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RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. Are there any agencies which place Ethiopian women into domestic situations in Saudi Arabia?
2. What work opportunities exist for single mature women in Ethiopia?

RESPONSE

1. Are there any agencies which place Ethiopian women into domestic situations in Saudi Arabia?

The website of one private employment agency in Ethiopia named "Abdu K" claims to place domestic workers in Saudi Arabia:

> Abdu k private employment agency is an Ethiopian labour service founded in 1995. It is one of the leading private employment agencies approved by the Ministry of Labor, Government of Ethiopia, holding valid Registration NO. 001976/DEL/PER/300/-3/3604/93. It has started providing unskilled and semi-skilled workers to Bahrain, and now it is expanding its services to more Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia, united Arab emirate (Dubai), and Qatar. We provide labor and skilled workers for a wide range of jobs including housemaid, cleaning service, gardening and driving (Abdu K Private Employment Agency 2008, 'About Us', Abdu K Private Employment Agency website http://www.abdukagency.com/about.html - Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 1).

A 2006 Anti-Slavery International report on the trafficking of women to the Middle East explains that "[t]here are many factors and recruitment processes taking place in conscious labour migration and as a result, a wide range of players are usually involved", including employment agencies and brokers. It is noted that Ethiopia has developed "a formal

procedure for labour migration" which involved the establishment of "registered and state-controlled agencies to assist women migrating abroad for domestic work". Despite the existence of registered agencies, many women make use of non-registered agents, who have been known "to traffic many women abroad, mainly using false promises and debt bondage":

> The reasons why women use non-registered agents are generally many. They are often told that the services of non-registered agent are cheaper and that the agency can get better paid jobs for them. Another frequently reported reason is that women, particularly in rural areas, are not informed about what the formal procedure are, or they find it too complicated or inaccessible. When they are approached by someone offering a well paid job, they see it as a good way to escape from poverty and send money to their families. Lastly, relatives and friends are often involved in the process, either by putting the woman in contact with the broker or by helping to pay the fees for arranging the job and travel. Trust is an important factor in this, and, in the case of re-paying the debts, so is the sense of duty which recruited women feel towards their loved ones. The following actors are normally involved in recruitment:
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> Agents and brokers: The agents, brokers and intermediaries are operating in the countries of origin and facilitate the employment, necessary administrative procedures, transport, and communication with counterparts in destination countries. While in many destination countries (and in Ethiopia as a country of origin) the work of agencies is regulated by law, many agencies exist and recruit workers illegally. "There are many agents (in Ethiopia), who are not legal. They would go from house to house, promising that they will get a job for a girl in Yemen or Saudi Arabia." The major problems reported are related to contracts, debt bondage and misleading information about living and working conditions.
>
> …The agents and brokers were reported to be the major source of fear, both in countries of origin and destination. According to the domestic workers interviewed, the risk of reprisals is high if the worker escapes the employment before she 're-pays her debt'. All saw the agents and brokers as very powerful people. Physical violence, intimidation and threats were the major factors outside the household they worked in which kept the women in abusive situations. There was also a big fear of reprisals after being repatriated back to the country of origin.
>
> …**3.3 Assistance and help at disposal**
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> 3.3.1 Destination countries
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> Employment agencies
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> In theory, the agency should help the worker with any problems. Some of them are supportive. In many cases, however, if an employer returns the maid to the agency, it is likely that the latter will be punished in some way as a discipline measure. "There is this agent, everyone fears him. He brings women from Ethiopia, he is well connected. But he is very cruel and he beats women if they escape the employer or if they are returned. He does bad things. A girl was returned by her employer to this agent and after a few days was found hanging in his cellar."
>
> Agencies are often threatening the workers that if they stop working, they will have to pay the 'debt' that they have with the agency and/or pay money directly for 'additional services' such the renewal of personal documents.
>
>> "I have paid $800 to the agent to help me to obtain new papers, because my passport and other documents were taken from my employers. He promised to get new ones for me. But when I came to collect them, he said that he wants more money. I do not

> have more money. I do not have any passport or documents now. I cannot leave this country." (Dana)
>
> "I paid $1400 to the agent. He promised to help me. But he never did. I live without a passport. I do not have more money. I do not know how will I get home."(Kumari)

> Basically, agencies usually do not represent the interests of the workers in negotiations with employers. It is rather the other way around. -Many agents punish the worker if she causes any difficulties. A Lebanese (female) employer, for example, reportedly said: "We took her in (to the agency) and they taught her a big lesson. Taamouah atle' mrattabe' (They beat her well)."
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> …3.3.2 Countries of origin
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> Government agencies
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> Services to returned migrant domestic provided by state agencies in the Horn of Africa are virtually non-existent, with the exception of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Government does not provide services per se, but co-operates with agencies such as IOM and non-governmental organisations such as the Good Samaritan Association or the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers´ Association. The services offered by these organisations are described in some detail in the Ethiopian country report in chapter 5. Ethiopia was the only country of origin of migrant workers for which the interviewed migrant domestic workers did not have concerns about returning to for fear of persecution.

The report continues with some information relating to Ethiopia's "Private Employment Agency Proclamation No. 104/1998, which provides for licensing private employment agencies and the prosecution of illegal brokers":

> Ethiopia has an institutional framework for addressing the issues of trafficking, which includes an inter-agency anti-trafficking task force with three sub-commissions, covering research and data collection, public awareness and legal issues. In terms of trafficking for forced labour, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) plays the central role. MOLSA is responsible for implementation of the Private Employment Agency Proclamation No. 104/1998, which provides for licensing private employment agencies and the prosecution of illegal brokers. Ethiopians are permitted to migrate for work only if they use a licensed agency or obtain special permission from MOLSA. MOLSA works in the task force and co-ordinates with other agencies such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Immigration Authority, and the Prime Minister's Office (Anti-Slavery International 2006, 'Trafficking in women, forced labour and domestic work in the context of the Middle East and Gulf region', Anti-Slavery International website, pp. 14-15, 32, 36, 52-53 http://www.antislavery.org/includes/documents/cm_docs/2009/t/traffic_women_forced_labour_domestic_2006.pdf – Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 2).

A 2003 study on the trafficking of East African women provides some information regarding employment agencies and brokers which organize domestic work for Ethiopian women in Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia. The study claims that in 2003, two registered private employment agencies were "due to start business…sending workers to Saudi Arabia", and provides further detail about Ethiopia's Private Employment Agency Proclamation No. 104/1998:

> **3. Ethiopia**
>
> **3.1. Dimensions and trends of trafficking in women and girls**

Most women trafficked from Ethiopia are trafficked to the Gulf for domestic labour. Main countries of destination are Lebanon, Emirates, Saudi, Bahrain and Yemen. All those interviewed agreed trafficking for prostitution also occurs, however existing research has tended to focus on domestic labour. The Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA) and IOM both state that most women ending up in prostitution in Gulf countries are either trafficked and deceived as to the work they will do. More often, women who escape abusive situations of domestic labour end up in prostitution due to a lack of alternatives. In terms of trafficking for marriage, neither organisation has come across any such cases.

Ethiopian women may be trafficked both through legal and illegal channels. There is one licensed employment agency sending women to Lebanon that is supposed to afford more protection to the women (see below legal framework). There is also second stage trafficking, where women may migrate legally or illegally, but to escape an abusive employer, may use another broker or agent to find another job. There are reportedly more than 200 agents recruiting Ethiopian women in this way in Lebanon.

…The Hadj (Muslim pilgrimage) is frequently used by women migrants as a pretext to enter Saudi Arabia, as in H.'s case below.

Case of H.

H. left Ethiopia when she was 17 to go work as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. She borrowed money from friends of her family to buy a plane ticket, and changed her name to a Muslim name so she could enter Saudi Arabia freely during the Hadj. At the airport she was met by a broker, A. who took her and other Ethiopian women from the airport to a house and made arrangements for them to find jobs as domestic workers. A. made a contract with H. under which she agreed to give the agency the entire first three months' salary from her job, and then from the fourth month onwards, 50% of H's wage would go to the agency. H. had to give her passport to A. who kept it the entire time she was working.

Case of N.

N. is from a village in Northern Ethiopia. She comes from a large family, but not desperately poor, her father is a dairy farmer. She has two brothers, one of whom is a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. At 19, she wanted to change her life for the better so she decided to go work in the Middle East as a domestic worker. N. organised her trip through an employment agency for a fee of 9000 birr. Her family lent her the money so she could go. She spent five years working for a family in Riyadh.

…Trafficked women are usually introduced to agents through a friend or relative, or agents may approach women directly themselves. Women, such as N. are often unsure as to the legality of their agent. According to an IOM study, the recruitment fee for illegal agents may range from 1000-7000 birr. EWLA state the fee may be as high as 10,000 birr. Often women pay half the fee before they depart and half is to be deducted from their wages. Women usually borrow the money from relatives or friends to pay the agent. Migrants sometimes sign contracts before they leave, but then may be forced to sign new contracts upon arrival with very different terms and conditions, and often in Arabic so they cannot read it. In other cases, women may have an oral agreement with the agent as to what they will do, how much money they will earn, like in N.'s case. As in H.'s case, not all women use brokers to facilitate the travel and work from Ethiopia.

… Private Employment Agency Proclamation No. 104/1998 (hereafter the Proclamation) filled a gap in the existing law to enable prosecution of illegal brokers. Unregistered brokers/agencies performing employment services or sending Ethiopians abroad can be prosecuted and sentenced to 3 or 5 years' imprisonment respectively. This penalty is

increased to a maximum 20 years' imprisonment if the human rights and physical integrity of an Ethiopian has been injured. To date, no illegal agents have been convicted under the Proclamation, though there are currently charges against 107 illegal agents. Some believe the Proclamation has had the effect of driving illegal agents underground rather than preventing trafficking.

The Proclamation was brought in to protect the rights of Ethiopian workers abroad and to establish licensed private employment agencies for that purpose. Ethiopians are permitted to go abroad for work purposes, only if they go through a licensed private employment agency or obtain permission from MOLSA. Under the Proclamation, private employment agencies have duties such as to provide pre-departure training to workers, establish an office in the country of destination and submitting annual reports to MOLSA detailing the situation of every worker registered by the agency. The agency must provide a deposit a bond guarantee of $30,000 for up to 500 workers (with higher amounts for more workers) to ensure protection of the migrant workers. It is illegal for the agency to accept any payment from the worker. All payments to the agency are to be obtained from the employer. The Proclamation also establishes MOLSA is responsible for monitoring the private employment agency in terms of how effectively they protect workers.

The Proclamation has improved the situation for migrants who migrate legally to Lebanon, but for various reasons it has not stopped trafficking in women. Currently there is only one registered private employment agency, Meskerem, to send workers to Lebanon. Three other agencies are due to start business, one to Lebanon and two sending workers to Saudi Arabia. Workers going to countries without a registered agency lack protection. Even for those workers going to Lebanon, not all workers go through Meskerem. It is more time-consuming to go through the licensed agency, taking about six to eight months, whereas an illegal agent can organise travel in three to four weeks. Meskerem also require clients to have finished high school, which not all domestic workers have. Despite these shortcomings, there is no doubt the very existence of the agency and the fact that it has a local branch in Lebanon has curbed abuses and provided more protection for abused workers in Lebanon (Pearson, E. 2003, 'Study on Trafficking in Women in East Africa', Sector Project against Trafficking in Women, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, December, pp. 17-19, 22-24 – Attachment 3).

The Private Employment Agency Proclamation, and the requirements for establishing and operating a private employment agency in Ethiopia, are also outlined in a UNICEF report on trafficking, which is cited in a 2008 report on Ethiopia by the UK Home Office:

26.05 The UNICEF report 'Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children in Africa 2005', states that:

"Even if Ethiopian women wish to migrate for work purposes, many of them become victims of trafficking, lured by false promises of good jobs, high salaries and easy life. There have been many reports of abuse of Ethiopian migrant women recruited for domestic work in the Middle East and Gulf States. They find themselves abroad in very exploitative situations where they are abused and ill-treated in working conditions comparable to modern day slavery. In this context, when a woman reaches her destination, the employer of the agent from the employment agency permanently withholds her travel papers and official documents, undermining her basic human right to free movement. The Private Employment Agency Proclamation 104/1998 aims at regulating all employment service entities and particularly at protecting the rights, safety and dignity of Ethiopians employed and sent abroad, with aggravated penalties for abuses of human rights and physical integrity of workers." [28e]

"The proclamation states that:

> a licence is required for any person who wishes to set up a private employment agency.
> This agency must prepare a formal contract of employment and submit it to the authorities.
>
> If the agency is providing services for hiring and sending workers abroad, the agency must fulfil the additional obligations:
>
> ensure that the employment contract fulfils the minimum working conditions set in Ethiopian law;
> be responsible for ensuring the rights, safety and dignity of worker
> have a branch office or representative in the receiving country
> provide orientation for the worker before he or she is sent abroad, concerning the work and the country
> notify the nearest Ethiopian Embassy of the worker's presence
> deposit guarantee funds in a recognized financial institution; US$30,000 if up to 500 workers can be placed by the agency, US$ 490,000 for between 500-1,000 workers and US$ 50,000 for more than 1,000 workers." [28e]
>
> The UNICEF report further continues: "Presently only one private employment agency for sending migrant workers to Lebanon has legal recognition. This concerns very few of all the potential candidates. Even if the immigration authorities did not issue visas for other migrant workers to Lebanon, this does not mean that trafficking would be stopped. It seems that the traffickers are using neighbouring countries like Tanzania and Kenya as transit countries for Ethiopian women to the Middle East and Gulf. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs established an Inter-Ministerial National Committee in June 1999 to look into the issue of Ethiopian women who are being trafficked to the Gulf States and Lebanon. IOM is supporting the government initiatives. Since the beginning of 2003, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has taken over the responsibility of the Inter-Ministerial National Committee." [28e] (UK Home Office 2008, *Country of Origin Information Report: Ethiopia*, January, pp. 132-133 – Attachment 4).

An article on private employment agencies in Ethiopia states that "[t]here are currently 42 private employment agencies operational under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), which send an average of 100 employees a day". In addition, "In the last six months [prior to April 2007] 9,987 Ethiopians through private and 2,029 through public employment agencies went to Middle Eastern countries for employment". However, it is argued that these agencies "are not being properly monitored" and that "Proclamation No 104/98…has a gap with regards to controlling such agencies":

> MoLSA and private employment agencies are facing questions and complaints over the handling of international employment for hundreds of Ethiopians. The labourers, often going to Middle Eastern countries, seek foreign placement with high hopes of a better life, but often find their dreams dashed with false promises and unexpected work conditions. The monitoring of both the agencies and MoLSA is under question.
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> Weyneshet Tadesse, 23, returned to Addis Abeba on April 3, 2007 from Ajman, one of the seven Emirates of the United Arab Emirates after staying there for only three months.
>
> She had travelled to the Middle Eastern country in hopes of earning more money and making a better life for herself and for her future. But dreams were cut short for Weyneshet when she was badly mistreated by her employer and given a work load beyond the boundaries of her contractual agreement.

“I was hired to serve as a maid,” said Weyneshet. “But instead I was made to work relentless hours at my employers’ camel farm in a rural area of the country that I was not familiar with; I did not even know the name of the place where I was.

Weyneshet managed her return home with the help of an Ethiopian businessman whom she met by chance. “I escaped during the night like some sort of a thief or robber,” she said.

Weyneshet is not the first young lady to have travelled to the Middle East and faced a situation that was far from what she had anticipated. There are currently 42 private employment agencies operational under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), which send an average of 100 employees a day. Much of the traffic is headed towards Beirut, Lebanon, a city under reconstruction following a recent war with Israel.

But the controls loosen once the women have been sent off. There is an existing chain, where by the 42 agencies are supposed to be controlled by the Ministry and they, in turn, are supposed to monitor the conditions of the employees that they send off.

But cases such as Weyneshet’s clearly evince that the employment agencies have not been able to spread their wings over the Red Sea.

“Our employment agencies have no mechanism to find out what kind of a situation we are in after sending us to our employers in Middle Eastern countries,” Weyneshet told Fortune.

But the employees are not the only ones that have been faced with dilemmas. Employers and their agencies are also losing a lot of business as a result of media coverage that was given to the plight of Ethiopians like Weyneshet who have suffered terrible ordeals instead of the improvement in living standards that they were hoping for.

Two Ethioipan [sic] women, who travelled for work, were reported dead, while there were unsubstantiated rumours that local employment agencies were involved in the sale of human organs.

Gebremehdin Abraha, president of the Ethiopian Private Employment Agencies Association, at least two women from each of the 42 agencies have returned to Ethiopia as a direct result of the press coverage.

“Ethiopians employed in the Middle East and their relatives here are disturbed by the news of the two deaths and have been an inconvenience on us ever since,” said Gebremehdin. “They come and accuse us with false information, and we are at a loss as to what to do.”

Although the blame for the abuse and mistreatment of Ethiopians by their foreign employers seems to be falling squarely on the shoulders of private employment agencies, they themselves are not being properly monitored.

MoLSA currently has the capacity to monitor three or four agencies simultaneously; the 42 that exist are beyond its capability.

MoLSA was not afraid to announce, during a Parliamentary session on April 10, 2007, that the number of employment agencies sending labour to the Middle East has gone beyond its controlling aptitude.

The current Proclamation No 104/98, with which the Ministry has been working, has a gap with regards to controlling such agencies.

Zenebu Tadesse, state minister of Labour and Social Affairs, told Fortune that, it was not a matter of licensing, since the issues concerned are about citizens, their security and rights.

"This whole business requires a special organisational set up," said Zenebu. "The increase in the number of agencies and the amount of traffic that they handle on a daily and monthly basis requires an intricate network which we just do not have right now."

That is why the existing Proclamation, which governs both private and public employment agencies, is being amended by the Ministry.

In order to augment the Proclamation and enhance the controlling capacity of the Ministry, a committee was formed to protect women entering the foreign labour market. Comprised of members from MoLSA, Federal Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority, the committee is aiming to integrate the working knowledge of its members to implement a viable plan to control the agencies and their foreign markets, according to Eskedar Tefera, head of the International and Public Relations Department at MoLSA.

"We have to be able to protect people that just want to make a better life for themselves doing what they know how to do, or are given the opportunity to do," said Eskedar.

In the last six months 9,987 Ethiopians through private and 2,029 through public employment agencies went to Middle Eastern countries for employment. Meskerem Agency, now out of operation, was the first private employment agency which opened the door to such type of employment, having found jobs for 18,000 Ethiopians.

With the labour export business getting bigger every year, local employment is beginning to feel the strains of a thinning labour force. Locally oriented employment agencies have been having a hard time finding suitable employees for local employers.

Eneleyew Yeshanew, nicknamed Shambel, secretary at Semenu Employment Agency, on Senegal Street around Semien Hotel, told Fortune that mass employment in the Middle East has been affecting their work locally.

"Women that would have been happy to find a job as a maid in town a year ago, now will not even consider getting hired on the local market," said Shambel. "Last year, we averaged about 30 placements a day, but now it ranges between five to 10."

The dramatic shift in figures and the boom in the business have led MoLSA, which has 317 employees, to begin providing training to Ethiopians employed in Middle Eastern countries about the existing situation there, it stated during its Parliamentary report.

During the report, Azeb Misfen, chairman of the Social Affairs Standing Committee, the Parliamentary body which overseas the Ministry, accused it as having outdated strategies, spending excessive manpower and time on studies rather than practical activities and the lack of coordination amongst its higher officials (Beshah, F. 2007, 'Ethiopia: Too Much Labour, Not Enough Controls', *AllAfrica Global Media*, source: Addis Fortune, 24 April http://allafrica.com/stories/200704240725.html - Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 5).

A UK Home Office country report on Ethiopia released in 2003 identifies "a network of persons", including illegal employment agencies and private entities, which organise domestic work for Ethiopian women in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries. The report makes similar claims to those raised above, that "[t]he Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs [has] had limited success in regulating employment agencies that [send] migrant workers to Middle Eastern countries":

6.61 Private entities arrange for overseas work and, as a result, the number of women sent to Middle Eastern countries, particularly Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, as domestic or industrial workers has increased significantly over the past few years. These Ethiopian women typically are trafficked through Djibouti, Yemen, and Syria. In 2001 there were reports that Syrian border police shot three women, killing one and injuring two, as they attempted to cross the border from Lebanon. The Chief of the Investigation and Detention Centre in Lebanon reported that 20,000 to 25,000 Ethiopian women worked in Beirut, a majority of whom were trafficked. Approximately 50 percent of these women were not able to return legally to their home country. [3a]

6.62 There is reportedly a network of persons based in the tourism and trade sectors that are involved heavily in soliciting potential clients, recruiting young girls, arranging travel, and fabricating counterfeit work permits, travel documents, and birth certificates. There are reports from the EWLA that some domestic workers abroad are subjected to abusive conditions, including sexual exploitation. In addition, the employers of domestic labourers sometimes seized passports, failed to pay salaries, and overworked their employees. Some domestics are forced to work for their employers' relatives without additional pay. Domestics are forced to pay a monetary penalty for leaving their employment early. Reports of abuse have decreased after the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs began reviewing the contracts of prospective domestic workers and denying exit visas if the contracts did not appear satisfactory. [3a]

6.63 There have been some government initiatives during the year to combat trafficking, including government consultation with IOM to try to resolve the problem. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have had limited success in regulating employment agencies that sent migrant workers to Middle Eastern countries. Many illegal employment agencies have escaped government scrutiny and continued to operate freely. There is a consulate in Beirut to assist women who were trafficked to Lebanon. The federal police's Women's Affairs Bureau, in collaboration with the media, have created a public awareness program on the dangers of migrating to Middle Eastern countries. [3a]

…6.65 Rakeb Messele, of the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM) anti-trafficking unit, believes that there is a great deal of trafficking going on in Ethiopia. All long for a new life abroad with promises of high wages and a good job. Yet for most that dream becomes a nightmare as they are forced into prostitution or a slave-like existence as housemaids working 20 hours a day without pay. The IOM says it is almost impossible to tell how many girls are shipped overseas. Most become difficult to trace because once they land they have to change their Christian names to Muslim names. [14ac]

6.66 "Specifically the girls are sent to the Middle East, Lebanon, Dubai and Saudi Arabia. These are the main countries of destination. In Lebanon alone there are about 25,000 Ethiopian girls (UK Home Office 2003, *Ethiopia Country Report*, October – Attachment 6).

However, the most recent US Department of State human rights report on Ethiopia claims that in 2008, "the MOLSA revised Proclamation 104/98 to improve coordination, supervision, and control over international employment agencies and better protect migrant workers from fraudulent recruitment and debt bondage situations". Despite this revision, the report also identifies trafficking as an ongoing issue, claiming that "[w]omen are trafficked transnationally for domestic servitude, primarily to Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates"; and identifying an increase in the sophistication of operations of traffic broker networks. It is also noted that in order to combat trafficking, the government, along with NGOs and the International Organization for Migration, "supervised and trained international labor migration firms" (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Ethiopia*, February, Section 5 – Attachment 7).

A report by Emebet Kebede on female labour migrants from Ethiopia emphasizes the use by many women of traffickers and illegal agencies for migration to Middle Eastern countries, and highlights the trend identified earlier that many women use Muslim pilgrimages in order to gain entry to Saudi Arabia. The report also describes the recruitment process for trafficking victims:

> No exact data is available on the number of Ethiopian women who migrate to the Middle East, but sources indicate that the numbers are high and most likely increasing…Few women migrate to the Middle East through legal channels. Most women migrate through traffickers/illegal agents and data certainly does not take into account the number of women migrant workers who are trafficked out of the country.
>
> …Aside from leaving the country with the help of illegal agents, women also use the Oumra and Hagi (Moslem pilgrimages) as a pretext to go to Saudi Arabia and, from there, to other Arab countries. According to a statement issued by the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Addis Ababa, 11'000 people got visas for Saudi Arabia to go for the year 2000 Oumra and Hagi, while 587 applications were denied. These pilgrimages occur twice a year. According to an official of the Ethiopian Immigration Authority, most of the women who leave the country through Hagi and Oumra use the Moslem pilgrimage as a pretext to migrate for employment in the Arab countries. As women are not allowed to travel alone on such a pilgrimage, they pay men who are travelling there to pose as their husbands and process visas for them.
>
> Various sources indicate that migration to the Middle East is on the rise, especially among women.
>
> …Large numbers of Ethiopian women have become victims of trafficking, lured by false promises of good jobs, high salaries and a comfortable life. Most of these women end up as modern day slaves. The process of recruitment for most victims of trafficking is similar. The women are first introduced to traffickers through friends, neighbours and relatives or are approached by the traffickers themselves. Traffickers typically own travel agencies, import-export businesses, have contacts in the Middle East or who travel to the this region regularly for various reasons. Trafficked women themselves have been instrumental in recruiting other migrants through the help of their families who act as the agents at this end.
>
> Unless the traffickers are travel agency owners or run import-export businesses, their address is usually not known to the migrant. The traffickers may not disclose their real names and, quite often, do not write a receipt against payments made by migrants. Migrant women are requested to provide a passport and photos for their agents to secure them an employment and process their work permits in the receiving countries.. Migrant women, usually pay half the agent's fee before the start of the process and the other half when their visas arrive. If the woman cannot afford to pay the whole amount, required, the agent agrees to take half before she leaves the country and half from her monthly salary at the country of destination. "The trafficker's fee varies from 1'000–7'000 Eth. birr (USD117–830)" (Kebede, E. 2002, 'Ethiopia: An assessment of the international labour migration situation: The case of female labour migrants', Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) Working Paper No. 3, Series on Women and Migration, International Labour Organization website, pp. 3-4, 6 http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/report/swmeth.pdf – Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 8).

An article in the Forced Migration Review explains that "[a]ll of the many recruitment agencies that arrange Ethiopian women's employment as domestic workers to the Middle East are non-registered and can be considered traffickers":

> Women are approached by the traffickers themselves or are introduced to traffickers through friends, neighbours and relatives. Trafficked women themselves are sometimes even involved in recruiting other migrants (De Regt, M. 2006, 'Ethiopian women increasingly trafficked to Yemen', *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 25, May, pp. 37-38 http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR25/FMR2521.pdf – Accessed 17 August 2009 – Attachment 9).

A 2002 report on trafficking in Saudi Arabia highlights the plight of migrant domestic workers from Africa and Asia who often fall victim to employment agencies which give "less than accurate descriptions of where [workers] will be placed and what the working conditions will be like":

> African countries also have well-established trafficking routes, such as the ones between Ethiopia and other east coast African countries, which lead into Saudi Arabia, according to the International Organization for Migration.
>
> …Saudi Arabia is one of the top 10 countries of destination for international migrants. Saudis rely heavily on migrant workers in all sectors of the job market. The perception of economic opportunity draws women and girls from East Asia, South Asia, and Africa, looking for domestic work. Domestic workers lack proper legal protections, however, and employment agencies are notorious for giving workers less than accurate descriptions of where they will be placed and what the working conditions will be like once they get there. Often these agencies request large sums of money to transport workers, and often they are at the center of prostitution rings (The Protection Project 2002, 'A Human Rights Report on Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children: Saudi Arabia', Child Trafficking website, March, pp. 466-467 http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/protection_project_2002_trafficking_saudi_arabia.pdf – Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 10).

In addition, an article dated 5 May 2008 claims that many "Ethiopian women [working] in Middle Eastern countries are facing severe human rights abuses":

> Every year, thousands of Ethiopian women, lured by the promise of lucrative jobs and comfortable lives, are shipped out to Middle Eastern countries but end up being trapped in prison-like conditions.
>
> Lebanon is the most popular destination for Ethiopian domestic workers, followed by Bahrain, Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Estimates indicate that there are over 50,000 Ethiopians working in Lebanon.
>
> Over 100,000 Ethiopian workers are believed to be working in the Arab countries of the Middle East.
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> According to the Ethiopian Women's Association, Ethiopian women in Middle Eastern countries are facing severe human rights abuses, including being subject to beatings, being denied earned wages, sleep deprivation, rape by employers, having parts of their body seared in boiling oil, being burned with hot irons, and thrown out of high-rise windows. As a result, many are driven to despair and mental illness, with some committing suicide ('Ethiopia bans citizens from seeking work in Lebanon' 2008, *The Daily Star*, 5 May – Attachment 11).

Further information about the abusive treatment of domestic workers in countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, can be found in a 2006 Human Rights Watch report (Human Rights Watch 2006, *Swept Under the Rug: Abuses against Domestic Workers Around the World*, July – Attachment 12).

2. What work opportunities exist for single mature women in Ethiopia?

The US Department of State human rights report mentioned earlier identifies high unemployment in Ethiopia as a factor driving migration. The report also highlights acute discrimination against women, particularly single women, and the lack of employment opportunities for women in Ethiopia:

> Discrimination against women was most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population was located. The law contains discriminatory regulations, such as the recognition of the husband as the legal head of the family and the sole guardian of children over five years old.
>
> …All land belongs to the government. Although women could obtain government leases to land, and the government had an explicit policy to provide equal access for women to land, rural communities rarely enforced this policy. In nearly all regions women did not have access to land, except through marriage. The law states that any property owned before marriage belongs to the spouse that previously owned it, while any property gained during marriage belongs to the husband upon divorce. In practice, when a husband died, other family members often took the land from his widow. In pastoralist areas where poverty is higher, women do not own property without a male guardian, which increases their marginalization and vulnerability. A widow must marry her brother-in-law or have an adult son in order to keep her deceased husband's land.
>
> In urban areas, women had fewer employment opportunities than men, and the jobs available did not provide equal pay for equal work. Women's access to gainful employment, credit, and owning and/or managing a business was limited by their low level of education and training, traditional attitudes, and limited access to information (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Ethiopia*, February, Section 5 – Attachment 7).

In a 2008 report, DFAT provided the following advice on the treatment of single women in Ethiopia, particularly highlighting the lack of economic independence experienced by many women who are forced by traditional constraints to seek dependence on men:

> Q.4. Can the post advice how single/separated women are treated in Ethiopian society?
>
> Q.5. Can the post advise if it is viable for a single female to live independently in Ethiopia?
>
> …R.4. In the rural areas girls may be married as early as eight years old. The consent for such unions is often left to the father. If a woman surpasses the expected age range for marriage (maybe between 18-25), then society may isolate her. Some superstitions hold that such women carry a kind of bad omen, and regardless of the true nature of the situation, women are usually blamed and can be isolated.
>
> R.5. This is more possible in urban areas as there is much wider access for women/girls to obtain education and employment at various levels. But still many remain unable to achieve economic independence due to many constraints (preferential treatment of boys for schooling, burden of house work and family responsibilities) which force women to seek dependence on male partners (DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/78 – CIS Request: ETH9384: Ethiopia: Single Women*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 11 August 2008), 20 August – Attachment 13).

In addition, DFAT advice provided in November 2007 indicates that "[i]n urban areas, women have fewer employment opportunities than men do"; and in both urban and rural areas, single or widowed women "are more likely to be subject to harassment":

> Female rights are largely non-existent in Ethiopia. Discrimination is most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population lives.
>
> …Regardless of changes made to the relevant laws, tradition and culture often prevail over civil and criminal law, and in practice women do not enjoy equal status with men. The Government has not yet fully put into place mechanisms for the effective enforcement of these laws.
>
> In urban areas, women have fewer employment opportunities than men do, and the jobs available do not provide equal pay for equal work. Women living alone in urban areas are more likely to be attacked by burglars and harassment (verbal and physical) is very common.
>
> Though it unlikely for rural women to live alone, those who are widowed or are forced to lead solitary lives due to other circumstances; they too are more likely to be subject to harassment (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/82 – CISQuest 9137/8: Ethiopia: Country Information*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 November 2007), 14 November – Attachment 14).

A news article dated 25 June 2003 highlights limited job opportunities for women in Ethiopia and the exclusion of women from the labour market. A government statement attributes this discrimination to "poverty, lack of economic empowerment, harmful customs and traditional practices as well as a low level of democratic culture":

> The Ethiopian government has blasted the "pathetic" attitude towards women's rights in the country which it says is fuelling the AIDS epidemic.
>
> It warned that social and cultural factors such as polygamy and sexual violence were exacerbating the vulnerability of the nation's women.
>
> In a statement, the information ministry described the threat posed by HIV/AIDS as "terrifying". In Ethiopia, HIV has infected some three million people. The majority – around 58 percent – are women. A million children have also been orphaned.
>
> The government warned that limited job opportunities forced girls and women into prostitution and women were often excluded from the labour market.
>
> "This is caused by poverty, lack of economic empowerment, harmful customs and traditional practices as well as a low level of democratic culture," the statement said.
>
> "In addition, the pathetic level of implementation of human and democratic rights of women enshrined in our constitution contributes its share to the vulnerability of our women to the deadly virus.
>
> "High illiteracy rates, heavy workloads and discrimination are also among major factors that have greatly affected the lives of women in our society," the statement said ('Gov't criticises attitude towards women's rights' 2003, *IRIN News*, 25 June – Attachment 15).

Kebede's 2002 report on female labour migrants cited above also describes Ethiopia's patriarchal culture and the low education levels of many Ethiopian women, resulting in "more and more women…turning to petty trading, domestic services, [and] according to a Government report, prostitution…Given their lack of skills and training, the only viable source of income outside the household for most Ethiopian women is the informal labour market". The report also states that "[w]ith limited access to the formal sector of the economy and unable to make ends meet by conducting small trades in the informal sector, it is not surprising that so many women leave the country as migrant workers to the Gulf States":

> The income level of the majority of the population is very low, as well as the education level, especially among women. Due to a patriarchal culture women have very limited access to education and training opportunities (especially in the rural areas). As a result, women's access to employment is much more limited than that of men.
>
> …The vast majority (85 per cent) of Ethiopian women live in rural areas and work in the informal agricultural sector, characterized by ease of entry, reliance on local resources, family ownership, small scale, labour intensity, and the need of simple skills obtained outside the formal educational system. As household incomes have fallen, women's contribution to the household has become essential and, as a result, more and more women are turning to petty trading, domestic services, according to a Government report, prostitution. Data is limited about the nature of women's employment in the informal sector in the country, but some reports indicate that women are moving into wage labour or other income-generating activities to supplement the household income.
>
> Given their lack of skills and training, the only viable source of income outside the household for most Ethiopian women is the informal labour market. Complicated procedures of licensing and allocation of market places constrain women from moving into more formal labour markets. A lot of women in the informal sector work as daily labourers or are involved in small trades which they start up with little capital, having no property to use as collateral for credit from financial institutions. Some women are able to get credit from informal community groups, but usually only small amounts of money. Lack of capital means lack of a place to conduct their small trades. Without a legal license to operate, they risk being chased away by law enforcement officers and having their property confiscated from time to time. Lack of business skills limits their capacity to expand and diversify. Such women do not have access to social security schemes. Their only security comes from informal community- based organizations to which they contribute small amounts of money. Women with low incomes have no access to childcare facilities, which also limits their participation in the labour market.
>
> With minimal or no education, women's access to the formal sector of the economy is limited. For example, 72 per cent of all civil servants in the country are men, while only 28 per cent are women. Of these women, 98.2 per cent work in lower positions, while only 1.79 per cent work in professional positions. Women in the civil service mostly fill jobs traditionally accepted as women's roles, such as secretaries, telephone-operators, nursing, food-preparation and office-cleaning positions that do not require advanced education. Moreover, since women are not provided with training opportunities, they do not move into higher positions. It is a vicious cycle.
>
> According to the latest draft report on the labour market prepared by the public employment service of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), during the year 1999, for example, out of 25,686 job-seekers registered, 55.5 per cent were men, while 44.4 per cent were women and that, out of the 694 job-seekers in the professional and technical fields, only 20 per cent were women.

> Roughly the same number of women and men seek jobs under the occupational code "Government executive officials and clerks". But this high figure is probably due to the fact that clerical jobs are included in this category for the lack of female Government officials in Ethiopia is obvious.
>
> Overall, out of the available jobs in the professional and technical fields, only 13 per cent of the posts go to women while 87 per cent of the posts go to men. In the "administrative and managerial" category, only 12 per cent of total posts are filled by women, while 87 per cent go to men. Of the Government executive and clerical posts, 57 per cent are filled by women and 42 per cent by men. Overall, out of the total 4,725 posts, women fill only 30 per cent and the remaining 70 per cent are filled by men. This data, though not conclusive, indicates that men have more job opportunities than do women in the formal public sector of the country's economy. With limited access to the formal sector of the economy and unable to make ends meet by conducting small trades in the informal sector, it is not surprising that so many women leave the country as migrant workers to the Gulf States (Kebede, E. 2002, 'Ethiopia: An assessment of the international labour migration situation: The case of female labour migrants', Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) Working Paper No. 3, Series on Women and Migration, International Labour Organization website, pp. 1-3 http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/report/swmeth.pdf – Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 8).

A study on gender equality in Ethiopia conducted by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) provides the following assessment of gender and employment in Ethiopia, which identifies the subordinate position of women in Ethiopian society and a significant under-representation of women in the formal employment sector:

> Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women at a subordinate position, using religion and culture as an excuse. These excuses have for many years been supported by laws and legislation that uphold patriarchy and women's subordination. This has brought about and maintained disparities between men and women, in division of labour, share of benefits, in law and state, in how households are organized, and how these are interrelated.
>
> …Women's low status in education, income and time constraint for self advancement, have hindered them from participating in employment in industries. They are either unaware about them, or are not given the required training, priority being given to men because in most instances men would have the necessary basic education to participate in the training. The number of Ethiopian women participating in industry and commerce is insignificant, due to lack of access to productive resources, such as land and credit, advisory services, training and information, and thus unable to benefit from industrial and commercial activities. The limited financial capacity of women would also hinder them from using available technology.
>
> *2.1.3 Gender and Employment*
> Employment in this context is defined as work done to earn money, and includes both formal and informal employment.
>
> *2.1.3.1 Formal Employment:* Women are underrepresented in the formal sector. In the year 1999/00, among all government employees women constituted only 30.75%. While this is the national picture, we see a wide regional variation. Addis Ababa has an almost equal number of (50.13) male and female government employees while some emerging regions have low figure for female government employees, 19.94% in Somali and 27.19% in Afar. The 30.75% referred to could be misleading as close scrutiny of the statistics show that women are highly concentrated in the routine type and low paying jobs. For example, looking at the Federal picture we find only 13.01% of the employees in professional and scientific fields, and only 14.0% in administrative position. Women are highly concentrated in jobs such as clerical and

fiscal (63.35%) and custodial and manual (48.07%). This might be related to the problems girls face in accessing and succeeding in their education. As the Personnel Statistics shows among the employees who have a 1–4 years of college or university education, only 18.35% were women. However, this does not rule out the fact that even without the requirement of education women still have limited opportunities of employment compared to men. According to the statistics released by the Federal Service Commission, among those illiterate government employees in 1999/00, 73.3% were male and 27.7% were female. This shows that women have problems in employment opportunities even when they have equal qualifications with men. This situation has serious implications on the empowerment and decision-making opportunities as well as earnings of women. At the federal, women make up 54.43% of the individuals who earn a salary of between Birr 105.00 and 199.00. On the other hand only 7.36% of the individuals who earn a salary within the range of Birr 180.00 and 199.00 were women. A related issue is promotion. In the year 1999/00, in all the regions except Addis Ababa, more male employees was promoted than females. In Addis Ababa 52.6% of those promoted were women while in Oromiyaa, Harari, Gambella, SNNPRA the percentages were 28.9, 23.0, 25.6, and 22.9 respectively.

2.1.3.2 Informal Employment: Women are involved in the informal sector in large numbers. They could either be employed by other people or be self-employed. According to a survey carried out by CSA in 1996, 64.93% of those engaged in the informal sectors were women. This figure included women who were operators and those who were owners.

Many of the women engaged in the informal sector are in small businesses that require small capital, not demanding sophisticated management and bookkeeping skills. According to a survey undertaken on 300 women in Addis Ababa, selling of vegetables and fruits, bakes like enjera and bread, charcoal and firewood, traditional drinks, second hand clothes and shoes, handicrafts, and goods such as sugar and salt were the major trades women were engaged in. However, a little more than half of them were engaged in selling fruits and vegetables with the rational that this trade requires a very small capital (Hayat, ND). According to the same study women engaged in the informal sector encounter a variety of problems. These are lack of working capital and business skills, unavailability of convenient working place, low demand, and harassment by the police for doing business in the streets. However, lack of working capital was identified to be the most serious problem by more than 80% of the respondents. Another study by Zenebework et al outlines the constraints women entrepreneurs face as follows:
– absence of sufficient and secure space and location;
– absence of clearly defined municipal policy resulting in inconsistency of regulations and licensing;
– poor urban management of street vending;
– harassment and confiscation of goods by officials especially the police;
– lack of infrastructure and services; and
– lack of representation and voice in urban planning.

In reaction to these problems, the Ethiopian government has taken initiatives to support micro finance institutions by establishing such funds as Ethiopian Women Development Fund (EWDF) and the Federal Micro and Small Enterprises Development Agency (FEMSEDA). EWDF supports poor women both financially and in capacity building while FEMSEDA assists Regional Micro and Small Enterprises Development Agencies in their effort to support operators. The government has also lifted the requirement of licensing for enterprises with an initial capital of less than Birr 1000.00 (Zenebework et al, 2001) (Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) 2003, ‘Towards Gender Equality in Ethiopia’, February, pp. 10, 13-15 – Attachment 16).

The UK Home Office report dated January 2008 cited earlier describes some principles of Ethiopia's 1994 Constitution which "provides for the equality of women", including women's labour rights and employment equality with men:

24.03 …The Ethiopian Embassy website describes Ethiopian women as being: "actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, and cultural activities of their communities. However the varied and important roles they play have not always been recognised. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labour. Without equal opportunities, they have lagged behind men in all fields of self-advancement." [5]

…Women's labour rights

24.41 The International Labour Organisation's report on 'National Labour Law Profile: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', accessed on 18 May 2006, states that:

"A whole range of general principles of labour rights are firmly anchored in the constitution…Article 35 of the Constitution deals with the rights of women, such as equality with men (Article 35 (1)), in particular employment, promotion, pay and the transfer of pension entitlements (Article 35 (7) and 42 (1) (d)). The constitution grants the right to maternity leave with full pay, as well as prenatal leave with full pay, in accordance with the provisions of the law (Article 35 (4) and (b))." [62]

24.42 The Labour Law Profile continues:

"Furthermore, the Ethiopian Labour Proclamation provides one part (Part Six) to the Working Conditions of Women and Young Workers. Maternity leave and maternity protection are regulated in Articles 87 and 88. There are provisions around the nature of work that a pregnant employee is not permitted to perform where it could be hazardous to their or the child's health. (Article 87 (2) to (6)). Night work is not generally prohibited, nor shall she be assigned to overtime – work. Moreover she shall not be given an assignment outside her place of work and be granted time off for medical examinations." (Article 88 (3) to (4)." Employees are entitled to maternity leave, which is to start 30 days prior to due date of birth, and end not less than 60 days after birth of the child. Maternity leave is classified as paid leave. (Article 88 (3) to (4). A nursing employee does not enjoy special legal protection." [62]

24.43 The Labour Law Profile further continues:

"The Constitution guarantees the right to equality in employment, promotion, pay and the transfer of pension entitlement (Article 35 (8) of the Constitution). The Labour proclamation in its Article (Unlawful Activities) penalizes any discrimination against female workers in matters of remuneration, on the ground of sex (Article 14 (1) b)) and contains general provision of anti-discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, political outlook 'or any other condition' (Article 14 (1) f)). Even though the Constitution recognises the given historical disparities; an obligation on certain employers to implement affirmative action measures to advance women participation is not imposed." [62]

24.44 The Ethiopian Government's Social Security Online website's 2005 profile on Ethiopia notes that for maternity there are no statutory benefits provided although "the labour proclamation (2003) and the public service amendment proclamation

(2002) require employers to provide paid maternity leave for up to 45 days after childbirth; thereafter, paid sick leave may be paid in case of complications." [31]

24.45 The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association study on 'The Political Participation of Women in Ethiopia', April 2005 note, that: "Ethiopian women are more likely to be overworked and underpaid than Ethiopian men. Lesser opportunity to education for women results in lower paying jobs and lesser opportunity to secure positions of authority. Women have very restricted employment opportunities in Ethiopia, particularly in private sector. Furthermore, unless there is economic necessity, many husbands require their wives not to be employed outside their home." [55] (p31)

24.46 On 13 November 2007 allAfrica.com reported that according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), "Although women play key roles in forest protection and conservation, policies and laws are biased in favor of men … in Ethiopia, female professional employees in forest-related sectors of the federal natural resource bureau made up only 13.6 percent in total." [122b] (UK Home Office 2008, *Country of Origin Information Report: Ethiopia*, January, pp. 104, 113-114 – Attachment 4).

The rights granted to women in Ethiopia's Constitution are also outlined in Kebede's study mentioned above; however, it is noted that "much more still needs to be done to address the issue of gender-equality and discrimination":

> Ethiopia adopted a new constitution that came into effect on August 21, 1995. The constitution guarantees equal rights to women in all spheres of society, including access to education and employment. The constitution also provides for affirmative action to enable women to bridge the gap created between them and men by a discriminatory culture, outlook, laws and practices. The country has a National Women's Policy, in effect since 1993, with the objective of encouraging equitable participation of women in the political, social and economic life of the country. "The policy aims to institutionalize the political, economic and social rights of women by creating appropriate structures in Government offices and institutions so that public policies and interventions are gender-sensitive and can ensure equitable development for all Ethiopians." Though some improvements have been observed in the situation of women over the past couple of years, especially in the field of education, much more still needs to be done to address the issue of gender-equality and discrimination in the country (Kebede, E. 2002, 'Ethiopia: An assessment of the international labour migration situation: The case of female labour migrants', Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) Working Paper No. 3, Series on Women and Migration, International Labour Organization website, p. 3 http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/report/swmeth.pdf – Accessed 18 August 2009 – Attachment 8).

In addition, a 2009 Freedom House country report on Ethiopia explains that despite "legislation designed to protect women's rights"; women still have limited opportunities for employment outside of agricultural labour:

> The government recently established a women's affairs ministry, and Parliament has passed legislation designed to protect women's rights in a number of areas. In practice, however, women's rights are routinely violated. Women have traditionally had few land or property rights, especially in rural areas, where there is little opportunity for female employment beyond agricultural labor. Violence against women and social discrimination are reportedly common. Societal norms and limited infrastructure prevent many women from seeking legal redress for their grievances. While illegal, the kidnapping of women and girls for marriage continues in parts of the country. General deficiencies in education exacerbate the problems of rural poverty and gender inequality. According to the NGO Save the Children, Ethiopia has

one of the lowest rates of school enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa (Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World Country Report: Ethiopia*, 16 July – Attachment 17).

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