1. Executive Summary

Refugees and asylum seekers residing in Aftit and Alemwach refugee settlements in Amhara Region continue to face compounded protection risks driven by insecurity, restricted freedom of movement, limited access to basic services, and strained relations with host communities. The broader security situation in surrounding areas has negatively affected humanitarian access, service delivery, and livelihoods, exacerbating vulnerabilities among persons with specific needs (PSNs), including women, children, persons with disabilities (PWDs), elderly persons, child-headed households (CHH), and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

The Protection Monitoring Survey was conducted to systematically identify protection risks, service gaps, and negative coping mechanisms, and to generate evidence to inform UNHCR and partners' protection response, advocacy, and solutions-oriented programming in Amhara Region.

Figure 1: Amhara region: Aftit and Alemwach Settlements

2. Introduction

This PMS report presents findings from protection monitoring activities conducted through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Aftit and Alemwach refugee settlements. The analysis draws on both qualitative and quantitative data to provide an overview of protection concerns across key thematic areas, including safety and security, access to services, documentation, child protection, gender-based violence (GBV), mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and community dynamics.

The findings aim to support evidence-based planning and strengthen the integration of protection across sectoral responses in Amhara Region.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Protection monitoring was conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches:

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Aftit: 28 KIIs	Aftit: 15 FGDs
Alemwach: 22 KIIs	Alemwach: 10 FGDs
KIIs targeted diverse refugee community members across age, gender, occupation, and specific needs profiles.	FGDs included 10–15 participants per group and were disaggregated by;

	Boys and girls (≤18 years); Men and women (18–59 years); Men and women (60+ years)

3.2 Geographic Coverage and Timing

Data collection was conducted at settlement level in Aftit and Alemwach refugee settlements. The assessment focused on protection risks, access to services, and community dynamics within and around the settlements.

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was ensured. Findings reflect perceptions and reported experiences at the time of data collection and may be influenced by access constraints linked to insecurity and information gaps.

4. Key Protection Findings

4.1 Safety and Security

Restricted freedom of movement emerged as the most significant protection concern across both settlements.

In **Aftit**, 80 per cent of FGD participants reported limited freedom of movement due to fear of robbery, kidnapping along the Metema–Gondar Road, and general insecurity. Poor lighting within the settlement, particularly around latrines and pathways, was cited by 80 per cent of participants as a major risk factor, disproportionately affecting women and girls and increasing exposure to GBV. Refugees also reported the presence of unknown armed men at night and incidents of hostility, including verbal and physical abuse, from some host community members. The majority of participants indicated that existing security measures are insufficient.

In **Alemwach**, 70 per cent of participants identified restricted movement as a key concern, followed by conflict within the community and distance to services. Sixty per cent reported that no security measures are currently in place, while nearly half indicated that existing measures require improvement.

Across both sites, women and girls face heightened risks related to fear of rape, harassment, kidnapping, and inadequate lighting, while insecurity significantly undermines overall perceptions of safety.

4.2 Access to Fundamental Rights and Basic Services

Access to Information

Refugees in both settlements reported receiving information on available humanitarian assistance primarily through community leaders, protection desks, humanitarian actors, and IEC materials. However, the consistency of information dissemination varies, with refugees in Alemwach reporting more irregular access compared to Aftit.

Service Availability and Gaps

In **Aftit**, key barriers to accessing services include limited police presence, lack of electricity, and inadequate sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, including delivery care. CHHs and elderly persons were most frequently identified as facing challenges in accessing services, followed by PWDs, single women, and UASC.

In **Alemwach**, lack of security and police presence emerged as the most critical gap, alongside limited access to documentation and SRH services. PWDs, elderly persons, CHHs, and single women were reported as the most affected groups.

Priority needs across both settlements include food and nutrition support, documentation, security, employment opportunities, awareness of refugee rights, and child protection services.

4.3 Access to Justice and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

In **Aftit**, refugees primarily approach protection desks, community structures, and religious leaders to address protection concerns and disputes. In **Alemwach**, community structures, family and social networks, and protection desks are the main mechanisms used.

These findings highlight the continued importance of both formal and informal community-based mechanisms in resolving protection concerns and underscore the need to strengthen referral pathways and coordination.

4.4 Access to Basic Services

Food Security

Irregular food supply, insecurity affecting delivery, and reduced rations were consistently cited as the main barriers to food access in both settlements. These challenges are closely linked to the broader security context.

Health

Limited availability of medication, insecurity affecting referrals, distance to health facilities, and documentation barriers significantly constrain access to healthcare services. These challenges are more pronounced for women, children, elderly persons, and PWDs.

Education

In **Aftit**, language barriers, lack of teaching and learning materials, and unpaid teachers were identified as key constraints. In **Alemwach**, safety concerns while travelling to school, distance, and financial barriers were the main obstacles. Children with disabilities and chronic illnesses face additional exclusion from education services.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

In Aftit, inadequate lighting and locks at latrines, delays in accessing water, and limited water storage capacity were highlighted. In Alemwach, shortages of sanitary pads, poor latrine conditions, and inadequate lighting were the primary concerns, particularly affecting women and girls.

Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs)

In **Aftit**, most refugees reported having received shelter and NFI assistance; however, the majority described shelters as being in poor condition. In **Alemwach**, most respondents indicated that they had not received adequate shelter or NFI support. Priority needs include shelter repair, blankets, solar lamps, clothing, and improved quality and targeting of NFIs.

4.5 Legal and Documentation Issues

Lack of documentation is a significant protection risk in both settlements. It was reported by 65 per cent of FGD participants in Aftit and 60 per cent in Alemwach. Restricted freedom of movement is the primary consequence, followed by difficulties accessing services and assistance.

Barriers to obtaining documentation include limited registration periods and insufficient access to registration staff, highlighting the need for expanded and mobile civil documentation services.

4.6 Child Protection

High numbers of UASC were reported in both settlements, with many children separated from caregivers during displacement. The most significant risks facing children include anxiety, stress, and trauma, child labor, and limited access to child-friendly spaces. In Alemwach, concerns related to kidnapping by armed groups were also reported and warrant further investigation.

Care arrangements for UASC primarily involve foster care within the community or support from relatives, underscoring the need for strengthened case management and monitoring.

4.7 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is widely recognized as a key protection concern in both settlements. Risk factors include poor lighting, cultural practices such as early marriage, economic dependency, limited access to basic needs, and exclusion of women from decision-making processes.

Women and girls face domestic violence, harassment, discrimination in accessing services, and school dropout. Limited awareness of available GBV services and referral pathways further exacerbates risks.

4.8 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

High levels of distress were observed across both settlements, with women and girls reported as the most affected. While some community-based and professional MHPSS services are available, access is constrained by insecurity, limited-service availability, language barriers, and lack of information on referral pathways.

4.9 Community Dynamics and Social Cohesion

Interactions between refugees and host communities are largely described as difficult. Key drivers include language and cultural differences, competition over natural resources, economic pressures, and security concerns related to the presence of armed actors. These dynamics increase protection risks and undermine peaceful coexistence.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

The findings indicate that insecurity is a key cross-cutting driver of protection risks, affecting freedom of movement, access to services, livelihoods, and community relations. Vulnerabilities are disproportionately concentrated among women, children, PWDs, elderly persons, and CHHs. Information and documentation gaps further exacerbate exclusion, while limited livelihood opportunities contribute to negative coping mechanisms.

6. Priority Recommendations

- Strengthening security measures, including improved lighting and community-based protection mechanisms.
- Expand access to food, health, SRH, education, and WASH services, with targeted support for PSNs.
- Scale up mobile registration and legal assistance for civil documentation.
- Strengthen child protection and GBV prevention and response services, including safe spaces and referral pathways.
- Expand MHPSS services and improve community awareness of available support.
- Support initiatives to improve social cohesion and peaceful coexistence with host communities.