

## ETHIOPIA EMERGENCY SITUATION

28 February 2022



Refugee children at Hamdayet, near the Ethiopia-Sudan border where refugees from Tigray region are received. © UNHCR/ Assadullah Nasrullah

### Key Developments

#### ETHIOPIA

On 18 February, [UNHCR briefed media](#) that it was working with the Ethiopian authorities and partners to provide emergency aid to thousands of Eritrean refugees who fled Barahle refugee camp and its environs in the Afar region after fighting engulfed the area.

In Afar, the security situation remains volatile with armed clashes reported in Barahle and Erebti districts. On 24 February, [OCHA reported](#) that according to Afar regional government authorities, the ongoing conflict has so far displaced hundreds of thousands of people, mostly pastoralists, and displacement is still ongoing. An estimated 200,000 people including IDPs, are in hard-to-reach locations either due to road conditions, security concerns, trapped behind conflict lines, or who took refuge in remote areas with no access to humanitarian assistance and services.

## Ethiopia Response

*The humanitarian situation across northern Ethiopia continues to seriously impact refugees, the internally displaced and host communities. Civilians have endured over one year of conflict with extremely limited basic services and assistance available, leading to a significant escalation in humanitarian needs with ongoing new displacements. The security situation remains volatile, affecting civilians and constraining humanitarian actors on the ground. Fuel remains in extremely short supply, humanitarian goods are currently only coming in by air, and communication, electricity, and banking services remain intermittent.*

UNHCR continues to hold discussions with BoLSA in Mekelle on collaboration and future engagement in provision of support to refugees and IDPs in Tigray. A comprehensive list of joint activities is being consolidated to facilitate decisions. Discussions also include allocation of required resources for the implementation of planned activities including relocation of refugees from urban centers to the camps, camp management activities, food distribution and health services. UNHCR also collaborates with BoLSA on IDP enrolment.

On 6 February, The UN Deputy Secretary General visited Mekelle and met with UN agencies, including UNHCR, to discuss the situation in Tigray. UNHCR and IOM led the delegation's visit to Sabacare 4 IDP site, where IDP leaders and families underscored the need for more support from the humanitarian community. IDPs raised concerns on insecurity, lack of food, cash, and inadequate health, education, WASH facilities and protection services. UNCHR protection, field, CCCM teams and partners briefed on ongoing activities. The delegation affirmed the commitment of the Secretary General to engage with stakeholders to facilitate provision of additional humanitarian assistance to Tigray and provide support for a peaceful resolution of the ongoing crisis.

On 9 February, the President of Ethiopia accompanied the UN Deputy Secretary General on a visit to the Afar region. UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator briefed the delegation on UNHCR's interventions and response in the region in support of refugees and IDPs, with an update on recent displacements, including the situation of affected refugees from Barahle camp.

On 10 February, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for East Africa visited Semera accompanied by the Head of Office of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for Ethiopia. The mission included meetings with Afar Elders, and focus group discussions with women and refugee leaders who fled Barahle camp and are currently hosted in Agda Hotel in Semera. They also met with cluster partners and head of agencies. Similarly, the UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator again briefed the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator on UNHCR's interventions and response in the region.

## Eritrean Refugee Response

### TIGRAY

The situation in the Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps hosting 25,000 Eritrean refugees continues to be relatively calm. On 24 February, a convoy of 15 WFP trucks carrying 290 MT of food departed Mekelle to Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps. UNHCR and WFP completed a general food distribution from 25 - 28 February in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps in Tigray for 22,533 Eritrean refugees with the support of the Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs (BoLSA) and the Refugee Central Committee (RCC). This was the first distribution of food in the camps since a one-month ration was provided in December. The food distributed is the last quantity available in WFP warehouses in Tigray. Given the lack of food and fuel supplies in Tigray, UNHCR and WFP are exploring the option of cash assistance to cover refugees' requirements for the month of March and beyond.

UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities on the criticality of food, fuel, and other enablers. During the month of February, UNHCR received informal reports that refugees have depleted their resources, and some were selling their properties with some begging from the host community in Mai Tsebri and nearby areas for survival. UNHCR protection teams in Shire and Mekelle continue to monitor the situation and explore possible

solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in Tigray regarding lack of food, availability of services and status of persons of concern in urban areas and camps, as well as the possibility for relocation.

UNHCR was informed by authorities during the first week of February about the decision of the regional government to relocate refugees and asylum-seekers in urban centers in Tigray to the two refugee camps in Mai Tsebri. UNHCR began conducting intention surveys and protection counselling to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers are informed, and that relocation is voluntary. While the survey and counselling are preparatory activities, the relocation exercise will be launched only when fuel is available.

In Sheraro, UNHCR registered over 1,500 Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers who have been exposed to various protection risks, including restriction of movement and exposure to frequent arrests and detentions. The refugees and asylum-seekers are in dire need of assistance and lack access to basic services as they have received very little humanitarian assistance since the conflict broke out in Tigray in November 2020. As a result, there have been reports of extreme starvation among this population. UNHCR is mobilizing support to provide them with food and non-food items.

## **AFAR**

On 3 February 2022, 34,000 Eritrean refugees fled Barahle refugee camp and surrounding districts in the Afar region when the camp was attacked. Refugees living in the camp as well as among host communities in Dallol and Erebti Woredas were forced to flee due to ongoing fighting. Barahle camp hosted 21,000 people and 13,000 were hosted in communities in Dallol and Erebti Woredas. Refugees trekked the long distance to the regional capital in Semera and told UNHCR staff that armed men entered the camp on 3 February, stole their belongings and occupied their homes. According to their testimonies, at least five refugees were killed, and several women were kidnapped. Family members also lost one another in the chaos of fleeing the camp. The number of refugees arriving in Semera from Barahle continues to increase. UNHCR and partners are providing life-saving assistance for the refugees displaced by the conflict, including provision of food and water, and core-relief times, as well as access to emergency shelters, WASH, and health facilities.

As of 28 February, 4,756 refugees were hosted at the Agda Hotel site in Semera while around 10,000 refugees are reported to be living in Afdera town, approximately 225 kilometers from Semera. Others are also believed to have fled towards the towns of Altefa and Dabure, further inland. UNHCR's protection team established a Protection Desk in Afdera to start referrals. WFP continues to provide general food distribution to the refugees arriving while local partner ANE provides firewood.

UNHCR, RRS and partners are currently working to re-locate refugees to a temporary site at Serdo, 40 kilometers from Semera, as per agreement with the regional authorities. UNHCR is working with RRS, the regional authorities and additional partners to prepare the site for hosting refugees, including by installation of emergency shelter, WASH, and health facilities, and ensuring access to water. Preparations in the Serdo temporary refugee site near Semera are ongoing, including setting up shelters and digging of latrines. A total 1,000 family tents will be pitched where relocated refugees will be hosted.

## **AMHARA**

On 17 February, UNHCR met with RRS and refugees in Dabat to discuss the need to relocate refugees in Mai-Aini and Adi Arush (Tigray) to Dabat. UNHCR will transfer refugees from Tigray to Dabat/Alemwach site once a secure passage is guaranteed. During the week of 24 February, UNHCR supported the relocation of 1,200 refugees by Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) from Dabat town to the newly constructed site of Alemwach in North Gondar.

On 25 February, 172 refugees arrived in Dabat from Mai Aini and Adi Harush after passing through police stations in Debark, Gondar and Sanja. RRS who was contacted by these police stations upon arrival, shared the lists with UNHCR for verification before their release from the police stations.

The UNHCR Global Distribution Tool system has now been integrated in Alemwach refugee camp for the identification of refugees upon arrival and for CRI distribution.

## Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

On 28 February, UNHCR's Principal Situation Coordinator began a four-day mission to Afar. A meeting with the Head of the Disaster Prevention Food Security Program Coordination Office (DPFSPCO) took place, during which the impact of the conflict on the Afar population was discussed. The Head of DPFSPCO sought UNHCR's support in strengthening CCCM interventions in the new IDP sites and in turn, build the capacity of the DPFSPCO. The Head of DPFSPCO also appealed for the speeding up of UNHCR's shelter response and core relief items (CRI). The mission visited Agda Hotel (Semera) where refugees displaced from Barahle are being temporarily hosted. The mission met refugee representative with the RRS to hear their concerns and inform them about the ongoing response plan.

The mission also visited Semera IDP site with partners and were briefed on the prevailing challenges, related to food and WASH. In addition, an assessment mission in Guya IDP site was conducted to establish the readiness of the host community to offer land for IDPs. Approximately 43 hectares of land may be available.

Close to 8,000 IDPs of Tigrayan ethnicity are living at a temporary and overcrowded IDP site in Semera. UNHCR and partners are present at the site and delivering food and emergency assistance. The regional authorities have identified a new site for the IDPs and UNHCR and partners are working with site planners to prepare the site. To date, 3,000 refugees have received food, 2,500 others received CRIs and 5 persons with special needs were referred for assistance.



**Protection:** The overall humanitarian situation in Tigray region continues to deteriorate with lack of access to basic needs. Response services to gender-based violence continue to be a challenge. Health facilities including the seven One-Stop centers have ceased to function due to lack of basic needs such as food, clothing, cash assistance and medical equipment to facilitate timely provision of services. Partners providing gender-based violence response activities across the region have also ceased their implementation due to lack of necessary materials and finances. Suspension of activities and services will have a significant impact on the progress made to prevent and address gender-based violence in 2021.

UNHCR protection team conducted a rapid protection needs assessment in Zekere IDP site in Mekelle, housing 920 households displaced from Amhara, Afar and Western Tigray. The result of the assessment indicates that food, shelter, health, MHPSS, CRI, WASH and sanitation materials are urgent priority needs. UNHCR and other agencies are planning to scale up response in the IDP sites for new arrivals, with targeted CRI assistance and CCCM activities.

On 24 February, UNHCR Protection team took part in a joint rapid assessment in Guya IDP site. A total of 21,250 IDP households from Abala, Erebt, Barahle and Megala reside in three collective centers at Guya site: 18,340 households in China camp; 1,525 in Silsa Guya high school; and 1,385 in Silsa Guya Elementary school site. The joint mission assessed the living conditions of IDPs and refugees who fled Abala, Erebt, Barahle and Megala and are now living in four IDP sites in Afdera. Some of the IDPs in Afdera and Guya have received 15kg of wheat each, however most of the IDPs have not received any food rations. Critical needs identified for this population include food, water, shelter, health services and clothing.



**Shelter and Non-food Items:** Lack of fuel continues to hamper CRI distributions to 6,000 new IDPs who arrived in Sheraro last month as well as 5,000 relocated IDPs from Dedebit to Selekleka new IDP site. UNHCR through the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) completed the distribution of 1,000 full CRI kits to IDPs in Selekleka reaching an estimated 5,000 individuals.

UNHCR continues CRI distribution in multiple locations in Shire, including to 900 vulnerable households that started on 16 February in 18 IDP sites in Shire. Distributions to the remaining 1,800 households in several locations, predominantly for returnees as well as newly arrived IDPs, was due to start on 28 February. On 24 February, UNHCR, through the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS), distributed CRIs to 500 returnee IDP households in Adi Hageray town in Maekelay Adyabo woreda in Shire following verifications undertaken by the receiving woreda.



**Camp Coordination and Camp Management:** The CCCM Cluster led a multisectoral needs assessment to determine the number of new arrivals in Quiha, Mekelle. A total of 1,392 households, (4,400 individuals) from Abala and Afar are currently sheltered in four collective centers. One of the sites visited by the team hosted over 400 households, who reported insecurity in places of origin as forcing them into displacement. The CCCM Cluster is identifying a partner to undertake management of the sites. CCCM is also advocating with service providers for the provision of lifesaving assistance to the new IDP arrivals.

The increasing rate of scabies cases continues to be an alarming health concern in all IDP sites in Shire and Mekelle. Cluster partners have approached service providers for the distribution of soap at affected IDP sites, however soap supplies are still not available in Tigray. In Shire, 734 new scabies cases were reported in four collective sites. A slight improvement has been reported following CCCM, WASH Cluster awareness sessions for maintaining sanitization and cleaning of clothes. CCCM partners also conducted home to home visits to determine the spread of scabies in other sites of Shire and Sheraro, where a total of 2,880 households (7,003 individuals) with scabies were reported. Meanwhile UNHCR, IOM in collaboration with WASH partners facilitated the weekly cleaning campaign and mass sterilization of clothes, blankets with boiling water to prevent scabies in eleven IDP sites in Shire. A total of 5,522 IDPs participated in the campaign.

The development of three new sites is being prioritized by the Cluster partners in Shire, Adwa and Sheraro. The construction of the sites would be completed within a month, with adequate resources and material. IDPs from Western Tigray who are unable to return due to insecurity will be relocated from schools to the new sites. Meanwhile, UNHCR has constructed 52 duplex shelters for some 520 vulnerable IDPs who could not afford rent and moved to the overcrowded sites in Shire.

## Sudan Response


Both Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah camps have reached full capacity. UNHCR has been working with the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) since late 2021 to obtain permission from local authorities to expand both camps – which receive Tigrayan refugees – so far without success. In the meantime, Tigrayan refugees would have to be relocated to Babikri, which houses Qemant refugees and still has capacity for some 20,000, although this would not be an ideal arrangement.

A total of 231 people were relocated from Hamdayet Transit Centre to Um Rakuba camp on 24 February. In addition to new arrivals, some 50 Ethiopians who had been living in host communities around Hamdayet were also in the convoy. UNHCR has been informed by COR that up to 2,000 Ethiopians living in communities around Hamdayet may choose to move to the camps in the coming days and weeks. A protection mission to Hamdayet will be carried out to verify the voluntariness of these moves.


On 1 February, UNHCR, in close coordination with COR and partners, relocated 74 Qemant refugees (39 households) in 5 convoys from Um Rakuba camp to Babikri settlement. The refugees were assigned new shelters and provided with hot meals and water. A protection desk was set up to address protection issues and facilitate referrals to the different service providers. There are now some 2,200 Qemant refugees in Babikri as of 31 January.


Two separate fire incidents were recorded during the reporting period with varying degrees of impact. On 20 February, a small fire started by a child in Babikri damaged three tents. No casualties were reported. On 23 February, a fire in Um Rakuba destroyed close to 40 shelters and 8 latrines. One refugee was injured and was referred to the MSF clinic for first aid. The exact cause of the fire was not determined. The affected households were provided with new shelters, food and CRIs.


On 21 February, UNHCR and partners launched the [Country Refugee Response Plan](#) seeking US\$ 517 million to provide assistance and boost the self-reliance of 925,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. Of the total number of refugees targeted by the plan, some 123,000 are from Ethiopia: including 59,000 who arrived in Sudan because of the ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia, 13,000 who were already in the country previously, and anticipating a possible increase of up to 52,000 additional Ethiopian refugees in 2022.

 **Protection:** UNHCR and COR continue to provide protection and assistance to Sudanese refugee returnees who have crossed from the various camps in Ethiopia's Benishangul Gumuz region. Daily arrivals remain low, with a total of 155 who have arrived so far. The official border point is still closed. On 9 February, 34 Sudanese returnees were assisted to return to their villages in Dindrow, Dereng and Damazine. WHO supported the dispatch of a Ministry of Health quick response team to screen and provide COVID-19 vaccination. Partners remain ready to provide support to any further influxes.

UNHCR and COR issued 678 ID cards to registered refugees in Tunaydbah (466) and Um Rakuba (212). As of 1 February, 10,826 ID cards have been issued to registered refugees aged 16 and above in Um Rakuba (6,513) and Tunaydbah (4,313), covering 48 and 32 per cent of beneficiaries respectively.

 **Education:** UNHCR conducted a rapid education needs assessment in Babikri, holding three focus group discussions with 30 youth, boys, and girls. The preliminary findings indicate that over 40 per cent of primary school age children were not previously enrolled in schools. The outcomes of the needs assessment will inform the education response in Babikri. In tandem with the rapid education needs assessment, UNICEF, UNHCR and COR conducted a joint site evaluation in Babikri and identified suitable locations for school facilities and child friendly spaces, taking into account protection considerations.

 **Health and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS):** 1,131 children under-five were screened for malnutrition in all refugee-hosting locations – of which 10 with severe acute malnutrition and 11 with moderate acute malnutrition were identified and referred for treatment. In addition, 437 pregnant and lactating women were screened with 283 women receiving infant and young children feeding counselling. 52 refugees in Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah received mental health and psychosocial support from ALIGHT. This support entailed assessment, treatment, and counselling.

 **Camp Coordination and Camp Management:** Preparedness and response efforts to mitigate against flooding and other extreme weather impacts have commenced in advance of the rainy season which begins around May. The operation has developed a detailed preparedness plan in

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