

# BALANCING HOPES AND FEARS

Experiences of women intending to migrate to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the new Ethiopian government scheme

April 2025

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## Acknowledgements

The authors of this brief are grateful for the support and assistance from the staff at KASMA Ethiopia, especially their Executive Director, Yenenesh Tilahun. We also want to send a heartfelt thank you to all the women who took the time to share their experiences, hopes and fears about migrating abroad for domestic work. We are also grateful to the key stakeholders who shared their knowledge and expertise about the KSA initiative.

From the Freedom Fund, we extend special thanks to Kumneger Addisu, Elizabeth Anderson, PhD, Eva Jew, Helen Shipman, PhD, Kehinde Ojo, Louise Hemfrey, Sonia Martins and Yuki Lo. Their expertise in migration and trafficking has been invaluable throughout this research, particularly in providing constructive feedback on this report.

Suggested citation: Dank, M., Tafesse, T., Moton, L., and Zhang, S. (2025). *Balancing hopes and fears: Experiences of women intending to migrate to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the new Ethiopia government scheme*. New York: The Freedom Fund.

## GLOSSARY

<b>BLA</b>	Bilateral Labour Agreement
<b>COC</b>	Certificate of Competence
<b>E-LIMIS</b>	Ethiopian Labor Market Information System
<b>ETB</b>	Ethiopian Birr
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GCM</b>	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>MOLS</b>	Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Skills
<b>SAR</b>	Saudi Riyal
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar



## INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has long been a destination country for Ethiopian migrant workers. Although migration to KSA provides an opportunity to seek a higher source of income than is typically available in Ethiopia, many migrant workers report feeling unsafe while working in KSA: their passports are frequently confiscated by employers, they are forced to work long hours without breaks and women endure unwanted sexual advances from male employers (Mixed Migration Centre, 2023; Zelalem, 2023). In 2020, the European Union Parliament denounced KSA following reports of the torture and deaths of Ethiopians in Saudi custody (Telegraph, 2020). However, despite regulatory amendments in 2021, many migrant workers also continue to be exempt from KSA's labour laws and remain exposed to the *kafala* system,<sup>1</sup> which is essentially indentured work (Aljazeera, 2023). Under this system, workers lose their documented status if they leave their employer without the employer's consent, even in cases of abuse and exploitation (Robinson, 2022). Therefore, the question remains of how to physically and financially protect vulnerable Ethiopian domestic workers in KSA.

In recent years, KSA has attempted to curb irregular migration, launching a large-scale initiative to forcibly remove migrants who have emigrated irregularly (International Organization for Migration (IOM) Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa, 2023). The IOM reports that "between May 2017 and June 2023, 558,000 migrants were returned to Addis Ababa" (IOM, 2023, para.1). In March 2023, the Ethiopian government, in collaboration with the KSA government, opened a campaign to recruit 500,000 women for domestic work in KSA (henceforth referred to as the "KSA initiative") as part of Ethiopia's commitment to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS), this regularised process will make it possible to ensure the protection of Ethiopian migrants' lives, salaries and well-being while in KSA. This, in turn, will hopefully prevent the harms that come with irregular migration (Aljazeera, 2023). The Bilateral Labour Agreement (BLA) drawn up between Ethiopia and KSA to establish this initiative stipulates that the Ethiopian government will send qualified domestic workers who are medically fit to carry out their specific tasks as per Saudi regulations and have no criminal record. Migrant domestic workers should also receive training at specialised household institutes in Ethiopia prior to travelling to KSA and must be aware of Saudi regulations, traditions and the nature of their employment contract (Human Resources and Social Development, 2022).<sup>2</sup>

As part of its commitment to implementing the KSA initiative and the broader GCM, the Ethiopian government has initiated several legal and institutional reforms, highlighted in the table below. These aim to ease the migration process and increase protection of migrant workers' rights, both before and during migration. A digitalised system has been introduced that is part of a broader shift towards decentralisation of migration services, moving service delivery centres closer to communities. The digital Ethiopian Labour Market Information System (E-LIMS) aims to significantly reduce the involvement of brokers and unsanctioned actors, reduce risks of forgeries of documents and improve legal channels of migration. A further key feature of Ethiopia's strengthened migration management system is the enhancement of migrants' skills prior to departure through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and the provision of training to instructors. MOLS, in partnership with civil society advocates, has also developed a recruitment monitoring manual and provides training on ethical recruitment principles and standards.

The following table highlights key reforms that have occurred as part of the Ethiopian government's commitment to addressing previous challenges in the migration system. While these are positive steps toward supporting safer migration, the findings of this report show that not all the earlier challenges have yet been eradicated.

**Table 1. Comparison of Labour Migration Process Prior to and After Reforms**

	Prior to the reforms	After the reforms
<b>Legal and institutional framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration-related proclamations (104, 632/2001, 923/2016) had gaps. Proclamation 923/2016 introduced an 8th grade education requirement for overseas work, creating challenges for women who previously worked in Gulf countries and were now ineligible to return due to this criterion.</li> <li>• BLAs were limited, with receiving countries having limited accountability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A National Partnerships Coalition has been established and cascaded to all regional states and city administration in collaboration with the IOM.</li> <li>• Proclamation 1246/2021 introduced amendments to Proclamation 923/2016, replacing the 8th grade requirement with a skill training and competency certification.</li> <li>• BLAs have been signed with several Middle Eastern countries, including KSA, to support safer migration.</li> </ul>
<b>Information dissemination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal recruitment system.</li> <li>• Jobseekers relied on brokers/agencies, increasing their risk of exploitation.</li> <li>• Minimal public awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overseas employment is advertised officially through district offices and mass and social media.</li> <li>• Formal awareness campaigns have been held to recruit migrant workers.</li> </ul>
<b>Registration/application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job seekers were required to travel to Addis Ababa for registration, increasing financial and social burdens during the pre-departure process.</li> <li>• Brokers dominated the migration process.</li> <li>• No labour ID system or central database existed.</li> <li>• Migrants needed to travel to multiple locations for different registration steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration and recruitment systems have been decentralised. 2,200 one-stop centres have been established providing biometric labour IDs near job seekers' residences to reduce broker influence.</li> <li>• An online system (E-LMIS) has been established where people can directly register as overseas jobseekers.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills development training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were limited TVET centres, mostly in Addis Ababa.</li> <li>• Jobseekers had to look for TVET centres and enrol in the training on their own (government-provided or private).</li> <li>• Jobseekers paid for fake certificates facilitated by brokers, employment agencies and TVET centres.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 77 accredited TVET centres have been introduced across regions, reducing migrants' need to travel to Addis Ababa.</li> </ul> <p><b>Following implementation of the digital E-LMIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOLS is planning to link the online registration service to the TVET training/COC certification.</li> <li>• TVET centres can upload COC certificates online, linking candidate data to the registration system for verification.</li> </ul>

	Prior to the reforms	After the reforms
Job matching and contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no minimum wage standards and no standards for employment contracts.</li> <li>• The overseas employment management process was manual, increasing the risk of errors, inefficiency and fraud.</li> <li>• Employment agencies were concentrated in Addis Ababa and were loosely regulated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum wage has been introduced for migrant workers in countries where BLAs have been signed. Employment contracts are required to fulfil certain standards in their content.</li> <li>• MOLS is in the process of introducing the International Recruitment Integrity System standard for agencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Following implementation of the digital E-LMIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A digital system of overseas employment management and dispatch has been introduced. The system regulates all employment processes, including contract uploads, visa checks and insurance verification.</li> <li>• A QR-code is now issued for approved contracts, thereby ensuring verification during deployment and return.</li> </ul>
Pre-departure orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-departure orientation was provided to jobseekers only when they were near completion of their overseas travel process.</li> <li>• International Labour Organization (ILO) booklets including commonly used phrases and country-specific guidance were distributed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-departure orientation is now incorporated into TVET training.</li> <li>• ILO booklets have been discontinued.</li> </ul>
Complaint handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal complaint system existed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An online complaint management system has been established. Migrant workers can use an app or a QR-code to submit complaints via text or recorded voice message.</li> <li>• A dedicated complaint team has been established.</li> </ul> <p><b>Following implementation of the digital E-LMIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overseas partner agencies should now be registered in the MOLS system by their local partners.</li> </ul>

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the Ethiopian government's enhancements to its migration system, the research project outlined in this report examined prospective migrants' experiences with the new KSA initiative. Specific areas of interest included:

- Migrant domestic workers' perceptions of the official support offered to migrate to KSA for work.
- How migrant domestic workers learned about the KSA initiative.
- Sources of information on working in KSA and the extent to which prospective migrant domestic workers can make informed decisions to migrate.
- The extent to which the Ethiopian government migration system is operating as planned.

In this report, to glean insights into how the migration system is working in practice, we draw on qualitative data collected from prospective Ethiopian migrant domestic workers (1) in the early months of the KSA initiative and (2) in the second year of the initiative after the digital E-LMIS had also been implemented. Additionally, we draw on six interviews with stakeholders from various Ethiopian government and local agencies who were directly involved in implementing the KSA initiative.

## METHODOLOGY

In September and October 2023, we conducted four focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 35 women who were preparing to go to KSA as part of the new initiative (Zelalem, 2023). There were two FGDs in Addis Ababa and two in Adama, Oromia. Once additional time had lapsed between the announcement of the KSA initiative and the roll-out of new changes to the migration system, including implementation of the digital E-LMIS, we interviewed an additional five women who were in the process of going through the formal system to work abroad in KSA. The purpose of these additional interviews, conducted in June 2024, was to document whether prospective migrant domestic workers to KSA had directly experienced any of the intended system reforms. Additionally, we interviewed five Ethiopian government officials and one Freedom Fund staff member to document their perspectives on what aspects of the migration system had been successfully changed and what challenges were still present. Information from all of these interviews and discussions has been primarily used to create the comparison table above.

### **Recruitment of study participants**

FGD participants in Addis Ababa were recruited in September 2023 using a government list of Certificates of Competence (COC)-holding women registered to travel to KSA and a list of COC trainees from a private TVET centre. FGD participants in Adama, Oromia, were recruited in October 2023 either while they waited to process their passports outside the regional branch of the Immigration and Nationality Affairs Agency or by using a list of COC trainees from a private TVET centre. Each of the women received about USD 10 for participating in the FGDs. The five women interviewed in June 2024 were recruited from the government training program for prospective domestic workers in Addis Ababa. Each of these women were paid approximately USD 10 for the interview, and discussions lasted an hour.

The government officials interviewed were identified by Freedom Fund staff, and one of the authors, Ms. TsigeredaTafesse, sent them formal requests for an interview. Those interviews lasted approximately one hour.



Of the 35 women who participated in the four FGDs, 20 stated that they intended to migrate to KSA for work, while the rest said that they planned to go to other Arab countries, namely UAE and Jordan. Whether or not these women were ultimately able to choose their destination is unknown. However, because this report focuses on the KSA initiative, it includes only the responses of the 20 women preparing to go to KSA in the early months following the launch of the initiative, as well as those of the five women and six stakeholders interviewed in the second year of the initiative.

## Sample

This report includes findings from the women who had started to go through the migration process in the early months of the KSA initiative, before the initiative was more established and the digital E-LMIS had been rolled out. Data from the five women who were interviewed in the second year of the initiative, after the digital E-LMIS system was implemented, are presented in relevant thematic sections to capture any changes in processes or procedures that might be attributed to the new electronic system. The post-digital E-LMIS findings are included to provide emerging insights into whether the system reforms are having the intended effects.

As detailed in Table 2, across the total sample, most (60%) of the participants were 18 to 30 years old. Over half (55%) the women who participated in the first round of data collection and 80% of those interviewed after the digital E-LMIS was introduced were between the ages of 18 and 30. However, these numbers may be skewed due to the possibility of workers under 18 not disclosing their status as a minor in order to work and financially support themselves.

There was no dominant marital status across the sample, with most participants being either single (40% of women who participated in the first round of data collection, 40% of women interviewed in the second round) or currently married (35% first round, 40% second round). There was also a relatively even split between participants who had at least one child and those without children (52% of the sample versus 48%). Most participants had at least some formal education (90% first round, 80% second round) and were from the Oromia Region (55% first round, 40% second round). Across the sample populations, participants' prior experience working abroad varied, although there were missing data for this variable.



**Table 2. Demographics of Ethiopian domestic workers considering migration to KSA (N=25)**

	Round one of data collection (n = 20)	Round two (after migration system reforms) (n = 5)
	Frequency (Percent)	Frequency (Percent)
<b>Age</b>		
18-21	2 (10%)	1 (20%)
22-25	5 (25%)	2 (40%)
26-30	4 (20%)	1 (20%)
31-35	3 (15%)	1 (20%)
36-40	2 (10%)	0
Missing	4 (20%)	0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	8 (40%)	2 (40%)
Currently married	7 (35%)	2 (40%)
Separated/divorced	1 (5%)	1 (20%)
Missing	4 (20%)	0 (0%)
<b>Number of children</b>		
0	10 (50%)	2 (40%)
1	4 (20%)	1 (20%)
2	2 (10%)	2 (40%)
3	3 (15%)	0 (0%)
4	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
<b>Highest level of education attached</b>		
No formal education	1 (5%)	1 (20%)
Up to 8th year (primary education)	7 (35%)	2 (40%)
9th through 12th year (secondary education)	11 (55%)	2 (40%)
Missing	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
<b>Region where participants grew up</b>		
Oromia	11 (55%)	2 (40%)
Amhara	2 (10%)	1 (20%)
SNNPR	0 (0%)	1 (20%)
Sidama	0 (0%)	1 (20%)
Missing	7 (35%)	0 (0%)
<b>Prior experience abroad</b>		
Yes	8 (40%)	2 (40%)
No	1 (5%)	3 (60%)
Missing	11 (55%)	0 (0%)

## FINDINGS

As part of its campaign to send 500,000 women for domestic work in KSA, the Ethiopian government made several promises to make the process faster, safer and less expensive by requiring the women to register with government-licensed employment agencies. The government also confirmed that there would be a minimum monthly salary of SAR 1,000 (USD 267<sup>3</sup>). Lastly, it said that all migrant domestic workers would be required to receive training at specialised household institutes in Ethiopia where they would be trained on Saudi regulations, traditions and the nature of their employment contract.

When asked whether the process was working as advertised, the women consulted as part of this research shared that there were some aspects of the process, such as the COC trainings, that were working for the most part. However, they also cited remaining issues that prevented or impeded them from migrating abroad in a timely manner, such as slow passport processing and illegal fees charged by brokers, even following introduction of the digital E-LMIS. They also had varying, and often insufficient, access to the information needed to make informed decisions about their migration. These issues are discussed in detail below.

### Obtaining information

Obtaining accurate information about the KSA initiative, its migration process and likely working conditions in KSA is critical for enabling prospective migrants to make informed decisions about their possible migration. However, the research showed that prospective migrants' access to information has not been consistent, particularly in the early months of the initiative, increasing their risk of exploitation before and after departure.



## How participants learned about the KSA initiative

The Ethiopian government was committed to overseeing the entire process, beginning with advertising the KSA initiative and managing recruitment of the migrant domestic workers. It announced and promoted the initiative on Facebook, billboards, in newspapers and via radio. However, among the 20 women who were consulted towards the beginning of the KSA initiative, only seven stated that they had heard or read the campaign announcements and subsequently registered with a government-approved employment agency, as directed. One of these women reported that she was still waiting for the process to play out:

*I heard and got registered. They said the government is looking for 500,000 women to send to Saudi. I paid ETB 4,500 (USD 56<sup>4</sup>) for COC training, got trained for 45 days and got my certificate. But so far nothing is happening.*

**24-year-old woman from Modjo**

In contrast, another seven women out of the 20 women interviewed in the early months of the initiative stated that they found out about the campaign only after reaching out to a broker and/or registering with an employment agency to find work abroad. These women were told that the only work-abroad opportunity at that time was in KSA. As one woman from Wello (age unknown) reported, "We went to the agency, and they sent us to take the COC training. We didn't hear the announcement." Thus, despite the government's efforts to spread word of the campaign, the information did not initially appear to reach all communities that would most likely take advantage of an overseas employment opportunity, including those more isolated from information and therefore at greater risk of exploitation. There were no data on how more recent prospective migrants specifically learned about the initiative although they seemed generally better informed.

## KSA salary confusion

A key theme in the FGDs with women in the early months of the initiative was confusion over the guaranteed salary. Government officials believed that during the announcement of the KSA initiative, it was stated that the monthly salary would be SAR 1,000 (USD 267). However, many of the women who participated in the FGDs towards the beginning of the KSA initiative had heard that the monthly salary would be SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559). It is unclear from where the women received this information, although many reported hearing advertisements on the radio about the opportunity and the monthly salary, including some allegedly shared by official government Facebook accounts; however, this information could not be independently verified.

The extent to which participants believed claims of higher salaries varied among the participants. Several of the women in the FGDs conducted in the early months of the KSA initiative appeared to have initially believed they would receive these higher salaries but decided not to go to KSA once they found out that the monthly salary was only SAR 1,000 (USD 267). Even though that is still higher than many locally available incomes, it was not deemed enough to endure family separation.

*I want to raise my children here. I am not going to abandon my three children just to make SAR 1000 (USD 267) per month. I was so eager to go when I heard the payment was SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559) so I promptly renewed my passport because that amount can make some difference. But as soon as we finished the COC training, they told us the salary is only SAR 1,000 (USD 267) per month which is only about ETB 18,000 (USD 313). Not worth leaving my family for.*

**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Some of the women who applied for migration in the early months of the scheme were also under the impression that the salary was in fact SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559) but that the Ethiopian government took SAR 8,600 (USD 2,293), leaving the women with only SAR 1,000 (USD 267), although there is no evidence of this actually happening in practice.

*I cannot be sure, but I heard that we get paid SAR 1,000 (USD 267) and the government takes the rest of SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559).*

**Woman from Wello, no age given**

Notably, though, other FGD participants claimed that it didn't make any sense that Ethiopian women would be paid SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559) each month given that a lot of Saudi citizens make only SAR 7,000 (USD 1,866) a month. This highlights the benefits of being informed about working conditions in the destination country.

*I don't think the government benefits by taking most of the money. I think the initial report of SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559) was exaggerated and that gave way to the speculation that the government will take most of the money. I think the government will benefit by reducing the unemployment. As it is the agencies that will send us, I don't think the government has that much involvement.*

**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

*To begin with, it's not reasonable to expect to be paid SAR 9,600 (USD 2,559) in Saudi. Some of their own citizens work for as low as SAR 7,000 (USD 1,866).*

**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

The issue of salary confusion was not raised in the later interviews with women who participated in the initiative over a year after it was launched, suggesting possible improvements in information transmission about key terms of the initiative. However, the early confusion highlights the importance of accurate information on key working conditions being provided from the onset of any new migration process so that prospective migrant workers can make informed decisions about whether to proceed. This also saves on time and resources since stakeholders involved in the migration process can focus on supporting women who are actually going to migrate.



Luggage to be loaded onto a bus of Saudi returnees, Addis Ababa. ©UNICEF Ethiopia/2013/Ayene

## Information about the migration process

In all the interviews and focus groups conducted in the early months of the KSA initiative, what is most striking is the lack of clear and sufficient information about the procedures and process of travelling for overseas work in the Gulf countries. In contrast, the five women who were interviewed in the second year of the scheme, after introduction of the digital E-LMIS, seemed better informed about the process. For instance, they reported that employment agencies had explained that a contract will be provided upon completion of the COC training and passing the exam. They nonetheless still relied on their personal social networks, like friends and family members who had previously gone abroad for work (see below), to learn about the migration process. This suggests that even when more formal information is provided, informal experiential knowledge passed down from trusted sources is still highly valued. It also highlights an important opportunity for civil society to support prospective migrants workers to access information, interpret it and trust it.

## Sources of information about working conditions in KSA

Of the 20 Ethiopian women who were planning to go to KSA and were interviewed towards the beginning of the KSA initiative, 14 had never worked overseas before, whereas six of the women had worked previously in an Arab country. Two women had previously worked in KSA, allowing them to draw on their own first-hand experiential knowledge of working conditions in the country, even if their experiences were not recent. For instance, a woman who worked in KSA 13 years ago shared her own experiences working there:

*In my experience, people over there are not as bad as the stories make them to be. I have worked five years at different places in Saudi and only had good experiences. It is a matter of chance.*

**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Another source of information mentioned by the women was social networks consisting of people currently working in KSA. When asked if they knew anyone currently working in KSA, seven of the women stated they had family working there and three said they had a friend or friends who were doing so. This meant at least half of the participants had the opportunity to seek at least some information from people they knew who were currently working in KSA.

Some of the women shared positive experiences communicated to them by their family and friends. For instance, one woman heard only positive things from her two sisters living in KSA:

*I have two sisters in Saudi. They went there about six years ago. Our eldest sister has a resident permit. The other one is working as a housemaid there. I haven't heard anything bad about the situation there.*

**21-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

As a result, this woman felt that the information shared by brokers and others on the working conditions in Saudi was exaggerated, and things were not as strict as others made them out to be. While her sisters may have respectful employers, it was not clear how much contact she had with her sisters and how freely they could communicate their experiences. Another woman shared some slightly more measured advice that she had received from a friend working in KSA:

*A friend of mine told me that it is not necessary to be covered up in Saudi. She told me the most important thing is to not get involved in any kind of relationship with the man of the house. I heard the work is not that difficult as the house will be cleaned once a week. But still, I am afraid the same thing will happen to me as it did to my friend, and they will pass me around to work at different houses.*

**24-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

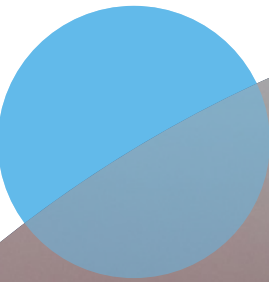
This statement highlights the extent to which some domestic migrant workers' agency is curtailed, leaving them unable to choose where to work and in a situation of servitude. Reflecting this, most of the women had heard that the working conditions in KSA were harder and more exploitative than in other Arab countries. In the last couple of years, women noted that there had been global media attention surrounding Ethiopian migrant workers in KSA being arrested, imprisoned and deported, possibly adding to this perception. Several of the women shared stories of their friends who were arrested and imprisoned, and in one case killed, during their time working in KSA:

*I know a woman who was arrested in Saudi. She faced many hardships in prison, and she was eventually sent back to Ethiopia empty-handed.*

**Woman from Wello, no age given**

*There is good and there is also bad. If you are unfortunate enough to get caught with the wrong crowd who do illegal stuff, you will also be arrested along with them. We hear lots of horrible stories about what happens in the prisons. Once they are in prison some of them will be given poisoned water and killed. I have lost three male friends in Saudi that way. They were killed intentionally. Sometimes it's the employers who do these terrible things. Our life doesn't really matter to them as they don't consider us like humans. But there are also good people there, but we hear lots of horrible stories, especially in Saudi.*

**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**



Yet, despite most women expressing fears about the working conditions in KSA, they appeared to weigh up the information provided by social contacts against their available options and the benefits and risks of migration. Many of the women indicated feeling that just because they knew or heard of someone having a good or bad experience working in KSA, this didn't mean that they would have the same experience. For instance, one woman shared that her friend had an employer who provided her with access to the internet to call home, but she knew that this wasn't the case for all domestic workers in KSA:

*If they are good people, they will let us have access to the wifi. My friend told me that even if they don't have wifi, they will buy an internet package and will allow us to use it to call home. That is if they are good people. I also heard some employers will take our phone as soon as we get in.*

**Woman from Wello, no age given**

Similarly, the following quote from another participant describes a lot of the hardships that Ethiopian domestic workers in KSA face, while also acknowledging that there are plenty of women with positive experiences to share. It also captures a recurring theme of fear of sexual harassment from employers, which women said they had been told to be particularly mindful of when in KSA:

*There is no consulate in Saudi; they are not reachable even if we call them. Workers abscond because they have no other option. Some of the housewives are very jealous for no reason. They fear their husbands will be attracted to the workers, so they make life very hard for them, so the women run away when they get the opportunity. It may be while they are taking the trash out or sent somewhere. They had to flee because the Ethiopian consulate there does not advocate for them.*

*A lot of women face so much hardship even after they abscond. A friend of mine was raped after she ran away from her employers. She ran away when she was sent out to take the rubbish out and a group of men with bad character found her. They raped her multiple times under the influence of drugs and left her out there, they even filmed it while they were doing it. Her sister who is also living with her eventually found her and arranged for her treatment and therapy. She is now back in Addis Ababa but she is still not quite right in the head as she is still traumatised with everything she's been through. It is very difficult to work there for most women. On the other hand, there are lots of women who are on very good terms with their employers. I know there are women who have been living and working there for many years, some even started families of their own and raised their children while working and living there. There are also others who are faced with serious torment and hardship, even death, from abuse and assault.*

**31-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

There was consequently an acknowledgement from many of the women that even though there are bad stories circulating around communities and the media, there are a lot of women who have been able to change their lives and the lives of their families with the money they earned working in KSA. As such, they felt it was important to not walk into this opportunity without information, but to also understand that for every negative story, there is a positive one.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that even where women had the chance to weigh up and assess the information at their disposal, they did not necessarily feel they could make a "free" choice about whether to migrate to KSA. For some women, KSA was their only option due to their destination options being limited to countries where their employment agency had a partner agency.

*I wanted to go to Dubai, but the agency only sends to Saudi. I have a friend in Saudi. She had to go through a lot of hardship, and she told me that I am better off going to a country other than Saudi as things are much harder in Saudi. That is why I wanted to go to either Dubai or Qatar. There is a lot more freedom in Dubai.*

**26-year-old woman from Wello**



For others, despite hearing information about horrific work conditions, the women felt that they had no choice but to go to KSA in order to improve their lives and the lives of their families. They just prayed that their situations would be different. This indicates that although information is vital for allowing prospective migrant domestic workers to make informed decisions, these decisions are often heavily constrained by socio-economic inequalities that force them to take greater risks than desired.

### **Expectation of support from the Ethiopian government**

When reflecting on the possible challenges women feared they may face in KSA, many expressed a mix of optimism and hope that since this is a government-sponsored initiative, the Ethiopian government would be more involved and willing to help if they encountered issues once they were in KSA. They hoped that the Ethiopian government and embassy would be more inclined to provide immediate assistance if women encountered issues with their employers. They also expressed a belief that if the government was to advocate on their behalf, their rights would be respected and they would be less likely to experience exploitation and abuse:

*Now that the government is involved by signing an agreement with the Saudis, the citizens will be protected. We also heard on the news that things are getting better now.*

**Woman from Wello, no age given**

*The embassy there will have the contact numbers of our employers there. The embassy will call every few months to check on us and if we have a serious problem they will come and help us.*

**31-year-old woman from Adama**

*I think our government has the responsibility to ensure our well-being when we go over there for work. I want the government to protect us and ensure our rights are respected.*

**26-year-old woman from Wello**

Thus, the fact that the initiative had state support appeared to boost at least some women's trust that they would be better protected.

## Implementation of the migration process

As noted by the stakeholders interviewed as part of the study, the Ethiopian government has taken steps to streamline the migration process since the launch of the KSA initiative and reduce the involvement of unregulated intermediaries. As the findings in this section demonstrate, there do appear to be some improvements. For instance, although brokers are still key stakeholders, there were signs of a possible reduced reliance on brokers and fewer instances of payment of irregular fees. However, there are still challenges linked to travel delays, accessing passports or visas and accessing the COC training courses.

Further, the five women who were interviewed after the introduction of the digital E-LMIS reported having more access to information about the migration process and described experiences more aligned with the official process. Yet, they did not appear to follow quite the same process to go overseas. Some underwent medical check-ups before starting COC training, while others were told that they will have the check-up after training completion. Although a representative from MOLS explained a specific sequence that prospective migrant workers are supposed to follow, including online referral systems to TVETs and employment agencies, the women's actual experience was that they independently sought out TVET centres and employment agencies, often choosing locations convenient for them. Thus, while the employment agencies used by these five women did appear to generally adhere to the basic requirements specified by MOLS, there is likely still room for further streamlining and monitoring of the process.

## Broker involvement

Likely reflecting the sometimes-limited available information on the migration process and procedures, particularly in the early months of the initiative, five out of the 20 women who participated in the FGDs towards the beginning of the KSA initiative disclosed that they had paid a broker to help them with the process of getting overseas work. Highlighting the apparently common use of brokers, one woman reported that they were often visibly touting for work:

*I witnessed a broker soliciting at the office of Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. He was caught and kicked out of the compound. There are lots of brokers lurking around that area.*  
**27-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Of the women who used a broker, several said they had paid their broker between ETB 5,000 and 10,000 (USD 87-174) to assist with the process and in some cases provide them with a COC certificate so they did not have to go through the training. Reasons for using brokers to procure a COC certificate included the time needed for the training (approximately 12 to 15 days), which curtailed their paid work opportunities, and a lack of nearby TVETs. However, three out of the five women who reported using a broker said that they did not end up receiving their COC certificate from the broker, who had disappeared with their money:

*I paid ETB 5,000 (USD 87) for the broker. He told me he will get me the COC certificate but I didn't attend the training. Every time I call him he is not reachable. I didn't think it through. The broker told me to do it this way but now he doesn't answer his phone.*  
**25-year-old woman from Oromia Region**

*I started the process four months ago and I paid ETB 5,500 (USD 96) to the broker for the COC. I paid so the broker can get the certificate for me.*  
**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

*I started a long time ago. I paid ETB 5,500 (USD 96) for a broker but didn't attend the training and I didn't get the certificate. Then I had to pay another broker again and I finished the process.*  
**Woman from Wello, no age given**

Others reported using brokers to be connected to employment agencies.

It is not clear the extent to which women who used brokers had received information about the KSA initiative. However, highlighting the possible impact of limited available information on women's vulnerability to exploitation by brokers, one woman paid ETB 20,000 (USD 348) for a broker after initially being asked to pay ETB 50,000 (USD 869). She was unaware that the costs of going through formal government channels should be minimal, with the main expense being the passport fee. Instead, she called for action against brokers to prevent their involvement:

*Something needs to be done about the brokers. I was initially asked to pay ETB 50,000 (USD 869) by a broker to start the process. I shouldn't have to pay anything to go through the proper channels.*

**22-year-old woman, location unknown**

On a brighter note, in the interviews conducted with the five prospective migrant domestic workers after introduction of the digital E-LMIS, there was a discernible decrease in women's interest in seeking out brokers to assist them to migrate abroad.

*After the bad experience I had with the broker I am now trying to find work through an employment agency...It has been three months since I started the formal process of overseas work migration. I started the formal process after waiting seven months for the broker to send me to Dubai.*

**19-year-old from Sidama Region**

This improvement, which could be attributed to the interlinked digital E-LIMS, may limit one possible means through which prospective migrant women are exploited. However, despite the apparent progress, it appears that some employment agencies may still collaborate with brokers, soliciting money to send women to countries other than KSA. There were also indications that some of the women interviewed might still turn to brokers if approached. Thus, although the apparent reduction in the use of brokers is certainly a positive sign, awareness raising on the process and official available support remains a critical objective so that prospective migrants do not feel forced to seek unregistered intermediaries to help them to navigate the migration process.

## Other payments & fees

Most of the women consulted in the early months of the initiative were unaware that they were supposed to incur only minimal costs, such as passport processing, as long as they directly registered with a licensed employment agency. Aside from possible broker fees, women who participated in the earlier consultations also explained other fees that they faced throughout the process. For instance, one woman stated that she had paid for the COC training, which is supposed to be free:

*I didn't have to pay the agency as it goes through the government. Although I had to pay ETB 5,500 (USD 96) for the COC.*  
**26-year-old woman from Wello**

Another participant claimed that the registered employment agency required her to pay ETB 5,000 (USD 87) in order to register for work and then asked her to lie to the Ministry of Labor and Skills about having to pay:

*They asked me to pay ETB 5,000 (USD 87) which I refused to pay. I asked them to reconsider and reduce the amount to ETB 3,000 (USD 52), as that was all I had. I had a friend who works at the agency. She told me that if I refused to pay them, they will simply send someone else as it doesn't cost them anything to cancel so I had to eventually pay them. But they want us to lie to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, they asked us to tell them that we were not asked to pay anything even though they told us they won't send us if we don't pay them.*  
**27-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**


Some of the women who directly went to employment agencies reported they did not pay for anything other than their passport, a medical check-up and COC certificate, while others said the agency asked them to pay ETB 10,000 (USD 174) or more without fully explaining what the amount covered. Thus, at least among FGD participants, there was considerable variance over what additional fees women were asked to pay.

In the five interviews with prospective migrants that were conducted in the second year of the KSA initiative following implementation of the digital E-LMIS, some reported paying low or no fees, while others reported more substantial additional fees imposed by their employment agency:

*My husband's friend told me it is free. The employment agency did not charge me money. I paid ETB 2,600 (USD 45) for my passport and spent about ETB 1,000 (USD 17) for a taxi.*  
**35-year-old from Oromia Region**

*In my first attempt through the broker, my father paid more than ETB 75,000 (USD 1,304) to the broker. With the new process I started through the employment agency, I paid ETB 1,500 (USD 26) for registration and ETB 3,300 (USD 57) for medical checkup. I was told the process is free. So, I am not expecting to pay additional payments. (The agency told the interviewee there is a fee of ETB 1,500 (USD 26) to be registered in the new electronic system of the Ministry of Labor and Skills).*  
**19-year-old from Sidama Region**

Some employment agencies therefore appear to be continuing to charge for services not recognised by MOLS, such as registration and uniforms. Additionally, some employment agencies informed women that they would be charged additional payments at the end of the process, potentially preventing them from reporting any irregularities to MOLS.



*So far, I paid ETB 3,300 (USD 57) for the medical checkup, and ETB 100 (USD 2) for the biometric data. The employment agency said I will pay ETB 2,500 (USD 43) for uniform before travelling. They also told me there are other payments that I need to pay, and I should be prepared to pay. They did not tell me the amount. (Interviewee was asked how much she is prepared to pay to the employment agency. She replied she is prepared to pay up to ETB 100,000 (USD 1,739) if the employment agency demanded it).*

**23-year-old from Sidama Region**

The women's acceptance to pay these fees is not necessarily linked to their financial capacity; rather, it is a necessity given the unequal power dynamic between them and the employment agency. Employment agencies serve as a key source of information regarding the employment process and act as a gateway to much-needed employment opportunities. The perception that they are able to affect women's chances of securing an overseas job fuels the continuing power inequalities between agencies and prospective migrant workers.

### **Long delays and poor communication**

Of the 20 women planning to go to KSA for work who were consulted in the first year of the KSA initiative, seven provided details on the length of time it had taken so far to go through the process, and all of them were still in limbo at the time of the FGDs. One woman had been waiting between one and three months, six women had been waiting three to six months and one woman had been waiting more than six months.

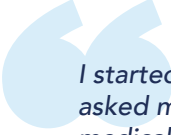
One woman observed that her waiting time did not align with the information she had been given at the onset of the process:



*It will only take 15 days. It has been over three months now. They told me my picture has not yet been selected<sup>5</sup> so I am still waiting.*

**Woman from Wello, no age given**

Another woman had been waiting five months to complete the process after being given an indeterminate waiting time:



*I started the process in May through an agency. When I gave my passport to the agency they asked me for the COC certificate. I attended the COC and finished everything except for the medical. They told me to wait; I don't know how much longer it will take.*

**23-year-old from Wello**

A limitation of the research findings, though, is that it was not clear why the delays were occurring or the sources of possible bottlenecks in the process.

Based on the five interviews with women in the second year of the initiative after introduction of the digital E-LIMS, it appears that now that the KSA initiative is more established and the electronic system is operational, the wait time required for travel may have been shortened. For example, one of the interviewed women was informed by her employment agency that she would travel just one week after completing her training. Although it is not clear whether these experiences are widespread, they suggest wait times are being reduced, at least for some women.

### **COC and rights training**

The 20 women who were consulted in the early months of the KSA initiative were evenly split between those who had completed the COC certificate and those who had not and instead paid for their certificate. All of the 10 women who completed the COC training described it as beneficial. In addition to learning how to do their prospective jobs, they also learned what their rights would be in KSA and whom to contact for assistance.

One woman explained that the training lasted 20 days for those who were going overseas for the first time and five days for those who had worked overseas before; however, a lot of the same information was covered in both trainings:

*First-timers were trained for 20 days while the returning workers were trained for 5 days. But the training is mostly the same and it's comprehensive. Even if some of us are assigned cleaning duties, we will eventually be put in the kitchen to cook or babysit so it's good that the training covers all that.*

**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Several of the women discussed what they learned in the training about their rights as domestic workers, namely their right to eight-hour workdays, breaks, sleeping quarters, medical assistance and proper food. They were also informed that they could call the employment agency or Ethiopian embassy if any of their rights were violated and they would receive assistance.

*We were told we can inform our employers that they should pay overtime if they make us work at different locations and that we are entitled to a weekly rest day and annual vacation. We were told that since this is an initiative supported by the government, we can call the agency if these rights are not respected.*

**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

*From what I heard we have to start work early but we will only do the task once. We can leave and change houses within three months but can't leave after the three-month period. We have a right to get medical assistance in case of illness or injury and the right to contact our embassy there.*

**18-year-old woman from Arsi**

*People at the agency told us that they will give us a contact number we can call in case of such things. We were told that person will relocate us to another house.*


**Woman from Wello, no age given**

However, despite being trained on their rights, some women expressed concerns about whether or not anyone would ensure their rights were upheld or provide assistance if they faced problems:

*We were told we have a right to be properly fed, get a clean sleeping place, work for only eight hours, etc. But what power do we have to ensure we get these conditions? If we call the agency, they will not even pick the phone up or return our call.*


**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Another woman mentioned that as part of the training, they were told to make copies of their contract and employment contact details, provide it to their emergency contact and hide a copy of their passport in their belongings. In response to that comment, a woman in the same FGD, who previously worked in Beirut, claimed that she had copies of her passport taken by her employer upon arriving in Lebanon:



Participant one: *They told us to make copies of this document and give it to our emergency contact here. Since the government is also now involved, something will be done if something happens to us.*

**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**



Participant two: *That is a good thing. I tried to do that at the first house I got in. But I was strip searched [by the employer] and every piece of paper I had on me was taken away from me.*

**32-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Nonetheless, at least some training courses did appear to provide tips to support the women if they faced difficulties.

Based on the information provided by the five women who were interviewed after introduction of the E-LMIS, it appears that while the COC training covered aspects of women's rights and responsibilities in destination countries, the information provided in the training still appears to be incomplete. The women appeared to have been trained primarily to be effective employees and while they had some rights sensitisation, they appeared to lack sufficient knowledge about their rights and how to address abuse if it occurs. Additionally, their experiences suggest that at least some prospective migrant domestic workers are receiving poor advice over whether they can pay for a COC certificate rather than attend the training. They are therefore knowingly or unknowingly paying for a fake COC certificate which they cannot use to go abroad.



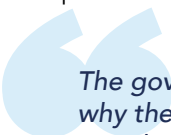
*The broker who scammed me charged me ETB 5,500 (USD 96) for a fake COC certificate. I didn't know it was fake. When I presented it to the employment agency, they told me it is forged.*

**19-year-old from Sidama Region**

The fact that women are still seeking and trying to use fake certificates also suggests that some barriers exist that prevent women accessing the training courses. However, information on these barriers was not available. Additionally, despite the large-scale changes to the Ethiopian migration system, none of the women was aware of the complaint system established by MOLS for domestic migrant workers. Although these were the views of only five women, the fact that none knew of it suggests incorporating this information into COC training could enhance the training's effectiveness.

### **Passport and visa challenges**

In the FGDs with women who were consulted towards the beginning of the KSA initiative, passports and visa challenges were cited as a recurring challenge impeding their efforts to migrate. The women reported that passports routinely took three to six months to be sent to applicants, although there was no obvious reason for why the passports took so long. This significantly delayed the process of travelling abroad for work that would enable them to start making money to support themselves and their family members. Additionally, the women reported being asked to pay exorbitant fees or multiple fees for the same service:



*The government needs to do something about that. They keep giving us all sorts of reasons why they don't give us our passports. We made the payments for the passport but if three months pass, they will make us pay the fee again. We have to pay another ETB 2,375 (USD 41) again just because the process takes longer than three months.*

**37-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

One woman expressed her frustration not only with the length of time it was taking for her passport, but also her visa and the overall cost of the process. She claimed that none of the information she had been provided to date had been accurate:

*I thought I would get it right away. I didn't even have money, so my husband and I had to sell some household equipment to pay for it. Then they gave me an appointment to come back after four months for fingerprinting. I got my passport the following month but I didn't have money to pay for the COC training, so I put everything on hold. Then I heard the COC is being offered for free. We were told the visa process will take fifteen days, but it ended up taking two months. They [the recruiter] don't give you accurate information about anything. I asked when I will be getting my ticket, but they kept giving me different dates. They told me they will give me the exact date three days prior to the flight.*

**27-year-old woman from Addis Ababa**

Despite the overall frustration and exasperation expressed by the FGD participants regarding the passport delays, high costs, lack of communication and relaying of inaccurate information, one woman looked on the bright side, claiming that as fewer women were going abroad to work due to the delays in passports or visas, this reduced the likelihood that the ones who do go could be easily replaced:

*It is not easy to get a passport these days which makes the process harder. However, that also has some positive sides. Previously everyone was getting their passports easily which caused a lot of women to go to Saudi and other countries. That gave the employers a lot of people to choose from. They may mistreat and fire us but there will be others available to replace us at a moment's notice. Now that getting a passport is not so easy, not a lot of women are going.*

**22-year-old woman from Adama**

For the five women who were interviewed later in the KSA initiative after the introduction of the E-LMIS, obtaining a passport was again cited as a major challenge, often requiring a significant amount of time for processing:

*It has been two months...I paid ETB 2,500 (USD 43) for my passport and ETB 1,500 (USD 26) for the first employment agency I contacted. It was in Sebeta [outside Addis Ababa]. My sister said it is too far and there will not be anyone else to look after her children if I go to Sebeta. So, I paid ETB 750 (USD 13) to register at another agency in Addis Ababa. I did not pay for the biometric data. It was free. The employment agency said I will go through the medical checkup after completing the COC training and passed the COC exam. The agency told me there will be additional payments. But they did not tell me how much it is and what the payment is for.*

**25-year-old from Oromia Region**

Others reported even longer wait times, sometimes up to a year-and-a-half:

*Getting my passport took me 17 months. I was processing my passport from Dessie town. I had to go to the immigration in Dessie nine times paying ETB 120 (USD 2) for each round trip. Once I got my passport, I started the overseas employment process two months ago.*

**23-year-old from Amhara Region**

Thus, based on these accounts, it appears that further efforts are needed to expedite passport processing.



## CONCLUSION

Although the findings of this study were based on a small sample of 25 women and six stakeholders' responses, we were able to detect several patterns. Theoretically, by working with host countries directly and making public the market demand and requirements process, the Ethiopian government can greatly increase formal migration for overseas employment and so reduce the demand for informal or irregular migration. In turn, one would expect fewer women, particularly those who are first-time migrants, to seek assistance from informal brokers or unregistered employment agents if information is more easily available about the formal migration process.

Although the second round of data collection was small, it did suggest that at least some women are turning their back on brokers. However, the hope that COC training would lead to greater consistency in job competency and pre-departure preparation among Ethiopian women under the KSA initiative is not reflected in the evidence, with a high proportion of the consulted prospective migrants still opting to pay for the COC certificate rather than complete the training, as well as a persistent lack of clarity over the availability of free COC training. Furthermore, despite the Ethiopian government's recruitment efforts, bureaucratic and contextual impediments remain, such as lengthy delays in passport issuance and inconsistency of public communication.

It is also worth noting that although the sudden appearance of abundant domestic work in KSA was welcome news to the Ethiopian government, most women seeking to work overseas still stated a preference for other destination countries. This was due to their fear of potentially challenging working conditions in KSA, including limited opportunities to exercise their agency. Participants of this study were actively weighing and comparing available information about jobs in possible destination countries. As indicated by our focus group participants, many changed their minds about going to KSA, although others did decide to go, including both first-time migrants and repeat migrants. The women described a rational decision-making process where potential migrant domestic workers sought information from others in the community and news or social media so that they could make as informed decision as possible, weighing up the risks and benefits of working in KSA. Women who participated in the early FGDs believed that they were well informed about the potential risks of working in KSA through their informal information channels, but less so through formal information channels, such as government sources or employment agencies. The five women who were interviewed in 2024 did appear to be better informed and better prepared through official government channels about potential risks of working in KSA. However, it is worth noting that many women appeared happy that the KSA initiative was government supported, allowing them hope that they would be supported if any rights violations occurred during their overseas employment.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this study offer the following recommendations for private entities, civil society actors, government agencies and researchers to consider when designing interventions that support migrant domestic workers and strengthen migration systems.

### **Increase communication around the formal migration process.**

Although the KSA initiative is government-sponsored, many women learned about the opportunity through local brokers. As a result, the brokers took advantage of the situation and required unnecessary fees to connect them to a registered employment agency. The Ethiopian government should continue to make strategic efforts to disseminate information about the KSA initiative and the application process, particularly in rural areas, to debunk any inaccuracies (such as those regarding salaries) and ensure that the process is legally being followed by employment and government agencies without the involvement of brokers. It is equally important that the Ethiopian government ensures effective decentralisation of the migration process, including the establishment of local labour centres in regions from where women tend to migrate, so that communication about the migration process is enhanced and controlled by representatives of the formal process to reduce the risk of prospective migrants being exploited.<sup>6</sup> Key information that is needed for migrants to make an informed decision on whether to migrate includes how the migration process works in practice, the costs of migrating, how long it is likely to take to migrate, working conditions and salaries in the destination country and what protections are available for migrant workers. Civil society organisations working on safer migration can play a critical role in disseminating this information in a language that resonates with the target communities. However, they need a strong understanding of the current overseas employment schemes, which they can gain through close collaboration with the Ethiopian government and employment agencies. Indeed, the long-term goal is to ensure information dissemination lies with the government and trusted civil society actors rather than unregistered brokers. Survivor-led organisations can also play a critical role in sharing their first hand experiences of working in KSA in a structured way, particularly given the emphasis placed on experiential knowledge by prospective migrants.

### **Increase monitoring of employment agencies and brokers.**

The later, small sample of interviews with prospective migrant workers in the second year of the KSA initiative suggests that some prospective migrants are no longer turning to brokers. However, these unregulated intermediaries still appear to be playing a role in supporting at least some women to navigate the migration process, making them susceptible to exploitation. There is therefore a need for stricter penalties for brokers, who are still capitalising on the KSA initiative by charging women for connecting them to employment agencies, in addition to charging money to provide them with forged COC certificates. Some registered employment agencies also appear to be profiteering from the initiative, charging women for expenses that should be covered under the process, such as training for the COC training certificate, and asking prospective migrants to lie to government agencies about having to pay these additional fees. Transparency in this migration process could be enhanced either by increasing staff capacity at MOLS to enable them to improve monitoring of employment agencies or by contracting a third-party agency to monitor the process from recruitment through to departure. Any registered employment agency not following the procedures should be fined and possibly de-registered, and brokers should be fined to deter other unscrupulous agents. There could also be incentives for employment agencies who open in underserved locations to reduce the demand for brokers.

## Accelerate passport processing.

Due to delays in passport processing, a lot of women are abandoning the idea of going to KSA to work as domestic workers. Now that it takes several months to get a passport, many women are having to pay transportation fees to go back and forth to the passport processing centres in addition to being possibly asked to re-pay the passport fee after three months. Expediting passport processing for those going to KSA as part of the initiative would reduce the waiting time and help accomplish the government's goal of sending 500,000 women to KSA for domestic work while protecting their safety and rights.

## Monitor the effectiveness of BLAs at protecting migrant workers' rights.

Implementing BLAs with destination countries is a significant step towards safeguarding migrant workers' rights, but their impact depends on enforcement in the destination countries and migrant workers' awareness of available support mechanisms. Research is essential to assess the extent to which BLAs tangibly improve the lives and rights of migrant workers in destination countries such as KSA. Additional measures to monitor protections for migrant workers in KSA could include follow-up calls with women during their first six months of employment (either via direct calls or through employment agencies in KSA), reallocation of resources to cover the Ethiopian labour attaché role in KSA and an increase in Ethiopian embassy staffing and resources to enhance capacity for supporting migrant workers. Support could involve regular follow-ups with employment agencies in KSA to ensure compliance with agreed standards.

Saudi Arabia. ©Wajdram/Adobe Stock

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The kafala system is a set of laws and policies that delegate responsibility for migrant workers to employers, including control over their ability to enter, reside, work and, in some cases, exit the host country.
- 2 Human Resources and Social Development (2022, September 21). "Saudi minister of labour and social development, his Ethiopian counterpart sign bilateral agreement to recruit well trained and medically fit domestic workers." <https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/media-center/news/72148>
- 3 All Saudi Riyal (SAR) exchange rates are as of June 2024 (using the monthly average), rounded to the nearest dollar. [SAR to USD Exchange Rate History for 2024](#)
- 4 All USD exchange rates are as of June 2024 (using the monthly average), rounded to the nearest dollar. [USD to ETB Exchange Rate History for 2024](#)
- 5 It is common practice for employment agencies to include a photo of the prospective domestic workers along with a short bio on a job board for employers to choose from. Unfortunately, this often leads to selection bias based on the appearance of the domestic worker, particularly around age and appearance.
- 6 The Freedom Fund is working with the Ethiopian government, actively supporting its efforts to enhance the formal migration systems and strengthening the role of civil society in raising awareness about migrant workers' rights.



# VISION




Our vision is a world  
free of slavery.

# MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations  
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