



U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2002 – Ethiopia

June 2002

Ethiopia hosted nearly 115,000 refugees at the end of 2001, including more than 80,000 Sudanese, about 30,000 Somalis, and more than 4,000 Eritreans.

Approximately 15,000 Ethiopians were refugees or asylum seekers at the end of 2001, including nearly 5,000 in Kenya, some 2,000 in Sudan, more than 2,000 in Djibouti, more than 1,000 in Yemen, and some 3,000 new Ethiopian asylum applicants in Europe and the United States. Some 10,000 Ethiopians lived in refugee-like circumstances in Sudan.

An estimated 100,000 Ethiopians were internally displaced at year's end.

Approximately 10,000 Ethiopian refugees repatriated during 2001, mostly from Sudan.

Uprooted Ethiopians

The year began with approximately 300,000 Ethiopians internally displaced. Most were displaced in the northern regions of Afar and Tigray as a result of the 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea.

An additional 10,000 persons in western Ethiopia fled their homes to escape clashes between local government forces and ethnic Amhara militias in early 2001. From January to March, land disputes escalated into violence between ethnic Oromos and ethnic Amharas in western Oromiya region, where former military dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam forcibly resettled thousands of Amharas after Ethiopia's 1984 famine. Fighting killed some 100 people and displaced more than 10,000 mostly Amhara civilians north across the Blue Nile River.

In April, riots erupted in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, after Ethiopian security forces attempted to quell student protests. The violence killed about 50 persons, injured an additional 300, and caused extensive property damage. Although the riots did not cause major population displacement, approximately 250 students fled to neighboring countries, including more than 100 to Kenya and nearly 100 to Djibouti.

In June, following the assassination of a prominent government security official, several hundred Ethiopian civilians and about 50 Ethiopian soldiers fled to Kenya, where most were granted political asylum. No other major violent displacements of Ethiopian residents occurred during 2001.

Most persons who had been uprooted during the border war with Eritrea returned to their areas of origin and started to rebuild their lives. However, approximately 100,000 Ethiopians remained internally displaced at year's end.

The international humanitarian community continued to provide an estimated 50,000 war-displaced civilians, many of whom remained in caves in Tigray region, with food, water, shelter, and health and

education services at year's end. .

"Displaced Ethiopians have been unable to achieve any self-sufficiency due to security concerns, presence of landmines, or psychological fears of the former conflict," the World Food Program (WFP) reported in November. The lack of rehabilitated health clinics and water infrastructure also presented risks to many displaced Ethiopians returning to their areas of origin, particularly children.

During 2001, an estimated 25,000 persons of Ethiopian descent voluntarily returned to Ethiopia from Eritrea. Most had lived for many years in and around Asmara, the Eritrean capital. Several thousand of the returnees received transportation and border-crossing assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Ethiopian government accepted "full responsibility for their transport and relocation within Ethiopia," a UN report declared.

An estimated 20,000 new Ethiopian returnees, however, remained internally displaced in northern Ethiopia at year's end. Nearly all of the displaced returnees struggled to survive on monthly WFP food rations. "The aim of this food assistance has been to save lives until such time as beneficiaries are in a position to return home and recommence agriculture and economic activities," a WFP report stated.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) appealed to donors for more than \$23 million to fund refugee and returnee reintegration programs in Ethiopia during 2001. By early November, however, donor nations had provided only about one-third of the funding requested.

Repatriation of Ethiopian Refugees

Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians fled their country during the 1974-1991 reign of military dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam. In 1991, a rebel group deposed Mengistu, triggering the return of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian refugees.

During the past decade, an estimated 800,000 or more Ethiopian refugees have voluntarily repatriated from Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and other countries.

In September 1999, UNHCR declared that a "fundamental and durable change" had taken place in Ethiopia with the end of the Mengistu regime and that most Ethiopian refugees who fled their country prior to 1991 no longer had a "valid fear of persecution." The UNHCR declaration, which became official in March 2000, effectively withdrew automatic refugee status for Ethiopians who had fled the country before 1991. Refugees who claimed to have "compelling reasons" for not wanting to return to Ethiopia were required to submit to individual screening interviews in asylum countries to determine their legal status.

Between January and March 2001, more than 10,000 pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees voluntarily repatriated from Sudan to their places of origin, primarily to northwestern Ethiopia, on UNHCR-chartered trucks. UNHCR provided returnees basic household goods, blankets, plastic sheeting, an in-transit food and travel allowance, and a reintegration cash grant equal to \$95. WFP provided returnees with a nine-month food supply. The Ethiopian government provided assurances of arable land to each returnee family.

At year's end up to 2,000 Ethiopians remained in Sudan.

Refugees from Somalia

Somali refugees fled to Ethiopia during the early and mid-1990s to escape civil war. Nearly 90 percent of all Somali refugees living in Ethiopia originated from northwest Somalia, known as "Somaliland."

An estimated 30,000 Somali refugees remained in five long-established camps in eastern Ethiopia at the end of 2001. In June, UNHCR closed the Darwanaji and Teferiber refugee camps after assisting with the voluntary repatriation of approximately 9,000 and 12,000 Somalis, respectively. In December, UNHCR assisted with the voluntary repatriation of the final 2,500 Somali refugees living in Daror camp, and prepared to close the camp. UNHCR planned to turn over the water system and health and education facilities of Daror camp to the local community.

Some 25,000 Somalis repatriated during 2001, primarily to Somaliland. UNHCR officially reported that nearly 55,000 Somalis repatriated, but that number was greatly inflated as a result of massive fraud in eastern Ethiopia's refugee program.

An estimated 4,000 Ethiopian nationals of ethnic Somali descent, many of whom lived side-by-side with genuine Somali refugees for as long as a decade, dispersed from eastern Ethiopia's refugee camps. Ethiopian nationals who chose to leave the camps voluntarily received the same nine-month food supply, plastic sheeting, and blankets that repatriating Somali refugees received from WFP and UNHCR.

Unknown thousands of additional Somali refugees continued to live outside established camps in urban and rural areas in Ethiopia.

During 2001, UNHCR provided nutrition, health, and education services to camp residents, and also distributed more than 2,000 fuel-efficient stoves. Through food-for-work programs funded by WFP, Somali refugees raised and transplanted more than 650,000 tree seedlings to lessen environmental degradation in and around the camps.

Following site visits to eastern Ethiopia's Somali refugee camps in May and August 2001, the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) issued a December report, *Welcome Home to Nothing: Refugees Repatriate to a Forgotten Somaliland*, which examined the repatriation of refugees from Ethiopia to Somaliland.

The USCR report noted that many Somali refugees had lived under the care of the international community in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps for more than ten years and had grown dependent on relief agencies for basic services. The report urged international donors to give UNHCR enough financial support to keep the voluntary repatriation and camp closures on schedule, and to work collectively so that Somali refugee returnees dependent on international humanitarian agencies would become self-reliant.

Refugees from Sudan

Civil war in Sudan has pushed waves of refugees into Ethiopia since the 1980s, with the Sudanese refugee population in Ethiopia peaking at more than 300,000 in 1991. Although the population subsequently declined,

new refugee influxes have continued.

Some 10,000 new refugees fled from Sudan to western Ethiopia during 2001, bringing the number of Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia at year's end to more than 80,000.

The refugees lived in four long-established camps and a newly created camp, Yarenja, in western Ethiopia. The largest camp, Fugnido, housed nearly 30,000 people, primarily ethnic Nuer. More than 15,000 additional ethnic Nuer refugees lived in Dimma camp. Some 15,000 ethnic Uduk refugees lived in Bonga camp, while about 13,000 ethnically mixed refugees resided at Sherkole camp.

More than 8,000 ethnically mixed refugees, including some 1,000 new refugees who fled the Blue Nile and Upper Nile regions of southern Sudan during 2001, resided further north at the newly constructed Yarenja camp.

UNHCR administered several programs for Sudanese refugee women and children, the majority of camp residents, including a new food distribution system to facilitate participation by more women in Fugnido, Dimma, and Bonga camps. The number of women participating in adult-literacy programs, vocational-skills training, and income-generation projects also increased, while enrollment of school-aged children exceeded 50 percent.

Although many refugees had been farmers in Sudan, Ethiopian authorities refused to make more agricultural land available to the refugee population, limiting opportunities for refugees to improve their nutrition through agricultural activities. UNHCR and the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs provided seeds and farming tools to selected Sudanese families, but land allocation strategies meant that many experienced farmers lacked land, while many inexperienced farmers received land, according to UNHCR. UNHCR also provided chickens and cattle to selected families.

"For the foreseeable future, durable solutions in terms of voluntary repatriation will not be available for most Sudanese refugees located in settlements in western Ethiopia," a UNHCR report noted.

Other Refugees

Some 4,000 ethnic Kunama Eritrean refugees, who fled in May 2000 because of warfare and discrimination in Eritrea, remained in Ethiopia at year's end. Lack of funds prohibited UNHCR from opening a new refugee camp in Grat Reeda, northeast Tigray region, to accommodate the Eritrean population. UNHCR maintained limited water, sanitation, and health care facilities in Wa'ala Nhibi, the remote temporary site housing the refugees.