

Ethiopian Red Cross Society

Summary of Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) response to COVID-19

In response to COVID-19 and the initial outbreak, the Department of Disaster Risk Reduction at Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) formed a task force including team members from its Restoring Family Links (RFL) and Assistance and Resilience for Vulnerable Returnees their Communities (ARV-RC) project. The task force mainly coordinates responses to protect migrant returnees from COVID-19 and conducted a rapid assessment at the start of the pandemic in one of the quarantine sites for returned migrants. The assessment identified important needs such as water, sanitary materials and non-food items necessary to support migrants during the two-week quarantine period.

Based on the assessment, Danish Red Cross procured 15,000 hygiene kits and 3000 dignity kits. To date (March 2021), a total of 11,000 hygiene kits and 3000 dignity kits have been distributed to returned migrants in quarantine centers in coordination with ERCS.

To enhance the skills of staff and volunteers and facilitate community outreach, 240 ERCS members were trained in PSS and COVID-19 awareness messaging in Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions under the ARV-RC Project. 85,531 people were reached through household visits conducted by ERCS staff and volunteers to community members and returned migrants. COVID-19 prevention activities and sensitization on good hygiene, health awareness and risk communication were delivered by ERCS. A good lesson has been to build on the mobilization of resources and existing structures of ARV-RC project in Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions for a more effective COVID-19 response.

Voices of returned migrants receiving support from ERCS

Case Study 1

"I am 25 and have two brothers who are married and leading their own life. My father died five years back, so I was living with my mother. Because of my family low economic status, I dropped my education at grade 9. Moreover, my mother was very sick and I had to support my mother through working on household domestic works. This doesn't help my mother to survive her sickness. I couldn't sit and see her suffering from the sickness without any help. At last, I decided to go to an Arab country. My mom had borrowed money from our neighbours to cover my travel expense.

Through an agency, I went to Beirut. I was certain that I will get enough money to send back home and help my mother... For the first month, my employers seemed good for me. I felt good, though, I was burdened with work overload. I had no rest, and I usually work for more than 16 hour per a day. After a month, I got skin and hair infection problems. I began to see hair loss... I had good relationship with my male employer. I tried to inform him about the change in my skin and hair. I said "Papa! What is this? I had not faced this kind of problem when I was in Ethiopia. Please help me". But, he replied "be quiet! Do not let evil spirit to enter into in our home!"

After two months, I got very sick. My employer took me for medical treatment. However, the doctor could not find any kind of disease inside me. He simply gave me one injection. But... my illness got worse. One day, when I was asleep, madam came and put a number of spiders on my hands. In the morning, while I was cleaning my room, I got different witchcraft things...under my bed and I dumped them in the garbage. After that day my hands, legs, arms and my genital organs got infected. Again, I told to my male employer and he helped me to take another injection. But, my whole body was infected. I couldn't send any money to my mother. My half salary was paid to cover my transportation

loan. My employers refused to pay my remaining monthly salary... I begged my employer to send me back to my country.

After that, I came here without any money. When I reached Ethiopian Airport, I felt loneliness; I didn't know where I have to go. No one was willing to support me. However, one guy (whom I did not know) asked me about my conditions. And I told him my life history. Then, he gave me 1000 birr and I came here and I have got different material support, psychosocial and counselling service from this support [Red Cross] centre. 'Inshalah!' (Thanks to God) I have seen a great change on my physical illness."

Case Study 2

"I came from a large family, but we were not desperately poor. My father is a farmer. I have two sisters; one is a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. Once up on a time, I asked my boyfriend if is ready to marry me, but he rejected my request. He rather proposed that I better go to the [Middle East] to make some money and change our economic status. He was a high school teacher who had to supports his family from his low monthly salary. I decided to go and work in [abroad]. I arranged my trip through an employment agency for a fee of 7000 birr that I took from my family.

I spent four years working for a family in Riyadh. I was paid every month. The working condition and hour was intensive. I had worked for a long hours. I was able to save enough money, before I returned back to Ethiopia. I sent the whole money to my boyfriend to change our life and arrange our marriage. When I prepared to return to Ethiopia after 4 years with the hope to live with him in one roof, his behaviour suddenly changed. He stopped answering my call... I was very stressed about it. I got a very bad headache. When I came to Ethiopia he didn't show up to welcome me. One day, in the middle of conversation with my friends, I happened to hear that he has left to South Africa and is living there. I lost my balance! I passed out! I really did not know what was going around and inside me for long hours... I didn't expect that he would do this on me. He took all my money, I have no money on my hand now. My four years effort and my hope to have a family gone like a mist. I don't know what I can do. Yeah, I have no money, no love, I got sick not physically, but it seems psychological. I started to feel stressed without any reason, I had sleeping problem...

When I came here, I heard about ERCS Assistance and Resilience to Vulnerable Returnees and their Communities' support centre from my mother... In this centre, I have been getting material support and psychosocial services and vocational training. I feel like I am getting better now. I need now economic support."