Externalization of Migration and the Impact on the Human Rights of Migrants

Call for inputs by the Special Rapporteur of the UN HRC
on the human rights of migrants

Evacuees from Libya - Emergency Transit Mechanism

Since the start of the Mediterranean crisis in 2014, UNHCR has been at the forefront of efforts to assist the most vulnerable, including relocating them to safe and secure places outside Libya. In September 2019, Rwanda signed the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNHCR and the African Union (AU) to evacuate asylum seekers and refugees from Libya to Rwanda.

Under the MoU, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda and the AU established, with the support of the EU, an Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Gashora Sector, Bugesera District, Rwanda, to support up to 500 vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, access multisectoral emergency lifesaving, protection, assistance, and solutions.

Subsequently, there have been two Addendums to the tripartite MOU, the first in October 2021 – December 2023 which increased the total number of individuals to be hosted in the center to 700 people at any given time, and the second in January 2024 which extends until 31st December 2025.

The aim of the ETM is to temporarily host asylum seekers who have undertaken voluntary evacuation from Libya. While in the ETM, asylum seekers go through refugee case processing undertaken by UNHCR to determine if they meet the requirements for durable solutions which mainly involves resettlement to a third country.



Evacuees from Libya to Rwanda

How does the evacuation process work?

Evacuations start in Libya where UNHCR staff identify vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees in need of international protection. Many of these individuals have been housed in detention centers and experienced trauma, violence, and abuse. UNHCR staff screen the individuals to see if they would be eligible to be evacuated to the ETM and counsel them as to the process to ensure their voluntary agreement. Information is then shared with UNHCR Rwanda and lists for evacuation are established based on vulnerability.

How many people are in the ETM and where do they come from?

Between September 2019 and April 2025, 2,760 refugees and asylum seekers were evacuated from Libya to the ETM in Rwanda through 21 evacuation flights. The refugees and asylum seekers consist of mainly Eritrean, Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian, South-Sudanese, Cameroon, Nigerian, Mali and Chadian nationalities. Over 2100 refugees have subsequently been resettled to third countries, as of April 2025.

Emergency Interventions

Once voluntarily evacuated from Libya to Rwanda, refugees and asylum seekers are received by MINEMA and UNHCR, subsequently transferred to ETM and provided with a range of services and support by UNHCR partners. This includes an initial health screening including psychological assessment, three meals a day, shelter allocation, primary health care availability the provision of three meals a day, allocation of shelter, the availability of primary health care 24 hours a day, and referrals for secondary and tertiary health care to local hospitals if needed. Individuals at the ETM also receive monthly cash assistance.

Most of the asylum seekers and refugees evacuated from Libya have been identified with psychological distress and PTSD. As a result, UNHCR and partners offer regular psychosocial counselling and therapy.

In addition, to prepare refugees for life after leaving the ETM, UNHCR and partners organize a range of activities and skills-based training to further their development and help them to regain their dignity. These include language literacy classes, computer classes, driving lessons, barbershop and hair dressing skills, financial literacy programs, and other skill developing training.

Other basic services such as protection (Child Protection and Gender Based Violence programming), legal redress, WASH, food, and Non-Food Items are provided.

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Case Processing for Durable Solutions

Once in the ETM center, the UNHCR conducts registration/verification of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as refugee status determination (while unaccompanied children undergo Best Interest Determination assessments), and durable solutions assessments.

After submitting for resettlement to third countries. Options to return home or integrate in Rwanda are also available, although no refugees have expressed wishes for these solutions.

As of April 2025, over 2100 refugees from the ETM center have been resettled to Canada, Sweden, Norway, Finland, France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and USA.

Source:
https://www.unhcr.org/rw/who-we-help/evacuees-libya-emergency-transit-mechanism

See also:
https://au.int/en/articles/au-government-rwanda-and-unhcr-joint-rescue-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-libya