

ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

15- 28 February

Key Developments



An Eritrean refugee cooks for her family at Mai Aini refugee camps in northern Ethiopia.

SUDAN

- *Approximately **62,000** Ethiopian refugees have crossed into East Sudan as of 28 February.*
- *41,000 refugees have been relocated from Hamdayet and Village 8 to Um Rakuba camp (20,572) and the newly established Tunaydbah settlement (20,609).*
- *The presence of armed actors and tensions along the Sudan-Ethiopia border continues to be a concern for the safety of refugees and humanitarian operations at Hamdayet and Village 8 reception and transit sites.*
- *UNHCR and partners continue to establish refugee community structures at all sites.*

ETHIOPIA

- *On 26 February a statement from the Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia announced that humanitarian agencies had been provided unfettered access in the Tigray region. A follow up statement on 3 March further noted “Humanitarian agencies can operate in the region with unfettered access and unhindered mobility, by simply providing a notification of operations to the Ministry of Peace, and at their own risk in region wide movement.” UNHCR immediately submitted notifications for several missions to Mekelle and Shire for which clearance had been pending, to be undertaken the week of 8 March.*
- *UNHCR and partners have established a regular presence in the two southern Eritrean refugee camps, Mai-Aini and Adi Harush. UNHCR’s new operational base at Debarq will support both the Eritrean refugee and the Ethiopian IDP response in the area.*
- *As of 28 February, nearly 6,000 refugees from Hitsats and Shimelba arrived at Adi Harush and Mai Aini camps either spontaneously or transported by the government from Shire. Refugees are receiving food and Core Relief Items upon arrival. There are currently about 1,200 in Shire awaiting transportation to Adi Harush and Mai Aini camps.*

- *Shelter and space to accommodate the newly relocating refugees is an urgent priority. All existing communal shelters are already over capacity, with some new arrivals staying in schools and others crowding in with other families. UNHCR and partners are constructing 500 emergency shelters to temporarily house approximately 3,000 more refugees. UNHCR is working with local authorities to identify additional land and possible alternative locations to support the anticipated relocation of some 15,000 Eritrean refugees from Shimelba and Hitsats camps.*



Response

Ethiopia

The humanitarian situation across the Tigray Region remains deeply concerning. Many refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities have endured more than three months of conflict with extremely limited assistance, leading to a significant escalation in humanitarian needs. The security situation remains volatile especially in rural areas, and in and around Shire, affecting civilians and constraining humanitarian actors on the ground. Basic services have gradually resumed in parts of Tigray; however, electricity and banking services remain intermittent.

Eritrean Refugee Response

The Ethiopian government has announced the closure of the Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps. UNHCR is working with local authorities to identify land to support the anticipated relocation of 15,000-20,000 Eritrean refugees from the two camps. Several sites were visited at various distances from Debarke town in the Amhara region, but no suitable site has yet been identified.

In the meantime, as of 28 February, nearly 6,000 refugees from Shimelba and Hitsats have relocated to Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps. Government efforts to relocate refugees from Shire was halted for two weeks due to the volatile security situation and lack of vehicles but resumed at the end of the month. As of 28 February, approximately 1,200 refugees were registered with the government counterpart ARRA in Shire to be relocated.



Protection: UNHCR is further increasing its staff presence in Debarke and Mai Tsebbri for the refugee and IDP response in the area and is working on stepping up registration and protection services. The Protection team has met with community structures and held bilateral meetings with partners to reassess their presence and newly strengthened activities.

ARRA is leading an election process for the Refugee Central Committees (RCC) in Adi-Harush and Mai-Aini camps. The election process began with zonal leaders who form the 'parliament' and then culminate with the RCC election. The process will help strengthen community structures and improve communication with communities.



Shelter: The relocation taskforce consisting of UNHCR, ARRA and key partners are looking to rapidly expand shelter and services at Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps. Shelter for the newly relocated refugees remains an urgent protection concern and the need for new land is a priority. Site clearing to build emergency shelters at Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps began on 15 February. The 500 emergency shelters being constructed by UNHCR's Partner Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to house some 3,000 individuals may be full by the end of March if current arrival trends continue. UNHCR and partners continue working to identify potential additional space for temporary and longer-term shelter solutions.



UNHCR talks to Eritrean refugee Halima, 45, and her children at Mai Aini camp in the Tigray region.



Food Security and Nutrition: WFP, UNHCR and ARRA began the February food distribution to Adi-Harush camp on 25 February. The distribution for Mai-Aini camp will begin 1 March. All newly relocated refugees have received food rations upon arrival.



Water and Sanitation: NRC has started the construction of communal latrines around the newly established emergency shelters in Adi-Harush. In Mai Aini camp communal latrines are being located in space identified adjacent to several NGO compounds.



Non-food items: All newly relocated refugees have received Core Relief Items (CRIs) upon arrival to Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)



IDPs in Shire: Access and security issues continue to present considerable problems for the humanitarian community in Shire. Cluster meetings and activities are regularly postponed due to insecurity. Efforts to bring CRI and other humanitarian supplies to the area is an ongoing challenge.

An Inter-Agency mission consisting of UNICEF, UNOCHA and UNHCR is planned from Mekele to Shire to assess the IDP situation on 02 March.

Estimates vary on the number of IDPs in and around Shire, with figures ranging from 52,000 to 273,000. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) conducted a food distribution for IDPs in Shire town, which ended on 27 February, and preliminarily reported that around 131,000 IDPs were found eligible to collect food rations.

UNHCR and OCHA had an introductory meeting with the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) to discuss their engagement in the cluster coordination meetings and planning. A follow-up meeting with all partners was postponed due to the security situation.

Interagency meetings concerning the IDP situation began at the onset of the crisis in Shire and have been steadily expanded and formalized into the 6 clusters, as well as into the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). UNHCR is leading the overall coordination and three of the six clusters (CCCM, Shelter/NFI,

Protection). All six clusters include Government counterparts and high representation from the humanitarian community active in Shire.



Camp Coordination and Camp Management: The CCCM cluster, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, was initiated as a response taskforce with regards to the proposal by the authorities on 22 February to relocate all the 12,000 IDPs residing in the Axum university campus to a former detention facility. Due to the efforts of the CCCM Cluster and site selection taskforce, the authorities suspended the relocation of IDPs from Axum university to the proposed former prison until the end of March. Efforts have been underway to identify other suitable temporary sites. The Cluster is also reviewing nearby open land neighboring Shire town for a long-term solution.



Shelter and Non-food items: Cluster partners have been coordinating the distribution of dignity kits; hygiene materials; shelters kits, and other household item support (blankets, jerry cans, etc). During the last meeting, the Cluster noted that growing demand greatly outweighed supply, as well as the challenges in developing IDP lists while avoiding overlaps.



IDPs in Embamadre: Authorities have stated that 34,000 IDPs are living in the area, most living with the host communities. UNHCR visited one of the sites hosting 700 IDPs from Humera and Shire.



IDPs in Mekelle: Protection monitoring in IDP sites has been ongoing in Mekelle and six out of eight sites in school premises have been monitored. A considerable number of persons with specific needs, disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children have been identified in the preliminary results. UNHCR participated in the identification and assessment of potential sites for the relocation of IDPs from school premises in Mekelle as schools will soon reopen. Discussions on the implementation modalities are still ongoing with partners and the regional authorities.

Sudan

The influx of refugees from the Tigray region into Sudan has continued with fewer than 100 arrivals per day since January. Refugees continue to arrive mainly at Hamdayet transit center with fewer number of new arrivals to Village 8.

Relocation: Since 13 November, 20,572 refugees were relocated from Hamdayet and Abderafi border points, and Village 8 transit site to Um Rakuba – 70kms away from the Ethiopian border, of whom 10,100 have been individually registered. **Um Rakuba** camp has reached full capacity and no further relocations will take place except for family reunification purposes.

On 03 January, UNHCR and partners began relocations to the new settlement, **Tunaydbah** – 136kms away from Gedaref town. By 24 February, 20,600 refugees had been relocated to Tunaydbah from Hamdayet and Village 8, of whom 3,300 have been individually registered.

Relocation has been on hold since 24 February on the instruction of COR as the Locality authorities were concerned the current refugee population in Tunaydbah exceeds the host community population in Tunaydbah and Mafasa locality. On 25 February, UNHCR received informal indication that relocation would be able to resume but official communication was pending by the end of the month.

In **Hamdayet** UNHCR and Commissioner for Refugees (COR) are conducting a verification exercise with local authorities, partners, refugees, and host community leaders to identify the actual population remaining, which is lower than figures from the initial registration upon arrival. UNHCR and COR will revise the figures accordingly.

SECTOR UPDATES



Protection: In all locations, Protection desks have been established to provide information on legal issues, rights, and obligations of refugees and facilitate the registration process. Protection teams are identifying people at heightened risk, including pregnant women, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied children and older persons and referring them to specialized services including counselling and health services for survivors of gender-based violence.

UNHCR held a workshop on 16-17 February on International humanitarian law (IHL) and the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum to equip COR in Gedaref, Hamdayet, Village 8 and Shagarab with knowledge and tools to enable them to draft standard operating procedures (SOPs) on maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum at transit centers and camps.

The Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Needs Assessment was completed in **Um Rakuba** conducting focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews ensuring Age Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach. The partners who supported the exercise included, UNICEF, IOM, Alight/ARC, Plan International and Save the children. The data will be analysed, after which a report will be shared, and joint plans will be discussed and implemented in the coming months.

OCHA undertook a mission to **Hamdayet** on 18 February to support the refugee response with a community consultation exercise and to develop community engagement methods. The team conducted an orientation session for refugee volunteers, who then divided into groups to conduct FGDs. UNHCR and OCHA met with tribe leaders to understand the situation for the host community.

In **Hamdayet**, the Gender-Based Violence Technical Working Group was held and attended by four Partners. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) development was discussed at length and Preliminary GBV assessment report was presented. The report will be finalised and disseminated. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) training schedule was also discussed. UNHCR will be supporting the training and development of standard materials.

In **Village 8**, the general protection environment has remained calm without major incidents and threats to refugees. Refugees received their food ration for February and continued to access protection services from the UNHCR and COR protection desk. UNHCR and COR conducted household follow up and monitoring of refugee populations. Key issues observed included idleness among the community especially the male youth who are always crowded around the coffee shops and video halls; many children in the community since more than 40% of the population in the transit are children, and concern about the uncertainty around the fate of their automobiles. High number of refugees going out to collect firewood to support preparation of meals was also observed. The need to relocate refugees from the transit to the camps for effective protection interventions and programming remains critical.



Child Protection: UNHCR and partners are working to scale up child protection programmes in the camps and Transit Centers, with a focus on psychosocial support, family tracing and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children, and referrals to support services.

In **Um Rakuba**, key child protection partners including the State Council for Child Welfare (SCCW) and Save the Children (SCI), Plan International, UNICEF and UNHCR have agreed to phase out interim care and focus on supervised independent living and foster care arrangements. SCCW has requested training for community-based networks and foster families. Partners are working to ensure community engagement, build family acceptance, and identification and training of community mentors.



Plan International child friendly space in Um Rakuba Camp/ UNHCR
Desislava Ivanova

In **Tunaydbah**, the Child Protection sub-working group including UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children, IRC, SFPA and UNHCR discussed the work of the CP task force to finalize family tracing forms and establish CP referral pathways, and the CP/GBV assessment analysis, and the introduction of the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) which requires discussion with the National Council for Child Welfare in Khartoum.



Education: The first mini workshop to discuss the development of the Education roadmap was held. This will give a clear agreed timeline on how partners will move from the Emergency phase to the transition phase for students to eventually be included in the national system. This workshop was attended by all education partners.

The MoE confirmed the availability of the English curriculum which is still undergoing the final approval stages. UNHCR noted that a careful analysis will need to be undertaken to understand the differences between the Tigrayan and Sudanese curriculum to develop the transition plan, starting with some subjects and moving slowly to others.

In **Um Rakuba**, teacher training activities in Code of Conduct and Protection have been completed for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and primary teachers in Um Rakuba camp. Discussions to create a harmonized roadmap are underway to ensure education activities meet the standards as set by Ministry of Education. Partners agreed to undertake a joint education assessment to feed into the roadmap which includes assessing the level of education of students, teacher training needs, assessment, and sensitization on language of instruction (English vs Arabic). A basic infographic has been produced by UNICEF.

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