



148,981 as of 30 April 2020

PERSONS OF CONCERN in the Afar and Tigray region

9,463

NEW ARRIVALS in the first quarter of 2020

32.86% as of April 2020

OF THE NEW ARRIVALS ARE Children

Operational context

New Arrivals – In the first quarter of 2020, 9,463 new asylum seekers from Eritrea have sought refuge in Ethiopia, placing a significant strain on registration and reception conditions in Endabaguna, Berhale and Aysaita, and increasing the already dire shelter shortages within the existing camps. With an average of over 3,000 new refugees arriving every month, available resources are prioritized to cover immediate basic needs and prevention of COVID-19 pandemic. With limited resources and health infrastructure to contain COVID-19, resources have been redirected to support the efforts of the government of Ethiopia in the health sector and to ensure that refugees are included in national and regional plans. At present, WASH and Health sectors are prioritized while gaps remain across all sectors. By the end of April 2020, the registered population under Sub-Office Shire's area of operation stands at 148,981 persons. This includes 94,145 refugees in the four camps in Tigray, and 53,703 refugees in the two camps and settlements within the host communities in Afar, and 1,133 out of camp refugees.

On 24 March 2020, the Ethiopian authorities have closed all border crossings into the country to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. ARRA has suspended asylum seekers reception and screening activities at the border, and registration activities in Afar and at Endabaguna centre in Tigray are also suspended.

COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness and Response

Since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Ethiopia on March 13, UNHCR amplified measures to curtail the impact of the pandemic on the Persons of Concern (PoC) to UNHCR. The COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan and mapping of camps' specific preparedness activities for worst case scenario were finalized jointly with the government counterpart ARRA and humanitarian partners. Awareness raising campaigns are well underway in all the six camps through home to home visits, mini media and use of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. Teams comprised of a total of 338 community/incentive workers, health promotors and members of the refugee structures across all camps are disseminating WHO recommended messages on COVID-19 prevention to refugees. To date the Sub-Office Shire has printed and dispatched to field a total of 6,160 IEC materials translated into local languages (6,000 brochures and 160 large flex banners).

WASH facilities are reinforced at camp level through establishment of hand washing facilities at points of delivery, pertinent locations in camps and at household level. A total of 131 communal/shared and 1,658 household hand washing facilities have been established across the six camps. In order to further strengthened hygiene practices among the PoC, UNHCR has doubled the quantity of soap (from 250gm to 500gm) for distribution to refugees along with increase in water supply to camps. UNHCR and partners modified delivery of assistance to maintain continuation of essential services and humanitarian assistance to refugees in the pandemic situation. Distribution of two months food ration (April and May) was conducted with COVID-19 preventive measures in place at the distribution points. Distribution of sanitary material (three months entitlement) also went along with food distribution. UNHCR in collaboration with Regional Health Bureau conducted COVID-19 related trainings for camp-based health staff. Procurement of medical equipment and supplies initiated to upgrade camp-based isolation centers.



The lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and hygiene materials for frontline staff of partners providing protection and assistance remains a major concern and hiccup in the COVID-19 response. UNHCR has placed an order for international procurement of drugs, hygiene items and PPE especially for health centers. In the items when these items are in the pipeline, SO Shire has initiated local procurement of these items to serve partner staff for two months.

Sectorial priorities and unmet needs



Protection

General – In relation to SGBV prevention and response, the operation works to enhance access to justice and physical protection of survivors, while strengthening mental health and psychosocial services. Community-based complaints mechanisms for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse have been established within camps in the Tigray and Afar regions. To limit physical contact and prevent COVID-19, UNHCR is currently providing protection assistance of only lifesaving/emergency nature. Non-essential services are currently on hold until the pandemic situation is improved, and the federal and regional state of emergency allow for more flexibility. Telephone follow up with communities and individuals is put in place to minimize the negative impact of these adjustments.

Prior to COVID-19 situation (26 January) UNHCR observed changes in the asylum procedures for Eritreans. The government changed the eligibility process for Eritrean asylum-seekers from prima facie determination to individual refugee status determination. UNHCR witnessed on the ground how the changes in the procedure have affected asylum-seekers and remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian impact especially on individuals with critical specific needs, as many were not registered. UNHCR is formally seeking clarification of the new procedures and formally advocating for the establishment of safeguards to ensure respect for the right to asylum in accordance with Ethiopian's Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019, as well as international refugee law.

Moreover, in early March, UNHCR was verbally informed by the Ethiopian Government of its intention to close Hitsats refugee camp in Tigray. Given the considerable humanitarian impact of such a decision, UNHCR is advocating and seeking clarification from the Government on how and when this will take place, expressing the need for any such measures to be conducted in close consultations with the refugees, the host community, the humanitarian community and the donors, as well as respecting the do-no-harm principle.

Child protection – The promotion of family-based care for UASCs is a priority - kinship/foster families are currently supported with cash. Humanitarian partners seek to increase the number of children living in family-based care arrangements to 75 percent by the end 2020. In 2019, 15% of the new arrivals in the Tigray region were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) – the number of UASC has exceeded the capacity to respond to their basic needs. Recreational centres and/or child-friendly spaces are a significant gap within all camps, negatively impacting their well-being. Moreover, there is no specialized service for children with special needs. Additionally, it remains challenging to accommodate UASC with other families, with most refugees not intending to remain in the camps for an extended period. This in turn makes children vulnerable to exploitation. The operation will maintain focus on ensuring quality child protection case management, adapting programming to be responsive to COVID19 prevention measures.

Resettlements – In Ethiopia, an estimated 15,000 - 20,000 refugees were in need of resettlement in 2019. With quotas for resettlement reduced, only 1900 refugees were assisted to depart to resettlement countries, 800 of them Eritreans. There is a need for increased advocacy for resettlement countries to raise this quota.



Health

A total of seven health centers, one in each of the six refugee camps in Tigray and Afar Regions as well as at the Endabaguna Reception Centre – supported on average 20,258 patients with primary health care as per November 2019 data. To ensure the provision of sustainable healthcare to the refugees, further integration of refugee health services with the Regional Health Bureaus and Ministry of Health will be actively pursued. In total 342 patients were referred to secondary and tertiary health facilities outside of the camps. However, lack of budget to support medical referrals to secondary and tertiary health facilities outside camps is resulting in refugee patients not being able to avail necessary treatment. Medical care is often limited in terms of sufficient drug supplies, culturally sensitive health care workers, appropriate prescription of medication, availability of ambulance services and equipped health care facilities. Additionally, refugees have often been through severe trauma, but there exist critical gaps in mental health services and psychosocial support for survivors of SGBV or trafficking.



Food and Nutrition

On a monthly basis general food distribution is provided for all refugees. Blanket supplementary feeding program is provided for pregnant and lactating women, children (0-2 yrs), medical cases and the elderly. In Mai Aini, Adi Harush, Shimelba and Hitsats Refugee Camps in Tigray, the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) is 6.8%, 10.1%, 17.8% and 10% respectively, with the situation remaining above the emergency threshold. In situation in the two camps in the Afar Region is more serious, with Barahle and Aysaita having a GAM rate of 16.6% and 16.8%, respectively.

NFI Non-Food Items

Upon arrival refugees are provided with the following eight Core Relief Items (CRI): 1) kitchen set, 2) plastic tarpaulins, 3) fleece blankets, 4) plastic jerry cans of 20 liter, 5) mosquito net, 6) sleeping mat, 7) bucket, and 8) soap. However, due to budget constraints, plastic tarpaulins cannot always be provided to every household upon arrival. Soap is provided on a monthly basis, but it is insufficient to last the monthly cycle. Besides, there is a general lack of sanitary materials including underwear, sanitary napkins and soap for women in reproductive age (12-49 years). There are serious shortfalls with regards to the replenishment of CRIs across all the camps since 2015. The main gap is in the provision of blankets and kitchen sets, especially for those who have resided in the camps for a long time. As of June 2019, the CRI coverage stood at only 23% against overall needs.



Education

In 2019, the average pre-primary school enrolment rate was 21%, while those for primary and secondary levels stood at 48% and 11%, respectively. The pre-preliminary and primary enrolment rate concerns only camp based schools. The main enrolment challenge relates to the onward movement of a significant number of refugees out of the Tigray camps in particular. Although refugees in the region express their interest in education, the priority is placed on finding a job, earn money and send remittances back home. Quality of education and teaching practices need serious attention. The qualification of teachers needs to be improved and the number of qualified female teachers needs to be increased, together with a need to attract and retain teachers in hardship areas. A significant number of children in schools already access education through the national system, therefore it is important to strengthen the national system in order to accommodate refugees. Adi Harush, Aysaita, Barahale camps do not provide secondary education and children residing in those camps seek education through the national education system in the vicinity of these camps. The opposite has been observed in Mai Aini, Hitsats and Shimelba camps, where children from the host communities attend secondary education within the refugee camps' secondary schools. An electronic enrollment system has been recently introduced by UNHCR and ARRA in both Tigray and Afar regions which will support the agencies' monitoring efforts throughout the school year.



Given limited access to education opportunities, the suspension of schools in the mid of March due to pandemic has further limited access to education for refugee students. On a related note, the interruption of school feeding programme has adverse impact on the nutrition status of the children. Although the government has introduced radio education to ensure learning continuity in the COVID-19 pandemic, its benefits are far from reaching the refugee students given non availability of radio sets with the refugees. As temporary solution camp-based community mini media centers are utilized to transmit lessons to refugee students. A range of partners are in the process of procuring solar powered radio sets for distribution to refugees and to ensure learning continuity in the pandemic situation. The university corridor in collaboration with Italian universities has opened opportunities to refugees to study master's degree program that will commence in September 2020. UNHCR is providing technical and ICT support to refugees in putting their application to various universities at postgraduate level.



Shelter

At the beginning of 2019, the total number of transitional shelters across all the six camps in Tigray and Afar regions were 6,684. In 2019, additional 579 transitional shelters were constructed, bringing the total to 7,263. There is a 55% shelter gap in the camps in Tigray Region and 83% gap in those within the Afar Region. There is an urgent need to construct more transitional shelters, particularly in camps in the Afar Region where only 17% of the refugees are living in transitional shelters, with the rest accommodated in emergency shelters. With the continued average daily arrivals of 300 persons, adequate coverage of shelters is a challenge that the operation is faced with. In the absence of sufficient shelters in camps, refugees are forced to live in settlements within the host community or in substandard temporary shelters. The host communities are generally accommodative of the refugees, but out of camp movements result in increase in rent in the host community, potentially negatively affecting relations between refugees and the host community.



WASH

The operation continues to promote sustainable access to safe and adequate water for refugees and host communities and ensure access to adequate sanitation services. The community management of WASH infrastructures and services remains a priority. For example, the Sarenta dam project becomes operational to meet the needs of both the host and the refugee populations. The expected completion date of the dam is around mid-2020. Shimelba Camp is the only camp that meets the UNHCR standard of 20l/p/d. The onset of dry season resulted in water shortages in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camp with low water supply of 12-13 l/p/d. Starting from September 2018, the massive influx of new arrivals had rendered the existing water system in the camps not commensurate to the need. The number of water tap-stands in camps are limited and people line up at water points for several hours. Many would return without fetching water. UNHCR as a temporary solution resumed water trucking to Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps, ensuring supply of 200 metric cube water to these camps and thus increasing water supply to 15-16 l/p/d. Although some of the water systems are becoming solarized, general concerns exist regarding the depreciation of the generators and the obsolete water pipeline system in Shimelba, Adi Harush, and Berahale camps. The water system in Shimelba Camp has already been solarized. As for sanitation, 1,100 new household latrines were added to infrastructure in all camps. This brought the household coverage in Tigray region to 55% of the needs, whereas Afar covers 30% of the needs, against a standard coverage of 85%.



Energy & Environment

Household energy is a vital basic component of the lifesaving assistance package as part of food preparation and lighting. Prioritized intervention for energy for the Eritrean refugee population and surrounding host community are geared towards finalizing the supply of electricity through the national grid and enhance the use of communal kitchens in the camps. Presently, Adi Harush



and Mai Aini camps are connected to the national power grid, whereas Shimelba Camp is in the process to be connected to the national grid. It is aimed to connect all the camps to the national grid by the end of 2020. There is no frequent provision of domestic energy supply – the banning of trees cutting, and wood-fuel collection has intensified, leaving refugees to sell the raw ration to purchase fuel for cooking. Over 80 % of the communal kitchens installed in Mai-aini are not functioning due to lack of repair and maintenance. The camp electrification programs are also equally affected due to shortage of ABC cables. The absence of streetlights and other forms of communal lighting in the camps gives room for crimes and other SGVB related atrocities.