

## ETHIOPIA SITUATION (TIGRAY REGION)

28 November - 3 December 2020



UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi listens to the stories of Ethiopian refugees who fled to East Sudan.

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### Key Developments

#### SUDAN

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi was in Sudan from 26-29 November to meet with government officials, local authorities, donors, partners and newly arriving refugees during his visit to Khartoum, Hamdayet transit centre and Um Rakuba camp. He commended the government for keeping the border open to receive the refugees from Ethiopia and called on the international community to support Sudan in the response.
- As of 2 December, 46,412 Ethiopian refugees have arrived in eastern Sudan. A small number of Eritrean refugees have also arrived from the Tigray region in recent days.
- During his mission, the [Inter-Agency Refugee Emergency Response Plan - Ethiopia Influx](#) was launched. The plan calls for US\$147 million for 30 partners to support up to 100,000 refugees from November 2020 thru June 2021. As the situation evolves, the plan will be revised as needed in the first half of 2021.
- Three airlifts of emergency relief supplies from UNHCR's global stockpiles in the UAE and Nairobi have arrived in Khartoum carrying family tents, blankets, solar lamps, mosquito nets, plastic sheets, and prefabricated warehouses. Many of these items have already been received in Um Rakuba. Additional flights are in the pipeline.

- During his engagements with press during the visit, the High Commissioner noted that UNHCR has continued to appeal jointly with other humanitarian agencies for access in Tigray. He also recognized the longstanding hospitality of the Ethiopian government towards refugees and urged them to uphold its international obligations to protect refugees being hosted in Tigray.

### ETHIOPIA

- Conditions at the Eritrean refugee camps in the Tigray region cannot be verified due to the enduring communication and access restrictions. With the current situation in Tigray now lasting nearly a month, it is likely that all basic services, including food, water and health care are drastically affected with supplies running out.
- On 2 December it was announced the UN in Ethiopia and the Federal Government have signed an agreement that seeks to enable humanitarians to have unimpeded, sustained and secure access for humanitarian personnel and services to areas under the control of the Federal Government in the Tigray Region and the bordering areas of the Amhara and Afar regions within an overall coordination framework.
- Concurrent to the signature of the agreement, UNHCR and WFP are in discussion with the government counterpart, ARRA, on the logistics, distribution modalities and security aspects of conducting a food distribution at the four Eritrean refugee camps in Tigray. WFP has already prepositioned the urgently needed food assistance.

## UNHCR Response

### Ethiopia

UNHCR has continued to appeal to the federal authorities in Ethiopia for urgent access in the Tigray region to reach some 96,000 Eritrean refugees registered in the region along with the growing number of internally displaced who are reportedly in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and services.

UNHCR is unable to verify reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment at the Eritrean camps, nor the overall conditions in the camps, due to the lack of access and continued communication blackout. UNHCR has strongly reiterated the call that no civilians should become a target and all possible measures must be taken by all parties to ensure that civilians – whether refugees or host communities – are kept out of harm's way.

UNHCR is preparing to resume protection and assistance activities in the Tigray region as soon as feasible. Supplies, including food, and services in the Eritrean refugee camps have likely been heavily affected. Discussions are ongoing between UNHCR, WFP and the government counterpart ARRA on logistics arrangements, distribution modalities and the need to conduct security assessment prior to proceeding with a food distribution in the camps. WFP has already prepositioned the urgently needed food assistance.

On 29 November ICRC reported some 1,000 Eritrean refugees had reached Mekelle town in search of assistance. UNHCR is seeking to confirm this information and assessing the status and origin of the refugees through staff who remain in Mekelle.

On 2 December, an inter-agency assessment mission travelled to the Afar region to assess the humanitarian situation in the area where earlier reports of possible internal displacement had been received.

UNHCR continues to have special dispensation to move around Shire town. UNHCR together with partners has provided water, high energy biscuits, clothes, mattresses, sleeping mats and blankets to approximately 5,000 IDPs residing in Shire town.

**Total New Arrivals From Ethiopia <sup>1</sup>**

**46,412**

Individuals

<sup>1</sup> Since 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

**Per State**

 Kassala **32,377** 70%  
 (Hamdayet)

 Gedaref **13,333** 29%  
 (Ludgi, Abderafi)

 Blue Nile **702** 1%  
 (Algazira, Yagolo, Yabisher)

 Arrivals average per day <sup>2</sup>  
 (since 10<sup>th</sup> Nov)

**2,011**
<sup>2</sup> Arrivals average since beginning of Nov 1,785.

**Sudan**

The influx of refugees from the Tigray region into Sudan continues, reaching 46,412 as of 2 December.

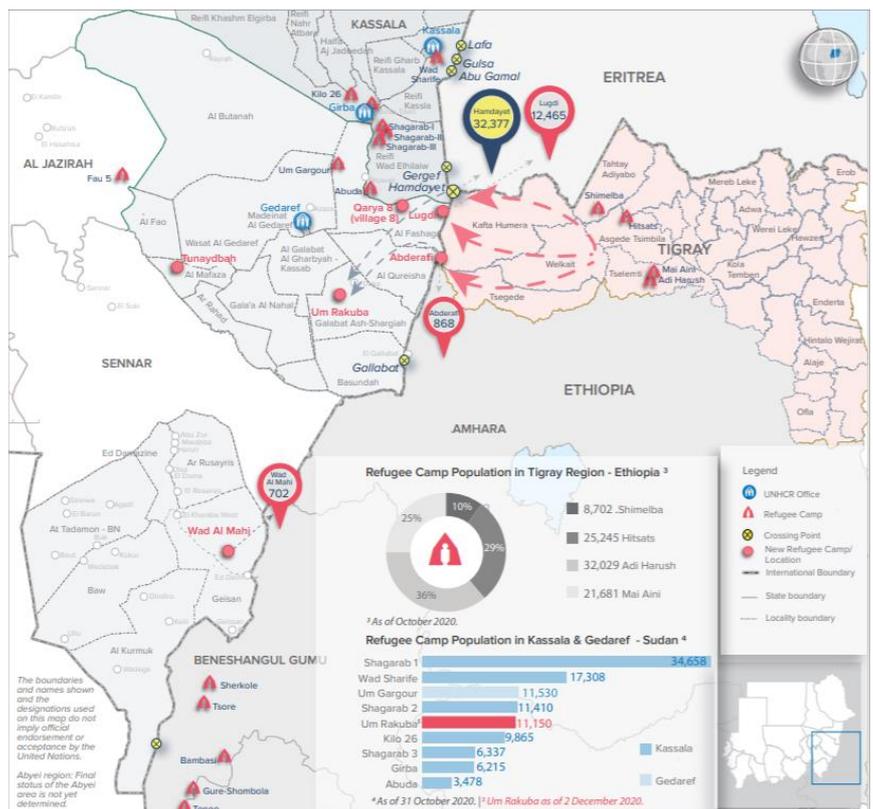
Refugees continue to arrive to the remote border areas of Hamdayet in Kassala State, and Lugdi and Abderafi in Gedaref State. There has been a downward trend over the course of the last week, with new arrival numbers remaining below 1000/persons per day. Factors contributing to the decrease cannot be verified. Refugees told the High Commissioner during visit that they want to return as soon as there is peace, but they fear more violence, including inter-communal violence.

**Relocations:** Since 13 November, 11,150 refugees have been relocated from Hamdayet and Abderafi border points to Um Rakuba camp – 70kms away from the Ethiopian border. UNHCR and the government counterpart, the Commissioner of Refugees, have encountered challenges in relocating refugees. Many have explained their preference to remain near the border to wait for family members still in Ethiopia, or in hopes they will be able to return to Ethiopia in the near future. Many of them are farmers, and as it is the harvesting season, prefer to be closer to their fields in case they can return soon.

Some of the newly arriving refugees have moved further from Hamdayet reception centre to Hamdayet market and town. Local authorities have raised concerns over the possible security and public health risks. After discussions with local authorities, UNHCR together with COR agreed

to continue mass information campaigns and outreach to the refugees at the market and town highlighting the importance of registration and the availability of protection and relief services, and to support with transportation for refugees from the town to locations where their safety can be better guaranteed.

**Protection:** Protection desks at all sites and additional protection monitoring by mobile teams continue to provide support to the refugees.



**Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV):** To mitigate risks of gender-based violence in the overcrowded transit centres, measures are being put in place such as the establishment of separate latrines for women and men and the installation of lighting in places hosting new arrivals. Meanwhile, systems to ensure necessary support to survivors of gender-based violence, including medical, psychosocial support and legal assistance are being established.

**Child protection:** UNHCR child protection desks with the support of Plan International continue to screen and identify unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and other vulnerable children and provide them with support and counselling. Rapid Best Interest assessment are being conducted with children being referred to foster care or group care arrangements with people the children knew and who they had travelled with during flight. Specialized psychosocial support as well as shelter, core relief items, and clothing have been prioritized for foster families to ensure the children are safely accommodated and receive the care they need.



Newly arriving refugees wait in line to receive mats and blankets in Hamdayet reception site.

Family tracing services have been enhanced as more families and children have been reunited. ICRC have extended services to the border areas, which was not originally planned, given the large numbers of refugees remaining there.

An inter-agency **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)** is being established due to the high risk of SEA in this environment. The taskforce will coordinate and implement PSEA activities with all sectors in the different sites.

**Health:** The Ministry of Health (MoH) with the support of UNICEF have begun vaccinations of children under five against polio at Hamdayet, Village 8 and Um Rakuba camp.

Efforts continue to fill the gaps in shortages of health staff, medical supplies and medicines; as well as medical beds and ambulances. Health partners have established basic health services at all locations. There is a need for Tuberculosis and HIV treatments at all sites, an UN-joint effort is being finalized to support MoH with replenishments for treatments.

**Village 8 in Gedaref State:** Refugees arriving at Lugdi continue to be transported by the Sudanese army to Village 8, further away from the border. There are now an estimated 14,000-16,000 people at the site; UNHCR has begun basic registration of the arriving families. Infrastructure works continue.

**Protection:** UNHCR protection help desk on site provides information on legal and SGBV issues, right and obligations of refugees in country of asylum, and facilitates the registration process. Registration has been facilitated by the newly established refugee committee; whose members continue to encourage families to register to receive assistance.

The newly arriving refugees with special needs, particularly vulnerable children, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women are immediately registered and provided with food and core relief items.

ICRC along with SRCS volunteers have established family tracing and reunification at the site and reunited families and children.

**Core relief items:** UNHCR, through COR, is distributing core relief items to new arrivals, including blankets, sleeping mats, soap and plastic sheets

**Food:** WFP has provided a one-month food ration for 16,000 people at the site including supplementary super cereals for pregnant and lactating women and children under five.

**Health:** MoH has vaccinated nearly 2,000 children under five against polio. SRCS and a team of volunteers continue to conduct nutritional screenings (MUAC) for severe acute malnutrition for 15 children. In addition, MoH with UNICEF support established a breastfeeding area at the site where 15 mothers so far have benefitted from counselling.

**Covid-19:** In Village 8, SRCS held awareness sessions for 135 refugees on COVID-19 symptoms and preventive measures to be taken.

**WASH:** In addition to UNHCR, UNICEF is now engaging in the WASH response. UNICEF constructed 21 blocks of emergency trench latrines.

UNHCR continues to truck clean water to the site with bladders provided by UNICEF. UNICEF has supported with water treatment chemicals for the main water treatment plant.

**Hamdayet in Kassala State:** In Hamdayet, more than 20,000 people remain at the registration centre and in Hamdayet town with the host community. UNHCR continues to register the new arrivals using an electronic registration and case management system. UNHCR is working with to sensitize refugees on the importance of registration.

**Protection:** An inter-agency team conducted a rapid protection assessment and facilitated group discussions with girls, boys, women and men including persons with disabilities and older persons to understand their protection needs at Hamdayet transit centre. The main findings included a lack of information on available services, girls and women not feeling safe following rumors of SGBV incidents, and urgent request for soap and face masks to mitigate exposure to COVID-19.



UNHCR staff register Ethiopian refugees at Hamdayet reception centre in Sudan.  
©UNHCR/Olivier Jobard

The UNHCR protection help desk, with the support of SRCS volunteers, continued to identify persons with specific needs (PSN) and referred some 92 people to specialized services; these include pregnant women, older persons, families who cannot meet their basic needs, and women at risk.

A UNHCR child protection desk is screening and identifying unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and other vulnerable children, where they are counselled and referred as necessary. Rapid Best Interest assessments were conducted for six UASC who have been placed in foster care or group care arrangements. In addition, three children were relocated and connected with their caretakers.

**Shelter and core relief items:** Four additional communal shelters have been installed near the transit centre to meet with the increasing demand of new arrivals and the relocated refugees from the Hamdayet market area.

UNHCR through COR continue distributing core relief that include blankets, sleeping mats, soap and plastic sheets to the new arrivals.

**Health:** MoH with the support of UNICEF vaccinated 639 children under five against polio. 26 pregnant women have been provided with iron and vitamin B supplements; in addition to 20 lactating mothers have received vitamin A supplements.

**WASH:** Clean drinking water continues to be delivered by Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) to the Hamdayet transit centre and the nearby health facility; MSF Netherlands at entry points. UNHCR conduct daily water quality control to ensure clean water.

Efforts at improving wash facilities continue. At Hamdayet, 54 latrines are completed - 42 at the transit center and 12 at the border point.

Clean up campaigns at the transit centre, registration site, health clinics and water points with the engagement of daily workers from the refugee community.

**COVID-19:** In Hamdayet, UNHCR continues to conduct awareness sessions on COVID-19 prevention measures, as well as safe water chain and food handling, reaching 1,128 refugees and distributing 613 informational leaflets in Tigrayan language so far.

**Um Rakuba camp:** The site is hosting some 10,700 refugees. Further to discussions with the government authorities and additional site assessment, it has been determined the capacity of Um Rakuba can be expanded to host more refugees than had initially been expected. Infrastructure works, site planning and allocating plots to families continues. So far, 1,305 family plots have been allocated.

**Core relief items:** UNHCR and Welthungerhilfe (WHH) through COR and SRCS are distributing core relief items that include sleeping mats, blankets, jerry cans, clothes, shoes, mosquito nets and hygienic products.



Women in Um Rakuba camp tell UNHCR how they had to grab their children & run for safety when clashes broke out in Tigray. ©UNHCR/Will Swanson

**Health:** MoH vaccinated 1,208 children under five against polio.

WHO has provided personal protection equipment (PPE) to staff at the Mercy Corps (MC) supported government Primary Health Care clinic and MSF health facility on site.

**WASH:** 16 handwashing facilities in front of communal kitchens and emergency latrines have been completed. Hygiene awareness campaigns are underway already reaching more than 2,000 refugees.

UNHCR continues to truck water to the site, using water containers provided by UNICEF. MoH, with the support of WHO, conduct daily water quality control to ensure clean water.

**Blue Nile Arrivals:** An inter-agency assessment mission was conducted to the Blue Nile State where 702 Ethiopians mainly from the Gumuz tribe in Wad Mahi area in Ethiopia arrived on 16 November. The circumstances of this group arriving and the reasons for their flight are being determined and may not be related to the conflict in the Tigray region. COR is setting up a registration team and UNHCR is setting up a protection desk and protection monitoring.

## Djibouti

No arrivals have been reported in Djibouti. An evaluation mission to the border was conducted on 26 November. Reception sites were identified along the Galafi, west of Djibouti, which is likely the route for possible asylum seekers. Screening for COVID-19 as well as combatant screening are being considered. Improving the poor infrastructure in place will be a priority. An inter-agency contingency and response plan is being finalized.

## Eritrea

There have been reports of refugees arriving and possible internal displacement along the border with Ethiopia, which cannot be verified as access to the border areas is restricted. Contingency and response plans are being finalized under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. Discussions between the Resident Coordinator and the government on the response to possible new arrivals or internally displaced are ongoing.

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