

## NORTHERN ETHIOPIA SITUATION

March 2023



*Emun, a refugee mother from Eritrea, starts a cooking fire outside her shelter in Alemwach. Emun and her children are among the over 20,000 Eritrean refugees secondarily displaced by the conflict in northern Ethiopia. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno*

## ETHIOPIA

### Key developments

On 23 March, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed endorsed Getachew Reda as the Head of the interim administration of Tigray Regional State, a key milestone in the implementation of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) signed between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Pretoria on 2 November 2022.

The reported withdrawal of Tigrayan forces from the Amhara region has allowed for the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) to take charge of the security of the area. This will allow thousands of IDPs in Sekota and neighbouring woredas to return home.

The newly established National Rehabilitation Commission organized a region wide consultative forum on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) with officials of the Amhara regional state in Bahir Dar. The forum seeks to demobilize and reintegrate up to 250,000 former combatants.

## UNHCR refugee and IDP response

### Tigray region

#### IDPs

In Abi Adi, UNHCR along with government authorities and partners resumed the first voluntary return of IDPs in 2023 since the signing of the Pretoria peace agreement. Out of the 3,066 families (8,736 individuals) targeted, some 134 families comprising of 422 individuals were assisted to return from Abi Adi to their place of origin, in Asegede, Tsembela Woreda.

UNHCR, in collaboration with a team from partner Innovative Humanitarian Solutions (IHS) provided protection counselling to those who have expressed their wish to return home to ensure that all returns are voluntary. The return desk team is counselling returning IDPs with specific needs and referring them to service providers in the return departure centre.

UNHCR provided the returning IDPs with cash for transportation and core relief items (CRIs). The returns were preceded by mass awareness sessions on landmines and unexploded ordinances (UXO) provided by UNHCR's partners ALYA (an artistic mental health and psychosocial support NGO) and Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (RaDO). ALYA provided mine action risk education to 50 children (13 girls) and 20 caregivers (13 female) in Atse Yohannes IDP site on the risk of explosives. Mobile health and child protection services are also being provided via Action Against Hunger. Imagine One Day is providing nutrition support to all returning children.

As part of capacity building, UNHCR provided training on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) to over 115 officials from government and partner organizations in Mekelle, Adigrat, Abi Adi and Maichew.

The new influx of IDPs from Western Tigray continued in the Shire area of operation. A total of 1,410 families (8,010 individuals) arrived in Endabaguna. On 20 March, a rapid protection assessment conducted revealed the dire situation of the newly displaced persons from Tahtay MaiTsebri, Lalay MaiTsebri and Mai Tsebri. They are sheltered in a transit IDP site where the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), IHS and International Rescue Committee (IRC) are providing water, child protection and GBV services, respectively. Urgent needs include food, health services, CRIs including dignity kits among others.

#### Refugees

During the reporting period, UNHCR provided multipurpose cash to 436 households (refugees and asylum seekers) in Shire, Sheraro, Axum and Adwa while WFP provided food rations to 1,207 households (2,221 individuals) in Shire and Sheraro.

### Amhara region

#### IDPs

According to the Disaster Risk Management Office (DRMO), the IDP figure in all 10 collective sites within South Wollo currently stands at 10,807. There are an additional 9,766 IDPs in Jara site in North Wollo.

In North Shewa, 6,632 households (21,129 individuals) have been enrolled in the Debre Birhan collective sites following the completion of the electronic enrolment exercise. New arrivals from Oromia region continue to be recorded, including 1,359 households (4,166 individuals).

The Durable Solutions Working Group has been activated in the Amhara region, co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM. On 14 March, a meeting chaired by the Disaster Risk Management Office (DRMO), with the attendance of UN agencies and government bureaus, concluded that assessments be conducted to identify gaps where durable solutions interventions could be implemented for IDPs, returnees and affected population. This platform will also seek to identify factors hindering durable solutions and it was recommended that existing assessments be used to identify durable solutions needs in both displacement and return areas.

The development of the recently allocated land in Bakello, Debre Birhan for IDP settlement is ongoing. About 3.7 hectares out of the allotted 6.1 hectares of land has been cleared/levelled and readied for shelter, sanitation, and communal facilities construction activities by CCCM Cluster partners. A preliminary discussion was held with Debre Birhan City Mayor's Office to agree on the prioritization and identification of the 3,800 IDPs for relocation to this site, planned for early May 2023. The Development Expertise Centre (DEC) through UNHCR funding has completed construction of 70 duplex shelters and is currently upgrading and constructing around 770 meters of in-camp connection roads and the main access road.

A community dialogue was organized at the Bakello Kebele Administration meeting hall on 17 March where members of the IDP Committee within the host community and members of the main IDP committees from China and Woinshet Camps met to discuss the prospect of their future co-existence. The host community members expressed their concerns as well as their readiness to host the IDPs moving in to Bakello Camp.

## Refugees

On 28-29 March, the Refugee Donor Group (RDG) in Ethiopia undertook a mission to Gondar where they visited the Alemwach settlement including the Dabat Health Centre, met with the Dabat Woreda Administration, Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS), partners, Refugee Central Committee and the Women's Association. In the debrief with UNHCR, the delegation expressed the progress observed in the site while also raising concerns on the lack of livelihood for refugees, the accommodation conditions in view of the expected rainy season and the way forward with the integration approach. As recommended, an advocacy note was shared with the RDG by UNHCR. The mission was composed of representatives from the Embassies of Switzerland, the Netherlands, PRM (USA), the World Bank and the European Union.

To mitigate the risk of flooding and other difficulties during the rainy season, mobilization is being done for the filling of sandbags to prevent rainwater from flowing into family tents. Some 450 family tents pitched in flood/mud risk locations were identified to be moved to safer locations.

After the completion and handover of 314 permanent shelters to refugees, UNHCR has commenced the second phase of the construction of 200 permanent shelters in Alemwach. Demarcation and excavation works are ongoing.

In line with the community area-based approach, aimed to enhance social cohesion with the refugee population, UNHCR in collaboration with RRS and IHS inaugurated and handed over 4 water points and a 50,000-litre water reservoir to the host community around Alemwach on World Water Day 2023.

General food distribution was completed in Alemwach reaching 18,045 individuals. Refugees were served at 80% food basket ration comprising of cereal, pulse, salt, dates, cooking oil and soap.

## Afar region

### IDPs

In Afar region, approximately 400,000 persons have returned to their areas of origin in certain zones of the region since the cessation of hostilities. However, as of March 2023, the Afar-Issa conflict triggered the displacement of 100,000 persons, while flash floods displaced another 30,000 persons. This led to considerable needs for shelter in several zones.

On 17 March, UNHCR jointly with relevant Clusters, facilitated the return of 460 IDPs to Abala woreda. Ahead of the return, UNHCR provided cash assistance to the returnees. This brings the total number of assisted IDP returns to Abala to 9,967 individuals.

UNHCR's partner Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) conducted an assessment in Berhale, Konneba and Abala woredas regarding returnees' needs in terms of access to justice and legal counselling. The assessment indicated that local courts and prosecutors' offices in all three woredas were in need of office materials including materials for preparing and printing temporary and permanent identification cards for returnees which are mandatory to open bank accounts or to access other services.

A four-day training on Gender Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE), Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) was provided by UNHCR to partners and government officials with the aim of building the capacity of participants in identifying, managing and implementing activities in safe spaces. This will improve the skills of the participants in creating awareness and responding to incidents of GBV.

## Refugees

UNHCR, through its partner, Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) distributed CRIs to 1,618 households in Berhale. Similarly, UNFPA distributed dignity kits to some 1,940 returnee women and girls in Abala and Berhale woredas.

UNHCR, jointly with WFP and RRS, conducted a joint assessment to better understand the situation and needs of Eritrean refugees living with host communities in Dalol and Erebt areas which are hosting a considerable number of refugees. The assessment also aimed at corroborating information on the number of refugees living in Zone 2 in Afar to make informed decisions on resuming cash support and/or other services.

UNHCR, RRS and WFP conducted a joint market functionality assessment in the area to inform the amount of cash to be distributed to refugees, considering current inflation rates.

There are approximately 10,000 Eritrean refugee children in need of education in Berhale, Aysaita, Serdo, Dalol and Erebt areas in Afar region. UNHCR conducted individual interviews with a total of 18 refugee children (ages 8-13) living in Serdo, Aysaita and Berhale refugee sites, and who have been out of school for 2 years. They expressed their wish to go back to school and the need for scholastic materials, uniforms, and school feeding support. UNHCR through EDUKANS Ethiopia ensured that more than 1,500 children attended ECCE, primary and Adult Learning Programme (ALP) program classes in both Aysaita and Serdo refugee camps. Scholastic materials were distributed to 160 students.

UNHCR, jointly with RRS and WFP, assisted refugees in Berhale (2,818 households / 16,634 individuals) and Aysaita (4,509 households / 24,948 individuals) through the monthly general food distribution (GFD) and cash assistance.

Through implementing partner African Humanitarian Action (AHA), UNHCR completed the construction of temporary health post blocks and a registration office at Serdo refugee camp. The construction includes fencing, waiting area and adequate shelter for guards.

## SUDAN

### New Arrivals

A total of 170 new arrivals from Ethiopia were recorded in March, entering eastern Sudan through Taya (104), Gallabat (31) and Hamdayet (35) border crossing points including 151 Ethiopians (125 Qemant and 26 Tigrayan). The majority of the Tigrayan new arrivals noted that they had escaped their areas of origin in Ethiopia a while ago but had not been able to cross the border into Sudan. As a result of the reduced military presence

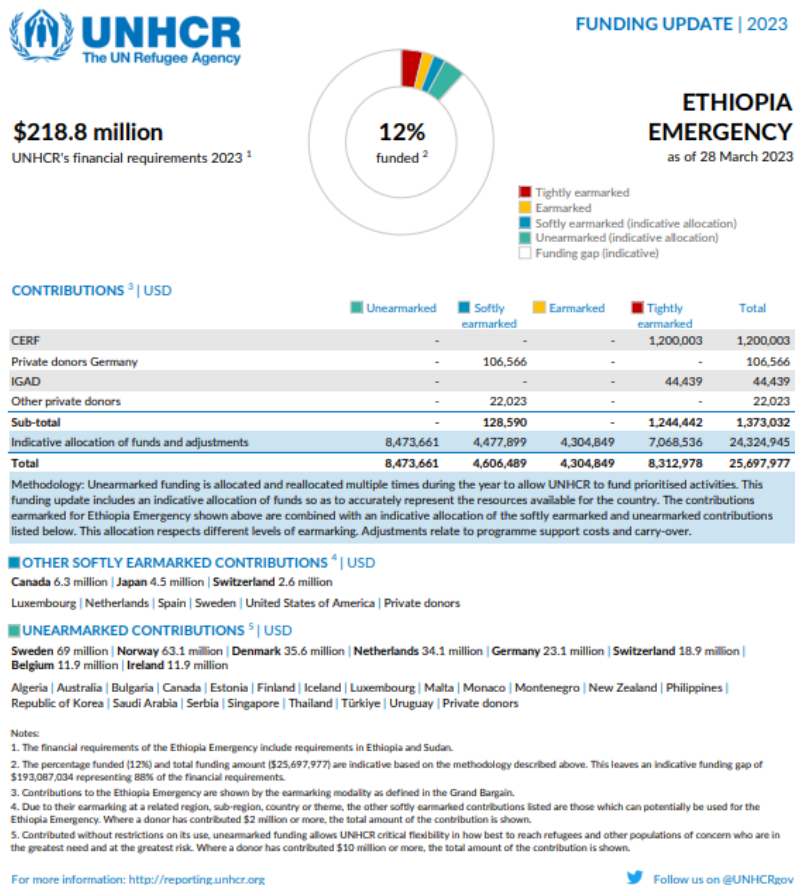


at the border areas following the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement and its implementation, the routes opened up, allowing them to enter eastern Sudan. Most of the new arrivals (more than 77%) are adult men, followed by children (12%) and women (almost 10%). So far in 2023, a total of 364 new arrivals from Ethiopia have been recorded, over 84% of whom are Qemant. Between January and March, a total of 408 new arrivals have been recorded (75% of whom are Qemant).

## Operational update

A delegation from the Embassy of Switzerland fielded a mission to Gedaref from 12-14 March with a focus on protection, irregular onward movement and trafficking. The delegation visited Gallabat border crossing point and transit centre where a meeting was held with Sudanese border authorities. UNHCR facilitated a visit to Babikri settlement and Tunaydbah camp where they had the opportunity to have discussions with Commissioner for Refugees (COR) and the refugees with regard to livelihood opportunities, reasons for irregular onward movement and the impact of developments in Ethiopia following the signing of the peace agreement on the refugees among other topics.

## Funding Overview



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