

## **“Girls and Boys Have Become the Toys of Everyone”: Interrogating the Drivers and Experiences of Adolescent Migration in Ethiopia.**

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### **Abstract**

The recently adopted Global Compact for Migration (GCM) has a strong focus on the rights of migrants. While the GCM is non-legally binding and its adoption has been heatedly contested, this is an important historical moment to reflect on the status of some of the most vulnerable migrants – adolescent girls and boys – and the efforts that will be needed to fast-track social change and ensure that they benefit from the ambitious targets of the GCM and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This article explores these issues through a case study on Ethiopia, where migration—especially of young people—is already accelerating and is poised for explosive growth in the coming years.

Drawing on qualitative data collected by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) international research programme, this article focuses on the ways in which adolescent girls’ and boys’ multi-dimensional capabilities drive and are shaped by migration. Our findings highlight that in many cases Ethiopian adolescents are “choosing” to migrate because they perceive no other viable options. Simultaneously pushed and pulled into undertaking risky endeavours with limited information, they often find themselves vulnerable to a range of risks with very little support. To help mitigate those risks, and help adolescents use migration to improve, rather than restrict, their access to their human rights, our conclusions discuss a number of key policy and programming entry points.

## Introduction

In December 2018, the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), having been agreed at the United Nations General Assembly in July 2018, was formally adopted at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakesh. This Compact marks a milestone in international co-operation on migration. The GCM has a strong focus on the rights of all migrants and aims through 23 key objectives to “facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration, while reducing the incidence and negative impact of irregular migration.” It also agrees “to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities migrants face at different stages of migration by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights and providing them with care and assistance” (quoted in Fella 2018, 1). While the GCM is non-legally binding and its adoption has been heatedly contested, this is an important historical moment to reflect on the status of some of the most vulnerable migrants – adolescent girls and boys – and the efforts that will be needed to fast-track social change and ensure that they benefit from the ambitious targets of the GCM and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

In the Global South, and especially in the poorest regions and countries, independent adolescent migration is a common phenomenon. Burrone et al. (2018) report that intent to migrate peaks at age 17, with rates as high as 58% in Sierra Leone and generally higher in low income countries and in communities where young people’s welfare is not prioritised. In 2010, it was estimated that nearly one quarter (24%) of all migrants in Africa were under the age of 20 (UNICEF et al. 2010). Historically speaking, the dominant narratives surrounding adolescent migration focused on the risks of exploitative child labour, trafficking and modern slavery (Black 2002; Whitehead and Hashim 2005; ILO 2012). Temin et al.’s (2013) *Girls on the Move* report sought to elucidate the other side of the coin and look

beyond the risks of migration and girls as “victims” to the potential opportunities that migration offers in terms of education, economic empowerment and exercising independence, voice, and agency. While an important contribution to the debate, over the last five years it has become increasingly apparent that what is critical is balancing narratives and capturing the heterogeneity of drivers and circumstances of adolescent migration. That is, although migration can facilitate adolescents’ desire not to “suffer in the mud” (Boyden 2013), we must not lose sight of the fact that much still needs to be done to mitigate the serious and multidimensional risks that young migrants – especially the most disadvantaged (e.g. domestic workers) face in terms of accessing their human rights (Presler-Marshall and Jones 2018; Jones et al. 2018; Jones et al. 2017; Population Council Ethiopia 2018; de Regt 2016).

Ethiopia is an interesting case study for exploring adolescent migration and the types of evidence, services, and programmes that can begin to offset adolescent migrants’ age- and gender-related vulnerabilities and help young migrants access their rights. First, there is evidence that the country as a whole is set for a rapid increase in migration. Not only does it remain more rural than most of its neighbours (80% in 2017 according to the World Bank 2018b)<sup>1</sup>, meaning that there is more room for urban growth, but it is highly vulnerable to climate change (Irish Aid 2018). Moreover, although the government for years worked to slow migration (Atnafu et al 2014, Carter and Rohwerder 2016), and migration remains under prioritised, the policy priorities of the national Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015–2020) are likely to increase migration. In an effort to reduce youth unemployment, accelerate poverty reduction, and catapult the country to middle-income status by 2025, the GTP II is committed to developing new urban factories and industrial parks<sup>2</sup> (Dehry 2017; Giannecchini and Taylor 2018). In addition, while the economic benefits of internal migration are the subject of debate in some countries, in Ethiopia there is clear evidence that it very

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to 66% in Sudan, for example (World Bank, 2018b).

<sup>2</sup> Some 17 industrial parks across the country are under construction as of 2018 (Dehry 2017).

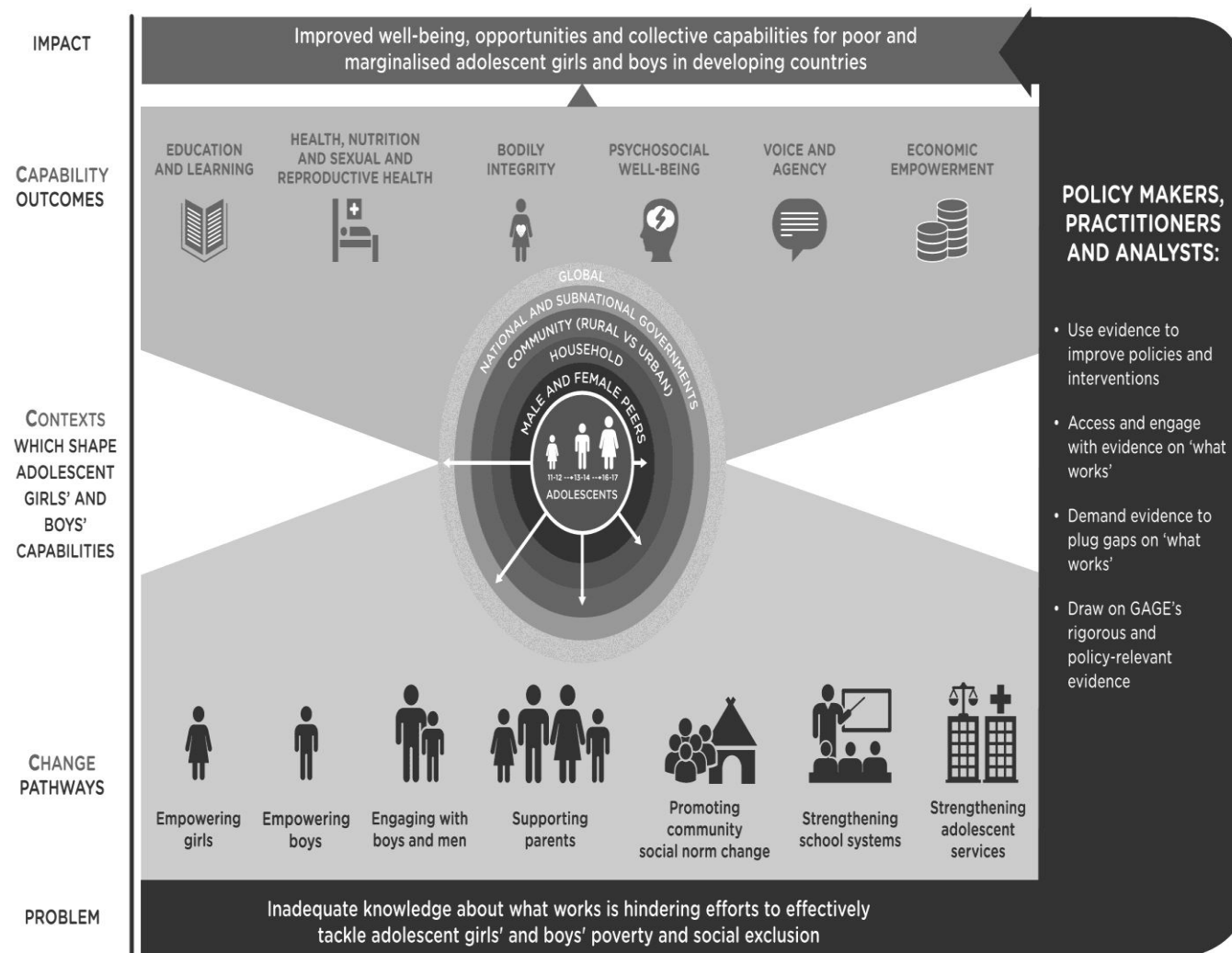
significantly improves both food and non-food consumption (de Brauw et al. 2017).

Second, there is reason to believe that adolescents and young adults will represent the bulk of Ethiopian migrants in the coming years. Not only is the country very young, with 24% of the population between the ages of 10 and 19 and 71% under the age of 30 (ILO 2018), but recent research suggests that improved access to education has shifted adolescent occupational aspirations considerably and that among the current generation, over two-thirds aspire to migrate, preferably to an urban area inside of the country (Schewel and Fransen, 2018). While there has been increasing discussion of adolescent and youth migration regarding the need to better understand the factors driving young people's international migration from Africa to Europe (World Bank 2018a; Pew Research Center 2018; Ahmed and Gough 2018), and there growing evidence of adolescent girls' involvement in domestic work in Ethiopia and internationally (de Regt 2016; Jones et al. 2018; Jones et al. 2017; Population Council 2018), overall there are still major lacunae in understanding the context-specific drivers and implications of migration for Ethiopian adolescent girls and boys. In particular, the evidence base on the ways in which migration shapes and is shaped by gendered adolescent trajectories—especially vis-a-vis gender-specific work opportunities and the risk of various type of violence—is weak. This article aims to contribute to closing those evidence gaps. Drawing on data collected by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) international research programme, in which Ethiopia is one of six focal countries, this article focuses on the similarities and differences between adolescent girls and boys involved in migration. Beginning with our conceptual framing and research methods, this paper then turns to the patterning of adolescent migration and its drivers—both push and pull. We then discuss adolescents' experiences of migration through a multidimensional capabilities lens before reflecting on policy and programming implications.

## **Conceptual Framing**

This article draws on the conceptual framing of the GAGE programme, which focuses on the interconnectedness of “the 3 Cs” - Capabilities, Contexts, and Change strategies - to understand what works to support adolescent girls’ and boys’ development and empowerment in the second decade of life and as they transition into early adulthood (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: GAGE Conceptual framework



Source:

GAGE Consortium, 2018.

The first building block of our conceptual framework refers to capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (2004), the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework exploring the kinds of assets (economic, human, political, emotional, and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of “doing and being” and access their human rights. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in adolescent girls and boys with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and “hardest to reach,” such as migrant adolescents and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The second building block is context dependency, with an emphasis on the ways in which adolescent girls’ and boys’ capability outcomes are highly dependent on family or household, community, state, and global context factors. For example, adolescents may be pushed (e.g. escaping from forced child marriage) or pulled (e.g. to earn remittances to support household economics) by family pressures to migrate domestically or internationally. At the same time, community awareness-raising about the potential pitfalls of migration and state-level policy frameworks can help to reduce exploitative and support positive adolescent migration trajectories.

The third and final building block of our conceptual framework acknowledges that girls’ and boys’ contextual realities can be mediated by a range of programme and policy change strategies. These include: empowering individual adolescents, supporting parents, engaging with men and boys to reduce discriminatory social norms and practices against adolescent girls and young women, sensitising community leaders, enhancing adolescent-responsive services, and addressing system-level deficits.

**Research Questions** Stemming from our conceptual framing this article seeks to answer four main questions:

What is the patterning of Ethiopian adolescent girls’ and boys’ migration?

What are the drivers – both push and pull factors – shaping adolescent migration?

How does migration affect adolescents’ multidimensional capabilities?

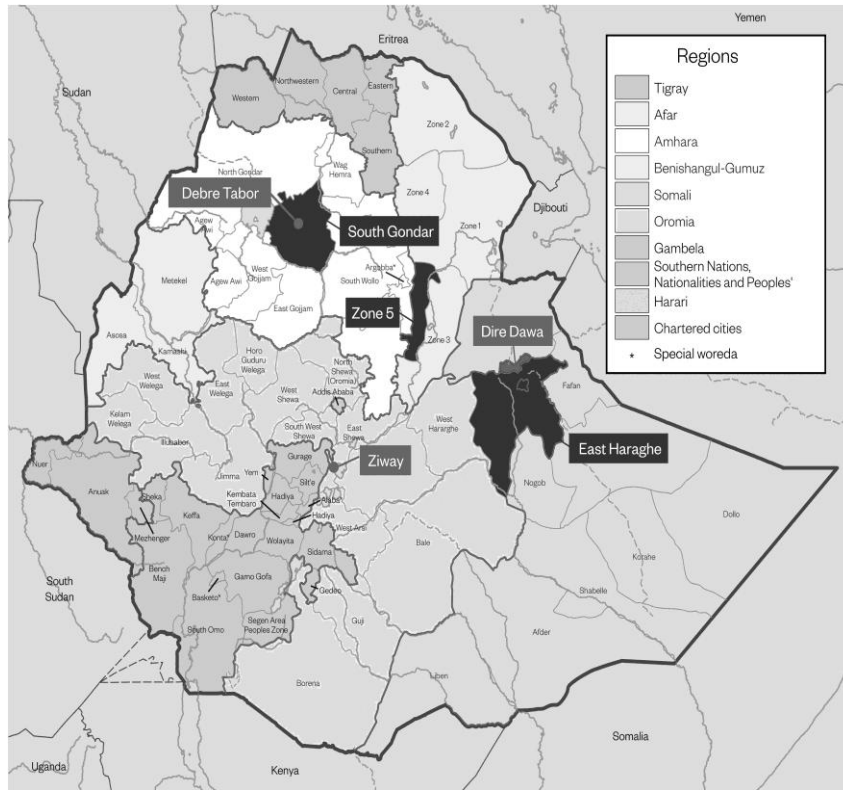
What entry-points exist for tackling and mitigating adolescent migrants’ risks in low-income contexts like Ethiopia?

## Methodology, Research Sites and Research Sample

To explore these questions, we draw on data collected as part of the broader GAGE baseline, which was carried out in late 2017 and early 2018 involving qualitative data collection with 250 adolescents – and their caregivers and siblings – in rural and urban sites in three regions in Ethiopia (see Figure 2). For our rural research sites, we sought to combine economic and social vulnerability criteria and selected geographical areas that are economically disadvantaged and/or food insecure as well as being child marriage “hot spots” (as a proxy for conservative gender norms) (see Jones et al. 2016). In total, the qualitative research is taking place in five *kebeles* in Ebenat district, South Gondar, Amhara, five *kebeles* in Fedis district, East Hararghe, Oromia and two *kebeles* in Zone 5, Afar. Research is also taking place in three urban settings which are geographically proximate to our rural sites: Batu in East Shewa (Oromia), Debre Tabor in South Gondar (Amhara), and Dire Dawa City Administration. These three urban sites not only allow us to better understand rural-urban comparisons, they also allow us to explore adolescent transitions from education into work, given the diversity of employment options available.



Figure 2: GAGE Ethiopia urban and rural research sites



Source: Originally created from File: Ethiopia adm location map.svg by User: Nord West and modified to show GAGE research sites.

Our primary sample, with whom we undertook individual interviews, included two age cohorts, the younger aged 10–12 years and the older aged 15–17 years. Adolescent girls and boys were purposefully selected from a quantitative sample that had been randomly selected from 220 communities in the districts discussed above, to include adolescents in and out of school, working adolescents and married adolescent girls. In addition, we carried out a range of group interviews<sup>3</sup> with adolescents (age 10–19) and adults, some of whom were purposively selected because they were current migrants or returnees, to explore the drivers of and experiences with adolescent migration. Tools, including community and body mappings, individual and community timelines, a “favourite things” exercise, and vignettes aimed at exploring social norms, were highly participatory. We also interviewed key informants—with expertise in adolescence, gender, and migration—at the local through national levels. In all interviews, we paid special attention to gender similarities and differences. See Tables 1 and 2 for an overview of our qualitative sample. Regarding research ethics, we secured approval from the Overseas Development Institute Research Ethics Committee – as well as from the relevant regional research ethics boards in Ethiopia. We also secured informed assent from adolescents aged 17 and under, and informed consent from their parents<sup>4</sup> and from adolescents 18 and 19 years of age.

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<sup>3</sup> Where adolescents were interviewed in groups, we report their ages by cohort. Where they were interviewed individually, we report their exact ages.

<sup>4</sup> Informed consent from parents of adolescents under the age of 18 was not obtained when those younger adolescents were living in adolescent-headed households in urban areas. This was the case for 15 young people in our sample.

**Table 1: Sample overview**

Individual interviews with girls	Individual interviews with boys	Individual interviews with parents	Individual interviews with key informants	Group interviews with adolescents	Group interviews with adults
143	105	200	160	68	45

**Table 2: Disaggregated adolescent sample by vulnerability characteristic**

Early adolescents				Older adolescents			
Girls (unmarried)	99	Boys	76	Girls (unmarried)	23	Boys	29
Girls married	10			Girls married	11		
Out of school / working adolescent girls	25	Out of school / working adolescent boys	19	Out of school adolescent girls	9	Out of school / working adolescent boys	9
Girls with disabilities	10	Boys with disabilities	9	Girls with disabilities	9	Boys with disabilities	9

The data analysis process followed multiple steps. Preliminary analysis took place during both daily and site-wise debriefings with the team – during which we explored emerging findings in order to probe more deeply in future interviews. Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers of the local language and then coded using the qualitative software analysis package MaxQDA. Our code book was primarily shaped around the GAGE 3 Cs Conceptual Framework, but was

also informed by the emerging findings from debriefings in order to ensure that local specificities were well captured.

## **Our Findings**

### **Trends and Patterning of Adolescent Migration**

Our respondents overwhelmingly agreed that “the trend of migration has increased from time to time” and that those in middle adolescence (aged 14–16) are most likely to migrate. They also agreed that internal migration is more common than international migration, especially since the government tightened restrictions on the migration of children under the age of 18 following the 2017 mass expulsion of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia (though they added that the primary impact of those restrictions has been to increase illegal migration rather than to discourage migration). Rural-to-urban migration is particularly common, given urban job opportunities. “With regard to internal migration, there is huge influx of rural out-migration to urban centres by adolescents,” explained a key informant from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (BOWCYA) in Dire Dawa. Rural-to-rural migration is also growing, most often on a seasonal basis, with the expansion of commercial agriculture. Adolescents are in “high demand as daily labourer workers for sesame weeding and harvesting” explained a Youth League key informant from Debre Tabor.

Regional variations in migration patterns are notable, although hardly uniform. In Zone 5, our respondents were largely pastoralists, whereby seasonal migration is a longstanding practice. The majority of respondents reported that parents tend to migrate together, taking with them their younger children and leaving behind adolescents, who are responsible for watching the home and looking after the animals that do not migrate. “Small children travel with their parents when older children stay behind to look after goats and the household,” explained a 12 year old adolescent boy who saw himself as one of those older children. Our findings show that it is quite common for young adolescent boys (aged 10–12) in Zone 5 to spend weeks and even months living away from their families while they look after camels and cattle. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, tend not to migrate except under duress, as will be discussed in more detail below.

In South Gondar, there is a great deal of rural-to-rural migration by adolescent boys seeking seasonal agricultural work. Rural-to-urban migration, for both girls and boys, is also extremely common. A 10-year-old boy noted that in his village (Community G, South Gondar), migration is so common, “there are no male children in our locality.” A community key informant in Debre Tabor reported that while people would not migrate *out* of that town “even if they were pulled out with rope,” migration into town is so significant that over the last decade the town has doubled in size. It appears less common for families in South Gondar to move as units, though migrating adolescents often travel with siblings or cousins and to aunts and uncles – for work as well as for secondary education.

In East Hararghe, parts of which are experiencing extreme drought, migration patterns are both varied and variable as families respond to current local conditions. Where drought is severe and longstanding in East Hararghe zone, whole families have tended to migrate, often to the Somali region until last year’s violent unrest and mass displacement.<sup>5</sup> “The family engage as daily labourers and children too,” explained a key informant in a rural *kebele* (Community L, East Hararghe). Where drought is less extreme, adolescents migrate on their own. The majority of adult respondents in East Hararghe reported that unlike girls “boys do not migrate . . . they work in the house of their neighbour or village by payment” (mother) if necessary. Indeed, our interviews in urban Batu, East Shewa found that the majority of migrant boys in that location are not from rural East Hararghe but are instead from poverty-stricken zones in neighbouring Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).

The city of Dire Dawa is unique amongst our research sites. Because of its size and its location, it is both a destination for rural-to-urban migration, and a transit corridor for legal and illegal international migration. “Migrants often came to Dire Dawa town either seeking a temporary job or to stay here for a while to arrange a further trip to move to abroad, especially to the Middle East,” reported a justice sector key informant. A 16 year old adolescent girl in secondary school noted that many would-be international migrants get marooned in the city by brokers, who

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<sup>5</sup> The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2018) estimates that more than 500,000 people were displaced in the last quarter of 2017 from Somali Regional State to East Hararghe zone, with thousands more exiting Somali region in the first quarter of 2018.

“promise to transit them on a boat to Djibouti but at the end decline their promises.”

### **Adolescent Migrant Occupations**

Although there is some overlap between the types of employment undertaken by adolescent girls and boys, such as daily labouring and work in the hotel sector, migrants’ jobs tend to be gender specific. Boys who migrate seasonally typically engage in agriculture – cultivating, weeding, and harvesting for sesame, *khat*, and other cash crops. Boys who migrate to urban areas tend to get involved in construction work, daily labour, work as shoe shiners, or operate *bajah* (local three-wheel taxis).

Girls, on the other hand, usually work as domestic workers (see also Jones et al. 2018; Population Council 2018; de Regt 2016; Atnafu et al. 2014). “[G]irls of 10 years old clean dishes, look after children,” explained an NGO worker in rural East Hararghe. They are also “engaged in petty trading . . . they sell tomatoes, potatoes, and other foods on the street,” added a religious leader in Dire Dawa. In addition, a significant number of young female migrants work in the hospitality industry – in hotels, and as café, bar, or shisha house waitresses. “Girls are very fast for hotel work and they are also familiar with the hotel work,” explained a 17-year-old boy in Debre Tabor.

A sizeable number<sup>6</sup> of girls first employed as domestic workers or in hospitality also end up in commercial sex work, as “they get hired in a hotel for 200 or 300 birr only and this is very small to bring a change in their life” (returned male migrant, 18 years, South Gondar). Girls also enter sex work because they are duped by brokers and because newly arrived girls face “language barriers and... don’t have any choice for survival” explained a community key informant from Batu. In Dire Dawa, a 15 year old girl enrolled in secondary school observed that the youngest girls can be the most at risk: “Most of the Oromo girls starting age 13 engage in the work because they do not have better knowledge.”

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<sup>6</sup> The Population Council (2018) found that between 7–17 percent of migrant girls transitioned into sex work between their first and second jobs.

In larger urban areas such as Batu and Dire Dawa, increasing numbers of adolescents are also involved in the factory work that the government is working to attract. In Batu, which is located in East Shewa District in the centre of Ethiopia in the Oromia region approximately 150km from Addis Ababa, large numbers of migrant girls are involved in the floriculture sector (see map above). They are often trucked in by brokers, lured from impoverished neighbouring districts in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (known for high rates of migration due to over-crowding and limited agricultural productivity) by promises of high pay. A 16-year-old boy in Batu, explained that his friends at Sher Flower Farm (located next to Lake Ziway in Batu) are "from Southern Ethiopia and are mostly those who lost their family and . . . left their home because of poverty."

### **Drivers of Adolescent Migration**

Adolescents migrate due to a wide variety of push and pull factors – with economics being the central reason for most (see also Cossor 2016). Although there is significant variation, the majority of respondents reported that adolescents migrate because they are simultaneously pushed by poverty and pulled by hopes for a better life.

### **Push Factors**

Poverty, drought and limited employment opportunities all constitute significant push factors in adolescent migration. "It is only destitution that makes children migrate," noted a father from rural South Gondar. "Food, they don't have something to eat," added a key informant from the Women's Association in rural East Hararghe. "When there is a drought in our area . . . I may stay [in a neighbouring zone] for a year," reported an 18-year-old boy from Zone 5. Adults in all areas observed that agricultural yields were declining over time. In South Gondar, land fragmentation and soil degradation were identified as key. "The fertility of the soil has been highly depleted because of the over-cultivation and peoples are starved every year," explained a community key informant from Debre Tabor. In East Hararghe, many areas have seen no harvest at all for several years, "because of the shortage of rain"

(father). “The climate condition of the area has changed from previous times” (mother, Zone 5).

Rural areas have few other employment options to offset agricultural losses. “A lack of job opportunities in the *woreda* is at its severe stage,” noted a justice sector key informant in East Hararghe. “In my home village there were no jobs,” explained a 17 year old adolescent boy in Dire Dawa. Indeed, driven by Ethiopia’s “youth bulge,” UN- and under I employment of even relatively well-educated young people is now commonplace – and driving migration. “My daughter completed grade 10. However, she could not get a job. So, she went to Addis Ababa and was employed as housemaid,” reported a mother in rural South Gondar. “They finish school but since they don’t find job opportunities, they seek to go to other countries,” added a father from Debre Tabor. Employment options in rural areas are especially bleak for girls. “Women don’t have options here; they want to go and try to start some small business in the city or strive in any way possible,” offered an 18-year-old girl, former migrant in rural South Gondar.

Educational failure is another key push factor. In Ethiopia, students take a national exam at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Scores determine whether an adolescent will be granted a spot at a preparatory school or at a government-sponsored technical school. Most rural students, who have been taught in poorly resourced, over-crowded classrooms – often with poor attendance records due to demands on their time for agricultural and domestic labour – are not prepared to pass. When they fail, doors to continued education swing shut and young people who lack access to career guidance (at schools or in the community), funds to re-sit for national exams or go to private colleges are left scrambling to find an alternative pathway. “I came here because I couldn’t get a pass mark in my 10<sup>th</sup> grade exam,” explained a 17 year old adolescent boy from Dire Dawa. In some cases, exam failure drives adolescents to leave. “I’ll be a burden for my family. Therefore, the only option is to migrate to another place,” explained an 18-year-old girl from rural South Gondar. In other cases, family members push failed students out of the house. “It creates a huge frustration on the part of the parents,” noted a community key informant in Batu.



Although doors to technical and vocational training (TVET) do not shut in the same way as doors to continued academic education, comparatively fewer adolescents are interested in TVET, because professional careers (e.g. doctor, engineer, teacher) are valued far more than occupations (e.g. electrician, bricklayer, manufacturer) in part due to historical discrimination against indigenous crafts such as pottery and blacksmithing (Geleto, 2018). GAGE findings highlight that adolescent future aspirations primarily require a university degree. As a father from South Gondar explained: “Let them live in Addis Ababa or Gondar, or any other town. The most important thing is that they attend and become successful in their education.” In addition, private TVET colleges can be expensive for poor households—especially given that most are located in urban areas and thus necessitate boarding fees as well. An 18 year old adolescent boy from rural South Gondar explained: “I didn’t want to join TVET originally as it costs 90 birr per month.”

Family dynamics also drive adolescent migration. In some cases, young people run away from home to get away from domestic violence between parents. “I left my home town because of the serious and frequent conflict between my parents. I was tired of observing their conflict and left even without having any information about this town and having no money in my pocket,” explained a 17 year old boy from Batu. In other cases, adolescents reported being driven off by tensions with parents and especially step-parents. “I came to Dire Dawa because of my stepfather . . . he does not want me to live with them,” reported an 18 year old girl from Dire Dawa.

Adolescents are also pushed into migration by families who want remittances and who hold up the example of neighboring children who have migrated and are successfully supporting their families. In Debre Tabor, a 15-year-old girl noted that a friend of hers, only 14, was made to migrate to the Middle East by her parents. “The families arranged the migration expecting remittance money in the future.”

Gender norms also play a role in migration drivers, with some migration push factors being specific to girls (Jones et al. 2018; de Regt 2016; Cossor 2016). An 18 year old adolescent mother in rural

East Hararghe noted that she had left home because of her heavy workload: "Because of workload I run away from home and came to Community I." Other respondents observed that when girls' reputations were sullied by sexual slander, successful migration offers a path through which they can rehabilitate their family's - if not their own - reputation.

Child marriage, however, is perhaps the most important factor pushing adolescent girls into migration. In South Gondar and Zone 5, where arranged marriages remain the norm, migration is often seen by girls as the only way out. An 11 year old adolescent girl from the former reported, "There was a girl that ran away while they were preparing her wedding; she then went to Ebenat as a maid. They want to marry her because she owns a land. But she refused and ran away." A 15-year-old girl from Zone 5 added that migration not only offers an escape from immediate marriage - it could also prevent a lifetime of physical violence: "I want to go to Djibouti, a husband can't come there and force you to get married and also he can't beat you there." In East Hararghe, where child marriage is increasingly "chosen" by girls themselves, desperate to prove that they are worthy of marriage but too young to fully understand all that marriage entails, migration often follows divorce - now increasingly common. "Whenever girls divorce their husbands, they move to Harar town to lead their [own] livelihood," explained a community key informant. In other cases, girls are moving because they are unable to withstand community pressures to marry. The mother of an adolescent girl in rural East Hararghe added that her daughter had migrated to Dubai because "there were boys who proposed to her" - and when her daughter refused "they threatened her that they would turn to witchcraft."

### **Pull Factors**

Our respondents were clear that pull factors - including opportunities for higher education, the demonstration effect of successful migrants, and the interventions of brokers - can be so strong that parents are unable to prevent their children from migrating. Even when their parents explain the risks, some adolescents "prefer to die while migrating" explained an agricultural extension officer in East Hararghe. A Bureau of Women and Children's Affairs (BOWCA) key informant in East

Hararghe reported that while his agency sometimes tries to reunite young migrants with their families, efforts are rarely successful, because “children who started earning income are not willing to return home.”

A key pull factor for adolescent migration, most strongly for girls given their more limited opportunities in rural areas (Cossor 2016), concerns opportunities to pursue higher education. Young people in rural areas often move to attend secondary schools since education after eighth grade is primarily available in towns. A 15 year old adolescent boy living in Dire Dawa reported that he lived and worked with five other boys in a mechanic’s garage, attending school after work. “I sleep in the garage compound and I pursue my education during my spare time.” Other adolescents migrate in order to support their own education when their parents are unable to pay fees. An 18 year old adolescent boy living in Debre Tabor but recently returned from Sudan explained, “It is a must for me to go there because I have to get money for my education.” Furthermore, given that special needs education is only available at a limited number of schools in urban areas, adolescents with disabilities have to migrate – which they often do by themselves as the government issues them a small stipend to offset boarding and subsistence costs – if they wish to attend school. A teacher in Debre Tabor told us that “students flood to our school,” coming from “far distant areas.”

Role models also play an important role in attracting adolescents to migrate. As summarised by a 16 year old former migrant in rural South Gondar, “people migrate to improve their life.” Some adolescents plan to migrate only long enough to make the money they need to “get back to their locality to create their own business” (community key informant, East Hararghe) or build a house. Others would like to live in town permanently, as “everything is available in the town” (12-year-old girl, Zone 5). Central to understanding the many young migrants who undertake migration in order to “fulfil their dreams” (16-year-old girl in preparatory school, Debre Tabor) is the degree to which many are pulled into this risky endeavour by their own developmentally constrained ability to evaluate costs and benefits when presented with examples of others who have succeeded. As noted by a BOWCYA key informant in Dire Dawa, “potential migrants are motivated by looking at those successful returnee migrants.” Girls are attracted when they see “domestic servants

who came from Addis Ababa wearing better clothes” (BOWCYA key informant, South Gondar). Boys observe that former migrants are able to “buy animals and take them to town to sell” (father, East Hararghe). Successful returnees from the Middle East are even more powerful role models. The few that have sent enough money for their families to “build a house . . . buy a *bajaj* [taxi] and a piece of land for themselves” (father, Debre Tabor) are considered “as a lucky person who got a lottery” (local government official, South Gondar).

A handful of older adolescents reflected on how little they had really understood when they first migrated. Several admitted naively following friends. “The only option I had was following her [his girlfriend]. If she hadn’t come to Batu town, I wouldn’t have come either. I would have continued my education there in the countryside,” explained an 18 year old boy living in Batu. “I never thought I would have to work this hard in the town,” admitted an 18 year old girl, also from Batu.

Peer pressure and demonstration effects are increasingly intertwined with brokers’ deliberate efforts to oversell young people on migration benefits, despite government efforts to “follow and bring to court illegal brokers” (BOLSA key informant, East Hararghe). Although brokers are particularly implicated in international migration, where they often blur the line between migration and human trafficking, in Ethiopia, many brokers specialise in procuring rural-to-urban migrants, often relying on family connections to recruit adolescents. Respondents in South Gondar explained that girls are recruited from rural villages to work as domestic workers in regional towns: “When you want a worker you tell the broker and give him money and then he will bring you who you need” (18-year-old girl).

### **Adolescent Migrant Experiences**

The dominant discourse about adolescent migration in recent years has centred on future-seeking and agency (Temin et al. 2013). For some young migrants in our research, this discourse has played out in reality. A 19 year old adolescent boy recently returned to rural South Gondar reported, “I saved 15,000 birr. I bought a plot of land here and also started my business with it in the market place. I have started saving to build a house.” The younger sister of

two migrant adolescent girls in rural East Hararghe explained that her sisters' work in the Somali region had transformed her own life. "We have bought a solar lamp with the money. I have been sick from eye illness and now I am ok. We used to eat sorghum and now we eat, rice, macaroni, and pasta." However, although most adolescent migrants agree that urban areas are more "modern and civilised" (13-year-old girl, Batu), some adolescent migrants achieve their educational and economic goals, and a few make "good friends who . . . encouraged me not to fear anything" (16 year old adolescent girl, Dire Dawa), the majority "usually face different challenges and problems" (father, Batu) with very limited support. "Girls and boys have become the toys of everyone," summarised a community key informant in Dire Dawa.

### **Economic Risks**

Adolescent migrants face several forms of economic exploitation – including very low wages, withheld salaries, and extortionate rent. "Since they are not skilled, they are paid 20 or 40 or 50 birr day . . . which covers only their food," reported a community key informant in East Hararghe. Wages for young rural-urban migrants remain low – and may in some cases be dropping – due to the over-supply of workers. "These days, the available job opportunities in the town do not match the numbers of job seekers," reported a government social worker in Dire Dawa. This not only drives up unemployment rates, and creates tensions between local and migrant youths, but also allows employers a degree of impunity – as any adolescent who quits can be easily replaced. There is also a gender pay gap. As a Youth League<sup>7</sup> key informant in Debre Tabor noted: "The male will be paid 70 birr and the female will get 60 or 50."

It is also not uncommon for employers not to pay their monthly salary. In some cases, young migrants "get money for daily consumption only" and are promised that "they'll be paid when they have finished an agreed amount [of work]" but that "agreed amount" does not always materialise (17 year old adolescent girl now returned to rural South Gondar). Girls again appear to be at

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<sup>7</sup> The Youth League is a government-affiliated association for youth focused on support youth employment and community engagement.

elevated risk, in part because of the types of employment they hold. Those who work in hotels, for example, can see their wages docked for mistakes, for their own meals or for a customer's refusal to pay. "If she breaks something that will be deducted from her salary" observed an 18 year old adolescent girl in South Gondar who had formerly migrated to a local town. Domestic workers can fare even worse, some work "only for food and clothes" (community key informant, rural East Hararghe). A 17-year-old girl living in Dire Dawa explained, "I used to prepare food, clean the house, and wash clothes. They did not even pay me for what I worked for." In the case of young adolescent girls involved in domestic work, a number of them reported not even knowing their salary as the money is often paid directly to their families, who may use the money for general household costs, rather than for the girl herself.

Although the Ethiopian government is working to attract foreign direct investment to expand employment options (EIC 2017; Derhy 2017), and many commercial employers offer higher salaries and even benefits such as health insurance and maternity leave, our research suggests that economic exploitation remains a concern, in part because of the lack of an official minimum wage. Respondents in Batu reported working at a wine factory, flour mill, and commercial flower factory, sometimes while they "simultaneously process their travel to Arab countries" (16 year old adolescent girl). They were especially scathing about the latter, which they saw as more exploitative, more dangerous, and more tightly linked to brokers. "If you break a single head of the flower, they deduct from your salary. If you have not accomplished work for what you have targeted to do in a month, they also will deduct your salary," explained a 17-year-old girl working at Sher Company. Indeed, noted a community key informant living in Batu, "the local youths are not willing to work at Sher . . . because of unfairness in the payment allocated for employees."

Another form of economic exploitation faced by adolescent migrants is extortionate rent. Rents in urban areas are climbing so quickly that adolescent migrants are financially stressed and often backed into unsafe living conditions. An 18 year old girl living in Debre Tabor observed that rent "price increased to 150 and 300 birr" in recent years. Young migrants in urban areas reported living and sleeping in a variety of insecure places, including "with many daily labourers . . . for 2 birr a night" (15 year old adolescent

boy, Batu), a “garage compound” and a “bakery warehouse” (16 year old boy, Dire Dawa), and under a bridge (17-year-old boy, Dire Dawa).

### **Violence Risks**

Our research found that adolescent migrants are at extremely high risk of violence. Some risks, such as being attacked by robbers, who “know we have money because we have been working” (17 year old boy, Debre Tabor), or being abused by brokers, who “punish them in a harsh manner” (12 year old boy, Batu), are age-related. Other risks are gender -related .

Migrant boys are at risk of age-, intra-regional and ethnic-based violence. In urban areas, respondents reported that ethnic violence is often ignited by “conflict over females” (justice key informant, South Gondar) and fuelled by alcohol consumption. “We are all Ethiopians but when you reach there everyone takes sides . . . it looks like a war zone,” explained a 17 year old boy in secondary school in Debre Tabor.

In rural areas, those migrating to lowland agricultural plantations, especially in Humera and Metema, which are located in Amhara near the border with Sudan and have a weak rule of law, face “fighting with knives. . . to get the jobs and plowing land in the area,” reported a community key informant in rural South Gondar. Security on sesame plantations is very limited and provided primarily by private security guards aimed at protecting profits and violence is accordingly high, with reports of adolescent boys and young men returning home in “coffins” on an annual basis. The violence occurs along ethnic but primarily intra-regional lines, with adolescent boys from different zones being targeted for the perceived misdeeds of others from their place of origin even from past work seasons (e.g. undercutting the price for daily labouring, engaging in sex work with girls from a rival group’s place of origin).

Adolescent girls face gender-specific risks of their own, starting with near-constant sexual harassment, from factory supervisors and customers. “If she sells tea, it is assumed that she also does another business with her body,” explained an 18-year-old girl now returned to rural South Gondar. “The men were . . . nagging me always,” added an 18 year old girl living in Dire Dawa. Adolescent girls are also at risk of rape, from the brokers who sometimes keep “them as a sex partner” (community key

informant, East Hararghe), the fathers of the children for whom they babysit, the men and boys in the families from whom they rent rooms, “men who drink alcohol” in the community” (19-year old girl, Dire Dawa), and “gangsters” who attack them at night in their own homes (17 year old girl, Debre Tabor).

Adolescent girls are also vulnerable to being tricked into sexual relationships. An 18 year old boy in Debre Tabor reported because it is hard for men who migrate to take their wives with them, a local “tradition” is to look for a local girl who can cook for them. “Her task will not be just cooking, it may change in the night”. An 18 year old girl living in Dire Dawa admitted that she had been fooled by a man who professed love. “I got married to a man who was telling me he had fallen in love with me. We started living together and suddenly I got pregnant. I came to know that he has a wife already.”

While girls in commercial sex work earn more than girls in many other professions, with a young sex worker in Batu observing that she makes in a single day what she used to make in a month as a domestic worker, threats to migrant girls’ bodily integrity grow exponentially when they are engaged in sex work. Young sex workers reported that they are exposed on a daily basis to verbal, physical and sexual violence. Girls reported that even young adolescent boys in Batu throw stones at their homes and hurl insults. “And there is beating. Beating was like our meal. They beat us because they are drunk. They displace their anger and worries on us,” explained an 18 year old girl living in Dire Dawa. Another 17 year old girl in that city observed that the constant threat of rape when she was younger and first entering the profession had left her terrified. “We used to sleep near the police station when we were young. We do not sleep well, since we sleep on street. We were afraid whenever we heard a sound.” The police, added a 17 year old girl, are all too often not a source of protection. “Sometimes we are also beaten by police. This is because they (customers) report to police that we have taken something from them. There are some who want to take back the money after sex.”

Migrant adolescents have also been impacted by the outbreak of ethnic violence and forced displacement in 2017/2018, which saw up to 1 million Oromos displaced from their homes in the Somali region (GoE and UN 2018). Our respondents in rural East



Hararghe included several dozen ethnic Oromos who had been living and working in Somali due to better job opportunities, but had been evacuated by the Oromia regional government in 2017 due to an explosion of violence that degenerated into widespread targeting of ethnic Oromo migrants.<sup>8</sup> A 10-year-old girl tearfully explained that “the neighbours with whom we ate and lived together for many years took our clothes and our money.” An 18 year old adolescent boy reported, “They sent adolescent males like us in order to take Oromo people. These adolescents had metal sticks and they took us from house by hitting us. There were individuals who were severely harmed.” A 13-year-old boy added, “the Somali young adolescents threw young boys on the street and jumped on their heads. I also observed that in some places the villages where the Oromos lived were burned and some people were burned together with their houses.”

Migrant girls affected by the recent Oromo-Somali conflict were subject not only to physical violence, but also sexual violence. Several respondents reported that they had seen girls’ and women’s breasts badly cut – and knew of victims who had died after being sexually tortured. As an NGO key informant from Community I, East Hararghe noted: “We did an assessment among displaced [persons] that live in [neighboring districts]. We observed a lot of abuses there against females that have been raped by many males. An 11-year-old girl was raped by many males, after the rape they cut her breast and sex organ with a sharp object. She has been getting treatment at the hospital.”

## **Health Risks**

Adolescent migrants also face a variety of health risks. Some, especially the young adolescent boys in Zone 5 who migrate on their own with livestock, are poorly nourished. “We have no food with us. We have only cattle,” explained an 11-year-old boy. “We are living in a forest, so we couldn’t get another choice except to drink milk,” added a 12-year-old boy. Food insecurity was also

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the inter-ethnic violence that resulted in mass displacement of ethnic Oromos from the Somali region is complex and here we are reporting adolescents’ testimonies from East Hararghe only given our research sample. More detail on the displacement context can be found here: GoE and UN 2018.

reported by a handful of urban migrants. While domestic workers are most likely to be “denied access to food” (12 year old boy, Batu), other adolescents are at risk because extortionate rents have broken their budgets. “I simply go without food,” explained an 18-year-old boy living in Batu when asked how he made ends meet.

Injuries and illnesses are also common. For example, a 19-year-old returnee boy in rural South Gondar reported that boys “fall from buildings . . . and die during construction work” in Addis. In Batu, adolescents who worked in the floriculture industry reported chemical exposure. “I fear that the chemical may affect my health. Sometimes the chemical from the flowers is sprinkled on my hand when I use my hands. Even if they see you staggering between death and life, there is no one to support you at the workplace,” reported a 17-year-old girl. Malaria and typhus are also increasingly common according to our respondents – the former among adolescents who migrate to lowland areas such as Humera and Metema and the latter in urban destinations where some areas are “now used as a toilet” due to population pressures (community key informant, Dire Dawa). That same population growth has created a large “burden on social services and infrastructural facilities” (Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BOLSA) key informant, Dire Dawa) that means that prevention and treatment are often out of reach. “The parents are forced to expend money to take back their children,” explained a father in rural South Gondar.

Substance use was also identified as a significant threat to the health of young migrants, particularly for boys for whom use is a way of demonstrating social status. Alcohol, cigarettes, hashish, and *khat* were almost universally presented as a problem, with a 16 year old secondary school girl from Dire Dawa observing that they are often intertwined. “After you chew *khat* during the day, it is a must to go out in the evening for something to drink.” A father in Zone 5 (Afar) noted that secondary students in that region now consider substance use “as a sign of sophistication.” In Dire Dawa, young migrants agreed that substance use is a problem. They reported glue sniffing is common amongst street-connected children, who often become violent “and fight with any one that passes by that area” and admit that they often cannot save money because “we are addicted to substances” (19-year-old girl).

While health centres in some urban areas work closely with NGOs such as Care-Ethiopia to provide services to young migrants (Maternal and Child Health key informant, Debre Tabor), the risks to young migrants' sexual and reproductive health remain significant and their access to services is extremely limited. They are "highly vulnerable to reproductive health problems including unwanted pregnancy, abortion and HIV/AIDs," explained a health extension worker in Debre Tabor. Commercial sex workers, "temporary wives"<sup>9</sup>, and mistresses are the most at risk - of both pregnancy and HIV - due to the nature of their relationships. In Dire Dawa, a nurse reported that sex workers are entitled to a free abortion, but only one. "This is done to prevent her coming again with the same case." A migrant girl attending secondary school in Dire Dawa observed that because "there is difference in payment when the commercial sex workers use condom and have sex without condom," HIV is rampant amongst sex workers<sup>10</sup>. Boys are also at risk, because so many "develop adulterous behaviour" when they migrate (justice sector key informant, South Gondar). Even if they are aware of the risks, added a 16-year-old boy in Batu, "I don't know whether they are taking care of themselves [using condoms] when they get drunk."

### **Psychosocial Risks**

"Everything becomes scary when you live outside your homeland," observed a 17 year old adolescent girl living in Batu. In addition to worries about violence, worries about costs loomed large for many of the adolescent migrants in our sample. "Here there is a different thing that makes us worry such as house rent payment, what I will eat and drink in the future," explained an 18 year old adolescent girl in Debre Tabor. "There is not enough budget (for them to meet expenses)," added a Youth and Sports Bureau key informant in Zone 5 (Afar) when asked what stresses adolescents face when they move town to study.

Social isolation is also a threat to many adolescent migrants. Several noted that their host "community didn't have a positive

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<sup>9</sup> Our research has found that girls often agree (or are forced by their parents to agree) to becoming the "wives" of migrants on a time-limited basis, to satisfy migrant men's sexual needs and keep house for them (see e.g. Jones et al., 2018).

<sup>10</sup> PEPFAR (2017) reports that 24% of commercial sex workers in Ethiopia are HIV+/- compared to 1.2% of the general population.

attitude to migrants” (17 year old adolescent girl, Debre Tabor), in part due to wage suppression, and others observed that it can be difficult to form friendships even with other migrants. A 15 year old adolescent boy living in Dire Dawa reported that he lived with six other boys but knows nothing about them, other than that they too are migrants. “I am not asking their whereabouts and we don’t have discussions.” Other young migrants choose to live alone, because they cannot “live in peace . . . due to status differences” such as family wealth or ethnic and religious differences (17-year-old boy, Debre Tabor). Given the cost of transportation and the time it takes to travel to rural areas, adolescent migrants are also commonly cut off from parental support for extended periods of time. “There is no transportation to the area. That is why it is too hard to go there and meet my parents,” explained a 17-year-old girl living in Debre Tabor.

In addition to facing social isolation while they are migrating, adolescent girls can face considerable stigma when they return home. “The community isolates her,” reported a 17-year-old boy studying in Debre Tabor. “If I went some time away from this area and changed my clothing style, everybody assumes I changed my life because I was having a relationship with a man. They don’t like women who go and stay in the city,” explained a 12-year-old girl from rural South Gondar. Girls who become pregnant can find that they have no home to return to. “My neighbour’s daughter was rejected by her family. She had nowhere to go,” reported a mother living in Debre Tabor.

Migrant girls also tend to feel more responsibility towards their families than migrant boys. A community key informant in Batu explained, “It is uncommon for males to change the livelihood of their parents. But the females . . . for instance, they improve the housing condition of their household from a thatched roof to a tin roof residence or help their family members to start their own mini-income-generating activities.” A 15-year-old girl in Batu added that because girls only “get satisfied when they see their parents become happy,” they are willing to tolerate considerable risk – including engaging in commercial sex work.

### **Educational Risks**

Although migration allows some young migrants to pursue education by funding the cost of supplies or facilitating access to secondary school (or special needs education in the case of adolescents with disabilities), for most migration marks the end of schooling. Some drop out in order to migrate. A 15-year-old girl living in Batu reported that she had been enrolled for the next term and had already purchased supplies – but ran away over her parents’ protestations because at the time money seemed more important than education. She very much regrets her actions now. “I just dropped out of school. I was prepared to start a class even before I bought exercise books. My friend told me that if I go to Batu, I can get 1,000 birr per month. My family was urging me that I should go home in order to continue my education. But I didn’t listen. . . . I am regretful for that.”

Even for adolescent migrants planning to combine work and education, reality often intervenes. Some are refused permission to enrol, or are forced to start again in first grade, because they “lost the grade report” needed for proper placement (18 year old adolescent boy, Batu). Others find that the city is so expensive, they must work more than they anticipated, leaving them no time for education. A 15 year old adolescent boy in Batu, who is working in road construction, explained that while he had tried to combine work and school, he “couldn’t get time to attend my education . . . I dropped out of my education from grade four.” An 11-year-old girl in Debre Tabor noted that her older sister had faced an analogous problem: “She dropped out of school in grade six, when she was not able to combine schooling with work.” Migrant girls are further disadvantaged in terms of combining work and education by sexual harassment – as night school is not “convenient because of the boys” (18-year-old formerly migrating girl, South Gondar). A BOLSA key informant in Dire Dawa admitted that efforts to help young migrants pursue education are nearly non-existent. “So far, there was no any attempt in this regard . . . It actually needs strong attention by stakeholders.”

## **Voice and Agency Risks**

Migration can represent independent decision-making in its own right when adolescents choose to migrate of their own volition. However, adolescent migrants typically face a variety of risks to their voice and agency. While the majority of those risks are driven more by poverty, age, and gender than by migration, in some cases threats are directly linked to the types of employment that young migrants undertake. Domestic workers, for example, have limited labour rights: the 2003 Labour Law (as amended) excludes domestic workers from its sphere of application other than promising that a special regulation will be issued at some point in the future (Gebremedhin, 2016). In addition, while employees in the floriculture industry reported that in some ways their rights are protected – with one 17-year-old girl in Batu observing “My supervisor cannot fire me from my work because she has no such right” – in other ways factory work is silencing young migrants. Toilet breaks, for example, are timed and silence on the factory floor is strictly enforced. Young migrants also reported that although health clinics are available at some factories, workers are not given information when they seek care. As 17-year-old migrant girl in Batu explained: “If you have problems on your body from the chemical and go to seek medical examination, they do not tell you the illness and just give you expired pills and syrup”.

## **Conclusions**

Our research findings highlight that in many cases Ethiopian adolescent girls and boys are “choosing” to migrate because they perceive no other viable options. Simultaneously pushed and pulled into undertaking risky endeavours with limited, and often false, information, they often find themselves vulnerable to a range of risks with very little support. To help mitigate those risks, and help adolescents use migration to improve, rather than restrict, their access to their human rights as outlined in the Global Compact on Migration, our research suggests a number of key policy and programming entry points.

First, greater efforts need to be made to promote safe migration at scale. In sending communities, the government and development partners should work through schools, youth associations, and government-organised ‘1:5 group’ community structures (which while politicised have the advantage of near universal penetration) to ensure that young people and their caregivers know their rights,

understand the risks that migration entails, and are aware of how and from whom to seek help should they need it.

Second, in destination communities, youth centres and BOLSA offices could usefully become one-stop information and referral centres for young migrants at risk. This could include provision of information about migrant labour rights to ensure that they recognise violations and know how to report them, and also include links to the services that can help reduce age- and gender-related vulnerabilities, such as healthcare, non-formal education, TVET, legal aid and social work and counselling services.

Third, the federal government should revise labour legislation in line with UN Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers to grant domestic workers equal labour rights, and all levels of government should work to eradicate broker chains and ensure that newly established industrial parks respect national labour law in regard to age limits and working conditions.

Finally, there is an urgent need for better data to inform programming. Migrant flows need to be better tracked, with data disaggregated by age and sex, in order to understand where services are needed to realise the rights for all migrants, including adolescent girls and boys.

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