Perilous Pathways: The Dangerous Migration of Ethiopians to South Africa

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Dirk Kohnert [1]

Cartoon: *"South African Foreign Affairs ministry, renamed in 'Go home Affairs'"*

Source: © Brandan Reynolds, Business Day, 23 June 2023

Abstract: Since the 1990s, Ethiopian youths and adults—primarily from the country's southern and central regions—have been migrating to South Africa via the "southern route." Over the past 25 years, this male-dominated migration flow has grown increasingly irregular, relying on human smugglers and multiple transit countries. The Ethiopian immigrant population in South Africa has expanded significantly, with shifts in the demographics of migrants, including age, ethnicity, place of origin, gender, and socioeconomic status. Rural youth have increasingly joined this migration stream, and more women are now migrating for marriage. Migration brokers play a pivotal role in facilitating irregular migration from Ethiopia to South Africa. Upon arrival, most Ethiopian immigrants engage in the informal economy and remain socially segregated, with language barriers hindering integration. The profile of migrants has diversified in recent years, now including teenagers, college graduates, and civil servants. Concurrently, the smuggling and settlement processes have evolved, particularly due to stricter border controls—exacerbated by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic—which have altered smuggling dynamics and exacerbated inequalities among Ethiopian migrants in South Africa. Social networks sustain this migration trend, fuelled by narratives of financial success shared by early migrants through remittances, material goods sent back home, and social media. Labour market demands shape migrant profiles, with varying skill levels (low-skilled, unskilled, high-skilled) and gendered labour roles influencing migration patterns. Religion, particularly evangelical Christianity, also plays a significant role, framing migration as a divine blessing, shaping risk perceptions, and providing spiritual support in navigating the challenges of settlement. Aspirations for economic advancement and self-improvement drive many migrants, often leading them into precarious journeys facilitated by smuggling networks operating from Hosanna (the capital of Hadiya Zone) and Nairobi. Corruption among law enforcement agencies further enables this transnational smuggling industry. However, rising xenophobia in South Africa and stricter enforcement in transit countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi have reduced migration along this route since 2015. Unauthorized Ethiopian migrants in South Africa face stigmatization. They are, often being perceived as criminals, informal economy operators, or threats to local employment opportunities. This perception exacerbates their marginalization and limits their integration into South African society.

Keywords: Human migration, Ethiopians, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, informal economy, remittances, human smuggling, migration brokers, inequality, xenophobia, stigmatization

JEL-Code: D14, D15, D31, D62, D63, D74, D81, F22, F24, F61, G51, J15, J23, J46, K37, N37, N87, O55, Z12, Z13

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[1] Dirk Kohnert, associated expert, GIGA-Institute for African Affairs, Hamburg. *Draft*: 2 June 2025

1. Introduction

Cartoon 1: *The longing of Ethiopians for a better future in South Africa* [2]

Source: © "My Love, Ethiopia", Gabrielle Tesfaye on Youtube,
Center for Black Diaspora, 25 February 2021

The 'southern route' to South Africa is a 5,000 km journey from East Africa to South Africa and is one of three major migration corridors transporting people out of the Horn of Africa (IMO, 2024). However, unlike the two better-known routes to the Gulf States or Western Europe, it is an even more perilous journey. Lucrative transnational smuggling networks funnel tens of thousands of people into southern Africa each year with little regard for their safety (Anyadike, 2023). The dynamics and casualties of this covert business are often overlooked by migration experts, aid agencies and government authorities. This may be because travel along the southern route encompasses so-called 'South-South' movements, which may be less of a priority for donor governments in the 'Global North'. Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa are key hubs of the southern route. The booming organised crime business is having an increasing political and economic impact on countries along the route.

It is believed that the number of people travelling along it is larger than those taking the northern route to Europe, but much smaller than those heading from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf states (Anyadike, 2023). Many, perhaps even most, of the undocumented Ethiopians and Somalis who reach South Africa apply for asylum. According to the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, just over 23,000 Ethiopians and 2,600 Somalis sought asylum in South Africa in the first six months of 2025. This suggests that the number of people travelling along this route each year could be approaching 50,000 (Anyadike, 2023). In order to avoid detection, travellers may be packed into airless fuel tankers and shipping containers, or forced to walk for days along detours through forests and national parks. There is also a precarious sea route from Kenya and Somalia to Mozambique, followed by a journey by road to South Africa. There is little food along the way and those who fall ill are usually abandoned. The ever-present threat of violence or extortion is also a concern, for example sudden demands for more money, as well as the danger of being kidnapped by criminal gangs or rival smuggling networks (Anyadike, 2023).

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[2] This is a homage to the interdisciplinary Ethiopian artist Gabrielle Tesfaye. "My Love, Ethiopia" won the Best Animation award at the 2021 Black Diaspora Short Film Festival. The festival is powered by the Center for Black Diaspora at DePaul University. Screening on 25 February 2021.

Borders along the route have become more securitised and travel documents have become harder to obtain due to jihadist threats in eastern and southern Africa. This has encouraged clandestine migration and the growth of the lucrative smuggling industry (Anyadike, 2023). Verified migrant deaths in Africa are among the highest in the world. This reflects the inherent dangers of irregular movement. The road trip south can take up to six months to complete and is expensive. According to the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM), it costs an average of roughly US$4,800 per person, compared to US$700 for travel to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Those making the journey are predominantly young men from southern Ethiopia and urban Somalia, seeking to escape a lack of opportunities at home. They hope to find work in the small, informal corner shops known as 'spazas', a retail niche in which Ethiopian and Somali immigrants excel (Anyadike, 2023). Families count the huge cost of the journey as an investment. The odyssey begins with a visit to an agent of one of the smuggling networks and the subsequent sale of land and livestock or taking out a loan to fund a son's trip. Payments are usually staggered to provide leverage and ensure that travel to South Africa is completed. The benefits to those who succeed are tangible and publicly visible in towns in the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). Remittances pay for new houses, farm equipment, school fees and lavish weddings – a reward for having a brave and dutiful son (Anyadike, 2023).

Over the last two decades, emigration has become a tradition in the Hosaina and Durame areas of the SNNPR, which borders Kenya — the first country in a chain along the southern route (Anyadike, 2023). Facebook posts and videos of men in South Africa paint a very positive picture of the experience. Even 'pastors' in some evangelical churches advocate it. This helps to allay the fears of their families. The young men themselves act with a mixture of bravado and fatalism. The smuggling networks are decentralised and extremely flexible. Routes constantly change depending on the pressure applied by law enforcement (Anyadike, 2023).

Graph 1: *the 'Southern route' of Ethiopian migration to South Africa*
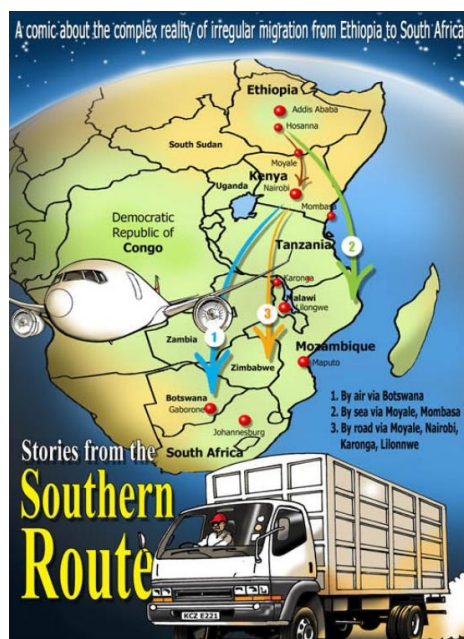
Source: © Maddo, UKAid, 2019, Univ. of Sussex , Cartoon Movement

As a migrant travelling in a group with smugglers, you are at their mercy. They have no phones or control, and that's when the abuse can start (Anyadike, 2023). Smugglers use a lot of deception throughout the travel process. They claim the journey is safe and will only take a few weeks, but the reality is very different. For example, the first destination may be Moyale, a bustling town on the Kenya–Ethiopia border that serves as a base for a number of smuggling networks. A smooth highway cuts through the north-eastern drylands, ending in the capital, Nairobi. However, most migrants are taken through the bush in groups, using so-called 'panya' (rat) routes to avoid checkpoints. They usually join the main road around the town of Isiolo. Exhausted, they are packed into vehicles, sometimes hidden among livestock, for the final 270-kilometre journey to Nairobi (Anyadike, 2023). The community, which largely consists of the Borana and Burji ethnic groups that straddle the Kenya-Ethiopia border, tends to provide the 'safehouses' that are a vital part of the smuggling operation. New arrivals are crammed into rooms in apartments or unsanitary, shed-like structures and locked in from the outside. They are given insufficient food and water and can be forced to wait for weeks or even months until the next stage of the journey is arranged. There is also an element of trafficking, with migrants being forced to work in construction or slaughterhouses to maximise the smugglers' profits. Local authorities, including the police, are complicit. It is organised crime, organised like a mafia network (Anyadike, 2023).

The next stop on the journey is Tanzania. However, due to aggressive policing, it has become something of a choke point. Irregular entry is treated as a criminal offence and, despite periodic mass deportations, around 3,000 Ethiopian migrants are currently detained in jails and police cells across the country. Locals regularly cross the border informally, bypassing the authorities, and they are well aware of the business opportunities that arise from helping others to do the same (Anyadike, 2023).

Further on, migrants head for refugee camps that have become smuggling hubs, such as the Dzaleka refugee camp just outside the Malawian capital Lilongwe (Anyadike, 2023). A handful of relatively large houses in Dzaleka belong to wealthy traffickers and are part of about ten Ethiopian-run smuggling syndicates. These syndicates use Congolese and Burundian refugees, as well as Malawians who can travel unnoticed, to do the work. The houses are secured by double metal gates and high walls topped with razor wire and floodlights that conceal the inner quarters. The top smugglers, who run fleets of up to 18 vehicles shuttling migrants from the Tanzanian border to Dzaleka, make US$2,500 per vehicle per trip. Smugglers can transport at least 40–70 people per month (Anyadike, 2023).

Even after arriving at their destination, the migrants' struggles continue (Anyadike, 2023). In September 2023, for example, South African police found more than 100 undocumented Ethiopians crammed into a house in Primrose, an old suburb east of Johannesburg. The migrants were living in appalling conditions and some were dehydrated and malnourished. They had been packed into the house, which had only one toilet and some buckets, and they hadn't been allowed to leave. This house was a collection centre for new arrivals. Migrants are moved from similar safehouses in Johannesburg to less crowded 'dorms' until the final arrangements are made (Anyadike, 2023).

A report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from early 2022 found that almost 51,000 Ethiopian migrants had gone missing while travelling to South Africa since 2016 (Burke & Pensulo, 2022). According to official statistics, 4,265 deaths and 1,707 disappearances were recorded in the districts of Hadiya and Kembata Tembaro along the southern route to South Africa between 2012 and 2019. A large proportion of migrants reported experiencing a severe lack of food, water or shelter during their journey. Most had

suffered abuse, violence, assault or torture, while one in four had been asked to find extra money for bribes, despite having already paid an average of US$5,000 for the journey (Burke & Pensulo, 2022).

However, South Africa itself presents a whole new set of challenges, in addition to the difficulties encountered on the journey there. These include rising anti-foreigner sentiment among Africans, a staggering crime rate, a struggling economy and a dysfunctional Department of Home Affairs (DHA) that frustrates asylum applications. Migrants face general insecurity and rising Afrophobia. Recently, for example, there were attacks on 'spaza' shops led by the Dudula movement, a populist group that aims to register as a political party in time for next year's election (Anyadike, 2023).

There are increasing reports of abductions of those being transported, who are only freed after families pay substantial ransoms to traffickers (Burke & Pensulo, 2022). The migration business becomes a relay, with the migrants taken from one to another agent and each charging their own money. They hijack them and demand ransom money. Abductions often occur immediately after people have been smuggled across the border from Zimbabwe into South Africa. The kidnappers wait for them and then hide them and send to their relatives asking for more money. It is big business in which even police and immigration officials are involved (Burke & Pensulo, 2022).

In the ensuing chapters, the motivations of Ethiopian migrants to migrate, in addition to the intricacies of their arduous, 5,000-kilometre-long journey to South Africa, will be analysed. This provides a foundation for the subsequent examination of the migratory experience of individuals who have arrived in South Africa. The concluding remarks of the study address several salient points. Firstly, the study questions the success of the exercise amongst migrants, given the lack of evidence to support its efficacy for most of them. Secondly, the multifaceted nature of regret will be explored, highlighting its various manifestations and the associated factors that contribute to common mental disorders amongst Ethiopian migrant returnees. Thirdly, the study delves into the concepts and transnational flows of ideas associated with migration, offering valuable insights and lessons learned from the experiences of the subjects.
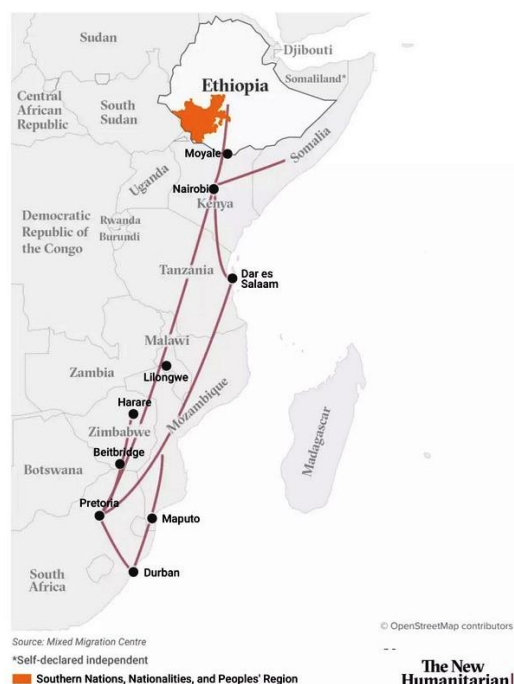
Cartoon 2: *'Stories from the 'Southern Route''*
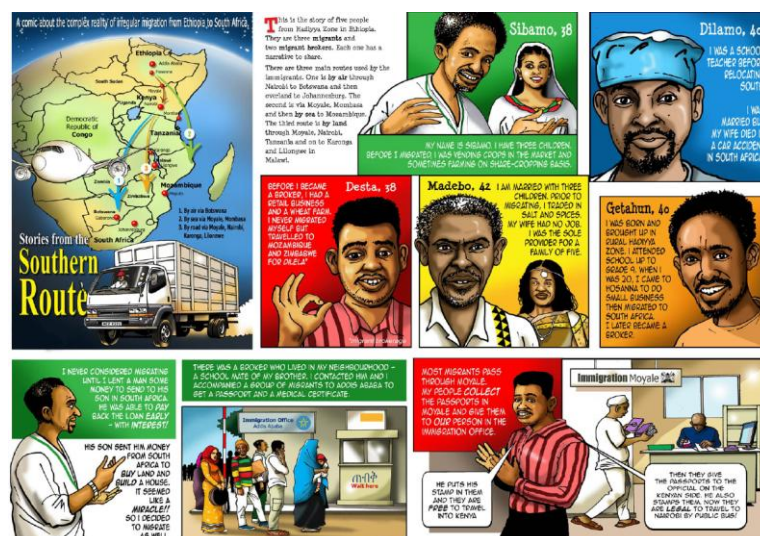
Source: © Maddo, UKAid, 2019, Univ. of Sussex , Cartoon Movement

2. The long journey to South Africa

Graph 3: *'Migration routes between East and the Horn of Africa and South Africa*

Source: © The new Humanitarian, Anyadike, 2023

Over the past 25 years, a significant number of migrants from Ethiopia have travelled to South Africa via the so-called 'southern route'. This route is becoming increasingly popular among Ethiopians seeking a better life. Between January and March 2025, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) detected 15,000 movements on this route. Between 2023 and 2024, this figure had already increased by 26%, rising from 11,613 to 14,568 (Panara, 2025). Most of the Ethiopians making this journey come from the south and centre of the country. The south is one of the most densely populated regions, where land ownership per capita is among the lowest. Competition for land is therefore fierce. Given the limited economic prospects in Ethiopia, many people consider South Africa to be a good place to live (Panara, 2025).

This male-dominated migration route is becoming increasingly irregular and involves multiple transit countries that are largely under the control of human smugglers. The size of the Ethiopian immigrant population in South Africa is growing. The profile of those migrating has also changed in terms of their age, ethnicity, place of origin, gender, and socioeconomic status. Young people from rural areas have joined the migration route, and an increasing number of women are migrating to South Africa for marriage. Currently, migrants from southern Ethiopia (Hadiya and Kambata) dominate Ethiopian migration to South Africa. The age and socioeconomic status of migrants has also changed, with teenagers, college graduates and civil servants entering the migration stream in recent years. The nature and operation of the smuggling and settlement processes have also changed. Due to multiple factors, including the intensification of border closures caused by the ongoing pandemic, the nature and trend of smuggling is shifting. This is reflected in the inequalities experienced by Ethiopian migrants in South Africa (Estifanos & Freeman, 2022).

The major push factors that forces Ethiopian migrants to the Persian Gulf and South Africa are economic and developmental issues ranging from a lack of employment opportunities to wage differentials (Kefale & Mohammed, 2016). Additionally, these migration flows reflect the political and security situations in individual countries. For instance, during the civil war in Ethiopia's Tigray region, hundreds of thousands of people fled fighting and famine (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

Migration flows in southern Africa are large and complex. Richer countries, such as South Africa, raise high expectations, which are often too high. In 2021, for example, South Africa achieved a gross domestic product (GDP) of US$419 billion. This accounted for over two-thirds of the GDP generated in the entire sub-Saharan region. Consequently, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg are considered an El Dorado by many people seeking to emigrate, even those coming from the distant Horn of Africa. After North Africa, South Africa is the second major attraction for continental internal migration (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

There are three main migration routes. The first runs from Somalia and Ethiopia to South Africa. The second runs from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda or Burundi to Tanzania, and then on to South Africa. The third route begins in southern Africa, primarily in Malawi and Zimbabwe, and also leads to South Africa (Boyer & Carton, 2024). This journey can take months or even years and migrants are exposed to life-threatening dangers such as human trafficking, sexual assault, hunger and thirst. Migrants even climb into tanker trucks to cross borders. Many suffocate, and the smugglers burn the bodies. Unregulated migration to South Africa has claimed at least 478 lives between 2014 and 2023. However, the number of unreported cases is certainly much higher. Some smugglers dispose of the bodies (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

Ethiopia and Somalia are major source countries on the 'Southern Route', with an estimated two-thirds of travellers being Ethiopian (Adugna, 2021). This migration began in the early 1990s in response to the end of apartheid, turbulence in Ethiopia, and growing social networks among migrants. It has increased since then. According to a 2009 analysis, an estimated 95 % of Ethiopian migrants arrive in South Africa through irregular channels and quickly regularise their status through the asylum system. As of 2017, it was estimated that as many as 14,000 Somalis and Ethiopians were making the journey to South Africa annually, where it is estimated that there are currently 120,000 Ethiopian migrants. Young people from southern Ethiopia, particularly those from the Hadiya and Kembaata ethnic groups with little or no education, often take this route. Irregular migration to South Africa requires crossing several countries and entails a high level of risk, including physical and emotional stress, the possibility of imprisonment or deportation, and even death. A chain of smugglers facilitates movement, often from Hosaena (the capital of southern Ethiopia's Hadiya Zone) and Nairobi. Corruption, especially among law enforcement, helps to support the transnational smuggling business. However, growing xenophobia in South Africa (Kohnert, 2005) and efforts by transit states such as Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi to reduce the number of migrants travelling along this route have led to a decline in numbers since 2015 (Adugna, 2021).

Zambia, the fourth-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa (with a GDP of $22 billion in 2021), and Tanzania are affected by migration movements in three ways. Firstly, they are an emigration country. Secondly, they are transit countries. Thirdly, they are immigration countries (Boyer & Carton, 2024). In Zambia, 89% of migrants reside in the Meheba, Mayukwayukwa and Mantapala refugee camps. For some, Zambia is the final destination of their journey, while for others it is just a stopover. As soon as they have recovered or have enough money, they plan to cross the border into Zimbabwe and then on to South Africa. According to the IOM, 191 people crossed the border from Zambia to Zimbabwe every day in

September 2023. The busiest sub-Saharan migration corridor lies between Zimbabwe and South Africa. In September 2023, an average of 597 southward crossings were recorded here daily (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

According to the IOM, an estimated 15,000 irregular migrants transit through Tanzania every year *en route* to southern African states. Each individual pays between US$3,000 and US$5,000 to human trafficking syndicates, who facilitate their travel by cargo and oil trucks. In August 2024, Tanzanian authorities intercepted 80 Ethiopians near the border with Malawi. Another 63 irregular Ethiopian migrants were seized, while 40 remain at large (Tairo, 2025). Ethiopians crossed through the porous border between Tanzania and Kenya. These migrants travelled from Nairobi and Mombasa and then entered Tanzania through the harbour town of Tanga (Staff Reporter, 2023).

The Southern Route has become increasingly popular, partly due to racist attacks in North Africa. In Tunisia, these attacks were even verbally encouraged by the president. EU member states such as Italy are encouraging a harsh rejection of migrants at their borders. Furthermore, many migrants believe that they will be able to integrate more easily in South Africa, the 'rainbow nation' and the homeland of Nelson Mandela. This symbolism resonates very strongly across the African continent. As southern Africa is one of the most stable regions on the continent, it has become a place of refuge for many. Nine out of ten refugees from sub-Saharan Africa remain on the continent, mostly in neighbouring countries (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

Horrific reports about the fate of unlucky migrants are often suppressed or ignored. For example, on 11 December 2022, police discovered 26 Ethiopians on the outskirts of Lusaka who had died of hunger and exhaustion. The smugglers had dumped the young men's bodies on the side of the road. In 2017, more than 150 Ethiopian migrants, some of whom had been sentenced to prison terms of several years in Zambia, were deported after the president issued an amnesty (Boyer & Carton, 2024). This was the result of an anti-human trafficking law that Zambia passed in 2008 with the support of the IOM. The law had the absurd consequence that any undocumented migrant could be prosecuted as a 'willing object of human trafficking' and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. Under pressure from the UN Human Rights Council and local associations, the Zambian parliament finally approved an amendment to the law in November 2022. Since then, individuals who have fallen victim to human trafficking have been recognised as such (Boyer & Carton, 2024).

This male-dominated migration is becoming more and more irregular and includes multiple transit countries, largely controlled by human smugglers (Feyissa & Zeleke & Gebresenbet, 2023). The size of the Ethiopian immigrant population in South Africa has increased. The profile of individuals on the move has also changed in terms of migrants' age, ethnicity, place of origin, gender and socioeconomic status. Youth from rural areas have joined the migration trail, and, increasingly, women are migrating for marriage in South Africa. The age and socioeconomic status of the migrants have also changed where teenagers, college graduates and civil servants are entering the migration stream in recent years (Feyissa & Zeleke & Gebresenbet, 2023).

A substantial number of smuggled migrants cite poverty and unemployment as the main causes of their migration. Marital discord, physical violence, unhappy marriages and the impossibility of divorce also often influence the decision to migrate. Among returnees and out migrants, 10.6% were illiterate, followed by 20.4% with a diploma, 22.1% with a primary or secondary education, and 36.3% with a degree or above. There was little variation in the occupational profile of non-migrants, but over 75% of migrants were trading entrepreneurs

(Abire & Sagar, 2016). The major causes of illegal migration in the study area were push factors of young adult migration. Poverty contributed the highest proportion, followed by unemployment, family pressure and peer pressure. The dominant migratory root causes in their home region are illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. Unemployment is a serious problem in this area. For rural people, migration is one of several coping strategies for dealing with poverty, which reflects a combination of social, economic, and political conditions. Most migrants believe that there is no development in their homeland and want to change their fate very quickly (Abire & Sagar, 2016). Pull factors may include higher wages, a high standard of living and demand for specific skills in the host country. In connection to this, the lack of good governance or commitment from local government officials to create job opportunities for young people and adults at home has made them feel hopeless and lacking in vision for the future, leading them to choose migration as the best option for improving their livelihoods. Apart from the negative effects, migration has different positive results, such as the flow of remittances, job creation opportunities, diaspora benefits, poverty reduction and improvements to social services. In Ethiopia, remittances are important because they constitute a large proportion of foreign capital inflows (Abire & Sagar, 2016).

Ethiopia, which was once primarily a source of refugees, is now experiencing evolving migration patterns. In the 1970s and 1980s, large numbers of Ethiopians fled their country due to war, famine and natural disasters (Adugna, 2021). Many of these refugees returned, and subsequent migration has been more complex in terms of the motivations behind migration, the individuals involved, and the countries of destination. Ethiopia has an advanced protection regime for forced migrants and currently hosts around 789,000 refugees, most of whom reside in 24 camps located throughout the country. Recently, Ethiopia has also faced the significant involuntary repatriation of its emigrants, primarily from major destinations in the Middle East. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Adugna, 2021).

Migration brokers, known as *'Berri Kefach'* or 'door openers', play a vital role in Ethiopian clandestine migration to South Africa by organising and sustaining irregular migration. They assist migrants in circumventing layers of migration control and navigating the complex, risky mobility landscape, despite the organised efforts of governments to stop irregular migration (Adugna, Deshingkar & Ayalew, 2019). Brokerage is socially embedded and forms part of everyday life in the community. Kinship networks, customary elders, church leaders, ordinary people, and local officials all play a part in facilitating migrants' departures. Brokers encourage the active participation of migrants, their families, and their communities in the migration process. They organise departures, transportation, money exchange and transfer services, border crossings, and reliable networks and routes through transit points to specific destinations. In Moyale, for instance, smugglers have successfully transformed migration into a community enterprise by engaging the services of the unemployed, underpaid civil servants, drivers, cross-border traders, hotel staff, religious institution workers, immigration officials and border guards. These individuals are brought together by their shared interest in supporting migrants' mobility. However, their internal interests vary, ranging from financial gain to loyalty based on social relations such as ethnicity, religion, language and locality (Adugna, Deshingkar & Ayalew, 2019). Communication technologies play a key role in maintaining networks and transferring money. Ethiopian smugglers track their clients' movements across South-Eastern African countries and provide resources when necessary by exploiting communication technologies and money transfer agencies. Access to Kenyan mobile phones and money transfer agencies in Moyale, that operate across South-Eastern Africa, is crucial for brokers and smugglers, as facilitating migration requires urgent intervention in the event of potential risks *en route*. Thus, the irregular migration of Ethiopians to South Africa is shaped by complex social relations, access to communication

technologies and money transfer services, and the flow of information (Adugna, Deshingkar & Ayalew, 2019).

The specific labour market demands of different countries and regions shape migration patterns and the transnational activities of emigrants in terms of migrant profiles, particularly their skills (low-, un-, or high-skilled) and gender (male or female labour), as well as the social transformations associated with migration, including return visits, non-direct family contacts and several features of remittances, including amounts, roles, directionality and intermediaries. The legal status of migrants during travel, and upon reaching destination and associated mobility and immobility factors are increasingly affecting the migration outcome of these migrants (Adugna, 2019).

Religion, specifically evangelical Christianity, has played a pivotal role in shaping the various phases of the migration process, portraying migration as the fulfilment of prophecy. This ranges from the imagination of a sacred destination and the signification of migration as a gift from God to risk perception, negotiation, place-making and spiritual engagement in order to overcome the specific challenges of the new migration habitus (Dori, 2025).

For Ethiopian migrants to South Africa, the meaning of personal relationships is shaped by individual connections, imported social networks adapted to the host country and the particular conditions of creating a livelihood in South Africa's informal economy. Social networks play a crucial role in perpetuating this. Narratives concerning financial and material success in South Africa, as manifested in materials sent back home and social media applications by pioneer Ethiopian migrants, induce further migration (Estifanos, 2018). An extension of this is that the male-dominated migration of Ethiopians to South Africa has also induced the migration of potential wives, who share the same dreams and encounter various risks despite improvements in their financial and material status. Once they arrive in South Africa, they experience separation from and reconnection with relatives, as well as forming relationships and networks that constitute social capital in South Africa. The life choices that prioritise income generation and economic relations over social relations have a significant impact on many social connections and dislocations. Others are influenced by the strength of informal social networks that support Ethiopian migrants. Furthermore, despite the use of technology and advanced connectivity, 'here' and 'there' are experienced as quite separate and different places (Estifanos, 2018).

Significant gender differences exist in the motivations and intentions of Ethiopians to migrate, both within Ethiopia and to South Africa. Although men and women have similar reasons for moving, their actual migration experiences differ significantly. Controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, men were more likely to migrate for job-related reasons than women. However, there is no statistically significant difference in the desire to move between men and women. The few inter-country differences observed reflect variations in levels of economic development, urbanisation and cultural norms (Djamba, 2003). From those of adults who are migrants or returnees about 72.5% are male migrants and small amount (24.8%) of the respondents are female migrants, according to a case study of Gombora District, Hadiya Zone in Ethiopia (Abire & Sagar, 2016). The male sex is exposed to illegal migration because males are mainly attributable to the hard work available in South Africa as well as the difficulty of the journey and money earning ability to their journey. The number of female migrants is increasing. The migration of young adult to South Africa is age selective. About 35 % of them were found in 15-22 age groups and over 68 % of them lie between ages 15 to 30 this age group is productive young people (Abire & Sagar, 2016).

The 'Southern Route' migration corridor is increasingly characterised by its irregularity. The Irregular migration results also in informal remittances and features of remittances utilisation in emerging rural migrant communities in Southern Ethiopia. Migration patterns shape the pattern of remittance flow, along with the way in which migrants and their networks substitute the function of financial institutions engaged in the remittance industry, as has been highlighted by an analysis of the features of remittances utilisation in emerging rural migrant communities in Southern Ethiopia (Zewdu, 2018).

Cartoon 4: *push factors to migrate ...*
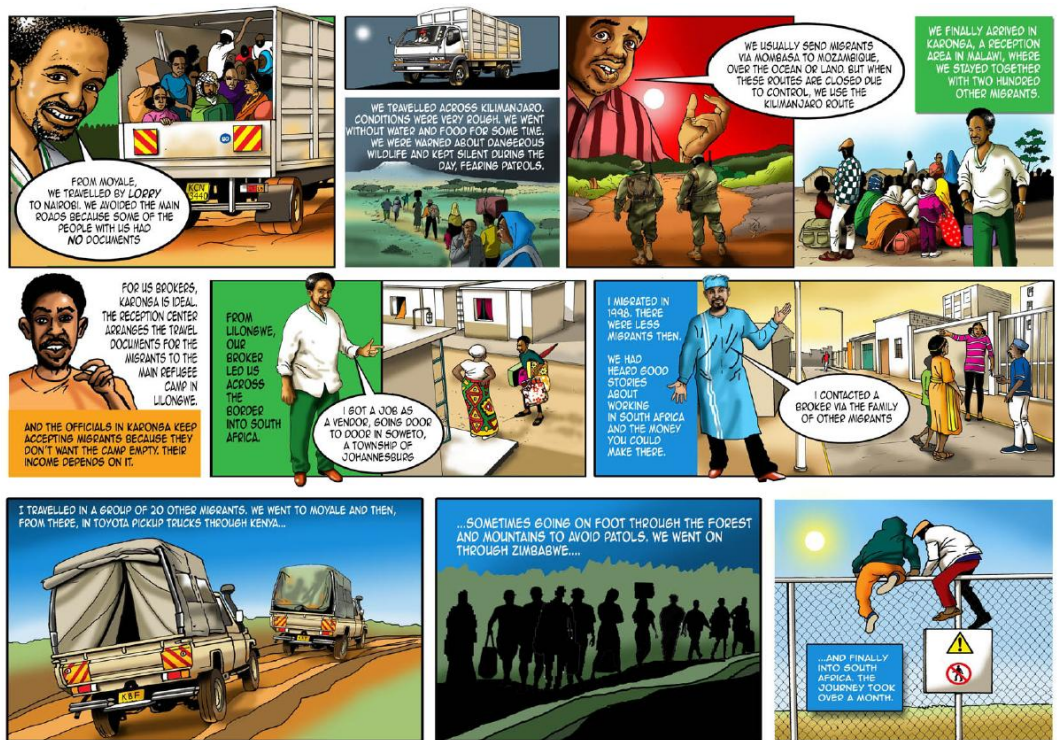
Source: © Maddo, UKAid, 2019, Univ. of Sussex , Cartoon Movement

3. The unsafe life of Ethiopians in South Africa

Cartoon 5: *"South African Foreign Affairs ministry renamed in 'Go home Affairs'"*

Source: © Brandan Reynolds, Business Day, 23 June 2023

Since the 1990s, Ethiopian youths and adults have been migrating from southern Ethiopia to South Africa. Most migrants reside in downtown areas of Johannesburg and Pretoria. This migration has been driven by poverty, political oppression, displacement and structural, socio-political and economic marginalisation following the rise to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front and its introduction of ethnicity-based regionalism (Berea & Tufa, 2024). Following these migrations, children and families of refugees primarily joined them in South Africa after the end of apartheid in 1994, when the ruling African National Congress (ANC) introduced a family reintegration programme. This created an opportunity for more families, friends, and relatives from Ethiopia and neighbouring countries to join refugees in South Africa through social networking, family visits, marriages, and tourist visas (Berea & Tufa, 2024).

In South Africa, social differentiation is officially based on racial classification, with four main groupings recognised as primary identity groups (Berea & Tufa, 2024). The classification of South African society into these groups evolved through colonial and apartheid-era state-led projects of racial categorisation, and racial classification in the country is largely predicated on physical appearance. These racial categories feature in both state and non-state bureaucracies in the form of tick boxes, and also in everyday life, where people define themselves and others in terms of the four standard racial categories: White, Black, Coloured, and Indian. Following the establishment of apartheid in 1948, racial classification became more institutionalised and policed, resulting in the creation of the four racial categories of White, Black, Coloured and Indian/Asian (Berea & Tufa, 2024). These four apartheid categories are still in use among ordinary South Africans and on administrative forms, even though the apartheid system ended a long time ago. The post-apartheid state has maintained these racial categories in order to address past racial inequalities and injustices through affirmative action programmes. In South Africa, 'black' identity refers to people of African ancestry and the various African ethnic and cultural groups. The various South African racial categories are positioned differently within the socio-economic hierarchy. Besides race, ethnicity is also a source of self-identification for South Africans. It is within this racially organised and race-conscious host society that refugees find themselves (Berea & Tufa, 2024). Some Christian Ethiopian migrants have bypassed the standard South African racial classification system by redefining their Habesha pan-ethnic identity as their racial

identity, effectively turning their cultural identity into a race. Black South Africans often greet Ethiopians in Xhosa for the first time because they think they are Black. However, many migrants do not see themselves as Black. They emphasise that they are Habesha. They argue that Black and Habesha are not the same thing, as Habesha people are not Black, but a distinct race. By reformulating their cultural identity as a racial identity, they transform an ethno-cultural social category into a race (Berea & Tufa, 2024). Those who self-identify as being of the 'Habesha race' reject self-definition in terms of the standard South African racial categories. Eritreans who identify as Habesha live in urban neighbourhoods alongside many other non-White communities, including Eritreans, Ethiopians, other African refugees, and Black South Africans. These are spaces where Eritreans and Ethiopians live and socialise, often using the collective Habesha cultural identity to define themselves. Rather than passively succumbing to the racial classification systems of their host society, these refugees were actively constructing classifications to define themselves, thereby complicating notions of race in the post-apartheid era. Thus, continued immigration to South Africa is shifting the country's demographics and identities (Bereka & Tufa, 2024).

Most Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa are involved in the informal economic sector. The target of their economic activities is mainly South Africans in the townships and Ethiopian immigrants themselves. Crime is not the major concern because it does not impact the immigrant community. Ethiopian immigrants have not integrated into the local community, mainly because language is a major barrier to integration (Gebre & Maharaj &Pillay, 2011).

Most Ethiopian migrants intend to settle permanently in South Africa. They do not make exaggerated complaints about their treatment by the local community, particularly rural residents. But they face abuse from the police and government offices, which makes life very difficult for them. Thus, they are unable to access financial services or rent a house with their asylum seeker documents. They also lack start-up capital for business activities and support from government and non-government organisations. The segregation of Ethiopians immigrants, their inability to speak local languages, and the involvement of many migrants in illegal activities such as bribery and corruption, all contribute to the situation (Gebre, Maharaj & Pillay, 2011).

Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa tend to work in the informal sector, and many are still navigating the documentation process. Consequently, they commonly engage in various petty trades, retail activities, and restaurant work (Àkànle, Alemu, & Adesina, 2016). Some also work as immigration brokers, helping young Ethiopians to immigrate and assisting Ethiopian immigrants who wish to visit Ethiopia with their documentation. As many immigrants lack the necessary travel documents, they cannot go home directly, particularly by air. They are therefore compelled to take long and risky international migration routes, crossing the borders of Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti or Somalia to reach Ethiopia (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016). As many of these immigrants arrive via unconventional routes and use unofficial means, finding standard employment is challenging. They therefore have to rely on brokers to find informal employment in the informal businesses of fellow Ethiopian immigrants as a major source of income. However, those who obtain legal documentation and complete their studies can obtain formal employment and/or start formal businesses (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016).

Many Ethiopian immigrants are involved in retailing and petty trade in household and restaurant products, which they sell door-to-door and from shop to shop. This survival strategy further exposes them to the risk of robbery and the confiscation of their goods. Sometimes, Ethiopian immigrants fight amongst themselves due to competition when they engage in similar lines of business. This is also sometimes due to breaking business and

transactional norms. This often leads to covert, unreported and disguised violence among the immigrants. A consequence of this violence is distrust when they are duped financially by fellow immigrants (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016). As many are undocumented, they deposit the proceeds of their informal transactions into another person's bank account, which may be withheld, resulting in violence and conflict within the group. Ethiopian immigrants lack strong relations and links with the Ethiopian Embassy in South Africa. This usually means that the embassy is unaware of the challenges that migrants face, making intervention difficult. In general, relations within the Ethiopian immigrant community in South Africa are weak due to a cycle of distrust, competition and exploitation (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016).

A major component of this is transnational political rivalry and ethnicity, which influence in-group integration and bonding in the destination country (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016). In other words, common political rivalry and ethnic disputes in Ethiopia are transferred to South Africa upon migration and affect ultimate relational outcomes. Many of those living on the streets turn to unusual and sometimes illegal economic activities, such as defrauding fellow immigrants, particularly new arrivals and those unfamiliar with the area. Many also engage in informal trades and businesses, as well as artisanship. Some also beg for alms. Those who are documented and working in the formal sector are more stable economically, as many of them possess critical skills, stable contracts and employment. Those who were not previously enrolled in schools but who possess the requisite qualifications are also enrolling to develop the skills that will enhance their long-term survival in the system. Like the Ethiopians (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016), many face the same challenges regarding security and attacks. Fear of attacks and security breaches are thus common challenges among immigrants. Survival responses to these challenges include placing faith in God, reducing outdoor and late-night activities, and making controlled investments to reduce the risk of exposure to socio-economic and political volatility. It is important to note that most immigrants on the streets are excluded from society and therefore form in-networks. (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016).

This is usually because they and their activities are undocumented, which poses a threat to society's socio-economic fabric. However, this is also commonly regarded as one of the drivers of myths surrounding illegal immigration in South Africa. The likelihood of exclusion, and actual exclusion, increases the likelihood of immigrants failing or perceiving themselves as failures, which often leads to frustration and involvement in illegal activities, particularly among economic migrants (Àkànle, Alemu & Adesina, 2016). Some gender-related factors were identified in the context, which are consistent with established narratives that depict migration as a masculine endeavour. Most immigrants are male, while most females are accompanying spouses or other relatives. They are often tied to their spouses in terms of careers and livelihood. This limits their survival opportunities to that of their spouses and relatives. Many are forced into working in the informal sector as attendants, grocery assistants, full-time housewives, informal day care providers or students, either to start a new career, build a lucrative life or simply keep busy while their spouses and relatives are at work. This makes them economically dependent and less empowered than their male counterparts. This may also subject them to abuse in certain instances. This is particularly important for understanding the drivers of xenophobia and Afrophobia in South Africa (Àkànlé, Alemu & Adesina, 2016).

The fantasies, expectations and migratory trajectories of unaccompanied Ethiopian child migrants are characterised by fantasies of future expectations and self-enhancement, which can propel individuals into virtual fantasy worlds and lead to physical migration (Nyamnjoh, 2024). However, these expectations and fantasies may also lead to nightmares, regret about

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travelling to South Africa, and a desire to return, as their fantasies differ greatly from reality. Often, culture shock is accompanied by a mourning process brought about by the individual's enormous loss of various love objects in their abandoned culture, such as family, friends, language, music, food, and culturally determined values, customs, liberty and attitudes. Under these conditions, the capacity to mourn is crucial in order to move on and develop a conscious reawakening. Disillusionment is considerable among those migrants who regretted selling parcels of land to migrate, only to be confronted with the above challenges. Fantasies lend the most powerful force to adult experience and behaviour. Most migrants had the same regret, i.e. migrating despite relatives' advice against it. Imprisonment in their host country, especially during the xenophobic attacks and looting of migrants' shops in 2008, 2015, and 2017, in which migrants lost everything and had to start again from scratch, has been a traumatic experience (Nyamnjoh, 2024; Kohnert, 2005).

For Ethiopian migrants to urban centres such as Johannesburg, the meaning of personal relationships is shaped by individual connections, social networks that have been adapted to the host city, and the specific conditions surrounding the creation of livelihoods within the emerging Ethiopian entrepreneurial enclave of 'Jeppe' in Jeppestown, a Johannesburg suburb established in 1886 (Zack & Estifanos, 2018). The suburb was named after Julius Jeppe, a German-born mining and real estate entrepreneur and patron in South Africa, who formed the Ford and Jeppe Estate Company with his son, also named Julius Jeppe. During migration individuals experience rupture and reconnection with relatives, as well as through relationships and networks that constitute their social capital in South Africa. The social world of Ethiopian migrants in this entrepreneurial enclave is complex. The life choices of migrants, where income generation and economic relations are the primary aim, affect many social connections and dislocations, rendering social relations necessary but secondary. Others are influenced by the strength of informal social networks that serve the needs of Ethiopian migrants. Furthermore, despite the use of technology and advanced connectivity, 'here' and 'there' are experienced as quite separate places (Zack & Estifanos, 2018).

Cartoon 6: *Xenophobia has replaced apartheid in South Africa*

Source: © Zapiro, Hogg, 2015, Ian Goldin

The illicit market for immigration 'papers' in South Africa often causes South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) officials to become angry with migrants, even though the latter consider themselves honest people and honourable citizens (Alfaro-Velcamp et al., 2017). Some DHA officials receive money through illicit transactions for documents such as asylum seeker permits. They become visibly frustrated with immigrants who try to obtain documents lawfully. These documents are necessary in order to be able to work and travel

safely, register oneself or one's children for school, access non-emergency healthcare and gain banking privileges. By purchasing these documents in Johannesburg or Cape Town, immigrants — including asylum seekers, refugees and cross-border migrants — aim to secure their legal status and take control of their lives. Thus, immigration governance in the Global South, including South Africa, is also characterised by corruption in state institutions and the vulnerability of immigrants (Alfaro-Velcamp et al., 2017).

Having entered the country without authorisation ('papers'), these foreigners become perceived as drug dealers, traffickers of children, squatters, facilitators and exploiters of an informal economy, and thieves stealing opportunities from South Africans (Alfaro-Velcamp & Shaw, 2016). The South African Police Service (SAPS) conducted raids, such as Operation Fiela, and arrested foreigners; The SAPS, along with the Department of Home Affairs officials, illegally detaining immigrants. Together, these techniques contribute to the criminalisation of African foreign nationals. These techniques are increasingly characteristic of governance in the global south (Alfaro-Velcamp & Shaw, 2016).

Ethiopian migration to South Africa is usually seen from a male perspective. However, more women than ever are moving (Mbiyozo, 2018). Whether they are fleeing war or seeking to meet their economic needs, more and more women are migrating independently throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The number of female migrants in South Africa is increasing. A growing proportion of these are travelling independently of spouses or partners. This trend is set to continue. Migration is an important means of reducing poverty and empowering women migrants. However, women migrants are more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, abuse and trafficking. African women migrants in South Africa face 'triple' discrimination in the form of xenophobia, racism and misogyny. Restrictive measures have a disproportionate impact on women migrants and children. Many women migrants work in domestic, small business and agricultural environments where there is a high risk of exploitation and abuse. Women migrants in South Africa encounter high levels of xenophobia at community and official levels, including from government officials. Women migrants who are in the country illegally are unlikely to abuse the asylum system and are afraid to interact with immigration or other officials, even when they require assistance. Regularising migration from neighbouring countries could have economic benefits for both the countries of origin and the destination country. These benefits decrease when migration is irregular. Thus, the intersection of gender and migration heightens women's vulnerabilities (Mbiyozo, 2018).

The abuse of power by South African police officers against immigrants from Ethiopia and other SSA source countries is rampant (Demeestère, 2016). Even if you have your papers, they'll take you away, complained migrants. Police management of African immigration and the institutionalization of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa have been little investigated so far. This relates to the co-production of an ultra-repressive migration policy based on armed raids, deportations, and exceptional measures. While this policy has a strong influence on daily police practices, police abuses are also questioned in a context of latent xenophobia and an open war on criminality with which African immigrants are, wrongly, widely associated (Demeestère, 2016). Through the proliferation of xenophobic rhetoric, the construction of an exclusivist conception of citizenship and the portrayal of South Africa as being besieged by African immigrants, the South African state has directly fanned the flames of a sense of 'migratory chaos' (Demeestère, 2016). By using the SAPS to enforce tougher immigration and security policies, the state has granted police officers increased discretionary power when interacting with African immigrants. Imbued with xenophobic representations and subject to a neoliberal logic of performance quantification, the police are inclined to enrich themselves quickly due to their low pay, and are thus free to instrumentalise immigration laws. In this sense, the arbitrary practices to which African immigrants are

subjected daily are much more a matter of police instrumentalisation than institutional dysfunction. This instrumentalisation essentially serves to tighten security and mask the endemic crime that has increased as national inequalities have widened (Demeestère, 2016).
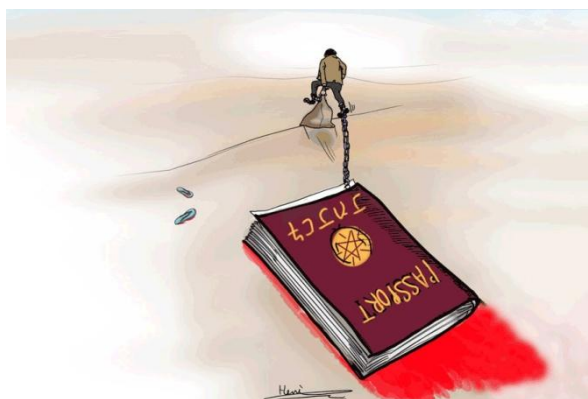
Cartoon 7: *the perilous situation of migrants in South Africa …*
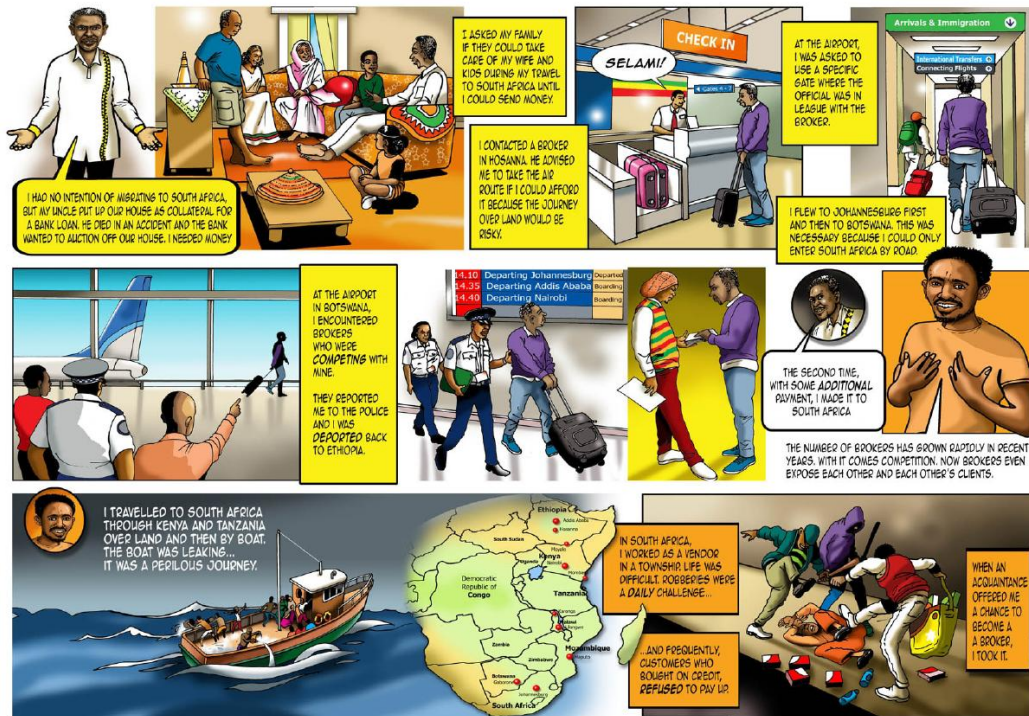
Source: © Maddo, UKAid, 2019, Univ. of Sussex , Cartoon Movement

4. Conclusion

Cartoon 8: *'Ethiopian exodus: a silent crisis in a roaring silence'*

Source: © Fortune (Addis), 2 September 2023

In early May 2025, South African authorities discovered that Ethiopian migrants were being held against their will in a Johannesburg suburb (Bargelines, 2025). Forty-four of them, including several children, were held in dire conditions. These cases highlight the understudied migration route from Ethiopia, the second most populous SSA country after Nigeria, to South Africa. As early as January 2025, around twenty Ethiopian nationals were rescued by the police from a house near Johannesburg. In 2024, another 90 people were found in similar conditions. Lured by the promise of a better life, these migrants find themselves trapped once they arrive. They pay the smugglers, but then once they arrive in South Africa, they must pay again. They won't be free until they have paid. This constitutes a transition from voluntary agreement to coercion, with individuals being held against their will (Bargelés, 2025).

In 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded nearly 80,000 migrant movements along the 'southern' route (Bargelés, 2025). Many migrants die before reaching their destination. Since 2020, the bodies of hundreds of Ethiopian migrants have been found in Mozambique, Zambia, and Malawi. Unlike the routes connecting the Horn of Africa to Europe or the Gulf States, the 'Southern Route' is not well documented. Most migrants are recruited in Ethiopia by smugglers based in Kenya. Then, on the road, they are forced into cars. They are starved and beaten, and violence is prevalent. Many migrants living in inhumane conditions are allegedly being held against their will. In August 2024, migrants held in a house north of Johannesburg were not only Ethiopian but also of other nationalities (Bargelés, 2024).

Ethiopian migrants to South Africa experience a range of problems at various stages of their migration, including overwork, sleep deprivation, denial of food and emotional abuse. They also experience difficulty adapting to the host culture, denial of salary, sexual abuse, labour exploitation, confiscation of travel documents, confinement, denial of medication and a lack of access to legal services, as well as a degrading attitude from employers, traffickers and smugglers (Habtamu, Minaye & Zeleke, 2017). These traumatising experiences can be associated with common mental disorders (CMDs), particularly among Ethiopian migrant returnees. Factors related to migration, such as inadequate preparation for domestic work abroad, lack of awareness of the nature of the job, limited or no intercultural awareness, and insufficient skills, are important predictors of mental disorders in this population. Unable to

fulfil aspirations and salary denial are also key risk factors for CMD symptoms. Overall, pre-migration risk factors are associated with CMD. Therefore, better vocational, skills-based and awareness-raising training programmes may help to mitigate some of these risk factors (Habtamu, Minaye & Zeleke, 2017).

Cartoon 9: *Ethiopia migrants die of hunger and thirst stranded in boat*

Source: © [MEMO](#) (Middle East Monitor), 31 July 2019

Regret in the decision to migrate shapes the migrant's experience and can be informed by their perceptions of their [achievements](#) at their destination (Mazzilli, Leon-Himmelstine & Hagen-Zanker, 2024). In some cases, migration enables people to achieve their desired objectives (e.g. in terms of economic well-being), although this is not always the case, nor is it ever complete or as substantial as expected. Migrants may evaluate how much they have achieved and whether it is worth continuing to work towards their goal – [regret](#) may then be one of the factors influencing their decision. However, these feelings are present alongside the longing for loved ones left behind. At times, this longing can generate feelings of isolation, anxiety and powerlessness. The most common regret stems from the clash between pre-departure expectations and reality. Similarly, concerns about the future and the current precarious situation, as well as the perception of discrimination against migrants compared to locals, were also common among participants and resulted in regret. Tough economic conditions prevented some migrants from sending remittances back home, exacerbating feelings of [frustration](#). Another important factor contributing to regret was the presence of bureaucratic obstacles. For Ethiopians in South Africa, these obstacles were part of daily life due to their unstable migration status (Mazzilli, Leon-Himmelstine & Hagen-Zanker, 2024).

Last but not least, the transnational [flow of knowledge](#) and ideas is of the utmost importance, as is the actual and potential transformational role of migrants in places of origin. This is evidenced by the migration of Ethiopians to South Africa (Feyissa, 2024). This includes the expansion of economic horizons, enabling business ventures in sectors that would otherwise be shunned or overlooked, and the diffusion of liberal economic ideas used to critique Ethiopia's historically entrenched statist conception of development. Other mitigating factors include enhanced networking capacity, a culture of saving, resilience, and self-belief. Coupled with the newly found financial resources, these new ideas and sets of skills acquired during the migratory experience have helped generate a collective energy that is enabling a place of origin that was previously on the margins of Ethiopian society to address the regional inequality shaped by history and turn itself into an economic hub animated by migration (Feyissa, 2024).

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Résumé : *[Chemins périlleux : la migration dangereuse des Éthiopiens vers l'Afrique du Sud]* - Depuis les années 1990, des jeunes et des adultes éthiopiens, principalement originaires du sud et du centre du pays, migrent vers l'Afrique du Sud par la « route du Sud ». Au cours des 25 dernières années, ce flux migratoire, dominé par les hommes, est devenu de plus en plus irrégulier, s'appuyant sur des passeurs et de multiples pays de transit. La population immigrée éthiopienne en Afrique du Sud a considérablement augmenté, avec des changements démographiques, notamment en termes d'âge, d'origine ethnique, de lieu d'origine, de sexe et de statut socio-économique. Les jeunes ruraux ont de plus en plus rejoint ce flux migratoire, et de plus en plus de femmes migrent désormais pour se marier. Les intermédiaires en migration jouent un rôle essentiel pour faciliter la migration irrégulière de l'Éthiopie vers l'Afrique du Sud. À leur arrivée, la plupart des immigrants éthiopiens s'engagent dans l'économie informelle et restent socialement ségrégués, la barrière de la langue freinant leur intégration. Le profil des migrants s'est diversifié ces dernières années, incluant désormais des adolescents, des diplômés de l'enseignement supérieur et des fonctionnaires. Parallèlement, les processus de trafic et d'installation ont évolué, notamment en raison du renforcement des contrôles aux frontières, exacerbé par des facteurs tels que la pandémie de COVID-19, qui ont modifié la dynamique du trafic et exacerbé les inégalités parmi les migrants éthiopiens en Afrique du Sud. Les réseaux sociaux soutiennent cette tendance migratoire, alimentés par les récits de réussite financière partagés par les premiers migrants grâce aux transferts de fonds, aux biens matériels renvoyés dans leur pays d'origine et aux médias sociaux. Les exigences du marché du travail façonnent les profils des migrants, avec des niveaux de compétences variés (peu qualifiés, non qualifiés, hautement qualifiés) et des rôles professionnels influençant les schémas migratoires. La religion, en particulier le christianisme évangélique, joue également un rôle important, présentant la migration comme une bénédiction divine, façonnant la perception des risques et fournissant un soutien spirituel pour surmonter les défis de l'installation. Les aspirations à l'avancement économique et à l'amélioration personnelle motivent de nombreux migrants, les conduisant souvent à des voyages précaires facilités par des réseaux de passeurs opérant depuis Hosanna (la capitale de la zone de Hadiya) et Nairobi. La corruption des forces de l'ordre favorise encore davantage cette industrie transnationale de contrebande. Cependant, la montée de la xénophobie en Afrique du Sud et le renforcement des contrôles dans les pays de transit comme le Kenya, la Tanzanie et le Malawi ont réduit la migration le long de cette route depuis 2015. Les migrants éthiopiens en situation irrégulière en Afrique du Sud sont stigmatisés. Ils sont souvent perçus comme des criminels, des acteurs de l'économie informelle ou une menace pour les opportunités d'emploi locales. Cette perception exacerbe leur marginalisation et limite leur intégration dans la société sud-africaine.

Zusammenfassung : *[Unheilvolle Wege: Die gefährliche Migration von Äthiopiern nach Südafrika]* - Seit den 1990er Jahren wandern äthiopische Jugendliche und Erwachsene – vor allem aus den südlichen und zentralen Regionen des Landes – über die „Südroute" nach Südafrika ein. In den letzten 25 Jahren ist dieser männerdominierte Migrationsstrom zunehmend irregulär geworden und ist auf Menschenschmuggler und zahlreiche Transitländer angewiesen. Die äthiopische Einwandererbevölkerung in Südafrika hat deutlich zugenommen, wobei sich die demografische Zusammensetzung der Migranten hinsichtlich Alter, ethnischer Zugehörigkeit, Herkunftsort, Geschlecht und sozioökonomischem Status verändert hat. Zunehmend schließen sich auch Jugendliche aus ländlichen Gebieten diesem Migrationsstrom an, und immer mehr Frauen wandern aus, um zu heiraten. Migrationsvermittler spielen eine zentrale Rolle bei der Erleichterung der irregulären Migration von Äthiopien nach Südafrika. Nach ihrer Ankunft arbeiten die meisten äthiopischen Einwanderer in der informellen Wirtschaft und bleiben sozial segregiert, wobei Sprachbarrieren ihre Integration erschweren. Das Profil der Migranten hat sich in den letzten Jahren diversifiziert und umfasst nun auch Teenager, Hochschulabsolventen und Beamte. Gleichzeitig haben sich die Schmuggel- und Ansiedlungsprozesse weiterentwickelt, insbesondere aufgrund strengerer Grenzkontrollen – verschärft durch Faktoren wie die COVID-19-Pandemie –, die die Schmuggeldynamik verändert und die Ungleichheiten unter äthiopischen Migranten in Südafrika verschärft haben. Soziale Netzwerke unterstützen diesen Migrationstrend, befeuert durch Erzählungen über finanziellen Erfolg, die frühe Migranten durch Geldüberweisungen, materielle Güter, die in die Heimat geschickt wurden, und soziale Medien teilten. Die Anforderungen des Arbeitsmarktes prägen die Profile der Migranten, wobei unterschiedliche Qualifikationsniveaus (geringqualifiziert, ungelernt, hochqualifiziert) und geschlechtsspezifische Arbeitsrollen die Migrationsmuster beeinflussen. Auch Religion, insbesondere das evangelikale Christentum, spielt eine bedeutende Rolle, indem es Migration als göttlichen Segen darstellt, die Risikowahrnehmung prägt und spirituelle Unterstützung bei der Bewältigung der Herausforderungen der Ansiedlung bietet. Das Streben nach wirtschaftlichem Aufstieg und Selbstverbesserung treibt viele Migranten an und führt sie oft auf prekäre Reisen, die durch Schmuggelnetzwerke ermöglicht werden, die von Hosanna (der Hauptstadt der Hadiya-Zone) und Nairobi aus operieren. Korruption in den Strafverfolgungsbehörden begünstigt den transnationalen Schmuggel. Zunehmende Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Südafrika und strengere Maßnahmen in Transitländern wie Kenia, Tansania und Malawi haben jedoch die Migration auf dieser Route seit 2015 reduziert. Irreguläre äthiopische Migranten in Südafrika sind Stigmatisierung ausgesetzt. Sie werden oft als Kriminelle, informelle Wirtschaftsakteure oder als Bedrohung für lokale Beschäftigungsmöglichkeiten wahrgenommen. Diese Wahrnehmung verschärft ihre Marginalisierung und