

# Supporting Children on the Move in Ethiopia

Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE), Ethiopia



## The Model

FSCE uses a 'corridor-based' approach for its IDTVRP (Identification, Documentation, Tracing, Verification, Reunification, and Post-reunification) children on the move programme. After finding that most of the children it met in Addis Ababa came from the southern region of Ethiopia, FSCE began work with communities in this region to identify and address the 'push and pull factors' that cause children to leave home. Together with key partners, it identified a geographic area that includes a long 'corridor' spanning 700km, frequently used by children and adults migrating from southern Ethiopia to Addis Ababa. FSCE works with key partners to target the three main stages and communities involved in the journey taken by children: the sending community, the transit and the destination community.

### Why children in Ethiopia leave their homes

Below are some of the most common socio-economic and cultural factors that 'push' children from their family or community situations, as well as the 'pull' factors that attract them to urban centres, such as Addis Ababa.

#### Push factors

**Poverty and precarious economic situations within families,** both of which can also be exacerbated by drought.

**Demographic factors.** It is common in some rural areas for men to have multiple wives, and there may be up to 15 children in one house. Parents are often unable to support such large numbers of children, leading older children to migrate and support themselves.

**Lack of information.** Communities often do not have any reliable information about urban areas or the realities that unaccompanied children face once they reach the city.

**Rural hardship.** Children in rural areas are expected to be responsible for household chores, assisting their parents in farming activities such as ploughing, weeding, harvesting, feeding the cattle, milking the cows etc.

## Implementation

### Sending communities

FSCE carries out primary prevention activities within the sending communities, raising awareness of the different forms of exploitation and abuse that children can be vulnerable to when on the move, as well as the difficult reality of life in large cities. Alongside awareness raising, FSCE runs projects that help families set up small businesses and earn an income in order to help keep children in their communities and schools.

**Family issues.** Breakdowns in family relations, resulting from divorce, abandonment, or the death of a parent, can make the home environment hostile and difficult for children to live in.

**Lack of access to education.** Children are often denied access to education because their parents cannot afford to send them to school. Girls are more likely to lose out when parents need to prioritise which children to give opportunities to.

**Attitudes and traditional practices of the community.** In the southern region of Ethiopia it is acceptable for children to migrate to urban centres unaccompanied so that they can work and earn money to help themselves as well as their families.

#### Pull factors

**Employment opportunities.** While income in urban areas is often too small to survive on, the idea of gaining employment is an attraction for many rural children.

**Attraction of urban areas.** For children in rural areas, life in the city, with its buildings, paved roads and cars, is an attractive prospect. This appeal is heightened when those who have previously left the village for the city return with a manner of dressing, talking and behaving which is distinct from their former neighbours.

### Transit stage

In the transit stage, FSCE works alongside the police and other stakeholder groups, training them on identifying and protecting children, as well as how to discuss with children the idea of returning them to their families. For those children over the age of 14 and for whom it is not within their best interests to return to their families, FSCE supports them to learn skills so that they can earn a living and support themselves.

### Destination communities

FSCE focuses a lot of its work on Addis Ababa's large bus terminal, where it has established an anti-child trafficking committee made up of people working in and around the station, such as bus drivers, loading staff, security guards, nearby hotel workers and residents in the surrounding communities. FSCE trained committee members in how to identify children who are being trafficked or whose movement appears suspicious. Children are referred to FSCE staff who can then support them with food and clothing.

After these basic needs are met, staff allow children to settle into one of FSCE's temporary shelters. When the time is right, they will ask children questions about why they are in the city and what led them to leave home. Staff determine the best interest of the child and establish whether they want to return to their families, and approaches are taken on a case-by-case basis. For children who are reintegrated into their families, initial work is done to trace and verify the family through telephone calls and visits, followed by careful preparation with both the child and parents if reintegration is in the best interests of the child. FSCE staff also carry out post-reintegration monitoring.

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### Impacts and outcomes

- Around 700 children are reintegrated back into their families every year by FSCE.
- There has been improvement in the treatment of children by the police and justice system as a result of FSCE's work on ensuring a multi-stakeholder approach, including integrating child protection into the training and procedures of other providers
- FSCE's work on children on the move was featured in the 2016 UNODC report Protecting victims of Human Trafficking in Ethiopia

### Challenges

- Over 10,000 children are still leaving home every year in Ethiopia.
- Where traffickers do operate, they change tactics as soon as a route or mode of transport is identified by organisations such as FSCE. FSCE has to constantly adapt and update its information to ensure it can keep protecting children.
- As government restrictions on advocacy activities lifted in 2019, FSCE would like to resume its work providing child protection training to the police, developing it further by establishing a monitoring system for quality assurance and promoting exchange between child protection units. However it currently does not have the funds to carry out this work.
- Children on the move is a complex issue that requires collaboration and coordination; it is not something that can be addressed by a single organisation. More awareness is needed on the concept of children on the move to enable successful and impactful collaborations between civil society organisations, government and UN agencies.

### About FSCE

FSCE was established in 1989 in response to the increased number of orphaned and abandoned children in Addis Ababa, caused by the drought and famine of 1984-85. Today FSCE draws on its extensive expertise and experience to address a wide range of disadvantaged children's issues through its work.