



## **Young and Astray:**

An Assessment of Factors Driving the Movement of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents from Eritrea into Ethiopia, Sudan and Beyond



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**

## Research. Rethink. Resolve.

The Women's Refugee Commission identifies needs, researches solutions and advocates for global change to improve the lives of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. The Women's Refugee Commission is legally part of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, but does not receive direct financial support from the IRC.

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The opinions expressed are those of the research team, and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNHCR. Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the authors. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by UNHCR of the opinions expressed.

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Cover photo: Mai Aini camp, looking over the Simien mountains.

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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

ARRA	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
BPRM	U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
COR	Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
HAI	Human Appeal International
IPs	Implementing Partners
IRC	International Rescue Commission
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
NSP	National Service Proclamation
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
SRC	Sudanese Red Crescent Society
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UASC	Unaccompanied minors and separated children
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VTC	Vocational Training Center
WYDC	Warsai-Yikaalo Development Campaign

## Executive Summary

For more than four decades, the northeast African state of Eritrea has faced complex challenges, including war, internal conflict, political resistance and prolonged economic strife. As a result, a significant number of Eritreans have left the country, either by choice or through force, and now live in host nations around the globe. Many Eritreans living abroad are forced to live in a refugee-like situation lacking stability, security and hope. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that it currently provides some form of aid or humanitarian assistance to more than 250,000 Eritrean individuals. Individuals from the Eritrean refugee population estimate the total number of refugees as much higher.

The profile of the Eritrean refugee population has changed over the years to reflect the needs of individuals and specific persecutions within Eritrea. Initially the Eritrean refugee population, primarily hosted in eastern Sudan, was made up of opposition fighters and their families, in addition to families from the borderlands forcefully displaced from their homes by brutal conflict, economic destitution and drought. While a large number of these families continue to claim refuge in the neighboring state, the profile and situation for a new wave of refugees entering into eastern Sudan and now also into northern Ethiopia are quite distinct.

In June 2000, the Algiers Peace Agreement was signed, bringing an end to a bloody border conflict that had caused hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee into Sudan. UNHCR supported the government of Sudan in a voluntary repatriation program in 2003-2004; however, more than 100,000 refugees remained in the camps of eastern Sudan. Since then, more than 260,000 Eritreans have claimed asylum in eastern Sudan and more recently in northern Ethiopia. This figure includes individuals and families originating from the borderlands between Ethiopia and Sudan, who move periodically from one side to the other in response to drought, famine and political tensions. The majority,

however, represents individuals who have fled from the highlands of Eritrea, and move quickly on from eastern Sudan, rather than back into Eritrea. They are largely single, educated young adults, primarily between 16 and 30 years old. In recent years, an influx of younger children has sparked some concern, as children as young as 10 years old began to flee from their country into Ethiopia, Sudan and beyond. The new refugee population is heavily male dominated, though many young females also flee Eritrea for reasons much the same as the males.

The Women's Refugee Commission, with the support of UNHCR, conducted research to assess the push and pull factors and protection risks faced by the Eritrean unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)<sup>1</sup> seeking asylum in northern Ethiopia and eastern Sudan.

## Key Findings

The UASC in Mai-Aini refugee camp, northern Ethiopia, and Shagarab I refugee camp, eastern Sudan, articulated several key factors causing them to flee from their homes and cross international borders without the support or supervision of an adult guardian. None of the reasons for flight can be taken alone, but instead must be considered as one of several colliding factors. Fear of military conscription, lack of education, unemployment/economic burden, desire to join a family member in another country, hope for resettlement and, for some, the sheer excitement of adventure, are all influences impacting the children's decision to flee. Though none of these reasons alone will come as a shock or surprise to staff working in this field, the consequence of one factor upon another, the ability to reason and explain their decisions, and the burden of responsibility felt by these children are quite extraordinary.

A significant number of Eritrean refugees, no matter their age, do not remain in the refugee camps but cross into Sudan or live outside the camps in Ethiopia. Some of those who stay in the camps seem to do so only as a last resort and a consequence of the ongoing economic stresses affecting their families. Various

protection concerns were raised by the UASC living in the camps, including but not limited to: a real threat of kidnapping and forced abductions in Sudan; potential *refoulement* by the Sudanese government; and potential forced conscription by an Eritrean opposition movement in northern Ethiopia.

## Key Recommendations

**In coordination with government counterparts and with identified child protection implementing partners, it is essential for UNHCR to initiate regional<sup>2</sup> discussion with regard to how best to protect and respond to the needs of Eritrean refugees, including children and adolescents, at all stages of their journey through this region.** Specific focus must be paid to the age, gender, economic situation and intentions of each child to ensure a flexible program response, both appropriate and sympathetic towards the needs of this highly variable population.

The individual needs of each child may vary depending on place of origin, upbringing, education, flight experiences, post-flight support, family or community interactions, and access to and availability of services. As such, **a thorough review of services and service providers must be undertaken, to ensure age, gender and culturally appropriate programs are available and that the child's best interest remains paramount.**

**Increased efforts should be made to engage with members of the adult Eritrean population, including the Diaspora, as they play a fundamental role in the development and upbringing of the UASC.** Additional material and educational support should be provided to community-backed initiatives to enable this generation of youth to develop to their full potential.

**Increased engagement with community-based mechanisms and groups is also necessary for the identification of Eritrean unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents seeking refuge in Ethiopia and Sudan** who remain anonymous, either unaware of the registration procedures in place or

choosing to avoid any formal procedures.

**Continued advocacy with the governments of Ethiopia and Sudan for the free movement and access to the employment market for Eritrean refugees within their countries of asylum is essential to ensure the protection of Eritrean UASC.** The governments of Ethiopia and Sudan both hold reservation to the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>3</sup>; Ethiopia made a reservation to the right to gainful employment (article 27), and Sudan reserves the right to freedom of movement (article 26), enforcing a strict encampment policy, which in turn severely limits employment opportunities. Ethiopia's out-of-camp policy does allow Eritrean refugees to move away from the camps after six months if they are able to support themselves; however, despite this, in both Ethiopia and Sudan many of the UASC are forced to work in the informal market where they are provided no legal protection, or remain in refugee camps solely dependent upon UNHCR and foreign aid.

**UNHCR and its partners, including government partners, should reconsider the education and vocational training options available to refugees in the camps, to better meet the needs of the population of concern.** This can only be achieved with full participation from the Eritrean refugee community, particularly the UASC. Education and skills training should be designed to reflect local market needs, for which a market assessment should be conducted for the benefit of host communities and refugees alike.

For a full list of recommendations, see page 24.

## Purpose of the Mission

Eritrea is one of the highest refugee-producing nations in the world. After more than 30 years of internal conflict, and armed struggle against the Ethiopian regime between 1963 and 1991, the population was again devastated by a bloody border conflict at the turn of the century. Unmet needs of a severely protracted refugee caseload in eastern Sudan are only intensified by

the persisting protection risks faced by new waves of refugees fleeing across the Eritrean borders.

The profile of the Eritreans fleeing into neighboring states is primarily young, unmarried individuals between 16 and 30 years of age. An alarming increase in the number of children and adolescents under the age of 18 travelling without parental supervision or guardianship has been noted over the past five years. These children are referred to within this report as unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). The report includes some reference to young people who fall within the 18- to 22-year age bracket, often former UASC, who continue to live alongside the UASC in the refugee camps in both Sudan and Ethiopia.

To accommodate for the needs of the Eritrean UASC, the host governments of Ethiopia and Sudan, with support from UNHCR and implementing child protection partner agencies, have established an expansive UASC group care facility in Mai-Aini camp in northern Ethiopia and two adjoined smaller centers for UASC in Shagarab I camp in eastern Sudan. Approximately 2,000 children live in these centers at any one time. But the incredibly transient nature of the camps must be noted, whereby the majority of these children and youths move on to unknown locations within a matter of months after arrival.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of this ongoing situation, the Women's Refugee Commission, in coordination with UNHCR, conducted this research to assess the push and pull factors affecting the Eritrean UASC in their movement from Eritrea, through neighboring states and onwards to their intended final destination. The research was intended to assess not only the driving forces, but also the protection risks encountered by this population during flight.

This report covers two field missions conducted in September and October 2012 to Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps in northern Ethiopia, to Khartoum and to Shagarab camp in eastern Sudan.

## Methodology

It is not, at this time, possible to conduct first-hand field research in Eritrea; international agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have not been removed from the country over the past decade, are highly scrutinized and unable to conduct studies on human rights violations or abuses; their presence is limited to practical reinforcement, as opposed to advocacy and response. In seeking to clarify and discern the extensive movement of the Eritrean youths, research has therefore been conducted in the neighboring states of Ethiopia and Sudan, both Eritrean refugee-hosting nations for more than a decade.

Field research was conducted in Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush refugee camps in northern Ethiopia, in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, and in Shagarab I refugee camp in eastern Sudan. Research was carried out directly with UASC living in each location by means of individual interviews, paired theme discussions<sup>4</sup> and focus group discussions.

A questionnaire was designed by the researcher to be used in both Sudan and Ethiopia. Questions were tailored to match the age of child participants. UNHCR personnel working in Mai-Aini and Shagarab camps provided comments and approved the questionnaire prior to the research mission to ensure that the questions were both politically and culturally sensitive.

Children were pre-selected by social workers in both Ethiopia and Sudan to attend the focus group sessions. Groups were split into: mixed gender under 13 years, 13- to 17-year-old females, 13- to 17-year-old males, 17- to 18-year-old females and 17- to 18-year-old males. Social workers were asked to arrange that approximately 10 participants attended each focus group discussion; this was not possible in some cases, depending on the number of children available and willing to participate, and also on the number of children registered as UASC in the camp. The representation by each focus group varied significantly between Ethiopia and Sudan, using the same size groups in Mai-Aini to represent a popula-

tion of around 1,800 children, in comparison to around 80 children in eastern Sudan. In Shagarab camp, no females 17-18 years could be identified as willing to participate. In this case an additional discussion was held with males 17-18, who account for the highest percentage of children in the camp.

See Annex 1 (page 27) for the focus group discussion questions.

	<b>Mai-Aini</b>	<b>Shagarab</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Focus Group</b>	No. of Participants	No. of Participants	No. of Participants
<b>Mixed under 13</b>	13*	8**	21
<b>Females 13 - 17</b>	8	7	15
<b>Males 13 - 17</b>	9	6	15
<b>Females 17 - 18</b>	13	-	13
<b>Males 17 - 18</b>	10	23***	33
<b>Total</b>			<b>97</b>

\* The youngest child involved in the group discussion in Mai-Aini was 10 years old.  
 \*\* The youngest child involved in the group discussion in Shagarab was 8 years old.  
 \*\*\* Split across two group discussions.

In both camps, it was initially planned that 15 interviews with individuals of mixed age and gender should be conducted. Due to time constraints and child availability, seven individual interviews were conducted with children of mixed age and gender in both camps. In Mai-Aini, owing to the large population, children were selected at random by their social workers when given a select age range of under 13, from 13 to 17, from 17 and 18, and 18-plus and still living within the group care facilities. In Shagarab, children were selected from the discussion groups, or participated if they asked to have further in-

dividual discussion. One additional interview was conducted with a former UASC male, age 20, who still lives within the underage center.

<b>Mai-Aini</b>		<b>Shagarab</b>	
1 x male	age 12	1 female	age 13
1 x female	age 13	1 male	age 16
1 x male	age 15	1 female	age 17
1 x female	age 16	3 x male	age 17
1 x male	age 18	1 x male	age 18
1 x female	age 19	1 x male	age 20
1 x male	age 19		

Additional interviews were conducted for specific reasons, as the researcher saw necessary. In Mai-Aini, two paired interviews were held with boys in the camp who had expressed a desire to discuss issues beyond those covered in the discussion groups. In Sudan, additional interviews were conducted while the researcher was in Khartoum. Three boys were identified by UNHCR as child victims of trafficking; one boy had fallen victim while being smuggled from Kassala to Khartoum, and the two others, twin brothers aged 16, had escaped a kidnap situation in which their four younger siblings had been taken by tribesmen; they have since been released.

Meetings were also held with agency staff involved in the care and protection of refugee children, particularly UASC, in all locations. Additional focus group discussions were held with social workers directly responsible for the care of UASC in Mai-Aini and Shagarab camps. In Mai-Aini, a group discussion was held with approximately 20 International Rescue Committee (IRC) social workers to discuss their initial concerns with regard to the UASC. Twenty-five social workers also attended an end-of-trip debriefing to provide feedback from the week's activities, ask questions about the follow-up and discuss any outstanding concerns. In Shagarab, an initial group meeting was held with four Human Appeal International (HAI) social workers and the UASC center manager.



Additional meetings were conducted with community groups in Mai-Aini, including youth workers and teachers with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), staff from Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and in Khartoum with the Eritrean Community Network, established by Save the Children. One additional group discussion was held with young adults identified by UNHCR as victims of trafficking who had been deported from Cairo to Ethiopia and were now seeking refuge in Adi-Harush.

Some information included in this report was obtained by the author through previous fieldwork, while working with the UNHCR in Kassala, eastern Sudan, in 2010 and 2011, and while working with Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA) in Cairo with a similar caseload in the early months of 2012.

Information provided by individual refugees is anonymous; names have been changed. The purpose of the research and intended use of information was explained to all participants.

## Limitations

Due to the transient nature of the population of concern it was not possible to determine exact statistics for any of the chosen locations. Estimates can be made based on the number of Eritrean refugees, including UASC, who register in northern Ethiopia and eastern Sudan each month, though these figures are not expected to fully represent the migratory trail. It is generally approximated by UNHCR sub-office Kassala that around 1,000 refugees per month leave Eritrea without registering with the neighboring host governments or with UNHCR. Additionally, the number of Eritrean refugees, including UASC, living in urban centers is unknown. Their profiles remain anonymous, their locations scattered and their protection risks/needs potentially worse than registered refugees in the camps with regular access to services.

It is to be acknowledged that in collecting information, the researcher remained aware that many of the topics under discussion may be perceived by the refugees,

the host community and/or by counterparts, including government partners, as contentious and thus information may have been given with slight trepidation or caution. Furthermore, as a western foreigner, the exact role and, in turn, capabilities of the researcher, though explained throughout the course of the research, may not have been fully understood or accepted by all participants. As such, information provided could have been biased on the part of the participants for individual gain.

## Context

The northeast African state of Eritrea is currently one of the world's highest refugee-producing nations. For a country with a population of less than 6 million, estimates that approximately 2 million Eritreans now live as refugees globally is cause for great concern. With a steady stream of young Eritreans flooding into neighboring states each month, the situation is considered by UNHCR personnel and refugee rights groups as an unheeded emergency.

Eritrea has remained in a permanent state of instability for more than four decades; internal disputes, political upheaval and economic strife have caused a continuous strain upon the majority of the population. Immediately following the retreat of Italian and later British colonialists in the late 1950s, Ethiopia, led by the nation's last Emperor, Haile Selassie I, annexed Eritrea, an act that led to more than 30 years of bitter conflict and resistance. Eritrean nationalists fought against the Emperor and his successor, General Mengistu Haile Mariam, and by 1991, with the support of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), managed to overthrow Mengistu's Derg regime.

A referendum of the Eritrean population was held in April 1993, with an overwhelming majority voting for independence. Guerrilla fighter and popular leader of the victorious opposition Isaias Afewerki was appointed President of the newly independent state. Initially he presented what was deemed a welcome alternative for politics as usual in Africa. A committed Marxist, Isaias



Mai Aini camp at dusk.

urged social justice, liberal democracy, human rights and a free market economy (Tronvoll, 2009). The nation rejoiced as a new Constitution was drafted.

For some years, the nation stabilized to a state of relative peace. Refugees, who had fled into neighboring Sudan during the conflict and periods of severe drought and famine, began to return home with the assistance of the Eritrean ruling party, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the United Nations. In 1991, more than 800,000 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees had registered with the UNHCR operation in eastern Sudan. Between 1991 and 1997, more than 139,000 Eritreans returned home (Bascom, 2005). Supporters of the regime, and particularly those who had fought alongside the EPLF, were rewarded with political appraisal and respect.<sup>5</sup> Orphaned children of deceased EPLF fighters were supported and raised as the nation's children and treated with the utmost care.

But the peace did not last. Throughout the 1990s, disputes regarding trade access, export taxes and tribal grazing areas became more frequent; by early 1995, tensions at the border with Ethiopia became hostile. The Badme Plains, lying across state boundaries, had

until that time caused little concern; however, cross-border tensions between Eritrean farmers and members of the Ethiopian leading party, the TPLF (many of whom had not necessarily supported the succession of the Eritrean state) and other such incidents eventually led to a declaration of war by the Ethiopian Parliament on May 13, 1998. The Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict resulted in the deaths of up to 100,000 people; although a ceasefire was declared in June 2000, following the signing of the Algiers Agreement, the situation has remained tense, with regular threats raised by both states.

Internal displacement within Eritrea reached an all-time high during the border conflict; however, an inherited nationalism and a commitment to defend the country's independence ensured a mass return of Eritreans from eastern Sudan to join the fight, rather than creating a new influx of refugees (Smith, 2011). UNHCR statistics record that approximately 50,000 Eritreans returned to their homeland in 2000 alone, followed by more than 70,000 returns from 2001 to 2004. In addition, after the conflict, an estimated 65,000 Eritreans were deported from Ethiopia back to their homeland;

in many instances this caused not only family separation but also a denial of rights to land and livelihoods for those individuals of concern. Furthermore, unclear citizenship rights for deportees (from both sides of the border) resulted in legal statelessness for many, a concern that continues to affect some persons of concern to this day.

Post-war efforts to stabilize society were limited, and it became quickly apparent that the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), as the ruling party is now known, would not abide by their original guarantees, rationalizing their failure to implement the new Constitution<sup>6</sup> by a continued state of emergency, contingent on the final settlement of the border conflict with Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> In absence of the Constitution, Eritrea has over the past decade earned a reputation for human rights violations and abuses, worsened by the government's absolute control of the mass media and judiciary, political dictation (no opposition parties are allowed) and reports of religious and ethnic persecution (Tronvoll, 2009).

Central to Eritrea's current political and economic climate is the state's control of land and services within the country. All land in Eritrea is owned by the state, and while previously farmers and agriculturalists were given relative freedom, in line with its Communist mandate, in the late 1990s the state seized the vast majority of fertile land, primarily from the western borderlands and central Eritrea, and redistributed it to government supporters from the returning Tigrinyan migrant and refugee communities. Immediate tensions between the Muslim lowlanders and Tigrinyan highlanders were unavoidable (Tronvoll, 2009). Simultaneously, the government maintains full control of all major industries; former private businesses have since become "joint ventures" with the government, and as such the state now runs trade, foreign exchange, banking, communications, transport and shipping, in addition to the major manufacturing services (Ogbazghi, 2011).

Eritrea lives under the constant perceived threat of attack from the neighboring government. The PFDJ justi-

fies the continued implementation of the 1995 National Service Proclamation (NSP) by their need for an ever-prepared military in what they describe as a national state of emergency. In May 2002, Isaias Afewerki extended the NSP, which mandates a minimum of 18 months national service for all Eritreans between 18 and 45 years of age, in what is now referred to as the Warsai-Yikaalo Development Campaign (WYDC). The WYDC formalizes the indefinite nature of national service and establishes a two-tiered workforce to serve both military and labor market needs. Refugees fleeing from Eritrea suggest that the actual age of forced conscription can be as high as between 50 and 55 years.<sup>8</sup>

Sympathizers might defend Isaias' actions as an attempt to "inculcate the ideals of the revolution into the minds of the younger generation" in an attempt to avoid "indolence and slothfulness" (Ogbazghi, 2011). Concerns about the loss of traditional and cultural values, of respect for the community elders and of nationalistic pride (towards the state of Eritrea, and not to the current government regime) are echoed by older members of the protracted caseloads in both Sudan and Ethiopia. However, such intentions are highly contested by the younger generations, who in response to the government's increasingly repressive stance resort to what they perceive to be their only option: flight.<sup>9</sup>

The Eritrean population appears torn by a commitment to become that strong, independent nation for which they and their ancestors fought, and a hopelessness as Eritrea continues to isolate itself from the rest of the world. For many, opportunities elsewhere, no matter the dangers involved during the journey, seem to be the only viable option as demonstrated by the ever-transient nature of the Eritrean caseload.

## Population Overview

The Eritrean refugee populations in eastern Sudan and northern Ethiopia are quite distinct for several reasons. Year of and consequential reasons for flight, ethnicity, political affiliation, religious belief, familial ties and educational background all play some role.

To clarify, the refugee camps of eastern Sudan currently host in excess of 87,000 refugees, of which 95 percent are of Eritrean descent. Approximately 67,000 individuals belong to what is referred to in this report as the “protracted caseload,” having sought asylum in Sudan during the 30-year armed struggle prior to the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict. Of this group, around 40,000 individuals are believed to have been born in Sudan. The remaining caseload consists of “new arrivals” who arrived after 2004. The refugees are spread among nine refugee camps in Kassala, Gadaref and Gezira states. New arrivals are sent to Shagarab I camp to complete their refugee status determination (RSD) with the government and registration with UNHCR; they are hosted in an area of the camp known as the “reception center” or dispersed among the protracted community in Shagarab I, II and III.

A general mistrust and hostility is evident between the two caseloads, explained not only by a religious and cultural divide, but also resentment about access to various camp services, including food rations, opportunities for resettlement and distribution of housing, all perceived by each caseload to favor the other; the reality does not reflect this perception. The protracted caseload, almost exclusively Tigre, Muslim lowlanders from western Eritrea, have grown up in the camps and see them as their own; they share linguistic, tribal and religious ties to the Sudanese host community. In contrast, the new arrivals are transient passersby, are primarily Tigrinya Christians from the highlands of Eritrea and are often perceived as a threat. They are depicted by neighboring governments as “economic migrants,”<sup>10</sup> undeserving of refugee status and the benefits that come therewith.

The longstanding protracted nature of the Eritrean refugee population is currently a fundamental concern to UNHCR; attempts are underway to find an appropriate durable solution for all remaining persons of concern. The UNHCR resettlement program has, over the past years, successfully extracted from the protracted caseload individuals and families perceived to be at risk in the camps, including religious minorities, single

women, and victims of torture or violence. A large-scale integration program was recently launched for protracted caseload Eritrean refugees left behind.<sup>11</sup> Integration initiatives targeting the new arrivals are absent to date. Sudan’s strict encampment policy, in reservation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, makes onward movement illegal within Sudan. However, with such limited opportunities available, whether education or employment in the camps, the new arrivals seek any means available to get as far from the Eritrean border as possible, often risking their lives in doing so.

Since 2004, more than 200,000 “new caseload” Eritrean refugees, primarily between the ages of 16 and 30, have registered with the UNHCR operation in eastern Sudan. Only around 20,000 now remain.<sup>12</sup> It is assumed by those working on the issue that the majority of new arrivals travel to Khartoum (and to a lesser extent, to Port Sudan, Gadaref, New Halfa and Kassala) to find work. Sudan makes no reservation to the right to gainful employment expressed in the Refugee Convention, though the strict encampment policy renders all movement without authorization outside of the camps unlawful. Any refugee caught working in the urban centers may face detention, fines or possible forced return to Eritrea if deemed to be an illegal migrant and not an asylum seeker/refugee. Regular Friday *al-Kasha* (police round-ups) are reported by Eritrean refugees and the UNHCR protection staff in Khartoum; in the course of the research, one member of the Eritrean protracted community in Khartoum explained that until recently, a 300 SDG (50 USD) fine was sufficient for release. However, more recently, he feared the threat of forced return if caught without refugee documentation and a legal work permit is more likely.<sup>13</sup>

While some statistics are available for refugees living in urban centers throughout the eastern states, government prohibitions on registration in Khartoum means that the number of Eritreans currently living in the capital city is unknown. UNHCR supports a projected Sudanese Ministry of Interior (MOI) civil registration initiative, whereby all asylum seekers and refugees throughout Sudan would be registered.

Northern Ethiopia offers a somewhat different picture, reflecting the political tension between the two nations. In response to a large number of political dissidents during and following the border conflict and the simultaneous influx of members of the persecuted Kunama tribe, Wa'ala Nhibi refugee camp opened in 2002. Its occupants were soon transferred to Shimelba camp, close to the Eritrean border, which was established in May 2004. By 2007, approximately 15,000 Eritreans were verified within the camp. Due to the emerging protracted nature of this camp, the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) assisted with a large-scale resettlement program of around 6,500 Eritreans to the United States in 2009/2010. A handful of families and individuals identified in this group are still awaiting departure from Ethiopia. The current number of Eritreans hosted in Shimelba camp is estimated at around 6,600.

In 2008, UNHCR supported the establishment of a new camp, Mai-Aini, to accommodate the ongoing influx of new arrivals from Eritrea. As the camp overflowed, yet another new camp, Adi-Harush opened in 2010. Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush are estimated to host approximately 16,000 and 22,000 Eritrean refugees respectively. Due to limited services available in Adi-Harush and a well-established set up in Mai-Aini, it is commonly known that new arrivals, though sent to Adi-Harush, move quickly instead to Mai-Aini, where the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) is responsible for camp management, food distributions, primary health care and nutrition. ARRA and IRC are responsible for primary education, school feeding and reproductive health, while NRC provides transitional shelter and livelihoods and JRS is responsible for vocational training, psychosocial support and youth programming. Mai-Aini is now a relatively self-contained structure, providing employment opportunities, health and educational support to inhabitants of local Ethiopian villages and Eritreans alike.

Though far more accommodating than those in eastern Sudan, the refugee camps of northern Ethiopia similarly do not provide an appropriate long-term stay envi-

ronment for the Eritrean new arrivals. In August 2010, the Ethiopian government formalized the “out-of-camp” policy, whereby all Eritrean refugees must first register at Endabaguna Reception Center (Shire) and stay in the refugee camps for an initial six months. Thereafter, eligible Eritreans may travel without too many restrictions to the urban centers to live with relatives or study, so long as they can prove able to support themselves. ARRA estimates that currently some 3,000 are eligible for the out-of camp policy; others are eligible for transfer to Addis Ababa for medical or security reasons.<sup>14</sup> However, Eritreans are still not given the right to work in Ethiopia and often are forced to work on the black market and/or for a much lower wage than the average Ethiopian.

UNHCR records suggest that more than 60,000 Eritreans have registered in Ethiopia since the end of the border conflict,<sup>15</sup> and as of October 2012, 2,264 Eritreans were registered as living in Addis Ababa<sup>16</sup>; however, much like in Sudan, the total population of Eritreans living in anonymity within Ethiopia is not known.

## Findings

The primary objective of this research was to better understand the push and pull factors affecting Eritrean youth; to gauge thought processes, level of understanding and the real reasons why children as young as 10 years old choose to leave their family homes, and cross international borders without any adult supervision. What have they been told? What are they seeking to achieve? Where do they want to go? And why? Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with age- and gender-segregated groups to try to better understand the situation, and the driving forces behind a mass migration of the Eritrean youth.

### Driving Forces Affecting Eritrean Youth

Reasons for initial flight provided by children in the camps of northern Ethiopia and eastern Sudan are sim-

ilar, which is not unsurprising due the merged profile of those who remain in the camps. The economic status of the children's family in Eritrea directly affected the children's situation in the camps. Children in both Ethiopia and Sudan explained that their families at home were too poor to support their onward travel, and that other children who passed quickly through the camps usually came from cities in the highlands of Eritrea rather than border villages, and were from more affluent families, often with relatives abroad. The children interviewed in the course of this research generally shared a similar economic profile and do not fully represent the views and situation of the Eritrean youth in general.

### *Reasons for Flight*

Primary reasons for flight provided by the UASC in both Sudan and Ethiopia include, in no particular order, lack of education, unemployment/economic need, fear of military conscription, religious persecution, family reunification or sponsorship, and general adventure, social pressure, "everyone else was going." For the most part, two or more reasons were provided.

Reasons for flight differed, to a limited extent, between boys and girls, with more girls expressing some concern about sexual exploitation (both in the home, with regard to early or forced marriage, and more often while completing military training) than the males in this study. Some females also explained their physical restrictions, particularly concerning enforced military conscription, as is explained below. Greater discrepancies appeared between age groups in both Ethiopia and Sudan; while children of any age flee from Eritrea for reasons of family reunification, sponsorship and economic burdens or religion, older adolescents and young adults were more likely to cite the perceived threat of forced conscription and of limited future prospects within Eritrea.

### *Education*

Strongly influenced during the Italian colonization, the Eritrean nation has until recently been applauded for

its advanced education system. Post-border conflict, the PFDJ government focused specifically on the re-establishment of the former system (Rena, 2008), and in the 1994 Macro-Policy, defined the objectives of the education system:

- to produce a population equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for a self-reliant and modern economy;
- to develop self-consciousness and self-motivation in the population to fight poverty, disease and all the attendant causes of backwardness and ignorance;
- to make basic education available for all.

The National Policy on Education (2003) "articulates the central value placed on gender equality in education"<sup>17</sup>; furthermore, the policy document continues, eight years of education is compulsory for children of school age, and the first five years of education are compulsory for all citizens. Education is free of charge, and "the government will work towards realizing equitable educational opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural, urban, regional and ethnic differences" (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Promised objectives aside, the children and youths in the refugee camps of eastern Sudan and northern Ethiopia were unhappy with the Eritrean education system. In recognition of discrepancies between the zone (or "zoba") administrative bodies in the five regions of the country, the situation does alter slightly depending on where the child had come from, for example, the cost of school fees, forms of punishment, fines for missing days of school or consequences for inability to afford a school uniform. In general, education in Eritrea is dependent upon teachers and school management employed by/forced to work for the government. During the discussion groups for this research, children expressed concerns with regard to unstructured, though heavily disciplined classes, and frequent disruptions to the year's syllabus when teachers disappeared, assumed to have fled the country.

All of the child participants agreed that they were concerned about what they could expect in their futures. Under Eritrean national law, the National Service Proclamation prescribes that any citizen, upon completion of grade 11, must enroll in national service; grade 12 should be completed at Sawa military training center (in the far west of the country) and thereafter, upon completion of the matriculation examination, students will be sent either into military training, civil service or, for the minority—often children whose families can afford to pay a 50,000 nakfa penalty—continue on to further education at the Eritrean Institute of Technology or one of the country's five technical colleges.<sup>18</sup> Few young Eritreans choose to continue or commit to education within Eritrea, knowing that indefinite national service is unavoidable and, as a result, economic prosperity for most is impossible.

### *Education and Economic Burden*

Children and youths in the camp, both in group discussions and individual interviews, spoke quite openly about the dire economic situation in Eritrea, and their individual families' inability to support their educational development. In some cases, education was simply not a priority; children, as soon as they are deemed able, are expected to help their parents and siblings, either selling, on the farms or in other manual labor jobs. Other children, exclusively those living in Mai-Aini camp, explained that their families had been charged anywhere between 25 and several hundred Eritrean nakfa per semester, despite the government insistence that education is free. Some described the expense of uniforms and textbooks, and the burden on their families when forced to pay a 10 nakfa fine for every school day missed, no matter the reason.

Many of the UASC living in Mai-Aini and Shagarab camps explained that they had previously understood, or at least expected, that upon arrival in Ethiopia and Sudan, UNHCR would provide a "full package," including free education. The UASC who remain in Mai-Aini were generally happy with the quality of education

they receive from IRC, ARRA and Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC), the implementing partner for education. Specifically they appreciated that they had been able to enter into the grade they had been in when they left Eritrea, that school books and uniforms were provided, and there were opportunities to advance on to further study through the government's Eritrean university student scholarship program for which the government of Ethiopia pays 75 percent of tuition (as with Ethiopian nationals) and UNHCR pays 25 percent (to the extent the budget allows).<sup>19</sup>

In stark contrast, UASC in Shagarab are frustrated by a distinct lack of educational opportunities in the camp. None of the children living in the UASC centers attend government schools; one group of boys who have lived in the camp for more than three years explained that they had previously tried to go to the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR)-run school in the camp, but faced harassment and racial threats by other children from the protracted caseload. Classes at the government school are taught in Arabic, which is often not spoken by the newly arrived Tigrinya children. As a result, academic opportunities are limited; HAI provides English and Arabic classes three mornings per week for children under 15 years old. UNHCR continues to work with local partners to ensure that classes are held every weekday. Efforts are underway to increase opportunities available for the older UASC; however, to date, the only option is a standard vocational training package.

### *Fear of forced conscription*

As noted above, the Eritrean National Service Proclamation of 1995 requires that all citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 complete an 18-month period of service. However, in a state of emergency, that period becomes indefinite. Tensions at the Eritrean-Ethiopian border, which have been reported by internationally based Eritrean news sites, including [asmarino.com](http://asmarino.com), to be occurring with increasing frequency since 2005, al-

low the PFDJ government to enforce such a state of emergency.

Upon completion of grade 11 at high schools around the country, all Eritrean children are required to enroll at Sawa military training center, where they will complete grade 12, in addition to their initial six months of military training. Country of Origin Information (COI) reports by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board,<sup>20</sup> the UK Border Agency<sup>21</sup> and other sources<sup>22</sup> provide that children as young as 15 may be forced into national service against their will if they have left education or have the physical resemblance of a much older child.

The zonal administration is responsible for the enrollment of children for national service either upon completion of grade 11, or for children who have left school early. The British Embassy in Asmara confirms that letters are issued to children at their family homes upon completion of grade 11, identifying those children whose details have been provided by their high school to the local administration. The authorities also conduct “round-ups” to capture national service evaders between three to five times per year.<sup>23</sup> Fear of imminent conscription, and being taken by force to Sawa was stated by the majority of children in Shagarab UASC Center as one of their primary reasons for flight.

UASC in Mai-Aini camp expressed a specific fear of being taken by force to Wi'a training center in southern-central Eritrea for failing to attend school; either because they dropped out of school or missed too many days. They explained that the Sawa training center is only for the educated children; those whose families can afford to send them to school. Wi'a is the alternative, used to train youths who leave education before completing grade 11, children thought to be less capable in school, some who had been caught trying to flee across the border and young people seen to be “polluting” the nation. Harsh conditions, aggressive control and severe punishments were all associated with Wi'a camp. Children as young as 12 or 13 years old are reported to have been taken to Wi'a, particularly young boys who appear physically older than their age, as

was described by children, both male and female over 13 years of age, in focus group discussions in Mai-Aini camp.

It must be noted again that no reasons for flight can stand alone; children in both camps said that their fathers, siblings or cousins were enrolled in national service and were unable to support the family, and as such they, the children, were required to travel abroad to look for work and send money home.

The younger males and most females in both camps also expressed physical fears about joining the military: “We are not old enough, or strong enough to train or to fight!” The girls spoke of fear of sexual exploitation, explaining that some girls as young as 12 years marry and become pregnant in hope of avoiding conscription; others arrange early marriages with Eritrean males outside of Eritrea as a means of escape from the country and in hope of better opportunities. The girls in Mai-Aini noted with caution that many of these young girls entering into such marriages of convenience were shocked to find that that the marriages were legal, and they were thereafter tied to the unknown man.

### *Religious Persecution*

Another overlapping issue raised by the UASC in both camps, but particularly in Sudan, is the level of religious tension within their country. One 12-year-old boy in Shagarab I explained that he did not believe he would be allowed to practice his Islamic beliefs as he would wish in Eritrea and so he had come to Sudan to partake in religious training in Khartoum. A slightly older male explained that he had felt forced to leave the country after several members of his Faith Church of Christ prayer group were arrested; he believes those arrested remain in detention in Eritrea.<sup>24</sup>

Concerns with regard to freedom of religion in Eritrea have been widely documented. In *World Report 2012: Eritrea*, Human Rights Watch states: “In 2002 the Eritrean government banned religious activities, except those organized by four registered religious organiza-



tions: Sunni Islam, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea. It deposed the Orthodox patriarch in 2005, has held him in house arrest since 2007, and chose his successor. The government also appointed the current Sunni mufti.”

While the majority of persons fleeing from Eritrea over the past decade have been of Tigrinya ethnicity and Christian faith, the restrictions placed on Muslims and persons from other religious denominations in Eritrea are a concern. Children in the camps are afforded some religious freedom; in Mai-Aini, Christians and Muslims live quite peacefully side by side. In Sudan, the situation for Christian refugees is more a little more tenuous; however, there is a church within Shagarab I and despite some hostility and harassment from the local and protracted refugee community, people can generally practice their faith quite freely.

### *Family Reunification and Sponsorship*

Approximately half of the 105 participants in this study, from both camps, claimed that their primary reason for flight was to join parents, siblings or relatives in the camps or the urban centers, or to be sponsored to join parents, siblings or relatives living abroad.

However, it is to be noted that a proportion of children and youths do have some family living within the camps or country of asylum. Many of these children choose to live within the group care arrangement in Mai-Aini or the center care in Shagarab rather than with their families. Reasons for this choice were varied. Many of the UASC admitted that they enjoyed the freedom that living away from their relatives provided, with few rules and responsibilities, living with their friends, with easy access to visit their relatives on a regular basis. Furthermore, the UASC admitted that services provided within the formal care arrangements were better than if they stayed with family; particularly food and social and vocational activities. Some of the older female teens in Mai-Aini said that their relatives in the camp were all adult males, and that they would not feel comfortable,

and it would not be appropriate for them to live alone with an older male. Concerns about being exposed to “illicit” activities if living with older distant relatives were expressed, examples of which include drug and alcohol consumption, involvement in sexual activities and gambling. Some distant family members in the camps were also unwilling to take care of them due to the resulting financial burden.<sup>25</sup>

In Shagarab, the older male youths expressed a specific fear that members of the protracted caseload community would target them. Because of the continued rivalry between the two caseloads, the boys claimed that they felt unprotected, and without family or community support, they felt much safer living within the UASC center. An obstacle noted to arranging foster care, particularly in Sudan, is that implementing partners do not have adequate resources or experience to conduct necessary family assessments, unifications and monitoring.

In some cases, UNHCR can arrange family reunification. Where a child may be at risk or alone in the country of asylum, and his/her family has been sent to live abroad, family reunification can be used as a ground for resettlement. More common is sponsorship, whereby the family abroad is responsible for making the application and providing evidence that it is able and willing to care for the child in its place of residence. Relatives in most cases had made applications and the children are supported by UNHCR in Sudan and by ARRA in Ethiopia through this process. Waiting time for sponsorship varies from country to country, as does the eligibility of family connection.

Family reunification and sponsorship can be arranged for children with relatives living in refugee-hosting nations; however, for the UASC with relatives in Israel, Saudi Arabia or other Arab states, the arrangement is less clear. Many of these children use independent means to travel to join their relatives; a complex smuggling system operates from both Ethiopia and Sudan (Smith, 2011; Lijinders, 2012). However, as has been reported over the past three years, the risks involved in

such journeys are immeasurable.<sup>26</sup>

### *Adventure Flight and Return*

Though rarely the sole reason for flight, several of the children, particularly those below 13 years old, expressed that they had not really thought too much about crossing the border; the majority live so close and those on the Ethiopian border had spent much time playing with Ethiopian children close to their homes.

In Sudan, the regular movement of some individuals to and from their homes to the camps, with a distinct increase during the summer months, demonstrates the children's mobility. In 2011, UNHCR sub-office Kasala assisted the Sudanese government-led family reunification program for children expressing a wish to go home. In the first group, 59 children were reunited with relatives or pre-established guardians at the Sudanese-Eritrean border with the help of the Sudanese security forces; follow-up checks by UNHCR community services staff in eastern Sudan are in place. In the second group, 78 children were reunited. In January 2012, 27 children were reunited with family in Eritrea; in August 2012, an additional 42 children were reunited with family in Eritrea and in October 2012, nine more UASC chose to be reunited with family back home.<sup>27</sup> UNHCR, with support from the child protection implementing partner, HAI, conducts initial best interest assessments, counseling and cross checks with families before return and following departure. The majority of the children who have chosen to return since this informal repatriation began are below 16 years old.

Voluntary return is not possible for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. Having claimed asylum in Ethiopia, and thus having sought protection from the government of Ethiopia, ARRA would insist that return to Eritrea could not be in the best interest of any refugee. Tense relations between the two countries further complicate any potential repatriation. There is no formal agreement between the two countries for return and no monitoring mechanisms within either ICRC or UNHCR to support family reunification. Geographically, the newer refugee

camps are located far from the Eritrean border and simply walking back across is almost impossible. UASC in Mai-Aini said that they have repeatedly asked UNHCR, IRC and ARRA to support their return to no avail. They expressed concern for children who had gone missing from the camps, some of whom new arrivals reported had arrived home safely, though the number of children missing, perhaps lost or deceased on the long journey through the desert-like plains, is unknown. All of the children under 13 involved in the focus group discussions in Mai-Aini expressed a desire to return home, in stark contrast to Sudan, where all but one member of the mixed under 13-years-old discussion group were waiting for family sponsorship to Switzerland, Germany and Canada.

### *Resettlement*

Though not their only reason for flight from Eritrea, UASC in both Ethiopia and Sudan portrayed both an expectation of and frustration with regard to resettlement.

In Mai-Aini camp, many of the children admitted that they had heard about the batch resettlement of Eritreans from Shimelba camp in 2009/2010 and had come to Ethiopia in the hope that they, too, would be included and sent to the United States. Others explained that friends and relatives in Eritrea, who had not been included in the batch and had subsequently returned, told them that the resettlement program was aimed at younger Eritreans and so they would have a better chance. Some were simply hopeful.

In Shagarab, children expressed some resentment about what they deem to be an unfair resettlement policy; many firmly believed that all Eritreans could be resettled from Sudan after living three years in the camps. In Sudan they felt that as UASC they were discriminated against. Some youths who had previously been through Ethiopia and had become frustrated when they were not resettled from there, moved on to Sudan for what they hoped may be a second chance. They continue to wait.

Refugee resettlement in both northern Ethiopia and eastern Sudan is limited. In Ethiopia, following the 2009/2010 U.S.-sponsored group resettlement from Shimelba camp, resettlement has been focusing on individual protection cases. In Sudan, approximately 3,100 spaces are available per year for the entire 87,000 refugee population. This covers both the protracted Eritrean caseload (2,000 spaces) and new arrivals (800 spaces), including those in Khartoum, as well as Ethiopians and other nationalities.<sup>28</sup> Resettlement is primarily used as a protection tool, from which UASC are not excluded, though due to the overwhelming needs of the entire caseload, as well as concerns regarding possible pull factors, difficulties in conducting family tracing as well as legal issues related to parental rights, very few UASC have so far been included in the resettlement program.

### *Initial Destination*

In discussion, the UASC were asked why they decided to travel to either Ethiopia or Sudan and why they had not moved on elsewhere. The answers to these questions came quite naturally; the majority of the children living in the refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia are originally from very close to the Eritrean border with each country. The majority of those interviewed in Mai-Aini are from border villages. In Shagarab camp the majority of those crossing the border are from the Gash Barka region, including Tesseney and Barantu. Due to the close proximity of Sawa to the Sudanese border and Wi'a to the Ethiopian, both camps see a steady influx of military deserters, though none of the UASC interviewed for this report had previously been to either center and rather had evaded military service beforehand.

The UASC in Ethiopia and Sudan seemed reluctant to explain how they had arranged their travel routes, whether they had discussed their plans with parents, teachers or friends, and who they were supported by. None of the interviewees discussed their plans with anyone but close friends or cousins who might travel

with them; they feared discussing any travel plans with teachers and peers for fear of being reported to the local administration offices. The majority agreed that if they had spoken to their parents first, they would have been prevented from travelling.

Only the children with relatives abroad (usually in the United States or in Europe) explained that their parents had encouraged their flight for the purpose of sponsorship. Those with relatives in the camps, elsewhere in Ethiopia or Sudan, in Egypt or Israel, had not been able to discuss their travel plans with relatives due to telecommunication restrictions. Instead they fled in hope that they might join relatives at a later date, often without first making contact with relatives to ascertain exact locations, as this is often not possible due to poor phone connection within Eritrea, and lack of contact details available for relatives abroad.

Some of the UASC spoke openly about the use of smugglers, though most had not needed to use them (due to the close proximity of their villages to the border). UASC in Mai-Aini described how children coming from farther afield, particularly from Asmara and Deke-mhare, would arrange with smugglers from the cities to travel directly to the border. One boy explained that he and his friends in Tserona had known of Eritrean security guards from these villages working as smugglers during their leave breaks, charging as much as 50,000 – 70,000 nakfa (approx. 3,000 – 5,000 USD) to be driven to the border. He said that “the security officers are not given cars or trucks, but stationed in groups of three at the top of the hills on the border; they are heavily armed and will shoot if you are not lucky.” In Sudan the UASC were less willing to talk about how they had arrived into the country, or about smuggling arrangements: “If your family knows someone then you use them.”

Onward movement was simpler to explain for the majority: “If we had the money we would go. But we don’t, and so we’re stuck here like chickens in a cage.” When asked where they would go, they replied, “Anywhere but here.”

## Protection Concerns and Other Challenges

The majority of Eritreans does not have access to the international media. Government control of the Internet and telecommunications renders all knowledge of the “outside world” dependent upon news from family and friends abroad.<sup>29</sup> Those with money are able to travel back into the country to visit for short periods and share stories of their life elsewhere. Their stories do not always paint the whole picture and so Eritrean youth cling to the hope, and genuine belief, that if only they can reach that other world (Europe, America, Canada, Israel, the Arab States) they, too, can live in places where democracy is respected,<sup>30</sup> and where they can work and earn to support their families back home.

Though the Ethiopian government is relatively welcoming towards Eritrean youth coming across the border, the country’s economic climate cannot sustain the needs of Ethiopian nationals, let alone Eritrean refugees. Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia are granted *prima facie* refugee status; though, in light of the Ethiopian government’s reservation to the right to gainful employment, guaranteed in the 1951 Refugee Convention, options remain limited. Refugees are required to register with the government at Endabaguna Reception Center, close to Shire in northern Ethiopia, and then must stay in the camps for six months. Thereafter, if they meet the out-of-camp policy criteria and are able to join relatives or provide for themselves, they are free to leave: some might find work in the informal sector, others join family and friends in the urban centers, the majority move on.

Documentation in Ethiopia has until recently been set aside; registered refugees rely upon their ration card alone to prove refugee status. In July 2012, revalidation was carried out in Shimelba refugee camp, which included issuance of refugee identification cards; similar plans are intended for Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps over the coming year. UNHCR carries out revalidations on a bi-annual basis to confirm the validity of the previous individual data collected, as well as validating the number of refugees actually present in the camp. Without such verification, it is impossible to track the

movement of the refugees, or to monitor for how long refugees generally stay in the camps.

In Sudan, a less receptive environment meets newly arrived refugees. The Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR) is responsible for refugee status determination (RSD), and while this is granted in almost all cases, the process takes time and involves scrutinizing checks by the Sudanese national security. Few individuals stay long enough to receive their yellow refugee ID card. RSD for children under 15 years has also become a concern to UNHCR over recent months. In line with “country of origin information” (COI) reports on Eritrea, compiled annually by various donor governments including Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the COR adjudicators have determined that children under 15 may not be at risk of forced conscription or any other persecution should they return to Eritrea. In instances where a child mentions other forms of persecution than forced conscription their claim may be considered less severe. Some children,<sup>31</sup> in particular UASC, have been denied refugee status but remain in the camps. These children are given three-month stay permits, which UNHCR staff explain have in some cases been renewed up to three times or more; until now, no children have been forcefully returned. This temporary stay permit does not allow access to services, including education and vocational training activities, and when they reach the age of 18, this group will have no access to food rations. In principle, those rejected have two weeks to appeal the decision, although flexibility with the timeline is sometimes acceptable to adjudicators. However, there is an agreement with the government that once children reach 15 years of age, their cases are re-opened for RSD.

That said, an estimated 80 percent<sup>32</sup> of persons entering Shagarab camp do not stay for more than a matter of months, at most. Some move on quickly to Khartoum and then pursue secondary movement onto another country. At the same time, while work might be found in the capital, regular police round-ups, reported deportations and general harassment from the Sudanese community mean that if means are available, the refugees move on.

Eritrean migration often depends upon the money and resources available to each individual refugee. Those from families in destitute situations in Eritrea are often forced to stay in the camps, while others with relatives abroad may be assisted with their movement to the urban centers. Again, movement from one country to the next will depend upon access to money, filtering out those without access to the necessary means for onward travel. Along the way, the Eritrean population, including UASC, often become stuck in a transient state, trying to find work to earn enough to pay for either the last or the next leg of their route. They are unable to turn back or to return to Eritrea for fear of punishment for having left the country illegally and concerns for the safety of the family members back home.

Beyond the lack of educational and economic prospects in Ethiopia and Sudan, various other protection factors were indicated by the UASC to explain why they feel they cannot stay in the first country of asylum and choose (or in some cases are forced) to move on.

### *Security in Shagarab*

The security situation for refugees living in eastern Sudan remains a concern to UNHCR and numerous human rights groups. Limited livelihood opportunities and what appears to be a belief that the Eritrean diaspora have come into a great deal of money are all considered causal factors for a complex kidnapping and human trafficking network, primarily affecting Eritrean refugees and migrants as they enter the east of Sudan. Initially a cross-border smuggling network led by members of border tribes, who were already engaged in goods import/export and alleged trafficking of arms, the smuggling of Eritrean refugees has evolved and grown uncontrollably in recent years. There has been a drastic rise in the number of Eritreans either held by or sold to some border tribe families in and around Kassala State for the purpose of ransom demand. A profitable business, the number of people involved in this abuse has risen, and is now believed to also include Eritreans from the protracted caseload and some new arrivals

who work alongside the border tribesmen to tap into the ransom payments.<sup>33</sup>

Victims' testimonies collected by various refugee rights groups and by UNHCR<sup>34</sup> indicate that the first point of kidnap may be within Eritrea, along the border with Sudan, and in the northern heights of Ethiopia close to the Sudan–Eritrea–Ethiopia tri-border point. Some testimonies describe smuggling arrangements turned sour, while others describe having been taken by force from within and around Shagarab camps. Though there has been a decrease in reports of kidnapping from the camp in recent months, perhaps in correlation with a significant drop in new arrivals registering in Shagarab camp,<sup>35</sup> the close connection between border tribes and members of the local tribes alleged to be responsible for several torture camps in the Sinai desert continues to cause much concern to the refugees in the camps and to UNHCR.

Refugees, including UASC, in Shagarab fear being kidnapped and held for ransom for sums of up to \$45,000 in Sudan or in the Sinai desert, and so move quickly, if they are able, to the urban centers. This fear may often also be coupled with economic incentives of more readily available work in cities. Three UASC in the camp described their individual kidnapping experiences; one had been taken by force from Shagarab market, one from the open areas outside of the camp where the children go to defecate (in absence of functioning latrines in the center) and one from surrounding fields where some of the youths have been able to find occasional, severely underpaid day-labor work. The children in the camps were fortunate and managed to escape.

Although less information is available about the presence of Eritrean security officers in the camps in eastern Sudan, the UASC mentioned a permanent discomfort in the knowledge that security officers are known to travel in and out of the camp with relative ease, and that kidnappings by Eritrean security personnel have previously been reported.

A further risk to many Eritreans transiting through east-

ern Sudan, including to the UASC, is potential forced return, or *refoulement*, at the hands of the Sudanese authorities. The protection risks presented in the camps, in addition to lack of available education or employment opportunities, force vast numbers of new arrivals to seek means of travelling to Khartoum or other urban centers. The lengthy RSD proceedings in Shagarab, often taking more than two months to complete, result in many Eritreans moving on before they have claimed asylum in the camps of eastern Sudan and before they have acquired any form of refugee documentation. These individuals are particularly vulnerable to arrest and forced return if caught travelling illegally outside of the camps.

The majority of new arrivals resort to the use of smugglers to facilitate their onward movement. Middle men in the camps help to make arrangements with Sudanese truck drivers, bus drivers or men working specifically to transport people from the camps. After payment has been made, the drivers help their passengers to avoid check points, either by travelling off road or by paying off the check-point officials. For the less fortunate, either those involved in traffic accidents or caught out by the authorities, initial detention has in some cases led to the deportation of Eritreans, deemed to be migrants and not asylum seekers by the Sudanese judiciary. In 2011, more than 350 deportations were recorded by UNHCR in eastern Sudan.<sup>36</sup> Between January and October 2012, 54 individuals are recorded to have been deported by the authorities to Eritrea; due to limitations placed upon UNHCR, monitoring within Eritrea is not possible and the status of individuals post-deportation to Eritrea is unknown.

### *Active Opposition Groups in Mai-Aini*

While some of the UASC in northern Ethiopia discussed their knowledge of the kidnapping situation in eastern Sudan and threat from the border tribes, they focused more on a perceived (and in some cases, real) threat of Eritrean opposition groups recruiting young people, including UASC within the camp.

Children in the camp explained that over the past 18 months they had witnessed an increase in the number of youths approached by members of the Eritrean opposition, offering possibilities for education and employment outside of the camp if they are to join the opposition groups. They described how several children who had been tempted by such offers had since returned to the camp, having escaped from military training in a location close to Shire where they had been taken to train and would then be sent to patrol the Ethiopian border with Eritrea. ARRA agreed that this had been a concern in the past year, but denied claims that the threat of recruitment had grown over the past six months. ARRA assures that actions have been taken to prevent political opposition groups from entering the camps.

The children participating in this research said that they had no interest in joining any political group within Ethiopia; they worried that others might be tempted by false promises, and insisted that UNHCR, IRC and ARRA ensure that children's focus remain on education and self-development, rather than potentially dangerous political options.

### *Other Concerns*

UASC in both camps expressed some exasperation towards their living situation in the camps, noting how frequently they had spoken to foreign researchers about their concerns, fears and plans, yet no changes had come from this. Many of the youth talk about the sheer helplessness and hopelessness that they feel, particularly with regard to their future prospects. They expressed fear of spending their entire lives in the camps, having, in their opinion, already wasted their youth. Various programs have been designed at camp levels to ensure the basic and developmental needs of the children are met. Camp activities, particularly in the Ethiopian camps, are often targeted towards the UASC, in turn causing some resentment from the rest of the refugee community who feel that the UASC are prioritized.

## Situational Analysis

### *Operational Programming*

**Mai-Aini camp** in northern Ethiopia received an average of 90 UASC per month in 2012. In September 2012, a total of more than 1,440 UASC, between 9 and 19 years, were recorded by IRC as living in the camp. Of these, approximately 1,000 (894 males, 130 females) live within the “group-care” facilities; a collection of 137 houses, located in one section of the camp. An additional 400 children are recorded as “living elsewhere” in the camp, either with relatives or in informal care arrangements. The remaining 40 are recorded as “missing”; IRC staff were not able to suggest where they may be.

Child protection activities in northern Ethiopia have in the past year have been managed by IRC. Taking over from former implementing partner (IP) Abraham’s Oasis, IRC is now responsible for the pre-established group care facilities, the child-feeding program and individual case management. IRC employs 47 social workers, each responsible for groups of no more than 30 children. It plans to reduce the child to social-worker ratio.

Social workers are responsible for orienting the children upon arrival, best interest assessment and determination, and overall care. The social workers are employed from within the refugee community and live close to the group care facilities. The majority of them have some background in social care, education or child development, and they are employed to work for eight hours per day.

In mid-2012, ARRA recruited “community watch guards” to monitor the situation in Mai-Aini. One team of guards was allocated to the group-care facilities and other areas of the camp throughout the nights and at weekends. The guards were recruited in response to concerns raised about various security risks faced by children and youths during the night in the open group-care area (this is not a closed area, but a segregated

part of the camp; it backs onto the main road and is close to the main market in Mai-Aini camp). UASC noted that the presence of the guards had significantly improved security in the area, though they did occasionally face problems with the guards themselves when trying to venture out into the camp after dark, in violation of IRC rules.

IRC records reflect that the majority of UASC living in Mai-Aini camp are accommodated within the group-care facility. Though not a closed-off area, the facilities are recognized by all camp residents as the UASC area, and generally few other residents have any need to enter. The children live in groups of eight or nine, segregated by age and gender. The 137 houses are clustered in one large block; houses for girls and children under 13 years of age are grouped at the front of the block, closer to the IRC office, the community watch guards’ office and the police station.

In October 2012, UNHCR reported that 131 unaccompanied children under 13 years old were living in the group-care facilities; the younger children also live in groups of eight or nine, and are assisted by a “house mother,” employed from within the refugee community, who is available in the house to help cook, prepare the children for school, help with chores and generally care for the young children throughout the working week. The house mothers do not stay at night or at the weekend. The children explained that they have good relations with their house mothers, they go to visit their homes in the community and are grateful for this additional care.

The majority of children living in the group care arrangement attend school; their social workers and other staff at IRC work closely to ensure that the children register and attend classes daily. Dropout rates range from 17 percent for primary school up to 56 percent for secondary school, the latter of which might be a reflection of the number of children leaving the camp.<sup>37</sup> The children interviewed were generally happy with the education offered in Ethiopia, though they did note that the high turnover of teachers could often be disrupting.

Medical services in Mai-Aini camp are provided by ARRA. There have been some problems in recent months as the previous camp doctor resigned; however, efforts are underway to fill this gap and ensure that adequate health care is available.

Social and vocational activities in Mai-Aini are provided by IRC and JRS. Two child-friendly spaces in the camp provide toys, games and learning opportunities for the younger children, while language and computer classes, dance, music and theatre groups, as well as a football league, are available for all UASC.

The JRS compound in Mai-Aini camp is run separately through funds from U.S. BPRM and private funders. The compound includes an always-busy volleyball court, an expanding library, classes in keyboard, guitar and singing, a theatre group and ongoing counselor training. JRS further offers a semi-structured counseling program. Two psychologists work with a team of incentive workers (trained volunteers) to provide group counseling through coffee ceremonies and other means within the refugee community, at the hospital and GBV center, and within the UASC area. Individual counseling sessions are also available. Additional gen-

der-segregated counseling rooms are under construction in the compound. The number of people, including UASC, currently benefiting from the counseling services is unconfirmed.<sup>38</sup> JRS works with 52 persons with mental disabilities within the camp community, including 12 UASC, providing additional support with daily living, medical care, counseling and monitoring.<sup>39</sup>

A vast open center is currently also under construction in the JRS compound, intended to provide a gym/exercise area, meeting rooms for trainings and a sports facility.

**Shagarab I refugee camp** in eastern Sudan has accommodated a steady flow of around 150-200 UASC per month over the past four years. The transient nature of the population means that they do not stay longer than a matter of months in the camp, and as of October 2012, only 77 UASC were registered in the two UASC centers. In 2012, 406 UASC were registered, while approximately 600 UASC have been verified by UNHCR in the refugee camps and urban areas in eastern Sudan ; however, the majority of these are presumed to be separated children living with relatives, as well as orphans from the protracted caseload.



JRS sports and social center under construction in Mai-Aini Camp.



HAI has for several years served as UNHCR's child protection partner in eastern Sudan.<sup>40</sup> They currently manage two connected centers in Shagarab I camp, accommodating boys below 15 years and all unaccompanied girls in Center I, and males above 15 in Center II. Much like in Mai-Aini, the vast majority of UASC in Shagarab are boys, with girls accounting for approximately 20 percent as of late October 2012. HAI currently employs one center manager and five social workers in the two centers. Monitoring, assessment and training offered by a UNHCR child protection officer, deployed by Save the children Sweden, is ongoing, and significant improvements in the performance of staff and the establishment of systems in the center have led to marked improvements in the social well-being of the children at the centers.

A recent restructuring of the social workers' terms of references mean that each social worker is now responsible for a group of around 20 children, depending on how many children are in the center at any one time. Social workers now meet in a group with the children under their care each morning and are available in the center to respond to children's needs throughout the working day. The recent restructuring also ensures that at least one social worker is on duty in the under-15s center throughout the night and at weekends.

Children in the centers are provided with beds and non-food items upon arrival (including soap, some clothing items, sandals and blankets), three meals per day and assistance in starting their RSD procedures with COR. Children have access to health care facilities, with two clinics located in Shagarab I camp, and the HAI-run hospital in Shagarab II. The UASC are encouraged upon arrival to attend classes at the COR-managed school in the camp; however, a lack of Arabic language skills in some cases, bullying of new arrival Tigrinya children by children from the protracted community, as well as engagement in economic activities, mean that none of the children currently attend formal education. HAI employs language teachers who offer three one-hour classes in English and Arabic each week; classes are currently only available for residents of Center I (un-

der-15 males and all females), though preparations are underway to find suitable language teachers for the older males.

UNHCR has worked with the Sudanese Red Crescent (SRC) and the Sudanese Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) over the past years to establish a structured vocational training program, available for UASC, other children in the camps and a smaller number of children from the host communities. Classes in mechanics, electricity, metal work and computer skills are available at the Children's Village in Kassala, and at the vocational training center (VTC) in Abuba refugee camp. Training runs for three to four months, during which time the child is provided with accommodation at the VTC/Child-Village. The attendees are provided with tools upon completion of VT in the hope that they might start small businesses and use the learned skills. Unfortunately, for the majority of UASC who have completed VT, access to the labor market has not been possible; some children explained that they had been promised loans to help them start businesses, but these loans were never received. They further discussed the sheer lack of need for mechanics, electricians and computer technicians in the camps, and as they are prevented from travelling outside of the camps by Sudan's encampment policy, the children often felt the skills they had learned were wasted. Limited follow-up is made by SRC, MoSW, HAI or UNHCR staff to promote or advocate access to employment for the trained youths within the local communities.

In the centers over the past year, children have received donations of footballs, a volleyball net and some musical instruments. HAI has recently arranged a football (soccer) league for all children in the camp, for whom the UASC have formed one team, though there does seem to be some discrepancy as to which teams in the camp have received uniforms and boots; the UASC claim that they have not. Unfortunately, the donated volleyball net and a keyboard that were provided over the past year were quickly damaged and are now locked up in the storeroom.

Similarly, a youth center was established in Shagarab camp in 2010; the center was handed over the community to manage, and now is on occasion rented out during celebrations of camp events, but is rarely used by the UASC or youths in the camp.

Some of the UASC who have been in the camp for a number of years recently formed a small theatre and music group; working completely on their own initiative they now create performances for any cultural celebrations in the camp, and have on occasion received some payment for their performances in Kassala town.

### *Role of the Eritrean Community*

In both Mai-Aini and Shagarab refugee camps, the relationship between the UASC and the rest of the refugee community is cause for some concern. The segregated nature of the care set-up in both camps has caused a certain hostility, such that the UASC feel that they are discriminated against and outcast, and the communities (in both locations) indicate some resentment that the UASC unfairly receive more services and care than other children in the camps. The UASC are often perceived as quite threatening, unruly and undisciplined, are thought to have lost many of their cultural and traditional values one might usually associate with the home and close community setting, and are perceived to engage frequently in illicit activities in the camps, namely drinking, smoking, drugs and sexual exploits. One active adult male in Mai-Aini camp, who works as a counselor incentive worker for JRS, heads the Camp Refugee Committee and attends the Child Welfare Committee meetings, explained that quite frequently parents from Eritrea or relatives elsewhere make telephone calls to members of the slightly more protracted community in Mai-Aini upon realization that a child has arrived in the camp. Families request that the community take the children into their homes rather than have them live in the group-care facilities to prevent the children from getting into any trouble in the camps.

The same man related his concerns about the children's loss of cultural ties; separated from the community and

living for years away from a family structure, he feared that too much damage may already have been done to the social development of these children: "They no longer have an interest in education, they just don't care. It can only be described as a generation gap."

UNHCR and its IPs have recently begun to work towards the establishment of a structured foster care system in both Mai-Aini and Shagarab camps. While foster care and kinship are often considered to be in the best interest of the child, these possibilities also provide potential sustainable durable solutions for the UASC, where possible preserving family ties and in some instances improving the perceived "gap" or separation between the UASC and the rest of the community. UNHCR staff report various limitations in finding suitable caregivers in both Ethiopia and Sudan.

Community members in Mai-Aini have identified 150 families that are willing to support the fostering of UASC in the camp, although the majority proved to be relatives who expected incentives to assume care arrangements.<sup>42</sup> As an alternative possibility, the Orthodox Church has also expressed willingness to take responsibility for around 80 children, taking them into the care of the church and providing a religious education in addition to formal schooling.

In eastern Sudan, a fostering program is also being explored. A handful of individual kinship arrangements have been arranged within the camp, as well as for some children with relatives in Khartoum, with the help of UNHCR Khartoum.

Similarly, the situation for adolescents approaching adulthood in both camps has caused concern. Currently a handful of youths who have reached 18 years remain in the care facilities, awaiting a formal transition arrangement. In Shagarab camp, approximately 25 young adults were supported by UNHCR field staff with accommodation within Shagarab I camp. They were moved initially in groups of five into one area, though after community members complained, the five groups of young adults were redistributed to stay in

shared compounds around the camp. Discussions are ongoing for these individuals as to which services they will now benefit from, and whether they ought to receive rations for two years like all new arrivals, or for one year as a transition solution. In Mai-Aini, the young adults have expressed a desire and willingness to move into the community, with support, though they are similarly concerned about which services they would be entitled to.

In informal discussions with adolescent boys and young adults in Shagarab camp, it was reported that young men in Eritrea would usually live with their families until around the age of 25, or until they decided to marry and start their own family. Young males would very rarely live alone, unless forced to do so in light of the military service limitations. Though it was stressed that they would be grateful for the freedom of living outside of the Center, and would like the opportunity to support themselves, some of the young men admitted that they were worried about what might happen to them in the community, who would care for them and how they would cope.

UNHCR and IPs note the use of vocational training, as a means of transition for the UASC in both camps, and while the chance to learn new skills and to be busy seems to be appreciated by most, severely limited employment opportunities in the camps, and either restrictions on movement to urban centers in Sudan or equally limited market need in Ethiopia, render this meaningless for most. In informal discussions, the youth added that they choose to partake in the very standard options on offer by UNHCR and IPs, though would much prefer to study and train in professional areas, including teaching, law enforcement, medicine, natural sciences and engineering.

## Operational Challenges

In recent years, targeted efforts by UNHCR, IPs and the governments of Ethiopia and Sudan alike have improved the conditions for children and youths within both Mai-Aini and Shagarab I refugee camps. The

deployment of child protection experts from Save the Children and Radda Barnen to the field offices has provided significant grounding for much needed systematic program design and implementation. Child protection staff development, including an increased presence and awareness of responsibilities, enhanced legal protection and aid to children in the camps, and a focus on durable solutions for all UASC, have been highly beneficial.

A fundamental challenge in working with and programming for the Eritrean UASC is that they have been pre-grouped under a theoretical label, whereas the reality may be that the needs and protections required by the Eritrean children and youths in the camps are dependent upon their individual profile. Reasons for flight, family ties, educational and economic background, physical and mental health, age, duration of stay and gender must all be considered. While the social workers for IRC in Mai-Aini and for HAI in Shagarab have received some training on best interest assessment and determination, which are now ongoing for all identified UASC in both camps, capacity is low and requires constant and long-term monitoring.

The ever-transient nature of the Eritrean caseload is challenging in itself; when there is no intention or desire to remain in the camps for the majority, it is not only difficult to identify those children at risk, but further to provide anything more than immediate and temporary protection for the time that they remain. Efforts are underway in Mai-Aini to try to encourage the UASC to stay long enough to complete their education, though there is little chance of persuasion for children who stay in the camps for no more than a couple of weeks, or those who intend to join family abroad. In eastern Sudan some thought has been applied to the inclusion of basic education within the vocational training package that many children benefit from; however, the absence of an accessible education system in the camps is a striking gap.

Child protection programming and planning for the coming years in both camps has focused primarily on

an inclusive strategy, whereby child protection elements should become part of the routine work of UNHCR field-based staff, and increased coordination with IP staff, particularly social workers. Focus on academic development and more permanent care arrangements are also core, though it seems at this stage that UASC do not feel that their needs are either listened to or met, despite them being represented through the Child Parliament in Mai-Aini camp, and through participatory assessments in both camps.

## Recommendations

### Government of Ethiopia

- 1) The government of Ethiopia is commended for its out-of-camp policy towards Eritrean refugees; however, concern remains with regard to restrictions to legal employment. In recognition of the needs of Eritrean refugees, including youths living within the camps and urban centers of Ethiopia, **the government is urged to reconsider its reservation to the 1951 Convention, prohibiting refugees from working legally within the country.**
- 2) In addition, **the government is encouraged to facilitate a market needs assessment in Shire, Gonder, Mekelle and other northern Ethiopian cities,** to gauge a comprehensive understanding of areas where the labor market needs strengthening and how the skills of the Eritrean refugee population can be coupled with those of host communities to develop the local economy.
- 3) **The Ethiopian government is applauded for the current provision of 1,000 university scholarships to Eritrean students each year, and is encouraged to extend this practice to provide tertiary education opportunities for a greater number of Eritrean youths.**

### Government of Sudan

- 1) In recognition that the transience of the Eritrean new arrival refugee population in Sudan is a direct result of limited employment and educational opportunities within the refugee camps, **the Sudanese government is urged to revise its reservation to the Refugee Convention, and to permit legal movement outside of refugee camps for those who are able and willing to work to support themselves.** Eritrean refugees within Sudan require access to gainful employment in order to become independent from UNHCR and international aid.
- 2) In addition, **the government of Sudan is encouraged to facilitate a market needs assessment in Kassala, Girba, Gadaref, New Halfa and Khartoum,** to gauge a comprehensive understanding of areas where the labor market needs strengthening, and how the skills of the Eritrean refugee population can be coupled with those of host communities to develop the local economy.
- 3) Acknowledging reports of ill-treatment by the Eritrean authorities of individuals caught either trying to flee, or having fled and forcefully returned, **the Sudanese government must comply with international legal obligations and end forced returns of Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees** until such time that mechanisms are in place to independently monitor the practice of the Eritrean State towards such individuals.
- 4) **The Sudanese Commission for Refugees (COR) is urged to reassess its current restrictive RSD policy towards Eritrean children under 15 years of age.** Consideration must be taken of new information indicating that children as young as 12 years old are reported to have been forcefully conscripted to Wi'a military training center.
- 5) **The government of Sudan must recognize the capacity within Shagarab camp and support the refugee community in its own initiatives to pro-**

vide for the educational needs of its children.

## UNHCR

- 1) **It is essential that UNHCR advocate with and thereafter support the governments of Ethiopia and Sudan as per the above recommendations with regard to reservations made to the 1951 refugee convention.** UNHCR must advocate to ensure Eritrean refugees, including UASC, have fair and reasonable opportunities to claim asylum, complemented by the opportunity to integrate within local communities, benefiting from free movement and access to gainful employment so as to support themselves and move away from absolute dependence upon the UN and international aid.
- 2) **UNHCR should promote access to primary and secondary education for all Eritrean refugee children,** taking into consideration each child's academic background and ambition, economic status and family commitments, so as to provide educational opportunities in keeping with the needs of the Eritrean youth.
- 3) **UNHCR must evaluate current vocational training programs,** which at present are not best utilized for the benefit of the children or the local economy. UNHCR should support the host governments to conduct local market needs assessments and design VT programs, with participation from UASC and refugee children, to match the needs of the local market and further the educational development of UASC and refugee children.
- 4) **UNHCR should identify a local implementing partner in Sudan and continue to support the pre-identified partner, Opportunities Industrialization Center - Ethiopia (OICE), in Ethiopia to establish a semi-professional apprenticeship scheme, to supplement VT and other tertiary education opportunities.** A program should be designed whereby youths are able to benefit from the professional qualifications and skills of members of the wider refugee and local communities, to train in professions that are otherwise unattainable, thereby filling professional gaps.
- 5) **In order to achieve regional solutions, it is essential for UNHCR to initiate regional<sup>43</sup> discussion with regard to how best to protect Eritrean refugees, asylum seekers and migrants throughout their journey from Eritrea to the final destination.** Particular attention must be paid with regard to:
  - the protection of Eritrean UASC upon arrival in each country of asylum, including the identification of each child's immediate intention for onward movement and ensuring that child-friendly procedures are in place to respond to the varying needs of each child;
  - how best to respond to the growing number of UASC resorting to the use of smugglers to facilitate their onward movement, utilizing the Eritrean refugee and Diaspora communities to ensure informed information is disseminated;
  - the use of resettlement as a protection tool, where local integration or voluntary repatriation are not possible and as a protection tool for individuals who have fallen victim to and/or continue to face threats from kidnappers, trafficking gangs or other organized groups posing some threat (for example Eritrean opposition movement groups in Ethiopia) in the refugee camps or elsewhere.
- 6) **It is essential for UNHCR to recognize the varying needs of the Eritrean UASC depending upon which stage they have reached in the regional movement process, and accordingly design child protection programs that address individual and group needs.**
- 7) **UNHCR must assess ways to better integrate the Eritrean UASC within the camps** by implementing foster care arrangement models, strength-

ening UASC and broader refugee community interaction, and developing support models such as mentorship and peer-to-peer activities.

### Implementing Partners

- 1) With support from UNHCR, IRC, HAI and SRC **should assess the professional development needs of their field staff, including incentive workers from within the refugee community.** Targeted trainings to develop staff knowledge and skills in child developmental health and psychosocial support, including the use of arts, drama and music, should be made available to social workers and case workers. Self-learning should be encouraged through the provision of tools and other resources.
- 2) **HAI and SRC should conduct regular staff reviews,** to assess the capacity of both long-term and newly employed staff at camp level and to identify gaps in implementation, and revert back to UNHCR in a timely manner when additional support and/or funding is required.
- 3) **HAI and SRC should develop programs focused on strengthening UASC integration into the broader refugee community** to build social networks, enhance protection and mitigate risky, onward movement.

### Eritrean Community: Camp and Diaspora

- 1) **The Eritrean refugee community both within the refugee camps of Ethiopia and Sudan, and in a broader context must strategize how best to respond to the migratory trends of the Eritrean youth; discuss ways and means by which refugee communities in Ethiopia and Sudan might support this vulnerable population, and formulate suggestions as to how UNHCR and donor governments might support them in doing so.**
- 2) **Members of the Eritrean Diaspora** ought to ac-

cept responsibility for the role they have played in the mass movement of the Eritrean youth, and as such **should use established and functioning social media networks, radio broadcasts, in addition to informal family influence and counseling to provide a more honest reflection of the difficulties of life for refugees outside of Eritrea.** Information should also be disseminated on the dangers of using smugglers, the risks posed by kidnappers, trafficking gangs and potentially by armed opposition groups.

- 3) **Eritrean refugees who have fallen victim to the various threats mentioned above, might use the very negative experiences they have suffered to better inform the Eritrean youth through camp discussion, broadcasts or community gatherings.**
- 4) **The Eritrean refugee community must utilize their human resources, to support in the education and social development of the youth:**
  - Trained professionals from within the refugee communities should identify themselves, and work together to support the educational and professional development of the youth.
  - Skilled laborers should identify themselves to the UNHCR, implementing partners and government counterparts and present ways in which they might help to support the local economy.
  - Social structures should be organized from within the refugee communities, with support and recognition from the UN, IPs and host governments, and should be run and managed in a way that is appropriate within Eritrean society.

## Annex 1: Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus group discussion questions were asked in two 45-minute blocks, as follows:

### Part 1

1. We are interested to find out what made you decide to leave Eritrea and go to Ethiopia/Sudan. Can you tell me what were the main reasons you chose to come to Ethiopia/Sudan?
2. Had you or your family been to Ethiopia/Sudan before? Or to any other country?
3. Did you have friends or family who had already made the journey?
4. Did you discuss your journey plans with family or friends before departure? If so, with who? Were you helped?
5. Would you/have you encouraged any other friends to leave Eritrea and come to Ethiopia/Sudan? If so, for what reason?
6. Before you arrived in Mai-Aini/Shagarab, what did you hope to achieve here?

How does this differ from what you are able to achieve?

What do you think is preventing you from achieving this?

What would you suggest might improve your chances of success in the camp?

What are your plans for your future: this month? year?

### Part 2

1. Can you tell me about the education you receive in the camp? How does this compare to the education you received in Eritrea? What would you like to see changed?
2. Are you generally satisfied by the health care that has been available to you in the camp? If not, what are your concerns?
3. When you arrived in the camp/center, what sort of information did you receive about camp rules, procedures, the refugee status determination (RSD) process or other services?

What else would have been helpful for you to know?

4. Do you have any suggestions for programs or ways in which the community/implementing partners/UNHCR might work together to increase security in the UASC centers in Mai-Aini/Shagarab?
5. We hope that, as young adults, you are interested in working with the community to establish a safer environment. Can you suggest to me any ways in which you would like to work with the community/implementing partners/UNHCR to achieve this?
6. Can you tell me about any positive experiences you have had in the camp? Have you felt particularly supported

by anyone/anything, or enjoyed a certain activity that you might like to do more often? Is there anywhere that you like to go in the camp where you feel safe, or you simply enjoy?

If no, by which means could implementing partners/UNHCR/the community support you?



## Annex 2: Profiles

### A Wasted Youth: Haben\*, 16, Shagarab I Camp

Haben, 16, fled his family home in Tessenei, western Eritrea in late 2008. He looked on with obvious cynicism as yet another foreign researcher asked him questions about his life in Eritrea and in Shagarab refugee camp. Haben has stayed at the UASC Center for longer than most; for three and a half years he has watched a steady flow of friends, peers, neighbors and foes pass through the camp, and while he wishes he could follow, he feels trapped. Haben explained that he came to Sudan as a 12-year-old boy, having been convinced by his father, a former Wad Sherife camp (eastern Sudan) resident, that UNHCR and other agencies would provide him with good educational and employment opportunities that he would never be able to access in Eritrea. Haben feels disappointed, misled and bitter; perhaps in his father's day, things were very different he says.

Soon after arrival, Haben enrolled in the vocational training options offered by SRC; he trained in mechanics and received tools to start a business, but explained that he had been promised a grant to get the business off the ground; this never came. His tools remain locked up, he claims, his skills forgotten. Haben is angry, about life, about what to him feels like a wasted youth; each day just like the last. He fears to dream of a different future.

Haben is vocal in the Center; he helps to look after some of the new arrivals and younger children, he participates in any community gathering or event, but most days he sits, bored. When asked how he copes, what he does for enjoyment, his answer was resigned: "This is my fate, I can never go back, and so I wait. I am not the same as you, I have no choice."

### Tormented by Disability: Yusuf\*, 18, Mai-Aini Camp

From a young age, Yusuf, 18, has been tormented by his rickets-turned legs and though he has learned to cope and remains mobile, walking is difficult and tiring. Originally from a small village outside of Adi Quala, close to the Ethiopian border, Yusuf attended school in the village until he had completed grade 4. He was forced to walk several miles to and from school each day, and his parents were unable to afford to send him to stay in another town where he might live closer to school; he became frustrated, often punished for being late and so he gave up.

In early 2009, Yusuf decided to leave his family home in hope of finding better opportunities for education elsewhere. He travelled alone, with regular rest stops, for several hours until he reached the border, and has now lived in Mai-Aini camp for two years and eight months. Upon arrival Yusuf faced similar challenges to those he faced in Eritrea; the distance from the camp to the school is closer, but it still takes him more than an hour to travel. Yusuf also noted that basic services, infrastructure and activities in the camp are all much harder to access for people with disabilities. Raised latrines, though more hygienic than in other camps, are a significant hurdle.

Yusuf currently lives in a house with 10 other youths; he rarely has a moment to himself, yet described feelings of utter loneliness. He feels angry, ignored and quite helpless, aware that he could go back to Eritrea, but what life could he live there?

*\* Names have been changed to maintain some level of confidentiality.*

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## Notes

1 This report refers throughout to unaccompanied and separated children. It is important to note that in many cases, it is difficult to differentiate, as many of the children choose to live in the unaccompanied children's centers, despite having relatives living elsewhere in the refugee camps. It is also important to recognize that owing to the transient nature of the Eritrean caseload in Ethiopia and Sudan, a child who may have once registered as "separated" may now live unaccompanied, and vice versa.

2 In this report, countries included within this region are Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Djibouti and Yemen.

3 See: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

4 Discussions with two or more UASC with a similar background to discuss specific issues relevant to the participants, for example, children with disabilities and children involved in sports or other organized social activities.

5 A significant number of Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan chose not to return at this time. Members of the fragmented opposition, particularly members of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) who had been ousted by the EPLF when the party split in 1974, remained. In addition, some families who had benefited from agricultural programs and foreign aid in the eastern states remained, having established homes and livelihoods on the Sudanese side of the border.

6 Ratified in May 1997.

7 In an interview with IRIN news reporters, Yemane Gebhreib, Director of the President's Office, Asmara on April 1, 2004 declared:

'The war created obstacles and in some aspects did not enable us to move at the pace we would have wanted to move. Now there is relative peace and even in the last two years there has been a lot of progress in terms of elections for local government. This time round there will be elections for regional assemblies etc. So wherever there is an opportunity, the government embarks on this process. But at the end of the day, survival is paramount. It all depends on whether we'll be allowed to live in peace or not. And if we have to postpone certain issues, then they will be postponed. This is not like baking a cake, it's nation building and what do we care whether something happens today or next year as long as the process is right. [...] Frankly our preoccupation now is whether we will have peace or war. That is paramount. You cannot see these issues in isolation. The way the country re-organises itself in times of hostility is different to when there is normality. The situation now is mixed. The clouds of war are still hanging over us. It's a question of priorities for a young nation.'

8 This assertion is supported by reports including but not limited to of the UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea and Human

Rights Watch World Report 2013 – Eritrea.

9 Stephanie McCrummen in her field notes piece for the *Washington Post* on December 13, 2009 comments: "One young Eritrean explained the country's system of indefinite national service as a kind of never-ending forced labor camp. Another, explaining how complete social control is here, told me: 'Resistance is futile -- the only escape is to flee!'"

10 See: "An Open Letter to Israel: Eritreans are NOT Economic Refugees" by field expert and Professor of Anthropology at Tennessee University, Tricia Redeker Hepner: [http://www.hotline.org/english/pdf/Trish\\_060312\\_open\\_letter\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.hotline.org/english/pdf/Trish_060312_open_letter_Eng.pdf).

11 The so-called, Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI), designed by UNHCR and UNDP in collaboration with the World Bank is a five-year development plan, started in 2012, intended to enhance economic sustainability within the 12 refugee camps of eastern Sudan, to allow for their gradual conversion into sustainable village communities. For more info, see: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483b76.html>.

12 Refer to Ambroso, G., Crisp, J., and Albert, N., *No Turning Back: A Review of UNHCR's Response to the Protracted Refugee Situation in Eastern Sudan*, UNHCR, Nov. 2011, p. 5, which states, "Peaking at around 800,000 in 1990, it [the refugee population] currently stands in the region of 80,000. Approximately 67,000 of this number fled to Sudan before 2001."

13 For more information on forced returns from Sudan, please see page 18.

14 According to UNHCR Ethiopia, March 2013.

15 See: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35576&Cr=ethiopia&Cr1#.UJvZrmhMbjQ>.

16 Population statistics received from UNHCR Branch Office, Addis Ababa on November 9, 2012.

17 UNESCO. September 2010: World Data on Education: VII Ed. 2010/2011. *Eritrea*.

18 Colleges include: College of Marine Science, College of Business and Economics, College of Agriculture, College of Health Sciences, College of Arts and Social Sciences. (Rema, 2008)

NB: During the research mission, various older members of the Eritrean community mentioned that Asmara University had recently closed. Little documentary evidence is available to this effect; however, it is understood that the university is not currently in operation.

19 According to UNHCR Ethiopia staff, March 2013.

20 See: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=5084f3982>.

21 See: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,UKHO,,ERI,50374efd2,0.html>.

22 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report *Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, published in April 2009, explains:

"Although the war with Ethiopia ended in 2000, in May 2002 the government introduced the Warsai Yekalo Development Campaign (WYDC), a proclamation that indefinitely extended national service....The WYDC was a national effort in which the generation that had fought for independence would join with new recruits to build the nation. In effect, it meant the forced conscription of every adult male up to the age of 50, although some refugees claim 55 is now the upper limit, with other sources claiming up to 57 for men and 47 for women....Not all national service is military service, since many conscripts are not deployed in the army but on civilian projects, or are assigned to commercial enterprises with their salary paid to the Ministry of Defence. However, the Ministry of Defence is in control of the national service programme and if someone working on a construction project were to abscond they are still be [sic] regarded as a deserter under military law."

23 *Op cit* 14.

24 See: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue9762.html>.

25 Input provided by UNHCR Ethiopia, March 2013.

26 Refer to van Reisen, et. al, *Human Trafficking in the Sinai: refugees between Life and Death*, Tilburg University, 2012.

27 UNHCR Sudan statistics, March 2013.

28 As per UNHCR Sudan input, March 2013.

29 NB: In November 2012, Sweden-based Eritrean advocate and radio presenter Ms. Meron Estefanos confirmed that her Radio Erena program would be broadcast in Eritrea daily between 8.00 and 8.30 Eritrean time, at 25 SW meter band.

30 NB: A desperate need for "democracy" was repeated by many of the youths in Mai-Aini and Shagarab.

31 25 UASC were rejected in 2012 according to UNHCR.

32 Input from UNHCR Sudan, March 2013.

33 Testimonies collected by rights groups, Hotline for Migrant Workers and Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, by Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance in Egypt and by UNHCR staff in eastern Sudan all include reference to Eritrean middle-men, particularly used for interpretation in all locations where refugees have been held whilst ransom is demanded.

34 See, for example, *Hotline for Migrant Workers, The Dead of the Wilderness. Testimonies from Sinai Desert*.

35 NB: The number of new arrivals registering in Shagarab has leveled off at approximately 2,000 persons/month for the past three to four years. In April 2012 this figure rose to almost 3,000 new arrivals, but dropped again in May and June, in August a mere 412 new arrivals were recorded and 284 in the first two weeks of Sep-

tember. Similarly, in the last week of October 2012, UNHCR Tel Aviv reported that for the first time in more than seven years, not a single Eritrean was reported to have crossed the border. Cairo on the other hand has seen a slight rise in new arrivals in the past six months.

36 See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4e9d47269.html>; <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/29505/>.

37 Data provided by UNHCR Ethiopia, March 2013.

38 As per UNHCR Ethiopia input, March 2013.

39 In late 2012, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the Center for Victims of Torture, which sent trained experts to work in Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camp by the end of the year.

40 Registration statistics received from UNHCR, Sub-office, Kassala on November 5, 2012.

41 UNHCR staff and former child protection experts on mission to the camps have disputed the capacity of this organization. Concerns have been raised with regard to limited international monitoring, poor general attitude of staff and no expert knowledge on child protection. In 2012, UNHCR sub-office Kassala tried to bring Save the Children into eastern Sudan initially to build capacity of the staff; however, government restrictions prevented the international NGO access and thus plans were halted. Note should be made also of the very low wage received by HAI staff, particularly the social workers, who receive a mere 400 SDG (65 USD)/month. In 2012, the amount was increased to 700 SDG (over 120 USD) as net salary.

42 Input from UNHCR Ethiopia, March 2013.

43 See note 2.



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