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# How migration information campaigns shape local perceptions and discourses of migration in Harar city, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Migration-information campaigns informing potential migrants about the risks of the journey and the harsh life conditions in the destination countries have emerged as prominent tools of migration management in the last decades. Despite their growing importance, little is known about their local implementation in countries of transit and origin as well as their influence on potential migrants' perceptions and experiences. The central objective of this paper is to understand how migration-information campaigns are implemented on a local scale and how they shape the perception and discourses of migration in the region. We pursue a multi-scalar analysis of international migration management policies and their outcomes in a specific place and link them with local migration aspirations. The paper is based on qualitative empirical research carried out in Harar, a medium-sized city in the Harari regional state of Ethiopia. Drawing on interviews with government officials, NGOs, city dwellers, and return migrants, as well as the analysis of policy documents and scientific literature, we show how the local implementation of migration-information campaigns shapes the local perceptions and discourses on migration within which migration aspirations are embedded. We found that information campaigns did not take into account the complexity and multifaceted nature of local socioeconomic

> and political conditions which reflects the discrepancy between policy discourses at large and people's perceptions.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, international migration management has emerged as a "new global policy discourse" (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010) intended to productively anticipate, control, and channel migration movements before reaching the external borders of major migration destinations in the global North such as the European Union, USA, or Australia. Besides job creation and income-generating programmes in the Global South to keep prospective migrants in place, public information campaigns to inform potential migrants about the risks of migration and the harsh life conditions in destination countries have emerged as a prominent tool of migration management. Generally, migration-information campaigns addressing irregular migration are based on the assumption of migrants as utility-maximizing individuals, whose mobility can be prevented through information campaigns about the hardships of life in destination countries. Even though evidence of the effectiveness of such campaigns is lacking (Tjaden et al., 2018), they have been deployed increasingly as a tool to deter unwanted migrants over the last decade. In spite of the lack of evidence that such campaigns are effective, the continued popularity of them by governments and international organizations (e.g. European Union) must be viewed in the context of their domestic mission in displaying government action in controlling borders while maintaining a humanitarian image (Fiedler, 2020; Oeppen, 2016).

With the increasing importance of migration-information campaigns as a policy tool, the number of studies on information campaigns has also increased over recent years (for an overview see Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021). With few exceptions (Bartels, 2017; Fiedler, 2020; Gazzotti, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019; van Bemmel, 2020), insufficient attention has been paid so far to the local implementation and outcomes of migration-information campaigns and their effect on migration aspirations and practices. The central objective of this paper is to close this knowledge gap and to enhance the understanding of how migration management policies formulated on international and national levels are put into practice in the form of migration-information campaigns, and how these campaigns shape the perception and discourses of migration on the local scale. For this purpose, we carried out empirical research in Harar city, a medium-sized city which is located in Harari People's National Regional State in the Eastern part of Ethiopia, between October and December 2019. As an important regional urban centre and a hub of diverse migration flow, Harar city is a good case for exemplifying the processes. Harar functions as a transit zone for irregular migration originating from the central and northern regions of Ethiopia towards the Arab peninsula via Somaliland. Furthermore, it is a migration destination for rural–urban migrants from the surrounding areas. Lastly, Harar is the nodal point of transnational networks of Harari people, especially to the USA, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia that have evolved since the displacements of Harari people during the 1940s and 1950s.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we introduce the relevant literature which guided this research approach and then provide context on migration dynamics in Ethiopia, and its involvement in international migration management. In the main section, we present the findings of our research on the implementation of migration-information campaigns in Harar to raise awareness of the dangers of irregular migration. In the final section, we analyse discourses and narratives revolving around migration and align them with local discourses.

## MIGRATION-INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS AS A TOOL TO MANAGE MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS

Migration management stands for a wide range of efforts aimed at reinventing and implementing policies concerning the cross-border mobility of people, and is used by a number of different actors, such as intergovernmental

organizations, governments, think tanks, and NGOs (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). This emerging new mobility regime is centred around the notion that human mobility should take place in an orderly manner, without disrupting, disturbing, or challenging the existing order of things, and thus should be transformed from a complex multifaceted reality into a manageable and predictable one. Information campaigns for preventing undesirable migration are one strategy for migration control. In the 1990s Australia, the USA, and the European Union and its member states started to implement such campaigns to primarily address human trafficking (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). In recent years, there has been an increased focus on public information campaigns to prevent irregular migration, in which the focus is centred around security-related arguments to dissuade potential migrants from leaving.

There is a growing body of literature addressing migration-information campaigns (for an overview see Maâ, 2021; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021; Rodriguez, 2019; Watkins, 2017; Williams, 2020). Pagogna and Sakdapolrak (2021) have clustered this research into four thematic areas:

1. The communication and media strategies – focusing on what is disseminated to potential migrants and through what kind of media channels (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Hartig, 2017; Heller, 2014).
2. The implementation of information campaigns in origin and transit countries, ranging from specific media campaigns to prevention and development projects, combining information campaigns with cultural and education projects (Bartels, 2017; Gazzotti, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019).
3. The symbolic dimension of migration-information campaigns focuses on the spatial imaginaries (Musarò, 2019; Watkins, 2017) created by these campaigns and how they affect migrants' intimate spaces (Williams, 2020).
4. The effects of information campaigns on migrants' decision-making, looking into the campaigns' target audience's information practices and perceptions thereof (Fiedler, 2020; Richardson, 2010; van Bemmel, 2020).

Despite the rich insights the studies presented above provide, little is known about the local experiences and outcomes of these migration-information campaigns as remote migration management activities in the areas of transit and origin, let alone migrants' perceptions and experiences of these activities. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyse the multiplicity of local effects of such campaigns by looking at how policy narratives travel from the international level to the local scale and shape local discourses and aspirations about migration.

To do so, the paper uses a conceptual approach that links research on policy translation (Clarke et al., 2015; Shore et al., 2011) and the concept of the "travelling idea" (Weisser et al., 2014) with scholarship on migration aspirations and capabilities (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). We understand migration-information campaigns as a good entry point to investigate how policy narratives structure local discourses on migration and how they affect migration aspirations. Hence, we examine Harar's multiscalar connections through migration-information campaigns and situate local actors within global migration management networks. Furthermore, we understand the discourses underlying migration management as collectively constituting a "travelling idea" (Weisser et al., 2014) connecting global and local aspects concerning the topic of migration. When policies travel globally they become vernacularized in different ways (Merry, 2006) through the process of translation. Thus, with this conceptual approach, we want to examine the interplay of the discourse on migration management emanating from the epistemic world of international organizations on the one hand and the particular agendas of local actors on the other. Finally, migration management-related policies not only shape migration aspirations but also impact people's capability to do so. According to de Haas (2021) for people to migrate requires both aspirations and capabilities, the latter depending on structural conditions. Hence, we investigate how the discourses and moralities which emerge through the local implementation of awareness-raising about the dangers of migration shape the migration aspirations and attitudes of potential migrants.

## DATA AND METHODS

The analysis and results of the paper are based on qualitative research carried out by the first author in Harar city, Ethiopia. All in all 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including nine interviews with government officials, one with the founder of a local NGO, two with local leaders of social organizations, eight with city dwellers, and five with return migrants. Furthermore, informal talks, structured observations, and transect walks were also applied and awareness-raising materials have been collected. All of the interviews were conducted together with Abebe Tolera, a research assistant from Haramaya University in Harar city, who not only helped translating but also established contacts with interlocutors. Through interpretative discussions after the interviews we established a communicative validation in the interview protocols (Bergen, 2018). Finally, to map out Ethiopia's involvement in international migration management and its actors and treaties the study draws on the analysis of policy documents and scientific literature, as well as one expert interview with an employee of the *International Centre of Policy Development* (ICMPD) who worked on the *EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative* (Khartoum Process) in Ethiopia. In the subsequent analytical process, data were structured and coded thematically using Atlas.ti software.

## MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is a country that has historically been characterized by strong migration and refugee movements spanning from the 70s until today and is also host to one of the largest refugee communities on the continent, with over 900,000 refugees originating mainly from East African countries (Fransen & Kuschminder, 2009; Mengiste, 2021; Zewdu, 2018). Ethiopian emigration dynamics have changed from conflict-driven to labour migration, especially to the Middle East (Zewdu, 2018). There is a long historical connection between Ethiopia and the Middle East going back several centuries, in which commodities, language, ideas, religion, and the movement of people have been circulated. More recently, labour migration ranks prominently as the main feature of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Middle East, especially the Arabian Peninsula (De Regt & Tafesse, 2016). Since the 1990s, when Ethiopia's borders opened up and emigration became more accessible, international emigration by Ethiopians has increased significantly (Ogahara & Kuschminder, 2019; Zewdu, 2018). As a result of prevailing poverty and lack of infrastructure in the rural areas and the difficulties educated people in urban areas have finding paid jobs in either the public or private sector, a lot of Ethiopians are trying to reach Saudi Arabia via Djibouti and Yemen, the so-called "Eastern Route," and South Africa through the "Southern Route" (Mengiste, 2021). Due to the EU's externalization of its border control, migration to Europe via the "Northern Route" has become a more and more difficult endeavour, which has led to countries in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf becoming the major emigration destination for Ethiopians (Zewdu, 2018). Since migrating through regular channels is beyond the reach of the poor, a lot of migrants opt to go via irregular channels. Here, irregularity manifests itself in two stages: first, unauthorized border crossing and second, violating immigration laws in destination countries. As Mengiste (2021) shows, the boundaries between formal and informal, legal and illegal, state and market are blurry as migrants and brokers use different strategies in the frame of labour-mobility provisions, thus showing the complex reality of migration processes. These complex migration dynamics from and through Ethiopia have not only posed internal political challenges but also led to external pressure from the European Union to adopt policies to curb irregular emigration and refugee transitions (cf. Strange & Oliveira Martins, 2019).

## MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has signed various international treaties and partakes in programs concerning awareness-raising campaigns to prevent irregular migration. In the following, we provide a brief overview thereof to highlight involved institutions and mark important conjunctures in migrant management internationally and its national implications.

Internationally, the *EU-African Valletta Summit on Migration* in 2015 presents an important turning point for the Ethiopian migration policy orientation. The *Joint Valletta Action Plan* (JVAP) and the EU *Trust fund for stability and for addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa* (the EUTF for Africa) – which were both adopted by Ethiopia – implemented the paradigm of the EU providing development and financial aid based on the willingness of countries to cooperate with migrants' return, reintegration, and readmission (Strange & Oliveira Martins, 2019). In this context, the *EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative*, known as the Khartoum process, plays an important role as it was established to focus on the challenges of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Mandated member countries, such as Ethiopia, monitor the implementation of the initiatives and actions under the JVAP. Within the Khartoum process, a major focus is placed on awareness-raising campaigns to prevent irregular migration.

Ethiopia serves as one of the key partners of the EU in its attempt to externalize migration management. This is for example reflected in the EUTF for Africa subsidy fund allocation, from which Ethiopia is one of the top recipient countries and has received 150.7 million Euro since December 2017 and 270.2 million in total (Raty & Shilhav, 2020). The resources are channelled not only to initiatives that seek to enhance the countries' socio-economic development and job creation to prevent people from migrating but also to migration-information campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives. In addition to Ethiopia's participation in key continental and regional collaboration measures like the Khartoum process, it has ratified international human rights protocols including the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons Especially Women and Children* (Palermo Protocol).

Migration management policies and programmes in Ethiopia have been shaped not only through international influence but also by legislation out of national considerations and interests. In 2013, following the deaths of dozens of Ethiopian migrants on their journey to the Republic of South Africa and the deportation of more than 163,000 undocumented Ethiopian female domestic workers from Saudi Arabia, the government of Ethiopia responded by criminalizing informal migration brokers and banning all licensed Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) (De Regt & Tafesse, 2016). The proclamation to establish Private Employment Agencies from 1998 was revised for the third time in 2016 as the new *Ethiopia's Overseas Employment Proclamation 923/2016* (ILO, 2017). The revised law provided significant modifications and laid down strict requirements for documentation. In effect, migrants had to develop informal strategies to move to countries in the Middle East. As Mengiste (2021) showed, the requirements to qualify for work permits do not reflect the social and educational reality of Ethiopian labour migrants travelling to the Middle East. In response to the increasing irregular migration (Ogahara & Kuschminder, 2019) from Ethiopia and with regard to harmonizing the national law with international human rights protocols like the Palermo Protocol, the Ethiopian government introduced the Proclamation 909/2015 to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (Federal Negarit Gazette, 2015). In 2020, this was followed by proclamation 1178/2020, new legislation on human smuggling and trafficking in persons. In which human smuggling and trafficking are criminalized and punished with harsher penalties including a life sentence (Federal Negarit Gazette, 2020).

These legislations are implemented by the national *Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling Committee and Task Force* (excluding programs for refugees and IDPs). The Committee coordinates activities designed to protect, assist, and rehabilitate victims of trafficking and smuggling. Moreover, it is responsible for creating awareness regarding the issues surrounding trafficking and smuggling and their impact on society. Despite the fact that Proclamation 909/2015 solely relegates enforcement of its activities to federal bodies, *Anti-Human Trafficking Task Forces* are the primary mechanisms created to coordinate migration efforts at regional and lower levels. The task force members are organized under four thematic working groups: the protection working group, the victim assistance working group, the legislation and prosecution working group, and the research monitoring and evaluation working group. As part of its oversight of regional task forces, the federal task force collects annual plans, biannual reports, and sometimes pays supportive supervisory visits to their offices. Due to a lack of local federal presence, limited branch office capacity, or lack of delegation to local authorities, its implementation and enforcement have been less effective (ILO, 2019).

In a way, these drawbacks and limitations between the federal and regional task forces resemble the problems at the local level of the Harari regional state, as both the structure and relationships between the institutions it consists

of appear to be constantly changing; for instance, one actor's responsibilities can shift to another. Against this backdrop, we will map out the actors and institutions that comprised the *Harari Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force* at the time of the data collection in 2019 and present the work and tasks these actors and institutions are set out to fulfil.

## MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE: HARAR'S ANTI-TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

The *Harari Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force* is divided into four working groups: (1) prevention working group; (2) victim assistance working group; (3) law enforcement group, and (4) research, monitoring, and evaluation working group. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in all four working groups. The *Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs* (BoLSA) is chairing the prevention working group responsible for awareness-raising about the dangers of migration and promoting livelihood strategies and job-creation programmes to prevent emigration. Among other things, the *Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs* is assigned to the prevention working group and the victim assistance working group, the latter being responsible for providing assistance to the victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling and referring them to other stakeholders and institutions to provide them with health and psychological support. The law enforcement working group is chaired by the *Security and Justice Bureau*, which ensures that the laws enacted by the federal government are properly enforced. The *Security and Justice Bureau* is also part of the research, monitoring, and evaluation working group.

The work of the *Anti-Trafficking Task Force* focuses on law enforcement and awareness-raising, or, as a member of the police commission said in an interview, "we intercept them, teach them about the dangers of migration and bring them back to their home communities" (Interview 4). The police commission works together with the Security and Justice Bureau to identify and intercept migrants who use Harar as a transit point for international migration on the eastern migration route. Law enforcement works together with regional social organizations and civil society to gather information about irregular migration dynamics in the region.

According to the stakeholder mapping from the ILO 2019, the *Harari Police Commission* performs tasks to control trafficking and smuggling and to support the victims thereof – tasks that Proclamation 909/2015 mandated the federal police with (ILO, 2019). The *Harari Police Commission* therefore lacks the budget to carry out these tasks in a proper manner. This lack manifests itself, among other ways, in the lack of infrastructure for dealing with intercepted migrants and victims of trafficking in terms of accommodation and repatriation. Therefore, social and religious organizations give their support by providing food and shelter for the intercepted migrants, and sometimes they help out with the transportation costs to repatriate the migrants to their home communities. Sometimes these support groups stem from the migrants' local communities of origin (Interview 4).

Awareness-raising activities are conducted on three different communication channels:

1. Via mass-media channels reaching out on a national as well as the regional level to reach broader sections of the population. These channels comprise national and local TV, radio, social media and YouTube, newspaper articles, brochures, and leaflets. Besides real-life stories and live panel discussions, the drama series format is also used to disseminate awareness on the dangers of migration, like for instance the drama television series *Chilot*, *Dana* and *Betoch* aired by the National Broadcasting Corporation in collaboration with the *Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs* (MoISA), the Addis Ababa *Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs* (BoLSA) and the *International Labour Organization*.

2. Via community-level institutions especially through community conversations and forum theatre events which are used to transport the awareness-raising messages. Interlocutors engaged by NGOs or social organizations are also sometimes involved in the process of sharing their experiences and telling their stories (Maâ, 2021). The head of the *Justice and Security Bureau* said that awareness-raising dialogues with the rural communities are more efficient than using mass-media channels or social media (Interview 3). An Oromo cultural leader (*aba gadaa*) from a community organization (*afocha*) said that in these community dialogues they "advise them about [...] the

challenges they may face on their way to this migration overseas, educate them, how they can change their life by working here in the local areas" (Interview 8). In the Harari Regional State *afochas*, traditional social organizations on different levels, are the backbone of social institutions.

3. Awareness-raising materials that are used in this context include PowerPoint presentations with photographs of overloaded trucks transporting migrants through the desert, or overcrowded boats transporting migrants across the ocean. The pictures are mainly screenshots taken from the internet. There are always cautionary examples of the dangers of irregular migration in the materials. Besides photographs, most stakeholders cited violent images in their discussions about the dangers of migration.

4. Via interpersonal communication – the exchange of ideas, experiences, and information between individuals. The process takes place within the contexts of everyday community life, friendships, parenting, and life in the city. As an example, another *aba gadaa* talked with me about conversations he has with his children about migration, where he advises them to focus on their education to go abroad by legal means. His view is that irregular migration is the worst option for young people, so he also sees it as his duty to discuss this topic privately with his children, in addition to communal gatherings and religious meetings (Interview 15).

## LOCALIZING MIGRATION DISCOURSE

Looking at the policy documents, the awareness-raising documents, and the interviews, we have identified four main discourses concerning migration:

### Regular versus irregular migration

A central discourse in the policy and awareness-raising documents is constructed according to the simplified dichotomy between legal and illegal migration. This simple dichotomy can be found in the awareness-raising materials from the BoLSA. It contains information on human trafficking and smuggling and regional-level measures (for the Harari region) to prevent them, all of which can be found in similar wording in Proclamation 909/2015 (Federal Negarit Gazette, 2015). The document defines the cornerstones for the establishment of the *Anti-Trafficking Task Force* in the Harari People's National Regional State. On the one hand, it puts an emphasis on the importance of legal migration for national development. Thus, migration is said to generate remittances, reduce unemployment, accelerate technological transfer, and increase the demand for the export of national goods (awareness-raising document 1). Human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and thus irregular migration, are framed on the other hand not only damaging to the migrants and their families themselves but also to the whole country. This simplified dichotomy was also repeated in several interviews, including with a member of the *Justice and Security Bureau*, who stated that irregular (international) migration is dangerous and has negative effects while regular international migration is perceived as something good because it brings knowledge and remittances.

The official discourse misses the reality of life for labour migrants since access to legal migration is made difficult by various hurdles, which in turn produces irregular migration movements. Regional officials are well aware of this problem. The *Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation* 923/2016 states that the deployment of workers overseas is only permitted in countries who signed a bilateral agreement with Ethiopia. Further, workers must have reached the age of 18, have completed their 8th grade education, and have the certificate of occupational competence and they must pay the fees for the issuance of documents (ILO, 2017).

### Criminalization of brokers and victimization of migrants

A second central discourse is the criminalization of brokers and the portrayal of migrants with false hopes and dreams who are victims of human trafficking and smuggling practices. In official documents brokers are described as

traffickers and smugglers who intimidate, coerce, deceive, and exploit migrants. The victims on the other hand are described as falling prey to false promises about a better life. As a member of the police commission stated: "They use tricks to lie and deceive migrants. So, migrants get wrong information on migration [...] and are easy prey for this type of migration." In this context, women and children are mentioned particularly as the most vulnerable types of victims, who deserve the most attention.

The consent of migrants, however, is not weighed in favour of the brokers if it comes to prosecution. Therefore, no difference is made between "actual" human trafficking and irregular migration facilitation either for internal or international migration (Federal Negarit Gazette, 2015). This has led to an increase in the prosecution and punishment of brokers, which is understood as an important task in the fight against irregular migration. Migrants on the other hand are not held accountable for their consent. Their legal status as victims as well as the discourse on victimization therefore does not include recognition of the agency of migrants.

## Dangers of irregular migration

The discourse on the dangers of irregular migration is especially framed and transported through vivid and explicit images, which are delivered and reproduced through actual visual images as well as verbal images and tropes. The background to the use and transmission of these images lies not only in anti-trafficking and awareness-raising strategies in general but also can be especially aligned with events of severe migrants' plights, such as torture, mutilation, and killings, which received intensive media coverage. In awareness-raising campaigns such images, therefore, play a major role. The dangers of migration are depicted in various ways, but they always have in common accounts of violence. The *aba gadaa* from one community for instance explained that "there are some, who go and come back with lost legs and lost hands, torture. They came back without having reached their destination. So, we take them as an example to teach those young people, who come here [to Harar] for migration" (Interview 8). In official documents, the same types of risks are used as examples – however, with a special emphasis on women and children. In the awareness-raising documents retrieved from BoLSA the dangers of migration are listed as social effects of human trafficking.

## Patriotism and irregular migration as a failure of development

Migration and development are discursively linked in official documents, which is reflected in the programmes and tasks of the anti-trafficking units as well as in public discourse. Within this discursive link patriotism plays an important role, as in a way it glues together migration and development. The stakeholder mapping written by the Ethiopian branch of the ILO for instance states that the prevention working group of the task force has to perform the task of promoting patriotism, which seems to fall within the sphere of job-creation and education measures to prevent irregular migration. The discourse on patriotism dwells on the notion of a decrease in labour force that the country would otherwise need, which is contradictory to the fact of high unemployment and lack of job opportunities.

The entanglement and links between migration, job creation, development, and patriotism come in the form of various themes. One is the problem of control of remittances and loss of tax money. The awareness-raising document states in this context that the economic effects of human trafficking affect the government's income by undermining taxes and increasing the dependence on the private sector and remittances. Furthermore, the document states that low-skilled irregular migration makes legal migration for low-skilled migrants harder because low-skilled legal migrants are less competitive. Overall, these dynamics are understood to reflect badly on the image of Ethiopia internationally, since it is feared that international investments will be negatively affected by irregular migration, which in turn makes development efforts harder to achieve.

People pursuing irregular migration are therefore understood to lack patriotism and knowledge. Especially young people are accused thereof since they are portrayed as being guided by misinformed aspirations of easy and fast

access to a better life through migration while at the same time being ignorant, impatient, and unappreciative towards state efforts to the development and job creation. Furthermore, young people are understood to migrate not on the basis of basic economic necessity, but due to aspirations to live in a foreign country with more opportunities, which is why it would be harder to stop them in their efforts. As a member of the *Office for Women, Children and Youth Affairs* explained: "we cannot stop these kinds of people [those with aspirations for better foreign places], but we can those who go to the Middle East for economic improvement" (Interview 1).

To counter these problems, local stakeholders therefore highlight the importance of job creation and education efforts to keep people, especially young people, in the country. In a way then, irregular migration is not only seen as a development failure but also even more so as detrimental to development, which ultimately makes the alleged lack of knowledge and patriotism that young people are accused of a matter of the failure of development as well.

## Rural population at risk

Irregular migration and human trafficking are discursively constructed mainly as a problem of uneducated and uninformed rural migrants, who are therefore the main target group of awareness-raising campaigns and migration management programmes. A member of the *Government Communication Office* thus reinforced that "the urban youth is actually not at risk of migration, because they have allocated information" (Interview 6) whereas rural people are at risk of migrating illegally. A member of a mass-media agency stated that rural migrants would be uneducated and thus have difficulties finding jobs in the city, which is why most of them would become homeless. Here, it is important to point out that no difference is made between rural-to-urban migrants and rural migrants who use Harar as a hub for international migration.

In any case, these migrants are associated with a range of problems that go beyond the issue of irregular migration. Thus, they are seen as a security problem, as they are said to get involved in drug-related crimes. Furthermore, they are said to pose a threat to public health, due to the lack of sanitation infrastructure. Finally, they are said to negatively affect the cleanliness of the city, which is not only a health issue but would also negatively impact the image of Harar as a tourist destination. Beyond these security-related and unemployment issues, what's interesting in the discursive construction of rural–urban migrants is the theme of loss of culture and religion. In the course of settling in urban spaces a community leader, who himself was a rural–urban migrant, highlighted this aspect, which constructs the rural sphere as a space of tradition and cultural and religious values and rural people as carriers and representatives of such values.

## ASPIRATIONS AND ATTITUDES OF POTENTIAL MIGRANTS IN HARAR

This section focuses on migration aspirations and the perception of migration of potential migrants in Harar. Several factors like the fulfilment of basic needs, education, and the embeddedness in translocal social networks structure and shape the overall "capability to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004). Schewel and Fransen (2018) argue that young people's aspirations and expectations for the future in Ethiopia have changed, as the young generation is reluctant to pursue agricultural livelihoods and tends to aspire to more urban lifestyles. Although urbanization is very low in Ethiopia, with about 80% of its population living in rural areas, the country is urbanizing quickly, along with economic, educational, and demographic transitions bringing important shifts for the movement of its populations (Schewel & Fransen, 2018: 557). People's aspirations generally relate to migration as something which relates either to the possibility of migration or to the potential transformations that could result from migration (Carling & Collins, 2018: 11).

In that sense, most of the young people interviewed saw the option of leaving as preferable to staying, but not at any cost. Generally, most of the young town dwellers lack the means necessary for legal migration. One interviewee stressed that he would like to go abroad, but that it was really difficult to get money for the birth certificate, visa,

and educational training. Moreover, legal migration is not only dependent on financial means and education, but also on other indicators like social networks. Furthermore, in interviews with young town dwellers about the dangers of migration, the images transmitted via media and migration-information campaigns were reproduced, which shows the impact these images have on the public discourse. A town dweller took part in an awareness-training session which was provided by the police, where he was shown pictures of tortured bodies and overcrowded containers. He also mentioned having seen the TV coverage of mass killings of Ethiopian migrants in Libya by Islamic terrorists. Concerning the actual aspirations of potential migrants, a number of different aspirations related to migrants' respective life situations could be identified.

## Type 1: Aspiration to migrate to improve one's situation, but with low capabilities to do so

The aspiration to go abroad with no specific destination but with the intention to improve one's actual situation is quite common. But the capability to actually migrate is constrained by many obstacles, which in turn make some of the potential migrants adjust their aspirations according to their actual possibilities, while others express that they have been immobilized involuntarily (de Haas, 2021; Schewel, 2020). A 19-year-old town dweller who was unemployed and homeless for some time described his aspirations and possibilities in the following way: "Everyone wants to go abroad, but my aspiration is to work and spend my life here in Ethiopia. You can change your life here as well. To go abroad is difficult, because you need a passport, people who help you. You need money. You need money for a passport and other things. So, it is really difficult, but once you make it abroad, everything is really good. The government there can provide you with loans and a house and you can pay it back after you have worked. That is what I heard from a friend whose brother is abroad. Lots of people tell you that. I would prefer to go abroad if possible, but I may not fulfil the requirements to go" (Interview 11). In a similar way, a young rural–urban migrant spoke about his aspirations and his attempt to fulfil them. In his case, an unsuccessful attempt to cross the border made him readjust his life goals towards a future that is situated in Harar with concrete plans as to what he wants to achieve (Interview 10).

## Type 2: Aspiration to migrate to a specific place related to transnational ties

Many people living in Harar have family networks dispersed around the globe. This embeddedness in networks results in aspirations to live in a specific place with certain characteristics, or lifestyles, which can be accomplished by migrating. In a group discussion, Harari women expressed their aspirations to go abroad and join their relatives in Western countries, like Canada, the USA, or Germany. The term *abroad* was packed with images and ideas transmitted through transnational communication facilitated by social media: "Life in Canada is very good. It is safe, the streets are clean, they have good infrastructure. You must work hard, though. But if you do you can accomplish a lot other than here" (Interview 20). Through their family networks and the information they share they are capable of aspiring to a certain lifestyle – for example escaping gendered norms and roles, having better infrastructure in the cities, better job opportunities, and better housing possibilities, all ends for which migration is a potential means. As one Harari woman pointed out in an interview, through her family ties abroad she hopes to obtain a visa and thus pursue legal migration. She explained: "I have a lot of relatives outside of Ethiopia, in Germany, Canada and America, my uncles and brothers and their children as well as other relatives. I have planned to go there within the next coming two or three years" (Interview 21).

## Type 3: Staying put – no migration aspirations and no capabilities

According to Schewel (2020), acquiescent immobility highlights the existence of non-migration preferences regardless of capability constraints. She restricts the term "to describe those who are both unable to migrate but neither do they desire to do so" (Schewel, 2020: 6).

We found few accounts of acquiescent immobility when talking to town dwellers in Harar. One of them was born and grew up in Harar. He took part in some job-creation programmes and works in a small enterprise as a carpenter. His family has no migration history so far and thus he has no relatives or friends abroad to communicate with. Since he has no transnational networks whatsoever he cannot really relate to the idea of migration as of yet. Another participant of job-creation programmes expressed his ambition to improve his life in Harar city by buying his own car and starting his own business. At the time of the interview, he was working in a small car-wash enterprise with others from the job-creation programme. When asked about their preference to stay, they first mentioned their wish to make a good living in their hometown, since both feel a lot of affection towards Ethiopian social life. Secondly, when talking about migration they immediately placed it in relation to the discourse on the dangers of migration.

## DISCUSSION

Based on policy documents and the empirical data collected during qualitative fieldwork our results show how the various discourses and perceptions of migration at the local level are shaped by the amalgamation of a diversity of institutional frameworks as well as local experiences. The results point to how the implementation of migration management initiatives, which do not reflect the complex reality of migration processes, lead to a discrepancy between the policy discourses and their local reception.

Stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of the anti-trafficking task force differ in terms of cooperation and impact. As the ILO (2019) has already observed in its report about the regional anti-trafficking taskforces in Ethiopia, most of the stakeholders reported that the task force has not undertaken much work and that there was a lack of cooperation between the stakeholders. On the other hand, some of the stakeholders considered the task force to be effective in apprehending migrants – or, in the words of the policy documents, victims of trafficking – and bringing them back to their home communities. This hints at the fact that most of the actual migration management initiatives implemented focus on law enforcement. Due to the fact that these laws are often replicated from international instruments and directly implemented in Ethiopia, they are not sensitive to public needs and local reality. Migration is nearly exclusively negotiated in the context of illegality, smuggling, and human trafficking. This does not acknowledge the fuzzy nature of migration processes in Ethiopia, which do not fit into clear dichotomies of illegal and legal. As the literature on illegal brokerage in Ethiopia shows, smuggling and the facilitation of irregular migration are socially accepted. And for many people aspiring to move, irregular migration is the only option on the table (Mengiste, 2021).

While the desire for "orderly and well managed" emigration is central to Ethiopian official discourse, there is a strong focus on mobility control, which tends to cast irregular migration as a symptom of failed development. Bakewell (2008) saw the problem in how initiatives linking migration with development across Africa conceptualized development based on sedentary notions, a view that needs to be reconceptualized for the mobile world we are living in. This is also reflected in the existing gap between the aspirations and future expectations of young populations in Ethiopia and the opportunities that are available to them. This gap not only arises from the lack of job opportunities in the country but also emerges from a change in aspirations and desires stemming from the broader access to formal education (Schewel & Fransen, 2018).

The different aspirations to migrate are reflected in official documents and opinions. Most of the officials are well aware that some migration aspirations are impossible to counter with policy measures. As already highlighted above, officials distinguish between two kinds of migrants: those who migrate out of purely economic necessity, usually due to a lack of job opportunities and livelihood options in sending countries, on the one hand, and those who migrate because of aspirations to simply live abroad, since they prefer (the image of) a certain place or country over their home town or village on the other hand. However, this official distinction as well as the resulting awareness-raising programmes do not reflect the limitations of the government initiatives. It is therefore not only the aspirations of (young) people that are responsible for attempts at irregular migration but also the structural constraints that are driving people to make such attempts. Thus, two limitations arise in the context of awareness-raising and development

programmes. One is that enhanced risk perception does not necessarily discourage people from trying to migrate irregularly. As research has shown, the target audience of migration-information campaigns is well aware and informed about the risks of migration and life at places of destination (Bakewell & Sturridge, 2021; Nshimbi, 2021) Moreover, migrants and asylum seekers are far from being mere recipients of migration management discourses; they create and select different channels of information. The second limitation is that government measures to create jobs and provide education to prevent irregular migration are not sufficient to tackle the structural problems of unemployment and lack of opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we provide insight into how Ethiopia is embedded in the international migration management framework and assess the impact of migration-information campaigns on local discourses and perceptions in Harar city, Ethiopia. In legal documents, bilateral agreements, and international policy frameworks, discourses framing irregular and regular migration are crucial but there is no reflection of local conditions in this dichotomy. Furthermore, we have identified a gap between global policy discourse and the multifaceted reality of migration processes by exploring the local implementation of migration-information campaigns. Many potential migrants are unable to migrate regularly due to a lack of formal paths, financial constraints, and bureaucratic barriers. It is important to recognize that migrants are neither rational economic actors nor passive and helpless victims in the migration process. To dispel the false assumptions about migrants that inform purported migration management initiatives, decision-makers and practitioners should consider understanding migration aspirations and individuals' perceptions of the migration process.

### PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.13112.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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