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Migrant Youth Informed Policy Guide

The Stories, Reflections, and Policy Recommendations of
Migrant Youth

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Introduction & Summary

Background: There are approximately 258 million migrants in the world, with youth migrants making up about 12.8% of international migrants. Though immigration is a top concern of many governments and organizations, migrants, themselves, are rarely consulted in the policy making process. Moreover, as called for by the UN World Youth Report, a more accessible, inclusive way for vulnerable migrant youth to be involved in the policies that affect them is crucial. Thus, this project documents the stories of migrant youth and compiles their recommendations on how governments, the UN, nonprofit organizations, and/or companies can best support them. **While decision makers argue over what migrant youth need, this resource seeks to give migrants a platform to voice their needs directly.**

Methods: All migrants that participated in this project are either currently aged 15-24, or were in that age group at the time of their migration. Participants were encouraged to share their stories and recommendations in whichever way was most convenient and comfortable for them. Though guiding questions were provided, migrants could share as much or as little as they wished. Answers were collected through written surveys and video calls. All languages were welcomed, and migrants to/from any country were encouraged to participate.

Participants: Four migrants generously shared their stories and offered their perspectives on policy and public opinion regarding migration. Migrant A, or Yonas, escaped Eritrea by a journey filled with imprisonment, torture, being held hostage, and other atrocities. Now, he has been waiting three years for his refugee status interview with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), but it seems to be postponed indefinitely, leaving him stuck in Egypt. Migrant B is a young woman who recently fled Honduras and immigrated to the United States. She was detained at the border and separated from her sister. Now she hopes to find a way to pursue her education and build a life in the United States. Migrant C, or Kwame, reflected on his time as an undocumented Ghanaian immigrant in Europe. He worked for years, until a promotion led to his deportation. He now runs an NGO working with vulnerable communities around the dangers of migration. Finally, Migrant D is a college student who immigrated from Ethiopia to the United States in the third grade. She reflects on the experience of migrating at such a young age and the complexities of the immigration process.

Outcomes: The stories and policy recommendations of all four migrants are included in this report. **These recommendations are not all-inclusive, but rather set a precedent of including stakeholders at the decision-making table.** An initial analysis of their recommendations shows five major insights. A detailed explanation of these insights is in the “Comparison & Analysis” section of the report. At a glance the 5 major insights are as follows:

1. **Migration is often the only option.** Every single migrant, regardless of background, wished that people understood that leaving one’s country is “often the last resort,” birthed out of necessity and filled with hardship.
2. **There is a [false] promise of the ‘West.’** All of the migrants alluded to a ‘promise’ of a better life in ‘Western’ countries that appeared to be unachievable elsewhere. However, the migrants that have since lived in either the United States or Europe find some degree of falseness to this promise.

3. **Prioritize job opportunities & safe migration: they often go hand in hand.** Many of the migrants articulated a need for policy that acknowledges the mutual benefits of migrant labor for migrants and the host country. Policy that focuses on the benefits of migrant employment would likely also create much safer pathways for migration.
4. **Families should not be separated.**
5. **Experience translates to expertise: migrants are experts on migration issues.** Notably, two migrants use their migration experiences to inform their NGO work. Their migration journeys uniquely position them to anticipate migration related issues in a way that most non-migrants would likely be unable to.

Interviews

Migrant A (pseudonym Yonas)

Yonas is originally from Eritrea but was born in Saudi Arabia, where his father worked as a diplomat for the Eritrean government. When he was five, his family moved back to Eritrea due to a change in his father's work, and Yonas began primary school there. In 2012, as mandated by Eritrean law, Yonas completed 12th grade at Sawa, an Eritrean military training camp. After 12th grade, Yonas and his peers took a matriculation test that would determine if they stayed in the military or went to college. Luckily, Yonas passed and went to a college in a town on the border with Ethiopia.

However, while Yonas was at Sawa, his father was arrested by the Eritrean government. Because he was unable to receive any communication during his military trainings, Yonas was unaware of his father's arrest for some time. Moreover, Yonas' family was never told the reason for the arrest nor did they know where his father was. Yonas explained that this type of disappearance is not uncommon in Eritrea, and that the government could often exercise such power without question.

In 2013, Yonas arrived home and discovered his father's disappearance. He describes, “[his family’s] whole life changed, financially, mentally, emotionally.” Anything that belonged to his father—money, the family home, cars, etc. —became the government’s. Seeing his family go from a stable life to being unable to fulfill their basic needs filled Yonas with stress and anxiety. He began to see his mother cry daily, due to Eritrean national security’s interference with their daily life and because of the way neighbors and relatives isolated the family. So, losing hope after his father’s arrest, Yonas decided to leave the dictatorial regime of Eritrea. Because of the government’s close watch, it was impossible for the whole family to leave; Yonas would have to go alone.

In 2015, Yonas withdrew from college “in order to chase [his] dream but also to help [his mom], and [his] family financially.” The only way for Yonas to leave Eritrea was to make a deal with smugglers to go through Sudan or Ethiopia. Though Sudan was certainly the safer route, it would cost \$5000. So, Yonas tried going through Ethiopia, knowing there was a ‘shoot to kill’ policy at the border. He was arrested, as many of those who try to escape are. However, because the officers knew who Yonas’ family was, they put him in extra harsh conditions—a prison Yonas described as “the Hell of Eritrea.” At Mai Swera prison, a branch of what is known

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as the worst prison in Eritrea, he was tortured for 6 months and kept in a shipping container with no access to the outside world. Then, Yonas was transferred to a military camp on the border. After 4 months of observing the ins and outs of the camp, he was able to escape to Ethiopia.

Once in Ethiopia, Yonas went under investigation by the Ethiopian government, before he was given asylum papers and admitted to a refugee camp. He recalls, **“There is no life on the camp. The life of a camp is very hard.”** The food that he was given was not enough to sustain him. After two months, he knew he had to go to Sudan. Again, the only way he was able to leave was with smugglers. He traveled for 9 days before the hired smuggler handed Yonas and others off to another smuggler, who held Yonas and the migrants hostage in a remote village in the Sahara Desert. They were told if their families could not pay an additional \$5,000, their organs would be harvested for profit instead. After pleading with the smuggler and enduring more torture, Yonas was forced to call his mother, knowing his family’s poor financial situation. The smuggler gave her one week to gather \$5,000 to save Yonas’ life; until then, he would continue to torture her son. She desperately spoke to everybody she knew and was able to come up with \$3,000 of borrowed money. That was all Yonas’ family would be able to offer. Fortunately, the smuggler accepted the money, but waited almost 3 weeks before he sent Yonas and the others in the in a car to Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan.

After 6 hours on the route to Khartoum, Sudanese soldiers spotted the smuggler’s car and began chasing them. The smuggler sped up, going almost 140 km an hour in the Sahara Desert, with an open doored car. The soldiers shot the car in attempts to stop it, but the smuggler went faster, even after one of the migrants fell out of the car. In the process, Yonas lost fourteen teeth and severely injured his back after being hit with the metal of the car. They eventually escaped the soldiers and arrived in Khartoum. However, Sudan presented many challenges for Yonas. Not only was the economy down, but Yonas, as well as most Eritreans, could not receive legal residence in Sudan. He was considered “illegal” and any interactions with authorities would send him directly back to Eritrea, unless he was able to pay them off. Even the Sudanese people were likely to report him and other Eritreans to authorities, so he decided to leave. His options were to go through Libya or Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea, in hopes of reaching Italy. Libya was far too dangerous, so he went through Egypt with smugglers. Yonas had to borrow almost \$1,000 from his family and friends in order to go. He explains, **“My ambition from the beginning was to go to a country where they can accept you, you can live there peacefully, and manage your life. And this thing, you can’t find it in Africa. You have to go to the ‘First World’ in order to find these things.”**

After two weeks of travel, Yonas finally reached Egypt in December of 2016. But all paths to Europe were closed; Yonas was “stuck in Egypt.” Unable to pursue his goal, he registered with UNHCR to gain residence in Egypt and wait for them to resettle him. They gave him an appointment in 1 year and 8 months for his refugee status determination interview. Three years later, he still has not had his interview and continues to be stuck in Egypt. UNHCR Egypt continues to postpone interviews due to “a shortage of officers”; notably, they have also been accused of corruption. If he is ever able to complete his interview, Yonas will still have to wait another year for them to process it. Most recently, his interview was rescheduled for August 2019, but Yonas says nobody can know if it will actually take place. He says, **“[UNHCR] has officers, but they don’t care. You can’t access any services from them. There are no services offered to refugees.”** He gives the example that underage children are given about 500 Egyptian pounds, or \$30 USD a month, “which is nothing.”

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Now, Yonas is working for Saint Andrews Refugee Services, an NGO that provides education to unaccompanied minors, occasional financial support, as well as emotional and psychological support to refugees. Currently, he is unable to pursue his education because he has to work in order to fulfill his basic needs, and because he has no proof of his previous enrollment in college.

When asked what his dream is, Yonas laughs, thinks deeply, and says, **“My current dream is to live with my family in a place which has peace, in a country that respects human rights. I don’t need anything. I just need now to live peacefully at a place that I can pursue my education.”**

Policy Reflections and Recommendations

- “The role of governments, the first thing that they have to know is that **we are human**...We have our basic needs, we need our basic things. We are not asking [for] anything. The policy should be that anyone that is [fleeing] their country is leaving for a reason. There is a reason behind it. So they have to be strict on the deportations...**anti-deportation**. It’s not fair to risk your life to come here and from here to get deported to the same country that you were in before, the same country that you will suffer in. **They have to know the risk of deportation.**”
- “We are not saying for us to sit down and for someone to give us anything...I’m telling you now that as a refugee, the things that we need, **we need opportunity**. Opportunity to access education, to access medical things, to access jobs. **They have to open jobs for refugees. They have to not discriminate. Discrimination is the worst thing currently here.** In Egypt, people of color, like us, like me, we are experiencing [it] in our daily life from the Egyptians: violence, discrimination. They see you like you are lower than them. [Like] you came from a backwards country, you don’t know anything...that’s the problem.”
- “The International NGOs, like UNHCR, they have to make [it clear] why they’re here, if they’re not helping refugees? ... **If...refugees [are] dying or making reports, if they are being deported by the Egyptian government, why is [UNHCR] here?** What work are they [doing]? They’re not working, nothing.”
- “Especially here at UNHCR Egypt, all of the officers are Egyptian. **They don’t really care about refugees.** They are just standing to make a salary. They’re working a job; they’re not providing any services. **They don’t feel the problems of refugees.** They know what’s happening and the challenges that refugees are facing, but they are not taking any action about that. “
- “We protested in front of the UNHCR. Almost 500 Eritreans, we went there and protested there in order to seek protection. Guess what they did? **They called the police...they hit us, they kicked us, they jailed almost 100 people. We still don’t know where they are...**You can look it up. BBC covered [it]. That’s the current position we are in right now. We get stuck. We can’t go back to Sudan, there is the risk of your life. You can’t go through Libya, at the risk of your life, you have to pay money. **And there is no way to go through UNHCR. UNHCR is not working.**”

- “I don’t know until when I will stay like this. **As a refugee, I have a dream. I have many things waiting for me. I have responsibilities back home;** they are [waiting] for me just to help them. I’m too confused now. In this current situation, I am just waiting without doing anything. Time is going. My age is going. I came here when I was 20. I’m 24 now. 4 years have gone by and if you ask me what I did in these 4 years, nothing! 4 years of my life gone like this!”
- “Even if you did nothing for me, **at least I get healed from talking.** This is my first [time] that I am sharing my history with you. I didn’t share my history before with anyone. I was really in need of this. Just to talk, at least I can say I shared my problems with someone.”

Migrant B

La emigración:

Emigration:

¿De dónde has emigrado y cuándo te fuiste? ¿Por qué ustedes o su familia se fueron?
Where did you migrate from and when did you leave? Why did you or your family leave?

**De Honduras, por miedo a las mandillas.
*From Honduras, from fear of the gangs.***

¿Adónde querían ir usted/su familia? ¿Cómo planeaban llegar allí?
Where did you/your family want to go? How did you/your family plan to get there?

**La verdad no sabía que hacer llegar aquí era la única opción ya que mi mamá estaba aquí.
*The truth is, I didn’t know what to do. Coming here was the only option since my mom was already here.***

¿Qué recursos usted/su familia necesitaban para migrar? ¿Tenía estos?
What resources did you/your family need in order to migrate? Did you have these?

**No tenía nada, tuve que gastar mis ahorros para poder viajar en bus por largos días
*We had nothing, I had to spend my savings in order to be able to travel by bus for long days.***

¿Estaba en la escuela en el momento de saliendo? ¿Cómo afectó la decisión de emigrar a su educación?
Were you in school at the time? How did the decision to migrate affect your education?

**Si estaba en la universidad, afecto muchos ya que no pude terminarlos.
*Yes, I was in university, it affected [my education] a lot because I couldn’t finish.***

El camino:

The Journey:

¿Cómo fue el viaje migratorio?

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What was the migration journey like?

**Pues muy triste, pesado y bien peligroso.
Well very sad, heavy, and very dangerous.**

¿Cómo migró?
How did you migrate?

**En autobús
By bus.**

¿Quién vino contigo?
Who came with you?

**Mi hermana que fue separada de mi cuando llegamos a estados unidos.
My sister who was separated from me when we arrived in the United States.**

¿Cuánto costó el viaje de migración? ¿Cuánto tiempo tomó?
How much did the migration journey cost? How long did it take?

**Traía 5,000 pesos hondureños y tomó 1 mes.
I brought \$5,000 Honduran Pesos and it took 1 month.**

¿Estabas en la escuela en este momento? ¿Cómo la fue?
Were you in school at this moment? What was that like?

**Si en la universidad, fue complicado no sabía que hacer.
Yes in university, it was complicated, I did not know what to do.**

¿Qué dificultades había durante el migración ?
What difficulties were there during the migration?

**A veces no dormíamos, aguantábamos hambre, frio. Y el transporte.
Sometimes we didn't sleep, bearing hunger, and cold. And the transport.**

Llegar allí
Arriving there:

¿Cómo era su país anfitrión?
What was your host [may have been interpreted as home] country like?

**Hay mucha delincuencia, muchos asesinatos, maras y un gobierno que solo pasa en peleas en ves de ayudar al pueblo.
There's a lot of crime, a lot of murders, a lot of gangs and a government that only fights instead of helping the people.**

¿Cómo entraste en el país?
How did you enter the country?

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Por el río
Through the river

¿Llegaste a donde querías ir? Si no, ¿por qué?
Did you make it to where you wanted to go? If not, how come?

Si, porque migración nos detuvo.
Yes, because of the migration of us two.

¿Adónde fuiste despues de su llegada a este nuevo país? ¿Interactuaste con el gobierno de este pais? ¿Cómo?
Where did you go once you arrived in this new country? Did you interact with their government? How?

A una detención llamada las hirieras. No fue lo que esperaba.
To a detention center called Las Hirieras (The Hurters). It was not what I hoped.

¿Fuiste a la escuela en este nuevo país? ¿Cómo fue eso? ¿Cómo pudo haber sido mejor?
Did you go to school in this new country? What was that like? How could it have been better?

No, después me llevaron a otra detención por un mes.
No, after I went to another detention center for a month.

¿Este nuevo lugar se ha sentido como su hogar? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
Has this new place ever felt like home? Why or why not?

No porque no podía hablar con nadie ni ver a nadie ni siquiera a mi hermana.
No because I couldn't talk with anybody nor see anybody-- not even my sister.

Policy Reflections and Recommendations:

La emigración:
Emigration:

¿Qué desea que la gente y los gobiernos sepan sobre la decisión de un migrante de salir su hogar?
What do you wish people and governments knew about a migrant's decision to leave home?

Desearía que supieran lo difícil y duro que es salir de tu país dejando todo y mas aún lo mucho que se sufre en el camino.
I wish they knew how difficult and harsh it is to leave your country, leaving everything-- moreover, how much suffering there is on the journey.

¿Cómo pueden las personas y los gobiernos ayudar a los migrantes que deciden salir sus hogares?
How can people and governments help migrants that choose to leave home?

Sería muy bueno si fueran apoyados porque cada persona tiene su historia y sabe lo difícil que a sido y todo lo que ah tenido que pasar.

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It would be really good if [migrants] were supported because each person has their own story and knows how difficult it has been and everything that's had to happen.

¿Tiene algo más para compartir?
Do you have anything else to share?

La experiencia que se vive aquí aparte de huir de tu país por algún peligro nadie la puede imaginar ya que sus sentimientos, su autoestima, su dignidad es lastimada de alguna forma.

The experience to live here, apart from fleeing your country from danger, nobody can imagine your feelings, your self-esteem, your dignity is hurt in some way.

El camino:
The Journey:

¿Cómo podrían las personas y los gobiernos haberte ayudado a usted o a su familia en el camino?
How could people and governments have helped you/your family along the way?

Con un mejor trato, con alimento, quizás con protección.
With a better deal, with food, perhaps with protection.

¿Qué desea que la gente sepa sobre el viaje migratorio?
What do you wish people knew about the migration journey?

Que no es fácil se sufre mucho yo lo tuve que hacer por necesidad ya que corría peligro con mi hermana; de no ser así no me hubiera gustado pasar por tanto en el camino.
That it is not easy to suffer so much. I had to do what was necessary so I ran from danger with my sister; if it was not like this, I wouldn't have liked to go through so much along the way.

¿Tiene algo más para compartir?
Do you have anything else to share?

El viaje se vuelve difícil desde que te das cuenta que no conoces a nadie que estás en un país que no es el tuyo y yo sabes lo que te esperara más adelante o peor aún sin saber si podrás llegar con vida.

The journey becomes difficult since you realize that you don't know anybody, that you are in a country that is not yours, and you know what is waiting for you later or worse— not knowing if you'll be able to get there alive.

Migrant C (pseudonym Kwame):

After he completed secondary school, Kwame, a Ghanaian native, began working as a messenger for a national business. Soon, he rose through the ranks and became a sales representative in various major regions. However, after the death of the business owner, Kwame lost his job. With this change, Kwame explains, **“Life became unbearable, which informed [his] decision to embark the journey to [the] West to seek better opportunities.”** At the age of 20, Kwame left Ghana in pursuit of educational and economic opportunity. He

entered Europe as an undocumented immigrant, staying in France for a few days before moving to Italy.

However, living as an undocumented immigrant in Italy proved to be increasingly difficult for Kwame, especially because he was unfamiliar with the language. After about a year and six months, he decided to leave. Attempting to go to a country with a friendlier language, Kwame tried to migrate to Holland, but was unsuccessful. He briefly returned to Italy, before he attempted to leave again. Soon, smugglers took Kwame to Calais, France. Using false travel documentation, he was able to cross the English Channel from Calais, entering the United Kingdom. After describing his journey, Kwame emphasizes, **“I did not have any ill intentions. All that I was seeking was to improve my lots, economically, education-wise and by assessing...[things] for my family.”**

When he first arrived in the UK, Kwame worked as a “cleaner” at a high school in England. Though the commute was very far, he emphasizes, “[It was] better to do something than to sit idle.” After four months at the high school, a contracting agency recruited Kwame and began sending him to “high profile jobs.” He proudly explains that he was the Lead Sorter on the night shift at Royal Mill and worked at the Royal Northwood Air Force Base. Soon after, Kwame began working at AirMarc Construction, where he was “a proud member of what they call T5 Projects.” Kwame worked for AirMarc through the contracting agency for three years, and soon “because of [his] hardworking nature,” Kwame’s boss asked him to resign so that he could employ him on a full time basis.

As AirMarc did the routine background checks for new hires, they noticed a red flag: Kwame—or more accurately, the man whose identity Kwame was using—was wanted by authorities. So, when Kwame arrived for a meeting with his boss, he was met by immigration officers with a copy of the passport that he used to enter the country. Though Kwame was arrested, the officers soon found out that his fingerprints did not match those on record. Upon further questioning by a Ghanaian immigration officer, Kwame said **“Yes, yes, I am a Ghanaian who entered into the UK illegally. But I’m not doing anything evil...I plan to make a living by working, and I have been working for all this while.”** He was detained for five hours and told to report himself daily to the immigration assessment center. Though Kwame’s lawyer was willing to fight for permanent residence, he was “demanding money” and the legal counsel was far too expensive. Kwame soon decided to voluntarily return to Ghana because he thought, “If I have money on me, I’m better off to go back to my city with whatever means that would be... [rather than the unknown] outcome...[in the UK].”

Since returning to Ghana in 2008, Kwame has had a successful career as an independent contractor and is the co-founder of an NGO called Migration Watch & Skilled Revolution Front. His NGO primarily focuses on curbing irregular migration by teaching Ghanaian young people about the dangers of migration and providing them with employable skills. He is a part of various platforms regarding forced migration and refugee management, working with both local and international agents. Kwame asserts that he has never regretted returning to Ghana.

Policy Reflections and Recommendations

- According to Kwame, “I would want to be an advocate because not everybody who has the chance to enter into Europe comes with good intentions. So if I have been able to...I believe I need to share my story... for them to see how best they can put **checks and**

balances in place to prevent people who have ill intentions to get access to certain national [entities]...”

- “Because to me...the truth to the unrest [is] because there's lack of employment. **Lack of employable skills, jobs and despondency which is causing—which is forcing—the...youth of African descent to try to [cross] the Sub-Saharan block...**[and migrate]...via the ocean into Europe for...opportunities. Because we have been taught that once we get to Europe we are done. So we [at Migration Watch & Skilled Revolution Front] are trying to concentrate and educate the youth, the impacted... [to understand] **we are better off engaging ourselves with ventures that would assist [us] —that would improve our lot—than to trying things to get to Europe...**”
- “**I can only speak to my country, and not another country.**”
- “If there's gonna be something like seasonal employment opportunity for...labor from Africa to Europe i.e. Italy, Spain... **I trust that...when [African workers] want an opportunity in Europe, they can go and offer services and come back. People will stop risking their lives to go through the desert and via the ocean to come to Europe**—which is negatively impacting...the country of origin and the facilitating country as well. I am very much aware of the African emergency funds... **it is not the money that we need**, it is a reason that you would have to find [the] root causes [of] and how best those root causes can be addressed accordingly on a need basis.”
 - “Most of the European countries have increasing age populations issues. i.e. Germany is one...[there is an] acute need of labor... **What would happen if we use employable skills to be able to solve...[this issue?]...otherwise [Europe] cannot stand it.**”
- “One thing...[I would suggest to youth considering migrating is to]... be mindful of the country they decide to go. What prospects are they? What is the legal regime? Would they allow your entry? **Once they are able to find out the pros and cons of the journey they are taking...they are better informed to make the right decision...**At our NGO, what we do is we go to a vulnerable communities, like slums...we try to form school based clubs and peer educators. So we inform them around...[the dangers of migration]”
- “In every situation, you would have...ill-intentioned people [and those] with good intentions. I think it is at the discretion of the officers trained in assessing who qualifies to enter. **Because I believe they are all psychologists.** Those counselors and the police—they are all psychologists. They don't just decide whether or not to grant you access. But even your persona, your demeanor, your code of language...”
- “**I believe the approach adopted by the US government is not the best** because I understand that children are being separated from their parents. And there's a **critical trauma** that comes...because you **cannot** separate children from their parents for no apparent reason!”

Migrant D

Leaving:

Where did you migrate from and when did you leave? Why did you/your family leave?

Migrated from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in November 2008. We left mostly for better opportunities, but also because the political situation was getting worse in Ethiopia and my family felt it was unsafe to stay.

Where did you/your family want to go? How did you/your family plan to get there?

We wanted to go to the US, and my dad came here about 2 years before us so we would be settled when we arrived. My mom, my siblings and I flew here later.

What resources did you/your family need in order to migrate? Did you have these?

I remember needing a lot of paperwork and having to go in and out of government offices a lot. We needed visas and the process took a long time and a lot of money, which we were able to afford I think, but I was young so I didn't really have a good grasp of the financial strain of the whole ordeal.

Were you in school at the time? How did the decision to migrate affect your education?

Yes, I was in 3rd grade. Fortunately for me when I moved I was placed into the same grade and didn't fall behind. There were a lot of placement tests we had to take before they were able to place us though.

Traveling:

How did you migrate?

We took a plane here from Addis.

Who came with you?

My mother and siblings.

How much did it cost? How long did it take?

Probably a lot, I think now plane tickets go for about \$900 so that times four and all of the fees for visas and other documentation/applications. The whole process took a few years, from the beginning of the application process. The flight was about 13 hours I think.

What difficulties were there?

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With the actual journey itself, it wasn't too bad. I remember we had to wait 2 hours in line at customs which was pretty horrible but other than that it was okay. The process of applying to come here was pretty straining though; I had to be pulled out of school a lot and I was constantly visiting government offices.

Getting there:

What was your host country like? Did you make it to where you wanted to go? If not, how come?

Yes we did.

Where did you go once you arrived in this new country? Did you interact with their government? How?

My dad had a place for us ready so we were lucky enough to be able to settle down pretty quickly. From what I've heard from his story though it was not easy for him to do at all, and I can't imagine doing it all alone. I guess I did interact with the government a little through placement tests and registering for school.

Did you go to school in this new country? What was that like? How could it have been better?

Yes, it took maybe a month or two to be able to join. I remember during the time we weren't registered yet we would look out the window at the kids coming home from school wondering what they did there. Once I entered I remember loving it. Everyone wanted to be my friend and they were so curious. But looking back it was a little bizarre, I was almost treated like performance and they'd often not have lessons and just have me sit on a stool in front of the class and translate words they'd shout at me to Amharic.

Has this new place ever felt like home? Why or why not?

Yeah, it has, I've been here for 10 years now so I have the sense that this is my second home.

Policy Reflections and Recommendations:

Leaving:

What, if anything, did you wish you knew before you left?

I wish I knew that America is not as wonderful as it seems. I mean I was very young so obviously, I wouldn't have known all the flaws in the system, but in Ethiopia, the U.S. is seen as a paradise where nothing goes wrong and the roads are lined with gold, and it was a very harsh awakening to see how wrong that is.

What do you wish people and governments knew about a migrant's decision to leave home?

That it is often the last resort. Most migrants are not coming to the U.S. to steal American jobs and commit crimes, but to provide for themselves and their families when they have no other options, and to escape danger.

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How can people and governments help migrants that choose to leave home?

By understanding each migrant's situation as something they have the opportunity to change, and should change, as a country with so many more resources. Being in a place of privilege and great advantage, we have to understand that it is our responsibility to help those who need it from us.

Traveling:

How could people and governments have helped you/your family along the way?

I guess by making the immigration process easier and a less filled with obstacles.

What do you wish people knew about the migration journey?

That it sucks! And we shouldn't be creating more policies to make it harder for people to migrate.

Getting There:

What do you wish people and governments knew about immigrants?

Just their experiences and the circumstances that lead to their migration.

What do you think immigrants need the most from people and governments that want to help?

The opportunity to build a life, without obstacles or judgment.

How can people and governments support you?

Fortunately, I'm doing fine and don't need too much help, but for migrants today, especially along the border, there are countless things the government could do, like reuniting migrant children with their families and reforming holding facilities. The most important thing is making it easier to migrate legally so people don't have to risk their lives fighting for a better life.

Comparison & Analysis

Each migrant shared their individual perspectives, independently of one another. However, amongst their suggestions, there were many areas of overlap. 5 of these major overlaps, or insights, are listed below. However, there are likely many more.

- I. **Migration is often the only option:** Every migrant interviewed, regardless of background, wished that governments, NGOs, and the general public understood that leaving one's country is "often the last resort," birthed out of necessity and filled with hardship. They all expressed that we should prioritize the humanity of migrants, and understand the circumstances that cause, and often force, migration.

- A. When asked about policy recommendations, Yonas said, “the first thing that they have to know is that **we are human.**” He emphasized an anti-deportation approach, calling on governments to understand that deportations often send migrants straight into the dire situations that they have worked so hard to escape.
 - B. Migrant B echoed similar sentiments, wishing that the general public “**knew how difficult and harsh it is to leave your country...and even more so, how much suffering there is in the journey.**”
 - C. In his analysis of factors causing African emigration, Kwame stressed a need for policies that address the root causes of African emigration—“**lack of employable skills, jobs and despondency**”—rather than money. Moreover, he articulated that the aforementioned factors are “**forcing youth of African descent**” to leave, emphasizing the necessity that drives migration.
 - D. Migrant D wished the public understood that “**most migrants are not coming to the U.S. to steal American jobs and commit crimes, but to provide for themselves and their families when they have no other options, and to escape danger.**”
- II. **The [false] promise of the ‘West’: All the migrants alluded to a ‘promise’ of a better life in ‘Western’ countries that appeared to be unachievable elsewhere. However, all the migrants that have since lived in either the United States or Europe find some degree of falseness to this promise.**
- A. Migrant B articulated the hardships of migrating to the United States—not knowing anybody, an unfamiliar language, and leaving everything behind. She described her first experience in the United States to be at a detention center known as Las Hirieras, and said it was “not what she hoped.” When asked if the U.S. felt like home, she said, “**No because I couldn’t talk with anybody nor see anybody—not even my sister.**”
 - B. Kwame said, “**We have been taught that once we get to Europe we are done.**” However, after his own experiences in Europe, he has dedicated much of his life to help young people “**better their lots [rather] than trying things to get to Europe.**” For instance, his NGO works to sensitize vulnerable youth to the dangers of migration and better inform them about the countries they plan to migrate to.
 - C. Migrant D explained “**I wish I knew that America is not as wonderful as it seems... but in Ethiopia, the U.S. is seen as a paradise where nothing goes wrong and the roads are lined with gold, and it was a very harsh awakening to see how wrong that is.**”
 - D. Notably, Yonas’ perception of Europe seems to fit with the promise that Kwame and Migrant D were once taught to believe in. For instance, Yonas says, “**[A country that accepts you, allows you to live in peace and manage your life], you can’t find it in Africa. You have to go to the ‘First World’ in order to find these things.**”

- III. **Prioritize job opportunities & safe migration: Both Yonas and Kwame emphasize the importance of employment opportunities.** Yonas stresses that he, and other refugees, are not “asking for anything”—they only need opportunities. Furthermore, Kwame articulates that seasonal labor opportunities in Europe for African laborers would create a mutually beneficial system: European countries would gain a much needed, younger workforce and African youth could access job opportunities. Moreover, such a system would likely make the migration process much safer. Migrant D emphasizes a similar point saying, **“The most important thing is making it easier to migrate legally so people don’t have to risk their lives fighting for a better life.”**
- IV. **Families should not be separated: Both Kwame and Migrant D explicitly criticized the United States for separating children from their parents at the border.** Kwame emphasized that this policy creates a **“critical trauma”** that is long-lasting and harmful. Migrant D expressed similar sentiment, calling on the U.S. government to **“reunite migrant children with their families and reform holding facilities.”** Moreover, Migrant B repeatedly explained the hardship that came from being separated from her sister at the United States border and being forbidden from speaking to anybody.
- V. **Experience translates to expertise: Notably, both Yonas and Kwame use their migration experiences to inform their NGO work. Their migration journeys uniquely position them to anticipate migration related issues in a way that most non-migrants would likely be unable to.**
 - A. Kwame explained that he uses his experiences to teach vulnerable communities about the dangers of migration. Similarly, Yonas works to provide migrants with medical, psychological, and educational services-- many of which he did not have access to during his journey.