

## Bi-weekly Operational Update: 16-31 March 2020

**Update on COVID-19:** The COVID-19 situation in Ethiopia is evolving rapidly, with the Government reporting a total of 26 confirmed cases as of 31 March 2020, with more suspects being tested. So far there have been no confirmed cases among the 750,000 refugees and their close hosts in Ethiopia. UNHCR is working closely with the Government to promote the inclusion of refugees in national preparedness and response measures, including prevention, testing and treatment. Together with ARRA, partners, local communities and refugee outreach workers and volunteers, UNHCR is conducting information and awareness campaigns in all refugee camps, settlements and in urban areas, informing refugees about the importance of social/physical distancing, proper hygiene, and what to do if symptoms appear. They are communicating with refugees through hotlines, flyers, posters and small group sensitization meetings with refugee leaders. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material such as posters and leaflets in different local languages with information on hygiene practices posted in different spots within the refugee camps and reception centers. Handwashing facilities have been installed in reception centers and other locations, where there are gatherings of people. Temperature screening is being done in some border entry points and in the different reception facilities, including in Shire and Melkadida.

The UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia sent a letter to all refugees in the country, conveying her support and solidarity with them and outlining the preventive measures that they should be taking. The letter, written in English, was translated into all the languages spoken by the refugees in Ethiopia. <https://bit.ly/39woyII> The UNHCR Representative also took part in the #SafeHands challenge to encourage refugees and others to practice proper handwashing as an effective preventive measure against the pandemic:

<https://bit.ly/2X55aQs>

Following the Government's decision to close all land borders as part of the effort to prevent the spread of coronavirus, UNHCR issued a statement in which it said the decision is a necessary measure during crisis, but appealed to the Government to consider the protection needs of asylum seekers while implementing the same.

Ethiopia is one of the 31 countries worldwide assessed as high-risk, whose financial needs for COVID-19 prevention and response has been included in UNHCR's global appeal for **\$255.2 million**.

UNHCR is also part of the prevention and response to COVID-19 in parts of the country where the humanitarian community is responding to IDPs and returnees.

**Over 2000 refugees relocated to Nguenyiel Refugee Camp:** A total of 2,190 South Sudanese refugees were successfully relocated from the Pamdong Reception Centre to Nguenyiel Refugee Camp in the Gambella Region. The transfer was conducted with a great sense of urgency taking into consideration the COVID-19 situation and mindful of the need to avoid overcrowding. The newly relocated refugees were allocated family shelters and provided access to basic services, including health and sanitation.

**Progress in shelter construction in Gedeo & West Guji:** In the Gedeo and West Guji areas, UNHCR has completed almost 80% of the planned 850 shelters, with 674 of them finalized. They include 262 shelters in Gedeo and 412 in West Guji Zones. Out of the remaining 176 shelters, 135 are ready for mud plastering while 41 are in the walling stage. Managed by UNHCR's partner, Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE), the shelters are for use by vulnerable communities in the two zones, most of whom have returned from internal displacement caused by communal conflicts.