

ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

13 January - 1 February



Ethiopian refugees prepare a meal in Um Rakuba camp.

Key Developments

SUDAN

- More than 60,500 Ethiopian refugees have crossed into East Sudan as of 1 February.
- 20,572 refugees have been relocated to Um Rakuba camp, and 13,371 refugees to Tunaydbah settlement.
- UNHCR and partners are holding sessions with government, UN, NGO and communities to strengthen measures on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

ETHIOPIA

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, was in Ethiopia from 29 January to 1 February to meet with government officials, the diplomatic community, donors, and UN and NGO partners. He also met with local officials and Eritrean refugees during a visit to Mai Aini refugee camps, one of the four Eritrean refugee camps in the Tigray region.
- The High Commissioner issued a [statement](#) on 14 January highlighting concern for Eritrean refugees' safety and well-being in Ethiopia's Tigray region in light of reports of severe human rights violations in Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps – including killings, targeted abductions, and forced return to Eritrea. The statement called for a stop to these abuses and full and unimpeded humanitarian access.
- A joint WFP/UNHCR/ARRA food distribution for 30,000 Eritrean refugees in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps took place 20-25 January and the distribution of core relief items to 5,000 households is ongoing.

Response

Ethiopia

The humanitarian situation across the Tigray Region continues to deteriorate, including for many refugees, the internally displaced and host communities. The security situation remains volatile and the situation in and around Shire remains particularly dire for civilians, Eritrean refugees and humanitarian actors on the ground. Humanitarian access remains constrained; while the ability to move supplies has improved, personnel movement is still difficult in much of the region.

Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps: UNHCR and partners have had no access to Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps for more than two months. Media and other sources report ongoing insecurity and destruction in and around the camps due to the conflict. UNHCR estimates that between 15,000 and 20,000 refugees who had been residing in the two camps have been disbursed, many to currently inaccessible areas in Tigray.

Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush:

During January UNHCR has gained access to the two Eritrean refugee camps of Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush where refugees were found in desperate need of assistance. Some 3,000 Eritrean refugees from Hitsats and Shimelba camps have also now arrived in Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps searching for safety and assistance. Some moved on their own while others were transported by the government.

A taskforce has been established with UNHCR, government counterpart ARRA and key partners to oversee the rapid re-establishment of services at Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps, and to assess and establish reception capacity for the refugees arriving from Shimelba, Hitsats and other locations including immediate temporary accommodation.

Core Relief Items: The distribution of a first batch of core relief items for 5,000 households at Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush is currently ongoing. The distribution will include refugees who fled Hitsats and Shimelba camps, as well as new arrivals who hadn't had the chance to register or apply for asylum last year. The first batch of items includes emergency tents, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, jerry cans, plastic buckets, soap and other sanitary items. More relief items are being dispatched to support with the humanitarian response in the Tigray region.

Food Aid: The Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), supported by WFP and UNHCR distributed food to nearly 30,000 Eritrean refugees in the two camps from 20-25 January. This was the 2nd monthly food distribution since the conflict started, following an earlier one in December 2020.

WASH and Health: International Rescue Committee (IRC) has resumed the provision of clean water and ARRA has re-established basic health services in the camps.

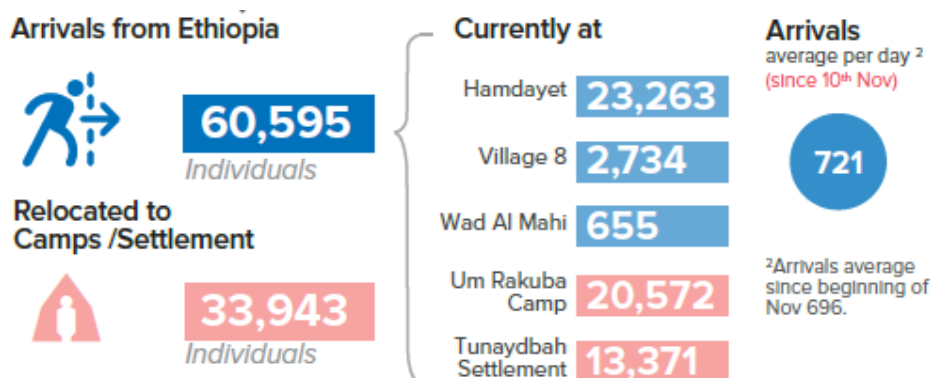
IDPs in Shire: UNHCR and partners have provided humanitarian assistance to IDPs in three sites in Shire town. This assistance has included clean water, referrals for health services, reproductive health, psychological first aid, mattresses, blankets, soap and high energy biscuits. Measures for prevention and response to gender-based violence are also being instituted.

IRC is offering Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) classes for IDPs in one of the collective locations in Shire. The sessions include indoor and outdoor games and children are provided with high energy biscuits. Some 328 children have been registered.

IDPs in Mekelle: There are currently seven IDP sites in Mekelle with some 50,000 IDPs. Partners are providing some basic assistance including food. There are protection concerns to be addressed which include unaccompanied children, family separation, and trauma.



Eritrean refugee children play outside a communal kitchen in Adi Aharush camp, northern Ethiopia.



Sudan

As of 1 February, the influx of refugees from the Tigray region into Sudan had surpassed 60,500. Refugees continue to arrive mainly at Hamdayet transit centre; there have been fewer numbers of new arrivals to Village 8. New arrivals say they have walked for 10-15 days to reach the border.

Some new arrivals to Hamdayet have reported incidents of rape, killing, looting of property including harvests, and of young men being forcibly recruited in Ethiopia.

Relocation: Since 13 November, 20,572 refugees were relocated from Hamdayet and Abderafi border points, and Village 8 transit site to Um Rakuba – 70kms away from the Ethiopian border. Um Rakuba camp has reached full capacity and no further relocations will take place for the time being except for family reunification purposes. Discussions on an extension of the camp are ongoing with the authorities. Relocation is urgent as the reception centre at Hamdayet is overcrowded.

On 3 January, UNHCR and partners began relocations to the new settlement, Tunaydbah – 136kms away from Gedaref town. By 1 February, more than 13,000 refugees had been relocated. Nearly 25,000 refugees remaining at Hamdayet and Village 8 have registered to be relocated to Tunaydbah. Relocation from Village 8 to the Tunaydba settlement is being prioritized due to the tense security situation along the border with Ethiopia.

COVID-19 precautionary measures such as social distancing, temperature checks, and mask use are in place during the movements. Refugees are also provided with water and high energy biscuits for the trip.

Protection

In all locations, Protection desks have been established to provide information on legal issues, rights, and obligations of refugees and facilitate the registration process. Protection teams are identifying people at heightened risk, including pregnant women, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied children and older persons and referring them to specialised services including counselling and health services for survivors of gender-based violence.

Village 8 transit site: During individual interviews and focus group discussions with women, they highlighted that the lack of interpretation at service points had prevented them from expressing themselves and in making reports, including of GBV incidents. They requested interpretation services at government and partner offices. Women raised concerns of SEA related to the scarcity of core relief items and food.

Hamdayet reception center: UNHCR has finalised construction of a multi-purpose Community Centre to be used for distributions, meetings, training of refugees and other activities.

Um Rakuba camp: IOM plans to raise awareness on smuggling and trafficking with youth and community members and to distribute posters in Tigrinya language. IOM will also begin programming on mental health and psychosocial support.

Tunaydbah settlement: Focus group discussions with refugees are ongoing and in follow up, UNHCR, COR and partners are putting in place referrals and services to meet the requests for urgent health and reproductive health services for pregnant women, cash, food and core relief items, improved water supply, sanitisers, hygiene kits and masks.

Refugees also raised concerns about the lack of interpreters at the protection desks and distribution points and requested improved information dissemination and regular meetings with service providers. Community-Based Protection staff met with more than 22 refugees to discuss developing a communication system in the camp and 7 refugee volunteers and interpreters have been identified to assist with communicating with the communities.



UNHCR and partners provide protection services to Ethiopian refugees in Tunaydbah settlement.

Alight Women's Centre in Tunaydbah hosted a group of women who raised concerns of livelihood opportunities and the need for cash assistance to enhance self-reliance.

Sudan Family Planning Association (SFPA) established an office in Tunaydbah and plan to open a women's centre and health facility.

Community-based protection:

An inter-agency **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)** task force has been established. The task force completed training, with more than 120 participants from humanitarian partners and security personnel in Village 8. Posters are also being put up across the sites to publicise PSEA-related information for refugees. A PSEA session was also held for newly recruited partner staff for Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba sites. Enhanced awareness-raising among refugees on PSEA and mechanisms for feedback and reporting, including a hotline, will be instituted. In addition, a UNHCR GBV specialist will be deployed to support activities.

UNHCR carried out 23 focus group discussions with more than 290 participants in Um Rakuba camp and Tunaydbah settlement to identify and assess the communication channels between humanitarian actors and the refugee communities.

Um Rakuba camp: UNHCR with the support of Alight, Concern and IOM, completed the community consultations to strengthen mechanisms for communicating with communities and community-based protection (CBP) outreach. The activity has now been expanded to Tunaydbah settlement where focus group discussions are ongoing with persons with specific needs, community leaders, women, and men. The CBP team identified seven volunteers and interpreters who will be assisting the process of communication with the refugee community.

UNHCR and volunteers from a local Sudanese charity continue a data collection exercise on Communicating with Communities. They held a focus group discussion with 20 participants from female-headed households in Um Rakuba camp. Key messages shared related to safety and security, COVID-19 precautions and to discontinue cutting of firewood from the forest.

The community-based protection (CBP) team met with the COR camp coordinator for Um Rakuba camp agreed on the establishment of community structures in the camp for protection responses in an organised manner. CBP will prepare a tentative plan and ensure the involvement of the community.

In Tunaydbah settlement: 100 community leaders and security committee members were identified by COR with the support of a respected priest from the refugee community. These leaders will represent all blocks at the settlement, the group will facilitated the exchange of informiaton with the community, ensure community safety and security and ensure support is provided to vulnerable groups.

Some 200 certified teachers, 12 doctors and others with a medical background in Tunaydbah have indicated their willingness to work closely with humanitarian organizations and provide support to the community. Community-based protection colleagues identified another 15 skilled refugees qualited to drive and operate construction equipment. UNHCR is working with partners to identify opportunities for skilled refugees.

Child protection:

UNHCR and partners continue to identify separated families in Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba. The majority of these family separation cases are linked to families arriving on different dates and having been relocated to different camps and measures are being put in place to ensure that these families are reunified and that family separation during relocation is prevented.

Village 8 transit site: UNICEF established a child-friendly space (CFS) which was receiving nearly 200 children between the ages of 7 and 17.

Um Rakuba camp: UNHCR, UNICEF, COR and Save the Children International (SCI) met with State Council for Child Welfare (SCCW) to discuss reunification for children currently in interim care. SSCW, COR, SCI and UNHCR will follow up on the tracing and reunification of 106 children and on the establishing family-based care.

Tunaydbah settlement: SCI has set up tents for child-friendly spaces and five animators have been recruited who mostly speak English, Tigrinya and some Arabic. Ten social workers were identified through SCCW, and their training has been finalised.

Two focus group discussions were held with children between five and 17 years old discussing information sharing channels.

Education

On 19 January, the State Ministry of Education and Guidance hosted the Gedaref state-level education refugee working group- UNHCR, UNICEF, NRC, Save the Children International and Education Services Organization. They discussed the need to include education committees at the locality level; a joint monitoring mission on 26 January; and the alignment of registration forms for the Refugee Education Management Information System, in order to facilitate the long term transition to formal learning.

Um Rakuba camp: The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) continues to operate two primary schools from grade one to eight for students from six to 13 years. The two schools rotate between two shifts but no formal curriculum is being taught yet.

NRC began the construction of the Temporary Learning Centre in Zone II. The registration of students between the age of 6-15 years and volunteer teachers for the centre is also ongoing and so far, 464 children and 18 male and 05 female volunteer teachers have been registered.

UNHCR, NRC and SCI are working to address the gap of secondary education.

Tunaydbah settlement: Education partners will complete 19 temporary learning spaces in the month of February. This includes ten primary schools supported by NRC, five early childhood spaces supported by SCI four secondary schools supported by Islamic Relief.

Health

Temperature screening is in place at the entry point in Hamdayet. UNCHR continues to distribute soaps and masks to new arrivals at Hamdayet and Village 8.

In coordination with Ministry of Health (MoH), UNICEF, and WHO, a door to door mass vaccination campaign for Polio for children under 5 began on 24 January in Hamdayet, Village 8, Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba.

Village 8 transit site: An Ethiopian refugee health team supported by MSF is running a primary healthcare clinic. They have up to 300 consultations per day for both the refugee and host community and are providing them with medications.

The Sudanese Organisation for Research and Development (SORD) and UNFPA sexual and reproductive mobile health clinic is supporting between 100-200 people per day with medical consultations, including neo-material services, family planning services to women, and sexually transmitted infections treatment. SORD is also delivering psychological first aid sessions to refugees.

The Ministry of Health supported by UNICEF is screening children under five and pregnant and lactating women for malnutrition and supporting supplementary feeding programs. They are also supporting the vaccination against polio, measles and meningitis.

Hamdayet reception center: Two State clinics are now providing health services to nearly 200-300 refugees per day. MSF continues to screen new arrivals at the health screening point at the Tekeze River and the MSF mobile clinic also provides medical consultation to refugees and the host community.

Vaccination of children against measles, meningitis, and polio has commenced. In addition, nutritional teams are screening children under five and pregnant and lactating women for malnutrition and providing treatments.

The SORD mobile clinic supported by UNFPA is providing medical consultations, including neo-maternal services, family planning services to women and sexually transmitted infection treatment for people. SORD counsellors are also delivering psychological first aid sessions and providing basic mental health support.

Um Rakuba camp: Health services for the refugees are being supported by multiple partners. COVID information and masks continue to be distributed at the four registration points. Mercy Corps is supporting one primary health care clinic near the camp while Alight has established a primary health care clinic at Um Rakuba. MSF is also running a health facility at the site, and Ascend UK clinic provides laboratory tests and conducts hygiene promotion. However, many refugees report they are still not able to access medicine or referrals for specialized services.



A primary health clinic providing health services to Ethiopian refugees in East Sudan.

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