

LAS CAANOOD SITUATION - EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA

15 March 2023



Elderly refugee women in the Doolo zone in Ethiopia's Somali region. © UNHCR/Reath Riek

Background

Violence in the Somali city of Las Caanood in early February has triggered a mass displacement of civilians, including across the border into Ethiopia. Since the first week of February 2023, an estimated 285,000 people have been uprooted from their homes, including approximately 185,000 internally displaced and nearly 100,000 as refugees in Ethiopia. These recent clashes and the resultant displacements are compounding the already fragile humanitarian situation in the region which is grappling with the worst drought in 40 years.

In a [statement](#) issued on 7 February, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, called upon Somali authorities to ensure an independent, effective, and impartial investigation. The UN and international partners in Somalia have also condemned the violence and called for the resolution of political tensions through dialogue, as well as unhindered humanitarian access to urgently address the needs of the displaced people.

UNHCR is working with the Ethiopian Government's Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS) to coordinate the humanitarian response for the new arrivals. The journey to the location where they have settled takes about two (2) days via difficult roads from Jijiga, the nearest UNHCR office. There is very little existing infrastructure on the ground. With limited options, many newly arrived families have resorted to sheltering in schools and other public buildings while others have no choice but to sleep outside. Many urgently need food and nutritional support, water and sanitation facilities, as well as specialized support for people with specific needs.

In early March, the Director General of RRS and the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia visited the area to assess the situation, speak with the refugees and host communities and inform the response to the immediate needs. The refugees told them that food, water, shelter and emergency healthcare were among their most urgent needs, while also calling for peace efforts, which would allow them to go back home.

SOMALIA

The general security situation in Las Caanood, remains unpredictable. Access remains a challenge due to insecurity. According to local authorities and humanitarian partners, more than 185,000 people have been internally displaced by the fighting in Las Caanood. An estimated 89 per cent of the IDPs in the assessed areas are women and children. Many of the IDPs are reportedly sleeping out in the open while others have taken cover in schools and other public buildings.

Operational response

Somaliland: During the month of February, in Kalabaydh and Gumeys, Sool region, Somaliland, UNHCR, through its partners, distributed core relief items (CRIs) such as blankets, jerry cans, and kitchen sets to 9,000 individuals (1,450 households) displaced due to armed conflict in Las Caanood.

In early March, UNHCR, through its partner Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) distributed 500 core relief items (CRIs), to 3,297 people in Gumeys, Somaliland, that have been displaced from Las Caanood.

In the monthly inter-sectoral meeting with the National Displacement and Refugee Agency (NDRA), UNHCR, in its capacity as co-chair of the Somaliland Protection, CCCM, and Shelter sub-national Clusters, informed the forum of the cluster members' plans to distribute CRIs, emergency kits and provide cash assistance, including UNHCR support to some 1,600 households.

Puntland: UNHCR delivered its first relief assistance to IDPs displaced from Las Caanood to Kalabaydh town through its partner, distributing CRI kits containing blankets, collapsible jerricans, a solar lamp, plastic sheets, sleeping mats, and a kitchen set, among others to 5,700 individuals (950 households).

UNHCR is planning to distribute CRI kits to 2,000 households and cash assistance to some 7,000 households over a period of three months once the security situation allows access to the areas hosting IDPs. UNHCR is coordinating with the service provider on the next steps to commence cash distribution.

UNHCR will also increase its CCCM and protection activities when access improves.

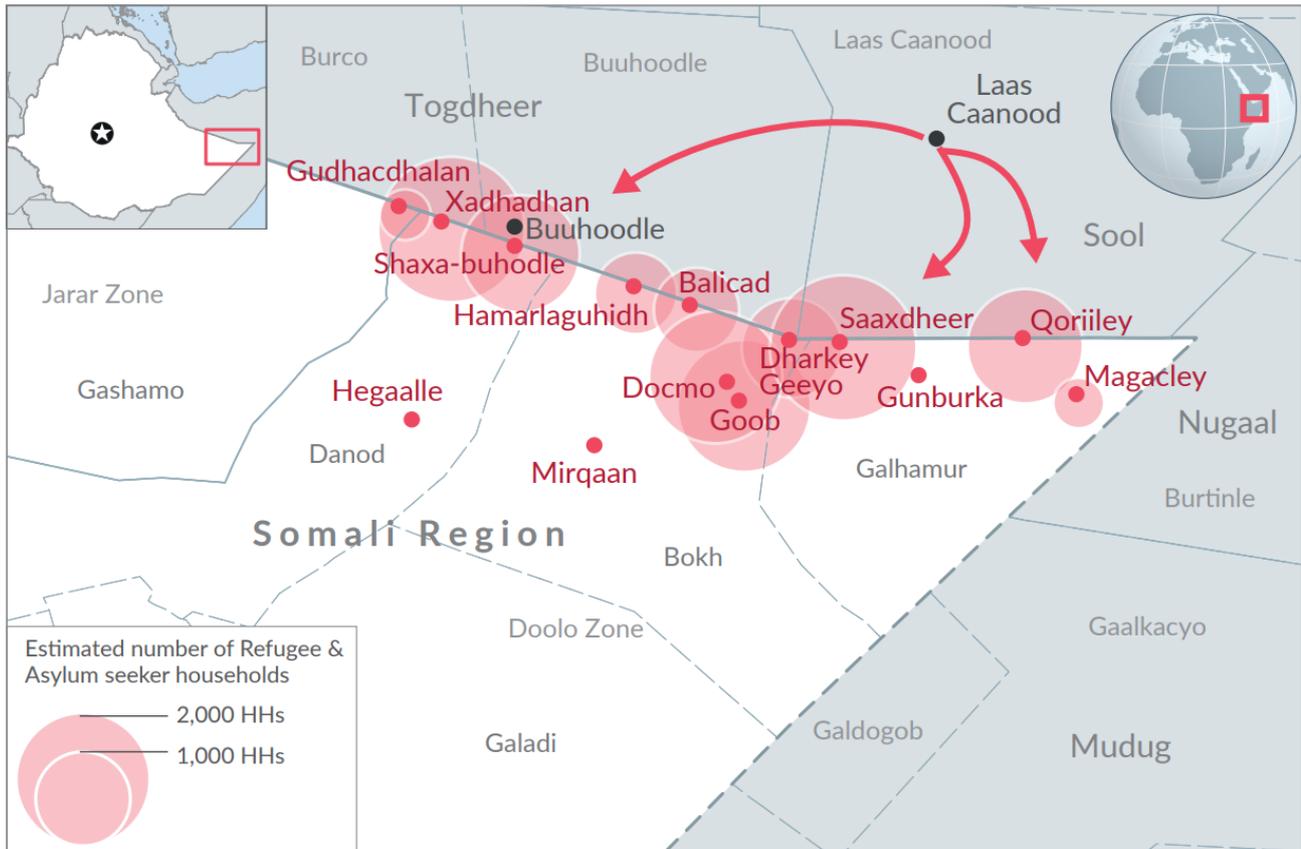
Coordination

On 6 March, UNHCR sub-offices in Galkayo and Hargeisa convened for an online meeting to discuss the latest developments in Las Caanood, population movements, challenges, and interventions by the respective offices. The two offices have agreed to meet every two (2) weeks to exchange on relevant information and coordination.

In a sub-national Inter-agency Cluster Coordination meeting held in Garowe, participants undertook a joint-interagency mission to Buuhoodle, Togdheer region, Puntland, from 11- 13 March. Findings of the mission will be shared accordingly. It was also noted that there are no major access challenges to deliver assistance from Puntland side. In the meeting, OCHA announced that a humanitarian coordinator has been recruited to lead the Las Caanood emergency response.

ETHIOPIA

Since 6 February 2023, an estimated 100,000 people have crossed the border into Ethiopia. The new arrivals, mostly women, children and elderly people, have temporarily settled across more than 13 locations in the towns of Bookh, Galhamur and Danot Woredas in the Doolo zone of the Somali region. In an extremely remote area with a limited humanitarian presence, local communities in Doolo have generously welcomed the refugees, sharing whatever resources they have, although they are themselves impacted by the severe drought.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Operational response

Registration: The majority of the new arrivals are women (43%) and children (33%). While 96% of families are headed by women, 33% of these have at least one person with specific needs. The Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) of the Government of Ethiopia, with support from UNHCR, is expediting rapid family-level registration, (also known as Level 1 registration) in the Doolo Zone to facilitate the provision of life-saving assistance. As of 14 March, a total of 59,404 individuals (47,083 families) have been registered across three sites: Docmo, Goob and Hegaalle, with strengthened engagement of RRS, local authorities and community leaders.

Protection referrals: RRS and UNHCR teams have set up protection desks to provide counselling and related support to the most vulnerable refugees. Since the beginning of the Level 1 registration on 24 February, 1,894 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) have been referred to the protection desks. ICRC continues to support with family tracing and reunification. Many were separated from their parents before crossing into Ethiopia, while others were separated from caregivers within Ethiopia, not far from the registration sites. Persons with disability and with mental health conditions, including trauma, have also been identified for specialized care and support.

With limited protection partners and referral mechanisms, community support mechanisms and structures will need to be established and protection partners identified to respond to refugees' protection needs. During exchanges with UNHCR staff members, refugee youth have shared the hope to be relocated to a safe site and to access education and livelihood opportunities until they can return home.

Protection from violence: UNFPA, through its local partner Organization for Welfare & Development in Action (OWDA), is preparing to implement an integrated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) emergency project, including the provision of reproductive health kits in the Doolo Zone.

Lifesaving relief assistance: RRS, UNHCR and WFP, in collaboration with the local administration, have begun distributing High Energy Biscuits (HEBs) and dates to the refugee population in Domco, Goob and Hegalle sites. Over 22,200 individuals have received 65 metric tons of High Energy Biscuits and dates provided by WFP. WFP has also prepositioned general food rations and arrangements are being finalized for distribution to both the host communities and refugees in the area.

So far, 1,575 vulnerable families have received core relief items, including blankets, jerricans, kitchen sets, plastic sheets, and mosquito nets. Some 9,000 additional relief items for 9,000 families have been prepositioned for distribution in the coming days.

Health and Nutrition: The nearest health centre is located some 70km from where the registration is taking place. However, the Regional Health Bureau (RHB), with support from WHO, is providing emergency health and nutrition services through mobile teams. The RHB has deployed two (2) mobile health teams to the Danod and Galhamur districts and developed a sustainable outreach strategy in Bokh district, which aims to include refugees into the provision of health care services.

The RHB has secured vaccines and funds to conduct measles vaccinations, Vitamin A supplementation, and deworming targeting 56,000 children under the age of 15. Drugs and medical supplies have been prepositioned and dispatched. UNICEF is planning a measles immunization campaign for the refugee children at the sites along the border with Somalia and vaccines have already been pre-positioned in Jijiga. UNHCR and WHO have prepositioned essential medicines and medical supplies for use by refugees and the communities hosting them. Additionally, UNHCR and WHO conducted an assessment examining priority needs for the distribution of additional medicines in health facilities within the area.

UNHCR has dispatched key nutrition screening equipment, including digital weighing scales, height boards, children's and adults' Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tapes to the area for its partner GOAL to scale up the nutrition screening of children and pregnant and lactating women. This will help identify and refer acute malnutrition cases for treatment.

The sorting of 168 cartons of essential medicine and supplies was completed in five (5) locations, including Bokh, Docmo, Hegaale and Mirqaan Health Centres as well as Goob Health Post, while 59 cartons of essential medicine and supplies were donated to Mirqaan Health Centre.

Limited presence of health partners is a challenge, with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)-Holland being the only partner present in Goob and with referrals to existing health systems in the districts not being fully functional yet.

Camp coordination and Camp Management: In Mirqaan, over 90 hectares are planned for the establishment of reception hangars and mass accommodation, while almost 90 hectares will be dedicated for the installation of WFP rub halls and warehouses. A national NGO, Save the Environment, is currently conducting an assessment in Mirqaan site to establish reception centers and other shelter related activities. The site is 40 kms from Bokh and has some water provision but would require some infrastructure development to absorb the refugee population. Local elders in the area also shared their willingness to host the refugees and share their resources. Prior to the relocation of refugees, involvement of the Regional Bureau for Water will be required to strengthen water supply, including through water-trucking.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH): UNICEF is working to organize water trucking to supply portable water for some 18,000 people for 45 days and to construct 16 emergency latrines by mid-March. An RRS WASH Technical Officer is on the ground helping with setting up coordination systems. UNICEF through its partner has distributed sanitation and hygiene kits in Danod woreda benefiting 3,000 individuals.

Administration

As of 13 March, a total of 100 staff members from UNHCR, RRS and WFP have been deployed to Bokh, which is the operational base for the humanitarian response in the Doolo zone.

With other humanitarian actors in the area, the demand for accommodation is high. Assessments on the suitability of potential longer-term UNHCR staff accommodation and office premises were completed and negotiations for rental agreements is underway. Other challenges include electricity supply and internet connectivity. Connectivity remains a major challenge due to the malfunctioning of a cellular tower in the area. Discussions are on-going with Ethio-telecom to resolve the issue. In addition, fuel shortages for the generators have also added to the delays with the syncing of tablets used for registration.

Coordination

On 8 March, UNHCR, RRS and the zonal authorities met with the refugees in Docmo to address crowd control issues and the disruption of registration activities. They identified refugee representatives, who will support with communication with the rest of the community.

An inter-agency coordination meeting was held on 9 March, with the participation of RRS, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, WFP, UNFPA, OCHA, WHO, the Regional Bureau of Disaster Management, Health, Education, Women and Children Affairs, NRC, and Save the Rural Society. Participants discussed the mapping of partners and upcoming response plans.

On 15 March, a coordination meeting was held in Bokh with participation from UNHCR, WFP and RRS. WFP confirmed its plan to begin the food distribution for host communities and refugees as soon as possible. The exchanges also focused on the demarcation of Mirqaan site and timelines for relocation.

Partnerships and External Engagement

UNHCR's Representative, took part in an [interview](#) with Al Jazeera on 6 March. He also [briefed](#) the press at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 7 March before joining the DG of RRS for a joint press conference in Addis Ababa with national and international media outlets. The UNHCR Representative also briefed Ambassadors and Heads of Missions in Addis on 10 March.

Funding needs

On 21 February, UNHCR declared an internal Level 2 Emergency for the response to the recent influx into Ethiopia from Somalia and will separately be issuing a Supplementary Appeal to respond to the protection and basic needs of the newly displaced population. Efforts are also underway in Ethiopia to prepare an interagency appeal on the needs of the new arrivals in the Somali region of Ethiopia.

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