

Unseen Crisis: Domestic Human Trafficking in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The literature critically examines internal human trafficking, focusing on its prevalence, characteristics, impacts on vulnerable groups, and intervention strategies. This article addresses the prevalence, traits, and consequences of domestic human trafficking in Ethiopia explicitly. It reviews the country's initiatives to address this issue, highlighting apparent shortcomings, feelings of hopelessness, and the need for accountability. Human trafficking involves strong networks, socioeconomic hardships faced by marginalized populations, and efforts toward reintegration. Using empirical studies and a qualitative research approach, the paper analyzes the system's role. It stresses the importance of societal conceptual clarity and offers initial recommendations on domestic human trafficking. Therefore, Ethiopia's efforts to combat this crime are increasingly critical, and a holistic approach tackling poverty, educational gaps, and weak legal and policy frameworks remains essential.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking remains a significant issue in Ethiopia, involving both local and international movement to different parts of the world. The country acts as a source, transit hub, and destination for trafficking victims. The rise in trafficking is mainly fueled by economic hardship, low levels of education, and a lack of opportunities, which make young men and women vulnerable to exploitation. Despite Ethiopia's laws and international agreements against trafficking, the problem persists widely. Many governments and organizations are now focused on fighting human trafficking because of its serious health effects and social crises. It involves recruiting, moving, transferring, harboring, or receiving individuals—often through force, coercion, or deception—for various exploitative purposes. These include sex trafficking, forced labor, child soldiering, and organ removal.

Internal human trafficking in Ethiopia is a hidden crisis that often goes unnoticed compared to international cases. It involves exploiting vulnerable individuals within the country through forced labor, sexual exploitation, and child trafficking. Significant factors include poverty, limited access to education, and weak policies and law enforcement. Addressing this issue requires strong policies, public awareness campaigns, community programs, and improved law enforcement. Although Ethiopia has taken steps to combat the problem, focus remains on accounting issues, victims' despair, and community perceptions of failure. Combating human trafficking demands a comprehensive approach that tackles poverty, education gaps, and weaknesses in policies and law enforcement. This policy paper covers the legal and policy aspects of internal human trafficking, organized into four parts: an overview of internal trafficking, initiatives against trafficking, challenges and gaps, and future directions.

METHODOLOGY

Research on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Ethiopia employs qualitative, multi-source methods to analyze laws, policies, and practices through comparative case studies. It uses a mixed-methods approach to explore internal trafficking in the Amhara, Tigray, and Oromia regions, including

parallel case studies and practical recommendations. The study examines recruitment, control, transit routes, and sector-specific exploitation in selected districts, considering factors such as hotspot sampling, survivor safety, and conflict-sensitive techniques, particularly in Tigray. Thematic analysis identifies patterns of exploitation and policy gaps. Challenges such as limited data access and political restrictions are mitigated with snowball sampling. This approach provides evidence-based recommendations and improves data collection and analysis, ethical standards, and trust in data governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from a comparative analysis of internal human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Ethiopia. It covers patterns, trends, causes, and impacts of internal human trafficking, as well as data gaps that impede effective response. Therefore, a regional strategy integrating law enforcement and humanitarian efforts is urgently needed.

Understanding the Overview of Internal Human Trafficking

Ethiopia faces significant internal human trafficking, mainly involving the migration of people from rural areas to cities for domestic work, construction, agriculture, and street vending. It is currently rated Tier 2, indicating ongoing efforts that are insufficient to meet minimum standards. According to the ILO, around 27.6 million people are victims of forced labor or sexual exploitation, most of whom are trafficked within the country (Fabbri et al., 2023). Recent UNODC data shows that more than 25 million people worldwide were affected by human trafficking in 2022, with about 24.9 million subjected to forced labor or sexual exploitation. The ILO reports that this number has consistently increased, with approximately 23% of victims being children and 49% women, mirroring a rise in reported cases (ILO et al., 2022). The report emphasizes that most trafficked individuals are exploited for forced labor and sexual purposes, with women and girls making up 54% of victims. Between 2019 and 2022, the number of identified victims grew by 25%. The private sector accounts for 63% of forced labor cases (ILO et al., 2024).

An estimated \$236 billion in illicit profits is generated each year (Profits & Poverty, 2024). Furthermore, 71% of trafficking victims are women and girls, highlighting a gender disparity in this crime (Islam & Fay, 2024). Despite increased awareness and legal measures, traffickers continue to exploit vulnerable populations, emphasizing the urgent need for better international cooperation and preventative strategies. The UNODC recorded a 15% rise in human trafficking cases globally as of 2023 (Walby & Francis, 2024). As of 2024, children make up 12 million of the 49.6 million people trapped in modern slavery worldwide (ILO, 2024).

Internal human trafficking remains a significant challenge in Ethiopia, primarily affecting women and children. Thousands of people, mainly women and children, are trafficked within the country for forced labor and sexual exploitation—a problem that is often underreported (Goitom, 2024). The main types of internal trafficking include domestic servitude, forced labor, and sexual exploitation of vulnerable groups, with child trafficking and labor exploitation being particularly prominent. This form of trafficking involves

exploiting individuals within Ethiopia through force, deception, or coercion (Busza et al., 2023). Victims are often moved from rural to urban areas, with vulnerable populations like internally displaced persons being most affected. The rising prevalence of internal trafficking impacts marginalized groups, mainly women and children, across both urban and rural communities (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025; Tekare, 2025).

Despite legislative efforts like Proclamation 1178/2020, enforcement challenges remain. Vulnerable groups, especially women and children, are most affected by debt bondage, document confiscation, and social isolation. Recruitment often involves trusted community intermediaries, with traffickers exploiting weak labor laws and informal sectors. The document identifies several recurring patterns in human trafficking, including the use of social connections by trusted recruiters to deceive victims and trap them in debt through placement costs. Major hotspots are informal labor sectors, including domestic work, construction, and agriculture. Digital platforms, such as messaging apps, facilitate rapid coordination of recruitment, with transit hubs serving as key staging points. Cultural coercion varies across regions, with distinct practices observed in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia. Gaps in regulation in these regions lead to targeted cases of domestic servitude, often during conflicts or disasters. Human trafficking in Ethiopia remains a critical issue, involving thousands of victims—mainly women and children—forced into labor or sexual exploitation (Gezie et al, 2021). Internal trafficking is frequently overlooked, but many victims are trafficked within the country under false promises of employment or education. For example, a 2021 study by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported that over 60% of trafficked individuals were moved between regions, highlighting the internal nature of forced labor and sexual exploitation (Sisay, 2024).

International organizations estimate that between 3.5 and 4.4 million people are internally displaced in Ethiopia due to conflict and climate change (Tsegay & Gezahegne, 2023). The Ethiopian-Tigray war has heightened vulnerability to internal human trafficking, especially among at-risk groups such as women, children, and migrant workers. Typical forms of trafficking include forced labor, domestic servitude, and the sexual exploitation of children (Girma, 2023)—persistent issues like corruption and official complicity present significant challenges. Many victims are transported from rural areas to urban centers like Addis Ababa, Mekelle, Dire Dawa, Bahirdar, and Hawassa, where they are lured with promises of jobs but often end up in exploitative conditions. Human trafficking remains a significant problem, particularly affecting children and women, who endure physical and psychological abuse, loss of education, and social stigma. These experiences lead to long-term health, psychological, social, economic, and legal consequences (Issalillah & Khayru, 2021). Legal barriers, safety concerns, corruption, and lack of adequate support hinder victims' reintegration and recovery.

Common Forms of Internal Human Trafficking

Internal human trafficking in Ethiopia primarily affects vulnerable populations, including women and children. Key forms include domestic servitude, child labor, sex trafficking, and forced recruitment. Despite government efforts, these crimes remain significant concerns. Corruption and fraudulent

documentation also facilitate trafficking. Ethiopia shares similarities with other developing nations but has unique characteristics (Sisay, 2024).

Internal human trafficking in Ethiopia is a significant issue, with an increasing trend in domestic servitude, child sex trafficking, and debt bondage (Gezie et al, 2021). Economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education contribute to the rise in internal trafficking. Law enforcement challenges include victims' fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, and inadequate legal frameworks (Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). Vulnerable populations include women and children, migrants, indigenous and rural communities, homeless individuals, and runaways. Challenges in addressing internal human trafficking include a lack of awareness, weak law enforcement, corruption, and limited victim support (Meyappan *et al*, 2021). To combat internal human trafficking, governments must enforce strict anti-trafficking laws, public awareness campaigns, victim support services, law enforcement training, and collaboration with NGOs.

The Ethiopian government has made efforts to combat trafficking, including prosecuting traffickers and conducting awareness campaigns. However, challenges remain, such as corruption and limited victim protection services. Typical forms of internal trafficking include forced labor in domestic work, exploitation in agriculture, forced begging, sex trafficking, and traditional servitude practices. Risk factors include poverty, political instability, economic problems, and gender discrimination.

The literature outlines patterns in human trafficking, highlighting how trusted recruiters leverage social networks and debt from placement fees. It emphasizes informal labor sectors such as domestic work, construction, and agriculture as key areas of concern. Digital platforms facilitate recruitment, particularly at transit hubs. Cultural coercion varies across regions, and regulatory lapses exacerbate the issue, especially during times of conflict.

Trafficking in Amhara, Tigray, and Oromia employs similar recruitment tactics, often exploiting debt and informal fees. In Amhara, victims are primarily subjected to domestic servitude and seasonal work. The ongoing conflict and displacement in Tigray heighten vulnerability, making trafficking and forced labor more complex. Oromia experiences organized recruitment for domestic roles, facilitated by weak regulations that allow exploitation. Data inconsistencies—especially in Tigray, where displacement can obscure trafficking—limit understanding. Crucial actions include identifying hotspot areas, regulating recruitment processes, supporting survivors, and implementing conflict-sensitive approaches in Tigray. Policies should be tailored to regional differences to ensure effectiveness.

Comparison matrix: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia

Region	Typical recruiters	Control tactics	Primary sectors	Key local drivers
Amhara	Local brokers; kin networks	Debt; wage withholding; isolation	Domestic work; seasonal agriculture	Rural poverty, school dropout
Tigray	Community agents; displacement actors	Coercion tied to displacement; document loss	Domestic work; forced informal labor	Conflict displacement; IDP vulnerability
Oromia	Village intermediaries; transport unions	Debt bondage; contract fraud	Domestic work, construction, and migration for work	Landlessness; youth unemployment

Source: Author,2025

The table highlights common trafficking patterns like trusted intermediaries and shared use of debt and placement fees, emphasizing risks particularly in informal sectors such as domestic work and agriculture. In Tigray, ongoing conflict heightens abduction dangers, complicating victim identification amid humanitarian displacement. Data on trafficking are scarce, primarily based on case reports, and mainly focus on urban areas. Recommended targeted interventions include community-based prevention in the Amhara region, conflict-sensitive protection measures in Tigray, and labor-market regulations in the Oromia region. However, enforcement without survivor support may drive trafficking further underground. Heavy-handed actions in Tigray could also hinder humanitarian access, and limited regional data increases the risk of resource misallocation, underscoring the importance of rapid assessments prior to implementation.

Root Causes, Scope, and Extent of Internal Human Trafficking

Internal human trafficking in Ethiopia is a multifaceted problem shaped by economic, social, and cultural influences (Sisay, 2024). Contributing factors include poverty, limited education, unemployment, and cultural norms, all of which sustain this crisis. Vulnerable groups, particularly children and marginalized communities, are frequently targeted because they lack access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, social issues like domestic violence and discrimination increase the chances of individuals becoming victims of traffickers (Mertens, 2021).

Women and girls, children, rural populations, and unaccompanied migrants are among the most affected groups. Internal human trafficking in Ethiopia is driven by complex, interconnected economic, social, and legal factors (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025). Most trafficking routes run from rural areas to cities, with children constituting 40–50% of victims. This scale of internal trafficking significantly impacts vulnerable populations, especially women and children (Gezie et al, 2021). Victims are exploited for forced labor, sexual abuse, and other mistreatments. Poverty, lack of education, and weak law enforcement worsen the problem, making it a critical issue for Ethiopia’s development and human rights. The trafficking mostly occurs within the country, involving forced labor, sexual exploitation, and various forms of abuse.

Impact of Internal Human Trafficking

Internal human trafficking is a serious issue affecting victims, society, and economies. It mainly targets women and children, often leading to social exclusion, legal issues, and health problems, both physical and mental (Gezie, 2021). Ethiopia's government response is inadequate, with limited victim support and weak law enforcement. Armed conflicts worsen this situation (Eyasu, Haile, & Tesfaye, 2020). The crime causes significant social, economic, and psychological harm in Ethiopia, resulting in severe emotional and physical abuse that leaves victims vulnerable and traumatized. As noted earlier, this crisis not only tears families apart but also traps communities in ongoing cycles of poverty and despair (Sergo, 2023).

Victims are subjected to exploitative or abusive jobs, causing severe emotional distress and financial hardship. When a family member dies, it weakens community bonds and social cohesion. Removing trafficked individuals from local workforces jeopardizes economic stability, intensifying cycles of vulnerability and poverty (Sisay, 2023). The physical and psychological trauma inflicted on victims can have long-term health effects, hindering development efforts and damaging social relationships. This hidden crisis disrupts local economies and wastes human potential, thus hindering economic growth (Giammarinaro, 2022). It involves the exploitation of vulnerable groups, such as women and children, through domestic servitude, forced labor, and sexual exploitation. These issues lead to emotional suffering, family breakdowns, increased crime, corruption, and a diminished workforce. Economically, it drains human capital, as victims often work under exploitative conditions without fair wages (Giammarinaro, 2022). Consequently, social services are strained, necessitating government and NGO resources for rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Trauma, despair, anxiety, and physical abuse exemplify psychological and health consequences that can lead to long-term health problems. The challenges faced by the government and policymakers include insufficient law enforcement, limited victim support, and inadequate funding for anti-trafficking efforts and victim rehabilitation programs. Ethiopia has intensified regional cooperation and monitored private employment agencies to combat human trafficking (Gezie, 2021). However, internal trafficking remains difficult to address, with many cases prosecuted as lesser charges. Health issues such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), drug abuse, and reproductive health problems are common. The country has launched initiatives, including public awareness campaigns, shelters, rehabilitation programs, and legal reforms, to address human trafficking. Despite these efforts, many victims struggle to access support services, and law enforcement remains insufficient.

Efforts to combat internal human trafficking in Ethiopia

Global efforts to fight human trafficking include initiatives like the U.S. Department of Justice's National Action Plan, the Polaris Project, the International Justice Mission (IJM), the UN's Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), the European Union's Anti-Trafficking Strategy, and Canada's Human Trafficking Hotline (UNODC, 2021). These efforts, however, face varying degrees of success due to challenges in law enforcement and adapting to changing trafficking methods. NGOs are vital for supporting and advocating for victims, although they are less often involved in direct intervention

(Demeke, 2024). Limited funding, enforcement, and coordination hinder the effectiveness of criminal justice responses, making it difficult to measure success. The primary aim of anti-human trafficking programs is to prevent, identify, and address trafficking within national borders, especially among internally displaced populations (Kranrattanasuit & Sumarlan, 2022).

Ethiopia's internal trafficking landscape shares similarities with other sub-Saharan African countries but also has distinctive features. Contributing factors include poverty, political unrest, economic struggles, and gender discrimination. The trafficking forms involve forced labor, domestic servitude, and child sex trafficking (Sisay, 2024). The ongoing conflict in regions like Tigray further increases the risks of trafficking.

Child trafficking remains a significant issue, especially for domestic work. Challenges for law enforcement include addressing counterfeit documents and bribery. In Ethiopia, internal trafficking mainly targets women and children for domestic help, forced labor, and sexual exploitation (Sisay, 2023). Rural families often send their children to cities for better opportunities, not realizing they may be drawn into forced labor or sexual abuse. Girls, in particular, are trafficked for sex and often end up stuck in abusive settings with few options to escape (Mbakogu, 2022). Additionally, in Ethiopia's informal labor sectors, people are trafficked into agriculture, construction, and other manual jobs under brutal conditions, with little or no pay (Busza et al., 2023). These victims are often held captive, their movements restricted, and their identities hidden to prevent rescue. This cycle of internal trafficking fosters ongoing abuse, isolating victims and deepening Ethiopia's human rights crisis (Desalegn et al, 2023).

Ethiopia actively combats internal human trafficking through diverse initiatives, including victim hotlines, increased government investigations, monitoring private employment agencies, and collaborating with international organizations (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025). In recent decades, cases of human trafficking—particularly involving labor and sexual exploitation—have risen. In the past five years, traffickers have exploited both domestic and international victims within Ethiopia, as well as Ethiopians abroad. Women and girls are often targeted for domestic servitude and sex trafficking, while boys and men are usually trafficked for labor. Children from rural areas are frequently lured with false promises of a better urban life (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025). Despite these initiatives, challenges remain, such as limited government action on domestic servitude and child sex trafficking, corruption, fraud, and the vulnerability of women and children. These issues underscore the urgent need to bolster protections for migrant workers and enhance legal and support systems for victims.

Existing Policies and Laws

Ethiopia has several policies and laws addressing internal human trafficking, including the Ethiopian Constitution (Article 18). In 2005, the country ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants. Ethiopia is also a signatory to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced

Persons in Africa. These laws are incorporated into national legislation under Article 9(4) of the Constitution.

Ethiopia has enacted its own Anti-Trafficking Law, Proclamation No. 909/2015 and 1178/2020, alongside the Criminal Code of Ethiopia. These laws outline penalties for traffickers and include measures to protect victims. Proclamation 1178/2020 specifically criminalizes sex and labor trafficking (Article 3), emphasizing prevention and suppression of trafficking and smuggling (as stated in its preamble). It defines various forms of human trafficking, such as slavery, forced labor, organ removal, prostitution, and related crimes (Article 3). The legislative framework aims to address domestic human trafficking through the government's efforts in prevention, protection, and prosecution.

The text outlines penalties for offenders and measures to support victims, including rehabilitation programs, victim reintegration, compensation (Articles 23, 24, and 26 of Proclamation 1178/2020), witness protection (Article 25), and a fund to assist victims (Articles 27–31). It also describes enhancements in Ethiopian anti-trafficking laws, such as broader definitions, increased victim protections, and expanded law enforcement powers for crime prevention, investigation, and property seizures (Articles 19–22, 38, 41, and 42). The law encourages national coordination (Articles 33–37) and international cooperation (Articles 39 and 43). The government has set up a high-level council chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister to oversee responses. The National Council to Combat Human Trafficking, responsible for coordinating efforts among law enforcement, border control, and other entities (Article 33), developed the National Plan of Action for 2020–2024. This council reports to the Prime Minister, is led by the Deputy Prime Minister, and includes various government ministries, agencies, regional authorities, civil society, religious groups, and other stakeholders nominated by the Deputy Prime Minister. It plays a key role in investigating cases, training officials, and prosecuting traffickers.

Under the international framework, victims are guaranteed protection, rehabilitation, and legal aid. Ethiopia has established National Anti-Trafficking Hotlines to provide confidential support, legal guidance, and crisis intervention. The government also runs anti-trafficking hotlines, awareness campaigns, and the Labor Market Information System. These efforts have led to increased investigations, improved victim identification, enhanced oversight of employment agencies, and greater legal convictions.

Government and Stakeholder Initiatives

The Ethiopian government has made notable progress in combating human trafficking by enacting laws and regulations that criminalize such offenses. Specifically, Proclamation No. 1178/2020 was adopted to focus on preventing and suppressing trafficking in persons (TIP) and smuggling of migrants (SOM). Collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has helped Ethiopia establish anti-trafficking hotlines and develop a comprehensive national migration policy that addresses TIP and SOM (Sisay, 2024).

Ethiopia actively fights internal human trafficking through a range of initiatives, such as enhanced investigations and oversight of private employment agencies, victim identification and support services, and the creation of anti-trafficking hotlines. The government has also launched awareness campaigns to inform communities about trafficking dangers and the recruitment tactics used for migrant work abroad (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025). Additionally, several government and stakeholder programs have been introduced, including the National Anti-Trafficking Hotline (8797), which offers confidential support to victims, as well as shelters, legal aid, and medical services available in multiple languages.

The Narrative, Hidden. How does it feel to be without hope, to be disregarded by society, and to be pushed into rape, exploitation, forced labor, and servitude before you turn twelve? Zenash*, a native of the Amhara region, was sold at 12 to work as a street vendor on the Addis highway in Ethiopia. Multiple men raped her that night, and she became an unaccompanied migrant child, trafficked and exploited for sex in a cruel, unlawful, and immoral crime for which she never received justice. There are cases in court, including: According to Articles 3(1) and 4(1)(a) of Proclamation No. 1178/2020, the prosecutor alleges that Jawar Abdulahi had been exploiting his child by taking him from Awash Arba to Addis Ababa since the child was ten years old. He falsely claimed to be a cancer patient and forced the child to beg on the streets of Addis Ababa from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The court sentenced Jawar to six years' imprisonment and a fine of four thousand birr.

In another case, the prosecutor accused Dereje Kasahun of violating articles 3(1) and 4(1)(a) of Proclamation No. 1178/2020 by forcing his 7-year-old daughter to beg on Adiss Ababa Street, including areas like Bole, Ayer Tena, Jemo, and Tore Hayloch. He disguised himself as a patient to make her work as a street vendor from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The court sentenced Dereje to six years and six months behind bars and fined him 5,000 birr.

In another case, the prosecutor charged Maso Hariso with violating Proclamation No. 1178/2020, specifically articles 3 (1) and 4 (1) (a). The accusation involved bringing a boy, aged five to six, from Sidama to Addis Ababa, forcing him to beg on the street, depriving him of food, and biting him. The court sentenced Maso to seven years' imprisonment and fined him 6,000 birr.

The Ethiopian government is also enhancing border control and law enforcement capacity to combat trafficking (Kiniti & Auya, 2023). Community awareness initiatives and victim support programs have contributed to greater awareness, more reporting of trafficking risks, improvements in legal and law enforcement measures, and the establishment of shelters and rehabilitation services. Additionally, public awareness campaigns have been launched to educate the general population about the dangers of trafficking and warning signs.

In 2023, the government investigated 728 trafficking cases, convicted 243 traffickers, and confirmed at least 33 convictions (US Department of State, 2024). In September 2024, authorities dismantled a major human trafficking network, arresting 49 travel agency owners linked to the trafficking of around 15,000 Ethiopians through illegal channels. Victims are trafficked for domestic work, forced labor, and sexual exploitation both inside Ethiopia and internationally (US Department of State, 2024). Ongoing concerns

include corruption and official complicity, which obstruct law enforcement efforts. The government works with foreign countries on trafficking investigations. It has signed an MOU with Djibouti to form a joint investigation team to address cross-border trafficking and migrant smuggling cases (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025).

The Ethiopian government has intensified its efforts to protect trafficking victims, identifying 541 victims in 2023 compared to 264 in 2022 (Federal police, 2024). More than 4,200 potential victims were identified and received support from NGOs and international groups. The government maintained formal SOPs and a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to assist officials in identifying and referring victims, with direct services provided to at least 96 individuals (Sisay, 2024). Ethiopian NGOs are crucial in combating human trafficking by providing shelters, legal assistance, and rehabilitation programs for survivors. Organizations such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) collaborate with the government to support victims and raise awareness about trafficking risks (Sisay, 2024). Many NGOs focus on education and empowerment, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children, to help them understand their rights and avoid exploitation.

International collaborations have significantly strengthened Ethiopia's efforts to combat trafficking. Partnerships with organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other global entities have provided additional resources and expertise, enhancing Ethiopia's capacity to combat trafficking (Sisay, 2024). Despite increased cooperation, challenges such as insufficient funding and limited outreach to rural areas—where trafficking is most common—still exist. The Ethiopian government and NGOs are actively working to combat human trafficking by developing policies, forming task forces, and enforcing laws against trafficking (Barako, 2022). To improve effectiveness, strategies need to be expanded and better resourced—this involves strengthening law enforcement, improving legal processes for prosecuting traffickers, launching educational campaigns, offering socio-economic support, and collaborating with international agencies to create economic opportunities and assist vulnerable populations.

Challenges and Limitations

Ethiopia faces considerable obstacles in fighting internal human trafficking, especially involving children and vulnerable groups. Despite government initiatives, the impact of Ethiopia's anti-trafficking laws has been inconsistent. Corruption issues like bribery and fake documentation continue to hinder efforts against trafficking. Challenges include limited action against internal trafficking, corruption, and fraud, as well as weak enforcement and scarce resources (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025). Research on human trafficking in Ethiopia is still developing, mainly concentrating on women victims, the causes of trafficking, and solely on economic aspects. Victim support services are limited, with only 20% of trafficking cases leading to convictions (Sisay, 2024). Notable efforts include the Human Trafficking Hotline, which connects victims with trained professionals who provide confidential assistance, legal support, medical services, and shelter. International NGOs also provide direct aid to survivors, including

shelter, psychological assistance, and reintegration programs, although these services remain inadequate (Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025).

To better understand the causes of human trafficking, a mixed approach should be employed, focusing more on women than men. International organizations play a vital role in supporting Ethiopia's anti-trafficking efforts, such as through the Human Trafficking Hotline and NGOs that provide direct help to trafficking survivors. However, Ethiopia faces multiple challenges in fighting internal human trafficking, including limited government action, corruption, fraud, a lack of dedicated labor attachés, weak law enforcement, economic difficulties, and insufficient victim protection measures (Gezie et al,2021). Additional issues include limited research on trafficking, enforcement gaps, poor coordination between federal and regional authorities, and low community awareness.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper examines Ethiopia's efforts to address internal human trafficking and highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy. Due to insufficient preventive security measures, the country faces mass displacement and re-displacement, putting civilians at risk of internal trafficking. This trafficking involves local brokers, fees for placement, and exploitation across various sectors, with regional variations influenced by poverty, conflict, displacement, and unemployment. Although the government is strengthening oversight of employment agencies, gaps remain in support services and protections. A comparative analysis reveals regional variation in recruitment and control tactics, suggesting that targeted responses—such as stricter regulation of recruiters, survivor-centered services, and conflict-sensitive approaches—are necessary, particularly in Tigray. Addressing the evolution of conflict through suitable policies and institutions can help reduce displacement, trafficking, and suffering. It also recommends enhancing law enforcement, victim support, and public awareness. Critics argue that current initiatives are poorly planned and only address symptoms, neglecting long-standing human rights issues. Suggestions include expanding services, improving data collection, and raising community awareness to combat deceptive recruitment, while cautioning against enforcement without adequate support. The paper advocates for a holistic approach to fight internal trafficking, focusing on strengthening law enforcement, building community support systems, and providing comprehensive victim rehabilitation. Improving protection, addressing root causes, and launching awareness campaigns and school programs are vital. Collaboration among NGOs, community groups, and local authorities is essential to create a safe environment for victims to recover. The ultimate goal is the eradication of internal human trafficking in Ethiopia, with concerted efforts from the government, NGOs, and international partners.

Declarations

Approval and Ethics:

- Anonymized datasets that are publicly accessible help safeguard vulnerable groups.

• All research activities were approved by the Mekelle University College of Health Sciences' Institutional Review Board (MU-IRB2624/2025). The protocol received approval from the same IRB.

Agreement to Participate:

Informed consent

was obtained from each participant before and during data collection.

Conflict of interest:

No conflicts of interest have been reported.

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Author Contribution

Berihu Teweldebirhan Gebresilassie wrote the main manuscript text, and Alemseged Gerezgiher Hailu prepared the methodology. All our authors reviewed the manuscript.

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