



Lived realities of sustained liberation  
for survivors of trafficking in  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Authors: Emily Brady and Andrea Nicholson



University of  
**Nottingham**  
Rights Lab



## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Dr Emily Brady and Dr Andrea Nicholson at the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, and commissioned by the Freedom Fund. Dr Emily Brady is a Teaching Fellow in American History at the University of Leeds, previously Research Fellow in Antislavery Culture, Rights Lab, University of Nottingham. Dr Andrea Nicholson is Associate Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, and a member of the Rights Lab Law & Policy research programme. Dr Deanna Davy (Dawes Senior Research Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University, previously Rights Lab) also contributed significantly to the design and planning of this research.

We are grateful to the team at Addis Ababa University for the data collection in Ethiopia, led by Anchinesh Shiferaw and her team members Kuribachew Hailu, Endalkachew Hailu Guluma, Kiya Gezahegne, and Ghetnet Metiku Woldegiorgis. The research would not have been possible without the guidance and support of civil society leaders in Ethiopia, especially Abera Adeba and Fisseha Melese at AGAR Ethiopia Charitable Society (AGAR), Wondosen Lisanwork at Beza Posterity Development Organisation (BPDO), Mulu Haile at Mission for Community Development Programme (MCDP), and Muluken Shiferaw at Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS). Thanks also to Elizabeth Anderson, Louise Hemfrey, Yuki Lo, Euan Mackay, Sonia Martins, Daniel Melese and Helen Shipman at the Freedom Fund for their guidance into this research.

Finally, a special thanks to all the interviewees in Ethiopia who bravely and honestly shared with us their experiences, both positive and negative, as well as their dreams for the future. This research has been undertaken to improve support to them, and many more courageous individuals like them, to live a dignified life and achieve their aspirations.

**Cover image:** Hana migrated to Lebanon for employment as a domestic worker, where she face exploitation and abuse. She was ultimately paid only two months' salary for two years' work. With support from the Freedom Fund and its partners, Hana returned to Ethiopia where she received housing, counselling, and skills training in hair-dressing. *Photo credit: Genaye Eshatu / The Freedom Fund.*

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## Executive summary

### Background

Many women and girls in Ethiopia work as domestic workers in urban cities as well as abroad, particularly in the Middle East. The conditions faced by women and girls in domestic work are well documented (see Freedom Fund 2019 and Tayah & Atnafu 2016), including harmful working and living conditions, economic exploitation, as well as emotional, physical, and sexual violence – in many cases amounting to human trafficking.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the women and girls who have suffered abuse as domestic workers end up in the care of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and are provided with mental health services, financial support, education, and training, as well as organised into local collectives for mutual support and joint advocacy. The primary aim of these NGO services is to support victims<sup>2</sup> to exit situations of exploitation, aid survivor healing and recovery, and to assist their reintegration into the local community and to live a life free from abuse.

This study set out to assess the reality of liberation as defined and experienced by survivors of human trafficking. The study assessed the situations of survivors one to two years after they had received reintegration support provided by four NGOs in Addis Ababa and Kombolcha: AGAR Ethiopia; Beza Posterity Development Organisation (BPDO); Mission for Community Development Programme (MCDP); and Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS).

### Profile of respondents

Data collection for this study involved 75 semi-structured interviews with survivors of human trafficking, conducted in Addis Ababa and Kombolcha. Participants were all female and included 53 women (age 18 to 49) plus 22 girls (age 13 to 17). All of the participants had experienced human trafficking and/or other severe forms of exploitation, both abroad and within Ethiopia. The women were all returnees who had been formally and informally employed as domestic workers in the Middle East. They reported experiencing intense and deliberate isolation while abroad, with many having their wages withheld or being significantly overworked in poor conditions. All of the girls in the study had served as domestic workers for Ethiopian households, some girls described receiving a wage but the majority did not. They recalled working conditions where verbal abuse, long working hours, and withholding of wages were rife, as well as reporting limited access to schooling.

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<sup>1</sup> For this study, human trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” Based on the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations (UN) Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, the term victims is used to refer to those who may or may not have survived or emerged from human trafficking, or where it relates to criminal processes and the term is specific to the field. The term survivor is used when referring to our participants or those known to have survived or emerged from human trafficking.

## Main findings

**One to two years on, following support from the four NGOs, liberation was a reality for most of the women and girls interviewed.** They highlighted the following elements as core to their conceptions of freedom: for women, stable employment, financial security, and maintaining close ties with families. For girls, conceptions of freedom were primarily concerned with access to education, followed by having close ties with their families, and decent working conditions. Educational activities provided by the NGOs, including integration of out-of-school children into formal education, vocational and livelihood training for women survivors, and raising awareness of migration risks, were seen as crucial by both the girls and women for achieving and maintaining their liberation.

**Although many of the participants would consider themselves liberated, their liberation remains precarious due to ongoing economic and labour instability.** Some of the women indicated that they had considered returning to the Middle East, and many of the girls continued to undertake domestic work, although it wasn't clear if their current work amounts to harmful child labour.<sup>3</sup> While government assistance exists in theory, survivors reported that it was difficult to access - with unfulfilled promises and long wait times being the norm. One to two years post-exploitation, many of the respondents remain reliant on, or expressed a desire for, continued support from NGOs.

**Women survivors described NGO support in the forms of education and training, small start-up grants, and advocating for improved government services as crucial to providing the conditions for sustained liberation.** The study found that training proved a highly effective means of empowering survivors, increasing their chances of earning a higher income and providing them with skills and qualifications that "cannot be stolen or taken away." The formation of collectives—where women are organised into groups for mutual support and income generation—were generally seen as valuable, although there were some alternative views from women who preferred the autonomy of running their own business and felt that their own business offered them better income.

**Girl survivors identified access to education, including evening classes for out-of-school girls as well as wider support to families facing financial difficulties, as highly important for reducing children's chances of facing exploitation.** Many of the girls interviewed were not educated beyond the 2nd grade and saw evening catch-up classes as vital for them to continue their learning alongside work commitments. They also wanted NGOs to assist with school fees and material necessities such as books and pens. The realities of low-income families were also described by the girls, acknowledging that some parents have no other option but to pull their children out of school and into work. To address this, NGOs need to look beyond individual children and support whole families to help improve their financial situation and prevent school dropouts in the first place.

**Support is most effective when aimed at both the community and individual level.** The model of NGOs working closely with survivors to build collectives and strengthen their self-representation is seen as fundamental to reducing the risk of re-trafficking, as well as building survivors' sense of independence. Reintegration and sustained liberation therefore require a more holistic and longer-term approach that builds community resilience, independence, and empowerment.

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<sup>3</sup> There was insufficient data in many cases to judge whether the nature of the work girls were engaged in was harmful or permissive labour under the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). See further the 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences' on child slavery, A/74/179, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (September 2019).

**Structural vulnerabilities also need to be addressed for sustained liberation to be achieved.** Both women and girls highlighted several barriers to their economic stability, including an education system that makes it difficult and costly to complete secondary school or to access higher education, limited market opportunities for decent work, and escalating costs of living. Another key vulnerability is the lack of affordable healthcare. Participants reported illness among wage-earning members of the family as a push factor for their migration, both internally and cross-border. Aside from exploitation by the end employer, the cost of the migration journey itself has also led to the women and girls becoming indebted to agents or other middlemen. These vulnerabilities carry a risk of aggravating poverty and debt induced re-exploitation. As such, the structural factors outlined above need to be considered as part of reintegration interventions.

## Conclusion and key recommendations

Despite legislation and ratification of international treaties relating to human trafficking and child labour, Ethiopian women and girls continue to suffer from forced labour, debt bondage and harmful child labour. Survivors of trafficking need immediate support to exit situations of exploitation as well as longer-term services to complete education and training, secure decent work and achieve financial independence. In addition to interventions that target individuals, community-level investment into survivor-led collectives and self-representation in program and policy decisions are also crucial to survivors' sense of empowerment.

The recommendations highlighted below provide specific guidance for NGOs and policymakers in Ethiopia to prevent women and girl survivors from re-trafficking and increase their chances of achieving sustained liberation.

### For anti-trafficking NGOs

- Lead the development of a vocational training directory that includes referral pathways to a range of courses offered by state, non-profit and private sector actors that can be accessed by survivors of trafficking.
- Support the empowerment and representation of survivors through programs that place survivors into leadership or training roles in NGOs.
- Establish women's returnee groups in communities to engage in local level survivor-led awareness raising on the realities of migration and safer migration options.
- Further assist in removing some of the stigma attached to returnees from the Middle East through educational campaigns and awareness raising in local communities.
- Partner with survivors of trafficking to hold government institutions accountable and improve access to promised services for returnee migrants and other at-risk groups.

### For policy makers

- Strengthen existing working groups under the National Partnership Coalition (NPC) to improve cross-learning between different organisations working with survivors of trafficking.
- Ensure the Ministry of Labor and Skills and related agencies for coordinating migration are properly capacitated and resourced to support the economic reintegration of returnees.
- Ensure domestic workers are included under current Labour Legislation so that they can benefit from basic protection of rights and access legal entitlements.
- Ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention (189), which calls for the support and protection of adult and child domestic workers.
- Increase use of public campaigns to explain official processes for legal migration, including the documents required and the timeline for processes.

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### Acronyms

AGAR	Agar Ethiopia Charitable Society
BOLS	Bureau of Labor and Skills
BMM	Better Migration Management
BPDO	Beza Posterity Development Organisation
EGSECE	Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination
ILO	International Labour Organization
MCDP	Mission for Community Development Programme
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPC	National Partnership Coalition
OPRIFS	Organisation for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Integration of Female Street Children
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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# Background

## Context

Ethiopia functions primarily as a source country for trafficking victims, with the number of Ethiopians experiencing exploitation—within the country and abroad—continuing to increase.<sup>4</sup> The Global Slavery Index estimates the number of victims of human trafficking in Ethiopia as 614,000.<sup>5</sup> The most common form of trafficking in persons tends to be trafficking of domestic and foreign victims, either for sexual exploitation or forced labour in domestic work, traditional weaving, construction, agriculture, or street vending.<sup>6</sup> According to the United Nations there are over 946,000 Ethiopians living abroad, 436,000 female and 510,000 male,<sup>7</sup> with both groups vulnerable to exploitation and abuse while working abroad.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that illegal migration accounts for two-thirds of all transnational migrants.<sup>9</sup>

In 2020, a report by the Better Migration Management (BMM) found that “Ethiopia’s response to trafficking is at a more advanced stage than many other countries in the region.”<sup>10</sup> In terms of survivor support, the Ethiopian Government provides assistance to survivors by training first responders to support survivors and those vulnerable to human trafficking, and “refer[s] vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking to appropriate shelters and improved service providers for legal, medical, and psychosocial support.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, the government provides services in partnership with international organisations and NGOs.

In 2020, Ethiopia had a net migration rate of 0.28 per thousand population, with a net number of migrants as 150,000.<sup>12</sup> However, official figures likely underestimate the phenomenon, as an estimated 60–70 per cent of those emigrating will be irregular migrants.<sup>13</sup> During the period 2020-2021, the flow of migration was affected by the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions. Irregular migration has become prominent, leaving unprotected migrants vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>14</sup> In particular, a ‘feminisation of migration’ has occurred with women from rural areas the more common demographic of migration.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gezie et al. (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Walk Free (2018). *Global Slavery Index*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/regional-analysis/africa/>.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022). *UNODC & Ethiopia Join Forces to End Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/November/unodc-and-ethiopia-join-forces-to-end-trafficking-in-persons-and-smuggling-of-migrants.html>.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Population Division (2020). *International Migrant Stock*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.hopeforchildren.org.au/our-programs/livelihood/anti-human-trafficking/>.

<sup>8</sup> For an example of such treatment, see the Case Study of Ami in Freedom Fund (2021), Ethiopia Hotspot Annual Report 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Gezie et al. (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2022). *Better Migration Management (BMM) programme in Ethiopia*. [Online] Available at: [https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/2020%20BMM%20ETH%20Factsheet\\_EN.pdf](https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/2020%20BMM%20ETH%20Factsheet_EN.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants 2015-2020, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Migration/>; Ethiopia - Net Migration Rate, World Data Atlas [Online]. Available at: <https://knoema.com/atlas/Ethiopia/topics/Demographics/Population/Net-migration-rate>.

<sup>13</sup> Tufa, F. A. (2019) ‘The State, Brokers and Migration in Ethiopia: Can Criminalisation of Brokers Mitigate Irregular Migration? Migrating out of Poverty Policy Brief

<sup>14</sup> Adunga, G. (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Zewdu, G. A. (2017).

## Summary of project and aims

The sustained liberation project was initially led by Dr Andrea Nicholson and Dr Deanna Davy of the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham. In October 2020, they shared their findings from the initial strand of this project, which gathered survivors' perspectives from 88 participants in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India.<sup>16</sup> The extension of this research to Ethiopia adopted the same methods and aims. Data was gathered by researchers at the Addis Ababa University (Anchinesh Shiferaw and Kuribachew Hailu) through 83 semi-structured interviews, 75 with survivors of human trafficking in Addis Ababa, Gofa, and Kombolcha. The central aim of the study was to explore whether survivors are achieving sustained liberation after approximately two years of NGO reintegration support.

The study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What does 'sustained liberation' mean for survivors of human trafficking? What are the different dimensions of freedom and what do they view as most important?
2. What are the typical journeys for survivors following their liberation? To what extent do they achieve the desired forms of freedom and what are the main challenges? What proportion of survivors have re-entered situations of exploitation?
3. Which integration services seemed to have the greatest effect on achieving sustained liberation? Does this differ among sub-groups?
4. Are there service gaps, with the benefit of hindsight, that should have been made available to survivors?
5. What are the recommendations for service providers, policymakers and donors to improve the reintegration of survivors?

This project aims to contribute towards the nascent body of evidence on survivors' outcomes following liberation and builds on other similar studies with survivors of sex trafficking in Northern India, Nepal, and Cambodia.<sup>17</sup> The study will be followed by a comparative report of the findings from the India and Ethiopia research projects.

As part of this study, the research team interviewed survivors who had experienced exploitation in the following countries: Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Beirut, and Kuwait. All of the 53 women in this project had travelled to the Middle East for domestic labour. These women travelled through a variety of channels, including regular and irregular means, and entered potentially higher paying informal work after having initially arrived for formal work. Migration was often a considerable expense, as they had to secure passports and pay agency or broker fees. To cover broker or agency costs/fees, they borrowed money from family or paid part or all of their wages to the broker or agency.

In addition, 22 girls were also interviewed as part of this research. Of the girls interviewed, all of them were still engaged in some sort of work alongside their NGO-provided schooling. Data from 2015 shows that children are more likely to be

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholson, A. and Davy, D. (2020) 'The Lived Realities of Sustained Liberation in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India: An Evaluation of Survivor Experiences – Summary Report', University of Nottingham Rights Lab and Freedom Fund.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid; Freedom Fund (2018) Pathways for children to exit commercial sexual exploitation in Kathmandu, Evidence in practice, at 3; Chab Dai, Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project: <https://chabdai.org/butterfly>; Dahal, P., Joshi, S. K., and Swahnberg, K. (2015), "We are looked down upon and rejected socially": a qualitative study on the experiences of trafficking survivors in Nepal', *Global Health Action*, 8, 1, 29267.



in school (79.9% in school, 59.5% working) until the age of 11. Thereafter, employment increases while education drops.<sup>18</sup> This is in part due to the structure of education in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE), which was functional when many of the survivors were in school, dictates that if a student fails to score at least the minimum passing point in national examination administered at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade (age 15-16), the student will not be promoted to a second cycle secondary education/preparatory level. Such an educational framework risks leaving behind those who do not perform well in exams.

The research was conducted during the covid-19 pandemic. As of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2021, Ethiopia had seen 277,959 cases, with 4,360 deaths.<sup>19</sup> This not only had a significant impact on the ability of the field researchers to travel but the research also revealed the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on participants. World Bank surveys reveal that more than half of households in Ethiopia reported that their incomes were either reduced or hard totally disappeared in April 2020, with female-headed households being hit hardest.<sup>20</sup> One aspect of this is that domestic work, which tends to be carried out by women, saw a collapse in demand due to fears of bringing people with covid-19 into the home. Furthermore, many women, including some in this study, rely on the small trade of fruits and vegetables, selling produce on the side of the road.<sup>21</sup> With the closure and restrictions of markets, they have not been able to sell their produce and goods. This had a significant impact on the livelihoods of the women interviewed as part of this study.

Women account for 60% of the informal sector for all age cohorts, with high illiteracy levels and low educational levels. The mean informal sector income amounts to 336 Ethiopian Birr (7.60 US dollars) at the lower end of the scale and 3,392 Ethiopian Birr (76.60 US dollars) at the higher end.<sup>22</sup>

## Legal and policy framework in Ethiopia

Sex trafficking and labour trafficking are criminalised in Ethiopia. The Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Proclamation (No. 909/2015) prescribes penalties of 15 to 25 year's imprisonment and a fine. This fine differs between whether the victims were men (150,000 to 300,000 Ethiopian Birr, equivalent to 3,385 to 6,771 US dollars) or women or children (200,000 to 500,000 Ethiopian Birr, equivalent to 4,514 to 11,285 US dollars). Licensed labour recruitment agencies are governed by the Overseas Employment Proclamation (No. 923/2016 and amendment 1246/2021), which imposes penalties for an employment agency's failure to comply with its provisions. In April 2020, the government enacted Proclamation 1178/2020, a Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Persons. This mandates funding for the government's anti-trafficking activities and addressed organisational and coordination challenges between government agencies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> UNICEF Ethiopia, CSA and C4ED (2020) Child Labour Analysis in Ethiopia 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Ethiopia, Worldometer [Online]. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/ethiopia/>.

<sup>20</sup> One study found that 8% of survey respondents lost their jobs at the beginning of the outbreak: job losses were higher in urban (20%) than rural (3%), and higher for women (13%) than men (6%). These figures have since rebounded, although they remain higher than they were. Dione, O. (2020) Tackling the impacts of covid-19 is imperative to Ethiopia's journey to prosperity, World Bank Blogs [Online]. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/african/tackling-impacts-covid-19-imperative-ethiopia-journey-prosperity>.

<sup>21</sup> Oxford Policy Management (2020) The Impact of covid-19 and Movement Restrictions on the poor and vulnerable groups in Ethiopia.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank (2007) Urban Labour Markets in Ethiopia Challenges and Prospects, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit Africa Region, 73, 83.

<sup>23</sup> President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1178-2020, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons.; Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021.

In terms of child labour, Ethiopia has ratified both the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138/1999) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No.182/1999).<sup>24</sup> The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child defines a 'child' as every human being under the age of 18 years.<sup>25</sup> Article 89(2) of the Labour Proclamation (No. 377/2003) prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 and provides for a number of restrictions relating to conditions and work for those between ages 14 and 17. A further factor in Ethiopia's levels of child labour is that compulsory schooling ends at age 12. In rural areas facilities are often thinly spread and there are wide disparities between the poorest and richest children, especially at the primary level.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout Ethiopia's education system there is a significant gender disparity in the percentage of girls accessing education compared to boys, and the disparity increases as the level of education progresses.<sup>27</sup> The gender disparity in favour of boys is partly due to wider favouritism of boys and perceptions about earning potential,<sup>28</sup> with parents less likely to prioritise girls' education, instead engaging girls in household chores or marrying them off early.<sup>29</sup> This study did not reveal any instances of child and early marriage, but did find that women had been obstructed in their pursuit of education and that many children were having to access education through NGOs to accommodate ongoing domestic work.

### Civil society response

A number of NGOs in Ethiopia are providing reintegration support to survivors of trafficking in persons. Through community outreach, NGOs identify survivors, returnees, and those still in situations of exploitation. These NGOs then support the survivors in a variety of ways including organising into survivor collectives, providing education and training, raising awareness, financial aid, and material support. The organisation AGAR Ethiopia also provides shelter for women and girls. While many survivors of trafficking have been liberated and supported as a result of such NGO intervention, little is known about the duration of reintegration support, what reintegration activities are most effective, what the gaps and challenges are for survivors in accessing support, and, most importantly, whether survivors have achieved sustained liberation.

This research therefore set out to address current gaps in knowledge and understanding through an exploration of whether survivors are achieving sustained liberation (freedom from trafficking) after approximately two years of NGO reintegration support. The study, through analysis of data collected through 75 semi-structured interviews with women and girl survivors of human trafficking, explores the support provided by NGOs to the survivors, their pathways to sustained liberation, survivors' perceptions regarding the services that have most helped them, and the ongoing gaps and challenges in receiving services and achieving sustained liberation. This report provides recommendations to NGOs working in the field of providing support to survivors of human trafficking, as well as broader recommendations to policymakers and the Government of Ethiopia.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 2.

<sup>26</sup> Education System in Ethiopia, Scholaro Pro, [Online]. Available at: <https://www.scholaro.com/pro/Countries/Ethiopia/Education-System>.

<sup>27</sup> Asfaw, A. (2012) 'Gender Inequalities in Tertiary Education in Ethiopia: Mediating the Transition to University through the Development of Adaptive Competencies', Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution.

<sup>28</sup> World Bank (2012) World Development Report 2012: 'Gender Equality and Development,' The World Bank.

<sup>29</sup> Plan International (2012), 'Because I am a Girl: The state of the world's girls'.



Askale attends a graduation ceremony for a vocational skills program managed by Freedom Fund partner AGAR Ethiopia Charitable Society in Addis Ababa.  
Photo: Genaye Eshetu / The Freedom Fund

# Methodology

## Study design

This study assessed the realities of survivors’ lives following exploitation and reintegration support provided by four NGOs in Addis Ababa and Kombolcha: AGAR Ethiopia Charitable Society (AGAR); Beza Posterity Development Organisation (BPDO); Mission for Community Development Programme (MCDP); and Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS).

Initial project design was undertaken by the Freedom Fund and the University of Nottingham. This project was first implemented in India, with findings shared in October 2020. Research in Ethiopia was delayed due to the covid-19 pandemic. Field researchers from Addis Ababa University met with AGAR, MCDP, OPRIFS and BPDO. The group carried out consultation, tested interview guides, established age brackets for interview guides, and discussed and approved ethical considerations and measures. The consultation was followed by field visits in Addis Ababa, Gofa, and Kombolcha, to meet individuals in communities supported by the NGOs.

Audio-recorded interviews were undertaken by the data collection and transcription team over a period of five months, with concurrent coding and analysis undertaken by the University of Nottingham over four months. Coding and interviews took place during the same research period to enable ongoing assessment of interviews and discuss emergent findings. Evaluation timelines were as follows:

Preparatory activities			Data collection activities		
Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Dec 2020	Jan - May 2021	Feb - May 2021	May – Dec 2021
Finalisation of research questions, design and ethical protocol.	Amendments to field instruments, translation of consent forms into Amharic, finalise ethics and approval.	Field visit with NGOs. Consultation and test of interview guides, discussion of ethics, sample criteria, and research protocols.	Data collection and tracking.	Transcription and data coding.	Data analysis, report writing and review by the Freedom Fund.

## Evaluation team

Preparatory team	Data collection and transcription team
1. Andrea Nicholson (University of Nottingham)	1. Anchinesh Shiferaw (Addis Ababa University)
2. Deanna Davy (University of Nottingham)	2. Kuribachew Hailu (Addis Ababa University)
3. Emily Brady (University of Nottingham)	3. Endalkachew Hailu Guluma (Arba Minch University)
4. Anchinesh Shiferaw (Addis Ababa University)	4. Kiya Gezahegne (Addis Ababa University)
5. Wondosen Lisanwork (BPDO)	5. Ghetnet Metiku Woldegiorgis
6. Abera Adeba (AGAR)	
7. Fisseha Melese (AGAR)	
8. Muluken Shiferaw (OPRIFS)	
9. Mulu Haile (MCDP)	
10. Euan Mackay (The Freedom Fund)	
11. Yuki Lo (The Freedom Fund)	

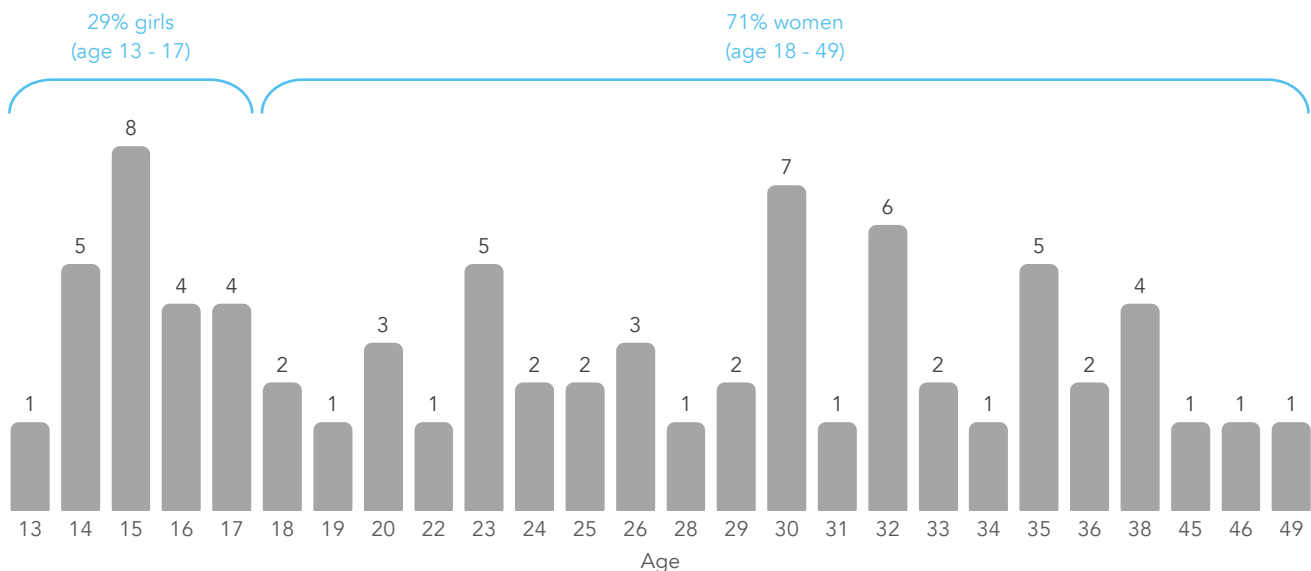
## Recruitment of participants

Participants were survivors of human trafficking who were one to two years post-exploitation. The sample was not restricted to those who had experienced trafficking in their locality, and participants had experienced trafficking in both the Middle East and within Ethiopia.

Despite efforts to establish equal gender representation in the sample throughout the research period, participation was 100% women and girls, as the partner organisations selected for this study primarily focus on children and women. This is not to say that men and boys are not exploited and trafficked in Ethiopia. Rather, the programming work of the participant organisations primarily serves women. The nature of exploitation in Ethiopia is in itself gendered, as the majority of women and girls are exploited while undertaking domestic work such as housekeeping, cooking, and childcare. Migration is often conducted with contracted labour focusing on this kind of domestic work, frequently resulting in exploitation upon the worker's arrival in the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> The participant NGO OPRIFS was established to work specifically with girl street children. Given the gendered nature of the crisis, it is possible that there may be greater financial support from donors on this issue, further motivating NGOs to work with women returnees.

In total, 83 women and girls participated in semi-structured interviews for this study. However, interview analysis identified that eight participants did not meet the definition of trafficking<sup>31</sup> and the data from the remaining 75 interviews was analysed. 53 (71%) of the analysed cohort were women aged 18 years and above and 22 (29%) were girls under 18 years of age.

Participants' age (N = 83)



<sup>30</sup> Asfaw, M. B. and Mekonen, K. D. (2016).

<sup>31</sup> The definition of trafficking used in this report is outlined on page i in the Executive Summary.

## Informed consent

While conducting prior research in India, the research team was advised that payment for participation would undermine efforts to support individuals to independence on which many of the NGO support strategies were founded. After discussion with the participant NGOs in Ethiopia, the same conclusion was reached for this project, but survivors were reimbursed for travel expenses to attend interviews at NGO offices. Participants were therefore invited to participate on an unremunerated basis, and it was explained from the outset that their participation was entirely voluntary. Survivors were also reassured that their decision whether to participate would not affect their relationship with the NGO. Informed consent was obtained for all women and girls at the start of each interview and confirmed a second time post-interview (Appendix B). Participants and NGOs were informed of the interview questions prior to the interview to ensure that none of the questions would lead to a problematic disclosure of personal or sensitive information. Participants were informed about confidentiality and were assured that no personal identifying information would be recorded or would be used in this report. Only research personnel had access to the qualitative data collected for the study.

Prior to fieldwork, the study methodology, information and consent forms, and interview guides were reviewed and granted approval by an ethics committee at the University of Nottingham, and subsequent separate ethical approval was received from the four participant NGOs.



A social worker interviews a young woman who was recently deported from Saudi Arabia amid the covid-19 crisis. The information she gathers is critical to provide support to returning migrants. Photo credit: UNICEF Ethiopia / Nahom Tesfaye

## Data collection and analysis

NGO data was used to identify individuals falling within the sample criteria. Participants were then selected by NGOs to represent child and adult age groups and sex up to a maximum of 100 individuals in total. Participants were recruited to participate in the study by the NGO supporting them. They were provided with information regarding the study via an information form and a consent form prior to the interview. Interviews were performed by qualified researchers from the Addis Ababa University who conducted the interviews in Amharic. The interviews were conducted at various sites that survivors and NGOs deemed safe, including schools, marketplaces, homes, and NGO offices. Girls were not accompanied by parents as they lived in their employers' homes and several no longer had living or contactable relatives, but their teachers acted as guardians, with both teachers and girls themselves consenting. Intelligent verbatim transcription<sup>32</sup> of all audio recordings was carried out into English. Participants were anonymised on transcription, with code numbers allocated to each transcript.

Adult and children interview respondents were asked a series of semi-structured questions using interview guides adapted to the age of the participant (Appendix A). As the partner organisations to this study primarily focus on children and women, 100% of participants were women and girls. In total, 75 interviews were conducted with women and girl survivors, of which 29.3% were girls. The study was designed for survivors from eight years of age with two separate questionnaires depending on age. The youngest participant in this study was 13 years of age and the oldest study participant was 49 years of age.

During data analysis, simultaneous coding was undertaken by the authors, with core themes extracted and decisions made on exclusion. In the few instances that the interviewer had indirectly provided examples of potential answers, which led to imitation from interviewees, those answers were excluded from analysis. Full thematic coding was then undertaken with subsequent meta coding through qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12.

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<sup>32</sup> Intelligent verbatim transcription captures what is said, rather than how it is said. It removes all repeated words, and fillers (such as 'erm'), while leaving the rest of the content intact and as stated.

# Results

## Profile of participants

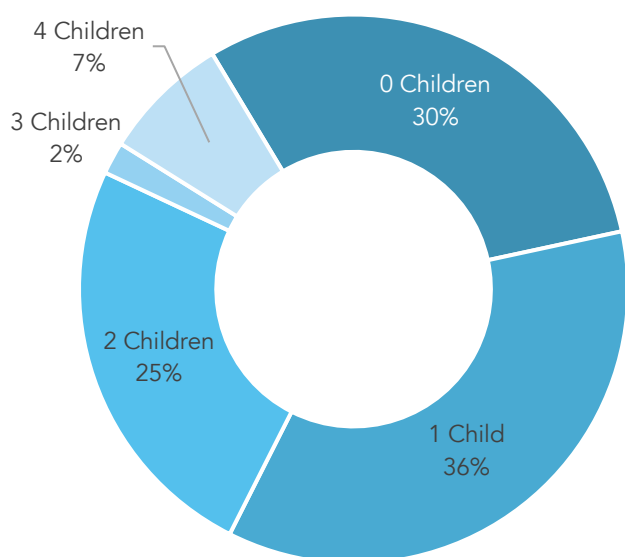
While the aim of the study was to identify survivors who were one to three years post-NGO support, the participating NGOs were no longer in contact with survivors three years post-support. Participants in this study were therefore one to two years post-support, with the majority receiving support during 2018 or 2019. At the time of interview, 100% of the girls interviewed between ages 13 to 17 years were still engaged in some level of employment, ranging from light domestic work to severely exploitative work. The girls interviewed were attending a school program provided by an NGO, with classes taking place for two hours in the afternoon outside of their domestic work.

Participants were from three locations: Addis Ababa, Gofa, and Kombolcha. Interview sites were identified by NGOs following consultation with participants. Privacy was ensured during the interviews by inviting the participants and the NGOs to identify sites where the interview could be conducted safely. AGAR interviews took place in survivors' homes. Women survivors from BPDO and OPRIFS were interviewed in the NGOs' offices, and the girls interviewed from OPRIFS were interviewed at the NGO's schools, with consent secured from the children and their guardians.

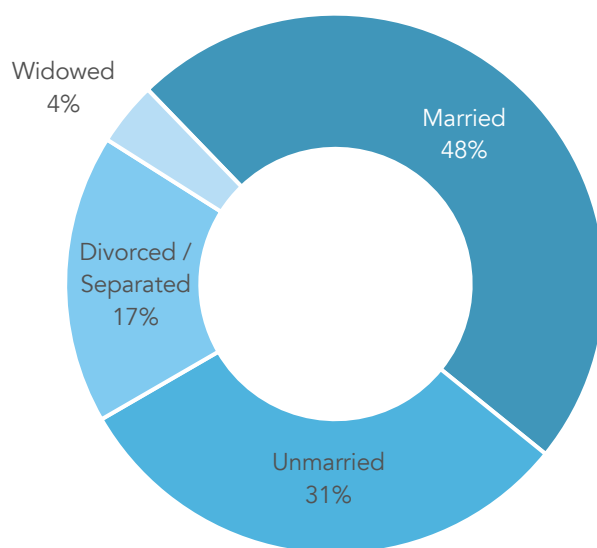
### Family size

Most of the women reported living with their immediate and/or extended families, which varied in size. The majority of women interviewed were married. However, the girls that participated reported living in households where they were also employed as paid or unpaid domestic workers. None of the girls were married or had their own children.

Women: Number of child dependents



Relationship status of women





## Education levels

The education level of interviewees varied significantly and varied between adults and children. The adults interviewed mostly had an education level of 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade (15-16 years old). Two women interviewed had never attended school. Girls tended to have a lower education level, with 45.5% only educated to a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level (eight years old).

Adult women commonly reported that the Ethiopian school structure excluded them from higher education. Where women had performed poorly in national examinations, they were unable to proceed with their education. Of the 51 women interviewed in this study, only one had an education level of 10+1—the completion of secondary education plus one year's training for a teaching certificate. Another had a level of 10+3—the completion of secondary education plus a three-year training program to earn a diploma in primary education. Frequently, women were discouraged from pursuing education after scoring below the required score in the Ethiopian General School Leaving Certificate Examination, which left them vulnerable to trafficking (see further page 21).

## Employment

Almost all the women interviewed in this study were exploited through domestic labour. Many women migrated abroad, mostly commonly to the Middle East, and the girls travelled to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia with the expectation of working as a maid in a household. Most were engaged in some form of domestic work including cleaning, cooking, or caring for children or elderly relatives. They travelled with the intention of doing domestic work and subsequently experienced exploitative labour practices including withheld wages or unpaid work, extreme working hours, lack of breaks, social isolation, and undiscussed additional labour, such as working in multiple households, or being forced to take on additional labour such as cooking or caring for elderly relatives.

Post-support, 78.7% of all participants in this study were employed at the time of interview, accounting for 100% of girls and 69.8% of women. For women, this included working in NGO-organised bakeries through MCDP or BPDO, or as market sellers. Nearly a third were seeking employment or raising children at home. Of the girls, all but one continued to work as a domestic servant within households in Addis Ababa. The remaining girl worked at her aunt's market stall. Nineteen women reported being in a situation of minimal income, stating they received 20-50 Ethiopian Birr / 0.42-1 US dollars a day or that they received no income. Nine girls reported receiving 350-400 Ethiopian Birr / 7.14-8.16 US dollars a month with the exception of three girls who received 1,100-1,200 Ethiopian Birr / 20.39-24.47 US dollars a month.

## Shelter

The majority of women were living in rented accommodation with their families. Many women stated that home ownership was of foundational importance to their conceptions of freedom, and that paying rent was one of their primary anxieties. The girls interviewed tended to live wherever they worked, whether that be with family or with their employers.

## Exploitation profiles

### Girls

Girls were lured into exploitation from rural areas, via family connections, neighbours, and brokers. Some sought employment themselves in order to support their families, while others were promised an education and were instead put to work in households in Addis Ababa.



*"We believed that it would probably be better than the rural life looking at our friends that had come earlier when they returned to visit their family. We left our family and came here to escape the challenging rural life and to live a better life here." (Girl, 17)*



*"My parents do not have a good life. They live in poverty. I came here to work and support them." (Girl, 17)*

Once in an exploitative situation, the subsequent treatment of girls by their employers differed. Some were denied all wages and others had their wages sent to their families without their consent. Most reported enduring verbal harassment or regular arguments about workload with their employers.



*"I work as a house maid and they say the workload is not that much, so they pay me only 200 Birr, but they don't pay me on time. I don't have a mother and father in the countryside. I have only one brother and he is in the countryside. I don't want to take my salary. I want to send it to my brother in the countryside, but I don't get my salary on time. I wash a lot of clothes. There are four children that I take care of. I am the only housemaid in the house. [...] When my employers come from outside, they ask me about what I did all day. When I tell them what I did, they say to me 'you haven't done anything or cooked any food.' They want me to cook three types of meal/dishes. They don't want one type only. I don't sleep well. The children go to school, so I have to cook for them. They won't allow me to go to school too. They haven't paid me my salary for two years." (Girl, 14)*

All of the interviewed girls reported that they were still engaged in domestic labour which impacted their ability to attend school or otherwise pursue full-time education. Their primary source of education was through the school run by the NGO OPRIFS for two hours a day in the evening. The work they continued to be engaged in ranged from light housework or work that was paid, to more exploitative situations in which children were overworked, wages withheld, and where children experienced abuse from their employers.

### Women

The recruitment and exploitation of women commonly occurred when they were young women, frequently living in rural locations with large families. Significant vulnerability factors included family pressure, poverty, lack of education, and a wish for a better life, frequently inspired by people who migrated and returned successfully. This is consistent with other scholarship that indicates that gender, "household wealth quintile, smuggling status, exposure to seductive information about overseas life, risk-opportunity imbalance before departure, and feeling hopelessness for success at home were

among the factors associated with human trafficking.<sup>33</sup> The impact of witnessing successful migrants returning to Ethiopia from the Middle East cannot be understated—these women frequently became aspirational figures, proving particularly enticing to younger women.



*"We Ethiopians are fooled. When I saw other women who returned back from Middle East dressing well, looking glamorous, having money and having changed their life, I said "I should go and work there and earn money for raising my children, sending my children to better school and leading a better life." However, what you thought before going there and what you get after going there are not the same. When you return back to your country, what awaits you is a bad situation." (Woman, 30)*

Women travelled to the Middle East via a broker, families, or friends, and used both regular and irregular means. Some women were unable to obtain passports, either due to cost, delays, age, or an inability to travel to make the arrangements. Where age was a barrier, they either lied about their age to gain legitimate paperwork or sought alternative, riskier means of travel. Anxieties around paperwork and passports were consistent throughout interviews, as survivors encountered difficulties getting and keeping passports. Many had their documentation taken and held by their employers or brokers in the Middle East to prevent them from running away. Some interviewees reported that their passports were still with their exploiters, with one indicating it was the broker in Ethiopia that retained her passport:



*"Before the training, I had even given my passport to a broker and my passport is still with him." (Woman, 23)*



*"At that time, the passport issuing authority does not issue passport for those under 25. Therefore, I added some years on my real age and applied for passport saying that I was 27 years old when I was actually under 25." (Woman, 30)*



*"My employer kept my passport in her bag. I couldn't take it." (Woman, 32)*

The variety of ways in which women experienced exploitation demonstrates the complexity of migration and human trafficking, and how varied solutions are needed for various forms of exploitation. Some women travelled to the Middle East illegally, which left them vulnerable to exploitation. Some women were promised a particular employment contract, and travelled via legal means, yet upon their arrival in the Middle East found the situation drastically different to what had been expected.



*"I chose the Middle East because I have witnessed that lots of young women in my neighbourhood, Abba Koran Sefer [a central part of Addis Ababa] have gone to the Middle East, sent their parents money and has changed the life of their family. However, I did not know what they go through in the Middle East to earn the money. There was no information regarding the suffering one might encounter in the Middle East at that time. It is a different story today as there is a lot of media which provide information. In the past, there was no conversation like this." (Woman, 30)*

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<sup>33</sup> Gezie, L.D., Yalaw, A. W. and Gete, Y. K. (2019) 'Human trafficking among Ethiopian returnees: its magnitude and risk factors', *BMC Public Health*, 19,104.

For other women, they travelled to the Middle East legally, but were frustrated by the hefty agency/broker fees that their current contract dictated and to whom they were then indebted. For many of these women, their solution was to run away from the house at which they were contracted to work and seek out informal employment which left them more vulnerable to exploitation but if paid, was paid at a significantly higher rate.



*"I thought of the better payment I will get, I said to myself "Why won't I run away and get the additional 3000 Birr by getting employed in other house?" and I ran away. But when I ran away and got employed illegally, the amount of work and the pressure was a lot because as the payment increases, the volume of work increases too." (Woman, 24)*

While employed in the Middle East, all the women interviewed were in some way isolated and controlled. Their movements were restricted, they were unable to leave the house, and frequently their means of communication were limited. The most common issue was the lack of rest, with many women working 19-hour days without breaks, waking up at 4 am and not sleeping until 11 pm. Other experiences included verbal harassment, food insecurity, illness, or injury at work and violence, including sexual assault.



*"After I went there, my employer started sexually harassing me. He made sexual advances, touches me inappropriately, and even came towards me naked. I have run into the wall so many times trying to avoid him [...] I called the agency and told them what was going on. They advised me not to sleep with him no matter what and that they will arrange for me another place for me to work at. [...] What I did not know was he had a reputation of getting maids pregnant." (Woman, 35)*

Despite prior agreements, women were frequently underpaid, unpaid entirely or had their wages withheld by their employer. While employed in a household and isolated from any support networks, many women reported feeling vulnerable to exploitation.

### Survivors' perspectives on services

The ways in which survivors found the NGO through which they were supported varied, but the majority found the organisation through their small, localised administrative unit known as a *kebele* or by being approached by the NGO directly. For instance, MCDP staff visit markets and ask for recent returnees. Indeed, Ethiopia has existing community structures, including a 'social healing system' based on localised initiatives such as the local *kebele*, a sustainable rotating funds association established in small communities known as *iquib*, and a burial society which raises money during emergencies, typically death, known as *idir*.<sup>34</sup> Despite this range of local community activities, support for survivors of trafficking is reliant on the efforts of NGOs. One participant explained:

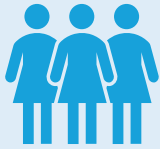
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<sup>34</sup> Choi, K. R. et al. (2020) 'A qualitative needs assessment of human trafficking in Ethiopia: recommendations for a comprehensive, coordinated response', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19.



*"While I was here in this marketplace, it [the NGO] came here looking for people who need support and registered us. It is because of that that I got support. It identified those of us that didn't have anything or anyone to support us and that are bringing up our children by ourselves and gave us the support. I will never forget that support in my life." (Woman, 38)*

To help survivors, the NGOs provide a broad range of interventions. These strategies include:



### Collective support

- Organising survivors into cooperatives
- Collective training in running a business
- Collective financial and material support



### Financial / material

- Providing scarce materials during covid-19 pandemic (such as flour, oil, hygiene products)
- Giving financial assistance to both individuals and collectives
- Covering transportation costs for training



### Training / awareness raising

- Training on customer handling and business practice
- Training about migration risk and how to migrate safely
- Additional vocational training, such as culinary school



### Schooling

- Schooling provided by NGO to fit around workload
- Providing learning materials (such as books and pens)



### Mental health

- Moral support through other activities (such as training, schooling)
- Counselling in one-on-one and group sessions



### Employment

- Some NGOs set up apprenticeships with local businesses, although largely derailed due to covid-19
- Arranging survivors into collectives through which they can run a business

The services offered by participant NGOs varied from organisation to organisation. There are some similarities in support, including counselling/therapy, awareness raising on the risks of migration, and vocational training. The level of support also differed, for example, counselling in group settings, as opposed to in-depth psychotherapy. AGAR and OPRIFS support both women and girls, whereas MCDP and BPDO only dealt with women. However, schooling was relevant to both groups, as was employment given the education system and the desire of some older girls to set up their own

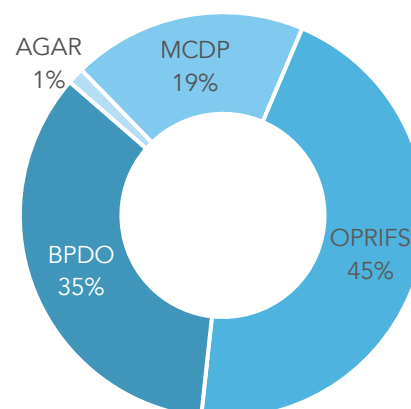
business or find decent work. However, none of the survivors interviewed mentioned counselling. Of note is how some—MCDP and BPDO—organise survivors into collectives in order for them to achieve ‘economic empowerment.’ This model is not shared by AGAR or OPRIFS, although they do provide temporary shelter as part of their support.

	AGAR	MCDP	OPRIFS	BPDO
Awareness training	✓	✓	✓	✓
Childcare centres*	✓	✓	✓	
Counselling / Therapy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education / Schooling		✓	✓	✓
Setting up collectives		✓		✓
Shelter	✓		✓	
Vocational training	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*For returnees’ children

This project aimed to interview a range of survivors from the four NGOs. However, due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, some NGOs were not able to participate as extensively as others. Only one interviewee was reached through the NGO AGAR. As such, the interviews show a higher representation of those survivors who engaged with OPRIFS, MCDP, and BPDO. Furthermore, all the girls who were interviewed were interviewed through OPRIFS, due to the organisation’s schooling program.

Participants' affiliation with the NGOs



### Awareness raising and knowledge generation

The NGOs’ reintegration work adopts a pragmatic approach to awareness raising, particularly regarding the risks of migration for work in the Middle East. In recognition that the push and pull factors of migration are difficult for women to discount, all the NGOs engage in some sort of preventative awareness raising activity and work to deliver training which offers women considering migration an informed perspective. The demystification of migration for work in the Middle East is vital to combatting trafficking. Driven by low educational and income levels, and lack of employment opportunities, young women seek to improve their and their family’s lives, but the reality of migration and the inability to earn sufficient income, or build savings, exacerbates their social and economic crises.<sup>35</sup> Although the knowledge of detrimental outcomes from migration does seem to deter some women from wanting to migrate or re-migrate, participants reported that the lure of a higher income abroad, visibly demonstrated by select returnees who had returned comparatively wealthy, meant they ignored warnings and were willing to take the risk:

<sup>35</sup> Jima, A. O. (2020), ‘Socio-economic Impacts of Human Trafficking among West Asia Returnee Young Women in West Shewa Zone of Oromia, Ethiopia’, *PanAfrican Journal of Governance and Development*, 1, 1.



*"You choose going when you see how your friends who went there and returned have changed their life. You decide to go and work to open some kind of business in your country upon your return...Going to the Middle East is more dangerous. Your situation makes you to decide to go the Middle East." (Woman, 23)*

The NGOs reported that they were mindful that some women will travel regardless, and that it was best to equip them for this as much as possible. As one woman put it:



*"Once you see the money you can earn in the Middle East, you always think of going back. If life is difficult for a woman here, she wants to go. I am telling you the truth since I have seen this from my experience. When your life situation is difficult, you say 'why shouldn't I go and work there instead of wasting my youth here'. You tell yourself, 'If I go there, I will earn money'. We don't see the hardship; we only see the money and our income." (Woman, 30)*

Telling women not to migrate does not reach those who have committed to migration, either mentally or financially, and so the NGOs instead inform women about the potential risks and how to avoid them. This kind of education seems to be mostly targeted at women who are considering migration. As one survivor noted:



*"At first, I did not think it [the training] was something that would be this helpful. I participated in the training with my own consent. Though I have learned lot from my past experiences, whenever I lack something here, I wish to go back to the Middle East. However, the most important thing I learned from them is going to the Middle East should be through legal means, not through a broker." (Woman, 23)*

However, interviewees frequently noted that they were more likely to listen to other returnees than to NGO employees about potential re-exploitation risks. Several women also noted that they felt more willing to share their experiences with NGO employees who were women, and implied that they would not have spoken to a man in the same way, indicating a need for survivor-led groups and the importance of employing women in key NGO roles.



*"I thank you for coming here and interviewing me. Since you are also a woman, a woman is a sister, a woman is a mother, and I hope you understand a lot of things." (Woman, 30)*

### **Education and training**

For children, OPRIFS seeks to provide them with the education that many of them had missed out on while working. Whether girls travelled to urban centres for work or because they believed they would also be sent to school, many girls had not been educated beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Some of the older girls explained that their experiences meant it was hard to catch up with schooling and that schools were not particularly well run. By providing evening classes, OPRIFS provides an avenue for education to resume and situates learning around girl's work commitments, making them more likely to attend. OPRIFS recognise the realities of poverty, as well as a familial need for income from all capable members of the family, including children. Without sufficient resources to sustain the family, many individuals have no choice but have

their children work to make ends meet.<sup>36</sup> Educational provision that acknowledges and adapts to this facilitates the potential for children to engage in formal or higher income employment in the future and reduces the potential for exploitation. Crucially, the additional costs of schooling that also inhibited girl's attendance at school are removed by NGO provision:



"We did not have enough money to buy books or pens. I want to continue school." (Girl, 14)



"School is good for knowledge. Even if it is not so much, little by little. It would have been nice if we had started when we were younger. Now when we are grown up, our thoughts go in different directions. Because our mind feels and thinks lots of things, we haven't understood a lot...So, due to such things, we did not learn a lot. We are trying little by little." (Girl, 17)



"There are no other night schools that support like this one [operated by OPRIFS]. I think this is the only one. For example, you have to pay when you want to go to night school. You have to buy exercise books, and other things are all at your cost. But here we don't pay for the school or for exercise books. It is good in many ways." (Girl, 17)

For women, training tends to be more vocational in nature. All the NGOs offer some form of vocational training, and BPDO provide training on how to run a business, work with customers, and prepare food. Many of the women interviewed said they benefited from training that enabled them to start different careers. The women survivors interviewed placed a high priority on training. Crucially, several women identified that training held immeasurable value precisely because the training and qualifications *"cannot be stolen or taken away."* While many have been in situations where brokers, employers, or family members have taken away their money, wages or belongings, the training was felt to be an empowering experience and provided skills that enabled them to strategise their approach to income differently.



*"Of course, it has changed me a lot. If a lot of money, thousands or hundreds of thousands, is given to you, it will be finished. But the knowledge in my mind that is given to me cannot be stolen or taken away. It is just mine, my own. Also, it has changed my mind."* (Woman, 35)

For adults and children, training and education became vital pathways through which further assistance could be given. For children in schools, this included pens and books. These training and education services provided a vital network for material support during the pandemic and enabled NGOs, such as OPRIFS and BPDO, to provide essentials like flour, oil, sanitary products, sanitiser, and face masks. Survivors marked the importance of such material support:

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<sup>36</sup> Haile, G. and Haile, B. (2012) 'Child Labour and Child Schooling in Rural Ethiopia: Nature and Trade-off', *Education Economics*, vol. 20 (4), 365 – 385.





*"I didn't expect the food and detergents. At that time, we had stopped work and sat in our house for nine months due to Corona pandemic as we feared for our children. In addition, I was very sick at the time and was staying in the house treating myself with holy water and holy soil I brought from the monastery. Because we are in deprivation at the time, when they called from the organisation and gave us the grain, flour, oil, and detergents, I was very happy." (Woman, 38)*

### Organising into collectives

Fifteen of the women interviewed stated they had been organised into collectives by BPDO and MCDP. This practice included introducing survivors to each other, inviting them to undergo training together, and providing them with the start-up capital and material support needed to start their own businesses together. The members then split all their profits between them, sharing their income between all members. This technique was not utilised by the other two NGOs in this study. Such an approach has several advantages, as the survivors provide each other with moral support, gain the freedom and independence of running a business, and assert autonomy over their own lives.



*"When you work together with others and not by yourself, I think the chance of going back to the Middle East will decrease. Because when you work alone, the chance of going back to the Middle East is high and you can simply close down the business saying that it is not working out for me. However, when you work after being organised in a group, when you lose hope, the members would encourage and give you hope not to give up. You can overcome challenges by discussing with each other." (Woman, 34)*

However, the formulation of these collectives was not always successful, often due to a variety of factors outside of survivors' control, such as the situations of other members and external economic pressures. As collectives divide their profits among all the members, and wages are shared among the collective, wages are often very small, and the size of membership can be significantly affected by those moving or returning to the Middle East. Therefore, while collectives do empower survivors by providing moral support, training, material support, and employment, it is not always sustainable in the long-term due to the underlying vulnerabilities affecting survivors.



*"That time the NGO helped the youth to be organised into cooperative association and I worked well. But most of the individuals with us didn't want to work because it was a cooperative association, so we gave back the fridge to the NGO. Then I went to the Arab country." (Woman, 32)*

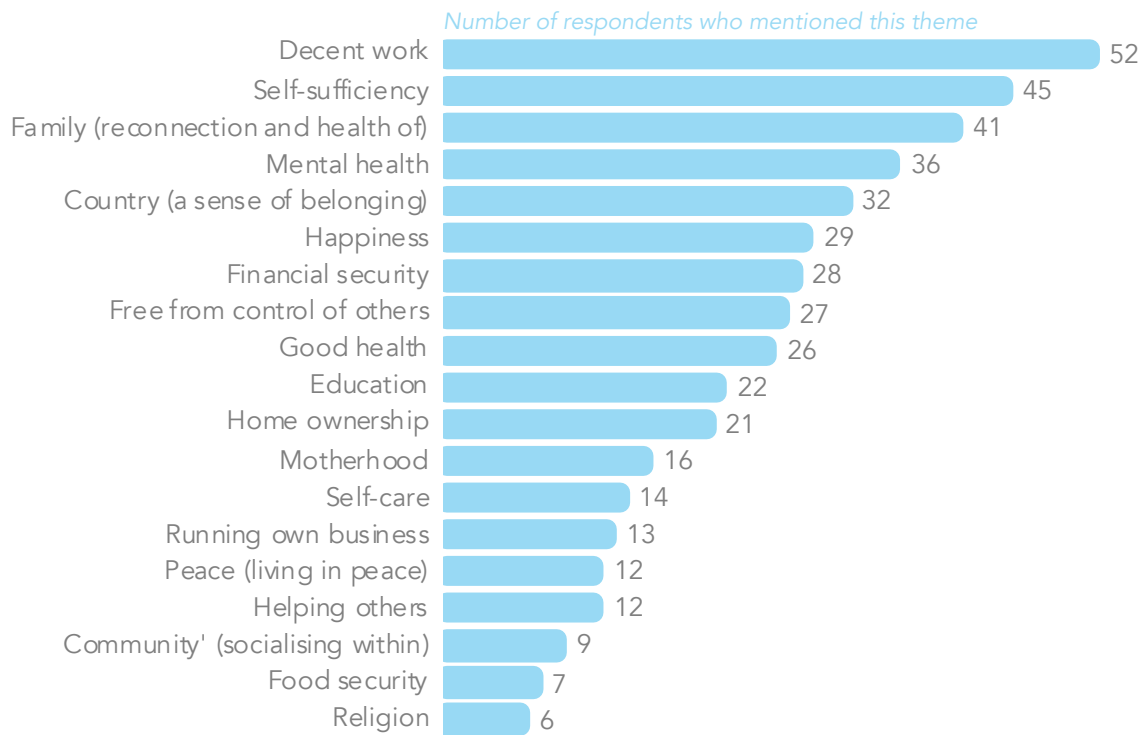


*"Now, we are unable to bake lots of bread because of the high price of flour in the market. This resulted in small profit. After covering house rent and utilities' expenses, we share the small amount that is left among ourselves. The association has 16 members. Currently, we are paid 1000 Birr [22.55 US dollars] per month. It is very hard to live on this pay." (Woman, 30)*

## Survivors' conceptions of freedom

The data reveals a range of factors that contributed to feelings of freedom, with both women and girls prioritising decent work, family, and independence. The most predominant responses from women relating to employment (identified as meaning decent work), self-sufficiency, and the reconnection with, and health of, their family.

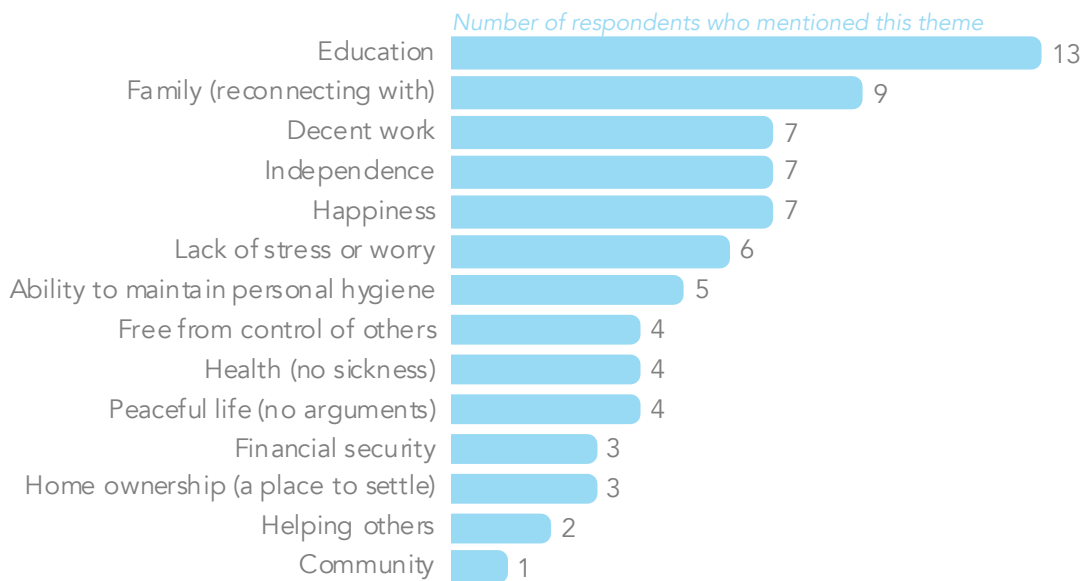
### Women's conceptions of freedom



Interestingly, although self-sufficiency was high in their conceptions of freedom, owning their own business or being self-employed was low in women's criteria, despite this model being promoted by the NGOs.<sup>37</sup> Instead, women prioritised self-sufficiency, which they equated with financial independence, and decent work in terms of permanency, sufficient income, freedom from abuse, adequate breaks, and fair working hours. While home ownership was less important, it was striking that 57% of women that identified this criterion as linked to the cost of rent, with others noting that home ownership had the potential to provide more space for them and their dependents than was currently possible.

<sup>37</sup> See also Freedom Fund (2021), Preventing Trafficking and Protecting Vulnerable Young Women Through Economic Empowerment. Cross-Country Report: Ethiopia, Nepal and Tamil Nadu, India, in which women and girls also expressed a preference for micro-enterprise/self-employment, but often this was a low and risky form of income.

### Girls' conceptions of freedom



For girls, the most important factor for freedom was having an education. This was followed by having a supportive family network, and then by the equally weighted factors of decent work, independence, and happiness. That the girls were already considering employment as central to their conceptions of freedom reveals how financial insecurity has impacted their priorities, as they were already preoccupied with how they would provide for themselves in the future. While girls had experienced harmful child labour, employment still figured highly in their conceptions of freedom. However, employment as freedom was defined in the context of decent work and included criteria very similar to women's concerns: less burdensome workloads and tasks; a lack of abuse; regular breaks; sufficient salary; and permanency of employment.

Peace in both groups was primarily concerned with living a peaceful life; one that was absent worry and difficulty. One woman noted that freedom itself brings a sense of peace. Only one woman mentioned peace in the context of security. 'Happiness' across women and girls broadly related to feelings of satisfaction and contentment, and they commonly articulated it in terms defined alongside a number of other criteria. These criteria included employability, mental health, and financial security. Girls primarily articulated freedom as relating to emotional states using words such as 'happy' and 'confident', rather than prioritising the more pragmatic, work-centric perspective of women. Freedom was:



"Living a relaxed lifestyle [stress free]. If there is no arguing, if you are happy with education [...] I'm free with my work. At least when I work and attend school, I am happy." (Girl, 15)



"To be self-confident and do your own work. If you work and depend only on yourself, you will live freely and happily." (Woman, 20)

### Employment and education

For women, the need for stable employment was the most prominent way in which survivors defined freedom. The ability to make a living for themselves and their families was key to how they asserted both their definitions of freedom and their hopes for the future. The nature of desired employment varied, with some specifying that they wished to own their own

business or work for themselves, but what was consistent was the desire to make their own way. Many women noted that they would prefer to work for a fair wage than rely on assistance, as they felt a degree of cultural stigma when accepting financial aid. In this way, they sought to provide for and support their families. In particular, they articulated the desire to be able to send their children to school and to be free of the anxiety over financial insecurity through work.



*“Even saying that I have a job, that gives me hope. Even if I am not earning much of an income, having a job itself has helped to calm my mind. Even having somewhere to be whether you earn money or not is better than not having a job.” (Woman, 35)*

For girls, education was the most significant factor in defining freedom. While decent work was also a consideration, girls also expressed a desire to pursue certain careers, as teachers, doctors, working with *Kebeles*, or working in unspecified roles in support of others. Girls were explicit that they saw education as a route to attaining these careers and recognised that in order to avoid poverty and exploitation, education was a priority. However, girls also prioritised employment and there was a disjunction between their immediate need for income, and their desire to gain the education needed to build a different future. While they aspired to be involved in the above-mentioned professions, their immediate need was for their current working conditions to improve and to provide them with more flexibility to attend school. OPRIFS mitigates this by providing schooling that children can attend around their work, with some girls explaining they were going to change their school ‘shift’ to accommodate working patterns.

### **Self-sufficiency/Independence**

Ideas of self-sufficiency and independence were high in survivors’ definitions of freedom and were linked with ideas of decent work and financial stability, with both women and girls frequently expressing the desire for financial security and financial freedom as a result of their own efforts. Many reported not wanting to become vulnerable in the same way they were when they experienced exploitation, and so sought ways in which to maintain their independence, and girls also equated independence with having the freedom to dictate their day. For many, remaining financially independent was crucial to concepts of freedom. While women expressed how important the small loans provided by NGOs had been in setting up a business (in conjunction with business training), those who had travelled abroad had often assumed significant loans from family members or given up a substantial portion of their income to pay brokers or agencies. This meant that while some NGOs may find the supply of loans to be a useful intervention, women were also wary of such support. Where loans were made interest-free, the risk was reduced:



*“I think what I may probably get from the government is a loan from small and medium enterprises with interest and I fear [the] loan very much.” (Woman, 31)*

This self-sufficiency and independence also manifested in the helping of others, as survivors sought roles for themselves through which they could support, educate, and uplift others:



*“I want to tell my story and share my experience on different platforms so that others would not be fooled by traffickers, would not face the hardships I faced and learn from my mistakes.” (Woman, 30)*

## Countering isolation: Family and mental health

Many of the women expressed the significant isolation they experienced in the Middle East where they had their movements restricted and their communications limited. Women frequently defined freedom in opposition to this kind of isolation, expressing a desire to provide for, and be close to, their families, both extended and immediate. After months, years, or even decades apart, women's desire to be able to live with their families and children was key to their conception of freedom, as was the support provided post-exploitation:



*"In your country you have freedom. But in a foreign country you live and work in a locked house. You are far away from your family and their love. You live detached from your family. You won't have any freedom. If you are uncomfortable, disappointed, or sad, you have to hold it inside yourself patiently. There, you have to tolerate everything. Well, you pass it by crying alone with your tears. But in your country, well, if you have it, it is found in your country." (Woman, 38)*



*"And my mother and father also helped me to stay free by consoling me and encouraging me, saying 'we will support each other as much as we can' and telling me not to cry." (Woman, 24)*

Unfortunately for girls, they were often unable to reconnect with family, stating this was because they were prevented by their employers from contacting them, their parents lived rurally and had no access to phones, or they had no living or locatable close relatives.

While both girls and women identified mental health as important, although it was a lower priority for girls and was expressed as living stress-free/argument-free lives, there was a distinct connection between the support that a family can bring and its link to good mental health. Women also defined freedom as being free in the mind and discussed the mental health problems they experienced due to stigma, the consequences of their exploitation, and/or what they had witnessed in other returnees. However, they also mentioned mental health in the context of having a strong mindset:



*"You become free from your inside. It is impossible to say that a person can live being free just because he/she has money. You can live by being free without having money...without having anything. This is natural. What makes you want to live by being free is being happy on the inside by yourself." (Woman, 29)*

While women rated their mental health as a high priority in defining freedom, it was not among the support services mentioned by survivors as being provided by the NGOs. Human trafficking returnees are more vulnerable to mental health symptoms, with one study finding that, of those surveyed in Ethiopia, 51.9% had symptoms of anxiety, 34.5% had symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 58.3% had depression.<sup>38</sup> As migration to the Middle East was often a traumatising experience that left survivors in poor mental and physical health, women reported that cultural stigma has developed concerning those who did not migrate 'successfully'. Furthermore, there was a perception that women who return from the Middle East are 'unwell'. This was not due to physical or illness, but because they had adopted

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<sup>38</sup> Gezie et al. (2018) 'Socio-economic, trafficking exposures and mental health symptoms of human trafficking returnees in Ethiopia: using a generalized structural equation modelling', *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 12,62.

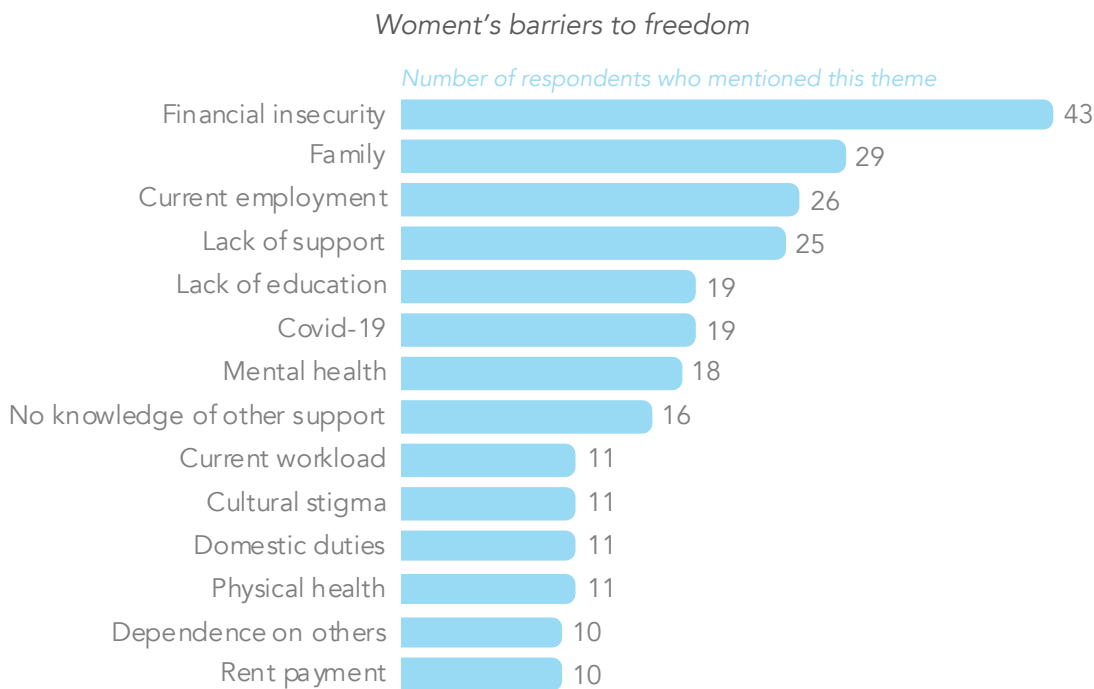
cultural language traits of the Middle East, such as speech patterns and louder speech which contrasted with the Ethiopian manner of speaking. As such, they were sometimes perceived as ‘shouting excessively.’ These factors led Ethiopian locals to assume that they were not mentally stable on return:



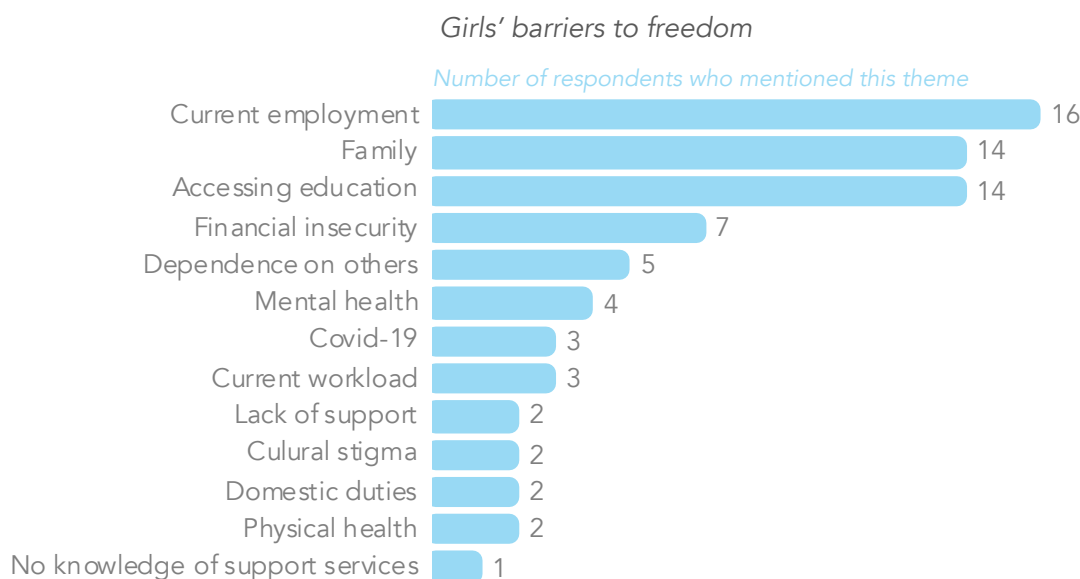
*“When a returnee makes a mistake, people here say that it is because she came back sick and crazy from the Middle East. It isn’t right. I think a lot of my fellow returnees get into bad lifestyles because of the way they are treated after returning back. Ironically, it is here we start feeling inferior. When you dress up, you are called names.” (Woman, 45)*

### The challenges of maintaining freedom

Despite NGO support, some women continued to feel stress and anxiety regarding their situation and the situation of their families. Given the ongoing financial pressures women were experiencing on their return, almost a quarter (25.3%) of them expressed an intent to return to a potentially exploitative situation or had done so already. When asked about what factors in their lives prevented them from feeling free, women identified a range of continuing issues. Primarily, these fell into the following categories and are discussed in more detail below:



Girls experienced similar concerns, but in different priority order. For the girls, who remained in employment, their existing employment was a barrier to their education. Access and the quality of education was also identified as problematic. In both groups, current employment was linked to financial insecurity. Family arose as a barrier to freedom for both cohorts.



### Financial insecurity

Collectively, financial insecurity was the biggest barrier to freedom that survivors reported. This is consistent with the finding that poverty was a significant push factor in migration. Girls stated that a lack of income and resources was the main factor that caused them to migrate to cities for work, as parents were unable to support the whole family in rural locations. In their existing employment, many girls struggled to advocate for adequate, full, or any payment for their labour. Women were also frequently engaged in work that did not pay them enough. Whether due to profits being shared through cooperatives, the threat of closure to informal markets where they worked, or the general economic downturn due to the pandemic, women reported low wages, a lack of capital, and a gender pay gap.<sup>39</sup> For women, their primary financial concern was paying rent, as well as providing for their children in terms of housing, education, and food. Persistent financial insecurity meant that poverty was an ongoing threat:



*"I think that I will have freedom when I get my own house and become free from rent in the future. Now, I don't have freedom because I live in a rent house. House rent is very difficult. When you change houses and go around looking for a house to rent, they will ask you whether you have children and will not allow you to rent their house if you have children." (Woman, 31)*

For many, this meant that the Middle East continued to have a significant pull.

This financial insecurity also had consequences for the mental health of those interviewed, as they felt the ongoing precarity of their situation:



*"I have never had the luxury of feeling free in my life. I am always working, and I am always under pressure from every direction." (Woman, 28)*

<sup>39</sup> For more on the gender pay gap in Ethiopia, see: Kolev, A. and Robles, P. S. (2010) 'Addressing the Gender Pay Gap in Ethiopia: How Crucial is the Quest for Education Parity', *Journal of African Economies*, 19, 5; Buehren, N., Gonzalez, P. and Copley, A. (2019) 'What Are the Economic Costs of Gender Gaps in Ethiopia?' Gender Innovation Policy Initiative, World Bank.

## Family

Familial relations occupied a complex position in the lives of many of the women and girl interviewees. While family were key to their definitions of freedom and being part of a stable home and family unit was often cited as a core requirement of freedom, for girls the inability to be with family was also a barrier to freedom. Girls worried about their families, and anxiety was cited as making them feel less free. Girls also explained that in some cases rejection by remaining family members, or employers prohibiting travel or communication with family members they wanted to see, caused them to feel less free. For women, the family unit provided a significant financial burden. Women frequently expressed anxieties about how to support their children, parents, siblings, and husbands. In many cases, these women were the sole breadwinners of their households, as they were either single or divorced, or their husbands were unable to work due to lack of employment or illness/injury. The financial burden of dependents was therefore a significant barrier to feelings of freedom.

Many women interviewed were severely harmed during their experiences in the Middle East, with some suffering long-term physical injuries. In some cases, this resulted in permanent disabilities or infertility, and affected their relationships on return. One survivor suggested that her abuse and subsequent infertility would make her less likely to have a family, and hence less likely to attain a recognisable freedom:



*"My husband told me he does not want to live anywhere else but Kombolcha. We went to Kombolcha. After we started living in Kombolcha, his family nagged him to divorce me saying that "how can you live with her since she could not give birth?" He also started changing. He told me that he wants to marry another woman and have a child. He asked for a divorce. I didn't have any choice other than saying okay. So, we separated. We did not have anything since we returned to Ethiopia empty handed. He married another woman, and I started living alone." (Woman, 30)*

Most women also explained that having children, and repeated pregnancies, prevented them from working, or working sufficient hours to make a decent living. Women were the main carers for their children, and in some cases also took on caring responsibilities for other family members' children, usually due to that family member's illness. These compounding childcare responsibilities impacted their ability to work.

While some of the women expressed a desire to live with their parents, more often living in the parental home was cited as a barrier for those who associated freedom with personal independence. Some women stated that parents were putting them under pressure to marry/re-marry or to earn more for the family as a whole.

## Health

A key component of this financial burden is healthcare. Interviews indicate that the Ethiopian health system may be inaccessible or inadequate at treating individuals, making them dependent on wage-earning family members. Since 1993, primary health care has been the core of Ethiopia's health system, which is comprised of primary hospitals, health centres, and health posts.<sup>40</sup> However, there remain several obstacles towards universal healthcare in Ethiopia, including

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<sup>40</sup> Assefa, Y. et. al. (2020) 'Primary health care contributions to universal health coverage, Ethiopia', *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 98(12), 894-905A.



“inadequate coverage, inequity, slow health-systems transition, inadequate quality of care, and high out-of-pocket expenditure.”<sup>41</sup> Although there is growing momentum behind providing community-based health insurance, the distance between healthcare sites means that many people in rural areas have poor access to healthcare, and the cost for certain services can be significant.<sup>42</sup> As such, when a family member falls ill, often the burden falls to women and children to support the family:



“What's important is health. When you are healthy, you have everything. You can attend school. I think the main thing is health. If you are healthy, you have everything.” (Girl, 15)



“I would be happy if I could get health insurance support for my children and family so that I can get them treated when they get sick.” (Woman, 31)

### Current employment

Although many of the women interviewed were in some kind of work (17.3% of women were unemployed at the time of interview), many also found their current work to be an obstacle to freedom and linked to their main concern of financial insecurity. 25.3% struggled with low wages, as their wages were either divided up among members of a collective, or dependent on the flow of customers throughout the day. For many of those organised into cooperatives, when a small income was divided between multiple members and used to cover costs, participants were often left with a very small income:



“At the moment, we are not earning income because, as I told you, there is a shortage of flour, and we are buying the flour from the market with a high price. We have expenses such as house rent and the salaries of the security guard and another man who assists us in baking the breads. After covering all these expenses, the income we are left with is not that much.” (Woman, 34)

What many women stated was missing is a reliable workplace. Women engaged in a variety of labour, from market selling, to tailoring, to working in bakeries, but frequently lamented the lack of a space within which to consistently work. Relatively high business rents pose a challenge for those seeking to expand or diversify their income<sup>43</sup> and risk driving out existing small businesses. The sense of work precarity was also exacerbated by concerns that the government would remove informal marketplaces that many relied on for income:



“There is now talk about moving the market. It is not official yet, but we heard that the land is wanted for road construction. We also have savings; we are saving 300 Birr [6.82 US dollars] now. We started with 30 Birr [0.67 US dollars] and increased the amount. I am hoping that the government will not simply scatter us to the wind.” (Woman, 32)

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Amare, M., Agency Urges Media to Widely Raise Public Awareness, Ethiopian Health Insurance Agency [Online]. Available at: <https://ehia.gov.et/node/408>.

<sup>43</sup> Abbagissa, J. (2013) ‘Challenges Confronting Women in Micro and Small Enterprises in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’, *The Ethiopia Journal of Business and Economics*, 3, 1.

Many of the girls interviewed were employed in households. Some were paid, some had significantly limited wages, and some were not paid at all for their work. As minors, many of them found their employers controlling. Some of them were discouraged from attending school, prohibited from attending church, or verbally harassed for not working hard enough. In some situations, girls were forced to choose between attending school or being paid for their work:



“She asked me if I wanted money or school. I asked her to send me to school. She told me that I can go to school, but if I learn, I will not get my salary. I agreed on that and started learning. She takes me to school. She started a job, so her husband will come to take care of the children. After I get back home finishing school, her husband will go to his job. [...] I agreed not to get my salary for the sake of learning.” (Girl, 14)

### Lack of education

Many survivors, both women and girls, noted their lack of education as a significant barrier to freedom. Indeed, for women, a lack of education was a significant vulnerability factor for many who saw migration as an alternative to school. Whether they needed to drop out in order to support their families, or they did not score highly enough in national exams to pursue their education further, they noted that not having an education limited their income, job prospects, and undermined their confidence:



*[Survivor was asked what made her most vulnerable to entering exploitation] “Failing the national exam in the 10th grade. Before this, I never thought of going to the Middle East. My dream was becoming a teacher. However, after I saw my result, I lost hope and motivation. Because I was a smart student and I used to get good grades I was one of the students who was expected to have a good score. I lost my confidence. Specially, my sister expected me to have a good score. Failing 10th grade took my freedom away.” (Woman, 22)*

For girls, their lack of education was also a considerable barrier to freedom. Most of the girls interviewed had been educated to a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level, and many could not read or write. They were therefore more vulnerable to cycles of exploitation and of missing out on both the educational and social aspects of school, with potential adverse impacts on child development and socio-emotional learning.<sup>44</sup>

### Survivors’ hopes for the future

Survivors were invited to reflect on their aspirations for the future, and their responses were numerous and varied, demonstrating the diversity of survivor needs, experiences, and required interventions. For girls, aspirations for the future largely focused on education of the self. For both women and girls, the risk of themselves or of their families falling into poverty was a chief concern, and their hopes largely centred on conceptions of stability and security.

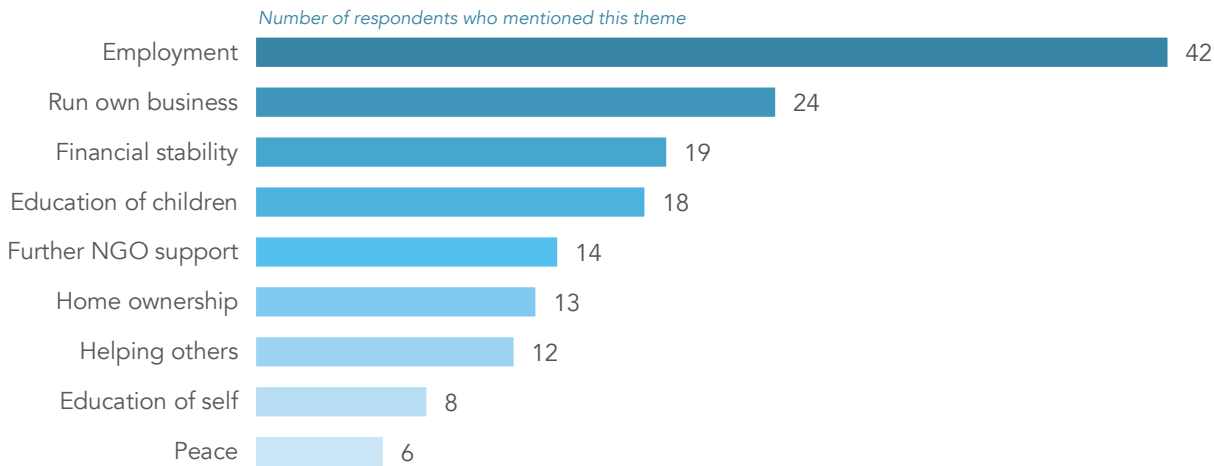
Women’s biggest hope for the future was decent employment, followed closely by running their own business. This was then followed by financial security and providing an education for their children. The type of work was not often specified, instead the emphasis was on earning a liveable income. Receiving further support, either from the NGO, *kebele*, or

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<sup>44</sup> Yorke, L. (2021) ‘Supporting Student’s Socio-Emotional Learning, Mental Health, and Wellbeing During and Beyond covid-19’, RISE Ethiopia [Online]. Available at: <https://riseprogramme.org/blog/socio-emotional-learning-mental-health-wellbeing-COVID-Ethiopia>.

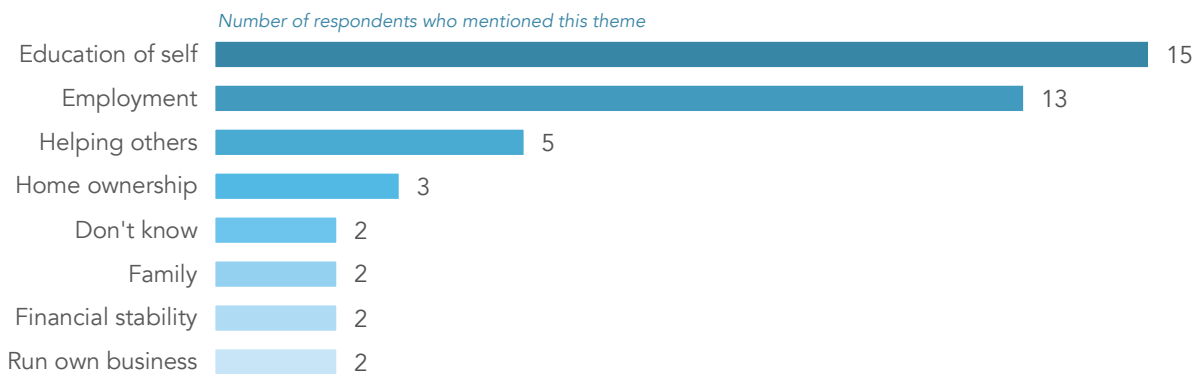
government, was also often cited as a hope for the future. Many women also expressed a desire to help others, whether through working with returnees or providing work for unemployed women. This desire to help others is consistent with other Ethiopian studies, where it has been noted that “returnees were keen to support resilience among the next wave of migrants.”<sup>45</sup>

### Women's hopes for the future



For girls, the biggest hope for the future was further education, followed by employment, and a desire to help others. Education of the self was a priority for girls, who saw it as intrinsic to the kinds of work they would be able to undertake later in life. This was also apparent in their understanding of employment. While they wished to be able to provide for themselves and their families, they sought to undertake skilled labour enabled by education. Given the Ethiopian ‘learning crisis’, many children leave school without basic literacy or numeracy skills despite increased levels of enrolment.<sup>46</sup> This may have been of added importance during the covid-19 pandemic, where the literacy and education levels of children were further threatened by school closures and instability.<sup>47</sup>

### Girls' hopes for the future



<sup>45</sup> Busza, J. et al. (2017) ‘Learning from returnee Ethiopian migrant domestic workers: a qualitative assessment to reduce the risk of human trafficking’, *Globalization and Health*, 13, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Iyer, P. et al. (2020) ‘A rising tide of access: what consequences for equitable learning in Ethiopia?’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 46, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kim, J. H. et al. (2021) ‘The Implications of COVID-19 for Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Perspectives from Parents and Caregivers’, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 31.

When considering their hopes for the future, survivors of all ages often evoked similar sentiments to their definitions of freedom. There is a clear correlation between some of their conceptions of freedom and their hopes for the future, indicating that survivors sought their own definition of freedom.

## Peace

A number of survivors expressed a hope for peace. The power struggle, election, and push for political reform that have led to the current crisis in Ethiopia affected survivors' access to decent work, their feelings of security and stability, and their ability to leave exploitative work conditions in Ethiopia because roads were closed or because employers used it as an excuse to prevent them from leaving:



*"What makes you free is working without security problem. If you are safe, it makes you to be free. [interviewer asked: What do you see as the most important thing for the wellbeing of you and your family in the immediate future?] I only want peace." (Woman, 19)*



*"My dream is for our country to be peaceful...The things we hear and see happening in other parts of our country are disturbing. I dream of the day that all these problems are resolved, and we live together peacefully like we used to. Peace. If our country is peaceful, I can live with my mother and my mother can also live without any fear. So, above all things, it is peace." (Woman, 30)*



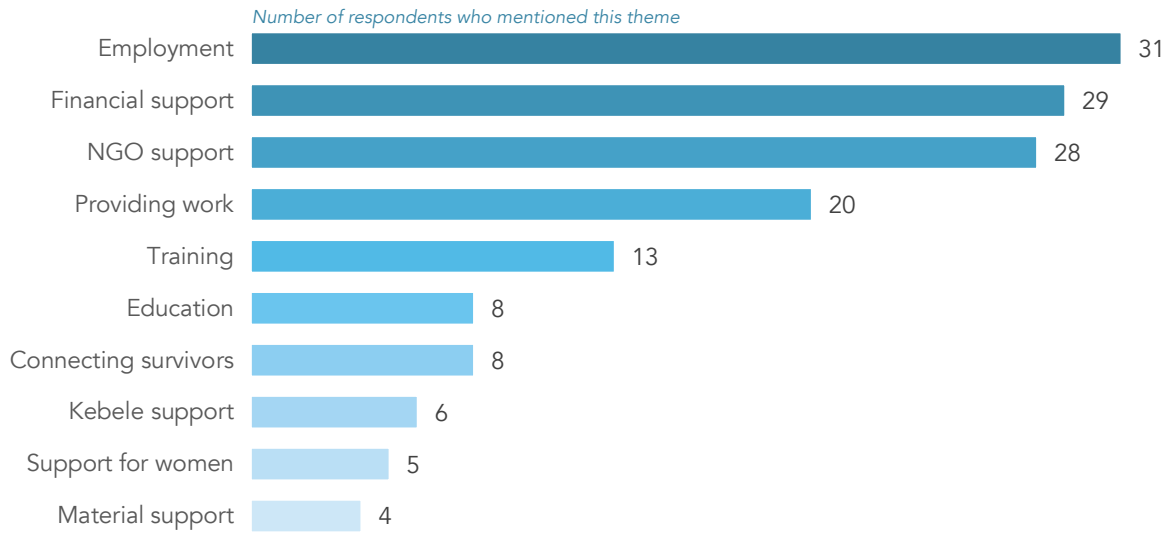
*"I tried [to reach out to my parents] but could not. To begin with, I did not have money and I could not travel. When I asked my employers to take me, they give me excuses like there is war or something so I could not go." (Girl, 16)*

## Survivors' suggestions on the type of support most needed

As part of the interviews, survivors were asked their feedback on what measures would generate meaningful change in their lives. This question allowed them the opportunity to directly articulate what action could be taken to enact real improvement to their situations and minimise re-exploitation risks for themselves and their communities. This differs from their earlier thoughts on their aspirational hopes for their futures in that these suggestions were rooted in more immediate, practical applications.

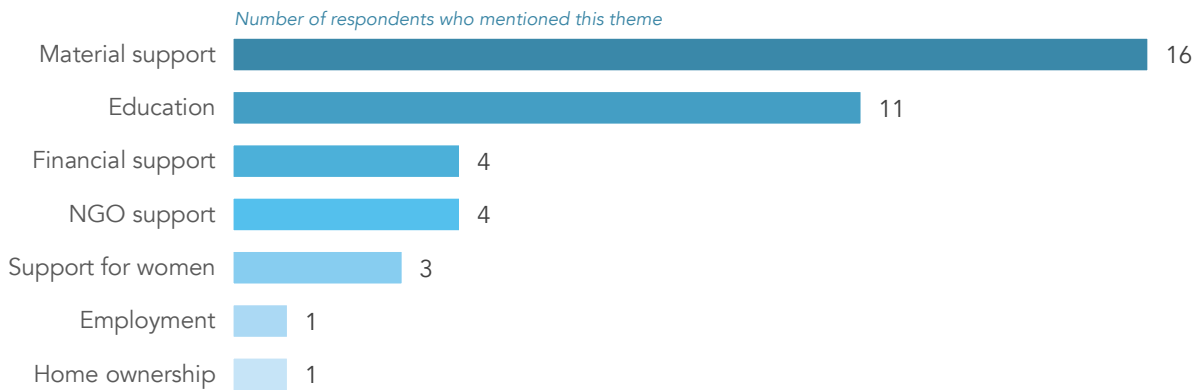
For women, providing reliable, decent employment was the most common response. This was followed by financial support, which was often explained as a need for capital to start up a business. The third most common recommendation was to receive further support from NGOs. As the NGOs themselves initiated these interviews, the process of ascertaining informed consent had to be navigated through the power dynamics of the supporting NGO and the individual receiving help. As such, many survivors used these interviews to request further assistance from the specific NGO in a variety of fields, most prominently in directly providing work.

### Women's suggestions



For girls, their biggest suggestion was for more material support. This included sanitary products and other hygiene products, which were in limited supply during the pandemic. This could be interpreted as children often having shorter term requests than adults, who often focus on the future. Many of the children had previously received material support from the NGO and found this to be a significant help to their situation, although some did report having their material support taken by their employers. Following this, they requested additional support to pursue their education.

### Girls' suggestions





Frealem migrated to Lebanon for employment as a domestic worker where her employers withheld her resident card and salary. As a returning survivor, she was supported with housing, counselling, and skills training. Today she owns a growing poultry business. Photo credit: Genaye Eshatu / The Freedom Fund

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## Conclusion

This study has explored the reality of sustaining liberation for survivors of human trafficking in Addis Ababa and Kombulcha, Ethiopia. Despite legislation and ratification of international treaties relating to human trafficking and child labour, both forced labour and harmful child labour in the country continue to pose a challenge. Trafficking survivors in Ethiopia face challenges in terms of sustaining liberation, primarily due to living costs, a lack of access to decent employment, and a lack of access to education.

The study found that the provision of free night classes, business training, and small grants to start businesses were key to ensuring that women felt able to sustain themselves and their families and prevented them from risking migration to the Middle East in search of sufficient income. While *Kebele*, *iquib*, and *idir* were sources of support, the study found that NGO provision of prevention initiatives and reintegration support were also crucial to trafficking survivors. The study finds that NGOs are providing a wide range of important support services to survivors, such as providing free night classes in addition to the supplies needed to learn, employment opportunities and livelihood assistance, access to collectives, small start-up grants, and material support. However, provision differs across NGOs meaning some survivors do not access the full spectrum of potential support. Women expressed both positive and negative outcomes from the formation of collectives,<sup>48</sup> but collectives were generally viewed as valuable. However, there was no evidence of women-only or child-only groups that could enhance existing collectives' preventative and reintegration initiatives. Decent employment and financial security, the ability to live with and support family, and education were identified as the most important factors for enabling survivors to both feel free and achieve sustained liberation. For some women, housing, self-sufficiency, and the ability to advocate for the sustained liberation of others were essential elements of their own pathways in liberation.

The evidence shows that the interventions and support of NGOs has enabled women survivors who participated in the study to sustain liberation, but several women reported they may return to the Middle East to pursue a decent income, despite their prior experiences. The same was not true for the girls interviewed. Due to healthcare issues in adult wage-earners in the family and low family income, many children remained in cities as domestic workers, despite previous exploitation. The study found that all the girls continued to work, from undertaking light domestic duties to several experiencing conditions that were exploitative with new employers. Survivors therefore face significant economic challenges that risk re-exploitation, and they worry on a day-to-day basis about their ability to sustain their families and livelihoods. Survivors' conceptions of freedom are not wholly met in liberation, with a lack of decent and varied work, high rents, discrimination of returnees, gender-based inequality, a lack of access to free healthcare, and low education levels acting as significant barriers to sustaining liberation beyond these initial years of support. The support provided by NGOs in supporting access by providing small start-up grants, education, and advocating change to address underlying vulnerabilities is therefore core to providing the conditions for sustained liberation and to ensuring social and economic development.

Support is most effective when aimed at the community and individual level, with the model of NGOs working closely with communities and building collectives to empower and strengthen the self-representation fundamental to enabling

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<sup>48</sup> For further details see p.19.

independence and reducing the risk of human trafficking and exploitation. However, several women expressed frustration with the ways collectives worked and the model could be re-visited to address those concerns, which were mostly financial. Reintegration and sustained liberation therefore require a more holistic and longer-term approach that builds community resilience, independence, and empowerment. Girls did not mention collectives, which may indicate that such avenues and services are not currently facilitated. A more comprehensive and cohesive approach to the strategies and services provided by NGOs would have a positive impact on survivors, as would the creation of women's and children's groups in addition to the collectives. The structural barriers of intergenerational inequalities of power make girls even more vulnerable to exploitation. Self-advocacy and advocacy for others can help children to build confidence and independence, while also informing the development of NGO support services from a user perspective.

Underlying and often structural vulnerabilities also need to be addressed for sustained liberation to be achieved. Both women and girls highlighted that any opportunities for economic development were inhibited by the education system and associated costs, and by the lack of opportunity for decent work. Another key vulnerability is a lack of access to free healthcare. Participants reported ill-health in wage-earning members of the family as a push factor for migration, both internally and cross-border. Aside from the risk of human trafficking, this also led to their becoming indebted to brokers or agencies. These vulnerabilities carry a risk of aggravating poverty and debt induced re-exploitation. As such, the concerns outlined above need to be assimilated into current interventions.

The recommendations that follow provide further guidance for NGOs, as well as policymakers, to ensure that trafficked persons achieve sustained liberation in these regions.

## Recommendations

### For NGO services

- **Lead the development of a vocational training directory that includes referral pathways**, covering a range of courses offered by state, non-profit and private sector actors that can be accessed by survivors of trafficking and labour exploitation. Vocational training topics should align with the priorities of survivors, the availability of resources, and be based on a detailed local market assessment to ensure the viability of future employment or self-employment. Training should also be linked to intensive on-training follow-up, post-training job placements, and the provision of guidance for the survivor for the duration of their job placement to support them to stay in work.
- **Support the empowerment of survivors through the establishment of programs enabling survivors to assume leadership or training roles in NGOs.** This has been shown to not only empower the targeted survivors but can also increase the participation of other survivors. A comprehensive capacity development package should be provided to survivors, focusing on supporting them to develop necessary technical and soft skills, while also strengthening their psychosocial resilience (e.g., building confidence and self-esteem, strengthening emotional resilience, etc.). A mentorship approach could be considered to foster a sense of belonging in the organisation, with more experienced survivors assuming the role of mentor for future mentees. Internal organisational capacity development is suggested to increase staff 'buy-in' for the program, as well as including survivor leadership as a core element in the longer strategic priorities of the organisation.



- **Establish and support women's returnee groups in communities to engage in local level survivor-led awareness raising** on the realities of migration and safer migration options. Additionally, these groups should have their capacity strengthened to be able to inform, participate, and lead in regional and national level advocacy initiatives. Groups will, in turn, be able to use their local knowledge and insights to provide gender-specific support on the identification of, and service provision for, those at risk of unsafe migration practices and fellow returnees. A similar survivor-led approach could also be used with child survivors through a program supporting their capacity development as child activists. This type of approach could target current and former child domestic workers, providing them the space, capacity development and tools to develop activist initiatives based on their own priorities and supporting them to present their messaging at a local or national level.
- **Further assist in removing some of the stigma attached to returnees from the Middle East** through educational campaigns and awareness raising in local communities. Survivors should be consulted on the content of these campaigns to ensure it is culturally appropriate.
- **NGOs have a vital role to play in driving policy change.** Ethiopia already has a wide range of community organisations, including *kebele/woreda*, which are in place to deal with local issues, but survivors repeatedly stated they did not receive the support promised by such institutions. NGOs can work with those institutions and registered survivor-led organisations at a local level to ensure adequate support for survivors of human trafficking and hold those institutions accountable to provide services to returnees.

#### For policymakers

- **Strengthen existing working groups<sup>49</sup> under the National Partnership Coalition (NPC) in Ethiopia**, which comprises of organisations supporting the recovery and building the resilience of survivors of trafficking and exploitation. Strengthening measures should include the provision of resources, where needed and support to enable members of the NPC to procure their own resources, thus promoting longer-term sustainability. NPC members can play a critical role in terms of: strengthening knowledge management relating to best practices for working with survivors of trafficking and exploitation in the Ethiopian context; training and capacity development of organisations supporting survivors of trafficking and exploitation; engaging in advocacy to push for systematic reforms for migrants workers and trafficking survivors/returnees; and developing localised service mappings of state, non-profit and private sector organisations working with survivors of trafficking and exploitation. The latter is a critical, cost-effective way of increasing access to the range of holistic support required by survivors of trafficking and exploitation.
- **Continue to improve the protection for workers and migrants.** Relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Labor and Skills and its constituencies (regional Bureau of Labor and Skills - BOLS), should monitor migration and migrants, and advance developments for fair working conditions.
- **Ensure the Ministry of Labor and Skills and related agencies for coordinating migration are properly capacitated and resourced** to support the economic reintegration of returnees and work closely with specialist services and civil society organisations in doing so.

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<sup>49</sup> The working groups are: Awareness and Foreign Employment; Law Enforcement; Returnees Protection and Rehabilitation; Diaspora Participation and Development; Migration Information Management; and Research and Investigation Teams.

- **The current educational structure creates a significant barrier to quality employment and financial security**, particularly for women and girls, and seems to exacerbate the risk of exploitation. The Government of Ethiopia should continue to look for ways of strengthening the implementation of key policy documents relating to girls' education, including paying particular attention to the gender and inclusion aims within the 2021 Ethiopian Education Sector Development Programme VI. This includes revising and developing a gender strategy for the education sector.
- **Increase use of public information campaigns to promote and explain official processes for legal migration**, including the documents required and the timeline for processes. The Government should also ensure that clear and up-to-date information and contact details on official recruiters and offices for processing applications are available on their website to support migrants to avoid potentially exploitative channels to travel abroad.
- **Strengthen existing social protection mechanisms, with particular attention to the barriers** that people from rural areas/lower socio-economic backgrounds/women and girls may face when attempting to access such mechanisms.
- **Ensure domestic workers are included under current Labour Legislation** so that they can benefit from basic protection of workers' rights, legal entitlements such as maternity leave, and minimum wage legislation.
- **Ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (n.189)**, which calls for the support and protection of adult and child domestic workers.
- **There exists a gender pay gap and gender-skills gap that disadvantages women in Ethiopia.** The Government of Ethiopia should look to strengthen the implementation of the gender measures outlined in the Ethiopia Decent Work Programme,<sup>50</sup> which would encourage greater gender equality in the workplace. The Government should complement this program by taking measures to include minimum wage and gender-based violence in workplace legislation, to help redress the imbalance, and to encourage employers to tackle discrimination and exploitation in workplace practices.

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<sup>50</sup> ILO (2021) 'Decent work country programme for Ethiopia – 2021-2025' ILO [Online]. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_mas/--program/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_837828.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/--program/documents/genericdocument/wcms_837828.pdf)

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## Appendix A: Interview guide for participants who are 14 years of age and older

### Present background:

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. What does your day-to-day life look like right now? *(Explore day-to-day activities, what their working life is like, what they are working towards.)*

### Wellbeing:

3. Can you describe what a good day is like for you?
4. And what does a bad day look like for you?
5. Has anything stopped you doing the things you want to do?
6. Has anything in your life helped you to do the things you want to do?

### Seeking support:

7. How would you describe the situation you were in when you first started working with/were contacted by [NGO] two-three years ago? *(If not described in answer to this question, please ask what factors they believe caused them to go into exploitative work.)*
8. How did you connect with/learn about [NGO]? *(Explore - what drove them to seek help/did the NGO approach them?)*
9. Was engaging with [NGO] important? how so? *(We want to understand why they've engaged with the NGO in a deeper sense. For instance, were they scared because a trafficker was after them? Or maybe they were falling into debt?)*
10. What sort of support were you looking for when the [NGO] started working with you?
11. And what assistance did you actually receive? From whom? *(It is important to explore what specific support they received, whether they felt safe, received food, income or travel, accessed legal aid, education, healthcare etc. Interviewee may mention several, explore to understand the differences between support given, e.g. NGO, CVC, other survivor or community groups, legal aid, etc. Consider asking for how long did you receive support.)*

12. Was the assistance you received helpful to you? For what reasons? *(Explore: Which services were most helpful? How long did they receive that support? Were they housed in a shelter? Did they feel safe? Did they trust their rescuers? Was there a risk of re-exploitation?)*

If no, ask: How come? *(Explore: Did you know you could ask for support? Did you know of anyone who could help you? What stopped you from asking for help?)*

Did [NGO] provide any other types of support that you weren't expecting?

13. Did you seek support from other people, or consider approaching other people/organisations? *(Explore why/why not, who, how their support might differ from or complement NGO, impact/importance of these relationships.)*

14. Since [NGO] started working with you, what has changed? *(Explore their journey since liberation. What has made the difference? How has the NGO made a difference? Was there anything that made a difference in particular? How has this improved their life? Do they feel more secure?)*

15. Do you feel you have learned any new ideas over recent years?

#### *Sustained liberation:*

17. What does it mean to be free? *(Explore – what is freedom and unfreedom.)*

18. What is the feeling of being free?

19. Does your life feel free now? In what parts do you feel free? *(Explore if there additional ways in which they feel more free than before?)*

20. Are there any parts of your life in which you still feel unfree?

21. What made you most vulnerable to entering your situation before you were free?

a. To what degree do you still feel vulnerable in these ways? *(If the participant indicates they are experiencing exploitation, please explore what factors have led them back into this situation.)*

22. Have you, or has anyone you know, gone back into situations that limit freedom? *(If so, explore how and why, what is the difference between those who go back to exploitative conditions and those who do not: do they still have loans/borrow money? Are those loans any different than before, such as interest rates?)*

a. What do you think are the most important ingredients for getting and staying free? *(E.g. personal, familial, community-related factors?)*

b. If you had to say one thing that helps you stay free? Any other things?

#### *Current support:*

23. Are you satisfied with your situation now? Do you think things have been resolved for you/sorted out? What are the reasons? *(Identify the actor/support – who/what has helped them to sort things out)*

24. How is work for you now? *(Explore to establish the conditions of work such as hours, breaks, pay, control exercised. if no work – ask why if not explained earlier in the interview.)*
25. What is the role of [NGO] in your life now? *(Explore what may have replaced NGO support provision if applicable, explore whether support is sustained or intermittent.)*
26. If NGO is still supporting them: What services have been most useful to you and why? *(Did you know you could ask for support? Did you know of anyone who could help you? What stopped you from asking for help?)*
27. What else might have been helpful for you or others in your situation? What else could be done to support people out of exploitation?
28. What support do you think you will need in the next year?

*The Future:*

29. What are your expectations/aspirations/dreams for the future and why? What would help you achieve this/those?
30. What do you see as the most important thing for the wellbeing of you and your family in the immediate future?
31. Thank you very much for your valuable time and for what you have told me today. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?



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## Appendix B: Interview guide for participants under 14 years of age

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? Your name, what you like doing? *(Explore friendships and social networks.)*
2. Do you go to school? How often? What do you like about school? What is your favourite subject in school and why? *(If the child says they do not attend school, explore why and what they do instead.)*
3. What does your day-to-day life look like right now? *(Explore day-to-day activities to establish what their life is like, what is important, what has changed.)*
4. What do you and your parents do together? *(Explore how much time they spend together, how this has changed over the past 2/3 years? Who else do they spend time with?)*
5. Are there times that you feel scared? What is happening then? Who is around?
6. If you could have three wishes, what would they be?
7. And what one thing would you get rid of to make life better?
8. Has anything stopped or helped you doing the things you want to do?
9. What does it mean to be free? *(Explore what is freedom and unfreedom.)*
10. What is the feeling of being free? *(Does your life feel free now? In what parts do you feel free? Are there parts in their life where they still feel unfree?)*
11. Who has helped you over the last two to three years? Has anything changed for you? *(Try to establish whether they understand what NGO support they have had, whether they received support from others, and what specific support/interventions have made a difference.)*
12. You wake up tomorrow and it's a really good day, what do you do? How do you know it's a really good day?
13. Are you happy now? What are the reasons?
14. What do you hope for the future? *(E.g. explore their aspirations for the future and what they think they need to achieve this.)*
15. What else would help you for the future?

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## Appendix C: Consent forms

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### ADULTS

**Full title of project:** Freedom Fund Sustained Liberation

**Name, position and contact address of researcher:**

Yes      No

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I understand that my application in this study is voluntary and that I am free to stop the interview and withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I confirm that I have received information about, and understand the research being conducted, and I agree to participate in this study.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I confirm that I am 18 years of age or over.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I consent to my data being recorded and transcribed and understand that I will be referred to anonymously in any publications.  |

*By signing this form I agree that my answers, which I have given voluntarily, can be used for research purposes.*

**Signed (researcher):**

**Date:**

**Signed (participant):**

**Date:**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**CHILDREN**

**Full title of project:** Freedom Fund Sustained Liberation

**Name, position and contact address of researcher:**

Yes    No

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I/my guardian confirm(s) that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I/my guardian have/has had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I/my guardian understand(s) that my application in this study is voluntary and that I am free to stop the interview and withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I/my guardian confirm(s) that I have received information about, and understand the research being conducted, and I agree to participate in this study.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I/my guardian consent(s) to my interview being recorded and transcribed and that I will be referred to anonymously in any publications.  |

*By signing this form I agree that my answers, which I have given voluntarily, can be used for research purposes.*

**Signed (researcher):**

**Date:**

**Signed (participant):**

**Date:**

**Signed (guardian):**

**Date:**

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**የምርምር (የጥናት) ስራ ላይ ለመሳተፍ የተሰጠ ስምምነት መግለጫ ቅጽ (ለአዋቂዎች)**

**የምርምር ፕሮጀክት (የጥናት) ስም (Full title of Project):** ዘላቂ ነጻነት በፍሪደም ፈንድ

**ምርምሩን የሚያካሄደው አጥኝ ስም፣ የስራ ድርሻ እና አድራሻ**

- | አዎ                       | አይደለም                    |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | የጥናት አላማ በተብራራ ሁኔታ እንደተገለጸልኝ እና አላማውን እንደተገነዘብኩ አረጋግጣለሁ።   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ( ጥያቄ ለመጠየቅ እድሉ የተሰጠኝ ሲሆን ለጠየኩት ጥያቄዎች አጥጋቢ መልስ አግኝቻለሁ።   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | በዚህ ጥናት ውስጥ የእኔ ተሳትፎ በፍላጎት ላይ የተመሰረተ መሆኑን የተገነዘብኩ ሲሆን ውይይቱን/ቃለመጠይቁን መቀጠል ካልፈለኩ ላቆም እንደምችልና ከውይይቱ በማነሻውም ጊዜ ምንም አይነት ምክኒያት ሳልሰጥና ያለምንም ችግር ልወጣ እንደምችል ተገንዝቢያለሁ። |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ስለጥናት አላማ የተገለጸልኝ ሲሆን እኔም አላማውን ተገንዝቤ በነጻነት በጥናት ላይ ለመሳተፍ ፍረደኛ መሆኔን አረጋግጣለሁ።   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | እድሜዬ 18 እና ከዚያ በላይ መሆኑን አረጋግጣለሁ።   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ቃለ መጠይቁ/ውይይቱ እንዲቀዳ እና ቃል በቃል እንዲጻፍ የተስማማሁ ሲሆን የሰጠሁት ቃለ መጠይቅ ለጥናት ግብአት ሊሆን እንደሚችልና በጥናት ላይ ስሜ እንደማይገለጽ በመገንዘብ ተስማምቻለሁ።  |

በቃለመጠይቅ ወቅት የሰጠሁት መልስ ለጥናት ግብአት እና ለጥናት አላማ እንዲውል ፈቃደኛ መሆኔን በፈረማዬ አረጋግጣለሁ።

**ፊርማ (የጥናት መሪ):** \_\_\_\_\_

**ቀን:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ፊርማ (የጥናት ተሳታፊ):** \_\_\_\_\_

**ቀን :** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**የምርምር (የጥናት) ስራ ላይ ለመሳተፍ የተሰጠ ስምምነት መግለጫ ቅጽ (ለህጻናት)**

**የምርምር ፕሮጀክቱ (የጥናቱ) ስም: የነጻነት ዘላቂነት በፍሪደም ፈንድ**

**ምርምሩን የሚያካሂደው አጥኝ ስም፤ የስራ ድርሻ እና አድራሻ:**

አዎ አይደለም

የጥናቱ አላማ በተብራራ ሁኔታ እንደተገለጸልኝ እና አላማውን እንደተገነዘብኩ እኔ/አሳዳጊዬ እናረጋግጣለን።

እኔ/አሳዳጊዬ ጥያቄ ለመጠየቅ እድሉ የተሰጠን ሲሆን ለጠየቅናቸው ጥያቄዎች አጥጋቢ መልስ አግኝተናል።

እኔ እና አሳዳጊዬ በዚህ ጥናት ውስጥ የእኔ ተሳትፎ በፍላጎት ላይ የተመሰረተ መሆኑን የተገነዘብን ሲሆን ውይይቱን/ቃለመጠይቁን መቀጠል ካልፈለኩ ላቆም እንደምችልና ከውይይቱ በማነሻውም ጊዜ ምንም አይነት ምክኒያት ሳልሰጥና ያለምንም ችግር ልወጣ እንደምችል ተገንዝቢያለሁ

እኔ እና አሳዳጊዬ ስለጥናቱ አላማ የተገለጸልኝ ሲሆን እኔም አላማውን ተገንዝቤ በነጻነት በጥናቱ ላይ ለመሳተፍ ፍረቃደኛ መሆኔን አረጋግጣለሁ።

እኔ እና አሳዳጊዬ ቃለ መጠይቁ/ውይይቱ እንዲቀዳ እና ቃል በቃል እንዲጻፍ የተስማማሁ ሲሆን የሰጠሁት ቃለ መጠይቅ ለጥናቱ ግብአት ሊሆን እንደሚችልና በጥናቱ ላይ ስሜ እንደማይገለጽ በመገንዘብ ተስማምቻለሁ።

በቃለመጠይቅ ወቅት የሰጠሁት መልስ ለጥናቱ ግብአት እና ለጥናቱ አላማ እንዲውል ፈቃደኛ መሆኔን በፈረማዬ አረጋግጣለሁ።

**ፊርማ (የጥናቱ መሪ):** \_\_\_\_\_

**ቀን:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ፊርማ (የጥናቱ ተሳታፊ):** \_\_\_\_\_

**ቀን:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ፊርማ (አሳዳጊ):** \_\_\_\_\_

**ቀን:** \_\_\_\_\_

The Freedom Fund (UK)  
Lighterman House  
30 Wharfdale Road  
London, N1 9RY  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0) 203 777 2200

The Freedom Fund (US)  
315 Flatbush Avenue  
#406  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
USA  
+1 (929) 298-4972

[www.freedomfund.org](http://www.freedomfund.org) - [info@freedomfund.org](mailto:info@freedomfund.org)