

Families of Missing Migrants:

Their Search for Answers, the Impacts of Loss
and Recommendations for Improved Support

Country report:
Ethiopia



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Funding for this report has been provided by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the donor.

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Cover photo: *Smoke and Broken Mirrors. Women (...)* reported often having to challenge the decisions made by their fathers or brothers-in-law concerning the search, the control of any property, or their ability to remarry – all factors impacting the short- and long-term financial stability of women and/or their children. © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

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Required citation: Mengiste, T.A., 2021. *Families of Missing Migrants in Ethiopia: Their Search for Answers, the Impacts of Loss and Recommendations for Improved Support*. International Organization for Migration (IOM). Geneva.

ISBN 978-92-9068-957-7 (pdf)
ISBN 978-92-9068-958-4 (print)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is the result of a collaborative effort involving several IOM offices and a team of independent researchers participating in the project “Assessment of the needs of families searching for relatives lost in the Central and Western Mediterranean”, funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The author would like to thank all the families who courageously shared their stories, the field assistants who provided invaluable support during the fieldwork, and Kiya Gezahegn and Yohanes Zenebe.

The editors would like to sincerely thank all the reviewers for their constructive feedback on the draft chapters. We would like to extend special thanks to Mengistu Tadesse at IOM Ethiopia for the close collaboration throughout the entire project, and to the project's advisory board members for their guidance and feedback on the report. We are also grateful to the following colleagues: Juliette Hasbroucq and Malambo Moonga (IOM Ethiopia); Julia Black and Andrea García Borja (IOM GMDAC); IOM's Media and Communications Division, particularly Natalie Oren, Pau Saiz Soler and Hiyas Bagabaldo for their work producing all the audiovisual communication materials for this project, as well as Safa Msehli for her unwavering support to the project; the entire IOM Publications Team, led by Valerie Hagger, particularly Laarni Alfaro for the editing, Mae Angeline Delgado for the layout and Frances Solinap for the administrative support; and Tristan O’Shea and Paulina Kluczynska (IOM GMDAC) as well as Michael McCormack, Dragos Prodan, Hania Mir, Lisa Rauscher and Marina Lehmann (IOM Germany) for their precious administrative support. We particularly wish to thank Roberta Aita for the art direction of this report, and Salam Shokor for illustrating the findings of the research in such a sensitive and beautiful way.

We are especially grateful to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for enabling us to carry out this research project.

This report is dedicated to the families of all people who have gone missing or died on migration journeys while seeking safety, dignity and better opportunities.

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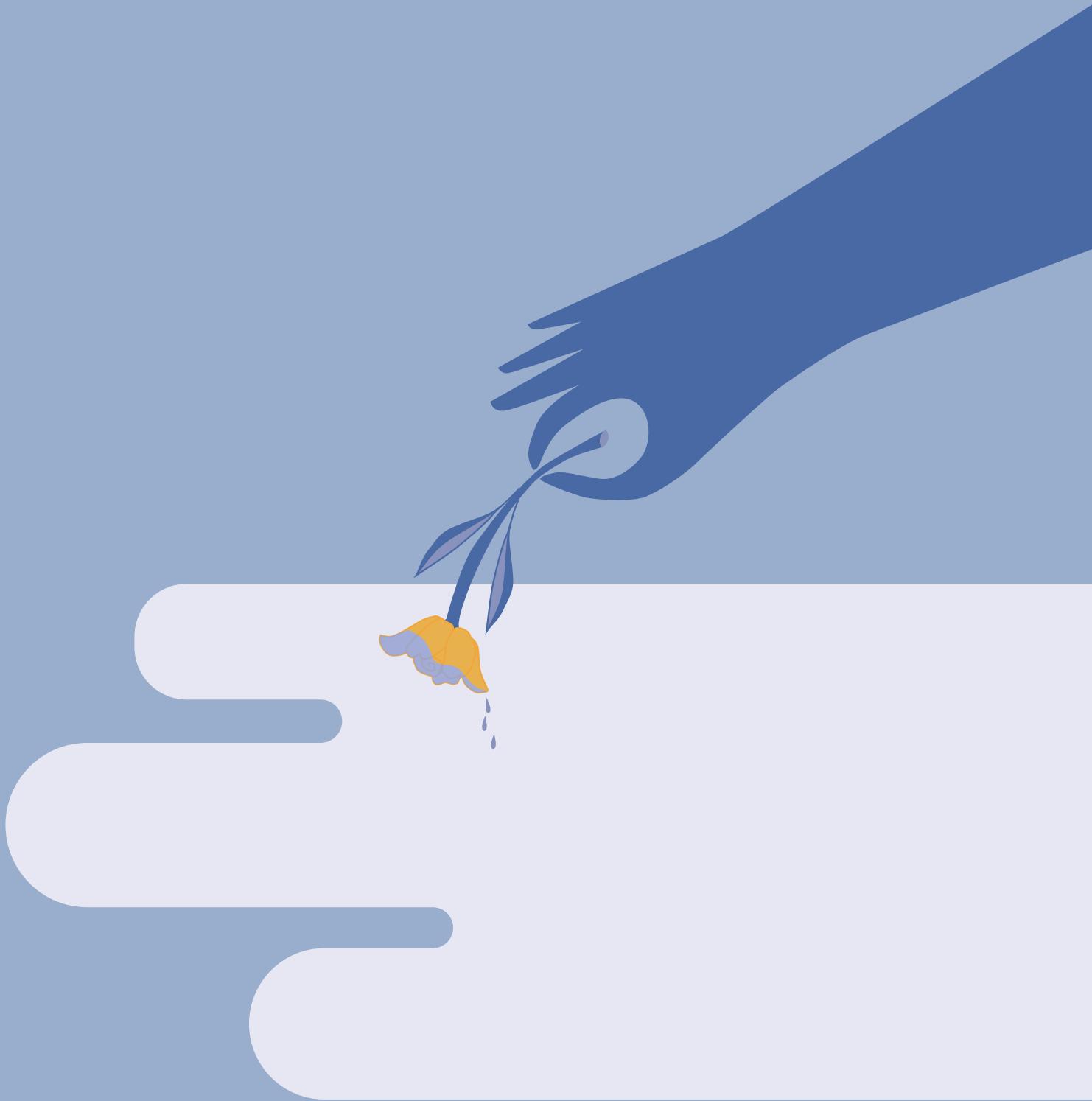
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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| BOLSA | Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs |
| CCCs | community care coalitions |
| CRVS | Civil Registration and Vital Statistics |
| CSA | Central Statistics Agency |
| CSKC | Civil Society Knowledge Centre |
| ERCS | Ethiopian Red Cross Society |
| GMDAC | Global Migration Data Analysis Centre |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MMC | Mixed Migration Centre |
| MMP | Missing Migrants Project |
| MOLSA | Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs |
| MSF | Médecins Sans Frontières |
| NDRMC | National Disaster Risk Management Commission |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NPC | National Partnership Coalition (NPC) for the Prevention and Control of the Crimes of Trafficking in Persons, Smuggling of Persons and Unlawful Sending of Persons Abroad for Work |
| OAG | Office of the Attorney General |
| PEA | private employment agency |
| PSNP | Productive Safety Net Programme |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNGA | United Nations General Assembly |



ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES SEARCHING FOR RELATIVES LOST IN THE CENTRAL AND WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Between April 2019 and March 2021, IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), through its Missing Migrants Project (MMP), carried out a research project aiming to document the experiences of families searching for missing relatives lost in the context of migration journeys in the Central and Western Mediterranean. Since 2014, IOM's MMP has recorded more than 40,000 deaths and disappearances during migration around the world. The death or disappearance of each person included in IOM's records has reverberating effects on the family and community surrounding them. With support from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, IOM GMDAC conducted research in Ethiopia, Spain, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe to better understand the experiences and the challenges that families face while searching for loved ones lost during migration. The project aimed to capture such situations in places of migrant origin, transit and destination.

The project was a highly collaborative effort involving several IOM offices and a team of independent academics and researchers who are migrants themselves or who work closely with migrant communities in the countries that participated in the study. An advisory board formed by key international and civil society organizations and academics working with families of missing migrants around the world provided input at different stages of the project.

The research team spent time with 76 families in their communities across four countries, having in-depth conversations with them. The team prioritized listening to what is important to the families, allowing them to drive the knowledge that was created with the project. Thus, the voices of the research participants, who are all missing their family members in the context of migration to another country, are at the centre of the project's findings and reports. The experiences of families were complemented with interviews with more than 30 stakeholders to assess the institutional, legal and policy frameworks applicable to cases of missing migrants in the contexts studied.

Based on the research findings and in consultation with the project's advisory board, a series of policy implications and recommendations were developed to drive action to support families of missing migrants in searching for their relatives and dealing with the impacts of their loss. They are aimed at different actors – in government, international organizations, and community and migrant support organizations – and can be found in the last chapter of each of the reports.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the absence of safe, dignified and legal migration pathways, thousands of Ethiopians embark on dangerous and long journeys every year towards Europe by crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to the Gulf States via Djibouti, the Red Sea, and Yemen, and to South Africa by boat over the Indian Ocean or by land across several African countries. These journeys are often risky, with thousands of Ethiopians believed to have died or gone missing, whether due to violence, vehicular accidents, shipwrecks, or lack of access to medicine, shelter and food along the way.

The families of those who have gone missing on their journeys may spend years not knowing what has happened to their loved ones. This report explores the challenges and needs of Ethiopian families who have relatives who went missing or died in the context of international migration, against the backdrop of the legal, policy and institutional frameworks applicable to issues of missing migrants in Ethiopia. It is based on qualitative interviews with stakeholders and families, as well as participant observation and desk research, which were carried out in spring 2020, and is part of a project carried out by IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre that aims to raise awareness about the challenges and coping mechanisms of people with missing migrant relatives in Ethiopia, Spain, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe.

The report hopes to contribute to stronger and more appropriate legal and policy responses to support families of missing migrants, which fulfil Ethiopia's commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by which States commit to cooperate closely at the international level to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration, and Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which calls on States to "save lives and establish coordinated international efforts in relation to missing migrants" (UNGA, 2018).

While Ethiopia has an increasing number of national laws and resources dedicated to migration management and has adopted and ratified relevant international human and migrant rights conventions, there are no specific policies, legal frameworks or institutions to deal with the specific needs and concerns of families of missing or dead migrants, including help searching for their loved ones, identification and repatriation of remains from abroad, and the emotional and socioeconomic impacts of the loss. As a result, families primarily seek information about the missing from informal channels and networks, including smuggling facilitators, survivors and members of the Ethiopian diaspora abroad, while the State tends to focus on the criminalization of those involved in smuggling and blame families for not stopping their loved ones from using irregular and dangerous migration channels.

In this context, Ethiopian families encounter multiple personal, legal and financial challenges when searching for their missing loved ones and when trying to repatriate the remains in the event of death. Families often lack financial resources to pursue a search, to confront the costs associated with the management of remains (if found), and to pay smuggling or ransom fees. Migrants often acquire vast amounts of debt to embark on their journeys – debt that is not forgiven in the event of their death or disappearance. Repayment of these fees disproportionately impacts women (often the widows of missing or dead migrants), who also find themselves unable to legally access inheritance or rights to property, given traditions and customs that privilege men.

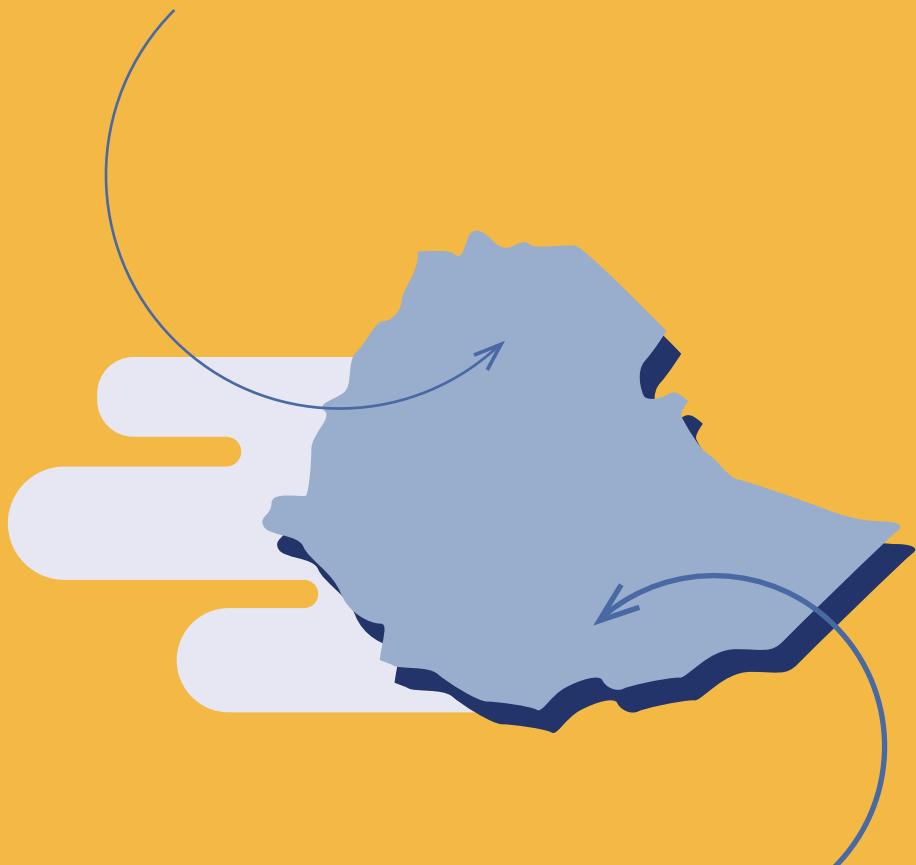
Testimonies collected in this study show the multidimensional emotional and psychological challenges that families experience due to the loss of their loved ones. However, families in Ethiopia are neither silent nor passive victims. In the absence of State-funded tools and services to adequately address their needs, the families themselves push their cases forward and develop their own networks and support structures to search for the missing – and in the process, cope with the grief and the social, legal and economic hardships.

Families and community organizations cannot continue to carry on these efforts on their own. There is a need to improve the collective understanding of their needs which, up until now, has remained unaddressed. The findings of this research have resulted in the following recommendations to improve the situations of families of missing migrants in Ethiopia:

1. **Amend the national legal and policy framework to take into account the situation of families of missing migrants and the dynamics of deaths and disappearances on migration journeys.**
2. **Designate an institution that functions as a single point of contact for families of missing migrants.**
3. **Enhance the capacities and roles of existing support structures for families, including diaspora groups abroad.**
4. **Provide social protection and economic support to families of missing migrants.**
5. **Address the needs of families through a mental-health and psychosocially informed approach.**
6. **Account for the different needs of family members when designing policy interventions.**
7. **Promote raising awareness on the subject of missing migrants as a humanitarian and human rights issue.**
8. **Seek to identify families of missing migrants and collect data on missing migrant cases.**
9. **Shift from a criminal/anti-smuggling approach to a humanitarian approach to the issue of missing migrants.**
10. **Put families at the centre, in line with international standards applicable to the management of missing migrant cases.**

CHAPTER 1

Migration journeys of Ethiopian migrants



1. Introduction

Tekalign Ayalew Mengiste¹

Faced with a lack of options for safe and legal mobility, thousands of Ethiopians leave the country every year using irregular migration channels to reach destinations in Northern Africa and Europe, the Gulf States, or South Africa. These journeys can be risky, with the most extreme evidence being that thousands of Ethiopian migrants are believed to have died or gone missing along these routes. While official data on the specific numbers of Ethiopian migrants who have died or disappeared is not systematically collected, it is estimated that more than 7,000 Ethiopian migrants have died or gone missing on irregular migration routes between 2012 and 2020 (BOLSA, 2020; IOM, 2014; IOM, 2017).² Each one of these people who went missing or died leaves behind a family and a community who are deeply affected by their loss.

This report is based on two streams of research conducted with families of missing migrants and with key stakeholders in Ethiopia in 2020, looking at the experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms of the families of missing migrants in the country. It is divided into two main chapters: Chapter 2 focuses on the findings from interviews conducted with families in Ethiopia who searched for, or are currently searching for, relatives and loved ones who went missing on migration pathways. Chapter 3 presents an assessment and a mapping of the legal, policy and institutional frameworks applicable to issues of missing migrants in Ethiopia and how these are experienced by Ethiopians with missing migrant relatives. The research from both chapters highlights the need to develop specific and targeted responses to the needs of the families of missing migrants in the context of Ethiopia. The recommendations in the final chapter of this report provide short-, medium- and long-term strategies and responses, and include scope for additional research leading to evidence-based policies and interventions.³

This chapter provides a brief overview of Ethiopian emigration trends, including the socioeconomic and historical contexts and a description of the three main routes of irregular⁴ migration out of the country.⁵ The chapter finishes with a short overview of the circumstances that can lead to deaths and disappearances on these routes.

¹ Dr. Tekalign Ayalew Mengiste is Chairperson at the Department of Social Anthropology at Addis Ababa University and an Affiliated Researcher at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. Dr. Mengiste is the author of all the chapters in this report.

² For updated data, please visit www.missingmigrants.iom.int.

³ The author and the editors note that the COVID-19 pandemic and the violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region that erupted in October 2020 are exacerbating the issues discussed in this report and that were found through the project's research. The pandemic has had disproportionate (negative) effects on people already in vulnerable situations, including those with missing migrant relatives. Furthermore, community groups may not be able to meet and support each other as much as they could previously, such as when this research was conducted. The violence in Tigray has meanwhile driven tens of thousands of people from their homes, resulting in potentially more risks of family separation or decisions to take dangerous migration journeys to other countries.

⁴ The term "irregular" is used to refer to a mode of moving outside regular/legal migration channels – it does not necessarily carry a criminal connotation, is not against migrants' dignity and does not undermine respect for the human rights of migrants (IOM, 2019a).

⁵ While this report focuses on Ethiopian migrants and their families, it should be noted that Ethiopia itself is a major country of origin, transit and destination for people from other countries in East Africa.

2. The Ethiopian emigration context

From the time Ethiopia formally permitted its nationals to pursue labour contracts abroad in the early 1990s, international emigration has increased significantly (De Regt and Tafesse, 2016; Zewdu, 2017). It is estimated that between 600,000 and 700,000 Ethiopians migrate annually to destination countries in the Middle East, Europe, South Africa, Australia and the United States, fuelling a vibrant global diaspora, estimated to have approximately 2.5 million people (Ayalew, 2017; IOM, 2018). It is also estimated that about 70 per cent of Ethiopians who migrate to international destinations are young men and women between the ages of 16 and 22, who embark on irregular migration journeys across dangerous overland and sea routes to reach their destinations (Ayalew, 2018; Adugna et al., 2019).

Structural, social, familial and individual conditions drive migration in general – and youth migration from Ethiopia, in particular. Conflict, displacement, poverty and unemployment have been cited as main driving factors leading young Ethiopians to leave their country (Zewdu, 2017; Williams, 2019). Poverty is rampant, with 26 per cent of the population earning less than USD 0.60 per day in 2019 (UNDP, 2014; Adugna, 2019); and in 2017, the youth unemployment rate in certain urban areas of Ethiopia was estimated to be approximately 50 per cent (Mains, 2012; Lefort, 2015; Ayalew, 2017). The vulnerabilities and aspirations of the country's young people are also shaped by political instability, environmental disasters and demographic pressures. Due to limited livelihood opportunities and volatile socioeconomic conditions, many young people are unable to fulfil personal life projects and family expectations, including generating a stable income, getting married and starting a family (IOM, 2014; Schewel and Fransen, 2018). Limited access to regular migration channels, increasingly connected economic and communication systems, the precarious labour situation at home, and the social and economic value placed on migration and diasporic remittances often make young people feel deprived and excluded from the global community, thus influencing their desire to pursue international migration (Semela and Cochrane, 2019; Ghebru, 2019).

While the context of irregular migration is shaped by a wide range of mobility dynamics, from diaspora networks to levels of immigration control in transit and destination countries, there are three general routes used by Ethiopian migrants leaving the country. The first one is the north-western route towards Europe, which links villages and towns in Ethiopia to Khartoum, the Sudan, and proceeds via the eastern Sahara Desert into Libya and then across the Central Mediterranean. The second is the eastern route to the Middle East and the Gulf States, through Djibouti and Somalia via Yemen, which involves crossing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The third one is the southern route to South Africa via Eastern and Southern African countries (Estifanos et al., 2019; Williams, 2019; Estifanos, 2017).

The north-western route towards Europe gained popularity among migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia following the heavy militarization and closure of their access to Israel via Egypt and the Sinai Desert in 2012 (Triulzi, 2013; Demissie, 2017; Ayalew, 2018; Belloni, 2019). Ethiopians embarking on long journeys northward to Europe include young men and women of varying levels of education from both rural and urban areas of the country (Triulzi, 2013; Ayalew, 2017). They travel north via the Sudan through the Sahara Desert to Libya, where they may cross the Central Mediterranean Sea to Italy or Malta (MMC, 2020; IOM, 2019b). Different actors, including smugglers, family members at home, other migrants en route, and members of the diaspora, as well as bus, taxi, or lorry drivers, and local people along the way support migrants in their journeys (Ayalew, 2018). However, despite the existence of networks of support, this journey is risky and unpredictable given the obstacles that migrants encounter along the route, such as violent attacks, exposure to harsh environments, being held in detention by border guards, and being kidnapped for ransom by criminal groups and militias (IOM, 2014; MMC, 2020).

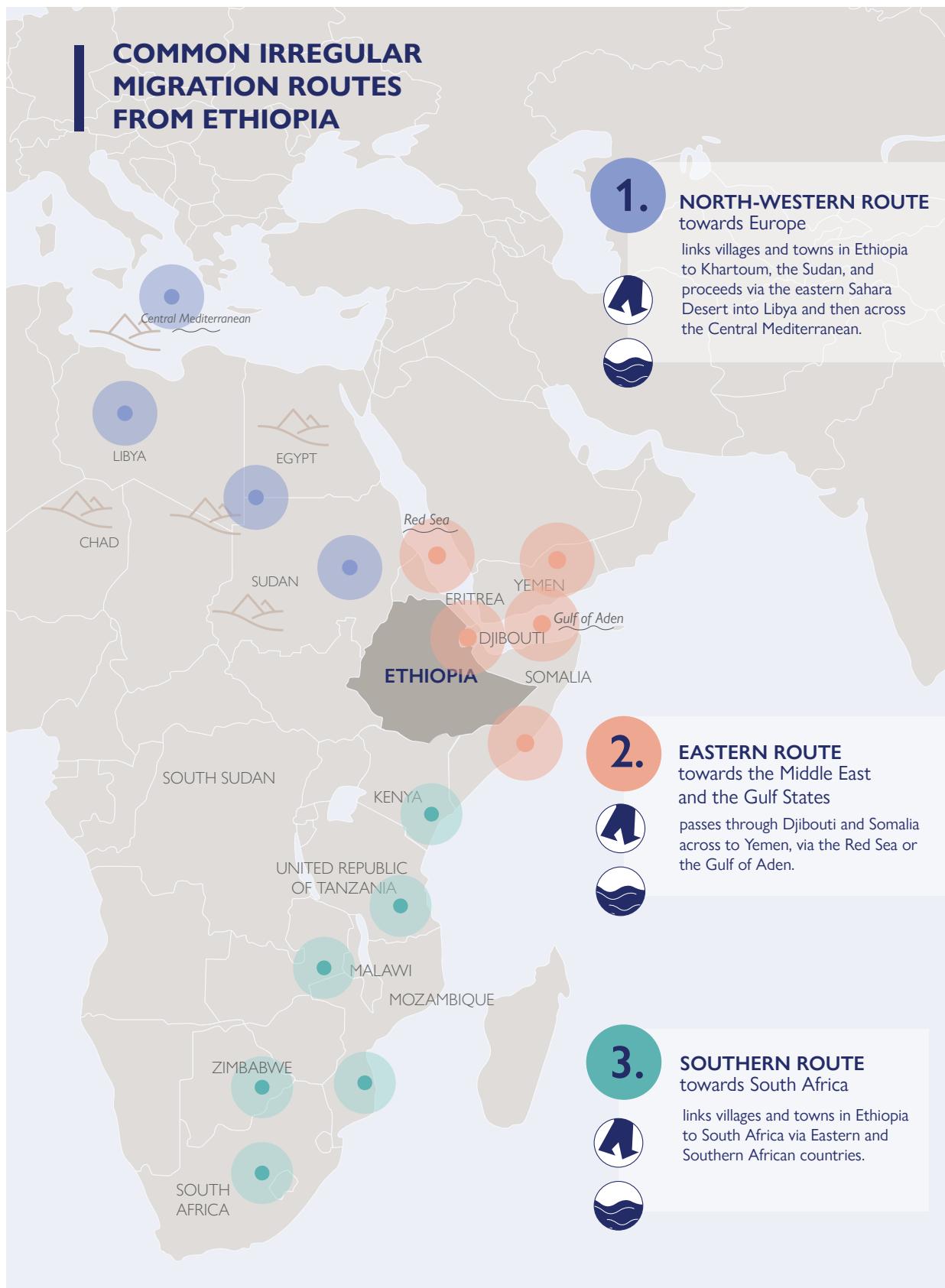
In more recent years, countries in the Middle East and the Gulf region have also become major destinations for Ethiopian migrants via the eastern route. Between 2009 and 2014, approximately half a million Ethiopians moved to the Middle East (mainly to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar (IOM, 2020a; Zewdu, 2017). While official statistics are scant, researchers report that a higher proportion of Ethiopian migrants in these destinations are young women, who are mainly from rural parts of Ethiopia and seeking jobs as domestic workers (Demissie, 2017; Zewdu, 2017). The majority have their migration facilitated by private employment agencies (PEAs) based in both Ethiopia and the countries of destination. Following the

enactment of Ethiopia's Private Employment Agency Proclamation in 1998,⁶ more than 600 PEAs have been established in the country, and they have helped more than 300,000 Ethiopians migrate to Gulf countries for domestic work (MOLSA, 2015). However, as legal migration through PEAs is considered to be overly bureaucratic, time-consuming and costly, in recent years many Ethiopians have turned to smuggling services to migrate to the Gulf countries – in particular, to Saudi Arabia – by crossing either Djibouti, the Red Sea, and Yemen; or Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, and Yemen (IOM, 2014; Zewdu, 2017).

Most Ethiopians migrating from the southern parts of Ethiopia (for example, regions like Hadiya, Kambata and Wolayta) tend to head towards South Africa on the southern route (Adugna, 2019). According to Estifanos (2018), this migration trend began in the 2000s when the then Ethiopian Ambassador to South Africa supported the migration of a few of his relatives to this country. These initial arrivals, together with the involvement of *delala* or *delaloch* (the local term used in reference to smugglers or brokers) and the spread of stories of and by migrants who reached their destinations, eventually led to a high rate of emigration along this route, and for a culture of migration between Hadiya in Ethiopia and South Africa to emerge (Estifanos, 2018). It is estimated that from 2016 to 2018, between 200,000 and 300,000 Ethiopian migrants have moved to South Africa (Kefale and Mohammed, 2016; Estifanos, 2018). In rural areas of the Hadiya zone, one of this study's research sites, there are well-established networks that facilitate mobility from villages and towns in southern Ethiopia with smugglers operating in transit border towns and countries all the way to South Africa (Adugna et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this can be a dangerous journey. Several families interviewed in the context of this briefing reported having lost at least one family member along this route. These journeys, which may take several months, start in Hadiya and pass through Moyale (at the Ethiopian-Kenyan border) and then across Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe before reaching South Africa (IOM, 2014 and 2016). Migrants often travel on foot, in container trucks, and by buses, and they travel through dangerous and hostile terrains such as around Mount Kilimanjaro. There have been several incidents involving migrant boats travelling along the eastern coast of the continent, on the Indian Ocean, in which people from Hadiya have died or gone missing (Estifanos, 2018).

⁶ Ethiopia's Private Employment Agency Proclamation No. 104/1998 was revised in 2009 in the Employment Exchange Services Proclamation (EESP) No. 632/2009. The proclamation was revised for the third time in 2016 and reissued as the Overseas Employment Proclamation No. 923/2016.

Figure 1. Common irregular migration routes from Ethiopia



3. Ethiopia's missing migrants

Migrating irregularly from Ethiopia towards Europe, the Gulf States and South Africa requires long journeys and can pose many risks along the way (IOM, 2014; Botti, 2019; MMC, 2020). While reports on the deaths and disappearances of Ethiopian migrants in transit are common, there are no official statistics on the number of cases of missing migrants. Some partial efforts exist: between 2012 and 2019, at least 5,972 Ethiopian migrants died or went missing along the southern route towards South Africa alone, according to Ethiopia's Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BOLSA); and between 2014 and 2020, IOM's Missing Migrants Project recorded the deaths of 1,073 Ethiopians on other migration routes, although this is believed to be an underestimate due to many data-collection challenges.⁷ Based on survivor testimonies and experts in the field, Ethiopians are systematically among the missing and the dead in shipwrecks in the Central Mediterranean Sea; however, confirming the nationality (let alone the full identity) of victims is often impossible.

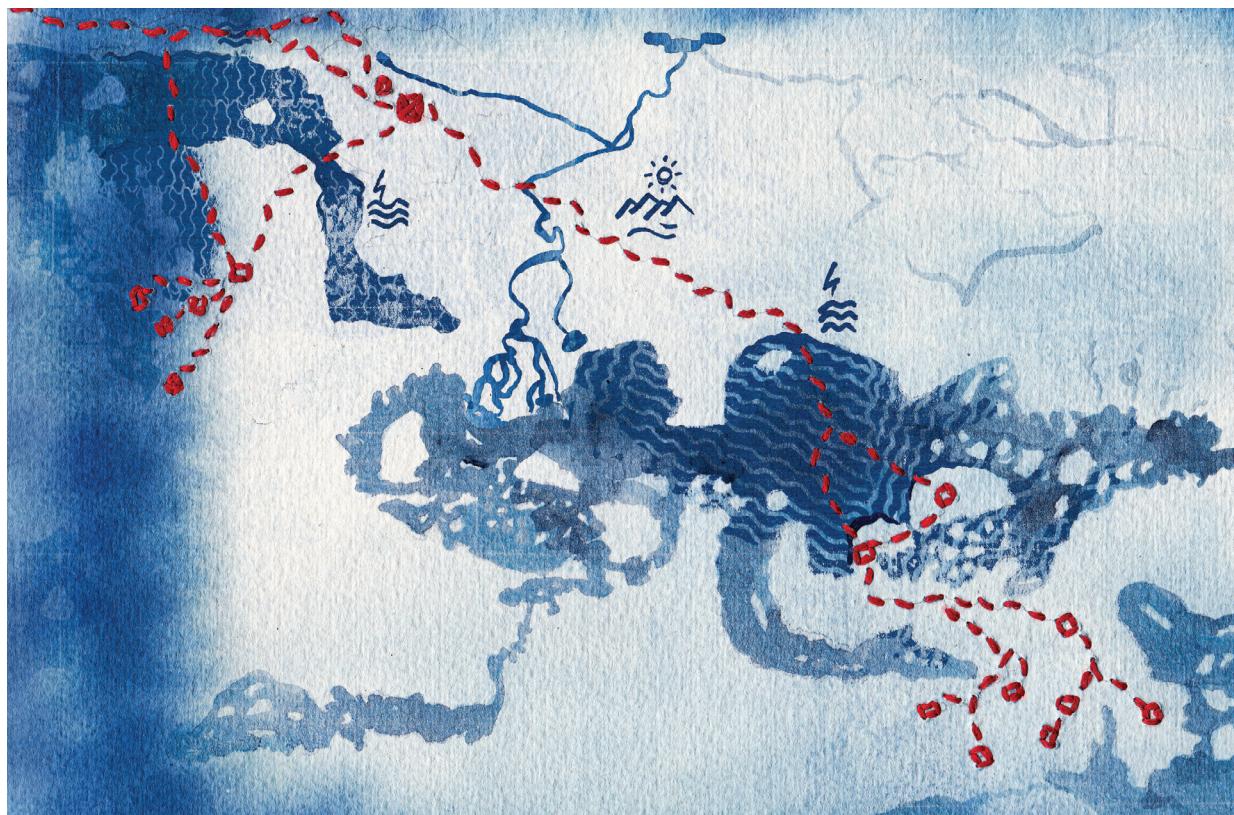
Barriers and restrictions to legal and orderly mobility block the ability of many Ethiopians to migrate safely, forcing them into more perilous and dangerous routes where humanitarian support and rescue may be unavailable. Available information indicates that migrants departing from Ethiopia have died as a result of the physical hardships that they encounter in their journeys on foot, on boats and in trucks as they deliberately make their way through remote mountain ranges, deserts and open seas with the aim of avoiding detection by authorities. Exposure to harsh environments leads to death by dehydration, exhaustion or starvation. Many migrants also die by drowning in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, due to suffocation inside containers, or as a result of violent practices by border guards, smugglers and militias – not to mention the results of gender-based forms of violence (Horwood, 2014; Global Initiative, 2018; Horwood and Forin, 2019). If smuggling is used, those migrating also have little autonomy to decide about their journey, as details about the routes and the modes of travel are often completely left up to smuggling facilitators (Ayalew, 2018).

The experiences of (and accounting for) migrants who die or go missing in the course of their journeys become increasingly complex in relation to immigration controls and border enforcement mechanisms along the migration pathways. For example, there are reports of migrants dying as a result of illness and lack of access to medical treatment in detention centres (MSF, 2020; IOM, 2014; HRW, 2019). Deportation practices to remote places in the Sahara Desert in response to the European Union's externalization of borders (Monella and Creta, 2020; Ayalew, 2018) also increasingly put migrants in vulnerable situations that could result in deaths and disappearances. The occurrence of kidnapping or torture for ransom resulting in deaths and disappearances among Ethiopian migrants has been widely documented as well in Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Mozambique and Malawi (Horwood, 2014; Horwood and Forin, 2019). In 2018, more than 90 per cent of the 12,000 migrants (including those from Ethiopia) interviewed by IOM after arriving in Italy from Libya reported at least one experience of abuse, exploitation or human trafficking on their migration journey (Bartolini and Zakska-Todorovska, 2020). Having to pursue more remote and distant pathways to reach a destination creates more risks for migrants too. Cases of migrants dying of suffocation in containers or lorries and those – dead or alive – being deliberately thrown into the sea by smugglers from overcrowded boats are reported by survivors (UN News, 2017; IOM, 2020b). Furthermore, there are abundant references to migrants being abandoned by smugglers after they have run out of fuel, become lost, or encountered law enforcement or border control (Reidy, 2019; IOM, 2014; Hairsine, 2019).

Deaths on precarious or irregular migration journeys are not the only factor behind Ethiopian migrants going missing. Reports of Ethiopian migrants going missing or dying while being stranded, in detention, or connected to situations of labour exploitation while living and working abroad are frequent. Saudi Arabia alone hosts an estimated one million Ethiopian migrants, most of whom have irregular migration status and are therefore exposed to labour exploitation and sexual and physical violence at the hands of different actors – including their employers. Research also shows that many Ethiopian women die as a result of harsh living and working conditions, labour exploitation in domestic work, or xenophobic attacks in South Africa (De Regt and Tafesse, 2016; Busza et al., 2017). While there is no comprehensive and publicly available data, several ad hoc investigative journalism pieces, as well as the works of activists, community groups, and relatives, have uncovered cases of Ethiopian migrants dying or going missing in such situations (Kebede, 2002; Facsar, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020; CSKC, n.d.).

⁷ These challenges are further explored in Chapter 3.

No matter the context, people with missing family members (the focus of this research) can be left with life-changing psychological, physical, economic, legal and social effects (ICRC, 2017). The next chapter, which presents the findings of the research carried out with families of missing migrants in Ethiopia, provides more evidence of these impacts.



Treacherous Destinations. This map is inspired by Muhammad al-Idrisi's “قاف آلا قارتخا يف قاتشملا و هزن”， known in the West as the *Tabula Rogeriana* world map from the year 1154. It positions Africa on the top rather than the bottom, inviting the viewer to critically examine the routes from an unfamiliar, borderless perspective. © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

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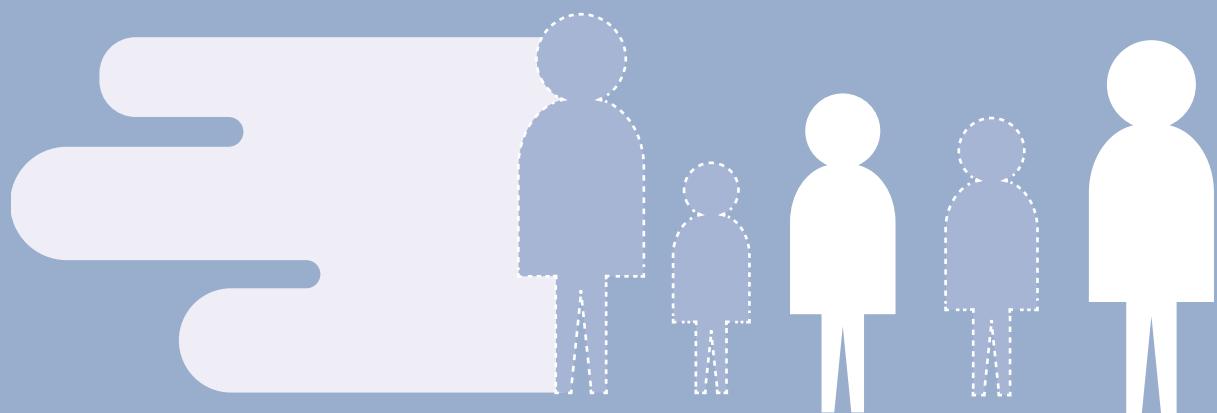
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CHAPTER 2

Families of missing migrants in Ethiopia: Assessing the needs of families searching for relatives lost on the Central Mediterranean and southern routes



1. Introduction

Despite the ubiquitous and regular coverage of migrant deaths in global media, there is limited understanding of the impacts that these deaths and disappearances have on their loved ones. As this chapter shows, families in Ethiopia encounter personal, legal and financial challenges when searching for their migrant relatives who go missing or die. Families often lack financial resources to pursue a search – not to mention facing the virtually impossible task of obtaining a visa to go abroad to search for information or to visit the sites where their missing relatives have been buried, considering all the requirements that need to be fulfilled. In other words, there is no prospect of leaving the country to locate a missing or disappeared loved one for most Ethiopians. Furthermore, there is no State or State-mandated institution that assists Ethiopians in the search and/or repatriation of their loved ones. Subsequently, there is no official data concerning the families that have suffered such a loss, their experiences, or measures to address their challenges. Reports have documented how such families in other parts of the world experience psychological issues like anxiety, depression and sleeplessness, along with physical ailments, as a consequence of the death or disappearance of a loved one (ICRC, 2017; British Red Cross et al., 2019; Robins, 2017). Less understood are the specific experiences of families in the Ethiopian context, including the disparities when it comes to sociocultural and gender norms.

The families encountered through this research are neither silent nor passive victims. While there are no State-funded bodies that address their multiple needs, many families have developed their own networks and support structures to search for the missing – and in the process cope with the grief and the social, legal and economic hardships that their losses entail. These include the mobilization of financial, psychosocial, and legal resources and support by religious organizations, kinship networks, the diaspora and community-based groups.

After introducing the research approach and methodology, this chapter provides an overview of the impacts of the deaths and disappearances of Ethiopian migrants on their families, including the challenges, needs and responses of these families, most often developed at the communal level. These findings are derived from field-based research carried out with Ethiopian families in Addis Ababa and Hadiya. The last section outlines the recommendations articulated by the families for how their situations could be improved. These points are integrated into the recommendations for action in the final chapter of this country report. The goal of this research is to identify bottom-up and local perspectives and practices, and to provide specific action points for stakeholders to deal with this pressing, but neglected, issue in Ethiopia.

2. Research methodology

The findings of this chapter were documented through participant observation and face-to-face qualitative interviews and supplemented by desk research. The focus was to identify the challenges and needs of families with missing or dead migrant relatives – and how they defined these difficulties – in the context of a search or the aftermath of the death or disappearance. The intention was not to be representative but to shed insight into the lives of people living with such a loss through qualitative methodology. A total of 21 family members between the ages of 25 and 66 were interviewed. Among them, 12 were men (fathers and brothers of missing migrants) and 9 were women (mothers and sisters). The research participants were nuclear family members (i.e. biological parents, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters) or other relations and acquaintances who held close emotional, social and economic ties to the nuclear family, who have a relative who had gone missing or died in the context of a migratory journey. While 10 interviews were conducted in Addis Ababa, 11 occurred in Hadiya. In the latter, interviews were conducted in the Hadiyya language and occasionally in Amharic. In Addis Ababa, all interviews were done in Amharic. The interview data was supplemented by literature on the Ethiopian context and included an examination of the country's laws and regulations relevant to the matter of migrant deaths and disappearances.



Inseparable Loss. "Where did he go missing?" "I don't know exactly." The focus was to identify the challenges and needs of families with missing or dead migrant relatives – and how they defined these difficulties – in the context of a search or the aftermath of the death or disappearance. © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

The selection of rural and urban field sites was done in consultation with the IOM country office in Ethiopia. Fieldwork was conducted with urban families in the neighbourhood of Kirkos in Addis Ababa, and in Hadiya in southern Ethiopia, both of which have historically high levels of emigration. Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, is a vast metropolis of nearly 7 million inhabitants. It has been a major sending and transit location for Ethiopians embarking on irregular migration to Europe, the Gulf States and South Africa (Ayalew, 2017; Belloni, 2019). It was also the epicentre of refugee migration to Europe following the conflicts and civil wars during the Dergue regime in Ethiopia (1974–1991) (Zewdu, 2017). The success stories of this diaspora and their active transnational economic, political and social engagement with the people in Addis Ababa have continued to fuel the migration aspirations of today's Ethiopian youth.

Multiple factors such as political repression, demographics, youth unemployment, the availability of technology and the existence of diasporic networks, combined with personal aspirations, drive migration from Addis Ababa (Triulzi, 2013; Ayalew, 2017), and specifically from the working-class neighbourhood of Kirkos, the selected research site. Kirkos is known locally for the large numbers of its young people who have embarked on long journeys to Europe through Libya since the early 2000s, relying on the north-western migration route across the eastern Sahara Desert. High-risk migration to Europe is a socially and morally accepted and deeply rooted practice among the youth in Kirkos. Informants in Addis Ababa estimated that each family in Kirkos has lost at least one family member for each one that has made it to Europe safely. Such familiarity with death and loss in the context of migration was one of the reasons why Kirkos was selected as a research site for this study.

Hadiya, on the other hand, was selected given its rural context, in addition to being known among informants as one of the regions in Ethiopia with high numbers of migrant deaths. Residents here believe that the number of missing and dead migrants exceeds any estimates and that these tragedies of families remain unknown and untold. The local officials consulted for this research referred to several incidents that were not necessarily public knowledge. For example, a Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs official reported that their office had documented the deaths of hundreds of Hadiya migrants along the coastal waters of the Indian Ocean, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Mozambique; Lake Malawi; and along the Gulf of Aden and Somalia.

The research conducted in both Kirkos and Hadiya cannot be seen as representative of the experiences of all families in Ethiopia or of the challenges they face in response to the deaths and disappearances of their migrant loved ones. For one thing, the research participants are all Ethiopian nationals. However, Ethiopia is popular as a transit and destination country, which leaves this research with a gap that requires attention. Nevertheless, in the absence of other such research, this study provides important insights into the conditions surrounding the loss of and the search process for missing migrants from Ethiopia.

With the deeply sensitive nature of the study, all interviews were conducted with the respondents' best interests in mind. The research team followed ethical guidelines, including securing informed consent and maintaining the privacy, dignity and anonymity of the families (all names used in this briefing are pseudonyms). Emotionally distressed and economically precarious families were given contacts from relevant charities and State organizations for the immediate or future provision of psychosocial and economic support. While an interview guide was used, the approach was inductive and participatory in nature – in other words, the families were invited to direct the conversations and identify what they themselves considered important aspects of their experiences, with the goal of also allowing them to articulate their own recommendations for how their situations could be improved.

3. Research findings: The challenges and impacts of having a missing family member and the available systems of support

This section outlines the challenges faced by families while searching for missing or disappeared loved ones who departed from Ethiopia with the purpose of migrating to another country, and the impacts related to living with this loss. After describing how families take action to search for their missing loved ones in both research sites (Hadiya and Addis Ababa), the cross-cutting issues they faced – including challenging gender dynamics, outstanding debts, demands for ransom for their kidnapped relatives, mental and physical health problems, and the role of spirituality – are examined. Overall, three common points of context emerged among the participants:

- (a) It was often impossible to determine when their loved ones started their journey, let alone when (or where) they went missing. It is common for Ethiopians who set off on irregular migration journeys to leave without informing friends or family members, abandoning their neighbourhoods or villages without notice and leaving no details concerning their plans nor destination. It is only once they arrive at points along the migration journey, like the Sudan or even Libya, that migrants contact their families, or their co-travellers and companions call with updates. This is to request money to continue their travel, at times to report accidents or fatalities that took place during the journey, or even (if they do not wish to continue) to inform that they will turn back. These delays prevent the timely start of a search for someone who is missing and the likelihood of a positive outcome (that is, the ability to determine the whereabouts of a missing loved one).
- (b) The search for missing loved ones and its aftermath have deeply gendered dynamics. Several of the challenges and impacts of having a missing migrant relative were experienced differently by men and women, with the latter being exposed to more economic and sociocultural risks in such a situation. For example, interviews indicated that the decision of when to start or stop searching often tends to be made by male relatives (fathers or older sons), but also by someone in the family considered to have the ability “to remain calm” (most often a man). Women (the widows or daughters of missing migrants) reported often having to challenge the decisions made by their fathers or brothers-in-law concerning the search, the control of any property, or their ability to remarry – all factors impacting the short- and long-term financial stability of women and/or their children.
- (c) There was a lack of a formal institution or mechanism to support families looking for migrants who went missing while pursuing their journeys. The families interviewed either did not know where they could turn to in the Government for support or were sceptical about doing so. This has led to the emergence of community-based forms of information-gathering and support, rather than stimulating the establishment of responses by the State.

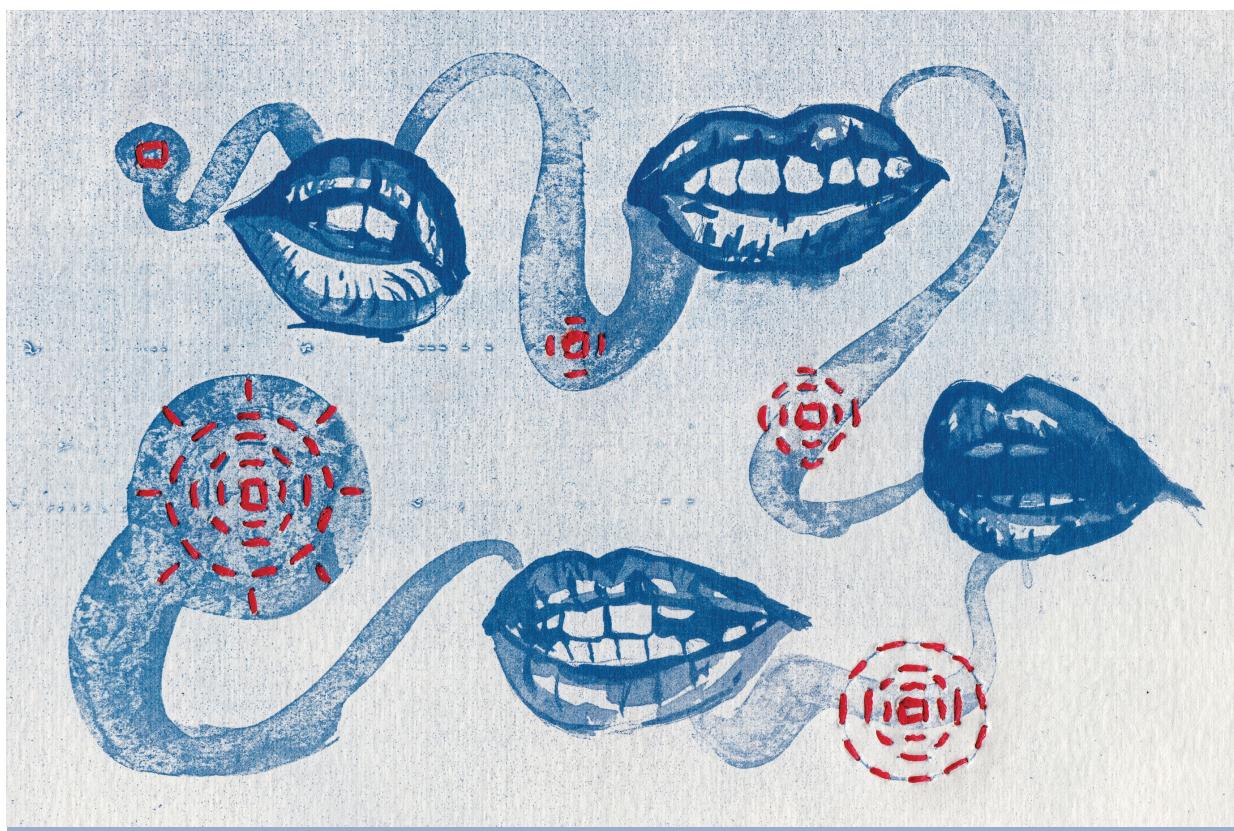
3.1. “We cannot go to Libya and search for him. We just pray God brings good news to us”: The search process

The experience of losing a loved one who decided to embark on a migratory journey and the initial confusion concerning how to jump-start a search were shared by all interviewees. Many of them reported being unaware of the fact that their loved ones had decided to migrate. Many people (particularly young men) reportedly left without informing friends or family members, and leaving no details concerning their plans nor destinations. Yet even in the case of migrants who did inform their families about their journeys, or who travelled with their support, it was difficult to determine when or where the person had gone missing. This was partly the result of migrants themselves deciding how to communicate or manage information concerning their journeys. For example, many told their loved ones that they would be in touch once they reached their destinations. Often having little information themselves about their itineraries or the locations through which they travel, migrants may opt not to communicate at all with their families at home during their journeys.

Most interview participants expressed respect for the decision of their loved ones to manage the flow of information about their journeys. However, many started the search for information about their respective family members’ whereabouts as soon as they received reports concerning incidents on migration routes that could involve them.

Such news could come from friends, relatives, smugglers, brokers, the news or social media. Some also began to search for information when the pattern of communication with the migrating family member changed or ended without any reason. Still, families indicated it had been difficult for them to decide when, where and how to start searching, because they had limited information concerning the details of their loved ones' journeys.

In Hadiya, rural families reported relying mainly on information shared by people who had travelled with their missing loved ones (other migrants, guides or smugglers) or even border guards. For most, the first person they contacted was the broker or smuggler who had facilitated the journey, followed by other migrants known to have travelled with their loved ones, and/or any survivors if the group had been in an accident. If none of these efforts were successful, or if additional information was needed, interviewees indicated they would report the case to members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the last country the missing person was known to have travelled through. In the case of migrants travelling to South Africa, interviewees reported calling friends, relatives and South Africa-based smugglers for information about recent migrant journeys over land or through the Indian Ocean. Despite the stigma that surrounds their activities, smugglers were often recognized for their willingness and ability to access contacts and information that could establish or inform the whereabouts of a missing person. Interviewees indicated how smugglers often had information concerning vehicular accidents, and they could contact border guards for information concerning any migrants being detained or imprisoned while transiting countries such as the United Republic of Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique, or members of smuggling and brokering networks operating from Ethiopia all the way down to South Africa, which expedited the dissemination of information.



Mouth-to-Mouth-to-Mouth Information. Families in Hadiya and Addis Ababa reach out to other migrants and their families, co-travellers, members of the diaspora, and quite often smugglers for information and help. © IOM 2021/
Salam SHOKOR

While the relationship between families and smugglers must not be romanticized, interviews revealed that many families were more likely to trust smugglers over authorities when it came to solutions or information about their missing loved ones. The reality of this is explained by this mother of a missing migrant:

“ We don't know which institution is responsible to offer information related to missing migrants. I don't know where to go or whom to ask in the Government. Secondly, it is impossible to go to the country where [my son] went missing because I can't afford that. What I can do is to get news from the *delala* [smuggler] who facilitated his journey. Though I am very disappointed in the *delaloch* [smugglers], I have never thought to accuse them [of my son's disappearance] also because most of them are my relatives. Also, I am scared to go to the government office because I have heard of families who sent their children through illegal ways and who were arrested and thrown into jail. Thus, what I can do is keep praying, hoping that one day my God may herald me with good news.

Families of migrants from Hadiya and Kambata also reported relying on the *iddir* system and its social networks to obtain information about their missing relatives. The *iddir* is a community-based support network, common in rural areas of Ethiopia, that pulls together financial resources to minimize the adverse effects of sudden shocks or crises (Aredo, 2010). The *iddir* plays a vital role in investigating and collecting data about missing and dead migrants since many of its members have either good rapport with smugglers or are smugglers themselves.

Text box 1. Community-based insurance (*iddir*)

Broadly defined, the *iddir* is a community-based association and support fund built around notions of altruism and reciprocity, common in rural and urban areas of Ethiopia. It relies on contributions from its members, who bring together financial resources to minimize the adverse effects of sudden shocks or crises (Aredo, 2010), including the disappearances or deaths of migrants. In the Hadiya region, following the deaths of migrants in South Africa, the local *iddir* often covers the costs associated with the repatriation of the remains. Usually, *iddir* members in the place of origin also support the families of missing and dead migrants by taking care of children and older family members, by hiring people to till agricultural plots or by pulling together a community labour force during harvest time.

Iddir members also play an important role in the search for missing migrants. They have contacts with smugglers, who often are also members of these groups in rural areas and who can help search for the missing through their connections along the migration routes, and try to determine whether a missing person was detained by authorities, kidnapped or died en route.

A family can request the support of the *iddir* to cover funerary costs if the death of their loved one took place in a destination where *iddir* members reside, and if the body was properly (that is, legally) repatriated. The family must then show proof of death and perform funeral and mourning rituals as per local traditions.

The fieldwork revealed variations in search patterns between Hadiya and Addis Ababa. For example, only a few families in Addis Ababa reported seeking information about relatives directly from smugglers. Contrary to the experiences of Hadiya families, smugglers operating in Addis Ababa were believed to have limited information concerning specific journeys of migrants travelling along the northern route. From the interviewees' perspective, this was due to the fact that the facilitation of migration along the northern route is organized in a different fashion. Interviewees indicated that contrary to the case of the southern route, where a single smuggler or broker tends to be the contact person for the entire duration of the journey, smugglers on the northern route tend to work more independently and may not know each other. They perform specific tasks and charge separate, stand-alone fees, and are therefore less likely to be in contact with a migrant for the entire duration of his or her journey (see also: Lucht, 2011). This difference in modus operandi implies that oftentimes, contacts with smugglers operating along the northern route yield limited or no information concerning a missing migrant. Personal and community ties and interactions with smugglers were also reportedly weaker in the urban context, compared to those reported by families in Hadiya.

Furthermore, families in Addis Ababa were more likely (than those in Hadiya) to follow local and international news coverage for information concerning missing persons and to reach out to relatives or friends in other countries whenever they saw reports of shipwrecks involving boats in the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean. They also seemed more inclined than families in Hadiya to rely on social networking sites for their searches, screening community groups for information about missing or dead migrants or posting short descriptions and photos of the missing person. In Addis Ababa, interviewees reported having learned of the fate of loved ones from photos posted on Facebook, often shared by other migrants (particularly young people) or by government organizations, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) or Ethiopian consulates along migration routes. In the cases in Hadiya, social media did not appear to play a critical role in the searches carried out by families, especially given the limited availability of internet in the Ethiopian countryside. According to their testimonies, interviewees preferred direct voice calls when seeking details concerning their loved ones.

Seyum's brother Eyasu is believed to have been killed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Libya in 2015. Seyum has been searching for details concerning Eyasu on behalf of his family ever since. Seyum was notified of Eyasu's apparent death via a phone call he received from someone who believed they had identified Eyasu online:

 My brother Eyasu left for Libya to reach Europe with his friends. One Saturday night I was watching a soccer game with my friends. Someone called me on Eyasu's phone, which [he had left] with me. They asked if I was Eyasu and I told them I was a neighbour who had borrowed his phone. I did not want to say who I was before I learned who was calling. They asked if I had seen [Eyasu's] picture on Facebook. I left the house and went to the nearby shop. I asked them to check what had been posted on Facebook on their smartphone. That is when I saw Eyasu, and I knew immediately it was him. The person who called, thinking I was someone else, had already told me that Eyasu had been captured and killed by ISIS. This was four years ago. We reported the case to the police. I [testified]. But nothing has happened following my testimony.

In Addis Ababa, families also reported reaching out to mass media to search for missing migrants. Helen is the older sister of Abenezer, who went missing in Libya. She told us the following:

 We went to several broadcasting companies such as Fana Television, Ethiopian Television, [JTV] and Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT). After several times of going back and forth and many appointments, ESAT, the diaspora-based TV, reported on the case since at that time many Ethiopians had gone missing in Libya. We [also] heard that the diaspora raised funds to search for the missing in Libya or to pay [ransoms] in the case any of the missing were alive or found. However, we have yet to receive support or news about our brother. My brother told me he had buried many friends. I think he is [now] dead as well. What can we do if the Government does not help? We cannot go to Libya and search for him. We just pray God brings good news to us.

Having exhausted all other options, some interviewees indicated that on occasion, they had to embark on their own journeys in an effort to trace the whereabouts of their loved ones. This generally implied acquiring additional debt in order to cover their own smuggling fees. As there are few options for Ethiopians to obtain visas to travel abroad to search for loved ones or to identify and repatriate the remains, families have no other alternative aside from pursuing irregular journeys for this purpose. Haile is the brother of Michael, who at the time of the interview had been missing for three years in Libya:

 Even my other younger brother has left. He is now in Germany. He is the youngest of all. He decided to leave after [my older brother] Michael went missing. He went to Libya to search for Michael and at the same time cross to Europe. He spent one year just looking for [Michael] in Libya. Fortunately, he made it to Germany, but he did not find our brother.

Text box 2. The role of smuggling facilitators

While often vilified as a result of the role they play in the suffering and death of migrants around the world, migrant smugglers (known in Ethiopia as *delala* or *delaloch*) can also be important members of the communities where they operate, given their role of providing mobility services.

The provision of smuggling services is seen culturally as a process that facilitates migrants' transits amid the criminalization of migration, the militarization of borders, and the potential and existing forms of criminal activity along the migration pathway. The process of facilitating migration is often overseen communally, by migrants and their families themselves, and seeks to create a collective system of transnational protection that provides a basic level of safety for migrants while on the road.

In many parts of Ethiopia, smugglers tend to be friends and relatives of the migrants whom they transport. They also assume personal responsibility for migrants' well-being (Ayalew, 2018; Adugna et al., 2019). However, when tragedy strikes, it is also common for many of these migration facilitators to disappear or to change their addresses to avoid being contacted by relatives or investigated criminally. Reportedly, smugglers discourage families from contacting the authorities, as the latter often blame disappearances on the families themselves (a claim further confirmed by the testimonies documented during this research). Furthermore, families also claim that some smugglers compensate them in the case of a death or disappearance of a loved one by facilitating the migration of another family member at no charge. These agreements are often brokered by respected members of the community.

In sum, families actively engage in searching for their loved ones, and they pursue every path available to them if they suspect something harmful has happened. With the lack of government agencies or any official structures or programmes readily available to assist with their search, families in both Hadiya and Addis Ababa reach out to other migrants and their families, co-travellers, members of the diaspora, and quite often smugglers for information and help. Families, and in particular those in the urban setting, seem more likely to use social and mass media for their searches. In some extreme cases, interview participants indicated that embarking on their own journey to follow in the footsteps of their missing loved ones (and often, in doing so, acquiring additional debt) was their last or only option to find answers.

3.2. “I live with his relatives. I depend on them ... Everything is difficult for me”: The gendered impacts of a loss

Migrants' deaths and disappearances, and the searches that they entail, impact men and women in Ethiopia differently. Since most missing and disappeared migrants are men, it is often the women who stay behind (wives, sisters and mothers). They are the ones who perform tasks related to the search, most often carrying a disproportionate amount of social and financial responsibility.

Among families in Hadiya, the uncertainty that comes with the loss of a family member carries deep social meaning. It also carries strong gender implications. For instance, the death or disappearance of a husband is often blamed on the wife who stayed behind – on her “bad luck” having led to the outcome. Widows are often mistreated by their relatives-in-law, and even the community at large. The wife of a man who died on his migration journey described this as follows:

“ Truly, this is the worst moment of my life. I don't know why God tested me. His relatives frequently blame me because they assume that my husband is dead as a result of my “bad luck”. In our community, it is very common to blame wives [whenever something wrong happens to their husbands]. That is heartbreaking.

Not only do wives of missing migrants face the emotional trauma of not knowing the fate of their husbands, but the women interviewed indicated that they also face legal challenges because of their ambiguous marital status. Unable to legally show that her husband died, or to obtain a death certificate recognized by the community and/or State institutions, a woman cannot claim ownership of the properties belonging to her husband, and her children cannot apply for State support or legally claim inheritance. Furthermore, women face stigma if they decide to leave the family home and/or remarry, as both actions are perceived betrayal of the deceased or missing husband and his family. If a woman decides not to remarry, on the other hand, she is likely to face severe economic challenges that impact her ability to care for herself and her children, especially if they were reliant on her husband's income for survival.

The wife of a missing migrant described her legal challenges and lack of independence this way:

“ I can't talk about property or inherit the land before I get proof of the death of my husband. According to the tradition, his brothers control the land. I can't go to the courts and get into a fight with his relatives. If they farm the land and give some food to my children, that is fine. I can't go against tradition and quarrel over inheritance. Land disputes are [a] serious problem in this village. People kill each other over land conflicts. I live with his relatives. I depend on them ... Everything is difficult for me.

Asserting ownership over farming land after the death or disappearance of a husband is a complicated task for rural women in southern Ethiopia. Although national laws recognize women's equal rights to access and control property (including land), community law and tradition still prevent them from inheriting and controlling farming land in rural areas. In many communities, the ownership of land is given only to husbands at the time of marriage, and the rights of women to inherit land are not recognized.

3.3. “I sold everything we had to search for information”: The impacts of debt

Migrants often acquire significant debts in order to cover the costs of their journeys. Many others depart already indebted, for reasons ranging from household expenses, family illnesses or smuggling fees for other family members. However, even in the event of someone's death or disappearance, debt is not cancelled, and many times the responsibility to cover financial obligations fall on the migrants' wives. Given the fact that women are often prevented from assuming control over property or other inherited goods, the debt imposes long-term obligations that limit women's ability to care for themselves, their children and possibly other relatives.

A widow who lost her husband during his migration to South Africa explained:

“ I was left on my own with kids to feed. I was left alone with the debts we acquired to pay for his travel. I would be happy if I got help to pay the debts and save the land we put down as collateral. I want to feed my children. I want to send them [to] school. But how can I do all these alone? His family should stop blaming me for [my] bad luck. [His disappearance] was not my fault. If they helped me care for these small children, I could at least work. His brothers also want to take the land. My problems are many.



Smoke and Broken Mirrors. Women (...) reported often having to challenge the decisions made by their fathers or brothers-in-law concerning the search, the control of any property, or their ability to remarry – all factors impacting the short- and long-term financial stability of women and/or their children. © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

This increased financial burden, particularly on women left behind, also increases the difficulties of bringing up children. Especially when the death of a missing person has not been confirmed, the women interviewed indicated they were expected to simultaneously continue the search for the missing person as well as care for family members and/or children on their own. A widow whose husband disappeared en route to South Africa explained:

“ I gave birth four months after he left Ethiopia. You see [pauses and cries] ... You can imagine what happened to me. My heart is broken. He was the only one who took care of and understood me. He farmed the land. I don't know how I am going to raise these kids. I sold everything we had to search for information and to make international calls to his friends, relatives and sometimes to the brokers. We had also borrowed money with a high interest rate from local moneylenders to cover his migration costs. Now the moneylenders are asking me to pay back as per agreement or they will take the land. Yet, I can't pay their money and the interest. The debt is increasing every year. Initially, we thought that my husband would pay back the money we have taken [once] he arrived in South Africa.

Older family members also face grave challenges as a result of the deaths or disappearances of their children, especially when they have invested or mortgaged their property or land to finance the journeys. Older mothers and fathers are often left without the economic support that their children were expected to provide had their journeys been successful. These losses are compounded when deaths or disappearances involve multiple children in a single family. The father of two missing sons stated:

 My sons were my hope. One died during an earlier migration [journey]. The second went to search for him and also to try his luck and reach South Africa. He went missing as well. It was last year when he called after arriving in Malawi. He never called again. I am dying twice: [because] I lost them and [because] I lost hope. They used to help me till and farm the land. They were my pride. They were my hope. I am getting older and weaker. I can't work. I rely on my relatives for agricultural labour, but they can only help me after finishing with their own farming. My farm is ploughed late and cannot produce much yield. In the village, children change their families' lives through migration. They buy new houses for their family. They buy oxen to plough the land. Everyone's life changed here after migration to South Africa [started]. But look at my life, which is becoming hell. I cannot even pay the moneylender. I am living with debt. My wife is already bedridden.

3.4. “We sent USD 3,000 to keep him alive”: Kidnapping fees and ransom demands

For many years, researchers have written about the phenomenon of kidnapping of Ethiopian migrants and their diaspora on irregular migration routes. The term “kidnapping” in the Ethiopian context has been used broadly in reference to the abduction of a person for ransom by a criminal group (Ayalew, 2018), but it also pertains to the retention or withholding of a person in transit until a fee is paid to a smuggler or broker for a service (Global Initiative, 2018) or as a form of extortion if said migrant is in detention (Horwood and Forin, 2019). Cases of mass murdering of migrants can also be linked to kidnapping cases in which ransoms could not be paid (Reuters, 2020).

While no specific statistics concerning kidnappings of Ethiopian migrants exist, the ubiquity of testimonies related to these experiences (documented in this study and in other publications) indicates that the potential of Ethiopian migrants being subjected to kidnapping while on their journeys is high. One estimate suggests that one in seven people travelling from the Horn of Africa towards North Africa is likely to be kidnapped (McGregor, 2019).

The families interviewed for this research described kidnappings as a common element of the irregular journeys on all three routes out of Ethiopia. Families often paid ransoms (or at least were familiar with this experience from others) to release their relatives from detention or other forms of confinement, or simply to obtain information on their whereabouts. Paying for smuggling and ransom fee however, on top of the debt acquired to finance a journey, can easily leave a family destitute. Furthermore, the payment of a ransom does not necessarily result in the release of the person, nor generate information about their whereabouts. In fact, most testimonies indicate that despite the payment of a kidnapping fee or ransom, many migrants are still never released or found. The following testimony shows the financial impacts of kidnapping events:

 My brother went missing in Libya three years ago. First, he was kidnapped by rebels, and they held him hostage with many other Ethiopians. They asked us to pay USD 12,500. We tried our best to raise money by begging but could not put together the required amount. We sent USD 3,000 to keep him alive. The criminals shot his legs and hands. They sent us the video of him squirming and photos by imo and WhatsApp [both instant-messaging apps]. For a year, we begged in many places and in public. We were unable to [come up] with the money. Then the criminals switched off their phone. Our brother has been missing since. It has been three years now. I think they killed him. My mother does not want to think he was killed. She insists that we keep searching. We went from office to office and even contacted the Libyan Embassy here in Addis Ababa. We got nothing. Many families became poor after paying ransom money to criminals. My brother's friend was kidnapped by another criminal group in Libya at the same time. The criminals asked the family to send USD 50,000. His family sold their house and sent USD 40,000 to save their son. But their son has also been missing in Libya for three years. Many families in our neighbourhood [Kirkos] have become poor since they borrowed money to pay the *delala* who facilitated the migration to Libya, and then sold their houses to pay the ransom money for kidnappers, and [still they] ultimately lost their sons. They have lost everything.

3.5. “His voice and image come to my mind every minute”: The mental and physical health impacts of loss

The interviews and field observations collected for this research attest to the deep psychological impacts related to the loss, disappearance or death of a loved one in the context of migration. Most families interviewed indicated that they had been unable to establish whether their missing loved ones were dead or alive, leading them to experience ambiguous loss, which occurs when there is no clear closure or sufficient reason behind what happened (Boss, 2000). As a result of their loved one’s disappearance, family members indicated that they experienced a vast range of physical, psychological and behavioural issues – ranging from anxiety, depression, hopelessness, stress, sadness, and loneliness to sleep disturbance, inability to focus, loss of appetite and paralysis. Families also reported having household members who attempted suicide following the disappearances or deaths of their migrant relatives, overcome by the regret of having encouraged or even pressured them to undertake risky migration journeys.

The mother of a missing young woman explained her grief:

“ I am really worried about my daughter. I can’t stop thinking about her. I don’t know what I am going to do. My hopes and dreams left with her. Sometimes I talk to myself just like a madwoman. I have long waited to see her face. But my wishes remain a daydream. Every day I pray, hoping to get her back alive. Whenever someone knocks at my door, I run, hoping that will be my daughter who has come back. I know she is not dead because I see her in my dreams. My heart always tells me she is alive.

Similarly, the father of a missing man explained:

“ As time goes on, our pain and suffering worsen. I can’t work in my farm effectively because [I can see] the face of my boy again and again. As a result, I can’t even fulfil the basic needs of my family. I don’t sleep at night. His voice and image come to my mind every minute. His mother had a heart attack after she heard of his disappearance.

Testimonies clearly demonstrate the multidimensional emotional and psychological challenges that families experience due to the loss of their loved ones. As time goes by, the emotional pain can also increase and is connected to the material implications in the everyday lives of families as well as the loss of livelihoods and personal well-being.

3.6. “If someone is buried without the proper cultural and religious funeral rituals, it is considered a kind of ‘double death’”: Spirituality, religion and rituals

Despite and often alongside the pain related to the loss of their loved ones, interviewees indicated that prayer and religious rituals have an important role in easing their suffering. Prayer and memorial events were frequently arranged by fellow church members, pastors and religious associations to offer solace to families. There are also church-based women and youth associations (known in Hadiyya as *mashura*) that are dedicated to praying with and comforting the families of missing or dead migrants. Religious leaders advise and comfort families too. Kinship associations and community elders make regular visits to families to accompany them during their grief through prayers, blessings and advice. In addition, friends and family members provide company, perform agricultural labour for older or female relatives of the missing, and sometimes offer assistance in caring for children and older relatives.

The mother of a missing migrant described her experience as follows:

“ Our fellow church members are the ones who persistently comfort me. They arrange a prayer programme frequently. They always advise me to keep praying. The pastor of our church has also told me that nothing bad will happen to my son. He also said that my son will come back sooner or later. When they prayed for me and I heard such words, I [felt] completely relieved. They always advise me to think [positively] and hope for the good.

Collectively sharing the pain resulting from the loss is an established practice among the rural families interviewed. Religion helps people cope, with the notion that the death or presumed death of a migrant is fate, “meant to be” or decided by a higher power. Families also indicated that those presumed to have been killed by ISIS are given the status of martyrs, which gives them comfort.

On the other hand, the pressure to conform to rituals and tradition may also impose additional financial and social burdens on the families of the missing. There were cases in which the families of missing or dead migrants were accused of being unable or unwilling to follow tradition. For example, in order to mourn and carry out burials according to tradition and religious guidelines, families need to bury the remains of their relatives in the graveyard of their ancestors. One of the roles of the bereaved is in fact to help the deceased make the transition from the living world to the world of the dead, through a series of religious and cultural rites which cannot take place without the remains. Socially, it is believed that the inability to recover remains or to gather information about the whereabouts of a missing migrant implies that his or her family is cursed.

The brother of a man who died on a migration journey explained:

 Our grief would have not been as deep had we found our brother's corpse and buried him in the graveyard of our grandfathers. [Worst] of all, in our community, it is believed as a huge curse for a family not to be able to get the remains of their dead family member. The whole family and their next generation will be considered cursed.

Another critical implication derived from the inability to locate and/or repatriate the remains of a loved one is the fact that families cannot apply for financial support from the *iddir*, which could alleviate some of the pressures emerging from the disappearance. Lacking official verification of a person’s death, his or her survivors are unable to file support claims. The mother of a missing migrant described the humiliation and shame that her family experienced when they were unable to find her son’s remains and perform burial rituals:

 I always wish I could get back his remains. But that seems impossible. There is no way to get dependable information about his death. I have tried everything, but all my efforts were in vain. I know death is natural, but when someone dies somewhere unknown, it is too painful. In our culture, if someone is buried without the proper cultural and religious funeral rituals, it is considered a kind of “double death”. We experienced it first when we lost him, and yet again when we were unable to perform the mourning and burial. This was humiliating and shameful.

4. Families' encounters with authorities: Challenges and ways forward

The families interviewed for this research recounted the challenges that they faced when interacting with government officials about their missing loved ones, and they provided suggestions and appeals for changes that could help them tackle some of the challenges described earlier.¹ They called for three main changes:

- (a) That the authorities take more of a humanitarian approach (rather than a law enforcement or political one) when dealing with the issue of missing or dead Ethiopian migrants;
- (b) That families and their cases are treated in a respectful and serious way;
- (c) That there be an official and/or State agency established to support searches for missing relatives.

Families indicated that respectful and dignified treatment by the authorities could reduce the challenges involved with their search. Many requested that government authorities – in particular, the MFA, public prosecutors and the police – take them seriously and not blame or criminalize them for the deaths or disappearances of their loved ones. Those living in Addis Ababa in particular mentioned having tried to reach out to the authorities for help, but most attested that these encounters were generally negative. Some families reported having been dismissed from government buildings, or not even being granted permission to enter. Furthermore, interviewees indicated that authorities often claimed that the information provided by relatives was insufficient or incomplete to start a search, and they were instructed to come back when they had more details. Respondents also repeatedly reported that authorities blamed the deaths or disappearances of their loved ones on the close ties the families had with smugglers. Families indicated they were often interrogated and pressured to provide information (names, addresses and phone numbers) of the specific smuggler or smugglers who had facilitated their relatives' journeys, but nothing concerning the actual missing persons. This led families to believe that the authorities were more interested in apprehending and prosecuting smugglers, rather than supporting families with their searches. The mother of a missing migrant stated:

 At every meeting in the kebele [neighbourhood or village], officials blame families for collaborating with *delala*. Whenever we go to the kebele for help, they keep asking for the contact details of *delaloch*, sometimes in a rough manner. They do not listen to us or advise as how to search for our missing children. We get better information from the *delaloch* than from State officials. The only interest of the Government is to catch and imprison *delaloch*. This does not help us.

Families demanded that authorities treat them humanely. The brother of a missing migrant explained:

 We are not criminals. We went to the police and to the Ministry [of Foreign Affairs] for help. They treated us as criminals. The guards did not even allow us to enter the building. [There is no path to file a report] or complaint. They must recognize missing migrants are also citizens. The State has to help us with our searches. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a consulate in Egypt. Through that consulate, they can search for the missing in Libya. We cannot communicate with the Libyan or Sudanese embassies here. This should be done by the Government.

The families want authorities to deliver on their promises of support rather than politicizing Ethiopian migrants' deaths. Several interviewees cited the example of government promises to repatriate the bodies of those killed by ISIS in Libya, which until now have remained unfulfilled. Many also felt that the focus on Libya in the discourse of migration took away attention from the apprehension, detention, imprisonment, deaths and disappearances of the many thousands of migrants travelling to countries like Yemen, Saudi Arabia or South Africa. There is a need for the Government to recognize that Ethiopian migrants encounter risks – including death – on other migration trajectories and regions, even when it is not politically convenient to do so. One woman's testimony showed the lack of attention on the dangers on other migration routes:

¹ Chapter 3 looks further into the legal and policy frameworks available to people with missing migrant relatives in Ethiopia and also provides insights and recommendations from authorities and other key stakeholders.

 Government authorities need not just talk about those killed by ISIS. Many Ethiopians die regularly in the Indian Ocean, in Yemen, in the Mediterranean Sea and in South Africa. Others disappear in prison, in detention centres or taken by criminals. I lost many friends on migration routes. I begged for money to rescue some. Two years ago, I lost my friend Saba in Yemen. Her family lived in rural parts of Jimma. She had called me from Yemen for help [to] bribe the border guards who had thrown her in prison. Her relatives are illiterate and very poor. They do not know what to do. They keep calling me to this day. I [also] went to international organizations. They told me that this was not their mandate. I collected some money by begging in mosques and churches. But it did not help. Saba is still missing. Her mother and father cry every day. No one is reaching out to them.

There is also a need for official mechanisms and a responsible (government) agency to consider the realities of people who go missing and their families. For example, families recounted the challenges they faced when it came to obtaining official proof of absence or death of their disappeared or missing loved ones. To obtain such a document, authorities would ask the family to provide evidence (for example, a description of the belongings that the missing person was carrying) that could help trace or identify the person; however, this is nearly impossible, as most families are unaware of the belongings their loved ones took with them for the journey. Conversely, families reported not being granted access to see items rescued or collected in the context of an incident that could be connected to their missing loved ones (for example, clothing, jewellery, pictures, passports and other travel documents found at the scene). What is more, as Ethiopian migrants go missing or die in places such as the Sahara Desert, Sinai, or Libya, or drown in the Mediterranean Sea, evidence connected to specific people is not collected or catalogued by any entity, nor is it returned to relatives. There is therefore a need for the systemized preservation and/or cataloguing of evidence that could allow for the eventual identification of a missing person.

Families also raised the issue of obtaining visas to travel to other countries to search for missing loved ones. There are no special visas issued for the purpose of carrying out a search for a missing person for humanitarian reasons, and obtaining a tourist or medical visa involves a highly bureaucratic and financially inaccessible process for most Ethiopian families. In addition, the fact that many disappearances are believed to take place in locations with ongoing conflicts and security threats compromises the safety of grieving families, who still on occasion embark on journeys with the hope of finding information concerning their loved ones. Therefore, the ability to travel safely, legally and in a dignified manner for families seeking answers must be an option.

Lastly, families indicated that in the event that the remains of their loved ones were found, the repatriation process and its costs reduce the possibility that the dead could be buried according to tradition. As described above, many families are already in debt and impoverished as a result of having to pay smuggling and ransom fees, and therefore cannot access additional money from local lenders to cover repatriation costs. Mechanisms that allow for the dignified repatriation of loved ones are therefore urgently needed.

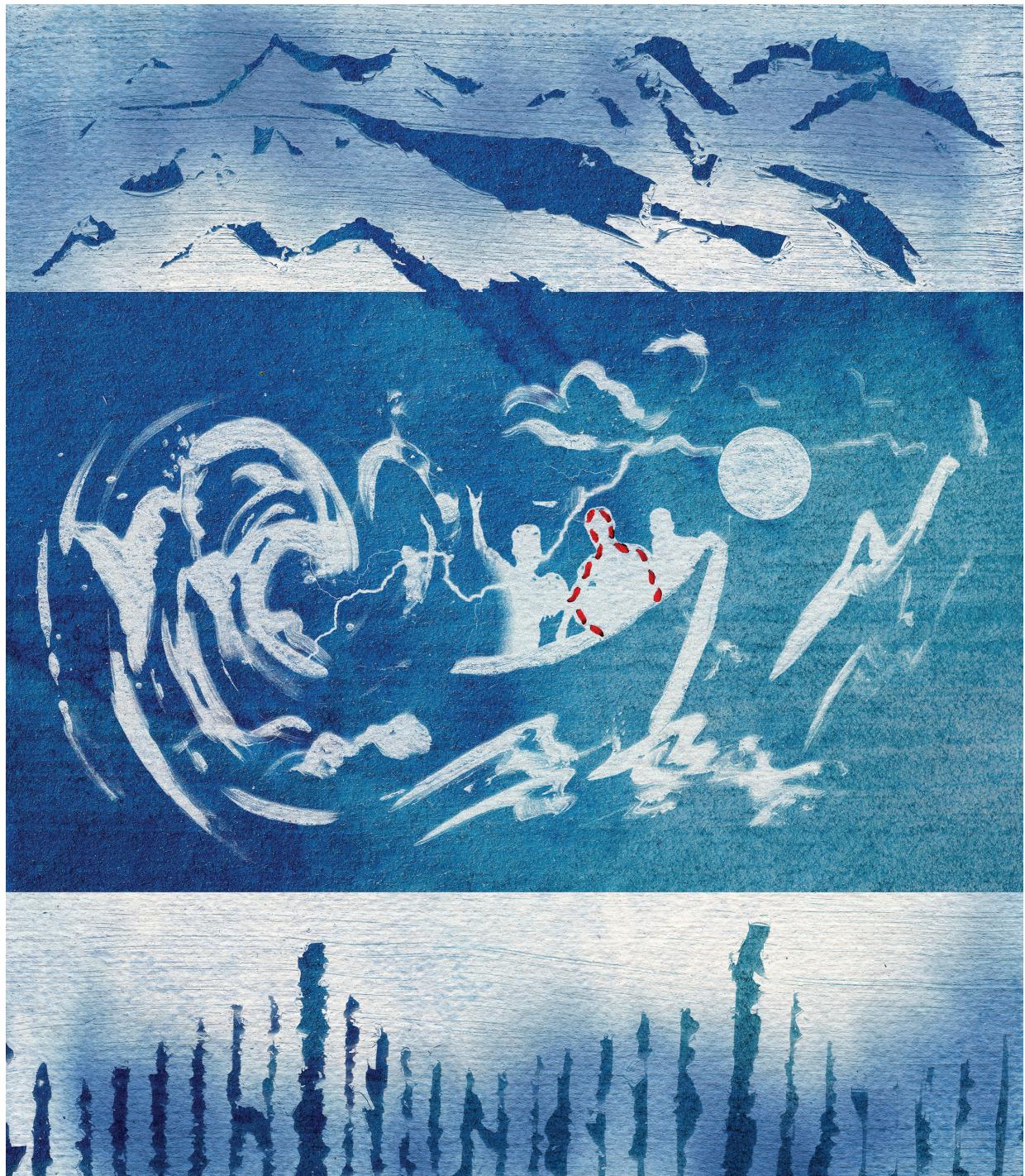
5. Conclusion

Despite the considerable size of the Ethiopian diaspora and how many have gone missing or perished in the context of their migration journeys, the needs and challenges of the families of the missing are not proportionately represented in the policy or legal framework in the country. This is evidenced by the fact that there is no official body or institution actively providing assistance or support to families looking for missing migrants. State actions related to victim support are often ad hoc, and only in response to high-profile cases, such as those involving a large number of deportations or deaths.

Even though Ethiopia has several government agencies and proclamations related to migration, and the Government has ratified important international conventions, there is a lack of technical and financial capacity to tackle the issue of missing or dead migrants. The Ethiopian Government has mobilized resources and established several institutions to manage migration and reduce the risks and violence that migrants encounter at various stages of the migration cycle, and there are many other achievements in terms of advancing the country's migration governance. However, still much of this governance and humanitarian support is donor-dependent and therefore driven by external priorities and procedures. As it stands, there is very limited domestic institutional and organizational support to proactively engage in the issue of migrant deaths and disappearances and that addresses the concerns and challenges of the families left behind, such as the mistrust between families and the State. This research found that the criminalization of smuggling is a barrier to families seeking State support in searching for the missing, knowing they will be interrogated and asked for information concerning smugglers, rather than their loved ones.

All families who participated in the research experienced psychosocial, economic, cultural and communal challenges, but their needs and priorities also varied across rural and urban settings and depending on the regional government they were dealing with (each with its specific migration governance practices and humanitarian support structures). Therefore, there is urgent need for multidimensional, evidence-based and community-rooted approaches that better support the families of the missing across the country. The next chapter, which connects the experiences of families described here to the existing legal and policy structures in Ethiopia relevant to the issue of missing migrants, confirms this need.

It is also clear that this research is only a starting point in terms of understanding the issue, and that further research is needed on how to better support the families of missing migrants in Ethiopia. Beyond this relatively small research project, there has been no other concerted efforts to conduct research on families and communities that have lost people in the context of migration from the country. Further research is therefore needed to investigate the different experiences of those in rural and urban settings, how the Ethiopian diaspora across countries are already helping with searching for the missing and supporting the families left behind, and how the findings of this research apply to non-Ethiopians searching for missing migrant loved ones in Ethiopia.



Loaded Waters, Barren Sahara. Barriers and restrictions to legal and orderly mobility restrict the ability of many Ethiopians to migrate safely, forcing them into more perilous and dangerous routes where humanitarian support and rescue may be unavailable. © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

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CHAPTER 3

Legal and institutional aspects shaping the search for Ethiopian missing migrants



1. Introduction

Ethiopia has several national laws related to migration and has adopted and ratified relevant international human and migrant rights conventions, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which in Objective 8 calls on States to “save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants” (UNGA, 2018). Despite this, there are no specific policies, legal frameworks or institutions in the country that concretely and proactively address the issue of Ethiopian migrants who go missing or die. This includes a lack of State action to facilitate the search for nationals who go missing or die while migrating internationally using irregular channels. In recent years, the Central Statistics Agency (CSA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) have started to gather and aggregate data on different migration indicators, but with a focus on the Ethiopian diaspora and overseas migrant workers living in Middle Eastern countries, while the majority of Ethiopian migrants who go missing or die had travelled on irregular routes towards their destinations (IOM, 2014; Zewdu, 2017).

When it comes to missing migrants, the main focus of Ethiopian State authorities has been to identify and dismantle the smuggling and trafficking networks facilitating the journeys. Families with missing migrant relatives report that government officials are often more interested in gaining access to information concerning brokers or *delaloch*¹ rather than finding out what happened to their missing relatives. Families report that authorities tend to blame them for not having prevented or stopped their loved ones from using irregular and dangerous migration channels. This approach, however, does not consider the structural barriers faced by families with missing migrant family members and/or the humanitarian and personal tragedy of losing a loved one. As a result, families primarily turn to informal networks to seek information, including smuggling facilitators and survivors with whom their missing relatives were travelling.

This chapter provides an overview of the challenges that families of missing migrants face when searching for their loved ones in Ethiopia, derived from the lack of coherent legal and policy frameworks and structures to address their needs. First, it reviews the many existing obstacles to accurately documenting the deaths and disappearances of Ethiopian migrants from an institutional perspective. Second, it maps the relevant laws and policy frameworks already in existence, as well as the actors and their roles relevant to the topic. This includes perspectives on how such actors can expand on the good practices already in place. Recommendations for how the families of missing migrants in Ethiopia can be better supported, based on this chapter and the previous one, are presented in the final section of this country report.

¹ This is the term used to refer to smuggling facilitators in Ethiopia. For more information on *delaloch*, and how they are perceived by the families of missing migrants and their communities, please see Chapter 2 of this report.

2. Methodology

This chapter is based on qualitative research carried out in Ethiopia with 21 families, as well as interviews with stakeholders who work in government, community and international organizations, in Addis Ababa and the country's southern region of Hadiya.² Existing legislation, policies, institutional structures and actors pertaining to the issue of missing migrants in Ethiopia were also reviewed and analysed.

The research only covers the experiences of Ethiopian nationals, meaning that more research is needed on the experiences specific to non-Ethiopians in Ethiopia, including refugees, who are also searching for missing migrant family members. There is also scope for more research in other geographic areas of the country – besides the international and national laws and frameworks discussed here, there may be different forms of support in other regions and local levels that are not included in this report.

3. Data collection on the deaths and disappearances of Ethiopian migrants

The deaths and disappearances of Ethiopians on migration journeys generally follow the geographies of the three main migration routes out of the country – north-west, through the eastern Sahara Desert into the Sudan and Libya and on to Europe via the Central Mediterranean; the eastern route to the Middle East and the Gulf States through Djibouti and Somalia via Yemen; and the southern route to South Africa via Eastern and Southern African countries. However, there is no systematic, comprehensive and State-led data collection on such incidents, which makes resolving these cases and supporting the families left behind very difficult. Government actors face several challenges when it comes to accessing accurate figures and information about the migrants who have gone missing or died abroad, for a variety of reasons. A prominent official working in the Government's unit on illegal³ migration and human trafficking control in Hadiya, southern Ethiopia, stated:

 Getting accurate information about [missing and dead migrants] is very challenging. ... In most cases, the source of information are the survivors, smugglers, illegal brokers, and traffickers that travelled with them. But ... brokers and smugglers change address constantly. They avoid as much as possible contact with us, fearing criminal charges and prosecution. Thus, it is difficult to get accurate information from such a group of individuals. Secondly, there is no well-organized system and binding agreement between the country of origin, transit, and destination to record, investigate and repatriate bodies of "illegal migrants". Thirdly, usually families of illegal migrants are reluctant to report missing and dead migrants because they don't want to expose those relatives and brokers who are involved in the course of facilitating "illegal migration".

Some partial efforts by the government to record deaths and disappearances exist: Ethiopia's Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BOLSA) in southern Ethiopia, which is the regional branch of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), keeps records of Ethiopian migrants from major sending districts in the southern region of the country, such as Hadiya and Kembata Tembaro districts, who died or went missing along the southern route to South Africa. Between 2012 and 2019, the Bureau recorded 4,265 deaths and 1,707 disappearances along this route.

² For more information on the choice of field sites for the research, please see Chapter 2.

³ The term "illegal" is used in this report only when it is a direct quote from a research participant or the official name of a government unit. IOM prefers the term "irregular" to refer to a mode of moving outside regular/legal migration channels, as this word does not necessarily carry a criminal connotation, is not against migrants' dignity and does not undermine respect for the human rights of migrants (IOM, 2019a).

The data was collected from testimonies of families and survivors in Hadiya and Kembata Tembaro districts and reports of Ethiopian embassies along the southern route, then was gathered by BOLSA officials together with local offices of IOM. However, these efforts cover only the southern route. Therefore, it is likely that many more Ethiopian migrant deaths are unknown to and unconfirmed by the Government. An officer of BOLSA in southern Ethiopia explained:

 The [true] number of missing and dead exceeds the figures indicated by the government officials since the number of cases remains unknown and invisible. Three years ago, more than 80 migrants mainly from Hadiya and Kembata Tembaro districts died due to suffocation inside containers. Similarly, in 2019 nearly 45 migrants died as a result of a car accident while they were travelling from Tanzania to Malawi in an overloaded truck through challenging roads. In 2019, about 200 migrants from a single village in the Tigray Region drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. In recent years, our office has witnessed that hundreds of migrants from the district of Hadiya have died along the coastal waters of the Indian Ocean and the coastal waters of Tanzania and Mozambique, on lakes such as Lake Malawi, and in the Gulf of Aden and in Somalia. Except in southern routes, no one is systematically recording migrant deaths in Ethiopia.

IOM's Missing Migrants Project is another effort to collect data on the deaths of Ethiopian (and all other) migrants.⁴ Between 2014 and 2020, the project documented the deaths of 1,073 Ethiopians from a combination of sources, including testimonies of shipwreck survivors, surveys with migrants en route, media reports, statements from experts (including IOM colleagues) in the field and ad hoc government statements. Nearly half (467) were people who died crossing from the Horn of Africa across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to Yemen, while at least 459 died on the Central Mediterranean crossing towards Europe.⁵ Very little is known about them – for most, their nationality is still unverified and their age, sex and identities are unknown and therefore unrecorded.

There are many reasons why the figures and information about missing Ethiopian migrants are incomplete, some of which are common to all deaths during migration and some more specific to the cases of Ethiopians. In general, the majority of the remains of people who die crossing the Central Mediterranean to Europe are never recovered from the sea. Thus, it is hard to verify their identities (including their nationalities). Deaths during clandestine journeys, especially through remote, harsh environments like the Sahara Desert, are also very hard to capture, as often the only source of information are migrant companions or smugglers who were the only witnesses and who do not report these deaths (IOM, 2014 and 2016). Another data collection challenge specific to Ethiopians is that there are indications that on irregular migration journeys, some may claim to be from Eritrea in hopes that it will help their future claims for asylum.

Even with the data gaps described above, recording only deaths and disappearances while travelling to a destination is still following a narrow definition of "missing migrants". No matter the context, the cost of a disappearance is immeasurable to families and communities who lose their sons, daughters, husbands, wives, brothers and sisters, who are often their main source of income and hope for the future. Besides on migration journeys, families in Ethiopia are also missing loved ones who are stranded, in detention, or in situations of labour exploitation while living and working abroad (Kebede, 2002; Facsar, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020). However, there is no comprehensive and publicly available data collection on Ethiopians who are missing or have died in these contexts.

⁴ More information is available at www.missingmigrants.iom.int.

⁵ It is likely that the number of Ethiopians who have died on the Central Mediterranean, as well as on North African routes to the coast, is much higher; however, it is more difficult to collect data on incidents that happen in these areas (compared to the crossing from the Horn of Africa to Yemen). When incidents are recorded here, determining the identities of the dead is harder as they are farther away from their homes and the groups travelling together are more diverse.



Hollow Rituals. “In our culture, if someone is buried without the proper cultural and religious funeral rituals, it is considered a kind of ‘double death’. We experienced it first when we lost him, and yet again when we were unable to perform the mourning and burial. This was humiliating and shameful.” © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

4. Overview of relevant legal and policy frameworks applicable to issues of missing migrants and their families

While Ethiopia has several national laws related to migration and has adopted and ratified relevant international human and migrant rights conventions, the domestic legal and policy framework has not been conceived to specifically deal with the phenomenon of missing migrants. There are also no bilateral or multilateral agreements or memorandums of understanding with countries of transit and destination that establish a legal framework for the exchange of information to facilitate the search for missing migrants, or the identification and repatriation of their remains in the event of their deaths. This section analyses the challenges that arise from the failure of the legal and policy framework to address the particular context of people going missing during (irregular) migration,⁶ and the impact that this has on families searching for their missing relatives.

4.1. International and bilateral legal frameworks and obligations

Ethiopia has ratified many international and regional human rights conventions related to the protection of migrants and their families.⁷ Article 9(4) of the Ethiopian Constitution stipulates that all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the laws of the country. Obligations under international human rights law derive, for the most part, from the right to life. Under the protection afforded to this right in international human rights law, States have a procedural obligation to investigate deaths within their jurisdiction, to ensure an independent and transparent investigation of the circumstances of each death, to identify the deceased, and to provide information to their families (IOM, 2016; Grant, 2016; Last Rights, 2019). In this regard, relatives of dead or missing migrants have a need to find out what happened to their family members and their whereabouts, with the corresponding rights established by international humanitarian law (the “right to know”) and international human rights law (the “right to truth”) (ICRC, 2017).

Various commitments taken at the global policy level show acknowledgement of the need for coordinated action on missing migrants. Perhaps the most relevant and recent international frameworks are: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by which States commit to cooperate closely at the international level to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration; and the Global Compact for Migration, which in Objective 8 calls on States to “save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants”, as well as to “[facilitate] communication with affected families” and to “establish transnational coordination channels ... and designate contact points for families looking for missing migrants” (UNGA, 2018).⁸

However, Ethiopia has not ratified some international conventions that are key to protecting the human rights of migrants and supporting their families, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (2003); the International Labour Organization (ILO) Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97); and the ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143). Countries of transit and destination in North Africa, the Gulf States and South Africa have also not ratified some key conventions, such as the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which requires that essential labour and social security protections be extended to domestic workers and other migrant workers. Cooperation and coordination with countries of transit and destination, for the purposes of resolving cases of missing migrants and supporting their families, is difficult to carry out when these countries also have not signed nor ratified relevant international conventions.

⁶ People generally go missing or die while migrating using “irregular channels” rather than “regular” ones because the former often involve more risks. It is also more difficult to resolve cases of people who go missing during irregular migration precisely because the aim is to avoid detection by authorities.

⁷ Some of the international human rights instruments and other conventions ratified by Ethiopia which are relevant to migrants and their families are the following: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW); United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the Protocols Thereto, including the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; and ILO Conventions No. 105 (1957), No. 111 (1958) and No. 181 (1997). Ethiopia is also party to several African Union human rights conventions, migration policies and proclamations that require freedom of migratory mobility within the continent, protections of migrants’ civil and human rights, and social protections, including the Migration Policy Framework in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Migration Policy Framework for Africa (adopted in 2006), and the African Common Position on Migration and Development (adopted in 2006).

⁸ Since it adopted the Global Compact for Migration in 2018, the Government of Ethiopia launched a multi-stakeholder consultation platform in September 2019 and has selected 10 of the 23 objectives as priorities. Work on these objectives is led by the National Partnership Coalition (NPC), which includes different government ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations, religious institutions, representatives of private sectors, media and other concerned actors who have a stake in migration. At the time of writing (December 2020), the NPC was preparing a national voluntary report assessing the Global Compact for Migration implementation in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, the SDGs related to migration are also mainstreamed into the planning and implementation of the NPC.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia also has bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan⁹ that ensure basic insurance for Ethiopian migrant workers in these countries in case of accidents at work, along with addressing their health-care needs and assisting in the repatriation of remains in the event of death. These agreements are mandatory under Proclamation No. 923/2016. However, they only apply to those who are legally employed in these countries of destination. Thus, families of people who went missing or died either en route or without having legal status in countries of destination do not have access to such benefits.

4.2. National legal frameworks

One of the main obstacles to addressing the challenges faced by the families of Ethiopians who go missing or die on migration routes to Europe, the Middle East or South Africa is that there are no specific legal procedures, policies or administrative protocols in the Ethiopian legal system for them. The existing domestic legal and policy framework does not have provisions to specifically deal with the phenomenon of missing migrants. The challenges are compounded by the fact that while there are policies and proclamations related to labour migration, diaspora engagement and development, immigration, refugees and anti-trafficking, there is no unified and cohesive migration policy. This is ultimately reflected in the absence of a specific body of policies and practices to address the issue of missing migrants.

There are, however, some general provisions in the criminal and civil codes and in anti-trafficking and labour migration legislation that could be applied to this issue. According to Ethiopia's Civil Code as Amended Proclamation No. 639/2009, any person whose close relative has been murdered can be compensated financially. This could be relevant for those with deceased migrant family members who may have been victims of crime during their journey. However, proof is difficult to obtain for cases of missing migrants (especially if they went missing or died in another country and without legal documentation) as evidence of a crime having occurred is often non-existent. It is also unclear if there is any case law involving "missing or deceased migrants" for which this provision has been successfully used, as there is no systematic data collection of such cases at the national level.

Some provisions protecting the rights of migrants who have been victims of human trafficking and smuggling exist. According to Ethiopian legal experts interviewed for this research, in theory, victims of trafficking and smuggling could include the families of migrants who have died or gone missing while being smuggled or trafficked – both during the journey and in destination countries. Article 597(1) of the Revised Criminal Code (Proclamation No. 414/2004) imposes penalties for those who engage in human trafficking and compensation for victims of trafficking, including families. The Civil Code also states that victims of trafficking, including families, have the right to claim compensation for damages. The Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (No. 1178/2020), which was adopted in 2020,¹⁰ includes the families and close relatives of trafficked migrants under the definition of "victims of trafficking". The law envisages the creation of a fund to support victim protection and rehabilitation efforts through fines imposed on those convicted. It states in Article 31 that the convicted person, in addition to facing imprisonment and paying a fine, may have to pay compensation to the victim or to the persons or organization who incurred costs in the name of the victim – in this case, the families of migrants who died or disappeared in the context of using the services of smugglers or being trafficked to another country. However, there is no indication that cases of this nature or that invoke the application of these laws have ever been pursued in the country.

There are also some provisions for migrant workers who have died while legally employed in another country. The Overseas Employment Proclamation (No. 923/2016) stipulates that foreign employers must have life and disability insurance for their workers. The proclamation holds private employment agencies (PEAs) and employers liable for the welfare of their (Ethiopian migrant) employees. It imposes stringent conditions with regard to the establishment, management, licensing and operations of PEAs. It also requires the repatriation of human remains in the event that the death of the migrant occurred abroad. For example, the law requires that PEAs deposit USD 100,000 or its equivalent in birr (the unit of currency used in Ethiopia) in a locked bank account for the purpose of guaranteeing the protection of the rights and safety of deployed workers. If a worker sustains serious bodily injury or dies, the Government can use this deposit for life insurance and to cover the repatriation of the remains and provide compensation to the family.

⁹ At the time of writing (December 2020), Ethiopia is negotiating three more bilateral agreements with Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait.

¹⁰ The Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants No. 1178/2020 replaced the previous Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Proclamation No. 909/2015, which had been adopted in 2015.

However, this proclamation only applies to Ethiopians legally deployed as overseas migrant workers, and there is no data concerning the number of migrants who have been protected by it. It does not apply to people migrating irregularly, and there is evidence that the majority of Ethiopian migrants in Middle Eastern and Gulf countries travel there by irregular means and work without government authorization (IOM, 2017).

Interviews conducted with government stakeholders highlight the particular challenges that arise due to the gaps in the legal framework. An officer working with the MFA stated:

 If migrants die in countries [with which] we have bilateral labour agreements, our consulate offices, labour recruitment agencies and the Ethiopian airline repatriate bodies from abroad. This is possible when migrants are legal and they have life insurance from their employer in the country of destination. But it is a big problem when migrants are illegal and die in migration routes, in transit or destinations. It is very difficult to discover and identify the body [of a] missing migrant in Libya or Yemen due to ongoing war. We work with our embassies, destination country security officials, and even sometimes with INTERPOL to detect kidnappers. But this is not easy. Our Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed for the first time has made very good [agreements]/negotiation with countries and repatriated hundreds of migrants who had been imprisoned for years in countries such as Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Egypt and [the] Sudan. He came back with migrants in his own chartered plane.¹¹

Additionally, Ethiopia's vital events registration system does not operate well in the context of nationals who die in other countries. The Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Proclamation (No. 760/2012) and its amendment issued in 2017 (Proclamation No. 1049/2017) regulate the collection of vital statistics, including the registration of deaths. Death registration is a key step for the protection of the legal interests of families of missing or deceased migrants. However, the CRVS system was only launched in 2016 and thus is not yet comprehensive nor adapted to the special characteristics of migratory loss or death. This is because there are no mechanisms in place to provide death certificates or declarations of absence for people who went missing in the context of irregular migration – this is not addressed in the country's legal and policy framework. This has created serious consequences for migrant families – in particular, the spouses of missing migrants. Without proof of death or disappearance, relatives (and especially spouses) cannot inherit property and land and may have problems establishing custody of their children.¹² This has important gender implications when one considers that the majority of those who go missing are men. Research indicates that women are often left to address these issues, facing considerable pressure from their in-laws and often finding themselves destitute.¹³

5. An overview of actors interacting with families of missing migrants

Searching for missing migrants and addressing the impacts of their loss require not only an efficient policy structure in Ethiopia, but also coordination and cooperation among the different types of actors interacting with families of missing migrants and engaged in the search, identification and repatriation processes. Interviews with stakeholders carried out as part of this research, including with officers in the MFA, BOLSA and IOM, confirmed that the process of searching for missing migrants and repatriating their remains in the event of their deaths involve multiple actors in origin and transit countries and migration routes. Collective willingness and participation of the many actors involved, including through transnational coordination mechanisms and favourable diplomatic relations, is required to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants and provide answers to their families.

¹¹ Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, has engaged in mediation efforts during State visits abroad to facilitate the release of Ethiopian migrants imprisoned in other countries. He has supported their return on official government flights alongside him. See, for example: APA News, 2019; ENA, 2020.

¹² For a discussion of these impacts, please see Chapter 2.

¹³ Ibid.



Begging Above, Begging Below. "We don't know which institution is responsible to offer information related to missing migrants. I don't know where to go or whom to ask in the government. ... What I can do is keep praying, hoping that one day my God may herald me with good news." © IOM 2021/Salam SHOKOR

However, despite the large number of State and non-State institutions engaged in migration governance,¹⁴ very few specifically tend to the dynamics of families with missing relatives – including the search processes, the identification and repatriation of remains, and assistance with the legal, economic and social challenges they face as a result of the disappearance.

¹⁴ Ethiopia has more than 35 government institutions with mandates related to aspects of migration management. Some of these are as follows: Office of the Attorney General (OAG), MOLSA and its local branches, MFA, National Intelligence and Security Service, Federal Police Commission, Regional Police Commissions, CSA, National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC), the Judiciary, National Human Rights Commission, Institution of the Ombudsman and others. MOLSA and its various agencies deal with specific aspects of migration, particularly labour migration and reintegration. The OAG deals only with counter-trafficking and smuggling, while the Ministry of Peace and the NDRMC deal with internally displaced persons and Ethiopian deportees. For its part, the MFA deals with the diaspora and aspects of assisted voluntary return and evacuation operations from other countries, whereas immigration and registration of vital events are handled by the FDRE Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency. The Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs was established by Proclamation No. 409/2004 with the mandate of administering refugee-related issues in Ethiopia. In addition, more than 50 civil society organizations – including faith-based organizations, NGOs, mass organizations, development associations, and several region-based and nationwide diaspora associations – work on issues directly or indirectly related to migration. The presence of these institutions shows that migration governance in Ethiopia has been on the national agenda. However, there is no a specific owner or responsible institution managing migration with accountability in the country. It is necessary to conduct a mapping study of the roles of these institutions and suggest working institutional frameworks and organizational structures of migration governance in Ethiopia. See also Ethiopia's Migration Governance Indicators Profile (IOM, 2019b).

Furthermore, there are no mechanisms that allow collaboration between government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), nor any that may allow for the collection and dissemination of information to resolve cases involving missing migrants and to repatriate the deceased. There is also no integrated system for searching for information, nor procedures put in place to keep families informed. This section maps institutional and civil society actors and their interactions with the families of missing migrants.

5.1. Government actors

The MFA coordinates the activities of Ethiopia's diplomatic and consular missions to ensure that the interests and the rights of Ethiopians residing abroad are protected. According to the Anti-Human Trafficking Proclamation (No. 1178/2020), the MFA is mandated to initiate the process to rescue, release and return any Ethiopian, outside of Ethiopia, who is a victim of trafficking in persons and/or smuggling of migrants. It also has the mandate to issue certificates of death and absence when an Ethiopian abroad goes missing or dies.

The Consular Affairs Directorate General at the MFA and Ethiopian consulates abroad deal with cases of Ethiopian missing migrants. Interviews conducted for this report revealed that Ethiopian consulates located in countries along the southern migration route to South Africa try to establish the whereabouts and well-being of migrants travelling on this route and repatriate their remains in the event of their deaths. For incidents involving a large number of migrant casualties, the MFA in coordination with Ethiopian consulates abroad also carry out efforts to repatriate the remains. However, there is no formal process followed or communication mechanism with families – in fact, interviews indicate this may be carried out only when the deaths receive significant international media attention.¹⁵ Furthermore, these activities are not available for cases of people who go missing or die on migration routes towards the Middle East and Europe, in large part due to Ethiopian consulates not being active in transit countries such as Yemen, Somalia and Libya, where there is active violent conflict.

One of the mandates of MOLSA is to regulate the overseas employment of Ethiopian nationals, according to Proclamation No. 923/2016. MOLSA's duties range from overseeing the licensing and monitoring of employment agencies to the protection of victims and migrant workers. MOLSA, along with the MFA (and its representations abroad), works with PEAs to search for missing migrants and to repatriate deceased Ethiopian migrant workers abroad. However, as stated previously, these efforts tend to focus only on migrants who are legally employed in the Middle East and Gulf States.

In each administrative region of Ethiopia, there is a BOLSA office responsible for employment/labour and social issues at the regional level. The local BOLSA offices in southern Ethiopia assist the MFA with searching and locating missing migrants and facilitating the repatriation of remains from transit countries located on the irregular migration route to South Africa (such as the United Republic of Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique), but their reach is also limited. Except for these activities along the southern route for migrants from the southern district of Hadiya, BOLSA offices in other regions or in urban areas such as Addis Ababa do not support families whose loved ones have gone missing on other routes – for example, towards North Africa and the Mediterranean. An expert on migrant protection at the BOLSA in Kirkos (Addis Ababa) stated:

 We do have various forms of support available to returnees and trafficking victims in the kebele [neighbourhood or villages]. But there is no specific programme to help families who lost their children during migration. If families are poor, they can access different safety net and food security programmes for poor urban households. [...] It is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is responsible for those migrants who die abroad. But our ministry, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, only works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in managing overseas labour deployment. Apart from that we don't work with them to help families. Many NGOs come to our kebele looking to provide humanitarian support for returnees, trafficked migrants or to create awareness for community not to engage in dangerous migration. As far as I know there is no NGO or State programme that deals with families who lost their children in [the context of] migration.

¹⁵ For example, on 24 March 2020, 64 Ethiopian men were found dead inside a truck in Tete, Mozambique. They died from asphyxiation while trying to reach South Africa (IOM, 2020).

From 2015 to 2020, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) was the government agency with the mandate to prevent, identify and prosecute crimes related to human smuggling and trafficking in persons. The OAG also led the National Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Taskforce. The taskforce aimed to support efforts intended to rehabilitate victims and to prevent and counter human-trafficking and migrant-smuggling crimes. While Ethiopian legal experts stated that the designation of victims could be extended to the families of those who have died or gone missing as a result of trafficking and smuggling, in practice the taskforce has only supported victims who returned home alive. There are no formal procedures or directives related to how the taskforce could be involved in searching for missing migrants, engaging with their families or repatriating their remains. As of 2020, the taskforce has been integrated into a National Partnership Coalition (NPC) for the Prevention and Control of the Crimes of Trafficking in Persons, Smuggling of Persons and Unlawful Sending of Persons Abroad for Work via Proclamation No. 1178/2020, as part of the Government's efforts to improve coordinated responses to migration.

Other anti-human trafficking taskforces that target irregular migration facilitators and brokers have also been established at different layers of the bureaucracy. One of these is the Human Trafficking and Narcotics Section in the Organized Crime Investigation Unit of the Federal Police (2009), which was established to curb human trafficking and smuggling and to deter irregular migration (Gezahegne, 2020). However, none of these currently have provisions to cover the topics of missing migrants and/or their families.

The focus on anti-human smuggling and trafficking contributes to the significant mistrust on the part of families towards State authorities. Families interviewed in the context of this project stated that the main focus of authorities, rather than prioritizing the search of missing or deceased migrants, is to seek information that may allow them to detect and dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks. Often they appear more interested in gaining access to brokers and smuggling facilitators rather than clarifying the fate of the missing relatives. As detailed in Chapter 2 of this report, dignified treatment of such families by the authorities could help reduce the negative psychological impacts they face in their searches and open better lines of communication between them and the State. Criminalizing or blaming families for the deaths or disappearances of loved ones reduces the likelihood that they will contact authorities for help in the future.

5.2. Civil society and community-based organizations

Due to the lack of specific national procedures and government institutions to support families searching for their missing loved ones abroad, to repatriate remains, or to provide assistance with the related psychosocial and economic challenges, such families are more likely to interact with NGOs and community-based associations. Community-based social support systems collaborate with State structures to provide community-led care for people facing specific forms of vulnerability. Known as community care coalitions (CCCs), they operate at the kebele (neighbourhood or village) level and have been effective at mobilizing psychosocial and economic support for destitute families who have lost their loved ones, including relatives who went missing during migration journeys. CCCs are actively engaged in facilitating and implementing training in life, technical, and vocational skills and small business start-ups for unemployed youth and destitute families, including families of missing migrants. They also mobilize community support for families who have lost their main source of financial support and raise funds to cover school fees, school supplies and uniforms for children who have lost their parents due to migration.

Even though there are no specific institutional schemes to support the families of missing or dead migrants, CCCs support these families to be included and prioritized in various government livelihood improvement programmes, such as the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).¹⁶ Under programmes like this, families can benefit from microcredits to start income-generating activities. In the slums of Kirkos, in the outskirts of Addis Ababa where the research among families was conducted, local authorities and other stakeholders identify poor families to be included in the PSNP. Families receive small cash transfers or are provided with skills training, a workplace and start-up capital to establish small businesses. In Hadiya, CCCs nominate families of missing migrants who are experiencing economic and social problems for the rural PSNP, which includes providing farmland and agricultural inputs to impoverished households.

¹⁶ PSNP is the Government's plan to implement social protection programmes – that is, cash or in-kind transfers or public works programmes for chronically food-insecure communities.

Other diaspora and community-based actors, such as the *iddir*, can also play a vital role in investigating and collecting data about missing or dead migrants and providing support to families left behind. The *iddir* are community-based associations and support funds built around notions of altruism and reciprocity, common in rural and urban areas of Ethiopia. They rely on contributions from their members, who pull together financial resources to minimize the adverse effects of sudden shocks or crises. Families of missing migrants interviewed in this study reported relying on the *iddir* and their social networks when looking for information about relatives who emigrated using irregular channels. *Iddir* members often have contacts with smuggling facilitators, who are usually members of these groups themselves in rural areas and who can help search for the missing through their contacts along migration routes.

There are also church-based women's and youth associations (known in the region of Hadiya as *mashura*) that provide emotional care, such as through conducting prayer services and comforting the families of missing or deceased migrants. Prayer and memorial events are frequently arranged by fellow church members, pastors and religious associations to offer solace to both rural and urban families.

Text box 3. The efforts of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to trace missing migrants and assist their families

The ERCS and the ICRC are the main organizations in the country specifically assisting Ethiopian families who have lost contact with family members due to armed conflict, other situations of violence, natural or human-made disasters, and migration. To benefit from these services, families must contact them directly. However, this research indicated that most families with missing migrant relatives (especially in rural areas) are unaware of this option.

The collection of tracing cases related to missing migrants is the responsibility of the ERCS. The ERCS conducts tracing and follow-up of individual cases, sometimes jointly with the ICRC in areas where the ERCS has limited capacity.

The online platform Trace the Face* allows the ICRC and National Societies to publish photos of people looking for their missing relatives in the hope of reconnecting families. So far the platform has focused on missing migrants cases in Europe, but the scope is expanding. Thousands of pictures of people looking for their family members have been uploaded to this platform (5,922 as of December 2020). The ICRC plans to roll out the tool in several regions of Ethiopia in 2021, raising awareness of the existence of this platform and helping people with missing migrant relatives upload their data to the site.

In addition, the ICRC is engaged in a transregional pilot project (called the Catania Project) which focuses on the identification of deceased migrants in the framework of a specific event, a shipwreck that took place on 18 April 2015 in the Central Mediterranean, off the Libyan coast. This shipwreck is one of the largest incidents that have occurred in the Mediterranean, in which it is believed that over 1,000 migrants lost their lives, most of whom originated from West African countries. The role of the ICRC is to collect information from the families of missing persons with the aim to facilitate the identification of remains recovered from this shipwreck. The families are in the process of being approached. At the time of writing (December 2020), 30 tracing requests potentially related to this shipwreck had been collected in Ethiopia.

* <https://familylinks.icrc.org/europe/en/Pages/home.aspx>.



| ACTOR | ROLE |
|--|--|
| Relatives of missing or deceased persons who are unidentified | Families engage in searching for their missing loved ones primarily through informal channels and networks. They may contact relevant authorities for support with the search. Family members in the diaspora search through their networks and can contact brokers for information. |
| MFA and its representations abroad | The MFA coordinates the activities of Ethiopia's diplomatic and consular missions to ensure that the interests and rights of Ethiopians residing abroad are protected. The MFA is mandated to initiate the process to rescue, release and return any Ethiopian, found outside Ethiopia, who is a victim of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. |
| MOLSA | MOLSA oversees the operation of PEAs, monitors the safety of legally deployed Ethiopian migrants in Gulf States and supports the repatriation of the remains of legally deployed migrant workers who died in Gulf States. |
| OAG | The OAG is mandated to prevent, protect, and prosecute crimes related to human smuggling and trafficking in persons, and to support the victims. |
| Police | Law enforcement authorities are mandated to detect crimes related to human trafficking, smuggling, and irregular migration, and to investigate complaints of disappearances filed by families. |
| <i>Iddir</i> , CCCs, and other civil society and church groups | Community-based associations can mobilize psychosocial and economic support for families of missing migrants. |
| Embassies and consulates | Ethiopian embassies and consulates overseas may engage in searching for Ethiopian nationals missing abroad and facilitate the repatriation of remains. |

6. Conclusion

This chapter compiles and analyses the legal and policy frameworks that apply to missing migrants and their families in Ethiopia. While Ethiopia has an increasing number of national laws and resources dedicated to migration management and has adopted and ratified relevant international human and migrant rights conventions, the domestic legal and policy framework does not specifically deal with the phenomenon of missing migrants and the needs and concerns of their families. These challenges are compounded by the fact that Ethiopia lacks an agency or ministry that specifically focuses on migration governance issues. This has resulted in the lack of a cohesive migration policy in the protection, labour, and development fronts, and ultimately is reflected in the absence of a specific body of policies and practices to address the issue of missing migrants.

Only a handful of actors work directly on issues concerning missing migrants and their families, and they largely do so in an ad hoc manner. Besides the intervention of government agencies when legally deployed migrant workers die abroad – or as a reaction to incidents involving a large number of deaths, those that receive international attention or involve influential Ethiopian diaspora groups – there is no formal system in place to search for people who left the country irregularly. There is also a general lack of awareness and understanding among relevant actors about the specific circumstances of missing migrants, as well as the needs and barriers faced by families searching for their relatives lost in their migration journeys.

At the moment, unsystematic and unsympathetic responses from authorities have led to the emergence of community-based forms of information-gathering and support, while authorities have tended to approach the issue of missing migrants as an anti-smuggling/trafficking issue first and foremost. As a result, families are often mistrustful and apprehensive about contacting them in these cases, which prevents authorities from having a line of communication with the affected communities.

In the long term, through establishing specific policies, protocols, and procedures and a clear centralized mechanism or search body, Ethiopian families missing their loved ones could be better supported. In the short and medium term, the research conducted for this report identified some good practices that could be replicated and leveraged to improve the situation of families of missing migrants. One example is the coordination of Ethiopian consulates and local BOLSA offices to support families in the southern districts of Hadiya and Kembata Tembaro in searching for their missing loved ones, as well as to help with the repatriation of remains in the event that a missing person was found to be deceased. Additionally, the research showed that families of missing migrants are more likely to interact with grass-roots, community-based associations than with government actors. Community-based social support systems such as CCCs and the *iddir*, which have proved effective at mobilizing psychosocial and economic support for destitute families who have lost their loved ones on migration journeys, could be better supported with training and resources from relevant actors. Families of missing migrants should also be prioritized in various government livelihood improvement programmes such as the PSNP.

The recommendations provided in the next chapter – which were articulated by the participants in this research (families of missing migrants and a wide range of government and civil society stakeholders) and discussed during a national stakeholder consultation in September 2020 – highlight the need for evidence-based policy and programmatic interventions to advocate, support and address the specific needs of families of missing migrants in Ethiopia.

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CHAPTER 4

Recommendations to improve the situation of families of missing migrants in Ethiopia



- 1. Amend the national legal and policy framework to take into account the situation of families of missing migrants and the dynamics of deaths and disappearances on migration journeys**
 - (a) Ethiopia should seek to complement or complete existing legislation and fill the legal void that exists regarding the management of cases of missing migrants, regardless of the legality or irregularity of the journeys on which the death or disappearance occurred.
 - (b) The legal and policy framework should include provisions to investigate all cases of disappearances or deaths of migrants and to ensure that families can report the disappearance using simple and accessible procedures. It should provide assistance in the search for and the tracing of a missing person in the context of migration and protect the rights and interests of missing migrants and their relatives.

- 2. Designate an institution that functions as a single point of contact for families of missing migrants**
 - (a) An agency or institution should be designated with a mandate to coordinate and facilitate cooperation between the various government institutions and civil society actors – at the regional, national and local levels – involved in the processes of searching for, identifying and repatriating missing or deceased migrants.
 - (b) This institution should act as a single point of contact for families searching for their missing loved ones, with the aim of enabling their active participation in the search for their relatives and facilitating the exchange of information. Families should be able to report the disappearance through simple and accessible procedures which they trust to be safe and confidential, regardless of the legality or irregularity of the journeys on which their relatives went missing.
 - (c) This institution should actively and effectively involve and collaborate with community-based and grass-roots associations and groups that support families of missing migrants.

- 3. Enhance the capacities and roles of existing support structures for families, including diaspora groups abroad**
 - (a) Community-based support structures such as the *iddir*, CCCs, and church- and mosque-based associations provide psychosocial, emotional and socioeconomic support to families of missing migrants in the sites studied in this research. They are an example of a good practice that should be maximized and replicated in other parts of Ethiopia where they are not as strong or present.
 - (b) These informal, grass-roots and community-based structures need to be recognized and supported by local State authorities and stakeholders as legitimate agents of change and support. Their capacities should be enhanced financially and technically to enable them to reach as many families as possible.

- (c) Members of the Ethiopian diaspora abroad also play a key role in supporting the search for people who have gone missing on their migration journeys, facilitating the repatriation of remains in the event of a death and providing socioeconomic support for the families left behind. This role should be supported and replicated. Diaspora groups could be engaged through the MFA and the network of Ethiopian consulates abroad, as well as through the Ethiopian Diaspora Agency.
- (d) Collaboration between community-based groups, larger organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and diaspora groups should be promoted and encouraged to better support families in their searches.

4. Provide social protection and economic support to families of missing migrants

- (a) State authorities, NGOs, international organizations and other relevant actors must create paths to support family members of missing migrants who are facing socioeconomic hardships following the death or disappearance of their relatives.
- (b) Families of missing migrants should be prioritized in various government livelihood improvement programmes such as the PSNP.
- (c) Community-based social support systems such as CCCs and the *iddir*, which have proved effective at mobilizing economic support for destitute families who have lost their loved ones on migration journeys, should be better supported with training and resources from relevant actors.
- (d) Bilateral labour agreements between Ethiopia and destination countries should contain provisions for families of missing migrants such as life insurance, repatriation of remains, and compensation to families in the event that a relative dies or goes missing abroad, regardless of legal status.

5. Address the needs of families through a mental-health and psychosocially informed approach

- (a) Programmes and policy interventions designed to support families of missing migrants should integrate a mental-health and psychosocially informed approach that takes into account the acute distress experienced by families with missing relatives.
- (b) The capacities of community-based support services that provide emotional support to families should be strengthened with training and resources.
- (c) Families and their communities should be meaningfully involved in all stages of designing and implementing mental health and psychosocial support services to address their needs.

6. Account for the different needs of family members when designing policy interventions

- (a) Any engagement with family members of missing migrants will require specific approaches based on their different needs, which are connected to a wide range of intersecting factors such as gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status and ethnicity.
- (b) Interventions should aim to address the negative impacts of deaths or disappearances on women, children and older relatives, who are disproportionately affected by such losses. Local authorities should address issues of marital status, inheritance, finances and guardianship of children in ways that reduce the disparities affecting women, children and older relatives.
- (c) Awareness-raising programmes should be developed with the participation of community-based groups to empower communities to collectively address the issues of stigma and marginalization affecting family members of missing migrants, especially women and older relatives. Religious leaders and community elders can also support these processes by discouraging such stigmatization and discrimination.
- (d) Any measures and interventions to address the needs of families should be context-specific. This research showed that rural and urban families face different contexts in their search and have access to different support structures, which should be taken into account when designing and implementing support programmes.

7. Promote raising awareness on the subject of missing migrants as a humanitarian and human rights issue

- (a) Improved awareness among government actors of the impacts of the absence of a relative on the family members left behind and the barriers they face while searching for answers could lead to the integration of this rather invisible and under-recognized issue into policies.
- (b) Raising awareness about the situation of families of missing migrants could help bridge the gap between them and relevant actors in their communities (e.g. religious leaders, community elders, local associations, places of worship, local authorities and community conversation groups).
- (c) Additionally, there should be increased awareness of how families can safely and effectively search for loved ones who are missing in the context of international (irregular) migration, including the availability of simple and accessible procedures to report the disappearance, no matter the context in which they went missing.
- (d) Media coverage plays a major role in the framing of policy discourses and the shaping of public opinion. Increased awareness of the need for ethical, reliable and balanced media reporting on issues surrounding missing migrants can serve as a catalyst to encourage action to search for the missing and support their families left behind.
- (e) Government, international organizations, charities, places of worship, migrant associations, community groups and other stakeholders should undertake awareness-raising measures on these topics.

8. Seek to identify families of missing migrants and collect data on missing migrant cases

- (a) Families of missing migrants need to be identified in order to enable their participation in any processes involving them. Community-based support groups could facilitate the identification of families to be engaged and included in processes to address their needs.
- (b) State authorities and others working with families should proactively collect data from families of missing migrants for the purposes of the search. Families who are providing data should be given information on its intended use prior to collection, and this data should be used only for the purposes agreed upon by the families.
- (c) The capacity of Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency (CSA) could be enhanced to systematically collect data on cases of missing migrants as part of its engagement in the entire migration data harmonization initiative and management. For example, surveys conducted by the CSA on migration could include this topic. IOM Ethiopia is working with the CSA to enhance its capacity in regard to migration data collection and management. Considering the large number of missing Ethiopian migrants and the existing (legal) humanitarian imperative, it is important for the agency to investigate how it could incorporate data that could help resolve cases of missing migrants and also help address the needs of their families.

9. Shift from a criminal/anti-smuggling approach to a humanitarian approach to the issue of missing migrants

- (a) Authorities in Ethiopia should approach the issue of missing migrants from a humanitarian perspective, as having a missing loved one, no matter the context, is a humanitarian tragedy. This needs to be the primary concern when State authorities are dealing with individual cases of missing migrants.
- (b) When families reach out to authorities to search for their missing loved ones, the focus should not be placed on the irregularity of the journeys on which the death or disappearance occurred. Emphasis should be placed on how authorities can fulfil the humanitarian and legal imperative to investigate cases of disappearances or deaths, assist families in their search and provide support to address their needs. Shifting from a criminal/anti-smuggling approach to a humanitarian one will result in families being less mistrustful and apprehensive about contacting authorities in these cases.

10. Put families at the centre, in line with international standards applicable to the management of missing migrant cases

- (a) All efforts to assist people with missing migrant family members should recognize and meaningfully consider the expertise, knowledge and well-being of families and situate them at the centre of all searches and initiatives to address their needs.
- (b) International standards that put families at the centre of all processes to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants should be followed, such as those developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross for interacting with families of missing migrants, information exchange mechanisms and minimum data to be collected for the search of missing migrants.

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