

ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

15 June – 15 July 2021



Mihret, 25, an Ethiopian refugee and engineer, oversees construction at a site in Tunaydbah settlement, Sudan. © UNHCR/Ahmed Kwarte

Key Developments

ETHIOPIA

- On 25 June, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi [called for](#) all parties to respect the protection of civilians and the safety of humanitarian workers following an escalation in the conflict.
- On 28 June, Ethiopia's government declared an immediate, unilateral cease-fire in the Tigray region after nearly eight months of conflict. Tigrayan forces took the regional capital Mekelle on the same day. Fighting has since continued on several fronts.
- While humanitarian access to previously hard to reach areas within Tigray improved, movements of personnel and supplies into Tigray has been severely constrained by the closure of airports and very limited road access.
- On 2 July, Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator [appealed for](#) immediate and unrestricted access to Tigray as the Security Council held its first open meeting on the conflict, stating that 400,000 people have “crossed the threshold into famine” – with another 1.8 million on the brink.
- On 13 July, High Commissioner Grandi [expressed concern](#) for the safety and security of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia and called for the violence and intimidation against them to stop.

- On 15 July, High Commissioner Grandi [highlighted](#) that UNHCR had lost access to the Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps when fighting reached the area on 13 July, with at least one Eritrean refugee death confirmed and credible reports of arrests, detentions, beatings, looting and sporadic gunfire with tens of thousands of refugees trapped and fearful for their lives.
- UNHCR is working with the Ethiopian government's refugee agency, ARRA, and partners to urgently prepare a new refugee camp in the neighboring Amhara region. Originally intended for the relocation of Eritrean refugees previously residing at Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps before they were destroyed, voluntary relocation of all those currently at Mai Aini and Adi Harush to the new camp will be pursued as soon as access and safe passage is possible.

SUDAN

- UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), the Regional Bureau Director for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes (EHAGL), and Head of External Engagement (EHAGL) undertook a mission to eastern Sudan 11-15 July. The delegation visited Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba camps, where they met with refugee leaders and host communities and visited several sites in both locations in order to obtain a better understanding of the current inter-agency interventions related to shelter, flood preparedness, protection and other sectors. Meetings with government official focused on the urgency to relocate refugees away from border areas, key protection issues, and support to host communities.
- UNHCR and partners have developed a six-month Plan of Action (July-December 2021) to address a number of critical short- and medium -term priorities in the emergency response in Gedaref and Kassala states, including with respect to the challenges presented by the rainy season and preparations for a potential new influx from Ethiopia.
- UNHCR and 31 UN and NGO partners are calling for US\$ 182 million in the [updated interagency appeal](#) for Sudan, an increase of US\$ 33 million. The revised appeal incorporates additional funding requirements for flood and storm mitigation, to carry out infrastructure improvements to the camps, including construction of more durable traditional shelters, and to meet the protection and basic needs of Ethiopian refugees from both Tigray and Benishangul Gumuz until the end of the year. So far 46 percent of the required amount has been received.

Ethiopia Response

The humanitarian situation across the Tigray Region remains deeply concerning for refugees, the internally displaced and host communities. Civilians have endured eight months of conflict with extremely limited basic services and assistance available, leading to a significant escalation in humanitarian needs with ongoing new displacements. The security situation remains volatile, affecting civilians and constraining humanitarian actors on the ground. Communication, electricity and banking services remain intermittent.



Eritrean Refugee Response

UNHCR has continued to identify and register Eritrean refugees – including those who were displaced from Hitsats and Shimeba camps – in Tigray, Afar, and Addis Ababa.

Relocations to Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps were put on hold following the developments of 28 June and the damage to the bridge over the Tekeze river, connecting Shire to Mai Tsebri. UNHCR and partners have staff stranded in Shire, and face difficulty sourcing supplies. The evolving access and security environment is currently posing the biggest challenge to the operation.

On 26 June, additional land to host Eritrean refugees was handed over to UNHCR by local authorities. The Alemwach site is located in Dabat, Amhara region. In light of the deteriorated security situation for Eritrean refugees across Tigray and more specifically in and around the Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps, the operationalization of the new site is being expedited to enable relocation as soon as possible. Communal shelters with access to water and sanitation (school buildings, etc.) were identified on 13 July in coordination with local authorities and are receiving small numbers of refugees who have managed to self-relocate. As of 15 July, a total of 2,500 CRI kits had reached Dabat from Addis Ababa. Arrangements are in place for cooked meals to be provided to new arrivals. Daily coordination meetings have been established between ARRA, UNHCR and partners to speed up the process and address any potential challenges that could cause delays.



Protection: While the security situation in Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps sharply deteriorated on 13 July, insecurity had been a concern for the last few months, especially armed criminality at night causing fearfulness among the refugee community. Increased night patrols had been put in place, but UNHCR and ARRA are aware that refugees had been self-relocating from the camps for the past few months.

UNHCR continues to advocate with the Government of Ethiopia to allow temporary residency and the provision of assistance to Eritrean refugees who fled Tigray and have been registered and verified in Addis Ababa.

UNHCR has discussed the situation of detained Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers with authorities in Shire and Adwa. Authorities stated that several hundred Eritreans who had been detained in Shire were released following verification of their identity, and that no refugees or asylum seekers remained in detention. In Adwa, authorities noted that while a number of detained refugees had been released, some with prior military backgrounds were still under custody. Local authorities indicated readiness to cooperate with UNHCR and other agencies on relocation of refugees to the camps.



Health: Plans have been made to construct a temporary outpatient clinic at Alemwach refugee site due to the long distance to reach Dabat primary hospital and health center. Initial investment in host community services is also being incorporated to ensure that current relations with the host community remain harmonious.



Food Security and Nutrition: The last food distribution in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps was conducted on 20-21 June covering food needs of refugees for one month. The population in Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps prior to the onset of the conflict on 13 July, is estimated at 23,946 persons based on the last general food distribution exercise completed in June 2021. Of the total population in the two camps, 11,482 individuals are in Adi Harush and 12,464 are in Mai Aini. The next food distribution is to take place towards the end of July.



Shelter: UNHCR plans to rehabilitate existing public infrastructure in Dabat town to be utilized as communal shelters. So far around seven sites have been identified, including Dabat High School - next to Alemwach refugee site and Ede' Tebeb site which were identified by a joint UNHCR/ARRA team to be used as temporary shelters for the relocation of refugees pending development of the camp/settlement.



Water and Sanitation: Mai Ani and Adi Harush camps currently face acute shortages of clean water which in the absence of access and water trucking is currently sourced from open natural water sources and is not fit for consumption.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA) estimates more than 1.7 million people have been displaced by the conflict in Tigray. UNHCR is working to significantly scale up IDP response operations while undertaking Protection and Camp Coordination and Camp Management cluster leadership responsibilities.



Protection: UNHCR's regular protection activities continued to be implemented in IDP sites in Shire and Mekelle. Rapid assessments are being conducted to evaluate the conditions and protection needs of persons of concern in light of the evolving situation in Tigray.

On 7 July, UNHCR's protection team undertook two rapid assessments in eight IDP sites in Shire and Axum. Findings revealed that assessed sites have become safer for IDPs compared to previous months. The number of IDPs in the assessed sites has decreased, with those remaining, however, found to be in desperate need of food as they have not received any humanitarian assistance for months. IDPs have generally expressed interest to return although this may not be possible in the near term for those who came from the western part of Tigray, where the conflict is expected to move.

On 13 July, UNHCR undertook a mission Axum and conducted rapid assessments in three IDP sites.

An initial draft of the Protection Cluster Strategy for Mekelle and Shire was finalized and is being shared with Cluster members for their review/comments.



Shelter and Non-food Items: As part of the Emergency Shelter and NFI Cluster, UNHCR will participate in a joint field visit to Zana in the central zone to assess damaged homes for possible rehabilitation to support IDPs returning to the town. UNHCR plans to organize monitoring visits to areas of return in the north-western and central zones of Tigray.

UNHCR is working with NRC to finalize the construction of 100 shelters in Hibret IDP site in Shire. A total of 250 shelters are yet to be constructed. The majority of these IDPs are likely to stay for an extended period of time in the IDP sites. On 15 July, UNHCR and partners in Shire completed the distribution of CRI kits to 500 vulnerable IDP families who were identified.



Camp Coordination and Camp Management: Given the change of the political administration and the declaration of cease fire by the federal government, the majority of IDPs have indicated willingness to return to areas of origin. In view of the anticipated returns, the CCCM cluster is conducting an

intention survey of IDPs living in sites, collective centers and host communities. The Regional Disaster Risk Management Committee (RDRMC) has endorsed the survey, which is carried out by CCCM partners in close coordination with UNHCR and other partners in Shire and Mekelle.

CCCM partners, together with the displaced community leaders, are closely monitoring the needs for IDPs in communal sites. With the disruption of supply pipelines and electricity, a significant reduction in availability of water, food and cooking fuel has been recorded in most IDP sites. Closure of banks has also drastically affected the procurement of supplies intended for use in IDP sites and communal centers.

Sudan Response

In light of the evolving situation in Tigray, UNHCR and partners have deployed key staff to Hamdayet to ensure preparedness for a possible new influx. UNHCR has set up 12 communal shelters with a capacity to accommodate 1,200 people and transferred 2 tractors which will be used with trailers to help transport new arrivals, CRIs and support water trucking during the rainy season. Local authorities have additionally allocated a piece of land some 1.5km from Hamdayet to temporarily accommodate any potential non-Tigrayan new arrivals, who will be relocated to Shagarab camp in Kassala.

At the same time, UNHCR is engaging with authorities at all levels to resume the relocation of some 5,400 Ethiopian refugees currently at Hamdayet. Except for family reunification, un-accompanied minors and medical cases, relocation from Hamdayet to the camps has been suspended since late February 2021 pending authorization by local authorities.



46,505

total number of refugees
registered via UNHCR's
Biometrics Identity Management
System as of 30 June



Protection: Protection desks have been re-established in Hamdayet reception center and strengthened in Um Rakuba and Tunyadbah camps with the regular presence of UNHCR staff to reinforce the work of NGO partners, encourage reporting and enhance confidence in the collective protection response.

Remote protection monitoring is in place for Village 8 transit center, while deployment of protection staff has been pending due to inaccessibility.



Food Security and Nutrition: The planned shift from in-kind food assistance to cash during the month of June met with resistance from refugees who expressed concern about the amount of cash to be provided in a context of high inflation and price fluctuations as well as the availability of markets. On 8 July, WFP began distributing one month of in-kind and one month of cash assistance concurrently but the exercise

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