

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

22 April 2015

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Ethiopia and Eritrea: The treatment of Eritrean refugees by Ethiopian government authorities; the rights granted to refugees, including access to employment, education and medical care, and entry and exit rights (2014-April 2015)

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1. Overview of the Situation of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia

Human Rights Watch states that, according to information the organization received from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 73,000 Eritrean refugees registered in Ethiopia on 30 June 2013 (Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 19). The UNHCR states that at the end of October 2014, Ethiopia was ranked the second largest country of asylum with 106,859 Eritrean refugees and that Sudan was the main country of asylum with 109,594 refugees (UN 14 Nov. 2014). At a press briefing on 14 November 2014, the UNHCR spokesperson in Geneva stated that there had been a [UN English version] "sharp increase" in the number of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia (ibid. 14 Nov. 2014). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), [IOM English version] "[i]n the last quarter of 2014 Eritrean refugee arrivals shot up to an average of 5,000 per month. This represented a dramatic increase from an average of 800 to 1,000 a month between 2010 and 2012 to 2,500 since March 2013" (OIM 20 Jan. 2015). The UNHCR states that there were 129,816 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia on 28 February 2015 (UN 28 Feb. 2015).

According to UNHCR, Eritrean refugees [UN English version] "mostly live in four refugee camps in Tigray region and [in] two [camps] in Afar region in north-eastern Ethiopia" (UN 14 Nov. 2014). A report in a press briefing from the UNHCR in Ethiopia from January 2012 states that, in the Ethiopian refugee camps, Eritreans "face a harsh life in the arid [...] crowded landscape which offers very little opportunities for a living" (ibid. Jan. 2012, 3).

The UNHCR states that about 90 percent of the Eritreans who arrived in Ethiopia in October 2014 were between 18 and 24 years old and [UN English version] "[g]rowing numbers of the predominantly young refugees in Ethiopia and Sudan have become frustrated with the shortage of services and absence of self-reliance opportunities in the camps" (ibid. 14 Nov. 2014). Sources note that some Eritreans leave the refugee camps and Ethiopia looking for a better future, particularly by trying to cross the Mediterranean (ibid.; Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 20).

Sources state that a [UN English version] "large number" of Eritrean refugees arriving in Ethiopia are unaccompanied minors (UN [2015]; US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). According to the UNHCR, at the end of October 2014, there were 1,591 unaccompanied children among the Eritrean refugees (UN 14 Nov. 2014). The UNHCR states that these unaccompanied minors are at risk of being victims of human and illegal migrant trafficking (ibid. [2015]). Similarly, the *2014 Trafficking in Persons Report* published by the United States Department of State, indicates that "Ethiopia is a source and, to a lesser extent, destination and transit

country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking" (US 20 June 2014). The report adds that

Eritreans residing in Ethiopia-based refugee camps, some of whom voluntarily migrate out of the camps, and others who are lured or abducted from the camps, face situations of human trafficking in Sudan and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. (ibid.)

2. The Treatment of Eritrean Refugees by Ethiopian Government Authorities

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, published by the United States Department of State, indicates that the Ethiopian government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the country and that, more specifically, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), an Ethiopian government agency, provides basic services to refugees in camps (ibid. 27 Feb. 2014, 16, 19). Similarly, the UNHCR states that the Ethiopian government allows humanitarian organizations access to those seeking refuge on its territory, to provide them with protection and assistance (UN [2015]).

In *Country Reports 2013*, the United States Department of State indicates, without providing details about the services in question, that there were no reports of discrimination in access to public services towards refugees living outside of camps (US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Rights Granted to Refugees

3.1 Access to Employment and Education

According to the UNHCR, [UN English version] "[p]rovisions under Ethiopian law for refugees local integration are very limited" (UN [2015]). *Country Reports 2013* states that the government "welcome[s] refugees to settle permanently in the country but d[oes] not offer a path to citizenship" (US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). The UNHCR states that the "limited funding" for the government Eritrean refugee program, both in Ethiopia and Sudan, has resulted in a lack of secondary and post-secondary education, as well as vocational training and job opportunities (UN 14 Nov. 2014).

Sources state that the Ethiopian government had reservations about applying the *UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, especially regarding access to employment (ibid. [2015]; Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 20). A UN document listing the conditions to which the member countries adhered with respect to the 1951 Convention notes specifically that Ethiopia recognized Articles 17(2) and 22(1) of the Convention [which concern the wage-earning employment and public education, respectively (UN 1951)] [UN English version] "only as recommendations," and not as legally binding obligations (UN n.d.). Human Rights Watch explains that, as such, Ethiopia may restrict refugees' right to work, to protect the national labour market, and their access to education (Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 20).

According to *Country Reports 2013*, the Ethiopian government does not grant refugees work permits (US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). According to UNHCR, it allows them to [UN English version] "engage in informal livelihood opportunities" (UN [2015]). An article published in August 2010 by the UN News Centre states that [UN English version] "[m]any Eritreans in Ethiopia work in the informal sector" (ibid. 10 Aug. 2010). However, in February 2014, Human Rights Watch stated that "Eritreans find it very difficult to find informal work in Addis Ababa and other major cities," and this is "underscored by the tens of thousands of Ethiopians who leave their country every year in search of work (Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 20).

According to *Country Reports 2013*, the government provided "some support" to Eritrean refugees who were pursuing higher education (US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). The UNHCR states that the refugees can attend university and that the Ethiopian government will pay 75 percent of their education fees and the UNHCR will pay the remaining 25 percent (UN [2015]). Further information on access to education could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Access to Medical Care

According to *Country Reports 2013*, the ARRA and the UNHCR, with support from NGOs, provided refugees in camps with basic services (US 27 Feb. 2014, 19). Further information on access to medical care for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.3 Free Movement

According to Human Rights Watch, "refugees are generally not allowed to leave the camps to move freely in Ethiopia, in violation of their free movement rights" (Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 19). *Country Reports 2013* states that, although Ethiopian law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation, the Ethiopian government restricted some of these rights (US 27 Feb. 2014, 16). *Country Reports 2013* also states that prior to the policy allowing refugees to leave the camps (described below), the government gave permission to leave the camps primarily to attend higher education institutions or undergo medical treatment, and that it gave such permission to "avoid security threats at the camps" (ibid., 17). Human Rights Watch also states that refugees may apply for a permit to temporarily leave the camps, mostly for medical reasons (Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 19).

3.3.1 Policy Allowing Certain Eritrean Refugees to Live Outside of the Camps

According to an article from the UN News Centre, in 2010 [or in 2008, according to Human Rights Watch (Feb. 2014, 19)], Ethiopia created a policy enabling Eritrean refugees to live outside of the camps, anywhere in the country, as long as they [UN English version] "can sustain themselves financially or have relatives or friends [in Ethiopia] who commit to supporting them" (UN 10 Aug. 2010). Similarly, sources state that Eritrean refugees may live outside of the refugee camps if they are able to financially support themselves (US 27 Feb. 2014, 17, 19; Human Rights Watch Feb. 2014, 19). Human Rights Watch states however that this policy applies only after a person has lived in a refugee camp for six months and allows them to live in urban areas; a person may also exercise this right if any relatives living in such areas can support them (ibid.). According to the UN News Centre article, the policy only applies to Eritrean refugees who do not have a criminal record (UN 10 Aug. 2010). According to the UNHCR, this policy [translation] "relaxes the restrictions on movement" imposed on Eritrean refugees and improves their access to services (ibid.). The UNHCR states that the policy [UN English version] "also involves skills training and educational opportunities" and is extended to refugees from other countries (ibid.). *Country Reports 2013* states that, according to the numbers provided by the ARRA, the agency that controls the application of the policy, 3,412 refugees from all origins lived outside of the camps in 2012, compared to 1,294 in 2011 (US 27 Feb. 2014, 17).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The following persons and organizations were unable to provide information: senior communications assistant, International Organization for Migration; professor, California State University, San Bernardino.

Attempts to contact the following persons and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints for this Response: senior information assistant, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; senior researcher, African Studies Centre; Horn of Africa research specialist, Human Rights Watch; professor of African Studies and Political Science, Pennsylvania State University.

Internet sites, including: Addis Ababa University; Amnesty International; eci.net; Ethiopar; Ethiopian Human Rights Commission; Ethiopia – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ombudsman; Factiva; Forced Migration Online; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; Refugees International; *Sudan Tribune*; Tigray Online; United Nations – Refworld; United States – U.S. Committee for Refugees; Voice of America; Zegabi; Zehabesha.

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