

# Ethiopia

14 December 2020

**796,437**

Refugees and asylum seekers as of 30 November 2020

**38,830**

Handwashing facilities in camps

**2,509**

Health and community workers trained



*Ethiopia. As part of the COVID-19 prevention activities, UNHCR distributes soap donated by UNILEVER in Hilaweyn refugee camp.*

## COVID-19 Operational Context

As of 20 November 2020, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 102,720 coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and 1,569 in the country. Ethiopia is currently registering the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases in the Horn of Africa.

## COVID-19 Prevention and Response

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 COVID-19 in both refugee camps and other locations sheltering refugees and asylum seekers throughout the country. They have enhanced communication and hygiene and are continuously working to reduce overcrowding to curb the spread of the virus. Supplies of water and soap continue to be reinforced, together with the installation of handwashing stations, as well as ongoing strengthening of health services and the provision of personal protective equipment for health care workers, first responders and others. Due to the conflict in Tigray, however, the delivery of services including COVID-19 prevention and response has come to a complete halt over the past weeks.

- **PPEs, COVID-related medicines and medical equipment** worth approximately \$1 million are being delivered for health services and health staff while a fresh procurement order for medicines and medical equipment for both COVID and regular health programmes has just been placed. Additional PPEs, including gloves and gowns, have arrived in the country and are going to be distributed.
- **38,830 handwashing stations** have been installed in communal centres and households in all the 26 refugee camps to promote regular handwashing with soap. **37,557** of these have been installed in refugee households and **1,273** were set up in communal facilities providing services to refugees and asylum seekers. More capacity is needed to ensure that every refugee household is equipped with a handwashing facility.
- Over **2,509** trained **health and community outreach workers** are actively engaged in awareness raising, case investigation 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 **17.9 litres**, with 3 refugee camps out of 20 receiving less than 15 liters per person per day, below the UNHCR minimum standard of 20 litres 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 conflict in Tigray Region has seriously disrupted the water provision in the 4 camps of the region. UNHCR and partners will work to normalize service provision there as soon as the situation allows, following assessments of the effects of the conflict.
- **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, if necessary. UNHCR has provided hospital beds, mattresses, coverall gowns and other supplies to equip these facilities and extended support to the Government-run treatment centers which are also accessible to refugees.
- In the capital, Addis Ababa, where over **33,000** urban refugees reside, UNHCR is **communicating with refugees via telephone helplines, WhatsApp and Telegram groups**. In addition to this, a **Digital Request and Complaint System (DRCS)** is fully functional, with an average of 100 requests received on daily basis and processed by the Protection team. The additional cash support for COVID-19 and provision of two-month advance cash assistance continues for December and January cash transfers. The Registration services resumed at UNHCR office to issue refugees with registration documents and update their data. Limited number are received per day due to the health measures in place to ensure the safety of refugees.
- Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs) and refugee leaders are also helping raise awareness. In order to meet additional expenses for soap and other sanitary materials, UNHCR provides an additional allowance of 300 Ethiopian Birr (\$7.86) per person per month, to those refugees entitled to monthly living allowances. The intervention is monitored through post-distribution phone interviews by Protection staff. In parallel, UNHCR also supports Voluntary Repatriation through the facilitation of exit visa processes for Yemeni refugees in Ethiopia.
- UNHCR is **supporting 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 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 also negatively impact the efforts already made towards the control of non-communicable diseases including diabetes, hypertension and mental health.

**Economic impact:** UNHCR continues to closely monitor how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the socio-economic dynamics of the different refugee hosting areas, including through referencing third party assessment reports on impacts on enterprises and jobs. In addition to COVID-19, refugee hosting areas are also under the double threat of the Desert Locust invasion and floods. Many projects funded by partners continue to report implementation challenges as a result of COVID-19 measures and changed priorities. Refugees in many of the camps indicate that the pandemic has negatively affected their economic and food security, with some mentioning that opportunities for maintaining their self-reliance through income earned by working as daily laborers are now limited due to COVID-19. Others who run small-scale businesses have also reported significant reductions in business opportunities.

UNHCR received approximately **USD 9.8 million** out of its financial requirements of **USD 34.9 million** for the COVID-19 response. The funding shortfall is limiting UNHCR's ability to effectively respond to the pandemic as resources are not enough to procure all needed PPEs, medicines, WASH facilities and other supplies. Inadequate WASH infrastructure, lack of additional space in schools and lack of masks for school children are also making school reopening challenging.

## Operational Response Updates

**Tigray Emergency:** UNHCR and partners were forced to relocate most of their staff from Shire in northern Tigray Region due to the conflict that started on 3 November between the Ethiopian Defense Forces (EDF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Since the start of the conflict, communication via telephone and internet has hindered UNHCR efforts to follow the developments in the refugee camps and IDP locations. Only a limited number of critical staff remain, in the areas affected by the conflict. With limited access to cash, fuel and food, their operational capacity has been severely hindered. This has led to a drastic halt in the delivery of services to refugees.

As food supplies have by now run out, ensuring access to food for the overall refugee population in Tigray is a priority. Preparedness efforts to deliver food to the refugees are ongoing, including ensuring that the security situation allows for distribution and there is capacity on the ground. This is adding to the already difficult situation precipitated by COVID-19, particularly on our protection and humanitarian response for Eritrean refugees and people internally displaced within Tigray Region.

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

**PROTECTION**

**New arrivals in Gambella:** relocations of refugees from Pagak to the Nguenyiel camp remain on hold due to the unavailability of the previously designated school to host them for a 14-days quarantine period. UNHCR and ARRA are thus discussing possible solutions, including the possibility of relocating them directly to the camp. In addition to this, 330 emergency shelters are still needed to accommodate the remaining 4,655 individuals newly arrived refugees in Pagak. UNHCR cannot address this need due to the unavailability of budget.

**Persons with Specific Needs:** In order to meet the specific needs of refugees with disabilities and ensure their access to UNHCR, the five field offices of the Assosa refugee camps have been equipped with 35 wheelchairs for both adults and kids.

**16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence:** The 16 days campaign was launched on 25 November in the refugee camps across the country. In Gambella, multiple activities were carried out under the theme "*Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, and Collect! Generation Equality: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*". Similarly, in the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions, community discussions and awareness campaigns were organized by UNHCR and partners, with the participation of refugee leaders and Women's Associations.

**EDUCATION**

**Reopening of Schools:** Schools in the refugee camps have gradually started to reopen to students, prioritizing grades 8 and 12 first, as they need to prepare for the upcoming national exams. UNHCR is working to fully reopen schools across the refugee camps, but the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to meet the Ministry of Education's strict precautionary requirements are exerting additional pressure on the already limited existing school infrastructure in Ethiopia. In Assosa, UNHCR has also provided school reopening training and COVID-19 Response Guidelines trainings to teachers, education officers and schools directors. There is a dire need for additional personal protective equipment (PPEs), learning spaces and water and sanitation facilities, which UNHCR and its partners are working to address.



*Ethiopia. A refugee women's association in Melkadida discusses Feminine Genital Mutilation and its negative impact with UNHCR and IRC, as part of the 16 Days of Activism*  
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Suleyman Ali

**SHELTER AND NFIS**

**Shelter maintenance and construction progress:** Maintenance work of transitional shelters in Gambella continued over the past two weeks, with a total of 180 transitional shelters completed by the Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) across three camps. In Bambasi refugee camp (Benishangul-Gumuz Region), additional beneficiaries were selected by UNCR and the refugee leaders for a CBI intervention that will enable them to carry out maintenance work of their shelters. In parallel, the construction of 50 transitional shelters has commenced in the five refugee camps of the Melkadida operation.

UNHCR provided NFIs, including sleeping mats, laundry soap, sanitary pads, blankets, and women's underwear to a total of 286 IDPs from the Oromia region. The IDPs are hosted in Webur School, Gambella town.



*Ethiopia. UNHCR and government official distributing NFIs to Oromia IDPs hosted in Webur School, in Gambella town. ©UNHCR/ Reath Riek*

**LIVELIHOODS AND SELF RELIANCE**

**Women in business:** In Tsore refugee camp, in the Benishangul Gumuz region, women engagement in business activities continues, with UNHCR and IRC support. As Business Skills trainees, they have so far engaged in restaurants, retail business and goat rearing activities.

**Farming made more efficient:** In Buramino refugee camp, in the Somali Regional State, the agriculture cooperative composed of refugee and host community members will start using a newly constructed granary, in support to the cropping activities the cooperative is engaged in. Thanks to the granary, the cooperative will reduce post-harvest losses caused by the lack of storage space and thus minimize losses of income.

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