

ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

6 September 2021



Ethiopian refugee Hailu Mehari sits with his family outside their shelter in Um Rakuba refugee camp in eastern Sudan.
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Key Developments

ETHIOPIA

As the Tigray conflict enters its 10th month, the overall security and access situation remains complex and fluid, hindering effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most affected populations in Central, Southern-Eastern, Eastern, North-Western and Southern Zones. Fresh displacement from fighting in Ethiopia's Amhara and Afar regions has been recorded as the conflict spreads beyond the Tigray region. In addition to some 2.1 million internally displaced people in Tigray, there are also 250,000 internally displaced people in Amhara region and 112,000 in Afar region according to the local authorities and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Of particular concern is the safety and wellbeing of thousands of Eritrean refugees living in the two Eritrean refugee camps of Mai Aini and Adi Harush in Tigray region, as well as the Berhale camp in Afar region which has been most recently affected by the spread of the conflict.

UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation, particularly the ongoing preparation of the new camp identified in Amhara region for the relocation of Eritrean refugees from Tigray. On 1 September, the Tekeze bridge between Mai Tsebri and Shire, which was earlier destroyed during the conflict, was inaugurated after it was repaired. It will facilitate access to the refugee camps of Mai Aini and Adi Harush from Shire. The bridge is currently only being used by light vehicles; WFP conducted an assessment and concluded that heavy cars/trucks/buses should be able to use the bridge within two weeks.

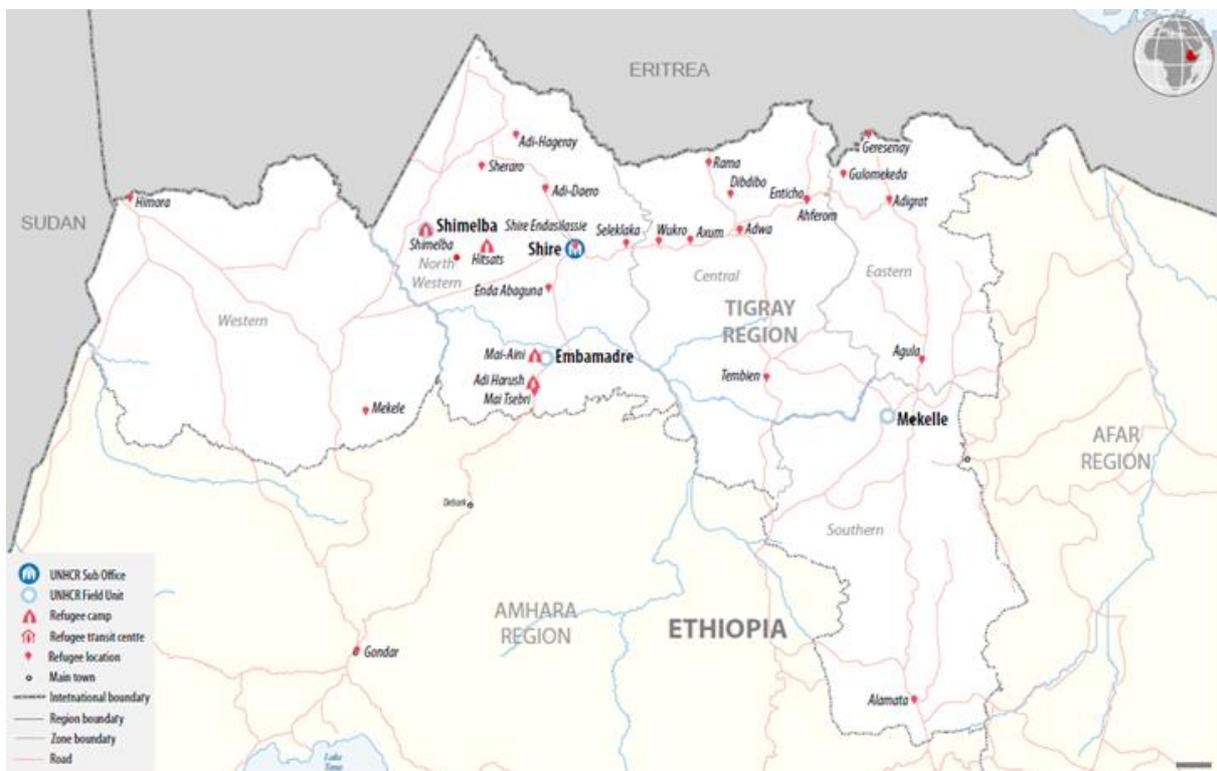
On 6 September, more than 100 WFP trucks carrying 3,500 metric tons of food and other life-saving materials arrived in Mekelle after weeks of challenges.

SUDAN

On 22 August, UNHCR High Commissioner [visited Um Rakuba camp](#) as part of a three-day mission to Sudan. The High Commissioner was joined by Norway's Minister for International Development, the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator a.i., UNHCR's Sudan Representative and UNICEF's Sudan Representative. During the visit, the delegation met with representatives from the refugee and host community, officials from Sudan's Commission for Refugees, the acting Governor for Gedaref, and several partners engaged in the humanitarian response. The delegation also visited a WFP food distribution point, a newly constructed NRC learning centre, and UNICEF/ZOA health and nutrition facility. The High Commissioner ended his visit by thanking the host community for their generosity, partners for their collaboration and donors for their unfailing support and open dialogue. He noted that many of the refugees he spoke to would like to return home but only if there is peace. He reiterated that *"there is no military solution to this problem"* and the only way to restore peace in Ethiopia is through diplomatic negotiation and political talks.

Ethiopia Response

The humanitarian situation across the Tigray Region remains deeply concerning for refugees, the internally displaced and host communities. Civilians have endured ten months 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. Communication, electricity, and banking services remain intermittent. The conflict is now also affecting civilian populations in neighboring Amhara and Afar regions.



Eritrean Refugee Response

Adi Harush and Mai Aini: The last food distribution in the two camps was delayed by several weeks and eventually carried out from 5-12 August in cooperation with partners, with rations expected to last approximately one month. Due to the ongoing insecurity and access difficulties, refugees are in a dire situation, basic services such as healthcare remain largely unavailable, and adequate clean drinking water is currently not available. Efforts are being made to improve support provided in the camps, pending relocation.

Berhale: The government has reported new displacement of 10,000 individuals in areas around Berhale following conflict that started around 20 August 2021. Active conflict has been reported 35 kilometers from the camp, compelling partners and UNHCR to leave the area. If the fighting escalates and reaches Berhale Camp, 21,000 Eritrean refugees would be in imminent danger. Food distributions for the months of July and August have been set to take place in the week of 06 September with the remaining ARRA staff and the refugee committees.

UNHCR provided support to four refugees who travelled on their own from Shire to Samara in Afar region. The refugees were moved to Aysaita camp, where they joined another 53 refugees staying in the ARRA office and where UNHCR provided family tents for additional accommodation space while ARRA is providing hot meals.

Dabat: The security situation around Dabat and Debark remains unpredictable due to the ongoing fighting in the area which could hinder establishment of the new camp. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation. UNHCR staff and partners travel daily from Gondar to Dabat up north to Debark.

At the new Alemwach site, which can accommodate 5,000 refugees with the current capacity, improvements are ongoing to extend it to accommodate up to 25,000 individuals. The construction of WFP and UNHCR rub halls, initially hampered by fuel and truck shortages, has finally started. Currently three local NGOs are supporting the response in shelter, energy, WASH, and warehouse management while health services are done directly by ARRA in conjunction with Dabat woreda.

As of 6 September, 195 persons of concern, including 188 refugees, 4 asylum-seekers and 3 Ethiopian nationals married to Eritrean refugees, were accommodated in interim emergency communal shelters in Dabat town until the new Alemwach site is equipped with electricity and water.

Addis Ababa: The documentation exercise for Eritrean refugees who self-relocated to Addis Ababa from the former Shimelba and Hitsats camps commenced on 4 August 2021 and is ongoing with the support of ARRA. As of 6 September, a total of 6,155 individuals received a new refugee ID document, and 1,250 individuals (745 households) received a new proof of registration. Partnering with the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE), UNHCR has assisted 5,048 individuals to open bank accounts to facilitate the transfer of cash assistance from UNHCR and receive remittances from relatives living abroad.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)



Protection: UNHCR has established 57 protection desks throughout IDP sites in the Tigray region. Referrals and delivery of basic relief items – including blankets, buckets, soap, kitchen sets and mosquito nets – are provided to the most vulnerable. As the majority of the IDPs are living among and receiving support from the host community, community-based protection mechanisms are being strengthened.

A relocation task force led by Protection and CCCM clusters has been set up. In Mekelle, the relocation of 100 to 400 families is planned during the next two weeks in Sabacare-4, a new site that can host up to 19,000 individuals. The Task Force requested all partners to support with the identification of households to prioritize for the relocation pilot and come up with criteria that can be used by community leadership structures. Relocation discussions are also taking place elsewhere across Tigray in line with Mekelle level guidance.

The UNHCR Protection Team is finalizing the operational plan of the IDPs Return Strategy, under the leadership of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC). While a majority of IDPs have expressed their willingness to return, many cannot do so as conflict persists in their areas of origin or conditions are not conducive for a dignified return.

Newly arrived IDPs fleeing the conflict areas around Zalambessa woreda in Tigray east have reached Adigrat and Maichew. In Mai Tsebri, there are more than 58,000 IDPs from Wolkayte, Tsegedie and other parts of western Tigray who arrived in two sites and currently there are no services providers to respond to their needs. 4,825 IDPs have newly arrived at the sites in Shire.

In coordination with UNICEF, UNHCR facilitated trainings on GBV in Emergencies for non-GBV actors, local authorities, and partner staff in Mekelle to promote better understanding of GBV, referral pathways, and handling disclosure for GBV incidents.

A total of 4,000 dignity kits have been transported to Abi Adi, Maichew, Axum, Adigrat and will be distributed this week. About 7,650 are ready to be distributed in Mekelle.

An inter-agency PSEA Network has been set up, co-led by UNHCR and Save the Children. UN Women is working on strengthen the PSEA Network through the establishment of community-based complaint mechanisms (CBCMs) as well as survivor-centered support services, to respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) amongst IDPs in Mekelle, Shire and Axum.

Protection monitoring reports stress food as the top priority for IDPs in Tigray. Following a UNHCR assessment, there is a critical need to emphasize the GBV and Mental Health and Psychosocial response (MHPSS). Negative coping mechanisms are clearly present, including an increased number of children begging or selling labour and cleaning services on the streets, and reports of women engaged in survival sex.



Shelter and Non-food Items: In Mekelle, UNHCR organized field visits to Sabacare 4 to assess the progress of the pending works before moving the IDPs planned for mid-September. Rehabilitation and leveling off the ground are ongoing, and 140 shelters are ready to host IDPs.

UNHCR offices in Abi Adi, Adigrat and Maichew have received NFIs for around 500 households each and distribution has started. Twelve trucks delivered NFIs in Semera for around 5,000 households for the distribution to IDPs in Afar.



Camp Coordination and Camp Management: UNHCR CCCM partners, Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) and Organization for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD), started deploying CCCM teams in different IDP sites in Mekelle, Adigrat, Axum, Abi Adi, Sheraro and Adwa. This aims to increase presence and develop all the IDP sites managed by UNHCR. Joint missions with other partners are ongoing to assess IDP sites in different woredas and hold discussions with the zonal authorities.

ANE has completed eight communal kitchens in the IDP sites of Shire and started road access improvements as well as ground levelling. 15 trucks in Fre Swuat and 10 trucks in Tsehaye IDP sites have also been deployed for site upgrading activities.

Sudan Response

Between 29 August and 2 September, 37 new arrivals (35 Ethiopian and 2 Eritrean) were recorded in Hamdayet Transit Centre – an increase of 17 individuals from the previous reporting period, bringing the total of refugees in Hamdayet to 5,858.

UNHCR and partners conducted intention surveys in Hamdayet, Village 8, and Basunda to assess whether refugees plan to relocate to the designated locations further inland and to identify existing family ties with refugees already residing in the camps. As part of the relocation intention survey, a protection screening was carried out simultaneously to identify PSNs currently residing in the transit centres near the border areas and to determine whether they will need additional assistance as part of the relocation process, during travelling and upon arrival to the designated camps.

Following the arrival of some 992 Qemant refugees in the Basundah locality, UNHCR and Inter-Agency partners fielded a Refugee Rapid Response (RRR) mission. UNHCR continues to lead and coordinate the response to aid new arrivals and to facilitate and support operational partners and government counterparts in service provision, including COR and local authorities. The RRR mission also assessed a potential site for a new Transit Centre to relocate the population.

On 23 August, the operation received clearance from local authorities for a new site to accommodate non-Tigrayan refugees. Qalaat Al Nahl – which lies some 60km from Gedaref town in Al Jazirah state – has been proposed as a second option to Fau 5. A multi-functional team was formed to conduct a joint technical assessment with COR and key partners and on 31 August, an Inter-Agency mission took place in Qalaat Al Nahl. The mission reported that 50% of the allocated land is viable subject to further technical assessment. Some segments of the access road need to be rehabilitated, including bridges. The team also suggested to local authorities to provide an additional plot of land, closer to the hills, where the soil is not black cotton and has an acceptable slope to minimize flood risk.



Protection: As part of an Inter-Agency rapid SGBV assessment, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted in both Tunaydbah settlement and Um Rakuba camp, to map out risks and challenges faced by refugees. A wide range of demographics in all blocks and zones were included to be as comprehensive and representative as possible. Safety audits were carried out, also in Hamdayet and Village 8 transit centres.

Following weeks of constructive engagement with partners, SGBV standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the emergency refugee response have been successfully adopted. The document outlines the guiding principles, procedures, roles, and responsibilities in the prevention of and response to SGBV for actors engaged in the humanitarian response. Building on best international practices, these procedures have been developed through a consultative process with service providers and will strengthen the services already offered to SGBV survivors and individuals exposed to SGBV. Plans are currently underway to organize a session with partners to operationalize the SOPs.

Child protection referral pathways were adopted by the child protection working group. A case management task force led by UNHCR, COR, Sudan State Council for Child Welfare, Alight, and DRC has also been initiated in Um Rakuba with a view towards streamlining case management and ensuring that minimum standards are respected.

During the reporting period, close to 150 referrals were received at the integrated protection desks– a slight increase from the previous reporting period. The types of complaints varied and referrals and follow ups continued to be made to the relevant partners to ensure these were addressed. The protection desks in Hamdayet, Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba are manned daily by the protection partner, Alight, with UNHCR staff present once a week.

Relocation plans are currently being finalized. Several options are also being explored with regards to the various assets (tractors, vehicles, trucks, and trailers) refugees brought with them. This includes securing clearance from Sudan's Commission for Refugees (COR) and Customs Authority to allow refugees to use these assets within the camps' perimeters or alternatively temporarily keep these assets in their current locations or transfer them to the Customs Office in Gedaref. Discussions with COR and Customs officials continue.



Education: The Refugee Education Working Group held a three-day workshop for education partners to establish a joint action plan for 2022. Discussions included how the current education services offered in camps could be adapted to enhance the use of the Sudanese curriculum within the next 18 months. Modalities to create greater complementarity between child protection and education, meet the needs of youth and those who are out of school and strengthen communication with communities were also examined. 15 I/NGO staff, refugee teachers, and representatives of the State and Federal Ministries of Education attended this workshop.

Eight (8) secondary school teachers (5 men and 3 women) from Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah attended a workshop on the Sudanese curriculum. This is part of an IGAD-led teacher training initiative funded by Germany/GIZ and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education which works towards the systematic inclusion of forcibly displaced children and youth in the national curricula of IGAD member states – a main pillar of the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education.

During the reporting period, two (2) Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres run by Save the Children were officially opened in Um Rakuba. Enrolment is ongoing and close to 180 children have signed up. These centres were funded with the support from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) – the first global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. Although the construction of ventilated improved latrine pits in ECD centres and primary learning centres is nearing completion in Um Rakuba, a shortage remains in the integrated learning centre in Tunaydbah. Efforts to scale up the provision of latrines, handwashing stations and water drinking points in these centres in both locations are ongoing.



Health and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): As of 2 September, a total of 957 suspected cases of Hepatitis E Virus (HEV) have been recorded: 806 in Um Rakuba, 87 in Village 8, 49 in Tunaydbah, and 15 in Hamdayet. Collaboration between relevant Health and WaSH partners and the Ministry of Health continues to be stepped up to curb the outbreak, enhance sanitation and promote improvements in personal and community hygiene practices. Patients are mainly presenting mild symptoms, with a few severe cases are admitted at the MSF hospital in Um Rakuba.

During the month of August, in both camps, a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) case management tool was developed for improved case tracking and qualitative analysis of case management. Integrated Refugee Health Information System (IRHIS) data was collected, and the tool is to be presented at the next MHPSS working group. Alight held an MHPSS awareness workshop on suicide prevention and response for community leaders in Tunaydbah. Topics included how to look for warning signs, what to do if someone is at risk of suicide and where to access services. Staff members of operation partners were also trained on psychological first aid, basic counselling skills and suicidal prevention and response.



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