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Criminalization and Multiple Marginalization of Migrant Street Children in Ethiopia

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Abstract

In Ethiopia, particularly in the Amhara Region, there has been an increase in the number of children leaving rural villages and becoming homeless in cities. This study analyses the uniquely harsh challenges these children face as homeless migrants in unfamiliar urban environments, focusing on how a new system of migrant classification is intensifying their hardship. Contrary to the prevailing perspective in previous studies, which accentuated exploitation and health hazards as outcomes of urban inexperience, this analysis, drawing on data collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations, contends that they are disproportionately viewed as criminals when contrasted with other migrant demographics. Cut off from regular work and contribution to the urban economy as low-wage labourers, they lack community support and consequently endure constant hunger, compelling them to scavenge for scraps in public waste bins. Frequently blamed for instances of public littering and urban pollution, and viewed with suspicion as potential security threats, migrant street children are subjected to violence, surveillance, and detention. The experiences encountered by migrant groups are not uniform, and a more nuanced understanding of their specific circumstances requires a departure from a homogenised, generalised approach to migrants. Understanding the distinct criminalisation and stigmatisation of homeless children is essential to formulate effective intervention strategies. To address the specific needs of these children and facilitate their successful reintegration into society, targeted psychological support, entrepreneurial training, and legal protections are required.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Amhara Region, Migration, Challenges, Migrant Street Children