



ETHIOPIA

Rights of child domestic workers

Annual report 2024-2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Ethiopia, the Freedom Fund works with local partners on two hotspot programs: safer migration and child domestic work. This report covers progress and outcomes during 2024 from our child domestic work program, which aims to improve child domestic workers' (CDWs') working conditions and reduce child domestic servitude in Addis Ababa.

In 2024, the hotspot contributed to positive changes in the protection of CDWs' rights like the organising of recruiters into an association to promote good practices for employing adolescent children who are of legal working age. In addition, the first case against CDW exploitation was prosecuted this year under the anti-trafficking laws.

Besides those key highlights, our hotspot partners continued to shift attitudes among families, communities and employers in the effort to reduce exploitation and improve conditions for child domestic workers. More than 2,000 employers were directly reached by partners, leading to positive changes in the treatment of CDWs. Data showed an increase in school enrolment and attendance with CDWs reporting increased support from employers for their education. In 2024, 314 CDWs who were previously out of school were attending formal education. Another 941 CDWs attended catch-up classes that included numeracy, literacy and life-skills training. CDWs also reported improved relationships with heads of household and an increased sense of belonging.

In 2024, 7,085 children accessed services through our partners, with 327 CDWs reintegrated with their families after receiving shelter services. Almost 100 children who had been reintegrated were still in education nine months after being reunited with their families. Some of these successes had been made possible through the seed grant allocation to vulnerable families.

The community safe space continued to provide support to CDWs and break the isolation that many children feel when placed in household work. The



safe space also provided a unique opportunity for CDWs to connect with and learn from other children in domestic work, to be referred to services like health centres and to take part in government meetings during which CDW-related issues were discussed. Partners continued to work with communities and local authorities to raise awareness, identify at-risk CDWs and refer them to appropriate services.

Iddirs (community groups) continued in 2024 to implement bylaws protective of the rights of CDWs, with women *Iddirs* implementing an innovative social insurance scheme for members to be able to support vulnerable CDWs in their communities. During the year, 189 legal cases were pursued, with 11 convictions secured in support of CDWs' rights. The first case against CDW exploitation was prosecuted under the human trafficking laws for the first time in Ethiopia, marking a critical milestone in the fight against internal trafficking and CDW exploitation. In total, four cases were prosecuted under the anti-trafficking laws.

This report covers the progress and outcomes from CDWs hotspot activities during 2024.

OPERATING CONTEXT

The year 2024 was one of high instability, primarily due to the fragile peace deal in Tigray and the major insurgencies that affected the Amhara and Oromia regions in particular.

Significant economic reforms impacted communities and partners. To open the Ethiopian market to more investment, the central bank floated the birr in late July. Prior to that, the birr's value was pegged to the U.S. dollar. This action is intended to facilitate Ethiopia's transition to a market-based foreign currency and aligns with the country's efforts to secure foreign currency loans from institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. However, one of the direct results has been the decline in the purchasing power of average families as the birr depreciates and the cost of living increases.¹ As more vulnerable families struggle to make a living in Ethiopia through formal or informal jobs, migrating to the Middle East becomes an option, especially as government has been pushing for its female work force in particular to migrate as domestic workers. The overall economic situation contributed to increasing the push factor for both child domestic workers and migrant workers.

Climate change is another push factor for internal migration and displacement that impacts CDW source communities. In arid pastoral areas, Ethiopia experienced its some of its worst droughts in recent years, while flooding damaged livelihoods and infrastructure in other part of the country. The Ethiopia Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR) released in early 2024 raised the alarm about the increasing impact of climate change on the Ethiopian economy, predicting that it will push millions more people into poverty² and further increase pressures on vulnerable families to rely on child labour, sending girls in particular to urban setting like Addis Ababa to become child domestic workers.



Lastly, 2024 saw several urban development projects taking place in Addis as part of a plan to beautify the city. These have pushed thousands of families out of their houses, affecting the work that had been initiated under the U.S. State Department's Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS) and disrupting relationships that had been built with vulnerable CDWs, who became untraceable due to forced displacement.

1 See: <https://epo.acleddata.com/2024/12/13/unrest-in-amhara-and-oromia-threatens-ethiopias-stability/>.

2 See: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4f599a4a-b79f-4979-826c-d8ca1fb35d24>.

PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policy/legislative

Directive on alternative childcare. In 2024, the Ethiopian government adopted a new directive on alternative childcare with some of the PEMS partners collaboratively working with the government on comprehensive standard operational procedures (SOPs) for the implementation of the directive. This has opened up the opportunity to specifically consider and factor in the vulnerabilities of child domestic workers in kinship arrangements, when designing those SOPs.

Political will/public awareness/attitude change

Positively shifting attitudes towards CDWs. Our partners have worked consistently with the community, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA), schools and enforcement bodies to address exploitation of child domestic workers. The early evaluation findings of an innovative model working with the children of employers to positively shift the attitudes of communities and employers showed improvements in several areas. The main positive changes have been seen in the sleeping conditions, mealtime practices and increased empathy and support from employers and children of employers towards CDWs. CDW participants in this same program also reported receiving more support from household members, as demonstrated by employers purchasing educational materials, allowing CDWs to attend school during the day, letting them study at home and helping them with their domestic tasks. The most significant shift in attitude has been in relation to school access, with school enrolment among CDWs in the intervention group dramatically increasing over the course of the intervention period (from 54% at baseline to 93% at endline).



Government performance

First case involving CDWs prosecuted under the anti-trafficking law. Over the past several years, the PEMS partners have been exerting efforts in Addis Ababa for prosecution of cases involving child domestic work. No abuse and exploitation of CDWs had ever been prosecuted using the anti-trafficking laws until 2024, when authorities finally brought forward human trafficking charge against a CDW trafficker and secured a conviction. To accomplish this, shelter partners worked with the support of an anti-trafficking lawyer to develop a “*victim of trafficking (VoT) assessment tool*” aimed at collecting information about rescued girls, which was used to gather early evidence of trafficking that could then be shared with the relevant authorities and enforcement bodies. This led our partner Hope for Justice (HFJ) to support the case of a 12-year-old child domestic worker that led to the prosecution of her trafficker (the child’s aunt) in the Southern region, under the Human Trafficking Proclamation (P1178). The court convicted the child’s aunt, but did not give her a jail sentence and instead fined her. The aunt’s defence was that she did not know that what she was doing equated to trafficking, nor that she was causing harm to the child (or to other children who had been trafficked under this case). While this outcome may not seem optimal to some, HFJ reported that demonstrating this type of behaviour is against the law had a profound impact on the local community. Further, prosecutors and the police in the Southern region found that the collaboration with the partner HFJ was highly useful while also recognising that this type of collaboration requires proper resource allocation.

Business performance

Promoting good practices among CDW recruiters for employment of adolescent children. In 2024, more than 150 recruiters worked with our partners to use contracts, codes of conduct and other employment agreements when placing child domestic workers. According to Freedom Fund and Population Council research, having a contract is associated with lower risk of wages being withheld, contributing to better outcomes for CDWs. Additionally, nearly 100 recruiters organised into an association, using the codes of conduct that had been previously developed, to promote good practices for the employment of adolescent children. They submitted 200 agreements to the MoWSA office and referred cases of abuse to police. They also started reporting recruiters who illegally hire children under the age of 15. Further details are provided below under the CDWs hotspot update.

HOTSPOT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Hotspot Objective: Improve child domestic workers’ working conditions and reduce domestic servitude of Ethiopian girls

Progress towards hotspot objectives

1 **Influencing the behaviour of key stakeholders, primarily formal and informal recruiters, transporters and employers**

Approximately 2,500 employers were reached directly by partners funded under the Oak Foundation and PEMS in 2024. Employers were approached through a range of activities from house-to-house visits to community reflective activities to engage employers on their behaviours towards CDWs.

Improving conditions for CDWs. During the year, the hotspot collected monitoring data showing 80% of employers implement improved conditions in some form. The sample included 52 employers and 50 CDWs. The biggest increase was in children attending school, which jumped from 65% pre-intervention to 80% post-intervention (CDW validated). The increase in rest time was less pronounced with gains of between 10 and 30 minutes for the children.

Strengthening community structures to create effective referral pathways. Partners have enabled community leaders to identify 382 CDWs at risk and refer them to appropriate services through Iddir and child rights committees in 2024. Community structures also continue to implement bylaws to protect CDWs, with women -run Iddirs under the Mission for Community Development program (MCDP) implementing an innovative social insurance contribution from members to be able to support vulnerable CDWs in their communities.

Engaging informal recruiters as change agents. Recruiters continue to take an active role in implementing employment agreements and conducting

follow-up to keep track of CDWs they have placed. Building on the Safe Recruitment Centre model in 2023, brokers previously trained by the Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission (ECC-SDCO) formed the Asnake Muluken Commission Work Association, which has an MoU with the local Bureau of Women Child and Social Affairs (BoWSA) to share employment agreements and conduct follow-up with children their agents have placed. On average, they share approximately 200 employment agreements per quarter and have been proactively referring CDW legal cases, including two cases that led to the removal of the CDW in 2024.

Using transport workers to identify at-risk and unaccompanied children at bus depots. Bethany Christian Service Global (BCSG), ECC-SDCO and the Professional Alliance for Development (PADeT) have been working with the country's transport minister and individual transport hubs to link them with MoWSA. Now all offices have implemented a focal person (paid by the transport ministry) for children's issues who is responsible for preparing a comprehensive system to register and manage cases identified. In the first quarter of 2024, 910 children were referred to BoWSA; however, there was a noticeable decline in referrals during the rest of the year due to staff turnover in the bureau. The Freedom Fund will be working with partners in 2025 to find ways to mitigate this challenge for sustainability purposes.

2 Improving government ability to monitor child domestic workers' conditions

Collaboration between local government and partners to institutionalise protections for CDWs. Freedom Fund partners including BCSG, MCDP and PADeT have been conducting training of on child development and how to use Ethiopian and international frameworks for protection of CDWs and the national child case management referral system. Further support from Andilay consulting group to condense training has become well known at the city level, with Addis Ababa's National Partnership Coalition requesting similar training for their staff at the end of 2024.

Prosecuting perpetrators of abuse and exploitation. Partners provided legal support to CDWs on issues ranging from unpaid salaries to sexual abuse. In 2024, Freedom Fund partners assisted 185 legal cases, resulting in 11 convictions. While this is a slight decrease in convictions from 2023, 2024 saw the first set of convictions for the trafficking of CDWs within

Ethiopia in cases that were supported by BCSG, HFJ and the Organisation for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS). These convictions, however, do not reflect the increased number of successful settlements that are being made in CDWs' favour on cases involving unpaid wages, access to services and leave entitlements, which amount to a majority of all cases.

3 Supporting the advocacy capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to improve government responsiveness and the legislative frameworks, including mechanisms for children's participation in advocacy

Civil society consultation on a key policy that affects CDWs. MCDP invited five child domestic workers to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with MoWSA, where the CDWs used the opportunity to advocate for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189, which sets labour standards for domestic workers. This is a collaboration between MCDP and Comunita Volontari per il Mondo (CVM), highlighting the key points of crossover between CDW and safer migration work. One participant reflected: *"Through the support I receive, I have learned to advocate for myself confidently. The Safe Space has taught me that my voice matters and that I have the right to express my opinions."*

4 Improving the quality of services provided to at-risk child domestic workers and survivors, especially access to education and vocational training

More than 7,000 children accessed services in 2024, with 210 children provided shelter and comprehensive services and 205 children supported to reintegrate with their families from shelter. Additionally, woreda (district) MoWSA offices are working with Freedom Fund partners in several areas to launch their own programs to reintegrate CDWs; the collaboration supported 122 children in 2024. This large number of child domestic workers who benefited from access to services demonstrates the effectiveness of hotspot monitoring and referral of CDWs, as well as the increased responsiveness from the local authorities.

Provision of life skills access to education and training for CDWs.

There were 314 previously out of school children enrolled in 2024 between

Oak Foundation and the PEMS program, with 379 children completing at least one level of an educational program either through mainstream school, alternative basic education (ABE) or shelter-based classes.

Safe Space for CDWs. Under MCDP's Safe Space model, 60 children are regularly attending training classes centred on creating handmade products like handbags and coffee tablecloths, where they benefit from vocational therapy and learn how to better manage their mental health and practical skills. Children who participated report feeling more relaxed and better equipped to manage their stress. Additionally, learning in how to apply problem solving and cognitive restructuring skills has helped children to reframe negative thoughts and find constructive solutions to their problems. A 17-year-old CDW said: *"I used to be afraid to interact with others, but now I've become more confident in social situations. I've also learned how to recognize signs of abuse and seek help."*

Provision of comprehensive shelter, family tracing and reintegration services for CDWs. In 2024, 329 CDWs received shelter services, including comprehensive psychosocial support and healthcare.

- Family tracing and reintegration is another critical aspect of shelter work. In limited cases, older CDWs (17+ years) have been supported towards independent living in Addis Ababa, through shared accommodation; 205 such children were reintegrated in 2024.
- Partners have been testing the effectiveness of seed grants among families of reintegrated CDWs and have been following up with samples of reintegrated children nine months later to understand their current status relative to education attendance. Out of the 160 families who received seed grants, 92 children are now regularly attending school nine months after reintegration. While partners' assessments have shown

a noticeable drop off in attendance over time – 80% still attending after three months and fewer than 70% at six months – all of the children had remained with their families, strongly indicating that financial support during reintegration does reduce children's likelihood of re-entering domestic work. Reasons for reintegrated children not being in school include having to wait for enrolment to begin in September, displacement due to conflict and the need to support family members.

Challenges

Addis Ababa City Corridor Project. Large informal settlement clearances and landscaping of existing infrastructure has forced a large number of people to relocate to other areas of the city. This has particularly affected PADeT, whose Watch Groups reported a significant reduction in the number of families in the areas where they work. The clearances have also led to the breakdown of established communities, with Iddir groups reporting their members, including committees, are now too spread out to administer. The clearances have not received critique from mainstream media, but non-governmental sources³ report the impacts of socio-economic cleansing in the centre of Addis Ababa in favour of a small wealthy upper middle class families, as well as lack of compensation for those removed, inadequate provision of new social housing, and social housing lacking basic facilities like running water and electricity as well as proximity to transport and markets.

Partner closure. Due to funding constraints and a change in operational relationship with its global head office, BCSG made the difficult decision to exit Ethiopia. As such, BCSG is planning to phase out all its operations in Ethiopia by the end of March 2025.⁴ The Freedom Fund is working with BCSG to ensure sustainability of their current efforts, either by securing buy-in from local government leadership to adopt activities or to transfer activities to other partners working in neighbouring operational areas.

3 See: <https://addisinsight.net/2025/02/07/gazanchis-the-gentrification-of-addis-ababa-disguised-as-urban-renewal/> and <https://addisinsight.net/2025/02/07/gazanchis-the-gentrification-of-addis-ababa-disguised-as-urban-renewal/>.

4 The organisation would cease to exist as BCSG but is looking at registering as a local entity instead.

SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Partners continued to collaborate through CoP meetings throughout 2024. The CoP meeting helped the CDWs partners to discuss prosecution and possible new approaches to use to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. As a result of these discussions, partners with shelters agreed to report cases of trafficking to the authorities at the source areas when reunifying a child with their family.

PEMS and Oak partners also use the CoP to work together in sharing ideas and suggestions to endorse and strengthen the national case management and referral mechanisms at the woreda level. An MoU has been signed between PEMS and Oak Partners with the aim of bringing together the four implementing partners funded by the Freedom Fund to address the abuse and exploitation of child domestic workers in Gulele Sub City.



CASE STUDY

A Journey to freedom and hope: A story of Sifen

Sifen is 13 years old and lives in Enzo, a small village in the Gofa zone of southern Ethiopia. She used to live with her parents and siblings but has never been to school due to the economic hardship facing her family. When she turned 12, her dreams of education were stolen away when her aunt trafficked her, promising a brighter future. Instead of school, Sifen found herself buried under endless household chores and babysitting for more than two years, her hopes dashed against the harsh reality of exploitation.

Sifen's aunt turned a deaf ear to her demands for an education, using her as a labourer rather than nurturing her potential. After an exhausting period, Sifen returned home for a holiday. There, she saw her older brother attending school while her other siblings stayed behind due to their family's economic struggles. The desire for knowledge burned deeper within her.

When a broker approached her family again, promising better opportunities in Addis Ababa, they reluctantly agreed, thinking it might finally give Sifen the education she deserved. But upon arrival, Sifen found herself trapped once more, enduring long hours of hard labour and psychological torment for three months, deflating her spirit over time.

Just when all seemed lost, Sifen ran away from the abusive situation. She was rescued by police and brought to Hope for Justice's Deborah Lighthouse. She received medical service and psychosocial support. With the help of her counsellor, she began to process her trauma and slowly regained her confidence. As Sifen shared her story and engaged in life skills sessions, it became clear how deeply she valued education. Her resilience shone through, inspiring everyone around her.

Sifen thrived during the catch-up lessons. Her thirst for knowledge was evident in every eager question she asked. She participated



wholeheartedly in life skills sessions. Through firm family tracing, a social worker successfully reunited Sifen with her family. The joy of the reunion was intense. Her mother and grandmother welcomed her home with open arms, their hearts bursting with love. The social worker took this opportunity to educate the family about the dangers of child domestic work and trafficking, emphasizing the critical importance of education.

Understanding the lessons they had learned, Sifen's family promised to enrol her in school. Sifen was provided with educational materials and her mother received small business training along with an income-generating activities grant from a Freedom Fund partner to help her improve the family's economic situation. With renewed hope and a loving family behind her, Sifen stepped into a future filled with possibilities, ready to reclaim the education she had always wanted.

VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations
and movements to drive a measurable
reduction of modern slavery in high-
prevalence countries and industries.

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