

MEKELLE UNIVERSITY



College of Law and Governance

Department of Civics and Ethical Studies

Exploring the Socio-Economic Challenges of Irregular Migrants/Migration: A  
Case Study of Zalambesa Town, Tigray, Ethiopia

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Civics and Ethical Studies in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Award of the Master of Arts Degree in Civics and Ethical Studies.

By

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis, titled "Socio-Economic Challenges of Irregular Migration: A Case Study of Zalambesa Town, Tigray, Ethiopia," is my original work. It has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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## ABSTRACT

*This thesis investigates the multifaceted socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration in Zalambesa Town, Tigray, a region profoundly affected by recent conflict and long-standing economic devastation. This study explored the tangible socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration on migrants, their families, and the wider community. Employing a mixed-methods research design, this study triangulates quantitative data from questionnaires with 50 participants and qualitative data from 25 in-depth interviews, three focus group discussions (18 participants), and 15 key informant interviews. The study reveals that irregular migration from Zalambesa is primarily driven by economic desperation, stemming from a severe lack of local employment opportunities and pervasive poverty. This situation creates a multitude of overwhelming challenges for the community. Economically, this migration frequently results in crippling debt for migrants and their families. While remittances offer some financial relief, they often foster disruptive dependency, exacerbate economic inequality, and deplete the local labor force. Socially, irregular migration contributes significantly to family fragmentation and places a disproportionate burden of responsibility on women. It further erodes community cohesion and, critically, devalues education, thereby threatening the emergence of a "lost generation." Institutionally, responses to irregular migration are perceived as largely ineffective. This ineffectiveness is attributed to a significant policy-implementation gap, where top-down policies consistently fail to address the fundamental economic root causes of the issue. In conclusion, irregular migration in Zalambesa is not a sustainable solution but rather a symptom of a deeper structural crisis. This creates a vicious cycle where the negative consequences of migration paradoxically intensify its initial drivers.*

**Key Words: Irregular Migration, Returned Migrant, Socioeconomic Challenges, Reintegraion, Zalambesa**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CSA: Central Statistical Agency

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

IOM: International Organization for Migration

KII: Key Informant Interview

LSAO: Labour and Social Affairs Office

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RMMS: Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UN: United Nations

UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1. Background of the Study

Across the globe, international migration has become a defining feature of the 21st century. Despite increasing political and economic barriers, the movement of people continues to grow in scale and complexity (McKenzie, 2008). The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020) estimates that there are over 271 million international migrants, constituting 3.5% of the world's population, a figure projected to rise significantly by 2050 (UNDESA, 2013). While much of this movement occurs through regular channels, a substantial and often perilous portion takes place outside established legal frameworks, a phenomenon known as irregular migration.

Within this global picture, irregular migration movement that occurs outside legal and regulatory norms presents one of the most urgent humanitarian and policy issues (IOM, 2011). This mode of travel is not merely a technical or legal matter; it is a high-stakes survival strategy characterized by extreme vulnerability. Individuals undertaking these journeys face a myriad of challenges, including exploitation by smugglers, perilous travel conditions, and the constant threat of abuse or death (Teshome et al., 2013). The decision to face such risks is seldom made lightly, and is almost always rooted in desperate circumstances in the country of origin.

The drivers of this phenomenon are multifaceted, often stemming from a combination of economic desperation, political instability, conflict, and environmental pressures that "push" individuals from their homes, alongside the "pull" of perceived opportunities elsewhere (Koser, 2013). In Africa, and particularly the Horn of Africa, these drivers are acutely present. The continent experiences significant cross-border movement, often irregular in nature, fueled by economic and political upheaval (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016). Ethiopia, as a populous nation in a volatile region, is a major country of origin for irregular migrants. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2017) noted a significant increase in migration from Ethiopia between 2000 and 2015. This trend is overwhelmingly driven by structural factors such as pervasive poverty and chronic youth unemployment (Kuschminder, 2014), compounded by peer pressure and the often-misleading narratives peddled by smugglers (Seid, 2016).

Nowhere are these circumstances more acute than in regions ravaged by conflict. The post-2020 conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, represents a catastrophic event that has fundamentally reshaped the socioeconomic landscape and acted as a powerful accelerant for irregular migration. The war led to the mass displacement of over two million people, a systemic breakdown of economic systems, and the widespread destruction of infrastructure, livestock, and crops, plunging communities into severe food insecurity and poverty (IOM, 2022; de Waal, 2020). For a generation of young people, the conflict has not only exposed them to violence and trauma but has also foreclosed their future, decimating local labor markets and obliterating pathways to sustainable livelihoods.

This national trend finds a stark and urgent manifestation in the Tigray region. This study focuses on Zalambesa town, a community situated at the epicenter of this crisis. Located on the border with Eritrea, Zalambesa has historically been a source of migrants, but the post-2020 conflict has transformed a chronic issue into an acute one. The war has shattered local economies, destroyed infrastructure, displaced millions, and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities (IOM, 2022; De Waal, 2020). The town's economy has been crippled, and its residents face immense socioeconomic challenges, including extremely limited access to basic services like healthcare, education, and sanitation (World Food Programme, 2022). In this environment of near-total economic collapse and profound uncertainty, irregular migration is no longer perceived as one of several options, but as the only viable escape from a life of destitution.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a nuanced, in-depth examination of the ongoing socioeconomic challenges that define the experience of irregular migration for the people of Zalambesa in the wake of the 2020 conflict. Understanding these lived struggles is essential for developing meaningful and effective policy and humanitarian responses.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Although irregular migration from Ethiopia is recognized as a severe national issue (ILO, 2017; RMMS, 2014; Wakgari, 2014), a critical review of the existing literature reveals a significant gap in knowledge concerning the specific socioeconomic challenges that define this phenomenon at the community level, particularly in regions transformed by conflict. This thesis, *Socioeconomic Challenges of Irregular Migrants in Zalambesa Town*, is precisely designed to address this gap. The problem is threefold:

First, there are significant thematic limitations in the current body of research. Much of the literature frames the issue in terms of broad "impacts" or focuses on singular causes (e.g., Emebet, 2002), which fails to capture the lived reality of the ongoing struggles faced by migrants and their families. Furthermore, optimistic macroeconomic reports on remittances (World Bank, 2016) often overshadow the devastating microeconomic challenges of crippling debt and asset loss that result from failed migration attempts. This study shifts the focus from static impacts to the dynamic and continuous challenges that define the migrant experience.

Second, there is a lack of geographical and contextual specificity. National-level studies, while valuable, tend to generalize findings that may not apply to all regions equally. Previous research has often concentrated on specific corridors, such as female migration to the Middle East (Abebaw, 2013; Wakgari, 2014), while the distinct dynamics in border towns like Zalambesa remain critically under-researched. While studies like Dejen's (2017) in Raya Kobo are insightful, the unique context of Zalambesa Town a border community profoundly devastated by the recent war presents a fundamentally different and more acute set of socioeconomic conditions that demand specific scholarly investigation.

Third, and most critically, the existing literature is insufficient to explain the migration dynamics within the transformative context of the post-2020 war in Tigray. This conflict was not merely an exacerbating factor; it was a catastrophic event that fundamentally altered the socioeconomic landscape, shattered local economies, and obliterated traditional livelihoods (De Waal, 2020). The war has intensified the drivers of migration to an unprecedented level of desperation, and consequently, has reshaped the nature of the socioeconomic challenges that follow. While theories of conflict-driven displacement provide a framework (Castles, 2003), there is an urgent need for new empirical data that documents the lived realities in this specific post-conflict environment.

Therefore, the central problem this research confronts is the lack of a nuanced, empirically-grounded understanding of the specific socioeconomic challenges faced by irregular migrants and their families originating from Zalambesa Town in the post-conflict era. By focusing on this critically affected and under-researched community, this thesis provided the specific, evidence-based analysis required to understand the full scope of the "Socioeconomic Challenges of Irregular Migrants in Zalambesa Town," thereby filling a crucial void in contemporary migration studies.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective of the Study**

To investigate the multifaceted socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration on migrants, their families, and the community in Zalambesa Town.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the Study**

To achieve the general objective, this study pursued the following specific objectives:

1. To examine how irregular migration affects the economic well-being of migrants in the study area;
2. To study how irregular migration affects the social well-being of migrant-sending households.
3. To assess the role of government policies and institutions in addressing the socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration in the study area

### **1.4. Research Questions of the Study**

Taking the principal and specific objectives of the research into account, the researcher is intended to answer the following three basic research questions. These include:

1. How does irregular migration affect economic wellbeing of migrants in the area?
2. How does irregular migration affect social-wellbeing of the migrant sending household in the study area?
3. What government policies have been implemented to address the challenges posed by irregular migration, and how effective have they been?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The study will serve as a guide and source of knowledge on the socio-economic and related issues of irregular migration in the study area. Most importantly, for those who intend to carry out further investigations, the study provides a fundamental insight in to issues such as causes of irregular migration, migration decisions and actors of irregular migrations.

Generally, this study will use as a requirement for the fulfillment of masters degree in civics and ethical studies for the researchers. Additionally, the research reminds policymakers or other concerned stakeholders to give due emphasis to illegal migration in the study area.

## **1.6. Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

**Geographical Scope:** The study is geographically delimited to Zalambesa Town, in the Eastern Zone of the Tigray Region. While the issue is region-wide, this focus allows for an in-depth, rather than superficial, analysis.

**Conceptual Scope:** The study focuses specifically on the socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration. While political and psychological impacts are acknowledged, they are not the central focus.

**Temporal Scope:** The research primarily considers migration experiences and their impacts post-2020, to capture the dynamics in the context of the recent conflict.

**Methodological Scope:** The research is delimited to a mixed-methods approach, as detailed in chapter 3. The sample is drawn using non-probability sampling techniques (purposive and snowball), which is appropriate for accessing this hard-to-reach population but means the quantitative findings are not statistically generalizable to the entire town, but rather indicative of the study sample.

## **1.7. Limitations of the Study**

The primary limitation of this study is the use of non-probability sampling, which, while necessary, means the findings cannot be statistically generalized to the entire population of Zalambesa. The sensitive and sometimes irregular nature of the topic may have led some participants to be reticent, despite assurances of confidentiality. Furthermore, due to resource and time constraints, the study could not be expanded to other affected woredas in Tigray, which would have provided a comparative perspective. Finally, the study relies on the recall of participants, which can be subject to memory biases. The use of a mixed-methods approach and data triangulation was deliberately chosen to mitigate these limitations as much as possible.

## **1.8. Operational Definition of Key Terms**

- **Irregular Migration:** For the purpose of this study, this refers to the movement of people from Zalambesa across international borders that occurs outside the legal and regulatory norms of Ethiopia and the transit or destination countries. This includes crossing borders without authorization and being smuggled (IOM, 2011).

- **Returned Migrant:** An individual who originated from Zalambesa, migrated irregularly, resided abroad for a period, and has since returned to live in Zalambesa, either voluntarily or through deportation (IOM, 2004).
- **Migrant's Family/Household:** A household in Zalambesa from which at least one member has migrated irregularly and has family members (e.g., parents, spouse, children) remaining in the town (Ibid).
- **Socioeconomic Challenges:** The negative impacts and disruptions caused by irregular migration on both the financial well-being (income, debt, assets, labor) and social fabric (family structure, community relations, education, social roles) of individuals and the community (IOM, 2011).

## 1.9. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter One provides the introduction, including the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, limitations, and definitions.

Chapter Two presents a review of related literature, covering theoretical frameworks and empirical studies relevant to the drivers and consequences and socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration.

Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the study area, research design, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and methods of analysis.

Chapter Four is the core of the study, presenting the analysis and interpretation of the collected data in a thematic manner.

Chapter Five provides the final conclusion, synthesizing the key findings, and offers a set of actionable recommendations based on the research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Conceptualizing Migration

In this section, definition of terms, the rationale to use the term irregular migration, the general overview of migration and concepts related to migration as well as relevant literature of the experiences of irregular migrants be elaborated. A variety of literature that is presented on the specific topic be evaluated in order to substantiate the subject matter. Initially, to clarify the concepts of irregular migration, it is important to give a definition of the phenomenon and what the words indicates.

Migration is defined as changing the place of residence by crossing a specified administrative or political boundary. It is movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification. The exodus of migrants from the Horn of Africa (mainly Ethiopia) to South Africa is a central issue. Each year, thousands of young Ethiopians risk their lives in an attempt to reach South Africa, where they hope to establish better lives for themselves and their families. Migrants often sacrifice their life savings to pay smugglers to facilitate the journey. According to the Global Slavery Index (2013), there are currently 651,110 Ethiopians in modern slavery (albeit both within Ethiopia and abroad), which ranks Ethiopia fifth in the world (after India, China, Pakistan and Nigeria) in terms of the largest absolute numbers of the population in slavery.

**Irregular Migration:** ICHRP (2010) defined an irregular migrant is a person who lacks legal status in a transit or host country by entering the territory of the state without authorization, as well as to those who entered the country legally and subsequently lost their permission to remain. Similarly, National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) of South Africa (2009) defined irregular migration as the movement of a person to a new place of residence or transit using irregular or irregular means, without valid documentation or by carrying forged documents. On the other hand, Koser (2000) summarizes that irregularity takes many forms and include a wide range of migrants, such as those who enter or remain in a country without authorization, those who are smuggled or trafficked, unsuccessful asylum seekers who fail to observe a deportation order and people who circumvent immigration controls through the arrangement of bogus marriages.

Return Migrant: IOM (2004) defines it as movement of a person returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence either voluntarily or forced usually after spending at least one year in another country. In this study, return migrant is a person who out-migrated from Zalambesa town, lived one year or above overseas but currently live back in home.

## **2.2. Theories of Migration**

### **2.2.1 Theoretical Approach**

There is no well-developed theory on the impacts of irregular migration as theories of migration deal mainly with the causes of migration. Massey, Arango & Hugo (1993) identified that, currently, it is difficult to find a rational and consistent set of theories about irregular migration.

### **2.2.2. The New Economics of Labor Migration Theory**

Irregular migration is one of the most important themes in the field of migration studies which is always regarded as an important contributing factor to many countries' development. However, most literature on irregular migration has focused on its irregularity and the situation of irregular migrants in the destination country. In reference to the New Economics of Labor Migration theory, studies have found both positive and negative impacts caused by social and economic means. According to the New Economics of labor Migration, international migration produces a positive effect in the migrant sending community yet; it is also notable that this may also create inequality in respect to other non-immigrant households in the same area. Through practical studies, scholars find that international migration improves living standards, relative income, and the opportunity to invest in productive activities of migrant households in the area of origin (Stark and Taylor, 1991; Taylor 1999; and Taylor et al. 1996)

In distinction, the studies about irregular migration seem to imply that irregular migration creates economic burdens on the families left behind. Studies on irregular migration often indicate entirely different scenarios such as labor exploitation and debt Kyle (2001). Hence the ultimate goal of this study is to assess the socio-economic impact of irregular migration in Zalambesa town.

### **2.2.3 Network Theory of Migration**

migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin. They can be considered a

form of social capital stretched across migrant space, and therefore facilitate the likelihood of international movement because they provide information which lowers the costs and risks of migration (Massey et al. 1993). Migration networks contribute three important insights into theorizing the migration process: they contribute to understanding the dynamics of differential migration; they help to predict future migration, since networks ‘reproduce’ migrants through time; and they contribute to resolving a major theoretical distinction between the initial causes of migration and its perpetuation and its diffusion in time and space (Fussell, 2012).

Migrant networks have long been present in migration research. They were implicit in one of the most important migration ‘classics’. According to Boyd and Nowak (2012), there are three main types of migrant networks: family and personal networks, labor networks, and irregular migrant networks. These authors also highlight the gendered nature of all networks, and the often active role of women in developing and sustaining personal networks. The dominant view of social networks in the migration literature is that they have the positive functions alluded to above by providing information and contacts, they direct migrants to particular destinations where help regarding accommodation finding a job, financial assistance and other kinds of support are available. The causes of migration to personal, cultural and other social ties where potential migrants benefit from experiences of their peers, who could possibly provide them with relevant information, and in some cases, help them adapt to the new environment in the receiving societies (Munshi, 2003). This is why once the network created, it can increase the number of migrants to join the system. An individual person can think of him or herself as a node that has ties to kin, community members, schoolmates, and colleagues, as well as to larger religious, political, educational, and state institutions.

The concept of this theory is directly linked with the causes of the Zalambesa town labor power migration. For instance, it is very common in this town men who migrated encourage their adult sons to join them, and later their brothers, close relatives and all of these family members encourage other family members to join the system. Even weaker ties may bring other community members into the migration stream through the exchange of information and assistance in making the migratory trip and finding housing and employment in a new destination. The role of migration networks in the process of migration is often manifested in the form of having a family member who is a migrant and/or having a friend from the same community who is a migrant. These networks reduce the costs of migration by providing

aspiring migrants with information about the migration process and about job availability and housing in the destinations. Therefore, social network and social media are one of the main causes for irregular migration.

### **2.3. Factors Associated to Irregular Migration**

The development of irregular migration is rooted in the structural incompatibility between the social and political conditions for migration. For an irregular migration flow to develop there must be a mismatch between the demand for entry, embedded in the international labor market, and the supply of entry spaces, determined by the political systems. They argue that in the sending country context, there must be illogicality between widespread social expectations (usually called push' factors) and the capacity of local government to satisfy or repress them. In the receiving context on the other hand, there must be a lack of conformity between the internal preconditions for migration (usually called pull' factors) and their interpretation within the political system. Trans -nationally, there must be a mismatch between the carrying capacity of the migration infrastructure and the monitoring and repressive capacity of states. People have many reasons why they might want to move from one place to another. According to UN (2006) report, for peoples to migrate, three factors, supply (push), demand (pull), and network (link supply and demand) must be present. In the absence of one of each, migration from one place to other not take place.

#### **2.3.1. Push Factors**

There are various factors that convince migrants to leave their homes of which economic factors are the main causes of irregular migration. Inline to this, according to the International Labor Organization, approximately half of the total population of current international migrants, or about 100 million migrant workers, have left home to find better job and life style opportunities for their families abroad (ILO, 2008). Poor households with weak social links, low level of education, limited access to information and shortage of financial capital to cover the cost for legal migration at one time, drought, and landlessness and unemployment are found to be the root causes of irregular migration (Gebrehiwot and Fekadu 2012).

#### **2.3.2. Pull Factor**

People moving to more developed countries as they that the same work they were doing at home is rewarded abroad with higher wages. So, migrants are drawn to those countries to maximize their income through better payment. Inline to this, the higher wages in destination countries definitely pull the migration flows as well. According to Stalker, the probability of

avoiding deportation, employment and the earnings at destination, employment probability in origin, and the total costs of moving (financial and psychological) are the pull factors for migration (Stalker, 2000).

#### **2.4. Types of Irregular Migration**

Human trafficking, and irregular transportation of a person across the border (smuggling) are among the most common types of irregular migration. Smuggling of migrants is a crime defined under international law as: according to article 3(1) of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol).

*“the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.*

In turn for a certain sum paid crime gangs irregular transfer migrants across a border into the countries where they have neither a citizenship, nor documents for legal entry. In such cases the relationship between crime gangs and migrants ends upon the crossing the border. However, due to an irregular status in the foreign country, these migrants may easily become dependent on the people who smuggled them in. Crime gangs often get advantage of such situation and force migrants to work without any reimbursement and thus cover the costs which the smugglers spend for their transportation.

Human Trafficking: is defined as the recruitment, transportation, harboring or recipient of person, by means of the threat or use of force or other form of coercion, fraud, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments to consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (UN, 2000). It is a modern day slavery, in which people are involved by deception or threat, the victims of the trafficking are restricted independence, free movement and choice, and become victims of physical, psychological, or sexual violence. The most common forms of human trafficking are trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation, in forced labor and in human organs.

Both human trafficking and irregular border crossing is a crime in the world and is run by the large international criminal networks. Due to present toughened migration policy and improved border monitoring technologies in developed countries, an increasing number of irregular migrants become victims of those criminal groups.

## **2.5. Consequences of cross-border Migration**

International migration has both positive and negative consequences on origin and destination countries. The destination countries could be benefited by labor force (labor supply) whereas the origin can be benefited by remittances (increase of wages at the household) (Weiner, 1995). For countries of origin and destination, it can become part of an overall strategy to achieve economic and social goals. Migration is not lonely removal of bodies but more fundamentally a redistribution of skills, experience and other human capital across the planet. It has direct and indirect positive effects on development, via creating employment opportunities, source of income, human resource accumulation, Diasporas networks or return migration (Betz & Nicole, 2013).

There is a general consensus that migrant remittances constitute a valuable input to family income. Remittance flows do benefit both the migrants' households and the non-recipient ones through diversified effects of spending. Remittances were a resilient source of capital for many developing countries during the global financial crisis (Siddiqui, 2016). According to the report of (World Bank, 2011), there was an estimation of US\$440 billion is sent worldwide by international migrants. In Bangladesh, the remittances sent by overseas wage earners have increased from US\$ 23.71million in 1976 to US \$2617.92 million in 2002 (Siddiqui, 2016). In 2009, India received US \$31 billion worth of long-term migrants' savings deposit outside the flow of remittances, which constituted 8% of the domestic savings and 2% of the country's GDP (Siddiqui, 2016). In India, remittances sent by short-term international migrants from Kerala and the Diasporas of Punjab boosted agricultural growth at the local level. Its agriculture was highly developed by generating local demands for certain products such as water pumps, high quality seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, adding new dynamism to the local market since 2009 (*Ibid*).

### **2.5.1. Impacts on the Migrants and Family Member Left Behind**

The impact of irregular migration has both positive and negative on family members left at home and their community up to national level. Irregular migration can creates the loss life of the migrants in their journey and after their arrival to the destination, inequalities, or creates dependency on remittances in origin countries, loss of productive labor force, problem on educational attainment, economic burden or debt, house hold disruption, increase on market prices, lack of interest for local job, education etc. In Zimbabwe, remittances simultaneously

caused price inflation, exacerbated poverty for non-migrant sending households and increased inter household inequalities (Siddiqui, 2011).

Dissimilarly, migration has negative consequences in both origin and destination countries. Some of the negative consequences for destination countries include unemployment or shortage of job opportunities and insecurity problems. On the other hand, migration affects the development of countries of origin through loss of essential productive human resources, often referred to as “intelligence”, as well as through potential depletion of the national labor force due to the movements at all skill-levels (UNDESA, 2012 & IOM, 2013). Highly skilled migrants can operate as creators, multipliers and transmitters of knowledge. They are valued for bringing a diversity of viewpoints and cultural enrichment to workplaces that design and produce goods for the global market. The emigration of highly skilled workers can weaken development efforts of small developing economies, particularly in crucial sectors such as health and education. As (IOM, 2007; Siddiqui, 2016) estimated, between one-third and one-half of all medical school graduates in South Africa emigrate to the United Kingdom or the United States every year.

### **2.5.2. Impacts on the Livelihood Sources of the Migrants and Their Family Left Behind**

A substantial body of literature on migration focuses on the economic effects of migration on families left behind. It is widely common that migration affects both host and migrants' sending country. Katseli, Lucas & Xenogiani, (2006), contended that migration poses a variety of economic effects on migrants' sending country. Migration can be a source of risk in sending countries. The home country can lose their labor force such as trained civil servants.

In another vein, migration also has an enormous impact for the migrants' sending community. For instance, it urges older family members to depend on remittance from the migrants. According to MOFA of Ethiopia (2012) declaration of Diasporas policy, Ethiopian migrants play their own role and contribution to economic development through finance, foreign currency, charity program, knowledge and reducing poverty. Those skilled and unskilled migrants who moved to the Middle East to exploit the labor market opportunities available are also supporting their family through remittance. They also participate in various developmental activities such as in hotel and schools. However, the expanding nature of irregular migration has complicated the possibility to create conducive environment for protection.

The FDRE government also calls the Middle East Diaspora group to participate in the development of their country. While the government is striving to control the irregular migration, though very difficult and complicated, the Diaspora groups are taken as major players in the countries national development. One of the critiques of international remittance is the impression that these are not used for productive ends. There is solid evidence supporting the notion that remittances are only used for consumption, household spending land, but not on productive investments. There is a notion that international remittances contribute to community development because of the multiplier effects through consumption and investments made within the community (Massey & Parrado, 1994).

As mentioned before, the main debate of whether remittances are used in productive means lies partly on the unclear understanding of 'productive use. When buying land and building houses are counted as investments, the proportion of investments through remittances increases substantially. While acknowledging the benefits that remittances produce, it is also necessary to consider the negative impacts that they create. For instance, (Massey & Parrado 1994), in case of Mexico finds that housing and land prices rise according to the demand of families receiving remittances, and they become unaffordable for families receiving none. These studies highlight both positive and negative impacts as a result of international migration. According to these studies, it is acceptable that international migration has improved the consumption and investment nature of migrant households. However this in turn has a back lash effects-inequality among families in one area.

### **2.5.3. Impacts on the Social Relationship of the Family Members Left at Home**

It is true that international migration has a massive social impact on individual, family and country level. Migration also alters the family bonds across time. Yet, the advancement of technology helps in linking the migrants and their family. Transcontinental ways of communication, such as Skype, internet, mobile and Whatsapp, help migrants to save their social bonds with their family and their home community. There is a growing body of literature that points out the impacts on the household structure by the absence of one or more family members in the migrant family in sending areas. These role changes influence the decision-making in the families of migrants as it has a huge impact on purchasing house hold material s and children's education (Antman, 2012). The first scenario in studying role changes focuses on male migration. As men are more likely to migrate than women, most literature focuses on management with the household affairs after the male breadwinner migrates (Antman, 2012). For instance, a study about the migration effects on families in

Indonesia shows that women often became the head of the household when their male siblings or husbands migrated (Hugo, 2002).

The second scenario of the occurrence of role changes can be discussed in case of female migration. It is noticeable that participation of women in economic activities is promoted through female labor migration. Although women are empowered if they are left behind, a study in China found that their wellbeing may be decreased because of the extra workload in the absence of their husband or children (Mu & van de Walle, 2011). In accordance with their study with Chinese migrant households, found that despite investing more time farming in the absence of their husband or children, there was no improvement in women's decision making about the household's farming activities. Along similar lines, Hugo (2002) found that it was hard for women to cope with agricultural work in absence of their husbands who had migrated abroad. Doubtlessly, women's participation in migration also creates changes in family structure and the distribution of the workload on the remaining household members.

Another focus of international migration's impacts on the family left behind is on the transfer of duties to parents remaining at home. Additionally, a number of studies have found the transfer of childcare duties to grandparents in cases of parental migration. Additionally, a number of studies have found the transfer of childcare duties to grandparents in cases of parental migration. King and Vullnetari (2006) argue that left-behind parents are vulnerable because of the lack of social support from their emigrant children, and therefore, are depressed and worried about their capability.

#### **2.5.4. Impact on Educational Attainment of the Students at Family Members Left Behind**

It has both positive and negative impact on educational attainment of students at home. The impact of migration on the school attainment and education performance of children left behind is the most documented dimension of the link between migration and the family left behind. Emigration may then increase or decrease household investments in schooling, depending on whether the income effects from remittances offset the effects of household disturbances. The effect of migration on school grades completed be equal to the sum of the impact of external migration on a child's educational attainment through its impact on family income (expected to be positive) and the impact of external migration on a child's education attainment through its impact on family structure (expected to be negative). The sign of the total effect cannot be defined theoretically and may change according to multiple variables

such as gender, time or level of education of parents, or if the household is in rural or urban areas (Borraz, 2005).

In contrast, irregular migration of parents can also have a serious negative impact on students' educational attainment. For example, McKenzie and Rapport (2006) detect a significant negative effect of migration on school attendance and educational attainment of 12 to 18 year old boys and of 16 to 18 year old girls. The authors argue that migration influences educational decisions via three main channels: the income effect brought about by remittances; the direct effect of adult migration on the demand for child work; and the impact of the prospect to migrate upon the incentives to invest in education. The authors criticize that the latter network most likely motivates the estimated negative contribution of migration to educational attainment. They explain that, in rural Mexico, children of migrants are more likely to migrate themselves (irregular) to the United States, where the return to human capital for an irregular alien is very low. In this case and children in migrant households are no more likely than children in non-migrant households to be economically active, so that the second channel (impact of migration on children's productivity) plays little to no role. This negative effect is increased once remittances become essential for the economic survival of a large part of the population of a country, generating a predisposition for migration on a larger scale and generating household dependency to remittances for household members left behind.

Another negative aspect with regard to school attendance may be linked with the risk that the withdrawal of wage earners from a household may disrupt family life. The reduction in the number of adult role models in the home, may increase the child-rearing responsibilities of resident household members, placing greater demands on older children to assist in running and supporting the household (Hanson and Woodruff, 2003) and making it more difficult for children to remain in school.

Some studies have identified specific gender patterns, with different results for boys from girls. Hanson and Woodruff (2003) analyze a sub-sample drawn from the 2000 Mexican population census to assess the impact of migration upon the educational attainment – defined as the number of accumulated years of schooling – of children aged 10 to 15 residing in rural areas. Whereas migration does not appear to influence the educational attainment of boys significantly, it does influence girls in migrant households, who appear to complete a significantly larger number of years of school. In the case of Pakistan, Mansuri (2006) provides an insightful disaggregated analysis of the impact of migration with respect to the

gender of the de facto household head, finding no evidence that a female de facto household gives a higher priority to educational expenditure. He also reaches the conclusion that there is no protective effect of migration-induced female headship on schooling outcomes for girls, and rather that women appear to be protecting male siblings. Thus, all of the above explanations indicate that unequal enrollment of male and female in schools.

The lack of general information on children left behind is one of the reasons for the lack of development of appropriate policy responses. There is no global estimate on the number of children who have at least one parent migrating. However, living in a family with at least one parent away for long periods of time is part of normal childhood experience for many children in the developing world. The Whitehead and Hashim (2005) report estimates that the percentage of children living in migrant households is between 18 and 40 percent in rural Bangladesh, 50 to 60 percent in rural Tanzania, and 80 percent in Mali. Patterns can be different from rural to urban areas. For example, in South Africa, the Southern African Migration Project (Simlane and Cursh, 2004) as quoted in Whitehead and Hashim (2005), paper to the international migration and development team, estimates that the percentage of households with one or two migrant parent(s) goes from 25 percent at rural level to 40 in rural areas. In developing countries rural areas are more affected by migration (internal or international) than cities. The impact of migration and remittances upon the children left behind is still notably understudied in the economic literature.

Looking at household composition may not provide detailed information. For example, if a child is living in a household without his or her parent, it is not possible to assess whether this situation arose as a result of migrating parents, divorce, or the child's relocation (e.g. an orphan or a child sent to stay temporary or permanently with member of the extended family such as uncles, grandparents, etc.). At the same time, single-headed households can be the effect of divorce or death of the partner, rather than ubiquitously the effect of migration (Whitehead and Hashim (2005), paper to the international migration and development team. Following the child-rights based approach described in the introduction empirical papers on the impact of migration on children left behind can be organized along four issues. The first group of papers analyzes the impact of migration on various measures of child health. The second group analyzes the impact of migration and remittances upon human capital formation, that is, educational attainment. A third group looks at the impact of remittances on child economic activities and possible risks of child lab. The final group looks at the effect on children of lack of parental care. Most of the research identified addresses the impact of

either migration or remittances upon school attendance and child work, while a few studies analyze how the migration of an adult household member and the ensuing transfer of resources affect children's health outcomes. Very few/almost none investigate the psychological effects of lack of parental care using solid quantitative methodology.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Description of the Study Area

Zalambessa is a town located in Tigray, Ethiopia. It is part of the Eastern Zone of the Tigray Region. It is about 42 kilometers north of Adigrat. The Serha Zalambesa border crossing is located in the town.

During the Ethiopian Civil War, on 15 November 1989, Zalambessa was bombed from the air by the Ethiopian Air Force; no fatalities reported (HRW, 1991). The exact border became an issue before and during the Eritrean-Ethiopian War since 1998 up to 2000 (Killion, 1998). After the war, the town was in ruins (Alex, 2000).

**Demographics:** According to a study published in the Journal of Ethiopian Studies (2019), is the population of Zalambesa town is approximately 20,000 people, mostly engaged in subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and small-scale trade (Tesfaye, 2019). The majority of the population lives in poverty, limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water.

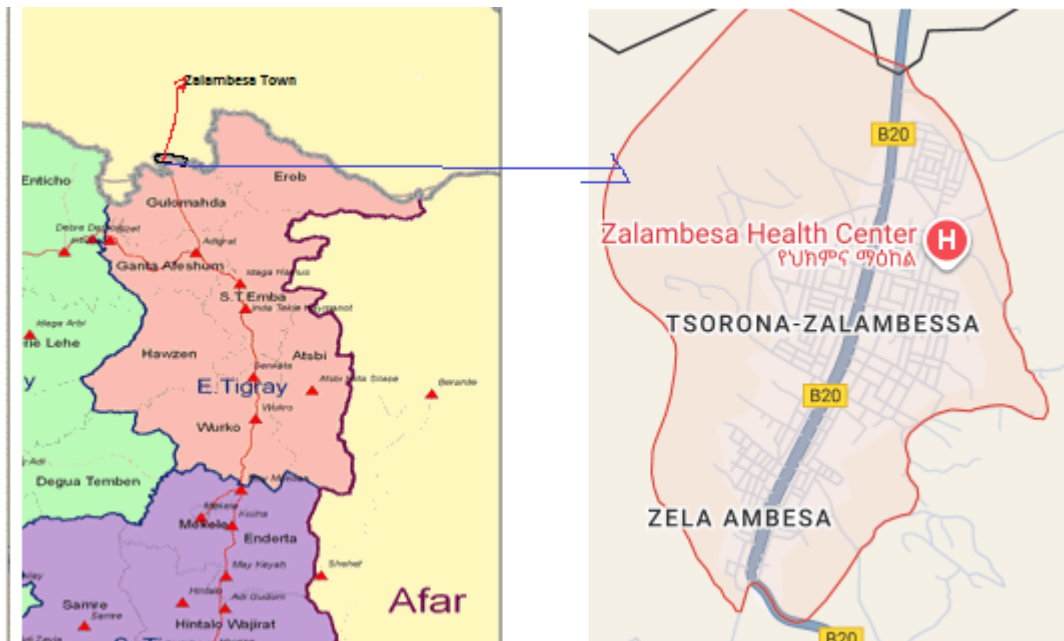
**Socioeconomic Conditions:** the town's economy is largely informal practices, with many residents relying on small-scale trade, including the sale of livestock, grains, and other agricultural products. A study by the Ethiopian Rural Development Research Institute (2017) found that the majority of households in Zalambesa town are engaged in informal economic activities, with limited access to formal employment opportunities (ERDRI, 2017).

In terms of infrastructural conditions the Zalambesa town has limited access to basic services such as electricity, roads, and communication networks. A study by the Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Irrigation, and Electricity (2018) found that only 10% of households in the town have access to electricity, while 60% of households rely on traditional energy sources such as firewood and charcoal (EWIE, 2018).

The education sector in Zalambesa town is also underdeveloped, with limited access to quality education. A study by the Ethiopian Education Research Institute (2016) found that only 30% of children in the town are enrolled in primary school, while the dropout rate is high, particularly among girls (EERI, 2016).

In general, the socioeconomic conditions of Zalambesa town are characterized by poverty, limited access to basic services, and underdeveloped infrastructure. The town's economy is

largely informal, and the majority of the population relies on subsistence agriculture and small-scale trade.



### 3.2. Research Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach to conduct a holistic investigation into the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration. A mixed-methods approach is a methodology wherein the researcher collects, analyzes, and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The fundamental premise for selecting this approach is the recognition that a complex social phenomenon like irregular migration cannot be fully understood through a single methodological lens.

The rationale for this choice is grounded in the complementary strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher incorporates methods of collecting or analyzing data from the quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single research study (Creswell, 2012). Neither approach, when used in isolation, would be sufficient to capture the intricate details of the research problem. Quantitative data provides the breadth necessary to identify broad patterns, trends, and the scale of impacts across the sample. In contrast, qualitative data offers the depth required to explore the nuanced, contextual, and lived experiences of individuals and families affected by migration.

By systematically combining these two approaches, this study aimed to achieve a more comprehensive, robust, and well-validated understanding. The integration of both types of

data allows for a richer interpretation, as the qualitative findings can help explain and contextualize the statistical results from the quantitative data (Aitken & Herman, 2009). Ultimately, this approach was deemed the most productive and practical means to investigate the research problem thoroughly, ensuring both the validity and reliability of the findings.

### **3.3. Research Design**

Research design is an extensive blueprint prepared for answering specific research questions or testing specific hypotheses (Nayak & Priyanka, 2015). This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration. This design is characterized by the concurrent, yet separate, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in a single research phase. The core principle of this approach is that both quantitative and qualitative methods are given equal priority to address the research questions from different perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

The procedure for this design involved three distinct stages. First, both the quantitative data (e.g., from questionnaire) and qualitative data (e.g., from in-depth interviews and FGDs ) were gathered simultaneously. Second, the two datasets were analyzed independently using their respective analytical techniques statistical analysis for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The third and most critical stage involved merging the two sets of results during the interpretation phase. This integration is not merely a side-by-side presentation of findings but a deliberate process of comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing the results to form a cohesive and complete picture (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

The primary rationale for selecting the convergent parallel design stems from its capacity for triangulation. By directly comparing the statistical trends from the quantitative data with the rich, contextual narratives from the qualitative data, this study sought to determine whether the findings from both methods would converge to support a single, overarching conclusion, or diverge to reveal contradictions or paradoxes that require further explanation (Jick, 1979; Creswell & Clark, 2018). This process significantly enhances the validity and credibility of the research findings.

Furthermore, this design leverages the complementary strengths of each method to offset the weaknesses of the other. While the quantitative strand offers a broad, generalizable perspective on the prevalence and scale of socio-economic impacts, the qualitative strand

provides depth, meaning, and a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences behind the numbers (Morse, 2016). By bringing these two forms of knowledge together, the convergent parallel design facilitates a more robust, holistic, and richly detailed understanding of the complex phenomenon of irregular migration than could be achieved through either a quantitative or qualitative approach alone.

### **3.4. Sources of Data**

To ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the research problem, this study utilized both primary and secondary data sources.

#### **3.4.1. Primary Data Sources**

Primary data, representing original information collected directly for this research, formed the core of the study. These data were gathered firsthand from individuals with direct experience and knowledge of irregular migration in Zalambesa town. The sources included irregular migrant returnees, families of migrants, local community members (including religious and school leaders) and government officials from relevant town and kebele offices

The primary data were collected using a combination of methods, including in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and questionnaires, which are detailed in the data collection section.

#### **3.4.2. Secondary Data Sources**

To supplement and contextualize the primary data, the study also drew upon secondary sources. This involved a systematic review of existing documents and literature. Sources included official reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic articles and journals, published books, and other relevant documents pertaining to migration patterns and their socio-economic consequences. This secondary data provided a broader context and served as a basis for comparing the findings from the primary data.

### **3.5. Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

#### **3.5.1. Sampling Strategy**

Due to the nature of the target population specifically, the lack of a comprehensive and accessible list of irregular migrants this study employed a non-probability sampling strategy.

This approach was the most practical and effective method for accessing a hidden and hard-to-reach population. Within this strategy, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used for the qualitative components, while a non-probability approach was also used for the quantitative survey.

### **3.5.2. Sampling Techniques**

**Purposive Sampling:** This technique was used to select participants who possessed specific knowledge and expertise relevant to the research questions. Key informants from governmental and non-governmental organizations were deliberately selected based on their professional roles and insights into the phenomenon of irregular migration. This included officials from the town's Labor and Social Affairs Office, youth and sport office, and other administrative bodies. This method ensures that the data collected is "information-rich" and directly pertinent to the study's objectives (Patton, 2015).

**Snowball Sampling:** To recruit irregular migrant returnees and their families, a snowball sampling technique was employed. This method is particularly effective when study subjects are difficult to locate (Kothari, 2004). The process began by identifying a few initial participants, often with assistance from local offices or community contacts. After being interviewed, these participants were asked to refer the researcher to other individuals within their network who met the study's criteria (Bryman, 2012). This chain-referral process continued until the required sample size was approached and data saturation was achieved, allowing the researcher to access participants who might otherwise have been inaccessible.

### **3.5.3. Participant Selection Criteria**

Regarding the sample size of the study area, according to Pilot, Beck, & Hungler (2001), sampling criteria were developed from the research problem, purpose, design, and conceptual and operational definitions of the study. To ensure the relevance and consistency of the data, specific inclusion criteria were established for the primary research participants (migrant returnees). Participants were required to:

1. Be an irregular migrant who returned from abroad to Zalambesa town from 2020 to the present.
2. Be currently residing in Zalambesa town.
3. Be willing to voluntarily share their experiences.
4. Be able to communicate in Tigrigna, Amharic, or English.

5. Be 18 years of age or older.
6. The criteria included both male and female participants to ensure gender representation.

#### **3.5.4. Sample Size Determination and Composition**

The total sample size for this study was **108** participants, strategically divided into quantitative and qualitative components to align with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The study was conducted across four purposively selected kebeles in Zalambesa town: Adisalem, Aratkilo, Mbraktsehay, and Araguro, chosen to capture a diverse range of community perspectives.

#### **Qualitative Sample**

The qualitative portion of the study comprised a total of 58 participants, distributed across in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). For the IDIs, KIIs and FGDs, the primary principle for determining the sample size was data saturation. As defined by Aldiabat and Navenec (2018), data saturation is the point at which the collection of new data no longer yields any new themes, insights, or information. Therefore, the researcher engaged in an iterative process of data collection and concurrent analysis, continuing to recruit participants until a rich and comprehensive understanding of their experiences was achieved and the data became repetitive.

#### **Quantitative Sample**

The sample size for the quantitative component, consisting of 50 questionnaire participants, was justified based on the principles of adequacy for descriptive analysis and the logic of the mixed-methods design. Since this study employs non-probability sampling with a hard-to-reach population, a traditional power analysis for determining sample size was not applicable. Instead, a sample of 50 was deemed sufficient to achieve the study's descriptive aims: identifying key patterns, frequencies, and trends related to the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration (VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007).

Crucially, the purpose of this quantitative data is not to provide standalone, generalizable findings, but to serve a complementary role to the qualitative data within the convergent parallel framework. A sample of 50 provides a robust quantitative snapshot that reveals the scope of certain phenomena (the "what"), which is then explained and contextualized by the

rich, in-depth data from the 58 qualitative participants (the "why" and "how"). This integration is central to the research design, allowing for a more comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The composition of the total sample is detailed in Table below.

<b>Research Component</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Sample Size (n)</b>
<b>Quantitative</b>	Questionnaire	Irregular Migrant Returnees	<b>50</b>
<b>Qualitative</b>	In-depth Interviews (IDI)	Irregular Migrants & Households	25
	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	Irregular Migrant Returnees	18
	Key Informant Interviews (KII)	Officials & Community Leaders	15
	<b>Sub-total Qualitative</b>		<b>58</b>
<b>Total Sample Size</b>			<b>108</b>

To ensure the independence of the quantitative and qualitative data strands prior to their analytical integration, rigorous measures were taken to ensure that no individual participated in more than one form of data collection. For example, a respondent who completed the questionnaire was not eligible to participate in an in-depth interview or a focus group discussion.

### **3.6. Data Collection Instruments**

To effectively achieve the study's objectives, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments was utilized. The primary instruments included a structured questionnaire, in-depth interview guides, key informant interview guides, a focus group discussion guide, non-participant observation checklists, and a document review protocol.

#### **3.6.1. Quantitative Data Collection Instrument: Questionnaire**

The primary instrument for quantitative data collection was a structured questionnaire. A questionnaire is a research instrument comprising a series of questions designed to gather specific information from a sample of respondents (Babbie, 1990).

The questionnaire was designed with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions provided standardized, quantifiable data suitable for descriptive statistical

analysis, while the few open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide brief, clarifying remarks.

The purpose of employing a questionnaire was to efficiently collect standardized information on the demographic characteristics and socio-economic conditions of a relatively large number of participants (n=50) within a limited timeframe. This method minimizes interviewer bias and, by using a consistent set of questions, ensures that the collected data is comparable across all respondents (Kothari, 2004).

The questionnaire was developed in English and then professionally translated into Tigrigna to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness for the participants. To further guarantee accuracy, a back-translation process was considered to check for conceptual equivalence. The researcher trained local enumerators who administered the questionnaires. These assistants were responsible for distributing and collecting the instruments and were instructed to provide assistance to any illiterate participants by reading the questions aloud and recording their answers verbatim.

### **3.6.2. Qualitative Data Collection Instruments**

To gather rich, contextual data, several qualitative instruments were employed.

#### **a) In-depth Interview (IDI) Guide**

In-depth interviews were a primary tool for exploring the personal thoughts, views, and detailed experiences of participants (Delpont, 2005). An in-depth interview is a crucial data collection instrument to obtain information on highly complex and sensitive subject matters from particularly well-informed respondents in the study area (Greeff, 2005).

A semi-structured interview guide was developed with a list of open-ended questions and probes. This format ensured that key research topics were covered consistently across all interviews while providing the flexibility to explore emergent themes and individual narratives in detail. The primary intention of using IDIs was to delve deeply into complex and sensitive aspects of the migration experience, gathering nuanced information that is often unobtainable through more structured methods (Mason, 2002). IDIs were conducted with 25 selected research participants, including both migrant returnees and their household members.

#### **b) Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide**

Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who possessed specialized knowledge or a unique perspective on the issue of irregular migration. The KIIs were guided by a list of broad, unstructured questions designed to facilitate an in-depth conversation.

This method was used to understand the broader institutional and community-level context of irregular migration, including its perceived consequences and the official responses to it. Informants were selected purposively based on their roles in the community (e.g., government officials, community leaders). The unstructured format allowed these well-informed individuals the freedom to provide detailed information and expert insights.

### **c) Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide**

Focus group discussions were utilized to collect information on shared experiences, social norms, and community perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). FGD is a methodology that enables a researcher to collect plenty of information from a group of individuals, allowing participants to expand on each other's responses (Beya & Nicoll, 2000).

A carefully planned FGD guide with a series of discussion prompts was used. A total of 18 participants were divided into three separate groups of six. To foster a permissive and non-threatening environment, the groups were segmented by gender (one all-male group, one all-female group, and one mixed-gender group). Each discussion was facilitated by the researcher, lasted approximately 50-60 minutes, and was audio-recorded with participants' consent, while a note-taker captured key points and non-verbal cues.

The goal of the FGDs was to capture a wide range of views and observe the interactions and agreements or disagreements among participants, thereby providing insights into collective understandings of the drivers and consequences of irregular migration.

### **d) Non-Participant Observation Checklist**

Observation is a method of gathering data by systematically watching and recording behaviors, events, and contextual details in their natural setting (Kothari, 2004). This study employed non-participant observation, where the researcher observed social settings and interactions without becoming actively involved. A checklist was used to guide the observation, focusing on the general living conditions, social infrastructure, and economic activities in the study area.

The intention was to gather contextual information that could help the researcher better understand the participants' narratives and to triangulate data collected through interviews and FGDs. This supplementary technique helps to reduce informant bias by comparing what people say with what is actually happening in the natural setting (Creswell, 2012).

#### **e) Document Review**

To supplement the primary data, a review of existing documents was conducted.

The researcher systematically collected and analyzed relevant documents from sources such as the Zalambesa town administration, local non-governmental organizations, and reports from the Labour and Social Affairs Office (LSAO). This review served to provide historical context, statistical background, and an understanding of the official policies and programs related to migration in the region. This information was crucial for contextualizing the primary findings and corroborating information provided by participants.

### **3.7. Method of Data Analysis**

In accordance with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the data analysis process involved three distinct stages: the separate analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration of the results.

#### **3.7.1. Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data, collected through the 50 questionnaires, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. All raw data were first coded and entered into a statistical software package (such as Microsoft Excel) for management and analysis. The analysis focused on generating frequencies and percentages to summarize participant demographics and to quantify key trends, patterns, and the prevalence of specific socio-economic challenges. This process provided a broad, numerical overview of the research problem, addressing the "what" and "how much" questions of the study.

#### **3.7.2. Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data, gathered from in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions, were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was chosen for its flexibility and its ability to identify, analyze, and report patterns (or themes) within the rich,

narrative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a systematic, multi-step process:

1. **Familiarization:** The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts and notes to become deeply familiar with the content.
2. **Initial Coding:** Salient statements, ideas, and experiences were systematically coded to identify interesting features across the entire dataset.
3. **Theme Generation:** The various codes were collated and grouped into potential themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions.
4. **Review and Refinement:** The generated themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data and formed a coherent pattern.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each final theme was clearly defined and given a concise name.

This rigorous process allowed for the emergence of a deep, contextualized understanding of the lived realities and underlying reasons behind the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration.

### **3.7.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

The final and most critical stage of the analysis was the integration of the separately analyzed quantitative and qualitative results. In line with the convergent parallel design, the findings were merged to compare, contrast, and triangulate the data. This was achieved by placing the statistical findings from the descriptive analysis alongside the thematic findings from the qualitative analysis. This side-by-side comparison allowed the researcher to identify areas of convergence, where the qualitative narratives confirmed or enriched the quantitative trends, as well as areas of divergence, where contradictions or unique insights emerged. This integration produced a more comprehensive, nuanced, and validated understanding of the research problem than either method could have achieved alone (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

### **3.8. Ethical Considerations**

The researcher adhered to a strict code of ethical conduct throughout the entire research process to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. The following key ethical principles were upheld:

### **3.8.1. Institutional Approval and Permission**

Prior to commencing fieldwork, the researcher obtained an official letter of cooperation from the Department of Civics and Ethical Studies at Mekelle University. This letter was formally presented to the relevant administrative offices in Zalambesa town to secure official permission and support for the study.

### **3.8.2. Informed Consent**

All individuals were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Before any data collection began, the researcher provided each potential participant with a clear and comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, expected duration, and the nature of their involvement. They were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Written or verbal consent was obtained from all participants before proceeding with questionnaires or interviews.

### **3.8.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

To protect the privacy of participants, strict confidentiality was maintained. All personal data, including names and identifying details, were removed from transcripts and datasets and replaced with pseudonyms or codes. The data has been stored securely and is accessible only to the researcher. In the final thesis and any subsequent publications, all information is presented in an aggregated and anonymized format to ensure that no individual can be identified.

### **3.8.4. Prevention of Harm**

The researcher remained sensitive to the fact that discussing experiences of irregular migration could be emotionally distressing for some participants. Participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question or to stop the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The research was conducted in a safe, private, and respectful manner to minimize any potential for psychological or social harm.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected to investigate the multifaceted socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration originating from Zalambesa Town. The findings are meticulously derived from a triangulated mixed-methods research design, which synergizes quantitative data from 50 questionnaires with rich qualitative insights from 25 in-depth interviews with returned migrants and migrants' families, 18 participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with returned migrants, and 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government and non-governmental officials. This methodological approach provides a holistic understanding by embedding statistical findings within the lived experiences of individuals and the expert assessments of officials. The analysis is thematically structured to first establish the demographic and socioeconomic context that precipitates migration. It then systematically deconstructs the primary drivers of these movements, followed by an in-depth exploration of the profound economic and social challenges that emerge for the migrants, their families, and the community at large. The chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of institutional responses, thereby setting the stage for the final conclusions and recommendations.

### 4.1. Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile of Participants

A thorough understanding of the demographic and socioeconomic landscape of Zalambesa is fundamental to comprehending the complex dynamics of irregular migration. The study engaged a diverse unit of 108 participants, ensuring a multi-perspective view of the phenomenon.

**Table 4.1: Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile of participants**

Variables	Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	74	68.5
	Female	34	31.5
	Total	108	100.0
Age Group	Under 20	16	14.8

	21-30	36	33.3
	31-40	36	33.3
	41-50	12	11.1
	51 years and over	8	7.4
	Total	108	100.0
Marital Status	Married	75	69.4
	Unmarried	33	30.6
	Total	108	100.0
Educational Status	Illiterate	49	45.4
	Primary Education completed	42	38.9
	Secondary Education completed	12	11.1
	BA Degree and above	5	4.6
	Total	108	100.0
Primary source of income	Day labor	19	17.6
	Remittances	26	24.1
	Farmer	10	9.3
	Trader	12	11.1
	Government Employee	7	6.4
	Unemployed	34	31.5
	Total	108	100.0

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The demographic data presented in Table 4.1 paints a stark picture of a community contending with structural vulnerabilities that foster an environment ripe for high-risk migration. Several key patterns emerge:

**A Crisis of Youth Unemployment:** The most striking finding is the prevalence of economic inactivity. With 31.5% of respondents identifying as unemployed and a further 24.1% dependent on remittances, over half the sample population lacks stable, local income-generating opportunities. This economic insecurity is particularly acute among the youth. The age distribution reveals that the primary migratory component consists of young and middle-aged adults (21-40 years), who constitute a significant 66.6% of the participants. This group represents the town's most productive demographic, yet they are the most affected by the lack of viable livelihoods.

**The Gendered Nature of Migration:** The data indicates that males (68.5%) are significantly more likely to be involved in irregular migration than females (31.5%). This highlights the gendered dimensions of the phenomenon, where men are often pushed by societal expectations to be primary workers, leading them to undertake dangerous journeys. As will be explored in Section 4.3.1, this has profound consequences for the women and families left behind.

**The Education-Opportunity Mismatch:** A critical insight is the disconnect between educational attainment and employment prospects. A substantial portion of participants has completed primary (38.9%) or secondary (11.1%) education. This profile is not one of an uneducated populace, but rather of a community whose investment in basic education yields no local economic return. This mismatch fuels immense frustration and a sense of hopelessness, making the narrative of overseas success powerfully seductive. The voice of a 22-year-old returned migrant powerfully illustrates this link:

*“I am 22 years old and single. I finished my secondary education but couldn't find a job, so I worked as a day laborer whenever possible before deciding to leave.”*

This personal testimony acts as a narrative bridge, directly connecting the statistical reality of youth unemployment to the individual, life-altering decision to migrate.

In summary, the socioeconomic profile of research participants reveals a community caught in a cycle of poverty and limited opportunity. It is a community with human potential, represented by its educated youth, that is being systematically undermined by a lack of economic dynamism, thereby establishing the fertile ground upon which the drivers of irregular migration thrive.

## 4.2. Economic Challenges of Irregular Migration

While initiated with the hope of economic deliverance, the reality of irregular migration is fraught with severe financial challenges that frequently trap migrants and their families in a cycle of debt and disappointment, fundamentally reshaping the local economy in the process.

**Table 4.2: Community Perception of Economic Challenges**

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Remittances have increased economic inequality	9 (18%)	35 (70%)	6 (12%)	0 (0%)
Migration has led to a shortage of local labor	2 (4%)	12 (24%)	31 (62%)	5 (10%)

Source: Field survey, 2025.

### 4.2.1. Unemployment and Livelihood Insecurity

The foundational economic driver and persistent challenge identified by participants is the pervasive lack of local economic opportunities, particularly for the youth. A participant in an FGD clearly articulated the post-war desperation:

*“After the war, all the shops closed, farming collapsed, and even government offices were not functioning. We were idle for months. What else can a young person do? We were forced to migrate.”*

This sentiment of migration as an economic necessity rather than a choice was echoed repeatedly. An educated but unemployed interviewed returnee elucidated, “I am a graduate, but I have never worked a day in my profession. I stayed home for three years. I saw others migrate and succeed, so I followed.” This points to a structural failure, a view supported by a KII who stated, “Zalambesa is a forgotten town. No industry, no investments... it leads for gross unemployment.” The consistent narrative across interviews is that the town’s weak economic infrastructure, decimated by conflict, pushes youth toward perilous migration paths out of a perception that remaining in Zalambesa offers no future.

Participants associate migration with a sense of economic despair and unemployment. The town’s weak economic infrastructure, worsened by the conflict, pushes youth toward risky

migration paths. There is a perception that remaining in Zalambesa offers no future. Other FGDs in the study mentioned about how the challenge is as follows:

*“Most of the youth here had no job, no land, and no support. That’s why many of us saw migration as the only option. “If there were enough job opportunities in Zalambesa, my son would not have risked his life in the desert.”*

The absence of stable employment and local income-generating options was repeatedly cited. Participants described migration as an economic necessity rather than a choice. Post-war disruptions in farming and trade exacerbated this.

#### **4.2.2. Economic Hardship**

The main problem that the irregular migrants faced at Zalambesa town is economic hardship. Data gathered from the KII of the study show that being irregular migrants were led to be forcefully deported before they got ready enough. They returned home with empty pockets as they did not collect their salaries. They also left behind all their material resources at their place of destination. Consequently, upon their arrival at home, they faced severe financial problems to help themselves with their daily-based basic needs” expenses.

One female returnee described the severity of financial hardship she faced upon her return follows:

*“I just returned an empty pocket even without holding some clothes for change. I could not ask my parents for money since they are poor and they have still expected to get my support which they were receiving while I was in Saudi Arabia. As a result, I am now facing a difficulty of even to cover my daily basic needs’ expenses.”*

The study further revealed that the irregular migrants were returned home without getting adequate money. Hence, they got no money to set up their own business after return. This, in turn, becomes a massive dare in their economic reintegration into the community to which they did return. Other irregular migrant mentioned how he struggled with the economic problems he encountered to initiate her own private business as follows:

*“I departed after I stayed only six months; then after that I wanted to start a business in order to earn income for my survival by borrowing money from my relatives because my families have nothing to sell. They sold all their cattle to*

*send me. The smallest and less capital intensive business which I wanted to engage was making coffee and tea for sale. But, when I calculated the initial capital, it became more than 50000 Birr. But, the financial capital is so hard to get.”*

The data gathered from an interview showed how the irregular migration made the economic hardship more challenging. Interviews conducted with KII from Zalambesa town OLSA showed how the economic hardships which the irregular migrants is the core challenge. The informants highlighted that the irregular migrants faced deportation when they were not get financial capital than when they left their homeland immediately. Hence, the migrants failed to cope up.

#### **4.2.3. Migration-Related Debt and Financial Risk**

The most immediate and catastrophic economic challenge is the immense debt incurred to finance the migratory journey. The qualitative data reveals a pattern of high-stakes financial risk-taking where families liquidate multi-generational assets, such as land and cattle, or take loans from informal lenders at excessive interest rates.

The testimony of a migrant's family member provides a heart-wrenching illustration of this financial devastation:

*“Before my son’s migration, I was well known in our kebele... I had many cattle... we all agreed on the idea and gave 110,000 birr from our household and the remaining 100,000 birr we borrowed... But after eight months my son was deported... Now we are in great debt and have lost everything. This has brought us only economic ruin.”*

This powerful narrative reveals a tragic irony: for many, the attempt to escape poverty results not in prosperity, but in a deeper, more entrenched state of economic destitution. As another family member stated, “We borrowed over 200,000 birr... My son was caught in Libya. Now we have nothing, and we are in debt.” This highlights the devastating financial consequences when the gamble of irregular migration fails, creating a cycle of debt that can cripple families for generations.

This supported by KII and FGD participants respectively illustrated “People sell their land, livestock, and even houses just to pay smugglers. When migrants disappear, families are left helpless. “There’s a whole underground economy based on smuggling people. Some benefit, but most lose.” The high financial costs of irregular migration are rarely discussed in policy,

but they are a critical concern for local families. Smugglers benefit at the expense of poor households, and failed migration results in long-term financial ruin.

#### **4.2.4 Failed Remittances and Economic Disappointment**

Remittances represent a central inconsistency in Zalambesa's economy. While it is a vital lifeline for the small minority of successful migrants, their aggregate effect on the community is profoundly disruptive, creates a remittance economy.

On one hand, remittances can be transformative for individual households. One interviewed household head explained:

*“For my family, remittance played a significant role... I built three houses in this town... This helps me to get a good income for other businesses.”*

On the other hand, this influx of external capital fundamentally distorts the local economy and creates negative externalities. As shown in Table 4.2, a combined **88%** of respondents either agree or strongly agree that remittances have increased economic inequality, fostering tangible social tensions.

This perception of inequality is compounded by the creation of a dependency culture. A key informant from the Labour and Social Affairs Office (LSAO) noted the challenge:

*“It was difficult to get rid of the residents from migration... sending a family member abroad became a popular way... to establish an additional source of income.”*

This reliance stifles local entrepreneurship and innovation, creating an economy built on consumption rather than production. For most, however, the expectation of remittances ends in disappointment. As one family member stated, “We expected remittances to start after six months, but instead we heard he was in prison in Yemen. We spent everything and got nothing.”

Thus, data from participants revealed that the myth of economic prosperity abroad often collapses under reality. Migration outcomes are unpredictable, and families invest without guarantees. Many returnees report little to no savings, creating a gap between expectations and reality.

#### 4.2.5. The Depletion of Human Capital: A Dwindling Local Labor Force

The migration of predominantly young, able-bodied, and often educated individuals creates a significant labor shortage and this undermines the productivity of the local economy. This phenomenon, often referred to as human capital flight, is most acutely felt in the agricultural sector. FGD participants articulated this problem with clarity:

*“It is now very difficult and expensive to find daily laborers for farm work. The youth don't want to farm; they only dream of migrating. This hurts our local production.”*

This depletion of the community's most valuable asset depresses local economic activity. In a tragic feedback circle, this decline reinforces one of the primary push factors for migration, creating a vicious cycle of economic stagnation and further out-migration.

#### 4.3. The Social Challenges of irregular migration

Beyond the quantifiable economic sphere, irregular migration imposes deep and enduring difficulties on the social fabric of Zalambesa. It breaks families, erodes community trust, and jeopardizes the future of its youth. The data in Table 4.3, where a vast majority of respondents agreed with the presented social challenges, underlines the severity of these challenges.

**Table 4.3: Community Perception of Social Challenges**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Migration has led to the breakdown of families	8 (16%)	27 (54%)	12 (24%)	3 (6%)
It has caused students to lose interest in education	17 (34%)	23 (46%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)
Returned migrants face social stigma	11 (22%)	29 (58%)	9 (18%)	1 (2%)

*Source: Field survey, 2025.*

### **4.3.1 Family Separation and Psychological Trauma**

The lengthy absence of migrants leads to the fragmentation of the family unit. This places an immense and often unacknowledged burden on the women left behind a phenomenon known as the feminization of responsibility. A woman whose husband and sons had migrated described this double burden:

*“I am tired more than before... As there is no partner in my home, I have to go to village meetings... representing my household... Their migration has imposed many new roles on me.”*

This increased responsibility often occurs without a corresponding increase in women's decision-making power, placing immense stress upon them. The emotional cost is severe. Families suffer prolonged uncertainty and grief. One interviewed parent shared, “I haven't heard from my son for more than two years... I don't know if he is dead or alive.” For those who return, the trauma continues. “My daughter came back from Saudi Arabia after abuse. She is mentally unstable now.” The lack of psychosocial services in Zalambesa means these deep psychological wounds are left unaddressed.

### **4.3.2. Erosion of Social Cohesion and Trust**

The economic disparities driven by remittances are eroding traditional bonds of kinship and solidarity. Unfulfilled expectations regarding remittances often lead to a loss of trust and internal family conflicts. One household head recounted a tragic story of social exclusion after her husband's death during a migration attempt:

*“Upon this problem (debt and loss of her husband), we lose our social support and all of my husband's family excluded me... I suffer from social exclusion... Except for the lucky ones, migration badly impacts the social relations of the migrant's family.”*

A key informant from the LSAO strengthened this, stating, “Cooperation is decreasing... People no longer trust each other, and conflicts over money from abroad are common.” This breakdown of social capital signifies a severe erosion of the community's collective resilience.

### **4.3.3. Devaluation of Education and the Threat of a Lost Generation**

Perhaps the most insidious long-term social challenge is the systematic devaluation of formal education. The powerful pull of getting rich quick through migration undermines the

perceived value of schooling. A key informant from the Zalambesa Education Office confirmed this alarming trend:

*“Many students, even in lower grades, see education as useless. Their only goal is to migrate... We are seeing high dropout rates and a lack of interest in learning.”*

This collective shift in attitude represents a massive future loss of human capital. It threatens to create a generation lost particularly the youth, disengaged from education and lacking the skills necessary for the long-term development of themselves and their own community. This imperils the town's future resilience and its potential for sustainable growth from within.

#### **4.3.4. The Trauma of Return: Social Stigma and Psychological Distress**

For migrants who return unsuccessfully, the journey does not end upon arrival at home. Rather, they faced a dual burden of crippling social stigma and profound, unaddressed psychological trauma. As one returnee lamented, “When I returned empty-handed, people laughed and said I was a failure... If you come back poor, you're nothing.” This social isolation makes reintegration exceptionally difficult. This combination of social isolation and psychological distress, often manifesting as symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), makes effective reintegration exceptionally difficult, leaving them as one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups within the community.

Furthermore, female migrants face extreme, gender-specific vulnerabilities. The trauma is often silenced due to stigma, but its presence is undeniable. One female returnee shared:

*“I was in Yemen with 40 other women. Some were raped by the smugglers... I see other female migrants face hell in detention centers. Some are used as sex slaves. But, no one talks about this.”*

This silence perpetuates a cycle of trauma and impunity, highlighting a critical and overlooked dimension of the migration crisis. One brother of a returned female migrant stated that “My sister became pregnant while migrating. She never talks about what happened. She’s silent, depressed.” Women and girls face gender-specific vulnerabilities from rape and trafficking to sexual exploitation in detention or in transit countries. Most return home without access to mental health care or legal justice, carrying invisible scars.

**Table 4.4: Ranking of the Most Serious Challenge by Respondents**

<b>Most Serious Perceived Challenge</b>	<b>Frequency (N=50)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Economic hardship and debt	24	48.0
Negative impact on education	12	24.0
Social problems (family separation, etc.)	7	14.0
Loss of youth and labor force	4	8.0
Other	3	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey, 2025.*

When asked to rank the most serious challenge, respondents overwhelmingly pointed to economic hardship and debt (48.0%). This confirms that despite the severe social costs, the primary and most acutely felt burden of migration is economic. This is followed by the negative impact on education (24.0%), signaling a deep-seated community anxiety about the long-term future for the next generation.

#### **4.4. The Role of Government Policies and Institutions in Addressing Socioeconomic Challenges of Irregular Migrants**

This section explored the perceived effectiveness of governmental interventions aimed at addressing the socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration. The findings reveal a significant and deeply felt policy-implementation gap, where national policies fail to translate into meaningful action at the local level.

**Table 4.5: Community Perception of Institutional Responses**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
I am aware of specific government policies	7 (14%)	38 (76%)	5 (10%)
Awareness campaigns are effective	4 (8%)	44 (88%)	2 (4%)
The government is creating enough local jobs	3 (6%)	46 (92%)	1 (2%)

*Source: Field survey, 2025.*

The data in Table 4.5 is unambiguous. A staggering **76%** of respondents are unaware of relevant government policies, and an overwhelming **92%** disagree that the government is creating sufficient local job alternatives, pointing to a profound disconnect between the state and the community.

#### **4.4.1. Awareness and Accessibility of Government Policies**

A recurring theme was the widespread lack of awareness about government reintegration policies. A returnee from South Africa stated:

*“When I returned... I expected some form of support, but no one came. I only heard rumors... but in Zalambesa, nothing reached us... It feels like we are forgotten.”*

FGD participants strongly echoed this perception. The participants emphasized that there were mismatch between national-level media announcements and actual local practice:

*“They (the government) say on the Television that there are reintegration programs for returnees, but who has seen them here? None of us have been visited or given any kind of explanation. It's like we're invisible citizens.”*

A KII from the LSAO acknowledged this gap, explaining, “We have reintegration policy frameworks... but there is no systematic dissemination of that information. Our office lacks community-level outreach mechanisms.” This reveals a critical failure in the policy communication chain, rendering well-intentioned policies irrelevant to those they are designed to serve.

#### **4.4.2. Institutional Support and Capacity**

Local institutions lack the financial, technical, and human resources to respond effectively. A returnee deported from Saudi Arabia noted, “The staff was concerned, but they told me frankly: ‘We don’t have anything for irregular migrants, especially after the war we are barely functioning ourselves.’”

This institutional fragility, exacerbated by the recent conflict, undermines the entire reintegration agenda. The Small and Medium Enterprise Office (SMEO) confirmed this, stating, “There is a mismatch between our institutional mandate and our operational capacity... we have neither the funding, training, nor ability to follow up.” This creates a support vacuum where returnees are left entirely on their own. Moreover, FGD study participants elucidated that, We are many, but we are not organized, and the government

offices are too weak to respond. They tell us they have no budget, no coordination, and no program that fits our needs. It's like returning to a home that no longer has room for you.

This theme underlines how institutional fragility, worsened by conflict, undermines the reintegration agenda. A literature on post-conflict reintegration (IOM, 2021) emphasizes, strong local institutions are a prerequisite for sustainable return, but this condition is unmet in Zalambesa.

#### **4.4.3. Policy Implementation Gaps**

Participants widely reported that existing policies were either not implemented or implemented selectively, leading to disillusionment. One returnee expressed his frustration:

*"I saw a news report that returnees would be trained... I went to the administration office twice... I was told 'come back next month.' I stopped going. I realized that policies exist only on paper."*

The Zalambesa administration confirmed this, citing a lack of operational directives and resources: "We work in an implementation vacuum." This gap reflects what scholars like De Haas (2010) term a "policy-practice disjuncture," where national-level intentions are not matched with local capacity, leading to policy failure on the ground.

#### **4.4.4. Reintegration Programs and Their Effectiveness**

This section of the analysis explores the perceived effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental interventions aimed at curbing irregular migration and mitigating its socioeconomic challenges. The findings reveal a significant and deeply felt policy-implementation gap, where national policies and proclamations fail to translate into meaningful action or tangible change at the local level.

Existing reintegration initiatives, where they exist at all, are often poorly designed and fragmented. A participant in an FGD explained:

*"They told us to form youth groups to get business loans, but no one explained how... Some people got training on tailoring, but no machines were provided. What's the use of skills if you can't apply them? It was a waste of hope."*

Research participants in a FGDs elucidated:

*"I was deported from Saudi Arabia. No one from the government called, helped, or even asked how I survived. There's no shelter, no skills training,*

*not even basic counseling. We are left on our own. The government talks about migration control, but not about helping those who return.”*

The lack of reintegration programs reflects institutional neglect. Participants called for job creation, psychosocial support, vocational training, and protection services, especially for vulnerable returnees and women.

The KII from SME office also acknowledged these limitations:

*“Yes, we piloted some reintegration packages in 2024, targeting 20 irregular migrant returnees with small grants and equipment. But, due to lack of monitoring and psycho-social support, many could not sustain the businesses. Some sold the materials to feed their families.”*

This theme emphasizes the importance of holistic and context-sensitive reintegration economic, psychological, and social which was clearly lacking.

#### **4.4.5. Lack of Coordination among Stakeholders**

Fragmentation and lack of institutional coordination were consistently identified as structural weaknesses.

Study participants with returned irregular migrants in FGD and the KII LSAO respectively concurred:

*“We are bounced from one office to another. Social Affairs says it's an economic issue. SME says it's not their mandate. We are tired of going around. They are not speaking to each other, and we're the ones suffering.”*

*“There is no inter-office task force or data-sharing mechanism. Each office runs its own programs independently. Sometimes we duplicate efforts; other times, important groups are left out completely.”*

In support of the above data revealed that, the lack of a multi-sectorial, unified reintegration strategy contributes to inefficiencies, with no single institution accountable for outcomes. As observed in post-war recovery studies, fragmented governance results in policy failure and service exclusion (World Bank, 2022).

The following qualitative data explains how interventions of the government and other stakeholders are failed:

**A Failure to Address Root Causes:** Residents view official interventions as superficial because they do not address the foundational problem of economic desperation. Awareness campaigns, in particular, are seen as patronizing and irrelevant when not accompanied by viable economic alternatives. As one returned migrant powerfully stated: *“The government warns us about the dangers, but these words are empty when we see no jobs here. The pull of a better life is stronger.”*

This quote perfectly captures the core policy failure: words cannot compete with the reality of hunger and lack of opportunity.

**A Disconnect between Top-Down Policy and Local Dynamics:** There is a profound chasm between policies formulated in the capital and the complex social realities on the ground. Smuggling networks are not external forces but are deeply embedded within the community's social fabric. An official candidly acknowledged this challenge:

*“Law enforcement is challenging because smugglers are often relatives or neighbors. The system is informal and deeply rooted. A policy from the capital doesn't easily change the reality on the ground.”* This sentiment was echoed by returned migrants in an FGD, who succinctly noted: *“A proclamation from Addis Ababa doesn't change the reality here on the ground.”*

**The Absence of Formal Support Networks:** In the vacuum left by ineffective formal institutions, community members are forced to rely on their own eroding informal networks. As one participant observed:

*“Even if the government does little, so we rely on each other. Neighbors and other relatives help a family if their migrant son is detained or dies.”*

While this highlights a degree of residual social solidarity, it also underscores the absence of structured, reliable support systems for families in crisis.

This lack of holistic, practical support is compounded by a failure of coordination among stakeholders. “We are bounced from one office to another,” an FGD participant said. “They are not speaking to each other, and we’re the ones suffering.” This fragmented governance ensures that no single institution is accountable for outcomes, leading to inefficiency and the exclusion of the most vulnerable.

#### **4.4.6. Migrants' Trust and Perception of Government Institutions**

The accumulated effect of neglect, exclusion, and inaction has eroded irregular migrant returnees' trust in state institutions. An interviewed study participant revealed,

*“The government never asked why I left or how I returned. They only care if you went legally. I feel punished for being poor and desperate. Now I am back, and it's like I have no country.”*

In addition FGD study participants illustrated, *“Many of us came back traumatized. But instead of support, we face stigma. Some officials blame us for taking illegal routes. We feel like criminals, not citizens.”*

The Zalambesa Administration Office admitted this challenge:

*“There's a lot of mistrust, partly due to limited service delivery. We need to rebuild credibility by showing results not just promises. But that requires resources we currently don't have.”*

These perceptions illustrate how policy failure leads to institutional distrust, which in turn discourages returnees from engaging with public services.

The findings clearly show that while policy frameworks exist, their implementation is undermined by poor coordination, institutional weakness, and resource scarcity. Irregular returnees face exclusion from reintegration programs, lack of communication, and social stigma, leading to deepened marginalization.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

This study investigated the socioeconomic challenges of irregular migration in Zalambesa Town, revealing it to be not merely a livelihood strategy, but a symptom of a deep-seated structural crisis. The findings conclude that this phenomenon is driven by the potent push of endemic poverty and systemic youth unemployment, and the seductive pull of perceived overseas success a narrative amplified by social media and facilitated by entrenched smuggling networks.

The socioeconomic challenges for migrants in Zalambesa town are overwhelmingly negative and dangerously multifaceted.

Economically, the phenomenon creates a destructive paradox. While a small minority of families experience the benefits of remittances, a far greater number are plunged into catastrophic debt, resulting in a net increase in community-wide vulnerability. The influx of remittances has given rise to a disruptive "remittance economy" characterized by localized inflation, deepening inequality, a culture of dependency, and the critical depletion of the local youth labor force, creating a vicious cycle of economic stagnation that ironically fuels further migration.

Socially, the costs are equally severe. Irregular migration systematically fractures families, imposing a feminization of responsibility on women and leaving children in the precarious care of elderly grandparents. It corrodes the very fabric of the community, replacing traditional solidarity with competition, mistrust, and conflict. Most alarmingly, the allure of migration is profoundly devaluing education, threatening to create a "lost generation" and thereby jeopardizing the town's long-term human capital and resilience.

Institutionally, government responses are perceived as fundamentally ineffective. A vast policy-implementation gap exists, where top-down awareness campaigns fail because they are detached from the lived reality of economic desperation. Local institutions tasked with providing support are critically under-resourced and unable to offer the one intervention that could provide a genuine alternative: viable, sustainable, and attractive local jobs.

In essence, Zalambesa town is caught in a debilitating feedback loop where the consequences of migration economic stagnation, social decay, and loss of human capital serve to reinforce the very conditions that drive it.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Based on these comprehensive findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed. They are designed to move beyond superficial interventions and address the root causes and multifaceted challenges of irregular migration in Zalambesa in a strategic, targeted, and sustainable manner.

### 1. Prioritize and Fund Diversified Local Economic Development.

- ❖ The Regional and Federal Governments, in partnership with NGOs and the private sector, must make a significant, long-term investment in creating tangible and attractive local jobs.
- ❖ Establish a government-backed, low-interest micro-credit facility specifically for youth-led enterprises in non-remittance-dependent sectors (e.g., local services, agribusiness value-addition, small-scale manufacturing).
- ❖ Invest in vocational training centers (TVETs) that teach marketable, modern skills (e.g., modern construction, electronics repair, hospitality services) directly linked to identified local and regional economic needs.
- ❖ Launch a program to modernize the agricultural sector by providing subsidized access to drought-resistant seeds, small-scale irrigation technology, and direct market linkages to make farming a more profitable and appealing livelihood for the youth.

### 2. Capacitate and Resource Frontline Social Support Institutions.

- ❖ Municipal offices for Labor, Social Affairs, and Women & Children's Affairs must be adequately funded, staffed with trained social workers, and empowered to provide proactive support.
- ❖ Establish a "One-Stop Reintegration Center" for returned migrants. This center must offer a holistic package of services: confidential psychosocial counseling for trauma, skills retraining, and job placement assistance.
- ❖ Develop community-based support programs for women and grandparents who are acting as primary caregivers, offering material assistance, mental health support, and childcare services to mitigate the severe burdens of family separation identified in the analysis.

**3. Re-orient Educational Messaging to Rebuild Human Capital.**

- ❖ The Zalambesa Education Office must launch a "Reality Check" campaign, co-designed and delivered *by* returned migrants themselves, to provide credible, peer-to-peer testimony about the extreme dangers and low probability of success.
- ❖ Simultaneously, create a "Local Heroes" initiative that publicly celebrates and promotes successful local entrepreneurs, skilled professionals, and innovative farmers as alternative, visible, and respected role models for the youth.

**4. Establish a Local Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on Migration.**

- ❖ A formal task force should be established in Zalambesa town, mandated by the regional government.
- ❖ This body must include municipal officials, religious and community elders, representatives from the education and health sectors, returned migrants, women's group representatives, and youth leaders.
- ❖ Its mandate would be to move beyond dialogue to co-design, implement, and monitor local solutions, ensuring that strategies are grounded in community realities and enjoy local ownership.

**5. Mandate a Bottom-Up Review of National Migration Policy.**

- ❖ Regional and national authorities must formally acknowledge the failure of current top-down policies in communities like Zalambesa town.
- ❖ They should initiate a formal policy review process that actively and meaningfully engages with migrant-sending communities. This should involve field hearings and consultations in areas like Zalambesa town.

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# MEKELLE UNIVERSITY



## COLLEGE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

### DEPARTMENT OF CIVICS AND ETHICAL STUDIES

Research Title: Socio-Economic Challenges of Irregular Migration in Zalambesa Town

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#### **Appendix I: In-depth Interview Guide for Irregular Migrant Returnees and Their Families**

**Purpose:** To gain an in-depth, personal understanding of the lived socio-economic challenges resulting from irregular migration.

#### **Introduction:**

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Yared Birhane, and I am a graduate student conducting academic research. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I am studying the socio-economic challenges that community members face due to irregular migration, and I would like to hear about your personal experiences.

Please be assured that your identity will be kept completely confidential, and all information will be anonymized and used for academic purposes only. You can refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

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#### **Part 1: Background Information**

- Can you tell me a little about your family and your role in the household?
- *(For families)* What is your relationship to the family member who migrated?

- (For returnees) When did you migrate, and when did you return?

## **Part 2: Economic Challenges**

1. (For families) Before your family member migrated, what was your household's main source of income? How has that changed since?
2. (For returnees) What was your primary reason for migrating? What were your economic expectations?
3. Can you describe the process of financing the migration journey? Was it necessary to sell assets (like land, livestock) or take on debt?
4. If debt was taken, how has that debt impacted your family's economic situation today?
5. (For families) Have you received remittances? If so, how have they affected your family's life? If not, what has the financial impact been?
6. (For returnees) Were you able to earn the money you expected? How did the economic reality compare to your expectations?
7. In your opinion, what is the single biggest economic challenge your family has faced because of this migration experience?

## **Part 3: Social Challenges**

8. How did the absence of the migrant family member affect the roles and responsibilities within your household? Can you talk about the impact on the workload of women or grandparents?
9. (For returnees) From your perspective, what was the most difficult social or psychological part of the journey itself?
10. How has the migration affected your family's relationships with neighbors and the wider community? Have you noticed any changes in trust, cooperation, or social support systems like *Idir* or *Equib*?
11. (For returnees) Can you describe what it was like to reintegrate into the community upon your return? Did you face any stigma or judgment

12. What impact have you seen migration have on the motivation of young people in Zalambesa regarding their education or local work?
13. What do you see as the biggest social challenge or change in the community caused by irregular migration?

**Part 4: Reflections and Future Outlook**

14. Looking back, how has this migration experience shaped your family's future?
15. What kind of support is most needed for families or for returnees who are struggling with these challenges?
16. Is there anything else you feel is important for me to understand about this topic?

*Thank you for your time and for sharing your personal story*

## **Appendix II: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for Irregular Migrant Returnees**

**Purpose:** To explore shared perceptions, social norms, and collective socio-economic impacts related to irregular migration within the community.

### **Introduction:**

Welcome, and thank you all for joining this discussion. My name is Yared Birhane, and I am a graduate student. We are here today to talk about how irregular migration is affecting our community in Zalambesa. I want to hear everyone's perspective. There are no right or wrong answers, and every opinion is valuable. The most important thing is that we listen to each other respectfully. This discussion is confidential, and your names will not be used in my research. Let's begin.

### **1. General Perceptions**

- When we say "irregular migration," what comes to mind for people in this community? What are the common stories you hear about the journey and the destination?

### **2. Community Economic Challenges**

- How has the flow of remittances changed the economy of Zalambesa for everyone, not just for the families who receive them? (e.g., impact on prices of goods, housing, land).
- Some people say it is harder to find young people for farm work or local jobs now. What does the group think about this? Has this affected our community's productivity?
- Let's talk about debt. As a community, how common is it for families to go into debt for migration? What happens to those families when the migration fails and the debt remains?

### **3. Community Social Challenges**

- How have family structures in our community changed because of migration? What new burdens are commonly placed on women and the elderly who are left behind?

- Has the way we support each other as a community (for example, through *Idir*) changed because of migration? Is there more or less trust between neighbors now?
- Let's discuss the youth. How has the "dream of migrating" affected young people's attitude towards finishing school and pursuing local opportunities?
- How are returnees, especially those who were deported or returned without success, treated in the community? Is there support for them, or do they face challenges?

#### **4. Interventions & Solutions**

- From your perspective, are the government's awareness campaigns about the dangers of migration effective? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the single biggest challenge our town faces because of migration?
- As a community, what can we do to support those who are struggling? What kind of solutions would actually make a difference here in Zalambesa?

*Thank you all for this insightful discussion. Your shared perspectives are crucial for this research.*

## **Appendix III: Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide for Officials and Institutional Stakeholders**

*(e.g., Woreda Administration, Education Office, Labor and Social Affairs Office, Local Law Enforcement)*

**Purpose:** To gather expert and institutional perspectives on the systemic socio-economic challenges of irregular migration, policy responses, and operational gaps.

### **Introduction:**

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Yared Birhane, and I am a graduate student conducting academic research for my thesis. Thank you for making time for this interview. Given your role and expertise, I am keen to understand the institutional perspective on the socio-economic challenges of irregular migration in Zalambesa. This information is strictly for academic purposes and will be handled with full confidentiality. May I proceed?

### **1. Role and General Assessment**

- From your institution's perspective, what is the current scale of irregular migration originating from Zalambesa? Is the trend increasing, decreasing, or stable?
- Which demographic group (in terms of age, gender, and education level) do you observe as being most affected or involved?

### **2. Analysis of Socio-Economic Challenges**

- In your assessment, what are the most severe **economic** challenges that irregular migration poses to the town's development (e.g., labor shortages in key sectors, dependency on remittances, impact on local markets)?
- What are the most pressing **social** challenges you observe (e.g., school dropout rates, family disintegration, erosion of social cohesion, new burdens on public services)?
- What are the specific challenges related to the **reintegration** of deported or returned migrants? Does your institution have a formal role in this process?

### **3. Policy and Institutional Response**

- Can you describe the key government policies, strategies, or local proclamations currently in place to address irregular migration?
- In your view, what are the main barriers to the effective implementation of these policies on the ground here in Zalambesa (e.g., lack of resources, limited coordination, lack of community buy-in)?
- How effective are law enforcement and judicial efforts in tackling the smugglers and brokers who facilitate this migration? What are the challenges in this area?

### **4. Gaps and Strategic Recommendations**

- In your opinion, what is the biggest gap in the current response to the challenges of irregular migration? Is it in prevention, support for families left behind, or reintegration of returnees?
- From an institutional standpoint, what strategic interventions would be most effective in mitigating the negative socio-economic impacts in Zalambesa?
- How could collaboration be improved between different government bodies, NGOs, and the community to address this issue more effectively?

*Thank you for your valuable time and expert insights. This has been very helpful for my research.*

## **Appendix IV: Survey Questionnaire**

**Purpose:** To collect quantitative data on the prevalence and perceived severity of the socio-economic challenges of irregular migration in Zalambesa.

### **Introduction:**

I am a graduate student conducting academic research on the challenges of migration in our town. Your participation in this short survey would be greatly appreciated. All your answers will be kept anonymous and confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Please mark the answer that best fits your situation or opinion.

### **Section 1: Demographic Information**

#### **1. Gender:**

- A. Male                      B. Female

#### **2. Age Group:**

- A. 18-25              B. 26-35              C. 36-45              D. 46+

#### **3. Highest Education Level Completed:**

- A. No formal education  
B. Primary School  
C. Secondary School  
D. TVET/Diploma  
E. University Degree or above

#### **4. Primary Source of Household Income:**

- A. Farming  
B. Daily Labor  
C. Government Employment  
D. Private Business/Trading  
E. Remittances  
F. Unemployed

## **Section 2: Household Experience with Migration**

**5. Has a member of your immediate household migrated irregularly in the past 5 years?**

- A. Yes                      B. No

**6. To finance a family member's migration, did your household have to sell assets or take on debt?**

- A. Yes, we went into significant debt  
B. Yes, we sold some assets  
C. No, we used savings  
D. Not Applicable

## **Section 3: Perceived Socio-Economic Challenges**

*(Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.)*

**7. Lack of local job opportunities is the main reason people migrate from our town.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

**8. The migration of young people has led to a shortage of labor for farming and local work.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

**9. Remittances have increased economic inequality between families in the community.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

**10. Irregular migration has led to the separation and breakdown of many families.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

**11. The dream of migration has caused many students to lose interest in their education.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

**12. Returned migrants often face stigma and have a difficult time reintegrating into the community.**

- A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Disagree   D. Strongly Disagree

#### **Section 4: Perception of Institutional Response**

**13. I am aware of specific government policies or programs against irregular migration.**

A. Yes B. No C. Unsure

**14. Government awareness campaigns are effective at stopping people from migrating.**

A. Agree B. Disagree C. Unsure

**15. In your opinion, what is the single most serious challenge caused by irregular migration in Zalambesa? (Please select only one.)**

- A. Economic hardship and debt for families
- B. Social problems (like family separation)
- C. Loss of youth and the local labor force
- D. Negative impact on education and youth motivation
- E. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for your participation!***