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FORGOTTEN REFUGEES:
ERITREAN CHILDREN IN
NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

DECEMBER 2015
FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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I. OVERVIEW

SCOPE OF MISSION

USCRI has a long history—nearly four decades—of working with Eritreans fleeing violence and persecution. Several of our board members visited Eritrea in 1997 and visited its neighboring country Ethiopia in 2010. USCRI undertook its most recent mission to Ethiopia with the America Team for Displaced Eritreans, a Pennsylvania-based NGO, as well as other NGOs and volunteers during the first two weeks of December 2015. The trip served as an essential fact-finding mission as USCRI contemplates how to provide assistance to unaccompanied children in three refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. The delegation visited the region and collected up-to-date information about Eritrean unaccompanied refugee children temporarily residing at and registered with the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center and those children living in the Adi-Harush, Hitsats, and Mai-Aini camps (the “Shire refugee camps”).^{1,2} In addition, the delegation met with officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Ethiopia (“UNHCR Ethiopia”), various NGOs, and the Ethiopian government (“GoE”). This report details the delegation’s findings and presents USCRI’s recommendations to stakeholders.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Secondary migration is pervasive among the predominately young and urban Eritrean refugees who initially seek protection in Shire. These refugees find that it is impossible to live comfortably and with hope for the future in the Shire camps due to the poor conditions within the camps. The refugee youth face a daily reality of limited water, food, sanitation, education, security, and opportunity. Within the Shire camps, there is little to no electric power. Eight to ten refugees collectively live in 10ft x 10ft concrete or mud dwellings in an extremely hot and arid area. Others live in tents. Within these crowded shelters, refugees must prepare their meals and store their meager rations and clothes.



Refugee children, newly arrived to the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center, watching a video about human trafficking.

The delegation was concerned about the lack of basic protection for the residents of the camps that it observed. Women and children are at great risk of experiencing abduction, violence, and sexual assault when they leave the camps to collect firewood, which is needed for cooking. Because resources like firewood are very scarce in the Shire region, refugees and members of the host communities must compete for these resources. This competition occasionally becomes violent. In addition, the supervision of and care for unaccompanied children are highly informal and inadequate. Most children receive no formal custody arrangement in the camps. Rather, several children are typically grouped into a shelter, and each group is paired with an unrelated adult refugee who lives nearby. For these groups, the adult neighbor serves as the children’s general point of contact within the camp. In theory, these adults look after the children and provide guidance. Children frequently report, however, that these neighbors take little interest in their well-being. Even when well intentioned, the assigned neighbors are often so desperate for their own survival and durable solutions that they leave the camps without making arrangements for other adults to care for the children.

In addition to gaps in shelter provision, there are substantial gaps relating to food and water rations, security, and education. Two of the camps visited have no secondary school or recreation facilities for teens. Moreover, the regional reception center does not have a primary or secondary school despite the fact that some children stay there for two months waiting for a shelter in the camps.

Refugee youth flee the camps on a daily basis, and the whereabouts of thousands of these children are unknown. **The pertinent question is not “why are these children leaving?” It is “why would a child stay in these camps indefinitely?” The most common phrase our delegation heard was “these children have lost hope.”**

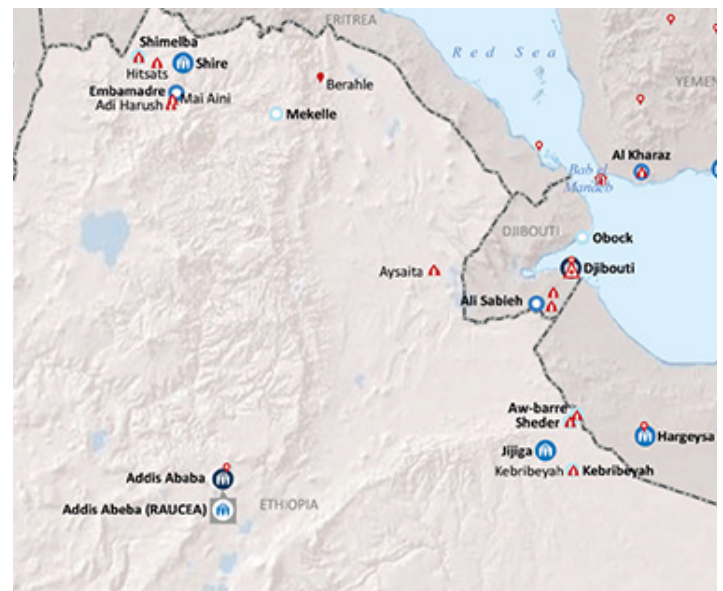
II. BACKGROUND

REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia, a country in the Horn of Africa (northeast region), shares a border with six countries: Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan.³ Ethiopia is comprised of nine regions including Tigray, which is the northern most region and borders Eritrea and Sudan. Currently, there are 23 refugee camps in Ethiopia, four of which are located in Shire, a district within the Tigray region.⁴ The Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center and three of the four Shire refugee camps—Mai-Aini, Adi-Harush, and Hitsats—are the focus of this report. USCRI visited the fourth refugee camp in Shire—Shimelba—during its 2010 mission.

Ethiopia maintains an open-door asylum policy and is home to the largest refugee population in Africa.⁵ An estimated 733,644 refugees have fled to Ethiopia; 57.4 percent of these refugees are children.⁶ Within the refugee population, there are 39,273 unaccompanied or separated children.⁷ The majority of refugees fleeing to Ethiopia are from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia.⁸

Eritrea is the largest producer of refugees in Africa. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UNHCR”), an estimated 5,000 people,⁹ mainly urban and educated youth, leave the country every month. And, since 2004, more than 112,000¹⁰ Eritrean refugees have requested asylum and protection in Ethiopia. These Eritrean refugees are fleeing human rights violations, as detailed in the United Nations Human Rights Council’s 2015 report on human rights violations in Eritrea.¹¹ These abuses

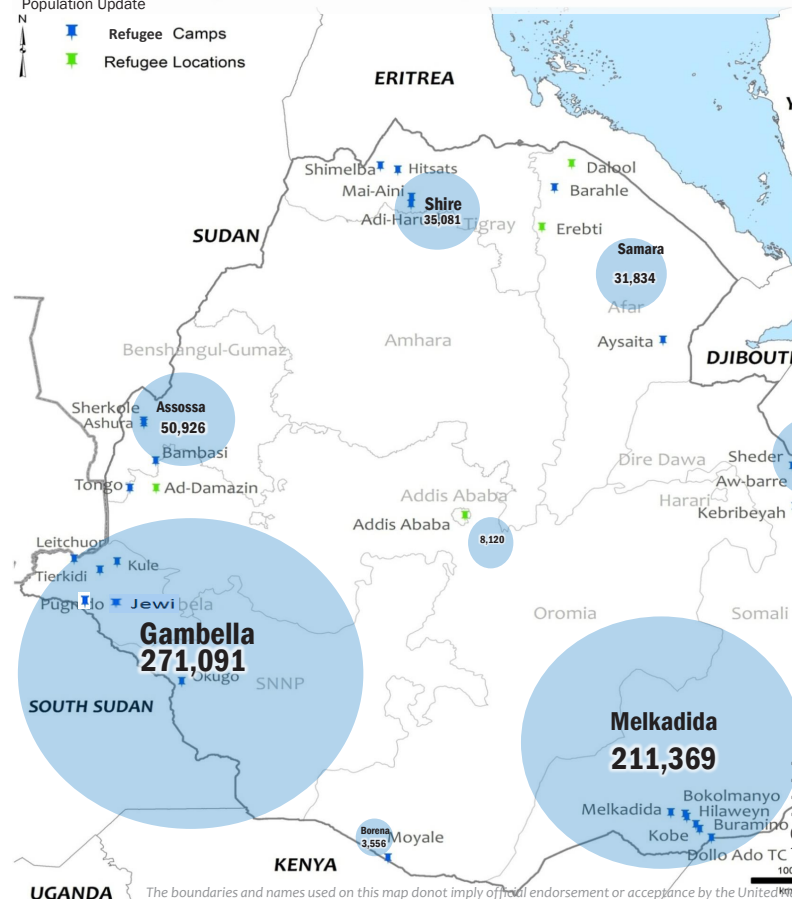


USCRI and its partners visited the Endabaguna Reception Center and three refugee camps in the Shire district of Ethiopia.

include mass surveillance and forced labor through open-ended national service as well as repression of the freedoms of movement, assembly, expression, press, and religion.¹² In addition, Eritreans frequently disappear and are routinely and arbitrarily arrested, detained, tortured, or executed without due process. In 1968, during an earlier period of mass refugee migration, more than 150,000 Eritrean refugees fled to Sudan due to Eritrea’s war of independence. This war sparked the longest-standing refugee crisis in Africa.

Population Update

Refugee Camps
Refugee Locations



Total Refugee and Asylum-seeker Population **731,071**

Total Number of Households **215,770**

Camp/Site	Population by Camp/Site & Co						Total	Camp/Site(%)
	SSD	SOM	ERT	SUD	YEM	OTHERS		
Addis Ababa	374	797	4,611				8,420	1.1%
Mai-Aini			10,898		74	1,360	10,898	1.4%
Adi Harush			8,492				8,492	1.1%
Shimelba			5,421				5,421	0.7%
Hitsats			9,869				9,869	1.3%
Tigray (OCP)			401				401	0.0%
Aysaita			10,291				10,291	1.4%
Barahle			9,048				9,048	1.2%
Erebt*			542				542	0.0%
Dalool*			7,511				7,511	1.0%
Ayne-Deeb*			4,442				4,442	0.6%
Pugnido	63,410			50	14		63,474	8.6%
Kule	48,443			15	3		48,461	6.6%
Pugnido II	16,512				1	2	16,515	2.2%
Okugo	7,714				1		7,715	1.0%
Tierkidi	53,399					4	53,403	7.3%
Jewi	48,494					3	48,497	6.6%
Gambella Main Entry Points**	29,903						29,903	4.0%
Other Location Gambella*	3,123						3,123	0.4%
Sherkole	4,688			6,062		680	11,430	1.5%
Bambasi	20			15,374			15,394	2.1%
Gizan/Ad-Damazin*	7			2,574			2,581	0.3%
Tongo	1,258			10,382		14	11,654	1.5%
Tsore/Ashura	6,071			3,796			9,867	1.3%
Ken-Borena						3,556	3,556	0.4%
Aw-barre		12,332					12,332	1.6%
Kebribeyah		13,553					13,553	1.8%
Sheder		12,131					12,131	1.6%
Bokolmanyoo		42,436					42,436	5.8%
Melkadida		44,910					44,910	6.1%
Kobe		42,533					42,533	5.8%
Hilaweyn		42,549					42,549	5.8%
Buramino		38,941					38,941	5.3%
Dollo Ado TC & RC							-	0.0%
Entrepreneurs spontaneously settled in Ethiopia			81,078				81,078	11.0%
Total	283,416	250,182	152,604	38,329	1,360	5,180	731,071	100.00%
CoO (%)	38.77%	34.22%	20.87%	5.24%	0.19%	0.71%		100.00%

Notes:
 * Refugees living within host communities
 ** Refugees at entry points
 OCPs: 3,762 in Addis Ababa and 401 in Tigray.
 2,446 new arrivals comprise 544 (22.24%) in Gambella, 1,734 (70.89%) in Shire, 34 (1.39%) in Addis Ababa, 121 (4.95%) in Assosha, 1 (0.04%) in Melkadida & 12 (0.49%) in Samara.
 The Shire refugee population decreased by 81,078 refugees in September 2015; these refugees no longer reside in the Shire camps and are believed to have spontaneously settled elsewhere in Ethiopia, subject to verification.

Sources UNHCR proGres For more information, contact mutueran@unhcr.org

This heat map, courtesy of UNHCR, shows the number of camp-based refugees throughout Ethiopia, including the Shire region where USCRI and its partners visited.

The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) manages all refugee camps through the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA).¹³ ARRA, UNHCR, and a network of civil society partners work jointly to protect and assist refugees.¹⁴ Although there has been an influx of Eritrean refugees into Shire, the refugee population in the camps tends to remain around 30,000 individuals.¹⁵ This is because approximately 75 percent of Eritrean refugees (over 80,000 people to date) have engaged in secondary migration.¹⁶ While many have traveled to Europe or Israel via Sudan, refugees are also living in Ethiopia's urban areas such as Addis Ababa.¹⁷

Ethiopia is party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, although Ethiopia has maintained reservations relating to refugees' right to work. It is also party to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which

includes in the definition of "refugee" those fleeing war and generalized violence.¹⁸ Ethiopia's 2004 Refugee Proclamation established a procedure for applying for asylum and incorporated the conventions' refugee definitions. The Proclamation prohibited the GoE from refusing entry to refugees and from returning them to any country where they would be at risk of persecution. This mandate also granted refugees some of the rights outlined in the inter-governmental conventions but denied refugees rights to movement and work. However, the country supports an "out-of-camp" program, solely for Eritrean refugees, which "allows [Eritrean] refugees to live outside of camps and engage in informal livelihood opportunities."¹⁹ According to UNHCR, 8,094 Eritrean refugees are living in Addis Ababa under this program, but many more are likely residing in urban areas without the proper authorization.

Very few countries are resettling Eritrean refugees. In 2015, UNHCR submitted resettlement applications for 1,000 refugees, including 100 unaccompanied children, who are living in the Shire camps.²⁰ UNHCR's resettlement referral target for all of Ethiopia was 5,965 in 2015.²¹ The United States conducts almost all resettlement of Eritrean refugees.²² In fact, the USCRI delegation was informed by a UNHCR official in Shire that the United States carries out approximately 97 percent of Eritrean refugee resettlement. In 2015, the United States resettled 1,783 individuals of Eritrean origin.²³ In contrast, Canada accepted a mere 142 refugees of Eritrean origin during the first six months of 2015.²⁴

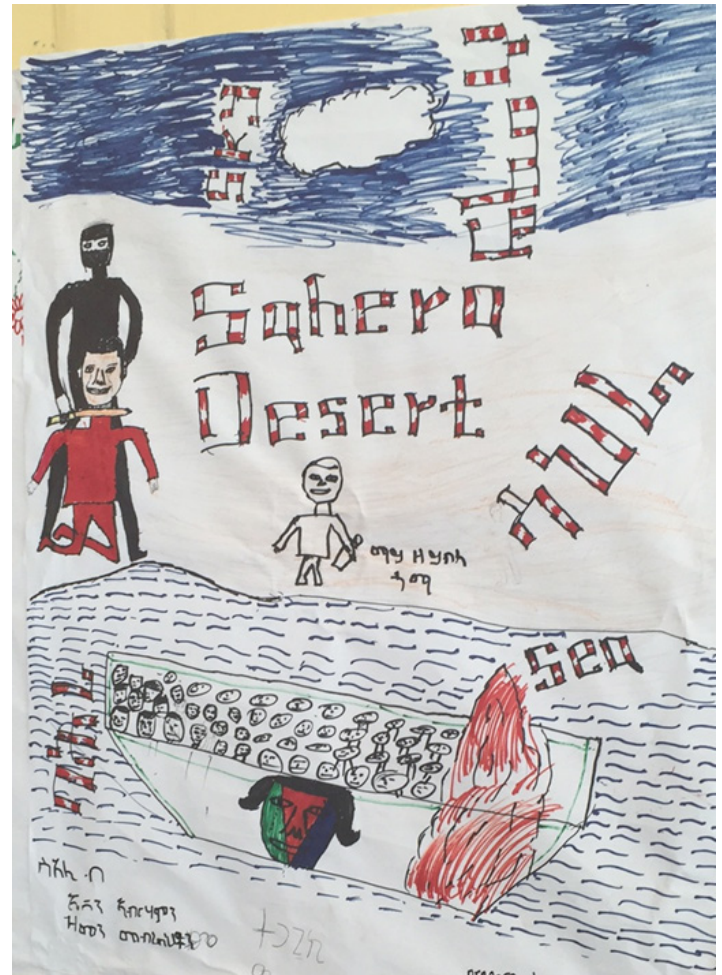
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN ETHIOPIA

“Of course there is trafficking.”

- ARRA Official, Hitsats

Unaccompanied children are a particularly vulnerable population; they often fall victim to abuse and human trafficking. Recently, UNHCR has seen a significant increase in unaccompanied Eritrean children arriving in Ethiopia. UNHCR estimates that, as of October 2015, 2,382 unaccompanied children resided in the Shire refugee camps, and 211 unaccompanied children awaited placement at the Endabaguna Screening Center.^{25 26} Moreover, from December 7 – 13, the Endabaguna Screening Center registered an additional 123 unaccompanied or separated children.²⁷ Once they reach a camp, most of these children will only find support from informal care systems.

Given the increasing number of unaccompanied children and the limited resources with which to care for them in the camps, refugee resettlement partners are exploring options for durable solutions.



A refugee child's artwork displayed at the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center

One option is to facilitate the children's reunification with parents or relatives in Eritrea. Unfortunately, according to UNHCR, "[d]espite ongoing efforts to facilitate safe voluntary return to Eritrea for unaccompanied children to promote family reunification, no such returns from Ethiopia have occurred in recent years."²⁸ In fact, in early 2015, the Eritrean government blocked an attempt to return 50 children.²⁹

Furthermore, many unaccompanied children attempt to leave the camps and reside elsewhere due to the bleak reality of camp conditions. An estimated 300 - 400 Eritrean children arrive to refugee camps in Ethiopia per month, while approximately 200 children depart per month. Some of these children leave the camps seeking new opportunities in urban

UNACCOMPANIED OR SEPARATED CHILDREN

2012-2015

Shire Camps

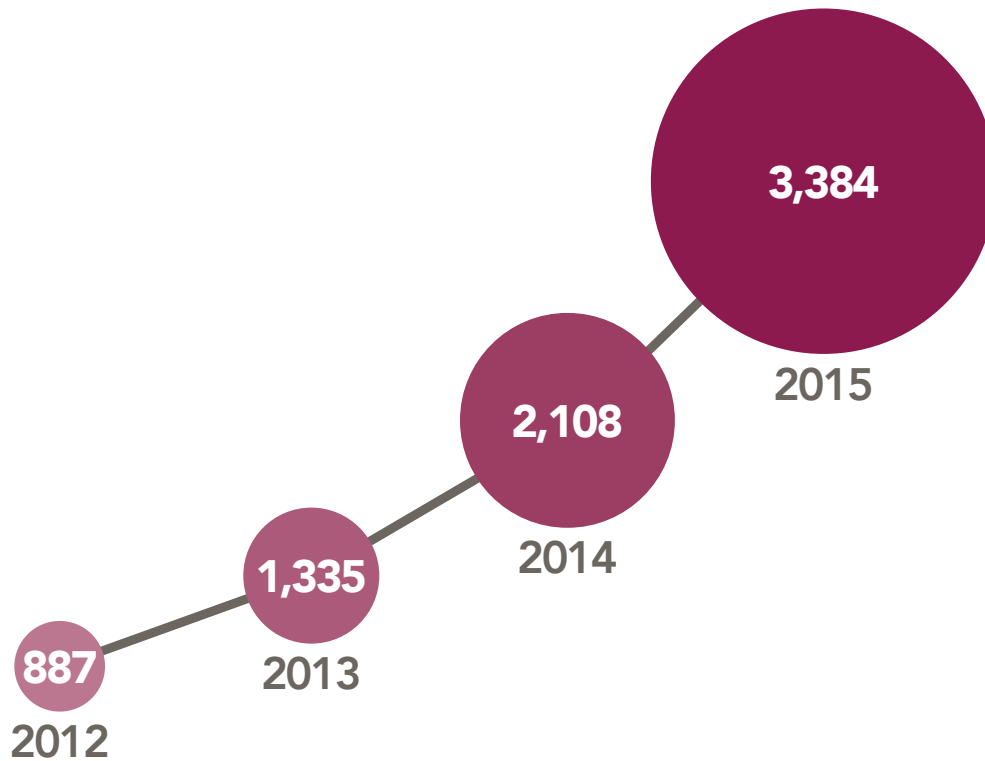


Figure 1: Since 2012, the number of unaccompanied or separated children has nearly quadrupled in Shire camps.

areas in Ethiopia, but the majority are presumed to be making the dangerous journey towards Europe through Sudan and Libya.³⁰ This movement puts children at risk of being trafficked, sexually abused, and having their organs harvested by criminal gangs. “Many unaccompanied and separated children suffer human rights abuses as a result of being smuggled

and/or trafficked.”³¹ Nonetheless, children continue to leave camps despite campaigns implemented by UNHCR, ARRA, and civil society regarding the risks of secondary migration.³²

“Tell them we are not economic migrants. We have all been politically persecuted. We left our parents at home, and there is no one to bury them. Tomorrow, if there is peace, we will go home.”

- Member of the Eritrean Refugee Council, Hitsats

III. OBSERVATIONS

CAMP DEMOGRAPHICS

Despite the 112,000 Eritrean refugees officially registered in Ethiopia, as of October 2015, these camps only hosted an estimated 33,500 Eritrean refugees. In Shire, 75 percent of refugees are below age 25, and 36 percent are children. As noted above, as of October 2015, there are an estimated 2,593 unaccompanied or separated children in the Shire camps and Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center.³³ Figure 3 on the next page shows the percentages of those living in the Shire area refugee camps who are children, and Figure 2 shows how many are unaccompanied or separated.

CAMP CONDITIONS & SUBSTANTIAL GAPS

The overall feeling in the camps is one of hopelessness. As outlined below, there are several unmet needs or substantial gaps creating austere camp conditions. The conditions and lack of opportunities drive young refugees to leave camp. As discussed in Section II, this secondary migration is highly dangerous and puts children at risk of being trafficked and abused. "In the worst case, refugees are abducted by traffickers, held for ransom and brutally tortured, raped and threatened with organ removal."³⁴ Improving deficiencies in camp conditions and infrastructure is essential to reducing this secondary migration and will help refugees live in a more dignified manner.

SHIRE REFUGEE CAMPS

As of October 2015

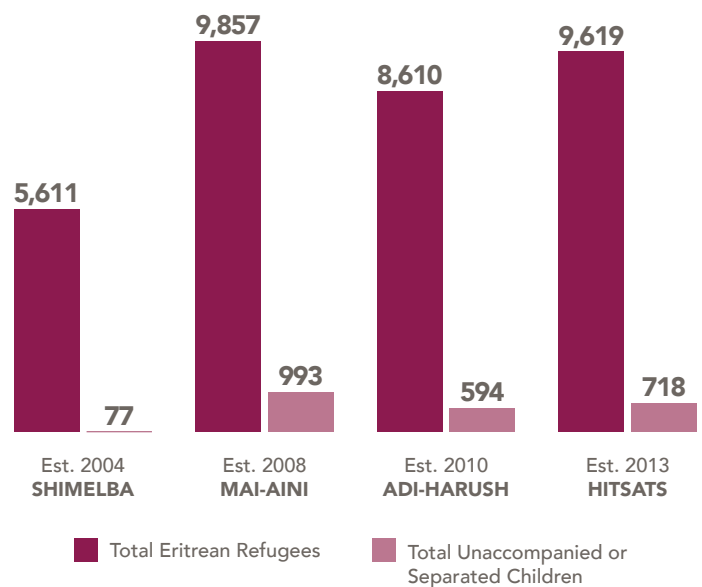


Figure 2: This bar chart shows the proportion of adults to unaccompanied or separated children in Shire refugee camps.

PERCENT OF REFUGEES UNDER 18

As of October 2015

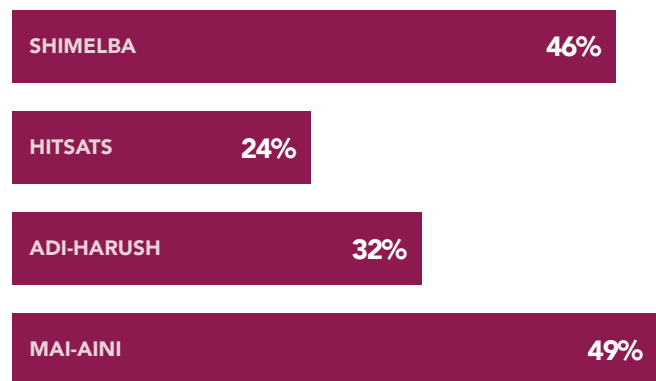


Figure 3: This chart shows the percentages of those living in the Shire area refugee camps who are children.

A. FOOD

There is simply not enough food being provided to refugees in the Shire camps. Each refugee is entitled to the same ration, regardless of age.³⁵ An estimated 95 percent of refugees in the camps are wholly dependent on these food rations, however, monthly rations often last only 14-20 days.³⁶ Furthermore, the little food that is available is not highly nutritious, and variety is lacking. Meals consist of a corn-based mash and injera, a traditional bread. Sugar and salt are generally unavailable.³⁷ The World Food Program and ARRA provide supplementary food items to “vulnerable groups,” but few children are considered vulnerable. Generally, a child only receives supplementary rations if he or she is under two years of age.³⁸ UNHCR has noted that the malnutrition rate is increasing in the camps.³⁹

“Our problems are food, clothes, shoes, soap, water, brooms, rats getting our vegetables, and there are no lights at night.”

-Young girl, Member of Children’s Parliament, Hitsats

Due to the lack of income and livelihood opportunities (discussed below in Subsection E), refugees commonly sell their food rations in order to buy firewood or charcoal for cooking.⁴⁰ In addition, some unaccompanied children who have aged out of group care at 18 years old are not being issued ration cards immediately, leaving them with no access to camp rations.⁴¹

B. WATER

Like food, water is rationed in the camps and is in inadequate supply. The cleanliness of water is also a concern. The limited water refugees collect must meet their drinking, cooking, and bathing needs. Shortages are particularly prevalent during the dry season. The delegation observed that in Hitsats, refugees are split into shifts and only allowed to collect water during their designated time period.

The water shortages have significant health implications. As UNHCR has noted, “[t]he inadequate distribution of water in the camps contributed to high prevalence of Diarrheal diseases.”⁴²

C. SHELTER



Preschool children receive their breakfast in Mai-Aini

The living conditions for refugees are rudimentary and overcrowded. Refugees are organized into groups of eight to ten individuals with whom they live in 10ft x 10ft concrete or mud shelters with dirt floors. Despite searing summer temperatures, the shelters are frequently constructed with a heat-storing metal roof. Within this space, refugees must prepare their meals and store their meager rations and clothing. Additional shelters are needed in the camps as some refugees are living in inadequate tents.⁴³ UNHCR has acknowledged that “[i]n Shire, Ethiopia, it is increasingly difficult to secure adequate shelters for the high numbers of UASC [unaccompanied or separated children].”⁴⁴

The delegation found that the camps all lack electricity and household lamps are in short supply. In Adi-Harush, for example, 840 lamps have been distributed but only to the most vulnerable individuals.⁴⁵ As part of its “Live, Learn, Play Safe 2014-2016” initiative, UNHCR built new kitchens

in the Shire camps.⁴⁶ However, due to the lack of electricity, these kitchens are of limited use, and refugees continue to rely on firewood for cooking. “The lack of firewood and other alternative fuels is causing severe problems in the Shire refugee camps.”⁴⁷ Not only is firewood scarce, but, as discussed below in Subsection F, this dependence on firewood contributes to security concerns for vulnerable groups.

D. SANITATION & HEALTH

The delegation was alarmed by the insufficient sanitary conditions within the camps. These conditions contribute to health problems for the refugees. Refugees share co-ed latrines. Household latrine coverage for Mai-Aini, Adi-Harush, and Hitsats is at 78 percent, while coverage for Shimelba is only at 49 percent. The inadequate and unsanitary latrine coverage contributes to Malaria because pits dug for such purposes become breeding grounds for mosquitos.⁴⁸ In addition, there are insufficient washbasins and soap in the camps.⁴⁹ Refugees repeatedly told the delegation that female sanitary products are also scarce.⁵⁰

Additionally, refugees in the camps lack adequate clothing. The USCRI delegation observed seven boys living together in a small shelter; each owned a small mesh bag that was hung on the wall. The bags contained a handful of additional clothing items for the boys. Other than the clothes on their backs, these few items were all they had. These boys slept together on a raised mud bed that comprised half of their shelter. To sleep, they had to line up to fit in the space like sardines.

Health services and medical supplies are limited. The most common illnesses and ailments in the camps include malaria, diarrheal diseases, upper and lower respiratory tract infections, urinary tract infections, and other gastric disorders.⁵¹ In addition to treatment for these physical conditions, refugees are in desperate need of mental health services.

E. EDUCATION & LIVELIHOODS

Refugee youth have limited educational opportunities in the camps and even fewer livelihood opportunities. Youth also have very few recreational opportunities;



A primary school for refugee children in Mai-Aini

two of the Shire camps have no functional recreation facilities. While all four camps have primary schools, the schools are overcrowded, and resources are very limited. As noted above, although some children stay at the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center for over two months while waiting for a shelter in the camps, the Reception Center does not have a school.⁵²

Within the camps, the delegation observed that schoolchildren had no books or supplies with which to work. Reports further show that children often lack desks, pens, and paper.⁵³ Mai-Aini is the only camp with a functional library. Although a library has been built in the Adi-Harush camp, it is not stocked with any books. Often, the only resources with which to teach are chalk and a blackboard. One primary school was so overcrowded that teachers had to split classes into two forty-student shifts. Teachers are paid the equivalent of \$35 USD per month and have limited incentives to stay in the camps. They frequently quit or leave. In addition, secondary school opportunities are generally lacking. Of the camps visited by USCRI's delegation, only the Mai-Aini camp provided children with the opportunity to attend a secondary school outside of the camp.

The few vocational opportunities that exist within camp are limited to refugees between the ages of 15 and 24.⁵⁴ The GoE prohibits refugees from engaging in formal employment outside of the camps. Within

the camps, the majority of refugees earn no income, although some refugees in the Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps have adopted minor income-earning activities such as hairdressing and petty trade.⁵⁵ Overall, the lack of livelihood opportunities makes educational attainment a low priority for many refugee children.⁵⁶

F. SECURITY

The Shire camps lack basic security. Individuals can enter and exit the camps at will because there is no perimeter security. The delegation observed an armed individual, with no relation to camp administration, wandering through the Adi-Harush camp. In contrast, the police guarding the camps are not armed.⁵⁷ Moreover, in Adi-Harush, there is no government police presence in the camp.⁵⁸ The lack of adequate streetlights contributes to the insecurity. Adi-Harush has installed ten street lamps throughout the entire camp, but, of these, only eight are functional.⁵⁹

Refugees in the camps face a high risk of being abused and trafficked. UNHCR found that approximately 95 percent of trafficking victims from

the East and Horn of Africa are Eritrean.⁶⁰ Women and children report high rates of sexual and gender-based violence.⁶¹ In particular, women and children are at risk due to their dependence on firewood. These vulnerable individuals must walk long distances out of camp to collect wood, putting them at danger of being sexual harassed or raped on their journeys.⁶²

G. SUPERVISION & CARE OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

As noted above, there are an estimated 2,382 unaccompanied children residing in the Shire refugee camps. Given the rapidly increasing rate of unaccompanied children arriving over the last four years, this number is expected to grow significantly in 2016.⁶³ UNHCR explained that unaccompanied children are placed in “community-based care,” which includes support and supervision by neighboring adults, “refugee social workers,” and “child protection caseworkers” (who are often referred to as “volunteer adult guardians”).⁶⁴ However, this system of care is highly informal, and children frequently do not receive the necessary support.

In the current system, children are placed under the supervision of refugee volunteers who live in nearby shelters. The volunteers are not screened prior to placement and receive no formal training regarding child care. These individuals receive few incentives—typically only extra food—to care for the unaccompanied children. The volunteers are often responsible for numerous children, and children have reported that their supervising neighbors have little interest in their well-being or education.⁶⁵ The delegation spoke to one volunteer who said her role was mainly to mediate disputes and ensure that the children receive their rations. Even when the volunteers are well intentioned, they are desperate for their own durable solutions and may leave the camp without giving notice and making alternative care arrangements.

Overall, there is a dearth of institutional knowledge or expertise regarding child care within the camps. The “refugee social workers” and “child protection caseworkers” do not receive the kind of formal training that one would expect. The current



Two refugee children at Mai-Aini

system provides minimal supervision and care for unaccompanied children. For instance, through informal arrangements, unaccompanied children may receive injera from another refugee in the camp, but the children are expected to cook all other food for themselves. Many unaccompanied children have reported to UNHCR that they must skip part or all of school because they need to cook their own meals.⁶⁶ The lack of adequate care is alarming in light of the fact that Ethiopia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁶⁷ The absence of a formal support system has dire consequences for these children. UNHCR informed our delegation that one unaccompanied Eritrean girl committed suicide and four other girls attempted suicides.⁶⁸



New refugee arrivals to Hitsats

IV. MISSION ACTIVITIES

“We have received many missions from Europe and elsewhere. This one is different, it is multi-sector, and you have experience. This was a practical mission.”

-ARRA Representative

Mission delegates met with the Counselor to Ethiopia’s Prime Minister and a senior member of the ruling party to discuss the overall conditions of refugees in Ethiopia and the ability of refugees to move to urban areas. The Director General of the Americas within GoE’s Foreign Ministry and representatives from ARRA, UNHCR, and civil society organizations also briefed the delegation regarding

the conditions within the Shire camps. From these briefings, the group gained a better understanding of the needs of and opportunities for unaccompanied Eritrean children in refugee camp settings. In addition to gathering this essential information on camp conditions, the delegation developed relationships and opened the door for ongoing communication with NGOs working in the Shire camps.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the delegation's observations, USCRI has constructed the following list of recommendations. USCRI recognizes that these recommendations cannot be fully executed without a significant expansion of UNHCR's resources and mandate in Ethiopia. Thus, USCRI urges the international community to increase the funds and mandate of UNHCR's mission in Ethiopia so this inter-governmental organization can acquire the capacity needed to implement the following recommendation

1 CONTINUE ETHIOPIA'S OPEN-BORDER POLICY

USCRI commends the GoE on its open-border policy, which has provided protection to the largest refugee population in Africa. It is essential that the GoE continue this policy given the ongoing conflicts in the region and the deterioration of human rights conditions in Eritrea. The United Nations Human Rights Council's 2015 report on human rights violations in Eritrea reveals the dire need for such a policy.⁶⁹

2 EXTEND THE OUT-OF-CAMP PROGRAM TO ALL REFUGEES

USCRI also applauds the GoE's decision to institute the out-of-camp program. As noted in Section II, the program allows Eritrean refugees to live outside of camps and engage in informal livelihood opportunities.

Currently, Ethiopia's out-of-camp program is only available to Eritrean refugees by individual request.⁷⁰ Notwithstanding geopolitical issues at play, this program should be accessible to all refugees hosted by Ethiopia. As discussed in Section II, bleak camp conditions contribute to the frequency of secondary migration. An expansion of the program would likely reduce dangerous secondary migration by allowing refugees to access better living conditions within Ethiopia and by facilitating refugee integration into local communities. According to UNHCR representative Dennis Likule, "If we had opportunities for the refugees to be out of camps and have something meaningful, then we would be encouraging a certain percentage to stay around and integrate."⁷¹ Given that secondary migration is occurring amongst all refugee populations in Ethiopia, limiting the program to Eritreans is no longer tenable.

3 ESTABLISH THE RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT FOR REFUGEES

The GoE should also revise existing law to permit refugees the right to legally work both in and out of camps. As conflict continues unabated in the region, long-term solutions are required, and refugees must be afforded opportunities to support themselves and their families. Granting refugees the right to work would contribute to Ethiopia's economy because refugees would start their own businesses and generate jobs and taxable income. In addition, allowing refugees to legally support themselves would give them hope and a reason to pursue educational and livelihood opportunities. Without the ability to legally work, refugees will continue to engage in secondary migration.

4

PROVIDE PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO URBAN REFUGEES

USCRI understands that UNHCR is significantly underfunded for its work in Ethiopia and in Africa as a whole.⁷² However, some of UNHCR's available resources should be allocated to supporting urban refugees. With a massive number of refugees leaving camps for urban centers, the need for UNHCR support in cities is immense. Support for urban refugees is particularly important given the current restrictions on employment for refugees in the country. Historically, UNHCR has supported urban refugees in Jordan, and USCRI believes that UNHCR is similarly obligated to support urban refugees in Ethiopia.

5

IMPROVE CAMP SECURITY

ARRA and UNHCR should collaborate to improve security within the camps. These entities should prioritize improvements to camp infrastructure. Such improvements would increase refugees' safety. By providing street lights in all of the camps, ARRA and UNHCR would likely curb some of the general violence. In addition, electricity and cooking stoves would reduce refugees' dependence on firewood; in turn, these technologies would eliminate the need for women and children to incur the risks of collecting wood out of camp. Civil society should aid this effort by contributing solar lamps and, if camps become properly connected to the national grid, cooking stoves.

ARRA and UNHCR must also ensure enhanced oversight for vulnerable refugees. As discussed in more detail below (see Recommendation 10), unaccompanied children should receive a formal network of support and supervision. In addition, given the high rate of secondary migration, the entities should begin tracking refugee departures in a formal manner. It is simply unacceptable that the whereabouts of thousands of children are unknown.

6

IMPROVE BASIC LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS (FOOD, WATER, SHELTER, AND SANITATION)

ARRA and UNHCR should also work to improve basic living conditions in the camps. As noted in Section III (A), the current rations are not sufficient to feed refugees and are not providing adequate nutrition. The entities should consider revising the current policy of providing the same amount of food to all refugees, regardless of age. An adult refugee certainly needs more food than a young child. However, the World Food Program and ARRA should provide certain supplementary food items to all children. Malnutrition is prevalent in the camps and growing children are in particular need of nutritious diets.

All refugees need increased access to clean water. By providing additional water to the camps, ARRA and UNHCR would improve the health of the refugee population by decreasing the high prevalence of diarrheal diseases.

ARRA and UNHCR should also increase the quantity and improve the quality of shelters within the camps. The camps need additional permanent shelters to replace flimsy, temporary shelters and reduce overcrowding. To the extent possible, the shelters should not have metal roofs, which contribute to extreme indoor temperatures during the summer months.

Finally, resources should be devoted to improving camp sanitation. Additional latrines should

be built, particularly in Shimelba, and these latrines should be segregated by sex. The provision of additional latrines will facilitate sanitary conditions and decrease certain health epidemics noted in Section III (D). UNHCR and civil society organizations should also provide additional washbasins, soap, and clothing to refugees. Children, in particular, arrive at camps with nothing but the clothes they wear. Furthermore, in response to concerns of refugee women, UNHCR and civil society organizations should increase the distribution of sanitary products in the camps. Such efforts will not only increase the overall health of the refugee population, but they will enable individuals to live in more humane conditions.

7 IMPROVE ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE IN THE CAMPS

Civil society should increase refugees' access to physical and mental health services within the camps. In particular, UNHCR should recruit trained doctors and mental health specialists.

8 IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL AND LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES

ARRA and UNHCR should work together to establish secondary schools for all camp-based children and children in the neighboring community. In addition, ARRA and UNHCR should establish educational opportunities in the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Center since children are forced to stay at the center for weeks on end. ARRA and UNHCR should also pay teachers higher salaries in order to increase retention rates.

USCRI recognizes and commends the GoE and UNHCR for providing higher education scholarships to certain refugees. Without employment opportunities in the country, however, these individuals are forced to return to camps after completing their education. Such limitations severely dampen the drive of each unaccompanied child to obtain an education, and these limitations contribute to secondary migration.

Civil society organizations can further facilitate educational and livelihood opportunities in camps by providing programs and supplies. As discussed in Section III (E), refugee children greatly need desks, school books, papers, and other basic supplies. They also need a library in Hitsats and books to stock the Adi-Harush library. Organizations could also consider long-distance learning programs to supplement current higher education opportunities. Finally, refugees need additional livelihood programs. When instituting these programs, organizations should not include an arbitrary age cap for eligibility.

9 ESTABLISH RECREATIONAL FACILITIES FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN IN ALL CAMPS

Civil society organizations should expand the recreational opportunities that are available to refugee youth. In particular, the Adi-Harush and Hitsats camps need functional recreational facilities. USCRI expects that secondary migration will increase unless there are activities to engage the youth.

10

ESTABLISH AN ADEQUATE CARE SYSTEM FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

ARRA, UNHCR, and civil society organizations must collaborate to establish an adequate and formal child welfare system for unaccompanied children. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ethiopia in 1991, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.”⁷³ Under Article 22, ARRA is obligated to provide protections to unaccompanied and accompanied refugee children.⁷⁴ Yet, as discussed in Section III (G), the current informal system does not provide vulnerable unaccompanied children with suitable care or supervision.

Formal guardianship placements should be established, and guardians should be screened and trained. Caseworkers and social workers should also receive more rigorous training. Overall, ARRA and UNHCR should require the caretakers to take a more active role in the care and supervision of the unaccompanied children. For example, the guardians should be responsible for cooking for the children. In order to encourage participation in the program and to retain volunteers, ARRA and UNHCR should incentivize guardians through a monetary stipend for each unaccompanied child under the guardians’ care.

11

SUPPORT MICRO-ENTERPRISE INITIATIVES IN THE CAMPS

The delegation noted the potential for micro-enterprise initiatives within the camps and urban refugee settings. For example, some of the refugee children engage in art programs; with the children’s consent, relevant stakeholders could sell the children’s art to individuals visiting the camps on missions. Given the lack of employment opportunities for refugees, all relevant stakeholders should encourage these micro-enterprise initiatives. Even small initiatives could provide much-needed supplementary income to vulnerable refugees.

12

INCREASE RESETTLEMENT OF ERITREAN REFUGEES

Countries engaged in resettlement should increase the number of Eritrean refugees they accept. Due to the ongoing human rights violations in Eritrea, the expanding Eritrean refugee population needs durable solutions. As noted in Section II, the United States has resettled more Eritrean refugees than any other country. Yet, in 2015, the United States only resettled 1,783 individuals of Eritrean origin.⁷⁵ The United States has increased its ceiling for refugee admissions in Fiscal Year 2016 to 85,000 new refugee arrivals.⁷⁶ Of this total, the government reserved 25,000 resettlement slots for African refugees.⁷⁷ The administration has not stated what percentage of slots it will allot to Eritrean refugees.⁷⁸ USCRI encourages the United States and other countries to significantly increase the number of Eritrean refugees resettled in 2016.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

USCRI thanks the GoE, ARRA, UNHCR, and Jesuit Refugee Service for their generous assistance and support with the mission. Without the support of these parties, the delegation's work would not have been possible. USCRI also recognizes the many dedicated employees and volunteers in the Shire camps who are working assiduously to improve the lives of refugees. Furthermore, USCRI is grateful for the inspiration that the refugees in these camps have offered; these refugees are incredibly resilient and courageous despite the dire nature of their lives in northern Ethiopia. Finally, USCRI credits and thanks Ed Grode and Stacie Blake for the photographs presented in this report.

VII. ENDNOTES

- 1 All references in this report to "refugees" and "unaccompanied children" pertain to both refugees and asylum seekers.
- 2 The delegation consisted of four individuals from USCRI: **Eskinder Negash**, Senior Vice President for Global Engagement; **Stacie Blake**, Director of Government and Community Relations; **Ed Grode**, USCRI Board Member; and **Tony Collins**, USCRI Volunteer. These USCRI representatives were joined by **Mike Slotznick** from the America Team for Displaced Eritreans, **Lucy Negash** from the Ethiopian Community Development Council, and **Kevin Bearden** and **Andrea Gooz** from General Dynamics. Melissa Hastings, Esq. provided research and drafting assistance for this report.
- 3 2015 Ethiopia Country Profile, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e483986> (last visited Jan. 7, 2016).
- 4 *Id.*
- 5 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE 1 (UNHCR ed., Dec. 7, 2015).
- 6 Ethiopia Fact Sheet, UNHCR 1 (Dec. 2015).
- 7 *Id.* While frequently used as synonyms, UNHCR has distinguished between "unaccompanied" and "separated" children. It defines "unaccompanied children" as those "under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so." The term "separated children" encompasses a broader group and can include those living with extended family members. Separated children are those "under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver." Trends in Unaccompanied and Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Europe, UNHCR (2000) available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=3c060c804&query=syria>
- 8 Ethiopia Fact Sheet, *supra* note 6, at 1.
- 9 Note that this represents the number of Eritreans leaving for all destinations worldwide not just the Shire camps.
- 10 Karim Lebhour, Escaped from Eritrea, Refugee Route Leads to Europe, YAHOO NEWS (Sept. 9, 2015), <http://news.yahoo.com/escaped-eritrea-refugee-routeleads-europe-072553271.html> (explaining that while there are officially 112,000 Eritreans in the country, Ethiopia does not document refugee departures).
- 11 REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ERITREA 5-14 (UN Human Rights Council ed., 2015), available at <http://daccess-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/114/50/PDF/G1511450.pdf?OpenElement>.
- 12 *Id.*
- 13 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, *supra* note 5, at 6.
- 14 Ethiopia Fact Sheet, *supra* note 6, at 2.
- 15 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, *supra* note 5, at 6.
- 16 *Id.*
- 17 *Id.*
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 2015 Ethiopia Country Profile, *supra* note 2.
- 20 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, *supra* note 5, at 7.
- 21 Ethiopia Fact Sheet, *supra* note 6, at 4.
- 22 SUB-OFFICE SHIREa BRIEFING NOTE, *supra* note 5, at 7.
- 23 Arrival Reports, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, http://www.wrapsnet.org/Reports/InteractiveReporting/tabid/393/EnumType/Report/Default.aspx?ItemPath=/rpt_WebArrivalsReports/Map-Arrivals by State and Nationality (last visited Jan. 5, 2016).
- 24 Daniel Schwartz, Canada's Refugees by the Numbers: The Data, CBC NEWS (Oct. 4, 2015), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-s-refugees-by-the-numbers-the-data-1.3240640#arrivals>.
- 25 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, *supra* note 5, at 4. Note that this number is smaller than that reflected in Figure 1. USCRI believes that the 3,384 number provided by UNHCR does not account for secondary migration of unaccompanied children.
- 26 *Id.*
- 27 WEEKLY REGISTRATION REPORT: ENDABAGUNA SCREENING CENTER 6 (UNHCR, ed., 2015).

28 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 5. (emphasis added).

29 Id.

30 Id.

31 Id.

32 SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING FROM THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA (UNHCR ed., 2014).

33 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 4.

34 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 6.

35 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION 2 (UNHCR Sub Office - Shire ed., 2014).

36 CONSOLIDATED AND SUMMARISED PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT REPORT: MAI-AINI, SHIMELBA, HITSATS AND ADI-HARUSH CAMPS (“CSPAR”) 4 (UNHCR ed., 2014).

37 Id. at 8.

38 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION, supra note 55, at 2.

39 Id. at 4.

40 Id. at 5.

41 Id. at 6.

42 Id. at 4.

43 There are 1,572 shelters within the Adi-Harush camp; 2,166 shelters within the Mai-Aini camp; 1,248 shelters within the Hitsats camp; and 2,298 shelters within the Shimelba camp. SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 12, 17, 22, 29.

44 SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING FROM THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA, supra note 32, at 8.

45 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 12.

46 Id.

47 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION, supra note 55, at 5.

48 Id. at 4.

49 CSPAR, supra note 56, at 9.

50 See also id.

51 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION, supra note 55, at 4.

52 The delegation was particularly concerned by this wait time given UNHCR’s previous statement that “[m]ost UASC spend now less than a week in the reception centre.” SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING FROM THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA, supra note 32, at 8.

53 Id.

54 Id. at 4.

55 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION, supra note 55, at 2.

56 CSPAR, supra note 56, at 2.

57 Id. at 14.

58 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 12.

59 Id.

60 SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING FROM THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA, supra note 32, at 2.

61 Id. (noting that men and boys have also reported such abuse).

62 JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSION, supra note 55, at 5.

63 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 4 (noting that “record high numbers [of unaccompanied children] are again anticipated in 2016”).

64 Id.

65 CSPAR, supra note 56, at 10.

66 Id. at 2.

67 Status of Ratifications, UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS, <http://indicators.ohchr.org/> (last visited Jan. 7, 2016).

68 See also Sally Hayden, Desperate Eritrean Child Escapees Are Committing Suicide in Ethiopia, VICE NEWS (Nov. 20, 2015), <https://news.vice.com/article/desperate-eritrean-child-escapees-are-committing-suicide-in-ethiopia>.

69 REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, supra note 11.

70 SUB-OFFICE SHIRE BRIEFING NOTE, supra note 5, at 6.

71 Lebhur, supra note 10.

72 Ethiopia Fact Sheet, supra note 6, at 1 (showing that, as of December 2015, UNHCR was 64% underfunded for its work in Ethiopia); 2015 UNHCR Regional Operation Profile – Africa, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02d7fd6.html> (last visited Jan. 6, 2015).

73 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

74 Id. at art. 22.

75 Arrival Reports, supra note 23.

76 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016, THE WHITE HOUSE (Sept. 29, 2015), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2015/09/29/presidential-determination-presidential-determination-refugee-admissions>.

77 Another 6,000 slots are unallocated and may be used on an as-needed basis. Id.

78 See id.





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