I saw a young girl who was mentally ill and screaming on the street. I can tell from her accent that she is from my home village. I cried when I saw her in that condition. We took her inside a house and she was loosing control. Later we tied her on a chair and took her to our embassy.
MISSING MY MOTHER WAS HARD FOR ME…

IF I WERE EDUCATED, I COULD HAVE TAKEN THE RIGHT DECISION

EVEN IF THE REWARD IS LESS, THERE IS NOTHING LIKE HOME…

YOU FEEL LIKE YOU GOT SOME INCOME, BUT YOU WILL SPEND IT AGAIN…

“THERE IS NO CLOCK THERE”

INSIDE THE VIAL, I WAS ALWAYS CRYING…

I SHOULD NOT LOOK AFTER GOATS AT THIS AGE, BUT I HAD NO CHOICE…

IT IS DIFFICULT TO BE WITH A WOMEN IN SAUDI

THE EMPLOYER OWES ME 4000 RIYALS; THE SAME WAS TRUE OF MY SEVEN COLLEAGUES…

CONTENTS
Due to changes in the KSA’s foreign workers legislation and the subsequent crackdown on irregular migrants, over a 160,000 thousand Ethiopian migrants have been brought to Ethiopia in a couple of months. Following the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s (KSA) crackdown on irregular migrants, IOM has been asked by the Ethiopian government to provide post-arrival and reintegration assistance to Ethiopian returnees.

Often the returnees speak of the hardship they faced traveling to KSA through irregular routes lured by traffickers and smugglers. In addition to providing post arrival assistance to the returnees, IOM has been working on educating the public in Ethiopia on the consequences of irregular migration since 1995.

IOM Ethiopia Chief of Mission and Representative to the AU/ECA/IGAD, Josiah Ogina.
BACKGROUND

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is one of the main choices of destinations for Ethiopian migrant workers. Thousands of Ethiopians made their journey to the Kingdom either following the regular labour migration procedures or through irregular means via Djibouti and through Yemen. The Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), reported that licensed Ethiopian overseas recruitment agencies received 198,000 applications for work in 2012, more than double the amount received in 2011, the ministry estimated that this represents only 30 to 40 percent of all Ethiopians migrating to the Middle East.

Following the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s (KSA’s) new regulation on irregular migrants in 2013, however, thousands of Ethiopians were forced to make unplanned trip back to their mother land. As many had been forced to flee, they came back with stories to tell.

Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ambassador Dina Mufti, calls the incident a blessing in disguise the government is viewing the situation as an opportunity to educate the public about the risks of irregular migration. Ambassador Dina said most of returnees had told interviewers they would not have left the country if they had known more about the treatment of migrant workers in KSA, and what they would have to endure to get there.
My mother was very keen about my education. She put all her hopes on me, because she knew that my elder sisters would soon get married and leave our house, but I disappointed her...
Marima* was born near the town of Woldiya, Northern Ethiopia. She was one of the best performing students in elementary school. When Marima joined high school far from home, her parents had to pay for her accommodation despite their small income. As a grade nine student, Merima was required to study hard, but she was rather reluctant even to attend regular classes. What was more interesting to her was the story of many young girls who travelled to Saudi Arabia to make money. Unfortunately, Marima failed ninth grade despite all the good support she was getting from her family.

Unhappy about her education, Marima’s family decided to arrange marriage for her. “My mother was very keen about my education. She put all her hopes on me, because she knew that my elder sisters would soon get married and leave our house, but I disappointed her,” says Marima with sadness.

While her school mates progressed to the tenth grade, Marima instead became a housewife at 15 years of age. Yet, she only spent two weeks with her new husband. Out of school and out of marriage, Marima’s only hope was to see her future in Saudi Arabia as a housemaid. The arrangement of her travel was covered by her cousin who also sent her the sponsorship contract from Saudi Arabia.

Marima’s first job as a maid was in Medina where she and two other Ethiopians were employed. The job was rather demanding. “We had to clean the five story building for long hours. We have very little time to sleep. I cried everyday thinking about my mother. Missing her was so hard for me,” says Marima telling of her hardships. After spending only a month working in Medina, Marima ran away from her sponsorship contract and went to stay with her cousin. Though her cousin tried several times to find work for young Marima, the later could not focus and stay to her obligations. Marima running away from her contract meant that her cousin was liable for thousands of Saudi Riyals compensation payment to the agents.

Marima spent six months on and off between contracts. She finally got a job as a cleaner in a house with only three family members living in it. However, by the time she was able to begin sending money home, her employers left for a long vacation and her contract was terminated. It was a disappointing moment for young Marima as things kept changing to her disadvantage. Subsequently, the Saudi government began the expulsion of migrants without work permits and her hopes for making a decent income were finally ended. All of the money paid to the agents and for her transportation proved to be a great loss.

Many young girls like Marima, who were not able to make money, expressed feelings of guilt upon returning home to their families. They were judged against the few others who at least managed to buy a Television set or build extra room for their families.

One thing Marima learnt from her experiences in Saudi is that education is best for a girls’ future. She wants to continue her education with commitment this time. “I want to go back to school and make my mother proud. I want make her dreams come true,” she added.
Ayele* 17, grew up in the small village of Mentawuha, Gojjam, Western Ethiopia. He was not privileged to attend school like many of his village boys and girls; rather he spent his childhood looking after cattle. Ayele is the first boy in the house. He has three elder sisters and one younger brother.

Ayele’s life as a child and later as a teenager was full of challenges. He lost his father when he was little and he had to support his mother with every chore he was able to perform. As a teenager, he was also responsible for the farming. When Ayele heard that people earn a better income in the Middle East, he asked his mother if he too can travel and work there.

Ayele decided to leave by himself and paid 3,000 birr to a smuggler who took him up to the shores of Djibouti. After an hazardous sea voyage, Ayele arrived in Yemen. “Right after we were off loaded from the boat, the Mashawars [traffickers] took us to a compound and started beating us. They forced us to call our relatives in Saudi. They were hanging people with a rope. They even shock people with electric until they received money from their families,” says Ayele witnessing the situation in Yemen.

Ayele was lucky to escape a serious beating because his uncle was sending the ransom money immediately. Despite that, he fell into the hands of the Mashawars three times and his uncle paid a total of 7,000 Saudi Riyals ransom money. The young boy spent seven months in Yemen trying desperately to cross into Saudi Arabia. Finally, he made it to Riyadh and went to the outskirts of Jeddah to look for his friend who would help him find a job.

One thing Ayele had not realized was that the Saudi government was preparing to expel ‘illegal’ migrants, such as himself, from the Kingdom. By the time Ayele started working, the expulsion exercise was taking its toll as it was announced that employers would be fined if they were found to be hiring a foreigner without the Iqama work permit. So Ayele’s first job to look after some 150 goats was in jeopardy. After only a month on the job he was told to leave immediately - “My employer told me to leave. He also warned me not to mention that I was working for him. I felt desperate and I didn’t know where to go,” Ayele told his story.

So desperate and confused, Ayele had no place to sleep and no food to eat. He then decided to turn himself in to one of the detention centres in Mecca.

Ayele has now returned to Ethiopia and is very eager to see his family whom he left eight months ago. The thing that he regrets the most is that he is not educated - “If I were educated, I could have taken the right decision,” he added.
I saw a young girl who was mentally ill and screaming on the street. I could tell from her accent that she was from my home village. I cried when I saw her in that condition. We took her inside a house and she was loosing control. Later we tied her to a chair and took her to our embassy.
Even if the reward is less, there is nothing like home…

Fatuma was only 23 when she left her small village of Wegdi, in Wollo province Northern Ethiopia. She believed that she could change hers and her family’s life in a short time period working as a domestic worker in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). So she left her small trading business behind and began preparations for Saudi Arabia, after all, many young women from her village had done the same. After processing her travel with an agent, she soon got the chance to get a visa and start packing.

Fatuma’s first employer lives in a place called Haferbatir, close to the border with Kuwait. It was not an easy job for young Fatuma to work for a big family. Her day to day chores were demanding and she had to stay late to finish them. Even though her employer was a nice person, the work load was too much to bear and she could not stay in the house for more than a month and a half. She then decided to leave and take her chance in another place. Luckily enough, her relatives were living in Jeddah and she managed to contact them.

Since she left her work contract without following proper procedure, Fatuma spent another five years working illegally and hiding from authorities. Her income was dependant on the mercy of her employers and she had no control over that. But she feels grateful for herself as she saw many other fellow migrant workers who suffered much more physically and psychologically. “I saw a young girl who was mentally ill and screaming on the street. I could tell from her accent that she was from my home village. I cried when I saw her in that condition. We took her inside a house and she was loosing control. Later we tied her to a chair and took her to our embassy,” says Fatuma telling a story of her fellow county woman.

When Fatuma reflects back on her life, she feels that she didn’t gain much in KSA. She rather prefers to stay in her country and start her business again. “It is much better to work in your country” says Fatuma. “Even if the reward is less, there is nothing like home”.

Fatuma hopes to setup a business with her husband whom she met in Saudi Arabia. She is keen to trade in different items from town to town and hopes to make a decent income for her family; but for now her priority is to take care of her 18 month old boy and see her beloved mother.
I feel like I have a family now. I didn’t expect this warm welcome.
Momena was born into a family of four girls and three boys in Bahir Dar. She was a teenager when she travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, only 14 years of age. She managed to obtain a visa during the Umrah pilgrimage, even though she was underage. It was not her intention to stay in school where she was attending fifth grade. She rather insisted that her family should send her to work because she believed she can make a decent income and help her brothers and sisters. Her family was not happy at first, but later they had no choice but to agree as they were afraid that Momena would leave without telling them.

When young Momena got to KSA, she had not imagined that life could be so challenging. Besides, she had no paper and she had to hide from authorities. She was employed in different houses and because her employers knew her status, Momena had no say regarding her payments. She was earning a salary which was much smaller than those who have the iqama, or work permit.

Momena spent 10 years working as a domestic worker - enduring many challenges. “The best employment a woman can get in Saudi is as a domestic worker. If you are lucky you might get a good employer. There are also many bad ones who abuse women. They even push you down a balcony” says Momena.

Momena in her stay in Saudi Arabia witnessed many young girls being abused. “I saw many girls with mental problems. There were also others who lost their lives.”

Although Momena received her payment, after much of it was docked by her employers, she managed to send some money for her relatives back home. That meant that she could not save much for herself. Besides, she had to cover for house rent and other costs. “You feel like you got some income, but you will spend it again. That makes you frustrated.” Says Momena, with disappointment.

What only makes Momena grateful about life in Saudi is her seven months old girl. She met her fellow Ethiopian husband in KSA and they were helping each other out. They had their first born months before the Saudi Government announced its new regulation to expel thousands of migrant workers out of the Kingdom. When the inevitable happened; Momena’s husband had to take action. He sent his wife and kid to Ethiopia for their safety.

Momena feels happy to be home and will soon see her family after 10 long years. She also thanks IOM, the Government and humanitarian partners who provided support on her arrival. “I feel like I have a family now. I want to thank my fellow countrymen and the organizations which assited us too. I didn’t expect this warm welcome.” She added.
When *Fiori Hagos 25 left her birthplace Mekele and headed to KSA she went through the legal route. Traveling to work as a babysitter, housemaid and a cleaner, she knew the hardship of the work she was in for. “I worked up to 1:00 AM and had to wake up early in the morning as well. There are some friends of mine who complained working for 24 hours. There is no clock there.”

As a young woman in Mekele, having stopped her high school at grade 10 not having the grades required for higher education she found it difficult to find work. Fiori stated that her parents did not like the idea of her having to leave home, but she was adamant to try her luck anyways. “My parents did not have much money so I had to ask my aunt who lives in Riyadh to buy me the ticket. At first she was insisting that I stay in Ethiopia and work here instead but I told her that if I don’t get the ticket I’ll leave on foot and she knew the hardship so she reluctantly agreed to buy me the ticket.”

Leaving Ethiopia, two and a half years ago, Fiori started working at a family house in KSA; describing the work atmosphere as “none stop”. “The person I used to work for was not a good person. He used to give me some hard time. He used to pull my hair and... (she cries) used to give me a hard time.” she continues crying.

Fiori said she was hoping that the situation would change but her hopes turned to dust as the employer never changed. She wanted to report the incident but was afraid that she would be in more trouble. “I heard that the police would not help us (house maids) they tend to favour the natives.” She describes her fear. “I could not take it anymore so I had to leave that place.” Fiori decided to work at another employer’s place. However, this time, she knew she had no legal work permit.

Working in KSA for a couple of years at one place, Fiori has been able to payback the money she owed her aunt, and to send a little amount to her family. She however states that when the Saudi government cracked down on irregular migrants, she was fired from her second employer’s place and was denied her remaining payment 2,400 Riyals.
I feel like a prisoner in the house. Nothing impresses my employer. Inside the veil, I was always crying, and it hurts so much.
Though Fetiah* was 22, was a seventh grader and attending school with her fellow villagers in Wello, Northern Ethiopia. It became the norm that young men and women in her area leave their homes in search of the supposed better life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Even her close relatives had already been living in the Kingdom working as domestic workers.

It was a tough decision for young Fetiah to quit school where she had been performing relatively well in English. Despite this, she took the decision to leave like many of her female school friends.

Fetiah journey to KSA was not a regular one as she took the dangerous route crossing the Gulf of Aden to Yemen and then into KSA, paying thousands of birr to smugglers.

It was such a difficult and dangerous journey to cross into Saudi Arabia through Yemen. The smugglers and traffickers network has become so strong and thousands of irregular migrants are often abused mentally, physically as well as sexually.

“The traffickers only care about their money. They pilled up people like goods and the journey from Yemen to Saudi Arabia was horrible especially for women” Fetiah remembers.

She got so emotional to tell the rest. Had it not been for her relatives in Saudi, Fetiah’s life could’ve been in danger. Her relatives had to pay ransom money every time Fetihah falls in the hands of the chained trafficker’s network.

Fetiah’s first job in KSA was to clean a four storey building where a large family was living. It was such a cumbersome job for young Fetiah to clean the large building by herself and the treatment she got from her employer was not good at all. She was constantly sent into hiding every time men enter the house and she was required to cover her face if she was out of her room. “I feel like a prisoner in the house. Nothing impresses my employer. Inside the veil, I was always crying, and it hurts so much,” says Fetihah sinking in emotions.

The new culture, the handwork and the ill-treatment from her employer left Fetiah traumatized. She started missing her family so much that she cried everyday in her room. After four difficult months, Fetiah left the house and started looking for another job. It was at this moment that her little English came to her rescue. She was able to communicate better with her second employer and stayed seven mothers though the job was still demanding.

When Fetiah recalls her one year stay in Saudi, she feels sad. She regrets all of her decisions for leaving her country and feels she hasn’t gained much from working abroad. She would rather prefer to go back to her family and continue her education and feels grateful to be home.
Nuru Ahmed, a father of two, was a hard working farmer in Borena South Wollo, northern Ethiopia. Despite Nuru’s tenure producing a decent income for his family, the lure of “prosperity” in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was very much tempting to him. Yet, Nuru was in his mid forties and it is not common for men in his village to go and look for a greener pasture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Despite this, the hard working farmer took to the decision to take his chances in KSA. He left his family behind in 2010 and made his way to the Kingdom paying thousands of birr to smugglers.

The more Nuru was far from his home, the more difficult his journey became. He was taken via the eastern migration route, i.e. crossing the Gulf of Aden from Djibouti and then into Yemen. “I had to save a bottle of water for four days to survive” says Nuru. “We just followed all their [traffickers] orders though they were loading us on the boat like animals.”

After a death-defying sea journey, Nuru made it to Yemen, but his ordeal continued. He fell into the hands of the ruthless traffickers who extort money out of many desperate irregular migrants. Nuru suffered serious beatings in Yemen before his relative sent his ransom money to his capturers. “My relatives sent 8,000 Saudi Riyals to the traffickers in three rounds. Had it not been for that, I don’t know what would have happened to me. I saw many, who have no relatives to send money, being beaten harshly and to the level that they lost consciousness.” Nuru remembers the situation in Yemen.

When Nuru finally made it to KSA, he was hoping to get a decent job and compensate for what his relatives paid during his capture - but things were different.

In Jeddah, the best job he could find was to look after goats. It was really heart braking and disappointing for Nuru to look after goats just like he did when he was just a little boy back in his village. “I should not look after goats at this age. But I had no choice.” Says Nuru with despair.

Nuru was also working as a daily labourer in a construction site where a new stadium was being built but it was only for a short while. During most of his three year stay in KSA, he was looking after goats in the outskirts of Jeddah.

Nuru is very grateful to be back. He was planning to return back to his county several times before, but was afraid that he would be arrested and serve time in jail as he was staying in KSA without legal documents. Besides, he was trying hard to make money in which to send some to his family back home. According to Nuru, those irregular migrants who did not manage to send money home feel ashamed to see their family. There are also many who owed money from friends and relatives. Hence, these migrants face a challenging dilemma whether to stay or to go back. Yet, Nuru realised that with the new Saudi regulation, it was no use to stay in the Kingdom. Even employers who need daily labourers are not willing to hire migrant workers without proper documents.

Nuru is very happy about the reception he got at Bole International Airport. He urged that the government, Ethiopians all over the world, IOM and its humanitarian partners continue providing all necessary post arrival assistance to returnees.

Nuru Ahmed wants to go back to his farming and make a living. “I know I can do better with my farm. It was not a good decision to go to KSA in the first place” he added.
Abdu Seid was very young when he stole 100 birr from his family and left his village Mersa, North Wollo. He wasn’t sure about his next move but he ended up in the tiny Horn of Africa country of Djibouti without his family knowing about his whereabouts. Abdu spent a year in Djibouti making a meager income which was only enough for him to basically survive each day. While in Djibouti, he observed that many of his fellow county men and women were making their way to Yemen packed onboard rickety smugglers’ boats. Despite the risks, he decided to take the same dangerous route together with many irregular migrants.

Young Abdu was lucky to safely arrive in Yemen, a transit country for Horn of Africa migrants before they make their way to KSA. Unlike many unfortunate irregular migrants, Abdu did not face a significant challenge in Yemen. “Crossing to Saudi Arabia via Yemen was not that difficult then. But it got worse within two to three years, especially for women migrants.” says Abdu.

Though Abdu was glad to have his first born in Saudi Arabia, he was constantly in fear of what will happen to his wife while he was away for work. Even if he was eager to send his wife and kid back to Ethiopia, he was afraid that they could be arrested because of their “illega” status.

When the KSA government started to send undocumented migrants back to their home countries, his first decision was to send his wife and child back to Ethiopia. He then stayed behind to take care of his payments, eventually also flying back to Addis Ababa.

Abdu is now in his home country and hopes to open his own small shop. He advises men and women not to travel without legal documents anywhere. “Women suffer a lot worse than men in the hands of traffickers and even during their stay in destination countries. - the suffering is simply too much,” says Abdu in conclusion.
The first three months we were paid regularly. Then they started giving us unnecessary reasons to withhold our salary...
Siraj Ahmed changed his name to Jemal Ibrahim the second time he travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a Hajj pilgrim. Though he had worked in KSA for four years, he was deported back to Ethiopia without making any substantial income in 2008. Yet, he decided to take his chance again. This time around, he took a huge risk. He sold his plot in Sankura Woreda in Silte Zone (Southern Ethiopia) to cover his travel and other costs amounting to 57,000 birr (about USD 3,000).

Siraj in fact made it to Mecca as a pilgrim with his new identity. He then went to Riyadh to look for work, but his hope of finding work was only realized after four difficult months.

Siraj was glad to find a job in a building construction site in Jeddah. However, his employer was not paying him regularly. “The first three months we were paid regularly. Then they started giving us unnecessary reasons to withhold our salary,” says Siraj explaining what happened to him. Siraj was desperate to get more money so that he could cover his travel costs. However, he was not paid for three months like his fellow Ethiopian migrant workers who were working in the same construction site with him. Siraj and his colleagues then decided to take the matter to the authorities. “The employer owes me 4000 riyals. The same was true of my seven colleagues. That’s why we decided to take the matter to the police.”

When Siraj and his friends got to a police station, the officer told them that their case will be looked into. He even gave them a subpoena to their employer. The migrant workers were very happy about the police response. They were hoping to get their payment back soon. However, while Siraj and his friends were returning back from the police station, they themselves were arrested because they were “illegal”.

Siraj spent 18 days in jail in Riyadh and was then taken to a detention centre in Jeddah where many other irregular migrant workers were awaiting their deportation back to their home countries.

Siraj feels very sad when he thinks about his loss. His hope for now is to go back to his village and farm his father’s land. “I have spent too much to go to Saudi but in return I got nothing. I could have been doing better farming here,” says Siraj with a broken heart.