

UNHCR Ethiopia

2011 Operational Highlights January 2012



Parallel emergencies from Somalia and Sudan characterized the 2011 refugee operation in Ethiopia. This is not to mention the 'silent emergency' in the north which continued to generate a significant number of Eritrean refugees, including a sizeable number of children coming on their own. As a result, the refugee population in the country has almost doubled over the last 12 months- from 155,055 refugees at the beginning of 2011 to 290,304 by year end, not including an estimated 10,000-15,000 unregistered Sudanese refugees who have been staying along the border with the host communities. At the end of last year, the country played host to about 186,000 Somalis, over 55,000 Eritrean and more than 46,000 Sudanese refugees who have been accommodated in 16 refugee camps and/or camp-like settings across the country. Also in the country as refugees were some 3,000 Kenyans and about 1,000 other refugees from different nationalities.



Refugee children from Sudan standing in front of their tent house in Tongo camp. UNHCR/Kisut G.E.

Somali refugees

At the beginning of 2011, Ethiopia hosted a little over 81,000 Somali refugees in five refugee camps (three in the Jijiga area and two in the Dollo Ado area). 12 months down the line, the figure has exponentially grown to almost 186,000. Of these, almost 100,000 were new arrivals who entered mainly through the Dollo Ado corridor, but also including about 1,350 who crossed through the Gode area.

The dramatic increase in the numbers prompted UNHCR and ARRA to open three more camps in the Dollo Ado area. This has brought to five the number of camps in south-eastern in Ethiopia and the total for Somali refugees in the country to eight. Dollo Ado, which entered the year 2011 with a little over 40,000 refugees and two refugee camps, became a very complex operation caring

for over 142,000 refugees, with more arriving every day. At the height of the emergency in July, an average of 2,000 refugees were coming every day, most of whom women and children. Thousands arrived in very bad health and nutritional conditions leaving UNHCR, ARRA and their health partners with an uphill battle to arrest the alarming mortality rate. At one point, crude mortality rate in one of the camps-Kobe- reached up to 5 per 10,000/day in contrast to the emergency threshold of 1 per 10,000/day. An outbreak of Measles compounded the problem.



Just relocated to Dollo Ado's newest camp-Buramino- a Somali refugee family poses for photo with a UNHCR staff member. UNHCR/ Stiofainin. Nic

UNHCR and its partners set in motion a massive health and nutritional intervention scheme, including mass anti-measles vaccination campaign, which ultimately resulted in bringing the mortality rate in the most affected camps (Kobe and Hilaweyn) to well below the emergency threshold.

However, the nutritional status of newly arriving children was still worrying, but ongoing efforts on all fronts mean that these should not lead to major deaths.

The three refugee camps in the Jijiga area, which accommodated over 41,000 refugees by year end, have their own set of challenges, too, including limited opportunities for self-reliance. UNHCR is piloting a project, known as the Development Assistance for Refugees, which aims to enhance refugees' self-reliance. By way of a durable solution, over 1,170 refugees from this group benefited from resettlement opportunities to the US and other countries.

***Sudanese refugees**

When 2011 set in, Ethiopia hosted 25,307 Sudanese refugees in two camps located in the Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz States (BGS). These were a residual group out of over 70,000 fellow Sudanese most of who were assisted to repatriate between 2006 and 2009. Even the remaining group (21,700 in Fugnido and 3,500 in Sherkole) were themselves in a repatriation mood when a fresh conflict rocked Sudan's Blue Nile State (BNS) last September.

As a result, thousands streamed east, once again seeking refuge in Ethiopia. By 31 December 2011, 19,680 new arrivals were registered in the BGS, with an estimated 10,000-15,000 more staying along the border with the host communities. UNHCR and ARRA moved in rather quickly to respond to the needs of the new arrivals. In addition to expanding and filling up the existing Sherkole camp, a new camp was set up in Tongo (sheltering 9,605 refugees), while a Transit Centre at Adamazine accommodated almost 5,000 refugees. A new site has been identified in the Bambasi area which should be developed into a third camp as soon as possible.

With the root causes of the displacement not yet addressed, more refugees are expected to arrive in 2012.

Together with ARRA and other partners, UNHCR is making all necessary preparations to quickly respond to a possible new influx of refugees through the Gambella State as well.

*** Refugees from the two Sudans have been referred in this document as "Sudanese refugees" while UNHCR works to separate South Sudanese from Sudanese refugees.**

Eritrean refugees

The northern front received the year 2011 with 44,823 Eritrean refugees in three refugee camps in Tigray State and in two camp-like settings in the Afar State. A year later, the figure grew to 55,085.

A total of 11,124 new arrivals were registered during the year. As part of a durable solution, 1,345 have gone on resettlement to third countries, mainly to the US. Many more left the camp without consulting either UNHCR or ARRA looking for better prospects abroad, often with devastating consequences.



Young, male refugees make up the majority of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. UNHCR/Kisut G.E.

The continued arrival of children without parents or relatives remains to be a worrying trend. Prospects for the repatriation of this group remain slim as the ICRC continues to experience difficulties accessing some areas in the country of origin. Pending a durable solution, some are put under family foster arrangements while the majority are receiving group care under IRC.

On a more positive note, hundreds of young Eritreans continue to benefit from the Government's 'out-of-camp' scheme which also offered educational opportunities for many. During the 2011/12 Ethiopian academic year, more than 600 deserving Eritreans were able to join different state-ran institutions of higher learning. When they do so, they are treated at par with the nationals.

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