

EXPLAINER – UNHCR’S EMERGENCY TRANSIT MECHANISM CENTRE IN RWANDA

13 February 2024

*In line with our mandate, and to support refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk inside Libya, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has put in place an **Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM)**, alongside other alternative pathways designed to provide durable solutions outside of Libya. Through the ETM, **refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk in Libya are evacuated on an emergency, voluntary and temporary basis**, as direct resettlement from Libya is not possible for some destination countries.*

In recent years, Libya has become a destination country for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants as well as a transit country for those attempting to reach Europe. Following years of conflict and political instability, coupled with the absence of any asylum system, Libya remains unsafe for them. Human trafficking and detention are rife, along with torture, extortion, and abuse. In some cases, lives are at immediate risk. Many refugees live out of sight, often in extremely precarious conditions, in overcrowded rooms, lacking running water or sanitation. They face further difficulties accessing basic services including health care, and education or stable incomes, exacerbating risks and exploitation.

*Through the ETM, refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk in Libya are evacuated and relocated to designated centres where **UNHCR processes their asylum claims and works together with third countries to secure long-term solutions**. ETM centres are currently operational in Niger (established in 2017) and Rwanda (established in 2019).¹ Here’s what happens **at UNHCR’s Emergency Transit Mechanism Rwanda Centre**:*

1. **Refugees and asylum-seekers whose lives are at risk in Libya are evacuated on an emergency and voluntary basis and temporarily hosted in Rwanda:** Established through a 2019 Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, the Government of Rwanda and the African Union, UNHCR’s ETM Centre is in Gashora Sector, Bugesera District Rwanda². It temporarily houses refugees and asylum-seekers who have undertaken voluntary evacuation from conflict-ridden Libya, where they have often been detained, subjected to violence, torture, abuse, including sexual abuse, and life-threatening situations. Between 2019 and December 2023, a total of 2,059 refugees and asylum-seekers were evacuated.
2. **UNHCR supports those voluntarily evacuated during their temporary stay:** UNHCR provides those evacuated from Libya with assistance during their stay in Rwanda. This

¹ See ‘UNHCR Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) Flash Update, January 2024’, available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/niger-and-rwanda-emergency-transit-mechanism-etm-flash-update-6929>.

² The Emergency Transit Mechanism is co-funded by the European Union, through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and supported by the Government of Rwanda and the African Union.

includes shelter, food, water, medical care, psycho-social and legal support, and language courses, with consideration of any specific needs. The Centre can currently host up to 700 refugees and asylum-seekers at any one time who are there on an emergency, voluntary and temporary basis.

3. **People temporarily live together in houses according to nationality and specific needs:** There is a range of accommodation options at the ETM centre in Rwanda, with provisions in place for families, single women and girls, men and boys, and options according to nationality. A two-storey building – the Ikaze Residence Apartment – has the capacity to accommodate 360 people in individual rooms and shared apartments. There are also 30 individual housing blocks that can host 340 people and are primarily used for families. Refugees and asylum-seekers evacuated to Rwanda have to date originated from 10 countries - Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Guinea and Mali.
 4. **In Rwanda, UNHCR examines the asylum claims of those evacuated from Libya:** The ETM is an important mechanism to provide legal remedies for refugees and asylum-seekers in the absence of an asylum framework and lawful refugee status in Libya. While in the ETM centre, the asylum-seekers go through refugee case processing undertaken by UNHCR. Through this process, UNHCR determines whether they meet the refugee criteria in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Recognition of refugee status is an important mechanism to enable resettlement to third countries and prevent refoulement of refugees.
 5. **UNHCR works to find durable solutions for refugees:** Once in Rwanda, the claims of the men, women and children who have been evacuated from Libya are processed by UNHCR. They are counselled on durable solutions including resettlement to a third country. To date, all refugees have agreed to be submitted for resettlement.
 6. **UNHCR works with resettlement countries to help refugees restart their lives:** Once refugee status has been granted, UNHCR submits refugees for resettlement to countries offering resettlement places. Following the submission of a resettlement case by UNHCR, the resettlement country determines if the refugee is eligible based on their country criteria. Resettlement countries also conduct interviews with refugees at the centre to validate the case. Once resettlement is approved, UNHCR supports refugees' departures to the third country. On average, this process takes six to eight months. As of the end of January 2024, 1,431 refugees have been resettled through the ETM Rwanda to Norway, Sweden, Canada, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Finland and the USA where they have found new homes and restarted their lives.
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