

NORTHERN ETHIOPIA EMERGENCY SITUATION

28 SEPTEMBER 2022

ETHIOPIA

The renewed fighting in northern Ethiopia is having serious impacts for refugees and existing internally displaced populations. The general security situation remains complex as fighting continues on multiple fronts across the three regions of Tigray, Amhara and Afar. Humanitarian needs are on the increase as new internal displacement have been reported in all three regions.

Recent developments

Due to the volatile security situation throughout Tigray including the increase in airstrikes, UNHCR field missions were suspended until further notice during the week of 26 September, also following an announcement from the Ethiopian government that aid organizations should refrain from working in areas where the government is taking 'preventive measures.' UNDSG is following up with the government and aims to issue information on areas where movements can continue as normal without pre-approval.

UN missions are also restricted in certain areas of the Amhara and Afar regions.

The UNHAS flight to Mekelle from Addis is still not operational leading to a complete lack of cash flow into the operation, which affects UNHCR's response on the ground, and has also affected staff rotations in and out of Tigray.

UNHCR response

The renewed fighting has led to a very dynamic displacement situation and we have at different points in the last month lost access to several refugee camps and IDP sites, while simultaneously responding to new displacements in all 3 regions of Tigray, Amhara and Afar.

In **Tigray**, despite the severe shortages again of cash and fuel, prior to 27 September, UNHCR together with sister agencies and partners were delivering protection and assistance to the extent possible in line with UN security advisories.

In early September, authorities in Shire advised humanitarian agencies to suspend all movements from and to Mai Tsebri town and the two Eritrean refugee camps Mai Aini and Adi Harush due to the worsening security situation in the area. However, despite the volatile security situation, UNHCR and WFP were eventually able to travel to Mai Tsebri to conduct the general food distribution for the month of September from 23-24 September. In total, 9,800 refugees (5,922 in Mai Aini and 3,878 in Adi Harush) received monthly food rations. Refugees also received one month of laundry soap supplies and additional CRIs distribution.

There are reports of some 210,000 new IDPs in the north-west around Shire. Their situation remains dire as they have been trapped in a conflict zone without food, water, relief items and shelter for several weeks. Assessment have found many unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), elderly, persons with chronic illnesses and women-headed families. UNHCR is taking the lead in emergency shelter response and Core Relief Items (CRIs) for the new IDPs. Other agencies are providing additional household items and WASH and water treatment supplies.

On 23 September, UNHCR distributed selected Core Relief Items (CRIs) to meet the needs of 2,000 children who had been living on the streets and have been relocated from Mekelle city to El Shadai Relief Development Association Center. Blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, and buckets were provided to the Center to accommodate these children for temporary stay, until they are reunited with their families.

Since our last update two weeks ago, UNHCR's partner Innovative Humanitarian Solution (HIS) reached 2,887 IDPs living in 8 IDP sites in Mekelle through awareness raising sessions on protection and other well-being

issues. The sessions covered PSEA, COVID-19 prevention, personal hygiene and sanitation, environmental sanitation, and the importance of protection desk and protection activities implemented by UNHCR.

Earlier this month, the Protection Cluster in Shire area of operation conducted a protection assessment mission to two new displacement areas of Zelazile and Kalawilo, where most of the IDPs were displaced for the second time, coming from Shiraro. Protection response priorities include awareness raising on gender-based violence, assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers and persons with disabilities, mental health and psychosocial support needs, distribution of dignity kits for women and girls, and urgent support for unaccompanied and separated children.

In the **Amhara** region, local authorities have reported the displacement of 155,200 IDPs from different zones. Local authorities in these zones have asked for immediate assistance including food, shelter, and other life-saving support. UNHCR and partners are exploring options to provide the required assistance.

Some IDP sites in the region (Jara in North Wollo and Sekota in Wag Hemra) are still not accessible to humanitarian partners to provide much-needed services. Movement restrictions beyond Debarke have similarly prevented access to Zarema IDP site. In other areas of central Amhara, UNHCR has been able to support voluntary return movements of some IDPs to their areas of origin.

Humanitarian activities are ongoing at the Alemwach settlement for Eritrean refugees.

In **Afar**, according to the local government, there are approximately 174,000 new IDPs in the region in need of humanitarian assistance. Our local partners are providing some detail on different groups of IDPs but many are in areas that are hard to reach due to insecurity and heavy rainfall.

Other activities are ongoing uninterrupted. On 19 September, UNHCR conducted a two-day training for 20 Refugee and Returnee Services (RRS) and UNHCR staff, including registration, protection, field and resettlement staff.

SUDAN

While the numbers of new arrivals reported in Eastern Sudan (Gedaref, Blue Nile, Kasala) remain low, the review and implementation of emergency preparedness measures for a potential influx in Gedaref and Kassala states continues, including border monitoring and the prepositioning of emergency relief items.

Recent developments

On 23 September, UNHCR declared an internal Level 1 emergency for Sudan due to the deteriorating situation in Ethiopia and to enable enhanced preparedness and response capacity on the ground. The Level 1 declaration for Sudan will remain in force for an initial period of six months.

On 25 September, Commissioner for Refugees (COR) staff in Gedaref, announced that they would be joining the COR strike taking place in other parts of the country. Since then, UNHCR and partners have been denied access to Um Rakuba, Tuneydbah and Babikr camps for certain activities. This has caused disruption in the delivery of other services and implementation of programmes. The planned duration of the strike is still unclear. UNHCR management continues to engage with COR in Khartoum, Gedaref and the camps to advocate for access for staff and partners to the extent possible and ensure provision of essential services are sustained. COR has indicated in Khartoum that the strike would be over by the end of the month.

The situation in Hamdayet (entry point and reception center bordering the Tigray region) remains calm with fighting in Ethiopia reportedly taking place at a distance from Sudan's eastern borders for the time being. Sudanese authorities, however, have expressed continued safety concerns for organizations should fighting move closer to the border.

Monkeypox has been found in Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba refugees camps. The total number of suspected and confirmed cases identified by community health workers in both camps is 120 (as of 28 September).

UNHCR response

In Gedaref, an interagency mission led by UNHCR visited a proposed site for a new transit centre in Al Qureisha on 21 September. The site is approximately 50 km away from Al Asera border point. It has been proposed by COR as a potential transit centre for Amhara refugees. However, its distance from the border might also make it suitable for a small camp for longer-term occupation if we were to see a small number of Amhara new arrivals.

UNHCR teams from Gedaref and Kassala, together with COR, conducted a monitoring mission to Gergef reception centre during the week of 26 September (despite the COR strike). Gergef is on the border with Eritrea and could be a possible entry point for arrival of Eritreans. While the overall condition of the reception centre is good, some facilities, particularly access to water, sanitation and hygiene need rehabilitation. COR has advised that in the event of an influx, tents and communal shelters could be erected on the land opposite the reception centre. At the moment, only two partners are present at the reception centre.

Following multisectoral deliberations on response to the monkeypox outbreak, UNHCR will work alongside local health authorities, WHO and partners, and plans to pursue a two-pronged approach for suspected/confirmed cases: set up isolation centres in Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah for vulnerable and severe cases, and in parallel provide emergency shelter kit (ESK) materials to other refugee households with cases, allowing them to set up an extended area adjacent to their shelter for self-isolation at home.

Building on lessons learned from previous experiences of managing public health emergencies in refugee contexts, this approach will allow for a more efficient management of the isolation centres and help promote a stronger community-based approach for the response. However, UNHCR is concerned that government authorities are inclined to impose excessive movement restrictions and may require facility-based isolation, which may not be feasible if the number of cases increases significantly.

Protection, public health and external relation teams have developed key risk communication messages for communication with communities and partners on monkeypox, which are being disseminated in the camps and to the member of the Refugee Working Group.

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