

## ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

9-17 December



A young refugee from Ethiopia attends a class run by volunteer teachers at a school.

### Key Developments

#### SUDAN

- *Sudan's Commissioner of Refugees has formally declared prima facie recognition for all Ethiopian new arrivals after 6 November related to the Tigray situation.*
- *More than 50,000 Ethiopian refugees have crossed into East Sudan. Many are arriving from further within Ethiopia and taking longer journeys to arrive to Sudan.*
- *Relocation of refugees from Hamdayet, Village 8 and Abderafi transit locations to Um Rakuba camp continue at an increasing rate; nearly 20,000 refugees have been relocated to the camp.*

#### ETHIOPIA

- *On 11 December, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi released a [statement](#) expressing deep concern for the safety of Eritrean refugees in Tigray, calling on the Ethiopian government to uphold its responsibilities to protect refugees, and to ensure safe and unfettered access according to humanitarian principles.*
- *On 15 December, WFP food assistance for 35,000 refugees for one month arrived to two of the Eritrean camps – Mai Aini and Adi Harush. For the remaining two camps in Tigray, a security assessment is being finalized before assistance convoys can proceed to those areas.*
- *The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator has [released](#) \$13 million from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to help people inside Ethiopia and \$5 million for refugees newly arrived in Sudan. On top of this funding, \$12 million has been released from the UN's Humanitarian Fund in Ethiopia and \$5.6 million from the UN's Sudan Humanitarian Fund (for a total of 35.6 million for the regional crisis from UN pooled funds).*

## UNHCR Response

### Ethiopia

The humanitarian situation in Tigray is increasingly critical and it remains vital for UNHCR and partners to urgently assist 96,000 registered Eritrean refugees along with the growing number of internally displaced and most vulnerable host communities. Across the Tigray region, food and fuel prices have skyrocketed and little access to cash has made the daily lives of civilians even more difficult. Running water and electricity remains limited across the region. There are reports of sporadic conflict in areas surrounding Shire town and Mekelle where UNHCR offices are located, as well as the areas around the Eritrean refugee camps.

Communication remains limited even after the main telecommunication company announced phone and internet connections being restored in Mekelle and six other areas. Issues with power due to lack of fuel and other issues is also hindering communications.

Discussions are ongoing with the federal government for UNHCR to have unhindered access to the four Eritrean camps and to areas where refugees have fled to within Tigray and further regions. Multi-sectorial assessment missions are being prepared to have an informed response once approvals are made.

For over a month, UNHCR has had no access to the four Eritrean refugee camps in Tigray. With limited communication and no physical access, UNHCR has been unable to verify the wellbeing of Eritrean refugees who remained at the camps, nor the overall conditions in the camps.

There are increasing numbers of Eritrean refugees approaching UNHCR offices in Shire and Mekelle after they fled the camps to seek safety from the fighting and to seek basic assistance. The government's refugee agency, ARRA, is temporarily sheltering Eritrean refugees in Shire town at their damaged compound and transit hall but many are sleeping in the streets. UNHCR is providing water but has limited resources to provide further assistance such as food.

A WFP convoy was able to deliver 19 trucks with 570 metric tonnes of food into the Tigray region on 15 December. Enough food assistance for 35,000 refugees for a month has arrived to two of the Eritrean camps – Mai Aini and Adi Harush. For the remaining two camps in Tigray, a security assessment is being finalized to proceed to those areas.

UNHCR and partners are finalizing a humanitarian response to an IDP hosting site in Shire. Partners expressed readiness to undertake immediate response in WASH and psychosocial support. IDPs have received a one-off supply of food rations; however, medical support and hygiene items remain a dire concern. The Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) is providing medical support with basic medicine and water trucking to the site.

UNHCR remains concerned for the safety and security of civilians affected by the conflict and stands ready to resume protection and lifesaving services as soon as feasible.

### Sudan

The influx of refugees from the Tigray region into Sudan continues, reaching 51,068 by 17 December.

Refugees are arriving through the remote border locations of Hamdayet in Kassala State and Lugdi in Gedaref State. Since 6 December, the numbers have been relatively stable with nearly 200 refugees arriving daily.

Registration at household level is being done by the Commissioner of Refugees (COR) and initial figures show among 11,000 households registered; 64 percent adults (18-59), 31 percent children (under 18) and five percent elderly (over 60).

Both reception areas in Hamdayet and Village 8 are still congested with overall poor living conditions despite the arrival of humanitarian support and assistance. Gaps remain across all sectors including shelter, food, health and WASH.

It remains a priority for local authorities to relocate refugees from the border points to Um Rakuba camp. Many refugees indicate they do not want to move from Hamdayet and Village 8 as they came with their agricultural assets and are concerned that they will not be able to return to Ethiopia whenever the situation normalises.

UNHCR together with COR continue mass information campaigns and outreach to the refugees on the importance of registration, and the availability of services at the camp.

An inter-agency mission on 15 December to Tenetba site determined that the former refugee camp is suitable to be developed to receive refugees. The site could begin to receive refugees by early January 2021.

**Relocation:** Since 13 November, 19,396 refugees have been relocated from Hamdayet, Abderafi and Village 8 to Um Rakuba camp – 70 kilometres away from the Ethiopian border.

UNHCR together with COR have increased the relocation of refugees to Um Rakuba from the three border points. Since 11 December, more than 5,000 refugees have been relocated to Um Rakuba. Relocations from all locations take at least a day to arrive to Um Rakuba. UNHCR is providing high energy biscuits and water to refugees along with masks.



**Protection:** At all sites, protection desks and additional protection monitoring by mobile teams continue to provide support to refugees with specific needs. The protection desks also provide information on legal issues, right and obligations of refugees in country of asylum, and facilitate the registration process.

Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) with the support of ICRC continue to facilitate family tracing and reunification services for refugees missing family members including free calls. Since late November, 1,699 calls were made in Hamdayet, 507 in Village 8 and 824 in Um Rakuba.

An inter-agency **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)** task force has been established due to the high risk of SEA in this environment. The taskforce has started PSEA orientation with partners and organizing sessions in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA. To widely publicize PSEA-related information for refugees, posters are being visibly put up across the sites.

**COVID-19:** Temperature screenings are in place at the entry point in Hamdayet for new arrivals. 365 COVID-19 tests were conducted in Hamdayet. UNCHR continues to distribute soaps and masks to new arrivals at Hamdayet and Village 8. In Um Rakuba masks continue to be distributed at the four registration points.

**Village 8 in Gedaref State:** Refugees arriving at Lugdi are being transported by the Sudanese army to Village 8, further away from the border. More than 3,550 refugees have been relocated to Um Rakuba from Village 8 since relocations began on 8 December.

**Protection:** UNHCR protection help desk on site have identified and referred 39 people for specific services. The protection desk provides to inform refugees of legal and GBV issues, right and obligations of refugees in country of asylum, and facilitates the registration process. The refugee committee continues to encourage families to register to receive services and assistance and inform refugees of the relocation process to Um Rakuba.

The State Council for Child Welfare (SCCW) with support from UNICEF identified 238 unaccompanied children and provided them with social work support.



**Core relief items:** UNHCR, through COR, is distributing core relief items to new arrivals, including blankets, sleeping mats, soap and plastic sheets.

**Food:** WFP distributed dry food rations to an additional 1,118 refugees complementing the last distribution in late November for 16,000 refugees.

**Health:** MSF is providing support with primary healthcare at the clinic run by the Ethiopian refugee health team where more than 200 medical consultations have been conducted.

The Ministry of Health has conducted so far 5,035 nutritional screenings for children under five years, out of which 408 were identified and treated with moderate acute malnutrition and 26 with severe acute malnutrition. MoH also screened 322 pregnant and lactating women out of which 258 were provided treatment.

Sudan Family Planning Association (SFPA) is providing reproductive health services to the refugees and also providing HIV treatment.

MoH with UNICEF support have vaccinated six newborns for measles and eight pregnant women for tetanus.

**WASH:** UNHCR and MSF continue to truck clean water four times a day from one pump at the local water supply. There is a need to rehabilitate the main water treatment plant. There are eight water points across Village 8 each one providing 5,000 litres of clean water to refugees.

There are 110 latrines on site and WASH actors continue to segregate and designate for women and men.

**Hamdayet in Kassala State:** Hamdayet remains overcrowded. Currently, nearly 22,000 people are at Hamdayet reception centre and in Hamdayet town residing with the host community.

**Protection:** The UNHCR protection help desk and mobile teams, with the support of Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) volunteers, continue to identify persons with specific needs and have referred 166 people to specialised services, these include pregnant women, people with disabilities, women at risk and other vulnerable people.

A rapid protection assessment was conducted at Hamdayet with focus group discussions and observations by protection teams. The main findings showed that the current conflict in Tigray is the main reason for flight and most journeys took between three to six days on foot, taking various routes. Participants confirmed preference to remain in Hamdayet so they can be reunited with family members.

**Child protection:** The UNHCR child protection desk continues to screen and identify unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and other vulnerable children. Referral to specific services and counselling continues. Rapid Best Interest assessments continue at Hamdayet and an increasing number of unaccompanied and separated children have been placed in foster or group care; and reunited with families in Um Rakuba camp.

UNHCR and protection partners continue to arrange temporary group care in the new communal shelters until family-based care can be found. Relief items, shelter, clothing and specialised psychosocial support are being prioritised for foster families to ensure the children are safely accommodated and receive the care they need.



A refugee doctor from Ethiopia assists a refugee with her sick child at a clinic where he works in the Village 8.

Plan International (PI) continues to provide educational and recreational activities to 400 children. PI relocated the child friendly corner to provide more space for children to play and learn.

**Food:** Hot meals are being provided at Hamdayet reception centre by Muslim Aid with the support of WFP.

**Core relief items:** UNHCR through COR continue distributing core relief items that include blankets, sleeping mats, soap and plastic sheets to the new arrivals.

**Health:** In Hamdayet, two state clinics continue to provide health services but are facing shortages of medicines, medical supplies, and ambulances.

Mobile clinics are in place at the transit site to alleviate the caseload on the clinics. The Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD) mobile clinic with the support of UNFPA have conducted more than 400 medical consultations including 169 neo-maternal services, family planning services to 46 women and sexually transmitted infections treatment for seven people and distributed 45 clean deliver kits.

SORD counsellors are holding psychological first aid sessions to provide basic mental health support to nearly 30 people.

**WASH:** To ensure access to clean water, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) continues to truck between 44,000 to 50,000 litres of chlorinated water per day that benefit around 5,650 people every day; UNHCR carries out daily water quality control.

Solid waste management and hygiene promotion campaigns continue around the transit centre compound, registration sites, clinics, and water points through daily workers from the refugee community supported by Concern and Sudan Vision volunteers.

World Without Hunger (WHH) constructed 14 lantern posts around the 32 latrines and shower rooms.

**Um Rakuba camp:** The site is hosting 19,396 refugees and has the capacity to host 30,000 refugees. Infrastructure works continue to develop the site. Site planning and allocation of plots to families is ongoing.

Daily camp coordination meetings are held with all partners by UNCHR and COR. The daily briefings focus on the gaps and how to best address them. There is a daily presence of COR and UNHCR at the joint coordination centre to support and facilitate partners response in the camp. Sector and technical coordination meetings are held regularly inside the camp to ensure that partners understand the real gaps and needs for Um Rakuba.



UNHCR and partners continue efforts to expand Um Rakuba camp to provide shelter refugees from Ethiopia.

**Protection:** Individual registration with Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS) began in Um Rakuba camp and two additional registration centers (for a total of four) were established.



UNHCR protection desk at the reception centre, with the support of SRCS volunteers, provide new arrivals with a safe space to raise their protection concerns. UNHCR protection staff continue to identify persons with specific needs and provide support as well as facilitating access to services.

Global Aid Hand (GAH), with the support of UNFPA, set up two tents for the Women Centre.

**Child protection:** In Um Rakuba, NRC is operating two primary schools from grade 1 to 8 with students from 6 to 13 years old. The schools operate in two shifts, using an informal curriculum.

Save the Children have provided support for 90 unaccompanied minors and provided 26 dignity kits those in need.

The MoH, supported by UNICEF, continue to operate a child friendly space for recreational activities like sports. Save the Children set up a mobile child friendly space for some 1,500 children; recreational activities range from drama, drawing, and sports. In addition, Save the Children held a community mobilisation meeting with community leaders, women, and active youth to establish a child protection network.

**Food:** Muslim Aid supported by WFP and WedCo prepare two hot meals per day although there is difficulty to sustain this as the numbers increase. WFP is providing one-month dry rations.

**Health:** One primary health care clinic near the camp, supported by Mercy Corps (MC), continues to provide health services to the refugees. MSF continues to run a health facility at the site. Ascend UK have set up a clinic and provides laboratory tests and conducts hygiene promotion campaigns.



Refugee children from Ethiopia study at temporary classrooms that were recently constructed at the Um Rakuba camp.

**WASH:** WASH interventions continue at the site but the needs increase as more arrivals reach Um Rakuba. UNCHR is providing clean water through trucking to meet drinking and domestic needs; nearly 89,200 litres, using water containers provided by UNICEF. The MoH, with the support of WHO, is conducting water quality control. There is a need for more water sources – 600,000 litres is needed daily for refugees and 150,000 litres for the host community.

Preparations are ongoing to construct a water supply distribution system to replace water trucking; IOM completed the platform for the installation of a 40,000 litres storage tank and the partial excavation of 1,649 metres of trench for the pipeline.

Works to establish emergency latrines, so far 168 have been set up and designated for women and men. WASH actors are working to set up a drainage system around the 16 water points at Um Rakuba.

## Djibouti

No arrivals have been reported in Djibouti. UNHCR and the Government have registered a total of 188 Ethiopians of Tigray origin who are stranded in Djibouti.

## Eritrea

There have been reports of refugees arriving and possible internal displacement along the border with Ethiopia, which cannot be verified as access to the border areas is restricted.

### Contacts

**Joyce Wayua Munyao-Mbithi**, Senior Donor Relations Officer, Regional Bureau for the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region, Nairobi - [munyao@unhcr.org](mailto:munyao@unhcr.org)

**Mysa Khalaf**, Reporting Officer, Regional Bureau for the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region, Nairobi - [khalafm@unhcr.org](mailto:khalafm@unhcr.org)