grew up in small towns. Emebet grew up with an abusive father who passed away when she was 13 years old. She loved going to school but she started smoking and chewing chat (Catha Edulis) when she was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. *"I became friends with one of the owners of a chat shop. I shortly became addicted to chat and used to chew with him. He showed me how to chew and how to smoke cigarettes. At times, he would also make me smoke weed. He used to say that it would relax my mind and at the time it did relax me. You get to forget your worries as you relax and laugh. He became my boyfriend. I was only around 14 or 15 years old. He was much older. I would say around 23 or 24. At school, we never talked about sex. The first time it happened to me with him was very scary to me. It happened right after I met him which looking back was really young for me to have started sex and everything else that I did"*. Emebet became addicted to chat and drugs and at a certain moment her boyfriend became tired of her, because of her addictions. She decided to go to Addis Ababa. Her boyfriend helped her financially: *"Surprisingly, he was the one that actually gave me the money to come*

to Addis Ababa'. Boyfriends sometimes also played a role in the decision to migrate, a topic that will be discussed later.

The gender order in Ethiopia has thus a negative impact on girls; they have housekeeping responsibilities from a young age, their mobility is restricted and their sexuality is denied. In addition, they are less encouraged to continue their schooling, as we will see in the next section.



Making injera is women's work (photo: Marina de Regt)

#### 5.4 Education

Awareness about the importance of education, for boys and girls alike, has clearly increased in Ethiopia, also in rural areas. Most parents had been able to financially support their children's education, and did not belong to the poorest of the poor (i.e. families that do not own land). Yet, this does not mean that there is no gender discrimination in education; as mentioned in chapter 2, girls' school enrolment is still lower than boys. Some of the interviewed girls had not been allowed to go to school at all, or were taken out of school after a few years. Sometimes parents were unable to cover the costs of schooling (while there are no school fees parents have to buy the notebooks, pens, and schoolbags) and therefore took their children, and in particular their daughters, from school. This was particularly so for single parent families. Hewan, a sex worker who came to Addis when she was 12 years old in order to continue her education said: *"I used to help them with fetching water and also looking after the cattle. I was not going to school, even though there is a school, but girls were not going to school. It is boys who are attending school."* Hewan's parents wanted her to go to school, and that is why her elder sister invited her to come to Addis. *"My sister said that if I stayed in the rural areas, I will face abduction and remain illiterate"*. The lack of educational opportunities in the places of origin was one of the main reasons to migrate to Addis Ababa in our study. Relatives living in Addis Ababa invite the girls to move in with them. While the girls expect to go to school, they are in many cases used as domestic workers and only in a few cases get the chance to start or continue their education.

While the large majority of the interviewed girls said that they liked going to school, some girls lost interest when they became adolescents. Fiker grew up in Gonder, her parents were civil servants and very strict with her regarding her education. *“My parents were not happy when I was with my friends. They used to nag me with questions about with who I was spending my time with. I was not allowed to go anywhere besides school. (...)”*. And she continued: *“Our father does not want us to do household chores. When he is at home he wants to see every one of us with our books. (...) When I started to grow up, I wanted to go out from the house and go to places. I would not go to school. After a while my father heard about this. This was the time when I started to think about running away. He used to say he would kill us if we do not graduate from high school and if something happens in between. After I heard this I ran away. I was 13 years old.”* Now Fiker regrets it, and wished she had finished her schooling. The socio-economic background of the family is important for parent’s attitude towards education, yet also parents who are illiterate are often convinced of the importance of education. We interviewed a number of poor women in Estie whose daughters had migrated to Addis Ababa. They all told us that they saw it as their responsibility to support their children till the tenth grade. In their opinion, after 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls (and boys) were responsible for their own lives, and could decide if they wanted to continue their schooling, take up paid work or migrate, etc.

We also interviewed a number of girls in Estie who were attending school and who mentioned that they had to become self-reliant after having reached 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and be able to support their parents as they had helped them reach this stage. They felt that they had to fulfil a social responsibility towards their parents. This “obligation to return” could also be a reason to migrate in case there is no suitable job available in the place of origin. Finishing 10th grade is, however, quite an achievement. Many girls drop out of school before having finished 10th grade. During a focus group discussion in a slum area in Shashamene girls told us about the difficulties to continue schooling when the economic situation of the family is bad: *“Most of the girls that attend school are often absent because they are loaded with work. Sometimes they stay home when their parents are sick, and they have to take care of them. Sometimes they totally stop schooling because of work. If there is no one who supports them their focus will be on work rather than on school.”* Some girls also said that they did not see the value of education because there were no well-paying jobs to be found in Ethiopia anyway. They only saw migration to the Middle East as a possibility to improve their lives and those of their families.

## 5.5 Migration motives

**Table 7 Reasons for migration**

	Total	Internal migrants	Returned migrants
Poverty		7	15
Failed marriage			
Avoid getting married		6	2
Continue education		4	
Had to stop education		3	5
Wanting to help the family		4	11
Death of one or both parents		10	2
Conflict with parents/relatives		6	1
Conflict between parents		1	
Abused by parents/relatives		3	
Burdened with household activities		1	1
Desire for more freedom			3
Other		10	12

Table 7 shows the variety of reasons mentioned for migration. It is important to underline that obtaining meaningful answers to the question why girls migrated via a questionnaire is very difficult. People tend to give more socially acceptable answers such as “because my family was poor” and “to help my parents”. The life story interviews give a more detailed insight in the complex motivations for migration.

Many girls hoped to alleviate the poor living conditions of their parents and siblings, and considered migration a solution. This was particularly so for girls who came from rural families and from families that were incomplete, in particular female headed households. Yet, notwithstanding the poverty of the families, girls often also migrated to improve their own living conditions. Acknowledging that you migrate for your own benefit is, however, less acceptable in a society where girls are supposed to sacrifice themselves for their families. Hayat, who lost her father when she was 10 years old, first worked as a nanny and then decided to go to Addis Ababa. In the interview she emphasized that she migrated to support her mother but she continued: *“I was so fed up with the life back home. I kept on nagging my mom that I want to leave to Addis Ababa. When my aunt came for a visit I insisted that I wanted to go with her. My mom didn’t have any money so my aunt covered the expenses and brought me to Addis. It was a hard decision especially for my mom but I was more serious on the matter. The fact that we also see Addis as a bigger place fulfils people’s needs. I was so eager. My mom said that she needed me by her side for good or for worse but I convinced her that I am not able to help her if we don’t have money.”* Individual aspirations to improve one’s life are often combined with the desire to help one’s family.

Escaping early marriages and abduction were important reasons for migration for girls that grew up in areas where these practices are still common, such as in the Amhara region. In some cases girls ran away because they were afraid that they would be married off by their parents, but in other cases their parents supported their decision to go to Addis Ababa because they were afraid that their daughters would get abducted. Elsa, a sex worker of 18 years old, was born in a small town near Debrebirhan. Her parents were in favour of education and she went to school while many other girls in her surrounding were not going to school. She said: *“When I was in school there were people who wanted to marry me, and who wanted to abduct me. But my parents did not want that. They wanted me to study, and not to get married at an early age. So they sent me to an aunt that was living in Addis Ababa”*. Awareness raising activities are carried out at schools and health centers with the aim to inform girls about the fact that it is illegal to get married under 18 yet parents do not always abide to the laws. In Estie we interviewed a 16 year old girl in a village, who had recently got married and moved in with her husband. She told us that she informed her school when she found out that her parents wanted to marry her off, with the result that the first attempt failed, yet the second time she could not resist. She expressed her regret of not having been able to finish her schooling and hoped that her husband would allow her to continue her education.

For many of the interviewed girls the wish to continue their education was an important motivation to migrate to Addis Ababa. All the domestic workers had come to Addis intending to continue their education, and many of the sex workers who had started their migrant lives as domestic workers had hoped to continue their schooling. Elsa, who was presented before, was allowed to go to school after having moved in with her aunt. Yet, her aunt was abusing her verbally; she did not want her to meet other people and forced her to do household chores. When she had finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade Elsa left her aunt’s house and started working in a cafeteria and later became a sex worker. She now regrets that she has not finished her education but is happy that she escaped abduction and a possible early marriage.

Another motivation to migrate was to escape the restrictive norms and values in the places of origin. Fiker, who we introduced on page 24, felt very restricted at home. Both her parents were civil servants and valued education highly. Her father forbade her to meet friends after school and did not allow her to go out. She started to rebel against his regime and decided to run away when she was 13 years old. Her story shows that a stable childhood, growing up in a family with

two parents who are having sufficient means of living, is not a guarantee for a stable future. The restrictive environment in which there was no space for her to experiment affected her life to such an extent that she took the decision to run away. We also interviewed other girls who migrated because they were attracted to a more exciting lifestyle than the one at home. Emebet, who we mentioned earlier, grew up in Debrezeit and lost her father when she was 13. Her mother had difficulties making ends meet and Emebet was responsible for housekeeping in addition to going to school. She hated the situation that her family was in and started to use chat and smoke cigarettes. When she was 16 she migrated to Addis Ababa by herself: *“Nobody forced me to come to Addis. It was my own decision. I thought that coming here would grant me freedom and to some extent it has. I was certain that I would become a sex worker. I knew that sex work would be the only means of creating an income for me. (...) I saw other sex workers when I was in Debrezeit and how the relaxed and loose lives they lived. Sometimes I feel bad that I am a sex worker and at other times I think this was what I was destined to be. I have accepted it. I thought life would be different here. But it wasn't much different from Debrezeit”*.

In the interviews with parents, puberty was sometimes also mentioned as a reason for migration; some parents told us that their teenage daughters started to rebel against social norms that were restricting them, for example with regard to their mobility. This could lead to fights and conflicts, in particular with their father or their stepfather. Saba, the mother of a migrant girl who is living in Addis Ababa, told us that her daughter was often quarrelling with her father. He did not want her to spend time outside of the house, apart from school. *“She would argue with her father on where she had been and where she was going. She decided that leaving and making her own decisions in life would be better. (...) It is out of fear for our daughter that my husband used to fight with her a lot. He would say that she would end up either pregnant with a child or sick because of sexually transmitted diseases.”* A number of the interviewed girls in Addis Ababa also told us that they left their parental home after conflicts with their parents or one of their stepparents, and in particular their stepfather.

In short, poverty, the wish to continue their education, the fear for abduction and early marriage, and escaping the restrictive gender norms and values in the places of origin are the main motives that inspire girls' migration to Addis Ababa. Two main storylines can be distinguished: the first one is about families affected by divorce or death of one of the parents, the presence of a stepfather or stepmother who girls oftentimes did not get along with, and physical or sexual abuse, from the side of their parents or stepfather or stepmother. The second storyline is about poverty, a harmonious family without conflicts but parents that were too poor to provide for (all of) their children.

In the interviews with returnees from the Middle East poverty and the wish to help the family were also the main reasons for migration (see table 7). Conflicts with parents and escaping restrictive social environments were mentioned much less. The fact that we interviewed women who in most cases were born and brought up in Addis Ababa may be an important explanation. The educational level of the young women who migrated to the Middle East was often higher than of the internal migrants (see table 4). Prior to migration most girls had been going to school (24 out of 30); some had had a job but the income was too little to support themselves and their families. Those that had finished their schooling had sometimes been unable to find a job and therefore decided to migrate abroad.

It is important to realize that one of these factors may be presented as the main motive but that in reality a complex set of factors affected the decision to migrate. In addition, this decision is often not taken individually but inspired by various people, including parents, relatives, and friends as the next section will show.

## **5.6 The decision to leave**

From the stories that we have presented above it becomes clear that many of the interviewed girls said that they took the decision to migrate to Addis Ababa themselves. Emebet, who we

introduced earlier, was very outspoken that it was her own decision to go to Addis Ababa. In the stories of other girls their agency also comes to the fore: they wanted to improve the lives of their parents and siblings, aspired to continue their education, escaped from abduction and early marriages or were attracted to a lifestyle that would give them more freedom. A number of parents in Estie also said that their daughters took the decision to migrate themselves, sometimes even without consulting them. Meseret lives with her husband and ten children in Estie. Her husband is a daily labourer and she herself sells spices. Her children go to school but her eldest daughter migrated because she was unable to attend vocational training: *“It has been two years since she left. We could not cover the required amount of money for her school registration. She was frustrated and refused to do paid labour. She persisted to go to the city and change her life”*. Another mother told us: *“This year she would have been in grade 12 but there was not enough money to send her to school so she left. She said that if she could she would continue school, otherwise she would just work as a domestic and live in the city. She wanted to change her life. That was her hope”*. Her daughter had not been able to continue 11<sup>th</sup> grade and therefore decided to go to Addis Ababa. *“She met with a lady who could arrange work for her in Addis as a domestic worker. She decided on her own to leave us. She would argue with her father about where she had been and where she was going and decided that leaving and taking her own decision in life would be better”*.

In a number of cases girls left without telling their parents where they were going, leaving them unaware of their whereabouts. In other cases parents had assisted with the migration of the girls, hoping that the girls would be able to improve their own lives and not so much that of the parents. Some parents said that the girls migrated because they wanted to make life easier for them, as “there would be one mouth less to feed”. Parents expressed their desire for the girl to be happy and better off than she was at home. Saba, whose daughter is living in Addis Ababa, said: *“What would she do here? I think that there are better options for work there in Addis as it is a bigger city”*.

Yet, the decision to migrate is often not an individual decision. In many cases parents, relatives, and friends play an important role as well. Saba supported her daughter’s decision to migrate, and only informed her husband after she had left to Addis Ababa. Parents and relatives may assist the migration of girls in two ways. First, parents who are unable to take care of their children, who want their daughters to continue their education or who are afraid of abduction, may ask a relative in Addis to take their daughter and send her to school. In reality many girls end up doing household chores in exchange for education; it is not clear whether this was initially agreed on. Second, relatives can help girls leave their family in case of abuse. Aunts seem to play a particular important role in assisting girls to migrate. The term “aunt” may, however, be used for any female relative and does not necessarily need to be the sister of one of the parents. When girls grow up with aunts because their parents have died or are unable to take care of them, they may also be a reason for migration; the stories of aunts and uncles that abuse and exploit girls are abundant.

Friends may also have an impact on the decision to migrate, and in particular male friends and boyfriends. Some of the interviewed girls ran away from a situation of abuse, and came to Addis Ababa with a boyfriend. Earlier we presented the stories of Helen and Tigist, who both lost their parents and grew up with an aunt. Helen ran away with a boyfriend when she was on her way to school because she could not stand the situation at home anymore. At the age of nine, Tigist ran away after having been abused severely by her aunt. She came to Addis Ababa with a young man, with whom she had sex for the first time. Fiker ran away from her father’s restrictive regime with a man who was working in the army. He helped her to get work and she moved with him from place to place until she settled in Addis Ababa. Relatively few girls mentioned that other girls helped them to migrate.

The dominant discourse about migration in Ethiopia focuses on trafficking and the important role of brokers in persuading families to allow their daughters to migrate. Based on the interviews with migrant girls brokers do not seem to play a big role in persuading girls to migrate internally. Their role is limited to finding employment for recently arrived girls in the city. More important

in the context of internal migration are relatives living in the city, friends who have already migrated to Addis Ababa and in some cases boyfriends. In the survey more than half of the girls said that they migrated with someone else (17 out of 30). Most girls who came to Addis to do domestic work migrated with the help of a family member, while the girls that migrated alone were often sex workers. Feven, who was working as a sex worker in her place of origin, met a woman who persuaded her to go to Addis Ababa: *“She said: You are beautiful, you will get a lot of money working in Addis Ababa. She told me that it is rare to find young girls like you doing business (sex work MdR) and she convinced me that being a young and beautiful brings high amounts of money. (...) I decided overnight and she promised to take me and find me a house.”* In some cases girls ran away because they wanted to avoid early marriages or abduction. Sometimes they left against the will of their parents, in other cases they left without informing them, and in some cases their parents supported their decision. Feven’s story shows that we need to be careful with the use of the term broker. Brokers are not always people who force or lure girls into sex work. Feven was well aware of the type of work she was going to do in Addis, and took the decision to migrate herself. The female broker facilitated her migration and Feven still owes her money. In contrast with the interviews with migrant girls, people working for organizations in Estie and Shashamene, such as police officers and representatives of NGOs, did mention the role of brokers in internal migration. One of the activities to prevent child migration is to check adults who are travelling on buses with more than two children. In case he or she cannot prove that the children are his own children, he or she will be prevented from taking them on the bus. In this way child migration is automatically criminalized and the question is whether this is in the advantage of children who opt for migration.

The returned migrants often mentioned that they took the decision to migrate alone, which is also in contrast with the dominant discourse on trafficking. One of the reasons could be that we interviewed young women who were born and brought up in Addis Ababa. In the countryside the role of brokers may be much bigger (see Jones et al 2014a). The interviewed women said that they only informed their parents after having finished the application procedures. Sara migrated to Saudi Arabia when she was 17 years old but added four years on her birth certificate. Only after the application process was finished she told her family that she was going to migrate to the Middle East. Betty also took the decision to migrate herself. Her family did not approve of it and even tried to prevent her from migrating. But she was convinced that she wanted to go: *“I wanted to try out life in Arab countries and all my friends had left before me and I had no friends who remained here.”* And Mesay said: *“I wanted to be independent. I am less interested in education. My dream was to open my own beauty salon and I realized that I could only achieve my mission by working abroad. (...) I decided to migrate myself, and no one accepted my decision, even my eldest sister, who had migrated herself, was opposed to it. My mother did not want me to have my own ID card and apply for a passport. She even informed government officials that I was under age and not allowed to migrate. But later they realized how much I wanted to go abroad and they allowed me to leave. My parents were leading a normal life: I did not leave because they were poor.”*

Although decision-making processes are difficult to study, as decisions are never unilaterally taken but influenced by others, the fact that the interviewed women all said that they decided themselves to migrate shows that the dominant discourse on trafficking leaves too little room for women’s agency. The trafficking discourse portrays female migrants as docile victims who migrated against their will, lacking control and being unaware of the work that they are going to do. Yet, without denying the fact that there are women who are lured into migration, the stories that we collected show that women, and also adolescent girls, often took the decision to migrate themselves.



## 6 Being an Adolescent Migrant Girl in Addis Ababa

### 6.1 First impressions

*“As soon as I got here, I was amazed by the colourfulness of the city. My hopes and dreams of being educated and becoming a better person got brighter with the city lights and I was extremely happy of what was waiting for me. I saw myself finishing school; getting a well-paid job, and helping my mother out of the life that she led.”* These are the words of Hayat, who came to Addis when she was 15 years old, invited by her aunt. Hayat’s father had passed away and her mother had difficulties making ends meet. She neglected her children, which affected Hayat very much and she was happy when she got the chance to improve her life. But her aunt’s promises were broken; she had to do household chores instead of going to school, and when her uncle started to rape her she decided to run away. Hayat is now doing sex work and is angry and sad that she was not able to continue her education.

Most girls had high hopes of their lives in Addis Ababa, and still value life in the city positively. Elsa said: *“I like the people, the light is bright and different from us, the cafeteria’s, hotels, the style of the people, the way they dress, the buildings are different from the countryside.”* The attraction of life in the city was an important reason for migration for some girls. Addis Ababa was considered a symbol of modernity and progress and migration was seen as a way to develop oneself into a more modern person. Yet, Hayat and Elsa were one of the few girls that explicitly referred to her first impressions of the city. Most of the girls only spoke about their experiences as domestic workers and sex workers, and the ways in which life in Addis Ababa differed from their earlier expectations. Elsbiet, who aspired to become a professional runner, said: *“Back home we used to think that Addis Ababa was everything and a source of making your dreams a reality. My dream was to make my running a reality but this has not happened. I left the waitressing job because I didn’t like the work. I then got into somebody’s home as a domestic worker.”* Elsbiet is now working as a sex worker. Feven, who we presented earlier, said about her expectations: *“To be honest, I wasn’t afraid when I came to Addis; I was rather optimistic and surprised to be in Addis. It was like arriving in America. But I thought I will be rich and collect a lot of money. The woman who brought me here shared the same feeling: “You will help your aunt let alone yourself, you will succeed financially. Ambitiously she told me: “In the worst case scenario, you can change your life just working for two months. When I earned 2000 Birr in the first business, I started to think my dream was coming through. But when days passed the reality changed upside down... nothing to show for two years.”*

Girls who came from rural areas expressed their appreciation of life in Addis Ababa because of its “cleanliness” (*nasena*). Notions about cleanliness differ between rural and urban areas. In rural areas it is less common to wash one’s body daily, protect one’s hygiene and wash one’s clothes regularly, which is mainly related to awareness, and not to lack of water. Sex workers and domestic workers are expected to keep themselves clean because of their work: sex workers in order to have clients and domestic workers because of their work in the house. Both groups are doing “intimate labour” and cleanliness is an important part of that. If they are not clean they may lose their jobs. Haimanot said: *“Water is better here. It is piped water. Back home it is from a well. Sanitation is good too.”*

### 6.2 Living conditions

The interviewed migrant girls lived in different parts of Addis Ababa. Domestic workers always live with the family of their employers. They sleep in the servants’ quarters at the back of the house, or in the house itself. Their mobility is often restricted, and evening classes are one of the few ways in which they can leave the house of their employers. Sex workers rent rooms alone or together with friends. Finding cheap and good accommodation close to their areas of work is a challenge and sex workers often move houses regularly. The fact that they have to travel back home late at night or early in the morning makes living in faraway parts of the city very

inconvenient. It is not only expensive because they have to make use of private taxis and *bajaj* (small taxi) to get home but it also puts them in vulnerable situations, travelling home at times that there are very few people around. Another reason why sex workers often move houses is that they do not want their neighbours to know what type of work they are doing. Sex workers are highly mobile in the city, moving from house to house.

While domestic workers live very isolated lives, as they hardly have time off and live with the families of their employers, they clearly do have some space for manoeuvre and can exert agentic power. The fact that many sex workers previously worked as domestic workers shows this agency: under very restricted circumstances they were able to take the decision to leave, and find a way to change their lives. And whereas domestic workers often live very isolated lives because their mobility is restricted, this does not mean that they do not have any social contacts. For domestic workers who are attending evening classes the classes serve as a means of social interaction, friendship, and the means to combat their stress in daily life. They exchange information and support each other. The contacts with other girls are sometimes even more important than what they learn during the evening classes. And as Hayat's story shows, domestic workers may also meet girls in the neighbourhood who can advise and assist them. The decision to leave domestic work is often facilitated by other girls. Domestic workers thus do not lack social capital completely; while their social contacts are limited they may use the few contacts they have strategically when needed.

### **6.3 Working conditions**

The working conditions of domestic workers and sex workers differ to a great extent. As mentioned above, domestic workers live with the family of their employers and have no regular working hours. They start their work in the early morning, preparing breakfast and cleaning the house, and end in the evening, after the last meal has been taken and the kitchen and house have been cleaned. In case they are responsible for children they may even have to work at night, attending the children when they wake up. Their salaries are very low; they earn around 200 Birr (8,5 €) per month and sometimes are only paid in kind (food and lodging). This last situation applies mainly to those who work for relatives, who invited the girls to live with them and who promised to send them to school.

Sex workers have a very different work life. They work at night and sleep during the day. They start their work around 10.00 pm and return home in the early hours of the morning. They earn between 50 - 200 Birr (2,00 € to 8,5 €) for a short job and 600 – 1000 Birr (25 € to 42 €) for a whole night. Sex workers can work in hotels or on the street. When they work in a hotel they have to stay in the hotel and are more restricted in their mobility. They have to drink and chew chat and smoke cigarettes in the bar of the hotel in order to pick up customers. Street workers can start and stop working whenever they like. They are not obliged to use alcohol, cigarettes and chat and can work on a more individual basis. The most well-known areas for sex workers are Haya Hulat, Chechnya, and Piazza but there are also girls that work around Bole and in other parts of the city.

Hayat's story, which we presented at the beginning of this chapter, is representative for many stories of adolescent sex workers. They started working as a domestic worker, then moved into waitressing and later entered sex work, yet there are also girls who became sex workers immediately after having left domestic work. They were disappointed by their lives as domestic workers; either because they faced abuse and exploitation or because of the low salaries that they received. Sometimes they had been invited by a relative who had promised them the possibility to continue their education in exchange for housekeeping, as was the case with Hayat, but the chance to go to school never materialized. Other times they first started a waitressing job in a bar and gradually entered sex work, as they found out that it was relatively easy to earn more money.

Half of the girls that were interviewed for the survey said that they found work in Addis via a relative/neighbor; they were in most cases domestic workers. Sex workers mainly found work through agents/middlemen and through friends. Many girls said that other girls, who they met in bars, convinced them to take up sex work. Some girls arrived in Addis Ababa on their own and searched for work, as domestic workers but also as waitresses in restaurants and bars. They approached broker offices, or brokers approached them, and were sometimes lured into jobs they did not want to. In order to get hired girls under 18 years need to have a legal guardian, who is a resident in Addis Ababa and has an Identity Card. Brokers may assist in finding a legal guardian but use this as a pretext to lure girls into sex work. There are many broker offices in Addis Ababa involved in arranging work for young women. Officially arranging work for minors is not allowed and those that are involved oftentimes do it secretly, moving from place to place to avoid being caught by the police. Some girls have no idea what the job consists of. Helen told us that she ran away from her boyfriend and via a broker found a job in a hotel. *“I told him to find me any job. He then found me a job in a hotel. I had no idea about the job. I didn’t know it was sex work. It got dark while I was in the hotel and the owner asked me to change my clothes. I asked why? I then told him that the broker had told me nothing about the job. He told me that I was very young for this job. He told me that I was going to be a commercial sex worker and that I was going to have sex with different men. I was confused and had no place to go to.”* Helen worked a few years in the hotel and then decided to become a street worker. Street work is considered better than working in a bar because of the independence and freedom of movement.

Almost all of the interviewed sex workers said that they would prefer to leave sex work. They complained about the way in which they were treated by clients, the hardship of their lives at night, the fact that they were unable to attend school because they work at night and sleep during the day, and their addictions to *chat*, cigarettes and alcohol. Hayat phrased it as follows: *“I just wish that I could get a job that pays well enough for me to have a normal life. By this I mean a life that will allow me to work all day and be able to sleep at night and not the other way around. I wouldn’t mind working as a waitress or a cleaner. I also wish that I could get a job that will not make me a victim of all my drug addictions.”* Some of them said that the money that they earned was “bad money” (the devil’s money) because they obtained it by doing sinful things, and that they were therefore unable to save it. It disappeared as soon as it was in their hands. They spent it on make-up, clothes, shoes, *chat*, cigarettes and alcohol. If it had been good money, they would have been able to invest it in a better future, in their view. Yet, finding another job with a relatively good salary is very difficult. The salaries for jobs suitable for young women who have not finished their education, such as waitressing and working in shops, are very low (around 1500 Birr per month). Most of the sex workers said that they would not be able to live from such a salary; the rent of their rooms alone was already 1500 Birr. Only women who share housing, or who live with relatives, can afford to take up such jobs.

The survey results support the life story data. The large majority of the girls that were interviewed for the survey received money in cash. Only two girls mentioned that they were paid in kind; they were domestic workers and received food and lodging in exchange for their work. Domestic workers earn very little (see above) and often send it home or use it for transport or essentials for themselves. Sex workers said that they spent their money on rent, household expenses, food, other essentials (make-up), entertainment (such as cigarettes and *chat*).

#### **6.4 Education and educational aspirations**

Many girls came to Addis Ababa with the intention to continue their education. This was particularly the case for girls who left their parental families in order to live with a relative in the city. Hayat lived with her aunt and hoped to get educated in Addis. Instead, she had to do household chores and was only allowed to attend evening classes after much begging. When her uncle started to rape her she kept quiet for a while but then decided to talk to girls in the neighbourhood. She ran away and became a sex worker. Many girls, and in particular those doing

sex work, were disappointed because they hoped to get educated and change their lives and those of their families but little of their aspirations materialized.

Yet, there were also girls who were still hopeful about their future. This applied in particular to domestic workers who were attending evening classes. They intended to leave domestic work and find a better paid job after having finished their schooling. Sex workers also aspired to continue their education but did not see possibilities to go to school because of their lifestyle. They referred in particular to the fact that they work at night and sleep during the day, and therefore are unable to attend school. They had a strong sense of having lost out on education and the possibility to improve their lives through education.

Quite a number of girls regretted that they had migrated referring to the fact that educational opportunities in their places of origin had improved after they had left. According to them their peers in the villages were now attending school which had not been the case while they still lived at home. In view of the rapid expansion of educational facilities in Ethiopia, this might indeed be true. Yet, they could also be idealizing their places of origin. They all thought that if they would have been educated, their lives would have been very different. This shows the strong discourse on education that is present in Ethiopia, even though employment opportunities for educated people are limited. As mentioned earlier, only during an FGD with adolescent girls in a slum area in Shashamene the limited jobs for educated people was mentioned. They were among the few that did not endorse the idea that education is the way to improve their lives. They all aspired to migrate to the Middle East because that was the only way to earn good money in their views.

## 6.5 Risks, threats and setbacks

The stories that we have presented until now show that the lives of migrant girls in Addis Ababa are not without risks. They often encountered poverty, abuse and exploitation in their places of origin, which were the reasons for migration, but face new risks, threats and setbacks in Addis Ababa. Domestic workers live isolated lives and run the risk of being exploited, as they may have to work long days without breaks, sometimes without receiving a salary, facing physical, mental and sexual abuse and lacking ways of support and protection. The violence in their lives comes from their employers, whether they are relatives or strangers. For some of them this is a reason to run away and look for a safer place to live and work. Yet, in many cases they are confronted with new threats after having left domestic work. Those who become sex workers may have to deal with violent clients, or be abused and exploited by boyfriends or brokers, although we heard this less often. In Ethiopia sex workers never work with a pimp, which is a great advantage in comparison to many other places in the world. As a result they have more freedom of movement and can act more independently. The most important threats come from clients, who force them to have sex without condoms, to have sex in ways they do not approve of, or who refuse to pay them.

Hayat spoke openly about the risks that she encounters during her work: *“There’s a tendency to fight and get beaten by customers when working as a sex worker. Because most of them come when they are drunk and intoxicated with other drugs they mistreat us often. Some men will cheat us. (...). I once was beaten badly around my eye and right now, as you can see, one of my teeth is chipped. This happened during a disagreement with a customer. He wasn’t one of my regular customers. He lied and said that he gave me the amount that he promised but he didn’t. I didn’t know that he had finished his money drinking and so he didn’t have any money with him. When I told him that I expect to be paid, he showed me that he wasn’t willing to pay me by beating me up.”* And Feven said: *“Many men beat us when the position and way they want (sex in) is difficult for us, and I don’t want people to beat me. Most of them want us when they get drunk and they don’t care about us. Life consists of ups and downs and people pass through it, but many men don’t understand this fact and see us like dolls. When I face such harassment, I can’t do anything, it is just my fate to accept the punch. I feel powerless and empty because I put myself there with my own consent.”*

Both domestic workers and sex workers run the risk of becoming HIV positive; the rate of adolescent sex workers with HIV/AIDS is on the rise in Ethiopia (Erulkar 2014). None of the interviewed migrant girls told us in the interviews about their HIV-status, which points to the strong stigmatization of people with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. In our personal contacts with sex workers we found out that some of them were HIV-positive. Girls were ashamed of their status, and worried about the future, in particular those with children. They were afraid that they would die and leave their children behind alone. Worku is 24 years old and HIV positive and her son of 11 as well. She is taking medication but knows that there is a risk that she might fall ill and die. She is very worried, also because she has a second child who is severely disabled and who needs full-time care. Helen also has HIV and a son of 2 years old from a client, who fortunately is HIV negative. She is worried about the future and wants to leave sex work as soon as possible: *“My current life is very ugly. I don’t recommend others to come here and join. It is a very horrifying life here. For someone who knows about it, it is horrifying whereas for someone who doesn’t know about this place it may be aspiring to join. But this life is not aspiring.”* She was able to attend a hairdressing course and hopes to take up a full-time job in a hairdressing salon in the nearby future. She does not want her son to know that his mother was a sex worker, and hopes to provide for him in another way.

Awareness about HIV/AIDS is present on a large scale in Ethiopia, and condoms are available free of charge, yet there are still men who prefer to have sex without condoms. Organizations that support sex workers, such as NIKAT and Timret Le Hiwot, play an important role in raising the awareness of sex workers about the importance of using condoms. Sex workers who are HIV-positive can get free medication in a number of hospitals in the city.

During a focus group discussion with sex workers in the area of Katanga, one of the participants summed up the risks in the lives of migrant girls very poignantly: *“When people know that you are not from here, they consider you innocent and someone can take advantage of you during or outside of work. The times are better now as women’s rights are better respected than the times when we first came. Then men would try to rape us in groups. Even not knowing directions and the area properly can lead someone to be taken advantage of as they can tell us the wrong direction to trap us. We could easily become victims of many diseases. We can also fall trap in unplanned pregnancies. Overall, we enter a life that we didn’t expect. Not a bad life, but not a life as good as you had imagined.”*

## 6.6 Support and protection

Hayat, who we introduced in the beginning of this chapter, was raped by her uncle but did not dare to tell her aunt: *“I didn’t tell my aunt fearing that I would disrupt a marriage but also fearing that she wouldn’t believe me. (...) The fact that I kept quiet actually encouraged him to try and rape me again and again until I left. After seven months in that house, I told some girls that I met around the school what happened to me. They told me that it was OK for me to leave. They told me that I could stay with them and it seemed like a good alternative to me. I left the house without telling my aunt.” (...) “Those girls that I met were easy to talk to and easy to get along with. I had befriended them in such a short period of time. They looked like they lived a good life. They seemed happy. Their hairstyles were different every time I see them. They didn’t tell me immediately about the real type of job they were engaged in; they just said that they were waitresses. They told me that I could also get into the business of serving and that I wouldn’t have anyone telling me what to do. Slowly they told me the truth and that I can easily get into the business of sex work. I needed money to survive so I gave in.”*

Support systems for domestic workers and sex workers are very limited. Domestic workers often live isolated lives with the families of their employers. They have very little time to meet peers or people that can support them in case they face abuse and violence. Hayat met peers who convinced her to run away from her abusive uncle. As mentioned before, evening classes are an important way for girls working as domestics to meet peers. Whether they also use this opportunity to find support in case they need it is not known to us. The girls that we interviewed during the evening classes were a selected group of girls because their employers allowed them to go to school. There must be many domestic workers who are not allowed to go to school, and

who have therefore less chance of meeting peers or teachers with whom they can share their problems and ask for support.

There are a number of organizations that support domestic workers. One of the organizations is OPRIFS, the Organization for the Protection and Rehabilitation of Female Street Children. OPRIFS has a shelter in Addis Ababa where migrant girls who ran into problems with their employers can stay during the trial of their cases. Many of the girls faced exploitation, abuse and violence at the house of their employers and ran away.

Sex workers are socially more exposed than domestic workers; they meet many people during their work, not only clients but also people working in bars and hotels, other sex workers, people working for organizations, and people on the street. They obtain knowledge about other people's lives and develop their social skills. Elsa, who first lived with her aunt in Addis Ababa and ran away and became a sex worker, said: *"With regard to my social life, I have learned to communicate with other people and I have good relationships with them. My social life has improved. My awareness of many things has increased."* And she continued: *"Previously I was not good at approaching people. But now the work itself has changed me, it forces you to communicate with people, it makes you meet people and it makes you free. Before I used to get shy talking about sex, but now we talk openly about sex, condoms, and sexually transmitted diseases. I also teach others about those things."*

Sex workers also meet people that support them in case of problems. Helen told us that she fell ill during the first month working as a sex worker in a hotel. *"The owner of the bar took me to a hospital and I got treated there. The doctor said that I needed to take a good rest for about a month. The owner of the bar took me to his house and I stayed there. He has kids and took good care of me. He covered everything when I stayed with him."* Two years ago she had a child from a client and now has difficulties making ends meet. She wants to leave sex work and attended a hair dressing course but is not yet able to earn enough to leave sex work. An Ethiopian in the US is sending her money for her son. Tigist had very little income during the rainy season and borrowed money from an Ethiopian friend, who owns a *chat* house. She considers him like a brother and says that he helps her whenever she is in trouble. Sex workers may have boyfriends, yet very few of them mentioned them when we asked about their support networks. Boyfriends sometimes know about their work. Hayat told us: *"I have a boyfriend and we have been in a relationship for about six months now. I first had a customer relationship with him that developed now into a relationship. Although he is not happy with what I do for a living, he has accepted it at this point since he knows I do it to survive."* She also mentioned the support of clients: *"Although I have met people that have made me hate my work, there are others that tell me that these days will pass and that I need to be strong. Men like this keep me carrying on."*

Girls who do not have any relatives, because they are orphans or broke all contacts with their parents, depend on social networks of peers and clients. Yet, even girls whose parents are still alive receive little to no support from them. Domestic workers have little contact with their parents back home; they depend on their employers for phone calls home and for visits during the holidays or for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. Sex workers have much more freedom of movement but have limited contacts with their relatives and parents because they want to hide their work from them. Therefore support comes mainly from people within their own circle. They often have more friends, who are working in the same sector, with whom they share their problems and who support them in case they are in need of money, a meal or housing. Yet, competition and jealousy are common among sex workers. Tigist and Worku were living together for eight years and shared their earnings but their friendship collapsed suddenly because Tigist felt used by Worku.

As mentioned before there are a number of organizations in Addis Ababa which offer support to sex workers, such as NIKAT and Timret Le Hiwot. They provide information and advice, they offer peer education trainings, a drop-in center, trainings in alternative income generating skills such as hair dressing. These organizations are often important places in the lives of sex workers,

as they can meet peers and stay overnight in case they are temporarily homeless. Yet, although most sex workers know about the presence of these organizations only a limited number of them makes use of the services of the organizations.

Another important institution in the lives of migrant girls is the church. Although very few girls mentioned the church in interviews, in personal contacts we found out that religion plays an important role in their lives as it provides them with mental support. Domestic workers may go to church with their employers or on their own, when their employers allow them to leave the house. Sex workers go whenever they feel the need for support. Tigist said: *“I love going to church when I am depressed. I love praying to God to help me stop working this job. (...). Our society discriminates against us. People even say: “How can you go to church while you are doing this work” but God is good.”*



A church in Addis Ababa (photo: Marina de Regt)

## 7. Being an Adolescent Migrant Girl in the Middle East

### 7.1 Living and working conditions

The young women who had returned from the Middle East all said that they had worked as domestics. They had to clean, cook, take care of children, do the laundry and other household chores. One of them mentioned that she had to take care of camels. Almost all of them complained about a heavy workload, low salaries or not receiving their salaries, loneliness, not having enough to eat, and various forms of abuse including sexual abuse. In the past ten years a number of studies have been done about the living and working conditions of Ethiopian women in the Middle East (see for example Kebede 2001; De Regt 2010; Fernandez 2010; ILO 2011; Minaye 2012; Reda 2012; Jones et al 2014a). Our interviews confirmed many of the conclusions of these studies: Ethiopian women migrate in large numbers to the Middle East but are often badly prepared for the lives that are awaiting them and are disappointed by the fruits of their migration. The fact that they were under 18 years old when they migrated increased their vulnerability; they were often subjected to denigrating treatment while they were still minors. Their freedom of movement was highly controlled; they were often not allowed to leave the house of their employers, they could not enter certain parts of the house, they sometimes had no access to a mobile phone and were not allowed to meet other Ethiopians.

Meseret migrated to Beirut, where her sister lived, but in the two years of her employment she never saw her sister. *“They didn’t want me to contact any Ethiopian. They shouted at me for nothing and locked me in the house for two years. I only saw the city and the outside world after two years.”* When she wanted to contact her sister, she had to write her parents in Ethiopia, who would then inform her sister. Rosa is 23 years old and lived in Beirut and Dubai. She returned from Dubai because she had continuous quarrels with her female employer, who wanted her to have sex with her retarded son. *“Employers and their sons are very difficult, they always harassed me sexually. They would come to the kitchen and touch my body, and the madam even supported the harassment of her own son. In Dubai I could hardly sleep: the sons of the house would always come to my room. One of the sons had the key to my room and I would often find him in my bed room”.* So the mobility of domestic workers is not only restricted, they also have to accept that other people invade the limited space they have for themselves.

Most of the women had been live-in domestic workers, employed on a contract and living with the family of their employers. In the Middle East, the prevalent system of sponsorship known as the *kafala* system requires the residence of migrant workers (including migrant domestic workers) to be sponsored by a *kafil* (sponsor) who must be a citizen. The legal residence of a migrant worker is tied to the *kafil*, who is in most cases his or her employer (Fernandez and de Regt 2014, 9). In the literature on domestic workers in the Middle East a division is made between contract workers and runaways or freelancers. Contract workers are employed on a legal contract and therefore documented. Runaways and freelancers would have left their employers, and thus their sponsors, and be automatically undocumented. In reality, the boundaries between these two categories are very fluid. Contract workers can, for example, also be undocumented when their contracts have been organized through illegal agencies who have neglected to arrange their documents. Living independently from one’s employer automatically means that domestic workers lose their documented status.

### 7.2 Moving back and moving on

While the mobility of migrant domestic workers is severely restricted during the time of their employment, the interviews also show how mobile migrant domestic workers are; even women who had only been abroad for a few years had sometimes moved from one country to the other. Sara, for example, migrated to Saudi Arabia via a legal agent and worked six months in Mecca. She ran away and travelled to Riyadh where she worked for as a freelancer for six different



employers. She was undocumented and lived by herself. In November 2013 she was deported to Ethiopia. While Sara moved inside Saudi Arabia, other girls migrated from one country to the other. Hiwot first worked in Beirut, then in Kuwait and then in Beirut again. She decided to go to Kuwait because she had heard that the salary was higher there. She stayed only seven months because she fell ill, and returned to Ethiopia. When she had recovered she went back to Beirut and worked there for another three years. Bortukan is 28 years old and migrated when she was 17 years old. She worked in Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Dubai, Qatar and Bahrain. She said: *“Dubai was my first destination. I was cleaning 18 separate rooms, 6 bathrooms, I did the laundry and prepared food for the whole family. I was doing all these tasks alone. After finishing my contract they decided to send me back without any reason. When I was in Dubai airport I ran away to Abu Dhabi and I worked there with a runaway status for one year. The police caught and arrested me while I was working and they deported me to Ethiopia. After deportation my plan was to migrate again. I decided to migrate to Qatar. I paid 7000 Birr to a local broker. In Qatar the madam didn’t want me to keep my personal hygiene but I always kept myself clean. When I would clean myself the madam would get upset as she considered it the behavior of a prostitute. But the rest of the family was nice to me. The madam sent me back because she wanted me to be dirty.”* Back in Ethiopia Bortukan decided to migrate to Bahrain but she suffered from a lack of food and decided to return home again. After a while she migrated to Sharjah, but again got too little to eat and ran away to Abu Dhabi. In Abu Dhabi she was arrested because she was undocumented and returned home with the help of her brother.

The fact that women move from place to place, return home and sometimes migrate again shows their agency. Running away is one of the few possibilities to leave a situation of abuse and exploitation and can be considered an act of resistance. Employers do not only lose their domestic worker, but also the money they have paid to the employment agency. The sponsorship system is in place to tie migrants to their employers and prevent them from running away, yet the numerous stories of runaways show that the system is not effective. The fact that women who return home decide to migrate again points to the limited possibilities to build up their life in Ethiopia.

### 7.3 Deportation experiences

The stories of those who were deported from Saudi Arabia were shocking in particular; they went through violent arrests, imprisonment, sexual hara and rape, and cruel treatment while they were waiting to be deported. They said that their experiences at the time of their imprisonment were worse than anything else they had experienced in the Middle East. The cruelty of the Saudi authorities was beyond imagination, and some were clearly traumatized. Feven had run away from her employers and was arrested when she was out in the street: *“It was so bad, the police caught me when I went to a shop to buy oil. They put me in a car and took me to a prison. In the prison I saw many Ethiopians, some of them were dying. The Saudi police put drugs in our bread to make us sleep, because many people were having mental problems.”* Sara was arrested in her own house, and some of her friends were raped. She was imprisoned for a month and finally returned to Ethiopia. She is happy to be back home: *“I am in my country”* is her answer to the question how it is to be home. Mimi was living in a house with eight other Ethiopian girls when the Saudi police entered and arrested them. She was imprisoned for three weeks and told us in detail about her experiences. She hardly had clothes to wear, covered herself with a shawl, and had to sleep outside. The Saudi guards and policemen were sleeping next to them and the risk of being sexually abused was always there. She was continuously on the alert and scared every night. She considered herself very lucky because she was not sexually abused or physically harmed, and returned *“with her hands and her legs”*. But she is unhappy that she returned empty handed and has not been able to realize her ambitions. Her family, however, preferred to have her back in one piece and said that they were not interested in her money.

Yet, this was not always the case. Arsema’s family was not happy that she returned home. They had spent all the money she remitted and were in need of her income. The community also

looked down on her: *“The community treats me oddly. They don’t treat me like a person who returned willingly. Since we returned by force their reception was different, they have a bad image of deportation.”* Bortukan confirmed this view: *“Neighbours consider me a failure”*. She returned empty-handed, doesn’t have a job and depends on her family, while she had migrated to support them. *“Deportees are considered illegal and unsuccessful.”* All of the interviewed deportees were happy to be home but frustrated about the limited job opportunities in Ethiopia. There is little work available and the salaries are low. Most of them aspired to set up a small business such as a beauty salon or a small shop, but they lack the capital to do so. In addition, while they desire to get married and have children, they mentioned that the chances to find a suitable husband are limited. Men would only be interested in their money, or look down on them because they had worked in the Middle East. As a result, quite a number of young women intend to migrate again despite the hardship they went through.

#### **7.4 Risks, threats and set-backs**

Girls who decide to migrate to the Middle East take a huge risk and are confronted with many threats and set-backs. Prior to migrating they may borrow money to cover the costs of their migration, which may put them at risk of debt bondage, in particular when they have borrowed money from the agents who facilitated their migration and employment. They run the risk of being exploited and abused by these same agents, and cannot complain because they depend on them. In the countries of migration they run the risk of being exploited and abused by their employers, and often lead isolated lives and are deprived of proper food and a place to sleep. They often have a very heavy workload, and cannot complain about their working conditions because domestic labour is not covered by the labour law. They are restricted in their mobility and have little to no support network. Girls that do complain can be punished in different ways, and sometimes running away is the only solution. The sponsorship system binds migrants to their employers and girls that run away automatically lose their legal status. As undocumented migrants they run the risk of being arrested and deported, which affects their lives greatly. Upon return home their social status is often low because they are perceived to have been sexually active, voluntarily or against their will, which affects their marriage chances. In addition, their families may regard their return negatively because they are missing the remittances. Returned women also have difficulties finding jobs at home and as a result often decide to migrate again.

Any woman who migrates to the Middle East runs the above-mentioned risks but they are bigger for adolescent girls. They are more vulnerable for abuse and exploitation because of their age. In addition, their migration takes place at a phase in their lives in which other major transitions occur, and therefore the impact of migration can be much larger.

#### **7.5 Support and protection**

Migrant women and girls in the Middle East have very limited sources of support and protection. There are hardly any legal frameworks that protect their rights, and in case there are, girls do not know how to access them. Domestic labour is not protected by the labour law so migrant women cannot complain about their working conditions. In addition, the sponsorship system makes them completely dependent on their employers. Support can come from other women working for the same family, from women working for other families, and from friends and relatives. Yet, this is highly dependent on the possibilities they have to contact other people. Some migrant girls are lucky and have employers that support and protect them, or some members of the family they work for are supportive, but this is the case for a minority of the girls. There are very few NGOs protecting the rights of migrant women in the Middle East. Women that run into problems sometimes contact the Ethiopian embassy but only those with a legal status are being assisted. Undocumented migrants were only assisted during the large-scale deportation campaign in 2013-2014. Upon return home migrant girls depend on support and protection of their relatives and friends. The Ethiopian government assisted the deportees in 2013-2014 but many

migrants were still disappointed by the help they received and felt left to themselves. Also in this case, the lack of support mechanisms is particularly negative for young and adolescent girls.

## 8. Transitions and Transformations

### 8.1 Internal migrant girls' evaluation of migration

In the survey, we asked the girls whether they thought that their migration had led to an improvement in their lives. Two third of the girls (21 out of 30) thought that their situation had improved after migration. Most referred to their economic status (14) and some to their schooling (12); those that mentioned schooling were in almost all cases domestic workers following evening classes. Freedom of mobility and the possibility of choice were also mentioned often and nine girls mentioned that their situation had improved with regard to their health.

Domestic workers were in general more positive about their migration than sex workers. They were often younger and still hopeful that they would be able to change their own lives and those of their families. Sex workers were in many cases disappointed and regretted their migration, and especially the fact that they had not been able to continue their education. Yet, they also saw the advantages of their migrant lives. They referred in particular to their economic independence, their social network, increased mobility and the increased awareness about a wide range of issues.

Sex workers were very positive about the fact that their mobility was not restricted; they were free to move around in Addis. Hewan, who came to Addis because her parents were afraid that she would be abducted, said: *"I feel free here. In the village there is abduction and families also worry when you go out from the house. Here there is law. In the rural area even though you are abducted there is no government law to protect you."* During a focus group discussion in Katanga the importance of freedom was also emphasized. *"Here there is no one to tell us what to do. We chew chat if we want to, which we weren't allowed to do back home."* Yet, other girls mentioned that freedom is relative. Hayat evaluated the freedom in Addis differently: *"I don't think my life is freer here than back home. I sell my body to make an income. I have the same routine life which involves working at night, coming home in the morning, sleeping all day, waking up at a certain hour to eat followed with multiple drugs to stay up all night. It is a vicious circle and cannot be compared with the freedom and real fun that I had with my friends and family back home. I just wished I could continue school, but I think it is too late now and will probably not happen."*

Sex workers focus on their own future, and often aspire to leave sex work and take up another job. Most of them would like to continue their education but their lifestyle prevents them from doing so. They therefore hope to earn enough money to open their own business (a small shop, a hairdressing salon or a beauty salon) or make use of the skills they acquired via vocational training courses organized by the various organizations supporting sex workers.

Yet, even though two third of the interviewed migrant girls in Addis Ababa said that their lives had improved after migration, 20 out of 30 girls also said that they had not achieved what they had hoped for. The large majority (23) wanted to have another job or a better salary, some wanted to continue their education (8) and others desired better accommodation (7). Most of them wanted to stay in Addis Ababa (24), five intended to return home, and nine aspired to migrate abroad. This last figure is very interesting as it underlines the idea that quite some girls are disappointed with their lives in Addis Ababa and hope to be able to earn more abroad. In the following section we zoom in on migrant girls' views about marriage and economic independence.

### 8.2 Views on marriage and economic independence

Most of the interviewed girls valued economic independence greatly, and even found it more important than getting married, at least at this moment in their life. Until recently marriage was the most important way to become independent and make a successful transition to adulthood,

but nowadays having one's own income seems to be important as well. In the past young men were only able to marry when they had a job and could provide for their wives-to-be, and women only wanted to marry men who could provide for them. Nowadays many young Ethiopian women do not want to be dependent on men anymore, at least not completely. Both domestic workers and sex workers expressed the need to be economic independent before getting married. Economic independence is important in case the marriage does not work out. Elsa said: *"Even though some clients ask me for marriage, I am not happy. I don't trust them; they may take me out from their house sometime because they found me working as a sex worker. So I don't want to get married until I am self-reliant."* The emphasis on economic independence may be related to the economic situation in the country and the pressure on families. The fact that some of the girls were coming from broken families may also affect their perspectives on their own future with regard to getting married and establishing a family. In contemporary Ethiopia it seems of utmost importance to be able to support oneself and not to rely on others, and in particular on future husbands.

Hayat based her opinion about marriage and having children on her own experiences as a child: *"My opinion about marriage is dependent on my ability to take care of children. Having seen what my family went through, I don't want to start a marriage and bring children to this world if I can't provide a better life for them. I have a boyfriend and we've been in a relationship for around six months now. I first had a customer relationship with him which developed into a relationship. Although he is not happy with what I do for a living, he has accepted it at this point since he knows that I do it to survive. Unless I change my work or he makes more money, I don't plan to marry him. But I have thought about it"*. The fact that Hayat says that she has no plans to marry her boyfriend is very interesting; she is not waiting to be asked to for marriage but takes her own decision whether she wants to marry or not.

Yet, this does not mean that migrant girls do not want to get married at all. Getting married and having children is still very important for the social status of women (and men) but the average age of marriage is being delayed. Domestic workers were explicit in their wish to marry in the future and have children, but they did not have an idea with whom they would marry and what their marriage lives would look like. Sex workers doubted that they would be able to marry, at least in the coming years. They had lost trust in men (also because of their experiences with men during their work, which gave them the idea that many men are unfaithful to their wives) and thought that they would not be able to find a man who would accept them as they are, with their history of having been engaged in sex work.

Mimi, a sex worker, said: *"I take marriage as a means to escape this life; I want to get rid of this business through marriage. I believe and want to get married. Marriage is a good thing and I want to get married and if I find a good and considerate man I may even get married now. I guess I haven't been lucky so far because I haven't met the right guy from work or somewhere else for that matter. I don't want to be engaged in a committed relationship while doing this job but I will settle after I begin doing another job like waitressing in cafe etc. If I met a good and caring man, I will marry soon. So far, no one asked me for marriage and neither had I wished a customer for marriage. Being in this life I will not accept any invitation for marriage. It is difficult to get married with a person (once a customer) who knew my life, anyways I will never try it being a sex worker."* And Emebet said: *"I hate the concept and thought of marriage. It is such a constricting feeling. Although my relationship with my first boyfriend was close to a marriage, we didn't get married. I see marriage as two people forced to get along and living under one roof. At the time I did wish he could marry me and us having children. I used to dream about it and hoped it would become a reality one day but my life is drastically different now. I face a different reality, a reality that I have accepted."*

### **8.3 Aspirations to migrate to the Middle East**

Among the interviewed girls in Addis Ababa there were a few who were interested in migrating abroad, in particular to the Middle East. Tsion said: *"I dreamt of going to the Middle East before coming here. I heard that it was a great place and you can get money over there but after coming here I changed my mind and wanted to continue my education with support of my aunt. My aunt also supported my decision. When I first*

*set foot in Addis Ababa I was happy and I was glad that I came here. Everything looked different but exciting.”* Most of them hoped to improve their lives in Addis Ababa. The stories they had heard about the experiences of migrant women in the Middle East made them reluctant to migrate abroad. Elsbietta, who ran away because she wanted to become a professional runner, worked for a while in Beirut: *“Life wasn’t great back there. It was an elderly woman that hired me. It was stressful because I wasn’t able to sleep day and night taking care of her. She just would not let me sleep. I stayed for one year and seven months in the same house. I was also deprived of food and so at the end asked the daughter of the elderly lady to send me back to my country.”* Her parents think that she is doing well. *“They don’t know that I’m a sex worker. I told them I own a shop.”* Selam, who ran away because her parents were restrictive, wants to migrate to the Middle East: *“I want to stop this work. I want to borrow money and go to one of the Arab countries. Whatever abuse I have there I want to go and work there in order to change my life. If I stay in Addis I will not change my life. Life is very expensive here. I can’t afford to pay 2000 Birr for rent.”*

The fact that we carried out the fieldwork just after the deportation of 160,000 migrants from Saudi Arabia, and at the time that the Ethiopian government had installed a ban on migration of women to the Middle East, may have affected the answers of the girls. The dominant view on women’s migration to the Middle East is very negative in Ethiopia; almost everyone knows about the large scale violations of human rights, such as abuse and exploitation. Yet, there are still many girls and women who see migration to the Middle East as the only way to improve their lives. During a focus group discussion with eight adolescent girls in a slum area of Shashemene seven out of eight intended to migrate to the Middle East despite the negative stories. They were convinced that migration to Addis Ababa would not help them to improve their lives as the available jobs are limited to domestic work and sex work and the salaries are too low to change one’s life. *“Parents are grateful to those who are living in Arab countries because they send them money. But those who are going to Addis Ababa, they may disappear and they may not be able to change themselves and their families.”* The girls referred to the fact that many people think that girls who migrated to Addis Ababa have become sex workers and that they therefore lack respect. *“When she comes from an Arab country they respect her and when she passes by greet her, but if she comes from any place in Ethiopia, they don’t respect her and they disgrace her because they don’t think she worked hard to earn money. They think she was a sex worker.”* Migration abroad was seen as the only way to improve one’s living conditions. There is a strong idea that one’s experiences in the Middle East depend on “luck” (*adl*), and seven from the eight girls was willing to try out her luck. *“It’s about chance, some of them will encounter bad things and some do not, so we say: “let’s try our chance and go”.*

#### **8.4 Supporting those left behind**

In the survey, a little less than half of the interviewed migrant girls in Addis Ababa said that they sent money home (13 out of 30). Those that were remitting money were sending it to their parents, and some to their siblings. Remittances were used for a variety of things, such as daily expenses, health care, education of siblings and the like. Six girls said that they did not know where the money was spent on. Seven girls said that the condition of their family back home had improved economically. Most said that there was no real improvement in their family’s living condition (20 out of 30). This shows that migration has mainly affected the lives of the girls themselves and not so much the lives of their parents and other relatives in the place of origin.

As mentioned earlier, many of the interviewed girls said that they migrated to help their families. Yet, the impact of migration on the families back home seems to be limited. The salaries of domestic workers are often too low to make a significant change in the living conditions of their families. Sex workers who are still in touch with their family are sometimes able to send money home. In the survey a little less than half of the interviewed girls said that they sent money home (13 out of 30). Those that sent money send it to their parents, and some to their siblings. Remittances were used for a variety of things, such as daily expenses, health care, education of siblings and the like. Gelila is 14 years old and works as a domestic. She migrated because her

parents were very poor and could not provide for her. She is now sending them money, which they mainly spend on food. Her parents are very happy with her support.

Gelila's story is quite positive, but there are also parents who have lost contact altogether with their migrated daughters. Some girls do not stay in touch for the reason of being ashamed and unable to support their parents or siblings. Others send money to their parents occasionally but not sufficient to make a substantial change to their parents' lives. The money is used for daily expenses, while they had hoped that they would be able to change the living conditions of their parents in a more structural way. Haimanot is a domestic worker, and said: *"They (people in the village, MdR) told me that I would change my life once I get here. But nothing changed except helping my mother with the money that I make. (...) They think that I am lucky because Addis Ababa is a very good place to live. But I keep quiet because I didn't find anything. They think that I have changed and have good things. But as for me, I haven't seen any change yet."*

Hirut (domestic worker): *"I don't send that much money unless my mother is sick. They live by themselves. They have not changed because I am living in Addis". (...) The community gives a special place for someone who lives in Addis. They think you have money. My grandmother expected clothes from me whenever I go to visit them. They respect someone who lives in Addis."* Mekdes has a different opinion; she thinks that women who have migrated to the Middle East have a special place in the home communities because of the stories about abuse. But they are not worried about women who work in Addis Ababa because they are closer by. The general view is that migration to the Middle East is financially more beneficial than migration to Addis Ababa, but the treatment of women and girls in Arab countries is considered worse.

The impact of migration to the Middle East on the families left behind was bigger than of internal migration. Most of the women had remitted the money that they earned to their parents and sometimes to siblings or others. The remittances were used mainly for daily expenses but also for other things such as health care. Half of the interviewees considered their life better than before migration, while eight said that it was worse than before. The last group referred in particular to stress and a lack of self-esteem, while four said that it was economically more difficult. Most, however, said that it had not worsened, but improved in economic terms. It is interesting that seven women said that their self-esteem had improved because of their migration. Those with bad experiences may have less self-esteem and those with good experiences more (although overcoming bad experiences may also be empowering). None of the women said that the condition of the family had worsened after their migration. In half of the cases it had improved economically, and in 12 cases with regard to education.

### **8.5 Future aspirations of returned migrants**

In contrast with the migrant girls in Addis, most returnees were disappointed by what they had achieved through their migration. Seventeen said that their plans had not been achieved, and seven said that some plans had been achieved. Their main plans were often to change the lives of their family structurally but their remittances had not been able to make such a change, as becomes also clear from the fact that they were mainly used for daily expenses and for health issues. Building a house, buying land, setting up a business and the like had not been possible.

Half of the women were currently working (15), six had worked upon return from the ME but were now without a job, and nine had never worked. Those who had a job found it in different ways; there was no clear trend in their answers. They were doing different types of jobs as well, ranging from domestic work to factory work, small trading, sex work, and waitressing. Those that were not working survived with the help of their family, some had savings and two had husbands. One girl received help from a private organization.

With regard to the future, 13 women wanted to remain in Ethiopia and 13 intended to migrate again. Three women were not sure whether they wanted to migrate again. The majority wanted to have a job or a better salary (23) and some wanted to buy a piece of land or build a house. Half of the women wanted to get support with a professional training or education so that they could develop themselves. During the interviews we heard many stories about shattered dreams and hopes and the obstacles to develop themselves in Ethiopia. Marriage and having children was not a priority, most women first wanted to have jobs and earn money. Maybe this was also influenced by the fact that their marriage chances are quite limited. As female returnees from the Middle East their social status is not very high, and men do not want to marry them because they are afraid that they have been sexually assaulted or had sexual relationships. This is, however, not something that came up in the interviews but we heard about it via informal conversations with others.

Mekdes said: *“I don’t have a boyfriend at the moment but I want to get married. Migration has affected my marriage prospects, it consumed my age. Girls of my age should get married but I am not. On the other hand, migration helped me to fulfill my needs. Due to migration my life changed economically, and I got freedom and education.”* Selam, who was deported, also thinks that migration has affected her marriage prospects: *“The main change after my return is that I started a relationship and have a job. I became more confident and have a salary. Thanks to the migration, I have changed economically, and got more self-esteem.”* Economic independence is valued highly but marriage is also important for women’s social status in Ethiopian society. Migration affects women’s life course. Returned women are having difficulties to get married. The emphasis women put on economic independence could mean that social mobility is increasingly being defined in terms of economic achievements and less in terms of marital status. Yet it could also signify that migrant women have fewer possibilities to achieve full adulthood through marriage and child-bearing and therefore focus on their own economic independence.

## **8.6 Transitions and intersections**

Migration, whether to Addis Ababa or to the Middle East, has had major implications for the life course of adolescent girls. As mentioned in the introduction, adolescence is a period when important transitions are taking place with regard to education, sexual relations and reproduction and marriage. The spatial transition of migration and their experiences at destination intersected with their personal and social process of transition to adulthood. Girls’ self-perception and the perception of the space they occupy in their social and familial networks have changed. They have moved away from their parents and siblings and this has sometimes affected their self-perception positively. In particular girls from rural areas discovered a world beyond the restrictive environment in which they were brought up. Yet, for others migration to the city meant a more restricted life, in particular for domestic workers who often lead isolated lives and are confronted with a heavy workload and abuse and exploitation. They were sometimes nostalgic about their lives at home. Many migrant girls were of the opinion that their peers in the villages were better off because they had been able to continue their schooling. As mentioned earlier, many girls migrated because they aspired to continue their education. Yet, their migration often affected their education negatively; instead of continuing their schooling they were forced to do household chores in the houses of relatives or started working as sex workers. In contrast with their peers in the countryside they dropped out of school. This had a negative impact on their self-perception. While education was their aspiration, it has become a frustration.

Migration intersects with marriage and marriage choices in different ways. The age of marriage has increased in Ethiopia and a smaller number of adolescent girls marry under the age of 18. The national campaign against early marriages has been successful and many people in rural areas are now aware of the disadvantages of early marriage. Girls themselves are often well informed and even protest against being married off at an early age. Migration is sometimes inspired by a fear to be married or abducted. The data collected for this research shows that the age of



marriage of migrant girls is being delayed; most of the interviewed girls were not yet married. For many girls this also impacted upon their achievement of full adulthood; marriage and having children in Ethiopia is considered one of the main ways to become an adult. While migrant girls who were a bit older consider themselves adults, society does not value them highly because they are not married. Some of the sex workers had boyfriends but premarital relations are valued negatively in Ethiopia unless they lead to marriage. The fact that girls have boyfriends therefore affects their social status. Some of the sex workers had children out of wedlock, which was also negative for their social status and impacting on their marriage chances. The marginalization and stigmatization of migrant girls, and in particular of sex workers, affects their self-perception in a negative way. While they may have increased their social capital, improved their social skills, and extended their knowledge about various aspects of life, society looks down on them. This has a major influence on their self-esteem. The fact that many of them have limited contacts with their family, and live without the protection of their relatives, makes them particularly vulnerable. The next chapter focuses on vulnerability and protection.

## 9. Vulnerability and Protection

### 9.1 Sources of vulnerability

*“Life in Addis is challenging. You can only cope with the city if you are a fast learner or if you have a good family who gives you directions. But I didn’t have anyone to give me advice and I did things as they came. This led me in the wrong direction.”* (Tsed, 24 years old).

Migrant girls in Addis Ababa are more vulnerable than their local peers, who grew up in the city. One of the main sources of vulnerability is the absence of their parents, or other close relatives, who can provide for them and support them. Family relations are of utmost importance in Ethiopian society and form the main source of support, both mentally and financially. Girls who have left or lost their parents in their places of origin are therefore extremely vulnerable for abuse and exploitation. In addition, the absence of male relatives is a source of vulnerability. Girls who do not have a father or brothers are more vulnerable than girls who have male relatives in the places of origin. Ethiopia is a patriarchal society where the status and living conditions of women and girls largely depends on the presence of men. Women and girls without male protection are faced with numerous challenges, and those who have migrated to the city are even more vulnerable. Migrant girls depend on alternative support networks but these are very fragile. Yet, families themselves can also be sources of vulnerability; many girls experienced abuse at home and migration was an escape.

Another source of vulnerability is that adolescent migrant girls have not been able to finish their schooling and therefore have too little educational qualifications to take up a job that may help them improve their lives. As domestic workers and sex workers they have little to no chance to continue their education and are consequently stuck in paid work that will not help them further. The lack of alternative jobs for girls with limited educational qualifications makes them very vulnerable. Migrant girls have often no other choice than to work as domestics or sex workers. People under 18 years old need a legal guardian to be able to take up a formal job. Illegal brokers are willing to function as legal guardians but often lure girls into domestic work or sex work. Both types of work are highly vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation. With a limited support network and no supportive family around, migrant girls are prone to be misled, abused and exploited.

Discrimination and stigmatization of migrant girls is another source of vulnerability. The fact that migrant girls are doing low status jobs and are living without the protection of their family affects their social status negatively. They are not supported by neighbours or other local people in case of problems. According to the interviewed girls people turn their heads away and do not want to involve themselves when there are conflicts. More importantly, law enforcing bodies such as the police do not support migrant girls in case they encounter problems. Sex workers in particular complained about the lack of respect for them and the various ways in which they are discriminated and stigmatized. When they are confronted with violent clients, the police often turn a blind eye.

The vulnerability of adolescent girls who migrate to the Middle East is mainly related to their living and working conditions in the private sphere of the house of their employers, and the fact that they are abroad. They live isolated lives and often experience different forms of abuse and exploitation. They are very vulnerable because they have limited freedom of mobility and few contacts with peers and fellow Ethiopians. This is comparable to domestic workers in Ethiopia, yet the fact that they are in a foreign country and are legally tied to their employers increases their vulnerability.

## 9.2 Sources of support and protection

Ethiopia's constitution guarantees free movement of people locally and internationally as is stated in Article 32 (1) of the constitution. Children under 18 years old are not allowed to migrate independently across the national borders, but internal migration of minors is not forbidden. The Ethiopian Government is a signatory of the Conventions of the Rights of the Child and the African Charter and a number of other international declarations, which include clauses referring to the rights of children and the rights of migrants. The lack of implementation of policies to protect children and migrants is the main problem.

The large numbers of migrating children has inspired local and international organizations develop interventions in the field of migration. We interviewed representatives of the following organizations about migration issues and adolescent girls' migration in particular:

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- Bureaus of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children (in Estie and Shashamene)
- The International Organization of Migration (IOM)
- The OAK Foundation
- The Population Council
- Save the Children
- CHADET (in Addis Ababa and in Estie)
- ANNPCAN Ethiopia
- Forum for Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE)
- AGAR Ethiopia
- The Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration for Female Street Children (OPRIFS) (in Addis Ababa and in Shashamene)
- The police (in Estie and Shashamene)

The most important activities of these organizations focus on:

- Awareness-raising in the places of origin about the risks of migration, and in particular illegal migration and trafficking
- Provision of shelters and safe homes for children on the move
- Rehabilitation of migrants, including children
- Provision of legal support for exploited and abused migrants, including children
- Provision of health services, including protection and treatment of HIV/AIDS and psychological help
- Provision of economic support, including vocational training and income generating activities.

Most of the interviewed representatives emphasized the negative consequences of child migration for the social and economic development of the country. The dominant view is that children should have the chance to get educated in order to make a valuable contribution to society. Child labour and child migration are discouraged and seen as bad characteristics of present-day Ethiopia. Preventing child migration and rehabilitating children with their families are therefore the main activities of the above-mentioned organizations.

Most of the activities are directed at migrant children outside of Addis Ababa, and migrant girls in Addis Ababa do not benefit from them. In Addis Ababa the most important sources of protection for migrant girls are organizations that support sex workers such as NIKAT Charitable Society and Timret Le Hiwot, and organizations such as OPRIFS which supports girls that live on the streets, often after having run away from an abusive employment situation. In addition, migrant girls may benefit from their own support networks, but as mentioned earlier, these networks are often limited and fragile.

Although there are numerous organizations that support women, youth and children in Ethiopia few of them focus in particular on adolescent migrant girls. The large number of migrant girls in the city makes it also difficult to reach out to them. In addition, migrant girls, and domestic workers in particular, are often not aware of the available services and support mechanisms in the city. Sex workers are more knowledgeable about the available services and have stronger support networks than domestic workers. Yet, they remain very vulnerable for abuse, violence and exploitation. In the following chapter we present a number of recommendations that could help improve the lives of migrant girls.

## 10. Key Implications for Policy and Interventions

This research project contributes to a gendered analysis of migration, and in particular the drivers of migration, the decision-making processes, and the intersection of decisions around education, marriage and reproduction at this particular stage in the lives of young women. The aim of the research was, among other things, to fill knowledge gaps about adolescent girls' migration and to come up with recommendations. In this chapter we present some key implication for policy and interventions.

As the research findings show, adolescent girls' migration is not just the result of structural factors but inspired by complex choices and desires. In addition, migration has positive and negative effects, both for the migrant girls and for their families. The most important issue is to ensure both safer and more positive migratory experiences for adolescent girls and young women, instead of trying to prevent or restrict migration.

### 1. Tackling the drivers of girls' migration

Poverty, and in particular rural poverty, is often mentioned as the main cause of migration. As the findings of this research show, poverty is one out of many reasons why girls migrate. In addition, not all migrant girls come from rural areas. There are also many girls that migrate from other cities and towns to Addis Ababa. Although improving the economic situation in the countryside might encourage more girls to remain in their home communities, it is important to look beyond the idea that poverty is the main reason for migration. There is a myriad of other factors that inspire girls to migrate. Organizations that aim to tackle the drivers of migration have to take these different reasons into account, and recognize and understand the ways in which they intersect.

The gender order, as described in chapter 5, affects the lives of Ethiopian girls to a large extent. Changing the ways in which girls are brought up and socialized into gendered social relations is not easy and can only be achieved through education and awareness raising programmes. Girls are escaping oppressive gender regimes at home, such as early marriages, abduction, mental and physical abuse, and (sexual) violence. The Ethiopian government, in cooperation with national and international organizations, is actively involved in awareness raising campaigns to improve the situation of girls and women. The national campaign against early marriage is a good example and has clearly been successful, as the findings of this research also show. Yet, the extent in which girls suffer from the gender order, and in particular from gender violence, calls for much more intervention. **Awareness raising programmes about gender, sexuality, violence and abuse** need to pay particular attention to the situation of all girls, and especially of orphaned girls, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Programmes specifically designed to improve the situation of adolescent and young women should be directed at girls and boys, women and men, children and parents. Only then structural changes in the gender order can be achieved. In addition, community leaders, religious leaders, representatives of legal bodies and service providers have to be involved in awareness raising programmes.

**Improving girls' access to schooling** is a government priority. In the past few years girls' school enrolment has improved considerably but there are still regions lagging behind. In addition, girls' secondary school enrolment is much lower than primary school enrolment. In some cases this is because secondary schools are more often further away from home. Expanding the number of schools and removing obstacles for girls to attend school are well-known priorities of the government. Yet, it is also important to address the quality of teaching to make sure that children learn useful skills at school with which they can find jobs afterwards, and to expand these job opportunities. The current schooling system is mainly focused on access to higher education while vocational training is equally important. Because there are so little employment

opportunities in rural areas, parents are inclined to marry their daughters off at a young age. Vocational training centers should have special programmes for adolescent girls who dropped out of school.

Yet, education is not useful when there are no jobs available. Whereas boys may take up their parents' agricultural work, there are limited opportunities in non-agricultural employment in the countryside for girls. This is an important reason why girls more often opt for migration instead of finishing their education. **Improving job opportunities for girls and young women** is therefore of utmost importance. This does not only apply to rural areas, but also to rural towns and cities. Employment options for girls are very limited and salaries are very low, even for girls who have finished grade 10. The government should make the creation of youth employment one of its priorities, and pay particular attention to girls and young women as they are the biggest group of international migrants (at least to the Middle East).

Many girls mention poverty and education as the main reasons for their migration, yet girls are also attracted to urban lifestyles. Through migration they hope to change their own lives and the lives of their parents economically, but they also want to live more modern lives, have access to consumer goods and benefit from the positive sides of life in the city. The attraction of an urban lifestyle is difficult to change but improving life in the places of origin may have some effect. In addition to infrastructural developments and the expansion of schools and universities, which is often equated with development, girls should be able to realize their aspirations to have different lifestyles than their parents. One way is **to establish centers where adolescent girls can get together to spend their leisure time**. They could receive skills training, support each other with the choices they have to make about education and employment, and receive information and training about a variety of issues such as their legal rights, gender and sexuality and the challenges and opportunities of migration.

## 2. Promoting safer migration of girls

Migration of children, and in particular of girls, is considered a negative phenomenon in Ethiopia. Most organizations active in the field of children's migration are trying to prevent migration of minors. Yet, when there are no structural improvements in the living conditions of people in the places of origin migration cannot be prevented, including that of minors. Recognising this there is an urgent need to organize migration in a safer way, protecting the rights of children and ensuring their safety.

There is very little to no reliable data available about the number of adolescent girl migrants, in the places of origin, in the cities and those that migrate abroad. **Data collection, reporting and tracking of migrant girls** is important in order to be able to ensure safe migration practices. Schools and community organizations can play a role in tracking the migration of adolescent girls.

**Girls who intend to migrate should be well prepared** so that they can manage the risks and take advantage of the opportunities during the journey. Awareness raising programmes should, however, not only focus on the risks of migration but also include training on the legal rights of children and girls in particular, the jobs available in the cities and abroad, financial management, the importance of social networks and of social skills. These awareness raising programmes should **make use of migrant girls living in cities as peer educators, informing girls who intend to migrate about their lives in the city. Returnees from the Middle East could talk about their experiences and inform about the ways in which risks can be minimized**. The pre-departure trainings that are organized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs are too short and do not prepare girls for the realities that they are going to face in the countries of migration. Negotiation skills and self-defense skills should become part of the training.

**Awareness raising activities could be organized in cooperation with schools, churches, community organizations, and via radio and television stations.** These programmes should not only be directed at girls but also inform parents about the risks and opportunities of migration so that they can make a balanced decision in cooperation with their daughters. **Programmes should also target the police and law enforcing bodies.** Instead of criminalizing girls' migration the authorities should be involved in ensuring safe migration practices for girls (and boys). The provision of personal documentation such as birth registration and identification cards are important for girls as they can facilitate access to health and education services in the city. Illegal brokerage should be punished, but not every person who helps a girl to migrate is a broker. Legal migration processes should be improved so that the need to make use of illegal brokers (in the case of international migration) decreases. The current ban on migration to the Middle East has only led to an increase of illegal migration, and has increased the risks of abuse and exploitation.

In addition to a shift from prevention to protection, there should be **more coordination between the various interventions that are already being implemented by local and international organizations in Ethiopia.** Organizations such as the Population Council, the OAK Foundation, and Save the Children already work closely together and with local partners in programmes to ensure safer migration of children. These programmes often do not always have a specific gender focus. It is important to pay attention to the particular situation of adolescent girls.

### **3. Improving the living and working conditions of migrant girls**

Migrant girls are a marginalized part of society and in need of support. They are more vulnerable than their non-migrant peers because they often have no family network that supports them, they have not finished their education and are forced to do low status work. They are relatively invisible in the city and have a low social status. There are a number of organizations assisting migrant girls, for example by offering shelters for adolescent domestic workers who have been abused by their employers. They receive legal assistance and are rehabilitated with their families after the court case has ended. In view of the low social status of migrant girls in their home communities, in particular in case of sexual abuse, some girls prefer to stay in the city.

Notwithstanding the importance of these interventions, **more activities should be developed for migrant girls that are not victims of abuse and exploitation but who want to live and work in Addis Ababa in better circumstances.** One of the most important goals of such interventions should be to increase the agency of migrant girls so that they increase their decision making skills and will be able to take their lives into their own hands. This could be done by developing projects together with migrant girls, which are based on their own interpretation of their needs are necessary. So instead of victimizing them, and have adults decide what is beneficial for them, **the voices and aspirations of migrant girls should be taken seriously when formulating projects.**

These **interventions could be organized in cooperation with community organizations or women's groups and associations for the urban poor.** Adolescent migrant girls are not identified as a separate target group by organizations working in Addis Ababa. The interventions could start with **workshops** in which migrant girls discuss with each other how their lives can be improved and how their aspirations can be realized. These discussions should go further than stressing the importance of education and the need for alternative jobs, but also include how to improve their social status, make them aware of their rights and increase their access to various types of resources, such as affordable accommodation and access to health care.

One of the interventions could, for example, be a **peer education system** in which migrant girls support each other, and in particular those who have been longer in the city advise those who

have arrived recently. This would tie in with the wish of some interviewed migrant girls to be in touch with each other. Bringing girls together and having them exchange experiences is a way to increase agency, and facilitating a support system among each other is another way. Girls should be taught how to protect themselves. In addition, this will increase the social capital of girls, which is important because they often lack the support of their family.

Another intervention could focus on **skills training, in which they not only gain skills to obtain other types of work but also learn life skills and personal financial management.** This type of training could also include training on their legal rights and how to access legal assistance, and ways of self-defence, in particular in the case of (sexual) violence.

Migrant girls are in need of **safe spaces** where they can meet peers and female mentors who can provide them with the necessary information and training to make their migration successful. These safe spaces should not only be for those who have run into problems but also for others. The fact that many domestic workers attend evening classes because they meet their peers shows the importance of such spaces.

Girls who return from the Middle East should be able to meet others who have gone through similar experiences. It is important to develop **support systems for migrants who return with mental or physical health problems, but girls and young women who were not abused should also have the opportunity to meet others.** Similar to migrant girls in Addis Ababa, they are in need of social capital and support networks. In addition, returnees need support to find employment and attend vocational training. The lack of job opportunities is one of the main reasons young women decide to migrate again.

Another intervention could focus on **improving the social status of migrant girls.** This requires raising public awareness about the factors that have inspired girls to migrate and the diversity of their experiences. The dominant discourse in Ethiopia about girls' migration is very negative. While the large majority of the population considers migration, in particular international migration, as one of the main ways to improve one's livelihood, the migration of girls and young women is viewed differently. They are routinely considered to be victims of (sexual) abuse and exploitation. The stigmatization of migrant girls and returned women should be tackled with awareness raising campaigns that focus on the diversity of their experiences. **Migrant girls and women could be invited to tell their stories publicly, in a wide range of settings (such as community centers, churches and schools),** but also their parents, husbands, siblings and children should share their stories. Migration is affecting each family in Ethiopia and sharing experiences could be a way to work against stigmatization of migrant girls and women.

One of the findings of this research is that there are no specific policies directed towards adolescent girl migrants. The existing policies focus on international migration; internal migration is not regulated with the exception that people under 18 years of age are not allowed to travel unaccompanied. They are also not allowed to migrate cross borders with the result that they make use of illegal brokers or change their birth certificates. Forbidding the migration of minors has thus negative effects and does not lead to less migration of children and young people, but instead to migration under unsafe conditions. In August 2015 Proclamation No. 909/2015 has been accepted, which aims to prevent and suppress human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. It includes a special provision for children. Yet, the government's focus on the regulation of international migration and the control of private employment agencies is not always in the interest of the migrants. **Migrants need support of their embassies in the countries of migration, also in case they have migrated via irregular channels.**

Girls that migrate internally are confronted with laws that hamper their migration process. The need to have a legal guardian in the city in order to be able to take up formal employment affects



girls' job opportunities and makes them vulnerable for brokers willing to serve as their legal guardians. These brokers sometimes lure them into sex work. In addition, girls under 18 years of age are not able to open bank accounts and have access to loans. This affects their economic independence. **Representatives of legal bodies and service providers, such as health care providers, should be made aware of the particular needs and circumstances of adolescent migrant girls so that they can facilitate and help them.** Reproductive and sexual health should receive special attention. Domestic workers would benefit from the implementation of ILO's Convention of Domestic Work 2011, and sex workers from the legalization of their work. Both groups are in need of protection as they are vulnerable for abuse and exploitation but service providers such as the police, lawyers and judges do not take their complaints seriously. Raising awareness about their need for support and protection is necessary.

The issues that concern migrant girls are the responsibility of different ministries, such as the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. None of these ministries has particular programmes for migrant girls, yet the local offices deal on a daily basis with issues around girls' migration such as social protection and welfare. **In view of the scale of girls' migration in Ethiopia it is of utmost importance that programmes and policies will be developed.** As well as ensuring their social protection and welfare these should tackle the drivers of girls' migration, ensure safer migration of girls and improve the living and working conditions of migrant girls.

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## **Annex: Three Life Stories**

### **Tsion: A poor mother, a nice aunt and broken dreams**

When my dad died, I came to Addis Ababa and started working as a housemaid to support my ailing mother. Now I am 17 years old so I can't really say that I have enjoyed my childhood like a normal child. It was cut short by the death of my father. When I was ten years old I was hired as a nanny in a household. The time before my dad died was a great time for me and I was happy because I spent my time with my family. I had friends and we used to play like normal kids even if it didn't last long and we used to talk about our dreams and aspirations for the future. For example, I wanted to be a doctor and my friends wanted to finish school and lead a comfortable life. But my dream was cut short by the death of my father and I was not able to continue my education from grade 3 onwards. Even though we didn't pay a school fee there are other related costs like uniforms, text books etc. So my mom was not able to fulfil all these requirements. I agreed with her decision and stopped going to school. I always felt like I lagged behind because I am not educated and I always say "what if I was educated." I think my stories would be different if I continued my education.

After the death of my father I lived with my mother and brother. I don't remember the day he passed away. My brother still lives there and he is a paid labourer for another farmer. When I was working as a nanny, I used to wake up early in the morning and fetch water from the nearby river and then come home and finish up remaining household chores. I had a very good relationship with everyone. It was a good time and I had no problem with my family and neighbours.

During puberty my friends and I did nothing out of the ordinary and we didn't go to recreational places because there were not that many in the place that we grew up in. We usually spent our time going to the field and talk. My friends lived with their parents so they didn't have the burden of generating extra income. They only helped with household chores. They sometimes worked on their parents' farm. I was not allowed by my employer to go out that much so I usually saw and talked to them when I was fetching water. When I stopped working as a nanny I went back to my mother's house. After a while I told my mother that I wanted to go to Addis Ababa to look for a job because I was not doing anything to support her. People living in rural areas perceive Addis Ababa as a great place full of opportunities. I was so fed up with the life I had back home. I kept on nagging my mom that I want to leave to Addis Ababa. When my aunt came for a visit I insisted that I want to go with her. My mom didn't have any money so my aunt covered the expenses and brought me to Addis. It was a hard decision especially for my mom but I was serious on the matter. The fact that we also see Addis Ababa as a bigger place fulfils peoples need, I was so eager. My mom was saying, "She needs me to be by my side for good or worse." But I convinced her that I cannot help her if we have no money.

I had a very good relationship with my mom and neighbours. My mom is sick and she can't do any work so as I told my brother works on other people's farms. But mostly it is her neighbours that help her because she lives alone. The major cost she faces is for food; she has a house. Now my mother lives alone in the countryside and my brother visit her once in a year. My family is poor.

I dreamt of going to the Middle East before coming here because I heard that it was a great place and you can get money over there but after coming here I changed my mind and wanted to continue my education with the support of my aunt. My aunt also supported my decision. When I first set foot in Addis I was happy and I was glad I came here. Everything looked different but yet exciting. Then I began living with my aunt and stayed there for a while without doing much of anything. My aunt lived in a rented place and she works hard, but it only covers the house rent. Being with aunt, I wanted to work as domestic worker on freelance basis but I failed. I don't even know how I ended up here I just want to get out of this life. Now I have many friends from all sorts of backgrounds.

I get anxious when I remember the day I started this job. In the place I am living with my aunt I saw some girls who work as sex workers and one day I asked them what they do and the

money they earn. One day they took me to the place they work around and I stood with them. They have also advised me to use a condom. But I didn't have condoms with me. My co-workers, who also precipitated me, found men and I was left alone. I stood on the street for a long time and one young guy came and we agreed with 80 birr for night. In the early days, I was afraid to bargain on the price, thus, I took any amount offered, and I couldn't handle it as it should be when it comes to payment. When I returned home I gave that to my aunt, she asked how I brought it and I told her what just happened. My aunt advised me to stop it indicating its consequences but I didn't accept her advice. Starting from that day onwards she never said anything and I kept supporting her and the little kid. For a long time after starting this job I didn't negotiate the price, whatever they pay me I will take it and go home.

My aunt knows that I am a commercial sex worker. I buy things for the house and for my cousin's baby. The little baby in the house is my cousin's, who got pregnant unexpectedly. I pay for her school and pretty much cover the household costs and sometimes give money to my aunt. I was not able to change my mom's life. I am confused how to help my mother. I don't send money to my mom because the money I get is not enough to support both my aunt and my mother. I spend all of it for daily consumption. My mom wants to see my life changed, so far she didn't ask my help. I didn't bring change to my mother as I thought when I left her.

I am a red light sex worker (I stand in the street) so my income fluctuates. I may get good money like 100 birr one night and the next too little, below 100 birr per night. There are days that I get desperate and even hang out with much less money. I don't drink like other sex workers because I get very sick. Sometimes drunken customers refuse to pay what was agreed and during this time I leave them even without getting minimum pay. Even some of them want to inflict violence, at such moments I allow them to leave without paying. My life is not good and I want to change my life. I sleep with many men; it's not life at all. I don't know who they are, what (diseases) they are caught with, I just sleep with them. I always use condoms with my clients, and in this sector no one would want to be a regular customer.

I regret coming to Addis when I started this business. I was happy in the village but when I found myself in this sector I have lost that happiness. My aunt was expecting me to live a better life than in the countryside and live with her assisting her. This was not the kind of life she expected but the life we are in can make you do things. I don't blame her. It's sure that my mom will be so sad and disgraced both at my aunt and myself. I don't want my mom to know about it. It will also be a surprise and such a sad story for people to know about it. All of them will be unhappy and blame me for my own life.

A healthy girl with hands and legs should not engage in sex work; she better finds other work. I don't want other girls to get involved in this work and I also want all women to change their lives. I believe in the importance of education and I always think about what I could have achieved if I had finished school. Poverty is the main obstacle in my life. I quit school because of it; I moved here because of it; I became a sex worker because of it. I want to change my life for the better.

## **Aynalem: First to Addis Ababa, then to the Middle East**

Born into a family of farmers, Aynalem started working when she was very young. This highly affected her educational performance and the age she went to school. She was 14 years old in grade 5. Aynalem remembers how much she wanted to continue and achieve well at school. Because of the extra work she was doing, she failed two times before reaching grade 5. Her parents are uneducated and were not very interested in her education. In Lasta Lalibela, the areas where she was born, the practice of early and arranged marriages is common. "Many times men asked my parents to marry me. My mom wanted me to marry early. It was my dad who delayed it. But in the end both of them accepted the request and started to prepare the wedding. But this was done without involving me." Even the school allowed her parents to marry her without consulting her. "My school was involved in determining whether girls are fit for marriage or not, and sometimes approve of it without the girls' consent." Aynalem wanted to continue her education, she was tired of the extra work she had to do at home and upset when her parents started arranging her marriage. She therefore decided to run away to Dessie, a nearby city.

Aynalem lived three years in Dessie where she worked in a dairy product shop earning 300 birr per month. She missed her family and decided to visit them after three years absence. In her parents' house she met her uncle who lived in Addis Ababa. He invited her to come and live with him and promised to find her a job. She agreed happily. While living in her uncle house and helping him because he was disabled, she started to work in a hotel as waitress. When she had been in Dessie she met and observed girls who worked in the Middle East and started thinking about migrating to the Middle East. Her work of waitressing was a means to migrate further. Starting from the first month salary, within 1 year and five months she saved 5000 birr for travel. She was 17 years and 5 months old when she migrated to the Middle East. When she told her family about her decision to migrate abroad they were happy. Many girls in their community had migrated to the Middle East and had managed to do something for their families. So they had high expectations of her migration.

Aynalem first went to Dubai where she worked for two years. She returned after having finished the contract. She didn't want to extend her stay because she had a very heavy workload. She stayed two months in Addis Ababa and then she went to Lebanon; she was 20 years old when she migrated for the second time abroad. She worked 1 year and 8 months in Lebanon. She had two jobs; in a residential house and in the employers' restaurant. When she asked for a salary increase because she had two jobs the female employer refused. She decided to run away, even though she had not received her salary in six months. When she was looking for a job as a freelancer she was arrested and deported.

Aynalem's third destination was Qatar. She worked only one month in Qatar. She was employed as a cook but because she was unable to cook everything her employers asked, they deducted her salary. Annoyed by the low salary Aynalem asked her agency to find her another employer, but the female employer refused to let her work for somebody else and sent her back to Ethiopia. Aynalem returned a year ago. She is working in a restaurant as a waitress and earns 400 birr per month. She is desperate and wants to migrate again. As soon as the ban is lifted she will migrate again.

## **Mulu: Growing up without a father and a strong wish for education**

I am now 13 years old. I came to Addis Ababa when I was 11. I lived with my mother in Gonder. My father lives here in Addis Ababa. I have two other siblings, both younger than me. My mother and father had a disagreement and he left us and came here. I had a strong wish to go to Addis Ababa and make some money to buy clothes and shoes. I wanted to help my poor mother. My father never called nor supported us. When my mother started selling things and frequented going to the market, I would stay with my grandmother. I have gone to school till 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I started when I was 6 at a school called Woref. My mother wanted us all to go to school but I was the only one that went. My brothers used to be afraid to be bullied. I came to Addis when I was about to start 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Before I came, aside from doing my homework from school, I used to work to support my mother. I would weed farms and cut/harvest the hay of wheat. I also used to clean houses. I got 10 birr per day. Then, when I turned 9, I left my mother's house and worked as a domestic worker. I would go to school in the morning and work in the afternoons. This time I was getting paid 200 birr per month. In addition to this, I would also come back home on Wednesdays and Saturdays to help my mother with the cleaning. Most of my jobs consisted of cutting grass and feeding the livestock as well as taking care of them in general. With the 200 birr I got, I used to give some to my mother and the rest to buy clothes and shoes for me and my brothers when it was a holiday.

As children we used to play "Dibosh" with small pebbles. I also played sports, mainly running with my younger brother. We used to play with kids from our neighborhood too. We didn't have livestock and so we just sit and wait at home for the most part. I'm the oldest of the three. When my mother comes back from the market we used to go to help her carry some of the things. These were some of my fondest memories. On the flipside, I remember I hated the winter time. The rain wouldn't allow us to go out and work like we wanted. My mother wouldn't be able to go to the market to sell her crops. That's what she would do with the money that I give her. She would buy and sell things like maize, sorghum and wheat at a small profit.

The difference with our family and those that had fathers was that children with fathers wouldn't have to work like I did. Their fathers would farm and provide for their family's needs. Our father left us but we did have land. What we used to do is give our land for someone to farm on it and after they harvest the produce we get half of what they get as rent. We would use that to eat. It was from the money that I give her that my mother would buy the crops she would sell not from what we harvest from our land.

Eventually, it was my aunt that encouraged me to come to Addis. My mother said no, but I disagreed with my mother and decided to come here against her advice. My aunt is my father's sister and she told me that she would reunite me with my father. I thought it would be a good plan to come here and work. I said to myself that I would be able to support my mother better and support myself with all of my needs.

I met my father and he asked me to stay and said that he would support me. He keeps making promises but I haven't seen him after that first time we met. He has remarried but doesn't have children and although I know where he lives, I haven't seen nor heard from him. When I first got to Addis, I was very happy. The city was clean, the people looked good. After one week I was hired as a domestic worker at a place that my aunt knew. They hired me for 200 birr. I clean the house and make the bed. It's not much of a hard work. The family has one daughter. Although the people are willing to let me go to school I can't because I didn't bring my certificate from my previous school. I've asked for them to send me my certificate from back home but they only sent me my national ID and so I've been forced to discontinue my education.

I feel bad when I think about having left my mother behind. I haven't spoken to her nor have I seen her since I came. I don't help her as much as I had hoped for. I have only sent back money once since I came. There are no phones back home. I've asked my other aunt (the sister of the one that brought me here) to help connect me with my mother, but she hasn't done so till now. She always tells me there's bad phone network reception.



I've not received any help from any organization since I came. My life is not that great but I've come to terms with my life here and I make my living with the 200 birr I make each month. I once fell ill but couldn't ask the people who I work for to take me to the hospital as I knew I didn't have enough money. They didn't take me either even though they knew I was sick.

I haven't met anyone here from back where I come from. When I was there, we would see some older girls leave for Addis in search for a better life. They mainly look for work as domestic worker. However, I've met new people from the neighborhood that I live in. I have become familiar with them as I have stayed in this house for two years now. I haven't saved much. Right now, I only have 300 birr in my hands, for example.

I think that if I ever get a chance to go back home and other people see me, they will think that I'm at a better place and would want to come to Addis like me. When neighbors and people in the community hear that I've sent money to my mother, they might get the idea of sending their children to Addis and have them help. The children will also want to come as I once did. Quite frankly, I miss playing. I miss my brothers. I even miss helping my mother carry her things on her way back from the market. I wish I didn't have to leave my mother in order to support her. I don't think having to leave your hometown is the best alternative.

Although, it is domestic work and I clean other people's homes, I'm able to work in a cleaner environment. I'm also able to buy better clothes for myself. I get along better with children here than back home. However, I wish to be educated in the future so that I can get a better paying job. I wish to be at a better place than I am right now. I want to continue my education. I want to get married, perhaps when I'm 25. I think my life would be different then. Then I would be able to help my mother and my brothers better. I would be able to lead a better life.