

# Ethiopia

16 April 2021

**805,164**

**Refugees and asylum seekers  
as of 31 March 2021**

**37,006**

**Handwashing  
facilities in camps**

**2,509**

**Health and  
community workers  
trained**

**87 protective**

**clothes, 47 digital  
thermometers & other  
PPES donated**

## COVID-19 Operational Context

As of 15 April 2021, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 236,554 coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and 3,285 deaths in the country. According to a UN report, the cases continue to increase and an average of 1,837 cases were reported daily in the last 7 days, with the overall positivity rate standing at 9.5%. The Minister of health said that the virus is spreading at an alarming rate. To halt the surge in transmissions, Ethiopia has announced stricter measures effective on 29 March, focusing on monitoring implementation of preventive measures such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distances, including limiting the number of participants in face-to-face meetings to 50. The Attorney General's office warned that violating the terms of the directives will result in severe punishments, including up to three years of imprisonment. Ethiopia is currently one of five countries in Africa registering the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases, according to WHO.

## COVID-19 Prevention and Response

Ethiopia rolled out its COVID-19 vaccination campaign earlier this month, prioritizing frontline health workers, individuals with underlying severe vulnerability conditions and elderly people. People of concern to UNHCR are part of the Government's vaccination plan. Already, more than 400 refugees volunteering in the health centres in refugee camps in the Gambella Region have been vaccinated.

The Government's Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and UNHCR, together with the Regional Health Bureaus and other health partners, continue to reinforce their response to the coronavirus in both refugee camps and other locations sheltering refugees and asylum seekers throughout the country. Organizations have enhanced communication on hygiene



*South Sudanese refugees are among the hundreds of frontline health workers in Gambella who received vaccination against COVID-19. ©UNHCR*

and are continuously working to reduce overcrowding, to curb the spread of the virus. Supplies of water and soap continue to be provided, together with the installation of handwashing stations, as well as strengthening of health services and the provision of personal protective equipment for health care workers, first responders and others, depending on availability. Health workers continue to take the WHO online vaccination training in anticipation of the rollout of vaccinations in the refugee camps.

- There have been **37,006 handwashing stations** installed in communal centres and households in 22 of the 26 refugee camps to promote regular handwashing with soap. There were **36,017** handwashing stations installed in refugee households while **989** were set up in communal facilities to provide services to refugees and asylum seekers. More capacity is needed, however, to ensure that every refugee household is equipped with a handwashing facility.
- Over **2,500** trained **health and community outreach workers** are actively engaged in awareness raising, case investigations and management, as well as mitigation, prevention and control of the virus. They include **446** healthcare workers, **22** laboratory technicians and **1,719** community outreach workers who are serving both the refugees and the communities hosting them. In addition, refugee representatives, Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs), women, youth and child committees and other community representatives were trained and are actively engaged to ensure that basic preventive measures are observed in the communities.
- The daily average per capita **water distribution** in the refugee camps stands at **19 litres**. While some of the camps have access to 20 liters per person, per day, per the UNHCR standards, others are receiving less than the emergency threshold of 15 liters per person per day. UNHCR, ARRA and partners are working to ensure that all refugees have access to adequate potable water, in keeping with the minimum international standards. The current emergency in the Tigray Region had disrupted the provision of water in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps where UNHCR currently has access and is working with partners to normalize the provision of services. To date, the per capita water distribution in Adi-Harush and Mai-Aini camps stand at 11.4 and 15.8 litres per person per day, respectively.
- **Isolation facilities**, known as Temporary Assessment Units, have been set up in all refugee camps to temporarily quarantine possible suspected COVID-19 cases, pending their transfer to Government isolation and treatment facilities, as needed. UNHCR has provided hospital beds, mattresses, coverall gowns and other supplies to equip the facilities and the health staff and extended support to the Government-run treatment centers, which are also accessible to refugees. The construction of five additional isolation facilities in the five Melkadida camps has been completed. UNHCR donated PPEs to the Zonal Health Bureau in West Guji, Oromia Region to bolster the government's effort to curb the spread of coronavirus. The materials, comprising 47 digital thermometers, 87 protective clothes, 84 bottles of hand sanitizers, 47 packs of face masks and 47 packs of surgical gloves, will be distributed among health facilities most in need.
- In the capital, Addis Ababa, where over **35,000** urban refugees reside, UNHCR is **communicating with refugees via telephone helplines, WhatsApp and Telegram groups**. Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs) and refugee leaders are also helping to raise awareness. In addition, telephone helplines and a **Digital Request and Complaints System (DRCS)** are fully functional. Concerned UNHCR staff are processing and responding to requests that are received on daily basis.
- In order to meet additional expenses for soap and other sanitary materials, UNHCR provides an allowance of 300 Ethiopian Birr (\$7.25) per person per month, to urban-based refugees entitled to monthly living allowances. The intervention is monitored through post-distribution phone interviews by Protection staff.
- Registration services resumed (they were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic) at the UNHCR's office in Addis Ababa, to issue refugees with registration documents and update their data. Limited numbers are received per day due to the health measures in place, to ensure the safety of refugees.
- UNHCR continues to **support the inter-agency COVID-19 response to the IDP situation** in the country, distributing non-food items, equipping isolation and quarantine centers and providing community communications on health messaging.

## COVID Impact and Challenges

**Health Impact:** Pivoting of much of UNHCR's limited health budget to the COVID-19 prevention and response efforts is resulting in a strain on the provision of regular essential health services in the refugee camps. This, in turn, will pose challenges in continuity of maternal and child health services, disease control programmes such as for HIV, TB and Malaria, among others. The reallocation of funds to combat COVID-19 may negatively impact the efforts already made towards the control of non-communicable diseases including diabetes, hypertension and mental health.

**Economic impact:** Despite the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, there have been positive advancements with respect to the planned roll out of projects designed by development partners in 2020. The £24m SHARPE Project and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) Inclusive Digital Economies Action in Ethiopia (IDEA) project have started activities in the Gambella and Somali regions. UNHCR is working closely with these partners to ensure that refugee inclusion and protection is realized and that these projects support the COVID-19 economic recovery efforts in refugee hosting areas. Most recently, UNHCR has commenced Cash transfer assistance in Bokolmanyo Woreda of the Somali Region. The cash assistance targets the elderly who are profiled as the most at risk from COVID-19. The funds are provided by the IKEA Foundation and distribution facilitated by the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.

## Operational Response Updates

**Tigray Emergency:** Protection and other critical services have gradually been reinstated to Eritrean refugees in Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush refugee camps, home to approximately 24,000 refugees. More than 7,500 of them were former residents of Shimelba and Hitsats camps who have either self-relocated or been assisted to relocate there. However, additional land to erect transitional shelters remains a critical gap requiring urgent solution. Existing emergency shelters will only address the needs of refugees for a short period and under the current dry conditions.

On 18th March a joint OCHA-UNHCR mission gained [access to Shimelba and Hitsats](#) refugee camps for the first time since November 2020, amid ongoing security concerns. UNHCR staff found both camps have now been completely destroyed, and all the humanitarian facilities looted and vandalized, and refugees had fled the camps. The joint mission was also able to visit Shiraro town, where local authorities reported an estimated 95,000 displaced people. A considerable number of Eritrean refugees are believed to be living scattered in the area. They are in dire need of urgent life-saving assistance, including food, shelter, health care, water and sanitation.

Meanwhile, conflict in Tigray continues to drive displacement across the region, with tens of thousands of people arriving in Shire, Axum and Adwa over the last weeks. UNHCR continues to work with other humanitarian partners to provide food, non-food aid items, water and medical services to the IDPs, but the gap remains huge. Since 15 March, UNHCR has distributed some vital aid items to some 5,000 displaced families, including blankets, sleeping mats, soap and jerrycans.

In Shire, there is an estimated 352,000 IDPs sheltered in 14 sites and within the host communities. The government has suspended its initial plan of relocating those sheltered inside the premises of the Axum University campus to a former detention facility thanks to advocacy by the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster of which UNHCR is a co-lead. A permanent site with a capacity to accommodate 18,740 people has been recently identified by the CCCM Cluster and approved by authorities.

Regular Ethiopia country and regional UNHCR updates on the crisis can be found at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/rbehag1>

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## Protection

**Conclusion of screening at Pagak Reception Centre:** With support from UNHCR, the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) concluded the screening exercise at the Pagak reception centre at the beginning of the month. A total of 7,916 people were identified as new arrivals from South Sudan seeking asylum. The remaining 7,222 were mostly already registered as refugees but had missed the comprehensive registration for various reasons. Most of them will be sent back to their respective camps to decongest the reception centre and the services it provides. Meanwhile, relocation of the new arrivals to Kule has commenced on 14 April. Pagak Reception Centre had the capacity to accommodate up to 5,000 people at a time, but that was reduced to 2,400 people due to COVID-19 and the need to enforce social distancing. ARRA and UNHCR are exploring the possibility to build a new site to serve as a backup reception centre in case there is a need to close Pagak as was the case in 2017.



## Education

**Scholarships to refugees in Ethiopia:** UNHCR offices in the field have organized orientation sessions for refugee students who would be interested to apply for a scholarship in one of 24 Italian Universities that promote the University Corridors for Refugees project (UNICORE 3.0). Supported by UNHCR, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli and other partners, the project will select 43 students to begin degree courses in Italy in September 2021, with the aim to increase opportunities for higher education for refugees. Some offices have been encouraging refugee students to apply including by providing access to free internet to facilitate the application process. The application period lasted from 1 March to 1 April 2021. Currently 20 refugees of different nationalities from Ethiopia are studying in different universities in Italy as part of UNICORE 2.0.



*A South Sudanese refugee applying for a scholarship from a computer in the UNHCR office in Gambella. ©UNHCR/Reath Riek*



## Shelter & CRIs

**Distribution of clothes in East Wollega:** UNHCR distributed clothes to vulnerable internally displaced persons in Gimbi and Larisa Bareda localities in Oromia's East Wollega zone. Donated by Japan's casual wear retailer, Uniqlo, the clothes, including tops and bottom wears for women, are specifically designed to capture heat in the body and keep the wearer warm during cold temperatures- items appreciated by the IDP women considering the rainy season is a few months away. 20 women in Gimbi, and 200 others in Larisa Bareda received the donation. Uniqlo donated over 97,000 such clothes for distribution to the most vulnerable women from among the



*An elderly woman in West Wollega displaying the UNIQLO clothes she received from UNHCR. ©UNHCR/Hanna Qassis.*

internally displaced persons in three locations in Ethiopia.



## Health

**Permanent health structure in Gure-Shombola camp:** In the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, UNHCR's partner Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) handed over to ARRA a permanent structure to replace the emergency health centre that has been serving the nearly 10,000 refugees in Gure-Shombola camp for several years. The newly constructed health centre includes Outpatient Department (OPD) rooms, an incinerator room and a guard house among other facilities. The new structure will still undergo another phase of improvement and is believed to improve the provision of health service in the camp. Meanwhile, UNHCR donated an ambulance and another vehicle to the Shedder health centre and Awbare Education Office, respectively to support the two Woredas' capacities in the provision of health and education services. This is also part of UNHCR's effort to bolster and expand existing social services benefitting refugees and the communities that host them alike.



## WASH

**Provision of water to host communities and IDPs in Filtu:** UNHCR and its partner Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) have started delivering 44m<sup>3</sup> of water per day to IDPs and host communities in Filtu (north of the Melkadida refugee camps). The communities have not had access to sufficient water for weeks due to the long dry season. UNHCR will continue to do this for a month in coordination with the zonal authorities and under the overall coordination of OCHA. In the meantime, UNHCR is in discussions with UNICEF on how best to address the shortage on a permanent basis.



## Livelihoods

**Seeds and tools for cooperatives:** In preparation for the upcoming farming season, 366 KGs of onion seeds were distributed to eight agriculture cooperatives made up of 722 people drawn from refugee and the host communities. UNHCR and its partners are gradually decreasing the amount of seeds provided to the cooperatives in order to encourage savings and enhance sustainability of the cooperatives.

In the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, UNHCR organized a training session for 200 members of the refugee hosting community from Womba and Dabus kebeles on how to produce vegetables using a small-scale irrigation scheme. Together with the same number of refugees from the nearby Bambasi camp, they will engage in a vegetable production project aimed at enhancing their livelihoods, thereby ensuring refugees' gradual inclusion within the host communities. A similar training is scheduled for 200 refugees from Bambasi camp. The two communities will then be given seeds and the necessary tools to get started.

## CONTACTS

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