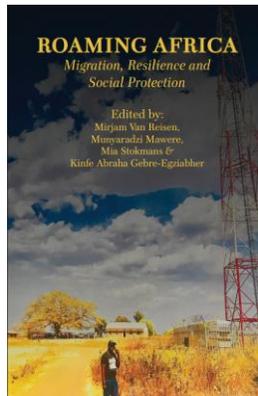


Young and On their Own: The Protection of Eritrean Refugee Children in Tigray, Ethiopia

Tekie Gebreyesus & Rick Schoenmaeckers

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Chapter 12

Young and On their Own: The Protection of Eritrean Refugee Children in Tigray, Ethiopia

Tekie Gebreyesus & Rick Schoenmaeckers

Introduction

Many children around the world are at risk of losing parental care and protection. This risk increases in emergency situations. The danger to refugee children, in terms of their safety and wellbeing, when they have lost their parents or caregivers is high. The sudden and violent onset of emergencies, the disruption of families and community structures, as well as the acute shortage of resources affect the physical, psychological and developmental wellbeing of children in refugee camps. Additionally, losing the care and protection of their families or caregivers puts children at increased risk of abduction, human trafficking, unlawful recruitment or use by armed groups, sexual abuse and exploitation, and loss of identity (UNHCR, 1994; UNICEF, 2017). Ethiopia has ratified important international conventions to protect the rights and

Unaccompanied children are fleeing Eritrea for many reasons, including to avoid being conscripted into indefinite National Service. Once in Ethiopia, they end up in refugee camps in Tigray. This chapter investigates whether the protection of unaccompanied and separated refugee children adheres to the standards set in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It investigates the serious challenges resulting in the lack of provision of basic needs and social services for children in the camps. This inadequate level of protection is the cause of secondary migration which puts unaccompanied and separated children in vulnerable situations where they might not find the protection that they so desperately need.

safety of children (United Nations, 1989; UNCRC, 2013). Additionally, national policies and laws have been developed to enforce the protection and rights of children (FDRE-ARRA, 2017).

This chapter presents the results of research conducted in Tigray, Ethiopia in 2017 and 2018 on unaccompanied and separated Eritrean children in the refugee camps near the Eritrean border. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (ICRC, 2004) are applied to assess the four refugee camps in Ethiopia that receive most of the Eritrean refugees. The first author is the head of the Shire operation of the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), which is responsible for coordinating the Ethiopian refugee operation, and is responsible for the research reported in this chapter. The second author is a researcher on unaccompanied children and youth from Eritrea in the refugee camps in Tigray. He conducted his own research in the same period as the first author, which has been published separately (Schoenmaeckers, 2018). His contribution to this chapter was to check and organise the original data for the chapter. Although the research is only an initial explorative study, it gives a direct and first-hand insight into the situation of the children in these refugee camps.

In terms of the structure of this chapter, the next sections outline the context of the study, including the Eritrean-Ethiopian border war, the refugee camps in northern Ethiopia and the legal framework for child protection in Ethiopia. The research questions are then set out, followed by the methodology. Then the main findings of the study are presented from the perspective of the children, NGOs and child protection officers, and committee members. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

The Eritrean-Ethiopian border war

After British and Italian rule, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in the 1960s. The result of this annexation was a border war for independence that

lasted 30 years. Eventually, the Ethiopian army was defeated in 1991 and, within a few years, a statehood referendum was held in Eritrea. In 1993, the new nation was born. Unfortunately, Eritrea's unstable relations with its bordering countries collapsed rapidly and, in 1998, a five-year border war culminated in the slaughter of more than 100,000 people on both sides (Connell, 2016).

Since its independence from Ethiopia, Eritrea has developed a culture of secrecy, intolerance and absolute control, claiming that this is necessary to defend its sovereignty. The regime, headed by President Isaias Afwerki, has been accused of crimes against humanity by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (UN Human Rights Council, 2016). This has resulted in an exodus of refugees from Eritrea over the last years, with over 5,000 people leaving Eritrea each month due to lack of fundamental freedoms, conflict and indefinite National Service (Kibreab, 2009; Tewelde-Berhan, Plaut & Smits, 2017; Van Reisen & Estefanos, 2017).

The number of Eritreans crossing the Ethiopian border has increased over the last five years, and accelerated after the peace negotiations between Ethiopia and Eritrea started in 2017. The Shire operation of ARRA, which is responsible for four refugee camps in Tigray, has a total registered population of 72,772 people, residing in one of four refugee camps: Mai Ayni, Adi Harush, Hitsats and Shimelba. The Endabaguna Screening and Reception Centre in Tigray received over 12,701 new arrivals from January to August 2018. Of this, 2,534 were unaccompanied and separated children (UNHCR, 2018d). After the peace agreement between both countries was signed in September 2018, a significant increase in refugees was measured at Endabaguna. Between 3 and 12 October, a total of 5,475 new arrivals were transferred from the border to Endabaguna and 6,987 were transferred from Endabaguna to Mai Ayni, Adi Harush and Hitsats (UNHCR, 2018a). The total inflow between September and December 2018 was 29,753. The inflow of unaccompanied and separated children under the age of 18 was 4,894 in that same period. The total population of unaccompanied and separated children in the four refugee camps in 2018 was 10,533 (UNHCR, 2018d).

Eritrean refugees arriving in Tigray find themselves in a tense situation. Besides a lack of basic resources like timber and water, struggles between Eritreans and Tigrayans revolve around nationality, land, identity and political destiny. These struggles are difficult and painful due to the bloody wars these people have fought against each other, although they are essentially ethnically the same (Reid, 2003). The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (later the People's Front for Democracy and Justice) and the Tigray's People's Liberation Front have played a major role in these tensions. Over the decades, differences in the tactics and ideologies of these former allies have corrupted the relationship and led to violence and contestation over resources, land and identity (Woldemariam & Young, 2018).

Refugee camps in Ethiopia

Tigray is located in the north of Ethiopia and has received many refugees from Eritrea over the years. Eritrean refugees are provided with shelter and basic resources in four main refugee camps in Ethiopia: Mai Ayni, Adi Harush, Hitsats and Shimelba. Although ARRA carries the main responsibility for the refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) assist ARRA in a variety of ways, include by providing food, water and hygiene facilities, as well as education and livelihood programmes (Chapter 11, *Inhospitable Realities: Refugees' Livelihoods in Hitsats, Ethiopia*, by Kristína Melicherová).

Most of the unaccompanied and separated children are cared for by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and provided shelter in Hitsats refugee camp, which is the newest refugee camp in Tigray. In the Shimelba refugee camp the situation is different than in the other camps. Shimelba is the oldest camp and was established in 2004. The camp is community based and 41% of camp residents are under 18 years of age. The people who live in Shimelba are from the Kunama ethnic group. This is the smallest ethnic group in Eritrea and is found mainly in regions near the Ethiopian border. Their language is Nilo

Saharan, which is unrelated to the dominant languages in Ethiopia and Eritrea, making communication a serious issue (Lo Dolce & Thompson, 2004; UNHCR, 2018b).

Unaccompanied and separated children in the refugee camps are carefully received and protected. They live in special care arrangements. These arrangements include community care, foster care, and kinship care. In kinship care, relatives or acquaintances of the children's family are responsible for the children. In foster care, the children live together with other refugees who offer to take responsibility for the children and care for them in their home. Community care is the most common arrangement, in which the children live with each other in group housing in communities. Each community has about 10 shelters and 5 to 10 children live in each. Social workers take care of the children and live together with them. They are refugees themselves and have good relationships with the children. The organisation and coordination of the unaccompanied children in community care is carried out by the NRC (Schoenmaeckers, Al-Qasim & Zanzottera, 2019).

The overall refugee coordination in the camps is executed by ARRA and the UNHCR. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are partners in resettlement and the provision of basic needs. NGOs in the camps provide livelihood programmes, education, protection and health care services. Beside the NRC, the NGOs currently active in the refugee camps include Innovation Humanitarian Solutions, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Medicine Sans Frontier Holland, the Dutch humanitarian organisation Zuid Oost Azië (ZOA), the Danish Refugee Council, and the International Refugee Committee, among others. In addition to providing relief and basic services, these NGOs support the refugees in organising themselves into committees. The refugee camps have well-established community-based structures where men, women and children are represented by different committees. The committees that are included in this research are the Child Welfare Committee, Refugee Central Committee and Children's Parliament (UNHCR, 2018b;

UNHCR, 2018c). The latter, the Children's Parliament, was formed to allow children in the camp to actively contribute to their own welfare. They organise meetings in which issues such as food distribution, leisure time activities and security are discussed. The Children's Parliament does not have legal power, but acts as a consultative group. The children who are members can be from all different care arrangements, but most active members live in community care.

Legal framework

On 14 May 1991, Ethiopia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Ethiopia has made much progress since then in terms of child protection and wellbeing. It has ratified various international conventions and treaties over the years in order to protect children and to protect and respect human rights in general (UNCRC, 2013). In particular, ARRA takes measures to ensure the protection of refugee children from discrimination and abuse. It also ensures that refugee children have access to free medical care, education, and social and psychological assistance. The provision of a secure environment and accommodation is one of its main tasks (UNCRC, 2013).

The Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children state that:

All children are entitled to emergency care and provision for their basic subsistence. Assistance for separated children must adequately meet their basic needs at a standard comparable to the surrounding community and should be provided in a way that reserves family unity, keeps children with their relatives or other care-givers and does not lead to separation. In emergencies, interim care must be provided for children separated from their families until they are reunited, placed with foster parents or other long term arrangements for care are made. This may include fostering, other forms of community-based care, or institutional care. (ICRC, 2004, p. 42)

The definition and function of foster parents or legal guardians varies in different countries. The term guardianship refers to the designation of responsibility to an adult or organisation responsible for ensuring that the child's best interests are fully represented. According to Articles 3 and 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), a guardian is responsible for administrative and judicial proceedings involving the child. A guardian is responsible for ensuring that the child is properly represented, that his or her views are expressed and that any decision taken is in his or her best interests. Under the Convention, unaccompanied and separated children should be provided with access to appropriate health care. When children live in crowded environments like refugee camps, they become more vulnerable to infectious diseases than otherwise. Therefore, it is important that the food that is provided to the children be balanced and constitutes a nutritious diet, taking into account their cultural eating habits and the diet of the local community (ICRC, 2004, p. 48).

In addition, the right to education needs to be protected. Like all children, refugee children also have the right to receive a proper education. In the case of unaccompanied or separated children, education programmes need to be organised in such a way that they do not encourage or prolong family separation. In addition, access to education should be promoted and monitored. The Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children state that it is desirable for separated refugee children to return to their country of origin with diplomas or certificates, obtained in the host country (ICRC, 2004, p. 49).

Key elements of children's psycho-social recovery "are the early meeting of basic needs, structured activities to restore a sense of normality, and care and nurturing" (ICRC, 2004, p. 50). In addition, it is crucial for the child's psychosocial wellbeing that family-reunification is realised where possible:

One of the main principles behind tracing and reunification is that recovery from harm is most likely to take place when children are cared

for by people whom they know well and trust. For children who cannot be reunited with their families, it is important to promote community-based care that builds on local culture and provides continuity in learning, socialization and development. [...] When there is a need for specialized interventions, local resources should be explored and supported if they are in the best interests of the child. (ICRC, 2004, p. 50)

Furthermore, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the national government is the primary body responsible for coordinating programmes at the national and local level:

National child-welfare services or local authorities should provide an overall framework for, and coordinate action on behalf of, separated children. Organizations should support government efforts to review policies and legislation to ensure that they are in line with international agreed standards. When there is a lack of ability or willingness to apply internationally agreed standards or when government structures and policies are disrupted, responsibility for protecting separated children can be delegated temporarily to organizations that have a mandate or expertise in this area. Support for the government should be continued in order to allow its services to take over coordination of the work as soon as possible. (ICRC, 2004, p. 67)

It is the duty of UNHCR and UNICEF to contribute and assist the government in fulfilling these responsibilities (ICRC, 2004, p. 67). The Ethiopian government has taken measures in order to address these issues. The basic principle the Ethiopian government relies on is the best interests of the child. This principle is applied in measures for providing basic services, like accommodation, food, water and education, but also leisure-time activities and protection.

The government is collaborating intensively with UNHCR and international partners in order to meet the standards contained in the guidelines (UNCRC, 2013). In September 2016, the Ethiopian government made 'Nine Pledges' to improve the lives of refugees.

One of the pledges was specifically targeted at children: to increase the enrolment of refugee children in preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education, without discrimination and within available resources. The other pledges relate to all refugees and include: expansion of the ‘out-of-camp’ policy to benefit 10% of the current total refugee population; provision of work permits to refugees and to those with permanent residence, within the bounds of domestic law; provision of work permits to refugees in the areas permitted for foreign workers, by giving priority to qualified refugees; making available irrigable land to allow 100,000 people (among them refugees and local communities) to engage in crop production; building industrial parks where a percentage of jobs will be committed to refugees; provision of other benefits such as issuance of birth certificates to refugee children born in Ethiopia, possibility of opening bank accounts and obtaining driving licenses; enhancing the provision of basic and essential social services; and allowing the local integration of those refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for 20 years or more. The planning of these pledges started with the roadmap published in August 2017 and includes actions to implement them (FDRE-ARRA, 2017).

Research questions

This study assesses the situation of unaccompanied and separated children in Mai Ayni, Adi Harush, Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps in Tigray, northern Ethiopia. It investigates whether the protection of unaccompanied and separated refugee children adheres to the standards set in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (ICRC, 2004). The chapter examines some of the key principles, as set out in the legal framework. The purpose of the study is to inform government agencies and organisations seeking to improve the wellbeing and protection of Eritrean refugee children in Tigray. For the purposes of the study, *unaccompanied children (or minors) are defined as: “children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so”* (ICRC, 2004, p. 13). *Separated*

children “are those separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members” (ICRC, 2004, p. 13).

The research question is: *To what extent is the reception and protection of unaccompanied and separated children in Tigray executed according to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children?*

In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are posed:

- *Is the provision of basic needs and social services for unaccompanied and separated refugee children in the refugee camps in northern Ethiopia adequate?*
- *What is the role of child protection officers in giving care and support to the unaccompanied and separated children?*
- *What are the main challenges involved in the reception and protection of unaccompanied and separated children?*
- *What is the situation regarding the onward movement of unaccompanied and separated children and the associated risks of smuggling, trafficking and kidnapping?*

Methodology

Data collection

This study used a mixed methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and analysed (Bryman, 2012). The geographical scope of the study included children who live in the four refugee camps in Tigray: Mai Ayni, Adi Harush, Hitsats and Shimelba. The data was collected during 2017 and 2018.

Primary sources of data include data gathered directly from unaccompanied and separated children, as well as child protection officers, caregivers from kinship care and foster care arrangements, and social workers. Key informants from ARRA, UNHCR, NRC, Innovation Humanitarian Solutions, Child Welfare Committee and

Refugee Central Committee were also approached. The child participants included children who live in community care and who are members of the Children's Parliament. The quantitative data includes descriptive surveys, which enabled the researcher to assess the situation of the wider target population in the camps. In addition, observations were made throughout the whole data collection period. Secondary sources of data include policy documents, manuals, discussion papers, and reports regarding children who live in the refugee camps.

The fundamental part of conducting research with children is obtaining parental consent. As the parents of the unaccompanied and separated children are absent, consent is required from the local authority and the person legally responsible for the child in order to ensure the child's safety. Consequently, informed consent is another key principle for conducting ethical research with children. This is not only to protect the wellbeing of the children, but also to respect their sense of control (Hopkins, 2008).

Prior to the data collection, a request letter was sent to the ARRA zonal office in Shire in order to introduce the aim of the research and obtain permission. After permission was granted and ARRA directed the permission letter to the camp offices, the objective, purpose and focus of the study were discussed with the UNHCR child protection officer and NRC child protection coordinator. Sensitive issues regarding the children, planning and management were thoroughly discussed.

The research methods used included surveys, interviews, focus group discussions and observations. The surveys were carried out to explore the main issues. In order to better understand the answers provided in the survey, the researcher followed up in interviews and focus group discussions. The focus group discussions gave the respondents the security to discuss sensitive issues, whereas the interviews were used to better understand responses in terms of their meaning on a more personal level. The interviews were also used to discuss the

questions with resource persons, and their answers are also included in the analysis.

The surveys and interviews with the children took place in the homes of the children and ranged from 50 to 90 minutes each. The focus group discussions were conducted in the Child Friendly Space and took between 1 and 2 hours. The interviews with key informants from the organisations were conducted in their offices and took between 60 and 90 minutes.

The surveys and interviews were translated into/conducted in the local language Tigrinya. Field notes were taken throughout. These notes were carefully reviewed for accuracy. Afterwards, the data was translated and organised according to the most frequently used words, phrases and sentences. The data was then analysed and is presented here in tables and narrative.

Observations were conducted throughout the research of the children's living conditions inside their houses and their relationships and interactions with their neighbours and caregivers. Observations were also made during the food distribution programme, in the communal kitchen, at the Child Friendly Space, and at school to see how the children participated.

Sample

As at December 2018, the total population of unaccompanied and separated children living in one of the four refugee camps in northern Ethiopia was 10,533 (UNHCR, 2018d). A sample of 200 (150 boys and 50 girls) children, who live in community care arrangements took part in the survey. In addition, 34 child protection officers from ARRA, UNHCR, NRC and Innovation Humanitarian Solutions were interviewed and 100 (of a total of 402) committee members and social workers took part in the focus group discussions. The committee members who participated included children and adults who were members of the following committees: Refugee Central Committee, Children's Parliament, Child Welfare Committee and social workers (Gebreyesus, 2018). The social workers who participated included the

caregivers who provide the children with care in the different arrangements (see Table 12.1).

Table 12.1. Number of respondents and data collection methods used

	Method	Male	Female	Total
Unaccompanied and separated children (in community care)	Survey & interview	150	50	200
Child protection officers (ARRA, UNHCR, NRC, Innovation Humanitarian Solutions)	Interview	22	12	34
Committee members (Refugee Central Committee, Children's Parliament, Child Welfare Committee and social workers)	Focus group discussion	70	30	100

More males than females participated in the study, as there are more males in the camp than females. The focus group discussions were held in groups of 20 persons. A total of 5 focus groups were organised. Table 12.2 gives the respondents per age group category.

Table 12.2. Age of respondents

	11–15 years		16–18 years		18+	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Unaccompanied and separated children (in community care)	120	60%	80	40%	-	-
Child protection officers (ARRA, UNHCR, NRC, Innovation Humanitarian Solutions)	-	-	-	-	34	100%

Committee members (Refugee Central Committee, Children’s Parliament, Child Welfare Committee and social workers)	-	-	40	40%	60	60%
Total	120	36%	120	36%	94	28%

A total of 120 of the unaccompanied and separated children were 11–15 years old; the other 80 were 16–18 years old. All 34 child protection officers were above 18 years old and 40 of the committee members were 16–18 years old. The other 60 were above 18 years old. Table 12.3 sets out the education level of the respondents.

Table 12.3. Education level of respondents

	Grade 1–4/ certificate		Grade 5– 8/ diploma		High school/ degree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Unaccompanied and separated children (in community care)	40	20%	145	73%	15	7%
Child protection officers (ARRA, UNHCR, NRC, Innovation Humanitarian Solutions)	-	-	-	-	34	100%
Committee members (Refugee Central Committee, Children’s Parliament, Child Welfare Committee) and social workers	30	30%	55	55%	15	15%
Total	70	21%	200	60%	64	19%

As outlined in Table 12.3, 40 of the children who participated in the study were in grades 1–4, 145 were in grades 5–8, and 15 were high school students. All 34 child protection officers were degree holders. Of the members of the committees, 30 were in grades 1–4 or had received a (any) certificate, 55 were in grades 5–8 or held a diploma, and 15 were high school students or degree holders.

Results

This section presents the results and is organised according to the research method used.

Survey of unaccompanied and separated children

The survey was conducted among 200 unaccompanied and separated children who are living in community care. Of the 200 children, 143 (72%) had been living in the camp for 1 or 2 years and 57 (28%) had been living in the camp for 3 or 4 years. All 200 children said that they lived together with 5 to 10 other children in one house. In Table 12.4,¹ the main reasons given by the minors for leaving Eritrea are given. The children could choose 1 of 4 reasons, which were selected based on explorative research. If the child had a different reason for leaving, they were allowed to give this reason.

As Table 12.4 shows, 23 (12%) of the unaccompanied and separated children left Eritrea to access better education in Ethiopia, 37 (18%) came to reunite with their family members who live in Ethiopia, 33 (17%) came due to peer pressure and the other 107 (53%) children came out of fear of forced military conscription.

¹ All tables and figures in this chapter contain original data collected during empirical study by the authors.

Table 12.4. Main reason for leaving Eritrea

	To access better education		Family reunification in Ethiopia		Peer pressure		Fear of forced military conscription	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Unaccompanied and separated children (in community care)	23	12%	37	18%	33	17%	107	53%

Tables 12.5–12.8 present the results of the survey regarding availability, accessibility and quality of services in the camp. These tables show the questions asked in the survey and the responses of the children. Some items from the surveys are not provided in tables and only explained in the text under the items to which they relate.

Table 12.5. Accessibility of services

		Yes		No	
		No.	%	No.	%
What services are accessible at your location?	1. School	197	99%	3	1%
	2. Play and recreational centres	196	98%	4	2%
	3. Community library	77	38%	123	62%
	4. Food services (communal kitchen)	188	94%	12	6%
	5. Health services	197	99%	3	1%

	6. Water and sanitation facilities	147	73%	53	27%
	7. Vocational skills training	130	65%	70	35%
	8. Protection and assistance	200	100%	-	-

As Table 12.5 indicates, the majority of the respondents said that most services are accessible at their location. Only the community library (62%) and, to a lesser extent, vocational skills training centres (35%) and water and sanitation facilities (27%) are mentioned as not accessible by a significant number of children. Not all refugee camps in Tigray have a functional community library and vocational skills training courses are not attended by the youngest children, who are going to school. Water and sanitation facilities are insufficient in all four camps, mainly due to a lack of potable water. This explains the high negative responses to these.

Table 12.6. Quality of services

		Yes		No	
Which services are you happy/satisfied with the quality of?	1. School	200	100%	-	-
	2. Play and recreational centre	17	8%	183	92%
	3. Community library	53	27%	147	73%
	4. Food services (communal kitchen)	77	38%	123	62%
	5. Health services	113	57%	87	43%
	6. Water and sanitation facilities	97	48%	103	52%

	7. Vocational skills training	77	38%	123	62%
	8. Protection and assistance	177	89%	23	11%

All of the respondents said that they are happy or satisfied with the quality of the school and most said that they were also happy with the protection and assistance services (89%) provided in the camp. Just over half, or 113 (57%) respondents, said that they were satisfied with the health services – 87 (43%) were not. The majority were not satisfied with the community library (73%), play and recreational centres (92%), food services (62%), water and sanitation facilities (52%), and vocational skill training centres (62%). It is surprising that all 200 children said they were satisfied with the quality of the school as there was no secondary education available in the camp where most of the unaccompanied minors were housed at the time the research was conducted.

To the question what services should be improved regarding availability, accessibility or quality of services, the vast majority of the children claimed that all of the services should be improved. In addition to the services listed in the survey, most also suggested that alternative energy sources, shelters, resettlement procedures, and care givers and house mothers should be improved.

Table 12.7. Services received from NGOs in community care arrangements

		Yes		No	
What kind of material/services do you receive from NGOs that implement community care?	1. Clothing	77	38%	123	62%
	2. Shoes	3	1%	197	99%
	3. Household utilities	147	73%	53	27%
	4. Food items	147	73%	53	27%

	5. Personal sanitary materials	97	48%	103	52%
	6. Alternative energy	17	8%	183	92%
	7. House	77	38%	123	62%

Regarding the materials and services children in group care arrangements receive from NGOs, most of the respondents said that household utilities (73%) and food items (73%) are provided to them. The majority also said that shoes (99%) and alternative energy sources (92%) were not being provided. More than half indicated that clothing (62%), personal sanitary materials (52%) and houses (62%) were not provided by the implementing NGOs. Pertaining to the frequency of the material provision, most of the respondents answered that they receive the materials and services as needed (i.e., no time was indicated).

All of the children said that they receive three meals per day. In the community care arrangements, 99% of the children indicated that housemates prepared food for each other in shifts. Only 1% of the children said that house mothers prepared the food. However, they emphasised that some materials or food ingredients provided to them were not sufficient for their daily consumption and prioritised the following issues as lacking: alternative energy; sugar, oil, onion, pulse and tomatoes; clothing, shoes and blankets; and potable water.

Table 12.8. Negative impacts on quality and insufficiency of services

		Yes		No	
Is there any negative impact or consequence that the insufficiency or quality of services has	1. School dropout	196	98%	4	2%
	2. Secondary movement	183	92%	17	8%
	3. Deviant behaviour	123	62%	77	38%

had for you or other children?	4. Exposure to child labour	147	73%	53	27%
	5. Drug and alcohol abuse	103	52%	97	48%

The children were also asked what kind of negative impact the lack of sufficient or quality services had on them. According to the respondents, this led to school dropout, being forced to engage in secondary migration, deviant behaviour, exposure to child labour, and drug and alcohol abuse. School dropout (98%) and secondary movement (92%) were highlighted by most respondents as negative impacts.

Interviews with NGOs and child protection officers

Interviews were conducted with the protection officers at ARRA, UNHCR, NRC and Innovation Humanitarian Solutions. Most child protection officers highlighted that they facilitate family reunification for the children. Additionally, they assess the children for the most suitable care arrangements and develop standard operating procedures for the children. However, most confirmed that children do not participate in capacity-building activities. They also said that there were deficiencies in personnel and children do not have adequate guardians and teachers. They said that the protection officers do not analyse the strengths and weaknesses of social welfare and child protection systems, actors and services. Furthermore, the child protection officers do not adapt, develop or establish information management systems, agree on policies and procedures for safe storage and the sharing of information and the provision of basic needs for children is not based on UN standards.

Child protection officers highlighted the main challenges as follows:

- Labour abuse among the children
- Inadequate access to water and sanitation
- Unsafe shelters

- Lack of foster care families
- Lack of adequate food programmes
- Smuggling and human trafficking
- Secondary movement
- Lack of voluntary repatriation
- Lack of durable solutions, such as resettlement
- Harsh environment
- Inconsistent *best interest determination* (BID)²
- Long distance to high school
- Lack of alternative energy and light
- Lack of Kunama interpreters at the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Centre

The majority of child protection officers said that they facilitate family reunification for the children, aim to work in the best interests of the child, including assessing the children for the most suitable care arrangement. Additionally, they have established standard operating procedures for the protection and reception of children.

Focus group discussions with committee members

Focus group discussions were held with the members of the Refugee Central Committee, the Child Welfare Committee, children residing in community care, children from the Children’s Parliament, caregivers from kinship and foster care arrangements, and social workers. The main purpose of the focus group discussions was to assess the main challenges that occur in the lives of the children in the four camps. Five focus group discussions were organised with 20 participants in each group. In the focus group discussions, everyone was given the right to speak freely and express their opinions. In this subsection, the main points raised by the participants are outlined for each theme presented in the discussions.

² “A ‘best interests determination’ (BID) describes the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child’s best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision-makers with relevant areas of expertise, and balance all relevant factors in order to assess the best option” (UNHCR, 2008, p. 8).

What is the situation regarding the onward movement of unaccompanied and separated children and the associated risks of smuggling, trafficking and kidnapping?

The participants of the focus group discussion emphasised that there is not such a high level of onward movement of children from the camps associated with smuggling or trafficking. The main illegal movement of children from the camp is towards Eritrea, mostly of children from the Kunama community and to a lesser extent from Tigrinya communities. Nevertheless, the onward movement towards Eritrea is of high risk. Children who leave for Eritrea are mostly leaving to see their families. The absence of adequate child and youth activities that anchor them to the camp account for this irregular migration. Additionally, the participants of the focus group discussions pointed out that according to them there is only a small number of children who leave for Sudan and Libya, but this group is at increased risk of smuggling and trafficking.

Is adequate shelter available for unaccompanied and separated children?

On this topic the participants said that there are insufficient separate shelters allocated for unaccompanied and separated children living in the camp. They live in the houses of their relatives and foster families. At the time of the research, some newly-constructed shelters were allocated for families that foster unaccompanied and separated children, but these still did not cover the need for shelters for all children. Currently, families in the camp are fostering children in their own houses, which they build themselves and have little living-space. The discussion participants emphasised that appropriate shelters must be constructed for foster families in order to encourage fostering parents to take children. Some participants stated that the main challenge is not only lack of shelters for unaccompanied and separated children, but the lack of adequate shelter in general.

Is there adequate access to the community-care food programme in the camps for unaccompanied and separated children?

And

Is there sufficient *funding* for the provision of clothes, shoes and hygiene items for the unaccompanied and separated children?

The participants of the focus group discussion pointed out that the budget for unaccompanied and separated children is inadequate. They pointed to the situation in one of the other camps, where community care programmes are supposedly better. They highlighted that children in other camps who live in community care get better support regarding clothing and food than children who live in foster care in the Shire camps. Additionally, they stated that the cash support for families taking care of unaccompanied and separated children is also inadequate. Furthermore, children do not receive clothes, shoes and hygiene materials regularly. The supplies are not need-based and some supplies are not suitable for the children. They stated that in some cases, the inadequate supply of clothing and other materials is causing children to drop out of school.

Is there adequate power supply in the communal kitchens for cooking injera³?

The focus group discussants stated that the camp they were residing in was not connected to the national grid line and that there is no electricity in the communal kitchens. The two communal kitchens that are constructed were not functional at the time of the research. Additionally, collecting firewood was banned by the local government, which aggravates the problem.

Do the children attend school?

And

What obstacles are observed that lead the children not to attend school?

Regarding education, the participants stated that in this school year the enrolment rate of students was high at the beginning of the year due to collaborative work done by the education stakeholders. But

³ *Injera* is a sourdough-risen flatbread made of flour in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

the dropout rate has increased over time. The participants stated that good follow-up opportunities are provided by Innovation Humanitarian Solutions for unaccompanied and separated children who dropout. They outlined the main challenges as:

- The harsh, hot environment of the camp (especially for those who attend classes in the afternoon)
- Poor follow-up of dropouts by teachers, the Parent, Teachers and Student Association and the Refugee Central Committee
- The long distance to the school
- The dominant focus of parents and children on durable solutions like resettlement
- Teachers who repeatedly missed classes
- Inadequate clothes, shoes and other supportive materials
- Low awareness among children about their rights and school rules and regulations
- Corporal punishment

Are durable solutions available for the children?

On this topic, the participants said that there is no opportunity for family reunification provided by the ICRC for children who return to Eritrea illegally. The only durable solution available is resettlement. However, the best interest determination process is not done on a regular basis due to the absence of the UNHCR child protection officer. In addition, children with specific needs do not always apply for a durable solution, despite having health or social problems. The participants stated that best interest assessments were done for several unaccompanied and separated children with specific needs by Innovation Humanitarian Solutions, but that the best interest determination process is delayed. The participants also said that providing kinship care and foster care is becoming a reason for delays in the resettlement process for these families (i.e., if a person who is in the process of resettlement is also provided with kinship care or foster care, the resettlement process of that person takes longer).

Is there adequate budget through UNHCR and WFP for supplementary feeding in the camp?

During the focus group discussion, the participants said that supplementary food provision is available in the health centre through budgets from the UNHCR and WFP. However, they noted that there is no specific supplementary food contribution targeting unaccompanied and separated children. Unaccompanied and separated children will get supplementary food if they fulfil the criteria for this service. They also stated that school children get extra meals at school.

Do the child protection officers fulfil their duties and responsibilities to support unaccompanied and separated children?

The participants stated that they are doing their best to support unaccompanied and separated children, and to protect them from any abuse and onward movement. Although, they highlighted again the absence of the UNHCR child protection officer. They also noted that there has been a delay in data correction by ARRA in terms of the age and names of children.

The absence of a Kunama interpreter at the Endabaguna Screening and Reception Centre is another issue outlined by the participants. This can lead to incorrect data being recorded for children registered by UNHCR and other organisations.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess the situation of Eritrean unaccompanied and separated refugee children in Tigray. The research attempts to answer the question: To what extent is the reception and protection of unaccompanied and separated children in Tigray executed according to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children? The data provides important first-hand insights from the refugee camps.

However, it should be kept in mind that the research was an initial explorative study and more extended research is needed to draw firm conclusions.

Both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children are implemented in Tigray. However, serious issues were raised during this research, indicating that these principles are not being fully complied with. For instance, the children said that they live in groups of 5 to 10 children in one house. These groups are too large, which affects privacy and hygiene. The quality of services and materials was generally described as low and insufficient. The lack of basic resources such as water, food, shelter and electricity make life difficult. Lack of materials and services was highlighted as a reason for school drop-out, secondary movement, deviant behaviour, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Based on the results of this study, it appears that the child protection officers are not able to fulfil their duties and responsibilities in the current situation. The workload of the UNHCR child protection officer is too heavy and his hours too limited. This results in much time when the officer is unavailable in the refugee camps. The absence of the child protection officer is highlighted as a main obstacle to adequate care and protection for unaccompanied and separated children in the camps. With the Nine Pledges made by the Ethiopian government in September 2016, these issues should improve considerably, which should strengthen the opportunities for children to study and work in Ethiopia, thereby creating a more conducive situation for the children.

For children who cannot be reunited with their families, it is important to promote community-based care that builds on local culture and provides continuity in learning, socialisation and development. Caregivers play a key role in promoting children's confidence, trust and security. In the current situation, the caregivers are often refugees themselves, who know the culture and the background of the children, which makes the care situation

community-based and inclusive of the local culture (Schoenmaeckers, Al-Qasim & Zanzottera, 2019). In addition, teachers in the camp should receive extra training in appropriate ways of responding to children who are separated from their families and have emotional and behavioural problems.

In conclusion, all partners (UNHCR, ARRA, NRC, Innovation Humanitarian Solutions, etc.) should work together to fill the gaps in the provision of basic needs and social services for refugee children. Every organisation should have a child protection policy and strategy in place at all levels in order to fully comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children.

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