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Ethiopian Slavery Victims Arriving in Israel through Jordan **Situation Report and Recommendations for Action**

THE FACTS:

Since October 2022, during the last seven months, 32 women have arrived at the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM)' premises in various ways and repeated similar testimonies. According to the women's testimonies, they left the Tigray region in Ethiopia due to the war, with the assistance of various Ethiopian registered manpower agencies. They were all promised legal domestic household work in Jordan. Three of the women testified about difficult working conditions there, but the others testified about conditions that amount to slavery.

When they arrived in Jordan, their passports were confiscated, in some cases by the agency, and in others by the family for whom they were to work. They were forced to work extremely long hours without proper conditions and for no payment. Some of them reported sexual harassment and even repeated rape incidents by the head of the household, his son, or even the chauffeur. One of the women testified that her employer told her that she had bought her from the agency and therefore does not need to pay her a salary. Some of the women were physically abused and humiliated by the women in the household.

Most of the women testified that they had no possibility of communicating with their families or anyone else outside the family with whom they lived. Since their families in the Tigray region were isolated as well or were killed in the war, these women were in an extremely vulnerable position. The women were held in the house of their employer-oppressors between six months to four years before they managed to escape. Ten of them testified that they were "sold" by their employer - oppressors to other families, who to the best of their knowledge, were situated in the Occupied Palestinian Authority (OPT). Since they were not allowed to leave the families to which they were sold, they were not sure where these houses were located – if in Jordan or the OPT. The women testified that they were held under even harsher slavery-like conditions in their second households in comparison to their first employers.

All the women are from the Tigray region, except one who is from Eritrea. In addition to these 32 women who arrived at the HRM premises from Jordan during the last seven months, two more women arrived through the same route in 2021.

Altogether, so far HRM has identified 34 women who arrived from Jordan, among whom 31 were held under conditions that amount to slavery. Each woman was rescued and brought to HRM's premises by a different person from the Ethiopian or Eritrean community. Some of them believed that they were sold to families in the OPT and when managing to escape, they were found in the OPT or in Israel, by members of the Eritrean or Ethiopian community. Others were brought by smugglers to Israel.

Most women did not remember, or were afraid to reveal, the name of the manpower agency that brought them to Jordan, but those who remembered and were not afraid, mentioned the following names of registered Ethiopian agencies: [Zavian Agency](#), [FL Agency](#), Ethiopian Halawa Agency. We note that in regard to the Halawa Agency, the woman who reported them was not sure about the exact name and it might have been [Hawally Recruitment Agency](#). Other women mentioned names like Bely, Samaiya, Tiki and Satlos manpower agencies, which we were not able to locate on the internet.

Not all the women wanted to be recognized as Trafficking in Persons (TIP) victims, but all those who asked HRM's assistance to receive the rights of TIP victims were recognized as such or were accepted to the shelter and are still in the process of receiving official recognition.

THE PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS:

1. Omissions in Israel

We note that the Israeli government has not proactively recognized any persons arriving from Jordan as victims of slavery or trafficking in persons, except the 28 women assisted and referred to by the HRM. In addition, the Immigration Authority has delayed issuing work permits to the women who were recognized as victims, which delay put them at risk to be re-victimized. Only after HRM intervened and the Legal Aid Department at the Ministry of Justice addressed the Immigration Authority in two of the cases, did the Immigration Authority grant work permits for the women.

2. Future concerns raised by this TIP pattern

Since the 31 women that HRM identified as TIP victims reflect a similar pattern of recruitment in Ethiopia and exploitation in Jordan and the OPT, one can assume that the number of slavery victims who entered Israel from Jordan is much larger than those who sought the assistance of the HRM office. One can also assume that the number of victims who are still held in horrific conditions in Jordan and probably in the OPT as well is even larger.

Moreover, the fact that two of the women who arrived lately were subject to demands of thousands of dollars in order to be transferred from Jordan to Israel might indicate the beginning of a new trafficking pattern. This new pattern may very well lead to future extortion and demands to provide sexual services to traffickers in exchange for transfer to Israel. In this way, it may prove to resemble the pattern of the torture camps in Sinai which existed between 2009 and 2013 and was characterized by extortion and sexual abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In Israel:

- **Proactive identification by government officials:** Some of the victims were homeless before finding their way to HRM, yet no policeman or social worker identified any of them. There is a need for better training for government officials in order to enable them to identify victims of TIP and slavery arriving from Jordan or the OPT
- **Speedy victim recognition procedures:** The fact that some of the victims are homeless also necessitates fast recognition procedures as to their victim status in order to provide accommodations for them.
- **Issuance of work permits without delay:** Especially during this period, when there is no more place in the shelter for trafficked women, it is crucial that the Immigration Authority grant work permits to these victims shortly after their recognition as victims. Only then will they be able to find proper work, and only then will the risk of further exploitation be reduced.
- **Expansion of places in women's shelter:** There is also a need to expand the number of places in the shelter for female victims of trafficking since some women arrive in dire physical conditions which do not allow them to work immediately, even if a work permit is issued immediately.

In the OPT:

As far as we know, it is illegal to employ foreigners in household work in the OPT. This may explain why the employers there did not allow their Ethiopian workers to leave the house. According to the testimonies, the conditions in the OPT were even harsher than those under which women were held in Jordan. While the evidential picture is complicated by the uncertainty of the women as to where they were held, due to their inability to leave the premises, the following steps are recommended:

- **Strengthening mechanisms regarding the identification of victims** by government officials and other first responders.
- **Enforcement of the law prohibiting employment of persons under slavery-like conditions:** There is a need to make sure that enforcement of the law prohibiting employment of persons under slavery-like conditions is prioritized.

In Jordan:

- **Prevention steps including tight control over manpower agencies:** All the women assisted by HRM arrived in Jordan under legal regularized agreements with registered manpower agencies. There is a need to make sure that these registered manpower agencies have a legal duty to protect migrant household workers and that a strict mechanism is set in place to ensure the prevention of holding workers under slavery like conditions.
- **Strengthening identification mechanisms:** There is a need to strengthen identification of victims by government officials and other relevant first responders.
- **Enforcement of the prohibition on employing persons under slavery-like conditions:** There is a need to prioritize the enforcement of the law on those employers who hold women in slavery-like conditions.
- **Extending work permits beyond two years or allowing access to asylum system:** Jordan allows migrant workers to hold a work permit for two years only. After that, they are required to leave the country. Before the war in Ethiopia erupted, these women from the Tigray region could return home at the end of their legal employment period, and they could also escape back home if they found the working conditions unbearable. Due to the war, many women whose legal work permits expired were unable to return to the Tigray region, as despite the peace agreement, Eritrean soldiers are still active in Tigray, and Aid organizations are still not allowed to enter. Until the situation there improves, Jordan should be asked to extend these women's work permits or allow them access to its asylum system instead.

In Ethiopia:

- **Tight control over manpower agencies:** There is a need to ensure a tight control mechanism over manpower agencies who send women to work in Jordan and other destinations. The mechanisms should ensure protection of these women's rights and ensure that they are held in proper conditions by imposing duties of care upon the agencies.
- **Law enforcement against law-breaking agencies:** There is a need to enforce the law against agencies that ignore women's complaints about inhumane work conditions and sexual abuse.

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