

Tigray Situation Update

06 September 2021



On 19 August, UNHCR, in collaboration with ARRA, relocated a group of Eritrean refugees, half of them children, from Ethiopia's Tigray region to Afar region. The refugees were living at the Hitsats and Shimelba camps, but had to leave when the camps were destroyed at the onset of the conflict. After months living in dire conditions, they received much-needed assistance. Some of the refugees have deteriorating health conditions and were in need of urgent medical attention. © UNHCR/Olga Sarrado

Background and key developments

Military confrontations between federal and regional forces in Ethiopia's Tigray region, which borders both Sudan and Eritrea, led the Government to declare a State of Emergency on 4 November 2020. As the Tigray conflict enters its 10th month, the overall security and access situation remains complex and fluid, hindering effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most affected populations in Central, Southern-Eastern, Eastern, North-Western and Southern Zones. Fresh displacement from fighting in Ethiopia's Amhara and Afar regions has been recorded as the conflict spreads beyond the Tigray region. In addition to some 2.1 million

internally displaced people in Tigray, there are 250,000 people in Amhara region and 112,000 in Afar region being internally displaced according to the local authorities and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Of particular concern is the safety and wellbeing of thousands of Eritrean refugees living in the three Eritrean refugee camps of Mai Aini and Adi Harush in Tigray region and Berhale in Afar region.

While providing immediate support with limited access, UNHCR's priority is to facilitate the relocation of refugees out of the conflict areas as soon as possible to continue to call for cessation of hostilities to be able to do so. In this regard, UNHCR is working urgently to construct a new camp, Alemwach, which will be able to host some 25,000 refugees from Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps. UNHCR and the Ethiopian Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) have also developed a relocation plan ready to be implemented.

UNHCR also continues to be very concerned about the safety and well-being of thousands of refugees that are unreachable. For months, UNHCR has been working with ARRA to locate, identify and support the Eritrean refugees who were previously sheltered in the Northern Tigray refugee camps of Hitsats and Shimelba, but fled when those camps were destroyed in January 2021.

Displacement figures

Prior to the outbreak of the Tigray crisis on 4 November 2020, the total refugee population registered in Tigray (95,929) and Afar (54,183) was 150,012, with the majority in camps, and a small population of 7,800 living outside of camp settings under the Out of Camp Policy (OCP). At the outset of the crisis, UNHCR confirmed 59,759 refugees as the baseline for the refugee population known to be in Tigray.

According to OCHA, the conflict in Tigray has displaced some 2.1 million people in Tigray region, 250,000 people in Amhara region and 112,000 in Afar region.

Operational response

Refugee response

Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps

- The last food distribution in the two camps was carried out from 5-12 August, in cooperation with partners. Due to the ongoing insecurity and access difficulties, refugees are in a dire situation, basic services such as healthcare remain largely unavailable, and clean drinking water is currently not available. Efforts are being made to provide support in the camps, pending relocation.

Berhale camp

- Active conflict has been reported 35 kilometers from the camp, compelling partners and UNHCR to leave the area. The food distribution for the months of July and August 2021 is planned this week with the remaining ARRA staff and the refugee committees. The government has reported new displacement of 10,000 individuals following conflict that started around 20 August 2021. If the fighting escalates and reaches Berhale Camp, 21,000 Eritrean refugees would be in imminent and vital danger.
- UNHCR and ARRA provided support to four refugees who travelled on their own from Shire to Semera. The refugees were moved by ARRA to Aysaita refugee camp in Afar

and joined another 53 refugees who stay in the ARRA office, where UNHCR provided family tents for additional accommodation space while ARRA provides hot meals.

Alemwach refugee camp and Dabat

- The security situation around Dabat and Debark remains unpredictable due to the ongoing fighting in the area which could possibly hinder our activities in the new camp. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation. UNHCR staff and partners travel daily from Gondar to Dabat in Debark,
- At the new Alemwach site which can accommodate 5,000 refugees with its current capacity, improvements are ongoing to extend it to be able to accommodate up to 25,000 individuals. The construction of WFP and UNHCR rub halls, initially hampered by fuel and truck shortages, has finally started. Currently three NGOs (ANE, IHS, AHADA) are engaged to support in shelter, energy, WASH, and warehouse management as the first key response while health services are done directly by ARRA in conjunction with Dabat woreda.
- In the meantime, as of 06 September, 195 persons of concern, including 188 refugees, 4 asylum-seekers and 3 Ethiopian nationals married to Eritrean refugees, were accommodated in interim emergency communal shelters in Dabat town until the new Alemwach site is equipped, with electricity and water.

Addis Ababa

- Since 4 August, UNHCR has started a documentation exercise for Eritrean refugees who self-relocated to Addis Ababa from the former Shimelba and Hitsats camps, at the Organisation for Women in Self Employment (WISE) office. The documentation exercise for Eritrean refugees, as of 31 August, issued new refugee IDs to 5,542 individuals / 4,441 households, and new proof of registration documents to 855 individuals / 583 households. A total of 4,459 individuals have been assisted to open bank accounts to facilitate the transfer of cash assistance from UNHCR (and facilitate the reception of remittances from abroad).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) response



PROTECTION

- UNHCR established 57 protection desks throughout IDP sites in the Tigray region. Referrals and delivery of basic relief items - including blankets, buckets, soap, kitchen sets and mosquito nets – are provided to the most vulnerable until they can return to their homes. As the majority of the IDPs are receiving support from the host community, community-based protection mechanisms are being strengthened.
- A relocation task force, led by Protection and CCCM clusters has been set up. In Mekelle, the relocation of 100 to 400 families is planned during the next two weeks in Sabacare-4, a new site that can host up to 19,000 individuals. The Task Force requested all partners to support with the identification of households to prioritize for the relocation pilot and come up with some criteria that can be used by community leadership structures. Relocation discussions are also taking place across Tigray in line with Mekelle level guidance.
- The UNHCR Protection Team is finalizing the operational plan of the IDPs Return Strategy, under the leadership of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) . While a majority of IDPs have expressed their willingness to return, many cannot do so as

conflict persists in their areas of origin or conditions are not conducive for a dignified return.

- The Protection Cluster Strategy for Tigray was endorsed by Cluster members and Protection Clusters are being set up in all the field units in Abi-Adi, Adigrat, Axum, Maichew, Mekelle, Sheraro and Shire.
- Newly arrived IDPs fleeing the conflict areas around Zalambessa woreda in Tigray east have reached Adigrat and Maichew. In Mai Tsebri, there are more than 58,000 IDP from Wolkayte, Tsegedie and other parts of western Tigray who arrived in two sites and currently there are no services providers to respond to their needs. 4,825 IDPs have arrived at the sites in Shire.



CAMP COORDINATION AND CAMP MANAGEMENT (CCCM)

- UNHCR CCCM partners, Action for the Needy in Ethiopia (ANE) and Organisation for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD), started deploying CCCM teams in different IDP sites in Mekelle, Adigrat, Axum, Abi Adi, Sheraro and Adwa with the aim to increase presence and develop all the IDP sites managed by UNHCR. Joint missions with other partners are ongoing to assess IDP sites in different woredas and hold discussions with the zonal authorities.
- CCCM cluster partner, ANE, has completed eight communal kitchens in the IDP sites of Shire and started road access improvements as well as ground levelling. 15 trucks in Fre Swuat and 10 trucks in Tsehaye IDP sites have also been delivered for site upgrading activities.



SHELTER AND NON-FOOD ITEMS (NFI)

- In Mekelle, the UNHCR Shelter Team organized field visits to the IDP site Sabacare 4 to assess the progress of the pending works before moving the IDPs planned mid of September. Rehabilitation and leveling of floor are ongoing whereby 140 shelters are ready to host IDPs.
- Field Units Abi Adi, Adigrat and Maichew have received NFIs for around 500 households each and distributions have started. Twelve trucks were delivered to Semera with NFIs for around 5,000 households for the distribution to IDPs in Afar.



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

- In coordination with UNICEF, UNHCR facilitated trainings on GBV in Emergency for non-GBV actors, local authorities and partner staff in Mekelle to promote better understanding of GBV, referral pathway, and handling disclosure for GBV incidents.
- 4,000 dignity kits have been transported to Abi Adi, Maichew, Axum, Adigrat and will be distributed this week. About 7,650 are ready to be distributed in Mekelle.
- A PSEA Network has been set up, co-led by UNHCR and Save the Children. UN Women has received funding for strengthening the inter-agency Ethiopia PSEA Network through the establishment of community-based complaint mechanisms (CBCMs) as well as survivor-centred support services as response to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) amongst IDPs in Mekelle, Shire and Axum.

Issues and Operational challenges

- The humanitarian response in the region continues to face challenges negatively impacting the ability to work and deliver assistance, including a volatile security situation, scarcity of cash and fuel, and limited electrical power and telecommunication services.
- Due to the volatile security situation, access to Tigray worsened. This has been raising a grave concern as food stocks have run out and partners cannot continue food distribution, with the exception of ongoing distributions in some areas where supplies had been previously dispatched.
- On 06 September, more than 100 WFP trucks carrying 3,500 metric tons of food and other life-saving cargo arrived in Mekelle after weeks of difficulties.
- Protection monitoring reports stress food as the top priority for IDPs in Tigray. Following UNHCR assessment, there is a critical need to emphasize the GBV and Mental Health and Psychosocial response (MHPSS). Negative coping mechanisms are clearly present, including an increased number of children begging or selling labour and cleaning services on the streets, and reports of women engaged in survival sex.

Ethiopia Emergency Situation Funding Update

(As of 24 August 2021)

On 10 August, UNHCR appealed for US\$ 164.5 million to assist 96,000 Eritrean refugees and 650,000 internally displaced people in Ethiopia's Tigray region and up to 120,000 Ethiopian refugees in eastern Sudan. Some US\$101.3 million, or 61% of the Appeal, will help provide essential aid such as shelter, domestic items and protection, including support for survivors of gender-based violence, inside Tigray. The overall appeal for both countries is currently 66% funded. UNHCR Ethiopia would like to express its – gratitude, for the funding received for its Ethiopia operation, to all donors, particularly the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), EU ECHO, Italy Japan, Norway, and the United States of America, alongside situation level funding from Finland, France, Luxembourg, and from Private donors.

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