

Update #2 on New Arrivals from Eritrea

5 October 2018

The reopening of the border crossing points between Eritrea and Ethiopia has resulted in a significant increase in the number of new arrivals from Eritrea, with the average daily rate of arrivals increasing from 53 to approximately 390 individuals. Between 12 September and 02 October 2018, a total of 6,779 refugees were registered at the Endabaguna Reception Centre with a further 2,725 others at the border points awaiting relocation to Endabaguna. Approximately 4,000 have already been transferred to the camps.

Communal hangars as well as water and sanitation facilities are being put in place at the two main entry points-Zalambesa and Rama- through which the vast majority of the new arrivals are crossing. IOM is providing transport support from the border to the Reception Centre and onward to the camps while WFP has committed to provide a sufficient amount of High Energy Biscuits (HEB) for distribution to all new arrivals at the border.

As per the established procedures, the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) is requesting new arrivals to present their asylum applications at temporary collection centres situated along the border, namely Zalambessa, Rama, Humera, Gerhusirnay, Adinebrieid, and Chilla, within 15 days of crossing the border. From there, they will be moved to Endabaguna for registration.

Women and children constitute approximately 90% of the new arrivals, in contrast with the current population profile of the Eritrean camps in Tigray, where young men were the majority. The changing profile is attributed to the reopening of border crossing points, which has facilitated easy transit and safe travel for women and children. Registration data indicate that, in addition to the standard reasons for leaving Eritrea, family reunification is cited as an additional motive for movement by 83% of the newly registered.

Working with humanitarian partners on the ground, UNHCR and ARRA are coordinating the delivery of life-saving assistance to the new arrivals, including food, shelter, water and health and sanitation. Essential aid items have been despatched from Addis Ababa for immediate distribution to registered refugees. Additional health and shelter experts are being deployed to the area to support the response.

Endabaguna's reception capacity has been upgraded to accommodate 1,500 individuals at a time, three times its normal capacity. Cooked meals are being provided to all refugees at Endabaguna, pending their transfer to the refugee camps where food rations are distributed. ARRA and UNHCR have enhanced registration capacity and are working with a target to register an average of 700 persons/day to decongest Endabaguna and the border reception centres.

Registered refugees are being transferred to Mai Ani, Adi Harush, and Hitsats camps where they are accommodated in existing shelters. In collaboration with partners, including IRC and IHS, arrangements are being made to put up additional shelters and water and sanitation facilities in Adi-Harush and Hitsats camps. Sites have been identified and contracts awarded. However, the situation remains critical with refugees continuing to arrive, challenging the existing services, particularly in terms of shelter and healthcare; the current turnaround time at Endabaguna is 48 hours. Efforts are being made to rapidly scale up the assistance and address critical needs for which further resources are required.

UNHCR notes that the Ethiopian government has reiterated its commitment to ensure the protection of, and assistance to, all Eritrean asylum-seekers in the country. Following the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship, signed on July 09, 2018 by the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, two border crossing points were reopened on 11 September 2018.